

# **THE SEEDS OF LOVE**

Florence Henrietta Darwin



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# THE SEEDS OF LOVE

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**Florence Henrietta Darwin**

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# THE SEEDS OF LOVE

## CHARACTERS

**JOHN DANIEL**, *aged 30, a Miller.*

ROSE-ANNA *his sister.*

KITTY, *aged 16, his sister.*

ROBERT PEARCE, *aged 26.*

LIZ, JANE *elderly cousins of Robert.*

JEREMY, *John's servant—of middle age.*

MARY MEADOWS, *aged 24, a Herbalist.*

LUBIN.

ISABEL.

*The time is Midsummer.*

## THE SEEDS OF LOVE

### ACT I

*A woodland road outside MARY'S cottage. There are rough seats in the porch and in front of the window. Bunches of leaves and herbs hang drying around door and window. MARY is heard singing within.*

**MARY.** [*Singing.*]

**I sowed the seeds of Love,  
And I sowed them in the Spring.  
I gathered them up in the morning so soon.  
While the sweet birds so sweetly sing,  
While the sweet birds so sweetly sing. {2}**

*[MARY comes out of the cottage, a bundle of enchanter's nightshade in her arms. She hangs it by a string to the wall and then goes indoors.]*

**MARY.** [*Singing.*]

**The violet I did not like,  
Because it bloomed so soon;  
The lily and the pink I really over think,  
So I vowed I would wait till June,  
So I vowed I would wait till June.**

*[During the singing LUBIN comes slowly and heavily along the road. He wears the dress of a farm labourer and carries a scythe over his shoulder. In front of the cottage he pauses, looks round doubtfully, and then sits stiffly and wearily down on the bench beneath the window.]*

**MARY.** [*Coming to the doorway with more plants and singing.*]

**"For the grass that has oftentimes been trampled underfoot,  
Give it time, it will rise up again."**

**LUBIN.** [*Looking up gloomily.*] And that it won't, mistress.

**MARY.** [*Suddenly perceiving him and coming out.*] O you are fair spent from journeying. Can I do anything for you, master?

**LUBIN.** [*Gazing at her fixedly.*] You speak kindly for a stranger, but 'tis beyond the power of you nor anyone to do aught for me.

**MARY.** [*Sitting down beside him and pointing to the wall of the house.*] See those leaves and flowers drying in the sun? There's medicine for every sort of sickness there, sir.

**LUBIN.** There's not a root nor yet a herb on the face of the earth that could cure the sickness I have within me.

**MARY.** That must be a terrible sort of a sickness, master.

**LUBIN.** So 'tis. 'Tis love.

**MARY.** Love?

**LUBIN.** Yes, love; wicked, unhappy love. Love what played false when riches fled. Love that has given the heart what was all mine to another.

*[ISABEL has been slowly approaching, she wears a cotton handkerchief over her head and carries a small bundle tied up in a cloth on her arm. Her movements are languid and sad.]*

**MARY.** I know of flowers that can heal even the pains of love.

**ISABEL.** [*Coming forward and speaking earnestly.*] O tell me of them quickly, mistress.

**MARY.** Why, are you sick of the same complaint?

**ISABEL.** [*Sinking down on the grass at MARY'S feet.*] So bruised and wounded in the heart that the road from Framilode up here might well have been a hundred miles or more.

**LUBIN.** Framilode? 'Tis there you come from?

**ISABEL.** I was servant at the inn down yonder. Close upon the ferry. Do you know the place, master?

**LUBIN.** [*In deep gloom.*] Ah, the place and the ferry man too.

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**MARY.** [*Leaning forward and clasping her hands.*] Him as is there to-day, or him who was?

**LUBIN.** He who was there and left for foreign parts a good three year ago.

[*ISABEL covers her face and is shaken by sobs. LUBIN leans his elbow on his knee, shading his eyes with his hand.*

**MARY.** I have help for all torments in my flowers. Such things be given us for that.

**ISABEL.** [*Looking up.*] You be gentle in your voices mistress. 'Tis like when a quist do sing, as you speaks.

**MARY.** Then do both of you tell your sorrow. 'Twill be strange if I do not find sommat that will lighten your burdens for you.

**LUBIN.** 'Twas at Moat Farm I was born and bred.

**MARY.** Close up to Daniels yonder?

**LUBIN.** The same. Rose-Anna of the Mill and I—we courted and was like to marry. But there came misfortune and I lost my all. She would not take a poor man, so I left these parts and got to be what you do see me now—just a day labourer.

**ISABEL.** Mine, 'tis the same tale, very nigh. Robert the ferry-man and me, we loved and was to have got us wedded, only there came a powerful rich gentleman what used to go fishing along of Robert. 'Twas he that 'ticed my lover off to foreign parts.

**LUBIN.** [*With a heavy sigh.*] These things are almost more than I can bear.

**ISABEL.** At first he wrote his letters very often. Then 'twas seldom like. Then 'twas never. And then there comed a day—[*She is interrupted by her weeping.*

**MARY.** Try to get out your story—you can let the tears run afterwards if you have a mind.

**ISABEL.** There comed a day when I did meet a fisherman from Bristol. He brought me news of Robert back from the seas, clothed in fine stuff with money in the pockets of him, horse and carriage, and just about to wed.

**LUBIN.** Did he name the maid?

**ISABEL.** Rose-Anna she was called, of Daniel's mill up yonder.

**LUBIN.** Rose-Anna—She with whom I was to have gone to church.

**MARY.** Here is a tangle worse nor any briar rose.

**ISABEL.** O 'twas such beautiful times as we did have down by the riverside, him and me.

**LUBIN.** She would sit, her hand in mine by the hour of a Sunday afternoon.

[*A pause during which LUBIN and ISABEL seem lost in their own sad memories. MARY gets up softly and goes within the cottage.*

**ISABEL.** And when I heard as 'twas to-morrow they were to wed, though 'twas like driving a knife deeper within the heart of me, I up and got me upon the road and did travel along by starlight and dawn and day just for one look upon his face again.

**LUBIN.** 'Twas so with me. From beyond Oxford town I am come to hurt myself worse than ever, by one sight of the eyes that have looked so cruel false into mine.

**ISABEL.** If I was to plead upon my knees to him 'twould do no good—poor wench of a serving maid like me.

**LUBIN.** [*Looking down at himself.*] She'd spurn me from the door were I to stand there knocking—in the coat I have upon me now. No—let her go her way and wed her fancy man.

[*LUBIN shades his eyes with one hand. ISABEL bows her head on her knees weeping. MARY comes out of the house carrying two glass bowls of water.*

**MARY.** Leave your sorrowful tears till later, my friends. This fresh water from the spring will revive you from your travelling.

**LUBIN.** [*Looking up.*] The heart of me is stricken past all remedy, mistress.

**ISABEL.** I could well lie me down and die.

[*MARY giving to each one a bowl from which they begin to drink slowly.*

**MARY.** I spoke as you do, once. My lover passed me by for another. A man may give all his love to the gilly flower, but 'tis the scarlet rose as takes his fancy come to-morrow.

**ISABEL.** And has your heart recovered from its sickness, mistress?

**MARY.** [*Slowly.*] After many years.

**LUBIN.** And could you wed you to another?



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**MARY.** [*Still more slowly.*] Give the grass that has been trampled underfoot a bit of time, 'twill rise again. There's healing all around of us for every ill, did we but know it.

**LUBIN.** I'd give sommat to know where 'tis then.

**MARY.** There isn't a herb nor a leaf but what carries its message to them that are in pain.

**ISABEL.** Give me a bloom that'll put me to sleep for always, mistress.

**MARY.** There's evil plants as well, but 'tisn't a many. There's hen bane which do kill the fowls and fishes if they eat the seed of it. And there's water hemlock which lays dumbness upon man.

**LUBIN.** I've heard them tell of that, I have.

**MARY.** And of the good leaves there is hounds tongue. Wear it at the feet of you against dogs what be savage. Herb Benet you nail upon the door. No witch nor evil thing can enter to your house.

**LUBIN.** And have you naught that can deaden the stab of love upon the heart, mistress

**ISABEL.** [*Speaking in anguish.*] Aught that can turn our faithless lovers back again to we?

**MARY.** That I have. See these small packages—you that love Robert, take you this—and you who courted Rose—Anna, stretch out your hand.

[*She puts a small paper packet into the hands of each.*]

**LUBIN.** [*Looking uncertainly at his packet.*] What'll this do for me, I'd like to know?

**MARY.** 'Tis an unfailing charm. A powder from roses, fine as dust, and another seed as well. You put it in her glass of water—and the love comes back to you afore next sun—rise.

**ISABEL.** And will it be the same with I?

**MARY.** You have the Herb of Robert there. Be careful of it. To—morrow at this hour, his heart will be all yours again, and you shall do what you will with it.

**ISABEL.** O I can't believe in this. 'Tis too good to be true, and that it be—A fine gentleman as Robert be now and a poor little wretch like me!

**LUBIN.** [*Slowly.*] 'Tis but a foolish dream like. How are folks like us to get mixing and messing with the drinks of they? Time was when I did sit and eat along of them at the table, the same as one of theirselves. But now! Why, they'd take and hound me away from the door.

**ISABEL.** And me too.

**MARY.** [*Breaking off a spray of the enchanters nightshade from the bunch drying.*] That'll bring luck, may be.

[*ISABEL takes it and puts it in her dress and then wraps the packet in her bundle. LUBIN puts his packet away also. Whilst they are doing this, MARY strolls a little way on the road.*]

**MARY.** [*Returning.*] The man from Daniels be coming along.

**LUBIN.** [*Hastily.*] What, old Andrews?

**MARY.** No. This is another. Folk do marvel how Miller John do have the patience to keep in with him.

**LUBIN.** How's that?

**MARY.** So slow and heavy in his ways. But he can drink longer at the cider than any man in the county afore it do fly to his head, and that's why master do put up with him.

[*JEREMY comes heavily towards them, a straw in his mouth. His hat is pushed to the back of his head. His expression is still and impassive. He comes straight towards MARY, then halts.*]

**MARY.** Come, Jeremy, I reckon 'tis not for rue nor tea of marjoram you be come here this morning?

**JEREMY.** [*Looking coldly and critically at the travellers and pointing to them.*] Who be they?

**MARY.** Travellers on the road, seeking a bit of rest.

[*JEREMY continues to look them all over in silence.*]

**MARY.** How be things going at the Mill to—day, Jerry?

**JEREMY.** Powerful bad.

**MARY.** O I am grieved to hear of it. What has happened?

[*LUBIN and ISABEL lean forward, listening eagerly.*]

**JEREMY.** 'Tis a pretty caddle, that's all.

**MARY.** The mistress isn't took ill? or Miss Kitty?

**JEREMY.** I almost wish they was, for then there wouldn't be none of this here marrying to—morrow.

**MARY.** What has upset you against the wedding, Jerry?

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**JEREMY.** One pair of hands baint enough for such goings on.

**MARY.** 'Tis three you've got up there.

**JEREMY.** There you're mistook. Th' idle wench and the lad be both away—off afore dawn to the Fair and took their clothes along of they. I be left with all upon me like, and 'tis too much.

**MARY.** What shall you do, Jerry?

**JEREMY.** I'll be blowed if I'm agoin' to do anything. There.

**MARY.** But you'll have to stir yourself up and deck the house and set the table and wait upon the visitors and look to the traps and horses and all, Jerry—seeing as you're the only one.

**JEREMY.** I'll not. I'm not one as steps beyond my own work, and master do know it too.

**MARY.** Then how are they going to manage?

**JEREMY.** I'm out to find them as'll manage for them. [*Turning sharply to LUBIN.*] Be you in search of work, young man?

**LUBIN.** I—I count as I've nothing particular in view.

**JEREMY.** [*Turning to ISABEL.*] And you, wench?

**ISABEL.** [*Faintly.*] I've gone from the place where I was servant.

**JEREMY.** Then you'll come along of me—the both of you.

**ISABEL.** [*Shrinking.*] O no—I couldn't go among—among strangers.

**JEREMY.** I never takes no count of a female's vapours. You'll come along of me. You'll curl the mistress's hair and lace her gown and keep her tongue quiet—and you [*turning to LUBIN*] my man, will set the tables and wait upon the quality what we expect from Bristol town this dinner-time.

**LUBIN.** [*Angrily.*] I never waited on man nor woman in my life, and I'll not start now.

**JEREMY.** You will. I'm not agoin' a half mile further this warm morning. Back to the Mill you goes along of me, the two of you.

**MARY.** [*Looking fixedly at ISABEL.*] This is a chance for you, my dear. You'll not find a better.

**JEREMY.** Better? I count as you'll not better this'n. Good money for your pains—victuals to stuff you proper, and cider, all you can drink on a summer's day. I count you'll not better that.

**LUBIN.** [*As though to himself.*] I could not go.

**JEREMY.** Some cattle want a lot of driving.

**ISABEL.** [*Timidly to LUBIN.*] If I go, could not you try and come along with me, master?

**LUBIN.** You'll never have the heart to go through with it.

**JEREMY.** 'Tis a fine fat heart as her has within of she. Don't you go and put fancies into the head of her.

**ISABEL.** [*To LUBIN.*] I'll go if so be as you'll come along of me too.

[*LUBIN bends his head and remains thinking deeply.*]

**JEREMY.** 'Tis thirsty work this hiring of men and wenches—I'll get me a drop of cider down at the Red Bull. Mayhap you'll be ready time I've finished.

**MARY.** I'll see that you're not kept waiting, Jeremy.

**JEREMY.** [*Turning back after he has started.*] What be they called, Mary?

[*MARY looks doubtfully towards LUBIN and ISABEL.*]

**ISABEL.** My name—they calls me Isabel.

**JEREMY.** [*Turning to LUBIN.*] And yourn?

**LUBIN.** [*In confusion.*] I don't rightly recollect.

**JEREMY.** [*Impassively.*] 'Tis of no account, us'll call you William like the last one.

**ISABEL.** O, and couldn't I be called like the last one too?

**JEREMY.** Then us'll call you Lucy. And a rare bad slut her was, and doubtless you'll not prove much worsen.

[*He goes away.*]

**MARY.** This is your chance. A good chance too –

**LUBIN.** They'll know the both of us. Love isn't never quite so dead but what a sound in the speech or a movement of the hand will bring some breath to it again.

**ISABEL.** You're right there, master—sommat'll stir in the hearts of them when they sees we—and 'tis from the door as us'll be chased for masking on them like this.

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**MARY.** But not before the seeds of love have done their work. Come, Isabel; come, Lubin—I will so dress you that you shall not be recognised.

[*MARY goes indoors. ISABEL slowly rises and takes up her bundle. LUBIN remains seated, looking gloomily before him.*

**ISABEL.** Come, think what 'twill feel to be along of our dear loves and look upon the forms of them and hear the notes of their voices once again.

**LUBIN.** That's what I am a-thinking of. 'Twill be hot iron drove right into the heart all the while. Ah, that's about it.

**ISABEL.** I'll gladly bear the pain.

**LUBIN.** [*After a pause.*] Then so will I. We'll go.

[*He raises his eyes to her face and then gets heavily up and follows her into the cottage.*

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ACT II.—Scene 1.

*The living room at Daniel's Mill. In the window ROSE—ANNA is seated awkwardly sewing some bright ribbons on to a muslin gown. KITTY is moving about rapidly dusting chairs and ornaments which are in disorder about the room and JOHN stands with his back to the grate gravely surveying them.*

**ROSE.** [*Petulantly.*] Whatever shall we do, John! Me not dressed, everything no how, and them expected in less nor a half hour's time

**KITTY.** There! I've finished a—dusting the chairs. Now I'll set them in their places.

**ROSE.** No one is thinking of me! Who's going to help me on with my gown and curl my hair like Robert was used to seeing me wear it at Aunt's?

**KITTY.** Did you have it different down at Bristol, Rose?

**ROSE.** Of course I did. 'Twouldn't do to be countrified in the town.

**JOHN.** Your hair's well enough like that. 'Tisn't of hair as anyone'll be thinking when they comes in, but of victuals. And how we're a—going to get the table and all fixed up in so short a time do fairly puzzle me.

**KITTY.** I'll do the table.

**ROSE.** No. You've got to help me with my gown. O that was a good—for—nothing baggage, leaving us in the lurch!

**JOHN.** Well, I've done my best to get us out of the fix.

**ROSE.** And what would that be, pray?

**KITTY.** Why John, you've done nothing but stand with your back to the grate this last hour.

**JOHN.** I've sent off Jerry.

**ROSE.** [*Scornfully.*] Much good that'll do.

**KITTY.** We know just how far Jerry will have gone.

**JOHN.** I told him not to shew hissself unless he could bring a couple of servants back along with him.

**ROSE.** [*Angrily.*] You're more foolish than I took you to be, John. Get you off at once and fetch Jerry from his cider at the Red Bull. He's not much of a hand about the house, but he's better than no one.

**JOHN.** [*Sighing heavily.*] Jeremy's not the man to start his drinking so early in the day.

**ROSE.** I've caught him at the cask soon after dawn.

**KITTY.** And so have I, John. How you put up with his independent ways I don't know.

**JOHN.** Ah, 'tisn't everyone as has such a powerful strong head as Jerry's. He's one that can be trusted to take his fill, and none the worse with him afterwards.

[*A knock at the door, which is pushed open by JEREMY.*]

**JEREMY.** [*From the doorway.*] Well, Master John— well, mistress?

**ROSE.** [*Sharply.*] Master was just starting out for to fetch you home, Jerry.

**JEREMY.** [*Ignoring her.*] Well, master, I've brought a couple back along of me.

**ROSE.** Ducklings or chickens?

**JEREMY.** I've gotten them too.

**KITTY.** Do you mean that you've found some servants for us, Jerry?

**JEREMY.** Two outside. Female and male.

**JOHN.** Didn't I tell you so! There's naught that Jerry cannot do. You'll have a drink for this, my man

**ROSE.** You may take my word he's had that already, John.

**JEREMY.** I have, mistress. Whilst they was a packing up the poultry in my basket. Down at the Bull.

**ROSE.** What sort of a maid is it?

**JEREMY.** Ah, 'tis for you to tell me that, mistress, when you've had her along of you a bit.

**ROSE.** And the man?

**JEREMY.** Much the same as any other male.

**ROSE.** [*Impatiently.*] Do you step outside, John, and have a look at them, and if they're suitable bring them in and we'll set them about their work.

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[JOHN goes out. KITTY peers through the window.]

**JEREMY.** I reckon I can go off and feed the hilts now. 'Tis the time.

**ROSE.** Feed the hilts! Indeed you can't do no such thing. O I'm mad with vexation that nothing is well ordered or suitably prepared for Mr. Robert and his fine cousins from Bristol town. Whatever will they say to such a house when they do see it?

**JEREMY.** I'm sure I don't know.

**KITTY.** [From the window.] I see the new servants. John is bringing them up the walk. The man's face is hid by his broad hat, but the girl looks neat enough in her cotton gown and sun-bonnet.

[JOHN comes into the room, followed by LUBIN and ISABEL. LUBIN shuffles off his hat, but holds it between his face and the people in the room.]

**JEREMY.** [Pointing to them and speaking to ROSE.] There you are, mistress—man—servant and maid.

**ROSE.** What do we know about them? Folk picked up by Jerry at the Red Bull.

**JEREMY.** No, from the roadside.

**ROSE.** Worser far.

**JOHN.** No, no, Rose. These young persons were spoken for by Mary Meadows. And 'tis rare fortunate for we to obtain their services at short notice like this.

**ROSE.** [To ISABEL.] What are you called, my girl?

**ISABEL.** [Faintly.] Isabel is my name, but I'd sooner you called me Lucy.

**ROSE.** And that I will. My tongue is used to Lucy. The other is a flighty, fanciful name for a servant.

**KITTY.** And what is the man called, John?

**LUBIN.** [Harshly.] I am called William.

**KITTY.** William and Lucy! Like the ones that ran away this morning.

**ROSE.** O do not let us waste any more time! Jerry, do you take the man and shew him his work in the back kitchen; and Lucy, come to me and help me with my gown and my hair dressing. We have not a minute to lose.

**KITTY.** They may be upon us any time now. I'll go out and gather the flowers for the parlour, since you don't want me any more within, Rose.

**JOHN.** And I'll get and finish Jeremy's work in the yard. 'Tis upside down and round about and no how to-day. But we'll come out of it some time afore next year I reckon.

**JEREMY.** Don't you ever go for to get married, master. There could never come a worser caddle into a man's days nor matrimony, I count.

[JOHN, on his way to the door, pauses—as though momentarily lost in thought.]

**JOHN.** Was Mary Meadows asked to drop in at any time to-day, Rose?

**ROSE.** [Who is taking up her gown and ribbons to show to ISABEL, and speaking crossly.] I'm sure I don't know, nor care. I've enough to think about as 'tis.

**KITTY.** [Taking JOHN's arm playfully.] You're terribly took up with Mary Meadows, John.

**JOHN.** There isn't many like her, Kitty. She do rear herself above t'others as—as a good wheat stalk from out the rubbish.

[JOHN and KITTY go slowly out.]

**JEREMY.** [As though to himself.] I sees as how I shall have to keep an eye on master—[turning to LUBIN and signing to him.] But come, my man, us has no time for romance, 'tis dish washing as lies afore you now.

[LUBIN jerks his head haughtily and makes a protesting gesture. Then he seems to remember himself and follows JEREMY humbly from the room. ROSE takes up some ribbons and laces.]

**ROSE.** [To ISABEL, who is standing near.] Now, Lucy, we must look sharp; Mister Robert and his cousins from Bristol town will soon be here. I have not met with the cousins yet, but I've been told as they're very fine ladies—They stood in place of parents to my Robert, you know. 'Tis unfortunate we should be in such a sad muddle the day they come.

**ISABEL.** When I have helped you into your gown, mistress, I shall soon have the dinner spread and all in order. I be used to such work, and I'm considered spry upon my feet.

**ROSE.** 'Tis more serious that you should be able to curl my hair in the way that Mr. Robert likes.

**ISABEL.** [Sadly.] I don't doubt but that I shall be able to do that too, mistress.

**ROSE.** Very well. Take the gown and come with me up to my room.

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[*They go out together, ISABEL carrying the gown.*]

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ACT II.—Scene 2.

*The same room. The table is laid for dinner and ISABEL is putting flowers upon it. LUBIN wearing his hat, enters with large jugs of cider, which he sets upon a side table.*

**ISABEL.** [*Looking up from her work.*] Shall us ever have the heart to go on with it, Master Lubin?

**LUBIN.** [*Bitterly.*] Do not you "Master" me, Isabel. I'm only a common servant in the house where once I was lover and almost brother.

**ISABEL.** [*Coming up to him.*] O do not take it so hard, Lubin—Us can do naught at this pass but trust what the young woman did tell me.

**LUBIN.** [*Gloomily.*] The sight of Rose has stirred up my love so powerful that I do hardly know how to hold the tears back from my eyes.

**ISABEL.** [*Pressing her eyes with her apron.*] What'll it be for me when Robert comes in?

**LUBIN.** We'll have to help one another, Isabel, in the plight where we stand.

**ISABEL.** That's it. And perchance as them seeds'll do the rest.

*[They spring apart as a sound of voices and laughter is heard outside.]*

**KITTY.** [*Runs in.*] They've come. All of them. And do you know that Robert's cousins are no fine ladies at all, as he said, but just two common old women dressed grand—like.

**ISABEL.** That will be a sad shock to poor mistress.

**KITTY.** O, she is too much taken up with Mister Robert to notice yet. But quick! They are all sharp set from the drive. Fetch in the dishes, William and Lucy.

**ISABEL.** All shall be ready in a moment, Miss Kitty.

*[She goes hurriedly out followed by LUBIN. KITTY glances round the room and then stands at the side of the front door. JOHN, giving an arm to each of ROBERT'S cousins, enters. The cousins are dressed in coloured flowered dresses, and wear bonnets that are heavy with bright plumes. They look cumbered and ill at ease in their clothes, and carry their sunshades and gloves awkwardly.]*

**LIZ.** [*Looking round her.*] Very comfortable, I'm sure. But I count as that there old—fashioned grate do take a rare bit of elbow grease.

**JANE.** Very pleasant indeed. But I didn't reckon as the room would be quite the shape as 'tis.

**LIZ.** Come to that, I didn't expect the house to look as it do.

**JANE.** Very ancient in appearance, I'm sure.

**JOHN.** Ah, the house has done well enough for me and my father and grandfather afore me.

*[ROSE, very grandly dressed, comes in hanging on ROBERT'S arm. ROBERT is clothed in the fashion of the town.]*

**ROSE.** Please to remove your bonnet, Miss Eliza. Please to remove yours, Miss Jane.

**JOHN.** [*Heartily.*] Ah, that's so—'Twill be more homely like for eating.

**ROSE.** There's a glass upon the wall.

**LIZ.** I prefer to remain as I be.

**JANE.** Sister and me have our caps packed up in the tin box.

**KITTY.** [*Bringing the tin box from the doorway.*] Shall I take you upstairs to change? Dinner's not quite ready yet.

**LIZ.** That will suit us best, I'm sure. Come, sister.

*[KITTY leads the way out, followed by both sisters.]*

**JOHN.** I'll just step outside and see that Jerry's tending to the horse.

*[He hurries out, and ROBERT is left alone with ROSE.]*

**ROSE.** [*Coming towards him and holding out her hands.*] O, Robert, is it the same between us as it was last time?

**ROBERT.** [*Looking at her critically.*] You've got your hair different or something.

**ROSE.** [*Putting her hand to her head.*] The new maid. A stupid country wench.

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**ROBERT.** You've got my meaning wrong. 'Tis that I've never seen you look so well before.

**ROSE.** O dear Robert!

**ROBERT.** You've got my fancy more than ever, Rose.

**ROSE.** O, I'm so happy to be going off with you to-morrow, and I love it down at Bristol. Robert, I'm tired and sick of country life.

**ROBERT.** We'll make a grand fine lady of you there, Rose.

**ROSE.** [*A little sharply.*] Am I not one in looks already, Robert?

**ROBERT.** You're what I do dote upon. I can't say no more.

[*LUBIN and ISABEL enter carrying dishes, which they set upon the table. ROBERT and ROSE turn their backs to them and look out into the garden. The staircase door is opened, and LIZ, JANE and KITTY come into the room. LIZ and JANE are wearing gaudy caps trimmed with violet and green ribbons.*]

**ROSE.** We'll sit down, now. John won't be a moment before he's here.

[*She sits down at one end of the table and signs to ROBERT to place himself next to her. The sisters and KITTY seat themselves. JOHN comes hurriedly in.*]

**JOHN.** That's right. Everyone in their places? But no cover laid for Mary?

**ROSE.** [*Carelessly.*] We can soon have one put, should she take it into her head to drop in.

**JOHN.** That's it. Now ladies, now Robert—'tis thirsty work a-driving upon the Bristol road at midsummer. We'll lead off with a drink of home-made cider. The eating'll come sweeter afterwards.

**ROBERT.** That's it, Miller.

[*LUBIN and ISABEL come forward and take the cider mugs from each place to the side table, where LUBIN fills them from a large jug. In the mugs of ROSE-ANNA and ROBERT, ISABEL shakes the contents of the little packets. Whilst they are doing this the following talk is carried on at the table.*]

**LIZ** [*Taking up a spoon.*] **Real plated, sister.**

**JANE.** Upon my word, so 'tis.

**ROSE.** And not so bright as I should wish to see it neither. I've had a sad trouble with my maids of late.

**LIZ.** Sister and I don't keep none of them, thank goodness.

**JANE.** We does our work with our own hands. We'd be ashamed if 'twas otherwise.

**ROBERT.** [*Scowling at them.*] I've been and engaged a house-full of servants for Rose-Anna. She shall know what 'tis to live like a lady once she enters our family.

**JOHN.** Servants be like green fly on the bush. They do but spoil th' home and everything they do touch. All save one.

**KITTY.** And that one's Jerry, I suppose.

**JOHN.** You're right there, Kitty, that you are. A harder head was never given to man than what Jerry do carry twixt his shoulders.

[*LUBIN and ISABEL here put round the mugs of cider, and everyone drinks thirstily. ISABEL stands behind the chairs of ROSE and ROBERT and LUBIN at JOHN'S side.*]

**ROBERT.** [*Setting down his mug.*] There's a drink what can't be got in foreign parts.

**ROSE.** [*Looking fondly at him.*] Let the maid fill your mug again, my dear one.

**ROBERT.** [*Carelessly handing it to ISABEL.*] I don't mind if I do have another swill.

[*ISABEL fills the mug and puts it by his side.*]

**LIZ.** As good as any I ever tasted.

**JANE.** Couldn't better it at the King's Head up our way.

**JOHN.** Good drink—plenty of it. Now we'll start upon the meat I reckon.

[*He takes up a knife and fork and begins to carve, and LUBIN hands round plates. During this ROBERT'S gaze restlessly wanders about the room, finally fixing itself on ISABEL, who presently goes out to the back kitchen with plates.*]

**ROBERT.** The new serving maid you've got there, Rose, should wear a cap and not her bonnet.

**ROSE.** How sharp you are to notice anything.

**ROBERT.** A very pretty looking wench, from what I can see.

**ROSE.** [*Speaking more to the cousins than to ROBERT.*] O she's but a rough and untrained girl got in all of a hurry. Not at all the sort I've been used to in this house, I can tell you.



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[ISABEL *comes back with fresh plates and stands at the side table.*

**LIZ.** [To JANE.] A mellow piece of pig meat I never did taste, sister.

**JANE.** I'm sorry I went and took the poultry.

**KITTY.** John will carve you some ham if you'd like to try it, Miss Jane.

**JANE.** I'm sure I'm much obliged.

[JEREMY *comes in.*]

**JEREMY.** [*Coming to the back of JANE'S chair.*] Don't you get mixing of your meats is what I says. Commence with ham and finish with he. That's what do suit the inside of a delicate female.

**JANE.** [*Looking up admiringly.*] Now that's just what old Uncle he did used to say.

**JEREMY.** Old uncle did know what he was a—talking about then.

**LIZ.** [*Warming and looking less awkward and ill at ease.*] 'Twas the gout what kept Uncle so low in his eating, 'twas not th' inclination of him.

**JEREMY.** Ah 'twouldn't be the gout nor any other disease as would keep me from a platter of good food.

**JOHN.** Nor from your mug of drink neither, Jerry.

[JEREMY *laughs and moves off to the side table.*]

**LIZ.** A very pleasant sort of man.

**JANE.** I do like anyone what's homely.

**JOHN.** [*Calling out heartily.*] Do you listen to that, Jerry! The ladies here do find you pleasant and homely, and I don't know what else.

**JEREMY.** The mugs want filling once more.

[*He stolidly goes round the table refilling the mugs. ROSE'S gaze wanders about her.*]

**ROSE.** [To ROBERT.] That's not a bad looking figure of a man –

**ROBERT.** Who?

**ROSE.** Well—the new farm hand.

**ROBERT.** A sulky looking brute. I'd not let him wear his hat to table if I was master here.

**ROSE.** He puts me in mind of—well—there, I can't recollect who 'tis. [*A knock is heard at the door.*]

**ROSE.** [*Sharply to ISABEL.*] Go and see who 'tis, Lucy.

[*ISABEL opens the door, and MARY MEADOWS stands on the threshold, a large nosegay of beautiful wild flowers in her hand.*]

**JOHN.** [*Rising up in great pleasure.*] You're late, Mary. But you're welcome as the—as the very sunshine.

**ROSE.** Set another place, Lucy.

**MARY.** Not for me, Rose. I did not come here to eat or drink, but to bring you these few blossoms and my love.

**ROSE.** [*Rises from the table and takes the nosegay.*] I'm sure you're very kind, Mary—Suppose we were all to move into the parlour now we have finished dinner, and then we could enjoy a bit of conversation.

**LIZ.** Very pleasant, I'm sure.

**JANE.** I see no objection.

**KITTY.** [*Running round to look at the flowers.*] And Mary shall tell us how to make charms out of the flowers—and the meanings of the blossoms and all the strange things she knows about them.

**JOHN.** [*Taking a flower from the bunch and putting it into his coat.*] Yes, and how to brew tea as'll curl up anyone's tongue within the mouth for a year—and fancy drinks for sheep with foot rot, and powders against the murrain and any other nonsense that you do please.

**MARY.** Now, John, I'll not have you damage my business like this.

**LIZ.** Maybe as the young person's got sommat what'll be handy with your complaint, sister.

**JANE.** Or for when you be took with th' air in your head so bad, Jane.

**ROSE.** Yes, I reckon that Mary has a charm for every ill beneath the sun. Let's go off to the parlour along of her. You're not coming with us, John, are you?

**JOHN.** I'd not miss the telling of these things for anything in the world, foolishness though they be.

**ROSE.** Come along then—all of you.

[*They all go out. JEREMY holds the door open for them. As she passes through it LIZ says, looking at him.*]

**LIZ.** We shall hope for your company, too.

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**JANE.** To be sure, mister.

**JEREMY.** [*Haughtily.*] I bain't one for parlours, nor charms, ma'am. I be here for another purpose.

[*They leave the room.*]

**JEREMY.** [*Having watched the party out, moves towards the cider jug.*] Now, my man, now, my wench—us'll see what can be done with the victuals and drink they've been and left. 'Tis a fair heavy feed and drink as I do need. Sommat as'll lift me up through all the trials of this here foolish matrimony and stuff.

[*He raises the jug of cider to his mouth as the Curtain falls.*]

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ACT III.—Scene 1.

*The next morning. ROBERT'S cousins are standing by the fire—place of the same room.*

**LIZ.** 'Tis powerful unhomely here, Jane.

**JANE.** And that 'tis. I wish as Robert had never brought us along of him.

**LIZ.** She's a stuck-up jay of a thing what he's about to wed if ever I seed one.

**JANE.** That her be. He'll live to wish hisself dead and buried one day.

**LIZ.** There bain't but one sensible tongue in the whole place to my mind.

**JANE.** Ah, he's a man to anyone's liking, sister.

**LIZ.** 'Tis homelike as he do make I to feel among all these strangers.

**JANE.** Here he comes.

*[JEREMY with a yoke and two pails stands at the doorway.]*

**LIZ.** Now do you come in, mister, and have a bit of talk along of we.

**JANE.** Set down them pails and do as sister says, Mister Jeremy.

*[JEREMY looks them all over and then slowly and deliberately sets down his pails.]*

**LIZ.** That's right, sister and me was feeling terribly lonesome here this morning.

**JANE.** And we was wishing as we'd never left home to come among all these stranger folk.

**LIZ.** Not that we feels you to be a stranger, dear Mister Jeremy.

**JANE.** You be a plain homely man such as me and sister be accustomed to.

**JEREMY.** Anything more?

**LIZ.** I suppose you've put by a tidy bit—seeing as you be of a certain age.

**JANE.** Although your looks favour you well, don't they, sister?

**LIZ.** To be sure they do.

**JANE.** And I reckon as you could set up a home of your own any day, mister.

**JEREMY.** *[Pointing through the window.]* See that there roof against the mill?

**LIZ.** Indeed I do.

**JEREMY.** That's where I do live.

*[Both sisters move quickly to the window.]*

**JANE.** A very comfortable looking home indeed.

**LIZ.** I likes the looks of it better nor this great old house.

**JANE.** *[Archly.]* Now I daresay there's but one thing wanted over there, Mister Jeremy.

**JEREMY.** What's that?

**JANE.** A good wife to do and manage for you.

**JEREMY.** I never was done for nor managed by a female yet, and blowed if I will be now.

**LIZ.** *[Shaking her finger at him.]* Sister an' me knows what comes of such words, don't us, sister? 'Tis an old saying in our family as one wedding do make a many.

**JEREMY.** Give me a woman's tongue for foolishness. I've heared a saying too in my family, which be—get a female on to your hearth and 'tis Bedlam straight away.

**JANE.** Now, sister, did you ever hear the like of that?

**LIZ.** Us'll have to change his mind for him, Jane.

**JEREMY.** I reckon 'twould take a rare lot of doing to change that, mistress.

**JANE.** Bain't you a-goin' to get yourself ready for church soon?

**JEREMY.** Dashed if I ever heard tell of such foolishness. Who's to mind the place with all the folk gone fiddle-faddling out?

**LIZ.** There's the man William.

**JEREMY.** I bain't a-goin' to leave the place to a stranger.

**JANE.** Why, sister, us'll feel lost and lonesome without mister, shan't us, Liz?

**LIZ.** That us will. What if us stayed at home and helped to mind the house along of he?

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**JANE.** [*Slowly.*] And did not put our new gowns upon the backs of we after all the money spent?

**JEREMY.** Ah, there you be. 'Tis the same with all females. Creatures of vanity—even if they be got a bit long in the tooth. 'Tis all the same.

[*JANE and LIZ draw themselves up, bridling, but LIZ relaxes.*]

**LIZ.** He must have his little joke, sister, man-like, you know.

[*JOHN enters.*]

**JOHN.** Jerry, and I've been seeking you everywhere. Come you off to the yard. 'Tis as much as we shall do to be ready afore church time. I never knew you to idle in the house afore.

**JEREMY.** [*Taking up his pails, sarcastically.*] 'Twas the females as tempted I, master, but 'twon't occur again, so there. [*He hurries off, followed by JOHN.*]

**LIZ.** [*With dignity.*] Us'll go upstairs and dress, sister.

**JANE.** 'Tis time we did so. All them new-fashioned things be awkward in the fastenings.

[*They go upstairs.*]

[*ROBERT and ROSE come in from the garden. ROBERT carries a little card-board box in his hand, which he places on the table. ROSE sits down listlessly on a chair leaning her arms on the table.*]

**ROBERT.** [*Undoing the box.*] This is the bouquet what I promised to bring from town.

**ROSE.** [*Her gaze wandering outside.*] Well, we might as well look at it afore I go to dress.

[*ROBERT uncovers the box and takes out a small bouquet of white flowers surrounded by a lace frill.*]

**ROSE.** [*Taking it from him carelessly and raising it to her face.*] Why, they are false ones.

**ROBERT.** [*Contemptuously.*] My good girl, who ever went to church with orange blossom that was real, I'd like to know?

**ROSE.** [*Languidly dropping the bouquet on the table.*] I'm sure I don't care. I reckon that one thing's about as good as another to be married with.

**ROBERT.** [*Going to the window and looking out.*] Ah—I daresay 'tis so.

**ROSE.** I feel tired of my wedding day already—that I do.

**ROBERT.** There's a plaguey, fanciful kind of feel about the day, what a man's hardly used to, so it seems to me.

**ROSE.** [*Wildly.*] O, I reckon we may get used to it in time afore we die.

**ROBERT.** Now—if 'twas with the right –

**ROSE.** Right what, Robert?

**ROBERT.** [*Confused.*] I hardly know what I was a-going to say, Rose. Suppose you was to take up your flowers and go to dress yourself. We might as well get it all over and finished with.

**ROSE.** [*Rising slowly.*] Perhaps 'twould be best. I'll go to my room, and you might call the girl Lucy and send her up to help me with my things.

**ROBERT.** Won't you take the bouquet along of you?

**ROSE.** No—let it bide there. I can have it later.

[*She goes slowly from the room.*]

[*Left to himself, ROBERT strolls to the open door and looks gloomily out on the garden. Suddenly his face brightens.*]

**ROBERT.** Lucy, Lucy, come you in here a moment.

**LUCY.** [*From outside.*] I be busy just now hanging out my cloths, master.

**ROBERT.** Leave your dish cloths to dry themselves. Your mistress wants you, Lucy.

**LUCY.** [*Coming to the door.*] Mistress wants me, did you say?

**ROBERT.** Yes, you've got to go and dress her for the church. But you can spare me a minute or two first.

**ISABEL.** [*Going quickly across the room to the staircase door.*] Indeed, that is what I cannot do, master. 'Tis late already.

**ROBERT.** [*Catches her hand and pulls her back.*] I've never had a good look at your face yet, my girl—you act uncommon coy, and that you do.

**ISABEL.** [*Turning her head away and speaking angrily.*] Let go of my hand, I tell you. I don't want no nonsense of that sort.

**ROBERT.** Lucy, your voice do stir me in a very uncommon fashion, and there's sommat about the

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appearance of you –

**ISABEL.** Let go of me, master. Suppose as anyone should look through the window.

**ROBERT.** Let them look. I'd give a good bit for all the world to see us now.

**ISABEL.** O, whatever do you mean by that, Mister Robert?

**ROBERT.** What I say. 'Tis with you as I'd be going along to church this morning. Not her what's above.

**ISABEL.** But I wouldn't go with you—No, not for all the gold in the world.

**ROBERT.** Ah, you've changed since yesterday. When I caught your eye at dinner, 'twas gentle as a dove's—and your hand, when it gave me my mug of cider did seem—well did seem to put a caress upon me like.

**ISABEL.** O there lies a world of time twixt yesterday and to-day, Master Robert.

**ROBERT.** So it do seem. For to-day 'tis all thorns and thistles with you—But I'm a-goin' to have my look at your pretty face and my kiss of it too.

**ISABEL.** I shall scream out loud if you touches me—that I shall.

**ROBERT.** [*Pulling her to him.*] Us'll see about that.

[*He tries to get a sight of her face, but she twists and turns. Finally he seizes both her hands and covers them with kisses as KITTY enters.*]

**KITTY.** O whatever's going on! Rose, Rose, John—come you in here quickly, do. [*To LUCY.*] O you bad, wicked girl. I knew you couldn't be a very nice servant brought in off the road by Jeremy.

[*ISABEL, released by ROBERT, goes over to the window arranging her disordered sun-bonnet and trying to hide her tears. ROBERT watches her sullenly.*]

**KITTY.** [*Goes to the staircase door and calls loudly.*] Rose, Rose—come you down as quick as you can run.

**ROSE.** [*Coming down.*] What's all this, I'd like to know?

**KITTY.** It's Lucy, behaving dreadful—O you must send her straight away from the house, Rose.

**ROSE.** What has she done, then?

**KITTY.** Going on with Robert. Flirting, Rose, and kissing.

**ISABEL.** O no, mistress, twasn't so, I do swear to you.

**ROBERT.** [*Brutally.*] Yes 'twas. The maid so put me powerful in mind of someone who—who –

**ROSE.** [*Coldly.*] I understand you, Robert. Well, 'tis lucky that all this didn't come off an hour or so later.

**KITTY.** [*Tearfully.*] O Rose, what do you mean?

**ROSE.** I mean that what's not broken don't need no mending. Robert can go to church with someone else to-day, he can. And no harm done.

[*She takes up the bunch of orange flowers and begins pulling it to pieces and throwing it all about the room.*]

**KITTY.** O Rose, Rose, don't take it so hard. 'Twasn't Robert's fault. 'Twas the girl off the road what led him on. I know it. Tell her to get out of the house. I'll dress you—I'll do the work. Only be just and sensible again; dear Rose.

**ROSE.** Let the girl bide. It makes no difference to me. There'll be no marrying for me to-day.

[*JOHN comes in at the door.*]

**KITTY.** [*Running to him.*] O John, John—do you quiet down Rose and tell her to get upstairs and dress. She's a-saying that she won't marry Robert because of his goings on with the new servant—But, O, you'll talk her into reason again, won't you, dear John?

**JOHN.** Come, come, what's all this cackle about, Rose?

**ROSE.** I'm breaking off with Robert, that's all, John.

**JOHN.** Robert, can't you take and explain a bit what 'tis.

**ROBERT.** [*Sullenly.*] A little bit of play 'twixt me and the wench there, and that's about all, I reckon.

**JOHN.** Now that's an unsensible sort of thing to get doing on your marriage day, to my thinking.

**KITTY.** 'Twasn't Robert's fault, I know. 'Twas the maid off the road who started it.

[*Here ISABEL sinks down on a chair by the window, leaning her arms on the table and bowing her head, in tears.*]

**JOHN.** [*Going to the door.*] Jeremy—Jeremy—come you in here a minute.

[*Instead of JEREMY, LUBIN comes in.*]

**JOHN.** 'Twas Jeremy I did call—not you.

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**LUBIN.** He's gone off the place for a few minutes.

**JOHN.** [*Vexedly.*] Ah, 'tis early for the Red Bull.

**LUBIN.** Can I—can I do anything for you, master?

**JOHN.** Not unless you can account for the sort of serving wench off the roadside what Jerry has put upon us.

**LUBIN.** What is there to account for in her, master?

**ROSE.** [*Passionately.*] O I don't particular mind about what's happened. Let her kiss with Robert if she has the mind. 'Tis always the man who commences.

**JOHN.** 'Tis not. There are some wenches who don't know how to leave anyone alone. Worsen than cattle flies, that sort.

**ISABEL.** [*Going across the room to LUBIN'S side.*] O you shame me by them words, I bain't that sort of maid—you'll answer for me—William?

[*LUBIN silently takes her hand.*]

**ROSE.** [*Her eyes fixed on LUBIN.*] I'll tell you what, John; I'll tell you, Kitty. I wish I'd held me to my first lover and I wish 'twas with Lubin that I was a-going to the church to-day.

**ROBERT.** [*Sullenly.*] Then I'll say sommat, Rose. I wish 'twas with Isabel that I was getting wed.

**JOHN.** Now, now—'Tis like two children a quarrelling over their playthings. Suppose you was to go and get yourself dressed, Rose—Anna—And you too, Robert. Why, the traps will be at the door afore you're ready if you don't quicken yourselves up a bit. Kitty, you go and help your sister.

**ROSE.** [*With a jealous glance at Isabel.*] No, I'll have Lucy with me.

**JOHN.** That's it, you keep her out of mischief

**KITTY.** I've got my own dress to put on.

**JOHN.** And Robert, you and me will have a drink after all this caddle. 'Tis dry work getting ready for marriage so it appears.

**ROBERT.** 'Tis fiery dry to my thinking.

**ROSE.** [*Crossing the room and going up to LUBIN.*] I have no flowers to take to church with me, William; go you to the waterside, I have a mind to carry some of the blue things what grow there.

**KITTY.** Forget-me-nots, you mean!

**ROSE.** Forget-me-nots, I mean. And none but you to gather them for me, William. Because—because—well, you do put me in thoughts of someone that I once held and now have lost. That's all.

[*Curtain.*]

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ACT III.—Scene 2.

*The same room half an hour later. ISABEL is picking up the scattered orange blossom which she ties together and lays on the window sill. LUBIN comes in with a large bunch of river forget-me-nots.*

**LUBIN.** I didn't think to find you here, Isabel.

**ISABEL.** O but that is a beautiful blue flower. I will take the bunch upstairs. She is all dressed and ready for it.

**LUBIN.** [*Putting it on the table.*] No—do you bide a moment here with me.

[*ISABEL looks helplessly at LUBIN who takes her hands slowly in his.*]

**LUBIN.** What are we going to do?

**ISABEL.** I wish as we had never touched the seeds.

**LUBIN.** O cursed seeds of love—Far better to have left all as 'twas yesterday in the morning.

**ISABEL.** He has followed me like my shadow, courting and courting me hard and all the time, Lubin.

**LUBIN.** She sought me out in the yard at day-break, and what I'd have given twenty years of life for yester eve I could have thrown into the stream this morning.

**ISABEL** [*Sadly.*] **So 'tis with my feelings.**

**LUBIN.** She has altered powerful, to my fancy, in these years.

**ISABEL.** And Robert be differenter too from what I do remember. [*A long silence.*]

**LUBIN.** Have you thought as it might be in us two these changes have come about, Isabel?

**ISABEL.** I was just the maid as ever I was until —

**LUBIN.** And so was I unchanged, until I started travelling up on the same road as you, Isabel.

[*For a few minutes they look gravely into one another's eyes.*]

**LUBIN.** [*Taking ISABEL'S hands.*] So that's how 'tis with you and me.

**ISABEL.** O Lubin—a poor serving maid like I am.

**LUBIN.** I'll have no one else in the whole world.

**ISABEL.** What could I have seen in him, times gone by?

**LUBIN.** And was it ever true that I did sit through a long Sunday her hand in mine? [*Another silence.*]

**ISABEL.** But how's us ever to get out of the caddle where we be?

**LUBIN.** [*Gaily.*] We'll just run away off to the Fair as t'other servants did.

**ISABEL.** And leave them in their hate for one another? No— 'twould be too cruel. Us'll run to the young mistress what knows all about them herbs. I count as there be seeds or sommat which could set the hearts of them two back in the right places again. Come —

**LUBIN.** Have it your own way then. But 'twill have to be done very quickly if 'tis done at all.

**ISABEL.** Us'll fly over the ground like.

[*She puts her hand impetuously in LUBIN'S and they go out together. As they do so, ISABEL'S bonnet falls from her head and lies unheeded on the floor.*]

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ACT III.—Scene 3.

*A few minutes later. LIZ and JANE wearing gay sprigged dresses and feathered bonnets, come to the room. They carry fans and handkerchiefs in their hands. It is seen that their gowns are not fastened at the back.*

**LIZ.** Such a house I never heard tell of. Ring, ring at the bell and no one to come nigh.

**JANE.** Being unused to bells, sister, maybe as us did pull them wrong or sommat.

**LIZ.** I wish we'd had the gowns made different.

**JANE.** To do up in the front—sensible like.

*[They twist and turn in front of the glass on the wall, absorbed in their dress, they do not notice that JEREMY has come in and is watching them sarcastically.]*

**JEREMY.** Being as grey as th' old badger don't keep a female back from vanity.

**LIZ.** O dear, Master Jeremy, what a turn you did give me, to be sure.

**JANE.** We can't find no one in this house to attend upon we.

**JEREMY.** I count as you can not. Bain't no one here.

**LIZ.** We rang for the wench a many time.

**JEREMY.** Ah, and you might ring.

**JANE.** We want someone as'll fasten them niggly hooks to our gowns.

**JEREMY.** Ah, and you may want.

**LIZ.** Our sight bain't clear enough to do one for t'other, the eyelets be made so small.

**JEREMY.** Count as you'll have to go unfastened then.

**JANE.** O now you be a laughing at us. Call the wench down, or we shall never be ready in time.

**JEREMY.** Man and maid be both gone off. Same as t'others, us'll have to do without service

**LIZ.** Gone off!

**JANE.** Runned clean away?

**JEREMY.** That's about it.

**JANE.** Well now, sister, us'll have to ask the little Miss to help we.

**JEREMY.** I've harnessed the mare a many time. Don't see why I shouldn't get the both of you fixed into the shafts like.

**LIZ and JANE.** *[Fanning themselves coyly.]* O Master Jeremy –

**JEREMY.** Come now. Let's have a try. I count as no one have a steadier hand nor me this side of the river, nor a finer eye for seeing as everything be in its place. I'll settle the both of you afore I gets out the horse and trap. Turn round.

*[The sisters turn awkwardly, and with very self-conscious airs begin to flutter their fans. JEREMY quickly hooks each gown in succession. As he finishes the fastening of JANE'S dress ROSE, followed by KITTY, comes into the room. She is wearing her bridal gown and veil.]*

**ROSE.** *[Pausing.]* What's this, Jeremy?

**JEREMY.** The servants be runned away same as t'others— that's all, mistress.

**ROSE.** Run away?

**JEREMY.** So I do reckon. Bain't anywhere about the place.

**ROSE.** *[Flinging herself down on a chair by the table, in front of the bunch of forget-me-nots.]* Let them be found. Let them be brought back at once.

**KITTY.** For my part I'm glad they've gone off. The girl was a wild, bad thing. I saw how she went on with Robert.

**ROSE.** *[Brokenly to JEREMY.]* You found them. Bring them back, Jerry.

**KITTY.** No—wait till you and Robert are made man and wife, Rose. Then 'twon't matter quite so much.

**ROSE.** I'll never wed me to Robert, I'll only wed me to him who gathered these blue flowers here.

**KITTY.** Good heavens, Rose, 'twas the man William.

*[KITTY looks in consternation from ROSE to the cousins and then to JEREMY, who remains impassive and*



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*uninterested, sucking a straw. ROSE clasps her hands round the forget-me-nots and sits gazing at them, desolately unhappy. ROBERT enters. He is very grandly dressed for the wedding, but as he comes into the room he sees ISABEL'S cotton bonnet on the floor. He stoops, picks it up and laying it reverently on the table, sinks into a chair opposite ROSE and raising one of its ribbons, kisses this with passion.*

**ROBERT.** There—I'd not change this for a thousand sacks of gold—I swear I'd not.

**KITTY.** Now Robert—get up, the two of you. Are you bewitched or sommat—O Jerry, stir them, can't you.

**LIZ.** Robert, 'tisn't hardly suitable—with the young miss so sweetly pretty in her white gown.

**JANE.** And wedding veil and all. And sister and me hooked up into our new sprigs, ready for the ceremony.

**JEREMY.** [*Looking at them with cold contempt.*] Let them bide. The mush'll swim out of they same as 'twill swim off the cider vat. Just let the young fools bide.

**KITTY.** O this'll never do. Jerry forgetting of his manners and all. [*Calling at the garden door.*] John, John, come you here quickly, there's shocking goings on. [*JOHN, in best clothes comes in.*

**JOHN.** What's the rattle now, Kitty? I declare I might be turning round on top of my own mill wheel such times as these.

**KITTY.** Rose says she won't wed Robert, and Robert's gone off his head all along of that naughty servant maid.

[*JOHN stands contemplating ROSE and ROBERT. ROSE seems lost to the outside world and is gazing with tears at her forget-me-nots, whilst ROBERT, in sullen gloom, keeps his eyes fixed on the sun-bonnet.*

**JOHN.** Come, Rose, 'tis time you commenced to act a bit different. [*ROSE does not answer.*

**JOHN.** Come, Robert, if you play false to my sister at the last moment, you know with whom you'll have to reckon like. [*ROBERT pays no heed to him.*

**JOHN.** [*To JEREMY.*] Can you do naught to work upon them a bit, Jerry?

**JEREMY.** I'd have a jug of cider in, master. 'Twill settle them all. Folks do get 'sterical and vapourish face to face with matrimony. Put some drink afore of them, and see how 'twill act.

**LIZ.** O what a wise thought, Master Jerry.

**JANE.** Most suitable, I call it.

[*Here MARY MEADOWS comes in, JOHN turns eagerly to her.*

**JOHN.** O Mary—have you come to help us in the fix where we are? [*He signs to ROSE and ROBERT.*

**MARY.** What has happened, John?

**JEREMY.** I'll tell you in a couple of words, mistress.

**LIZ.** No—do you fetch the cider, dear Mister Jeremy.

**JOHN.** 'Tis more than I can do with, Mary. Rose is set against Robert, and Robert is set against Rose. Rose—well I'm fairly ashamed to mention it—Rose has lost her senses and would wed the servant William—and Robert is a-courting of the maid.

**JEREMY.** Ah, let each fool follow their own liking, says I.

**LIZ.** And sister and me all dressed in our new gowns for the church.

**JANE.** And Jerry had to do the hooking for we, both of the servants having runned away.

**MARY.** Well, now I'm here I'll lend a hand. I'll help with the dinner time you're at church. You shall not need to trouble about anything, Mr. John.

**JOHN.** O once I do get them to the church and the ring fixed and all I shan't trouble about nothing, Mary. But 'tis how to move them from where they be! That's the puzzle.

**ROSE.** I'll never move till the hand that gathered these flowers be here to raise me.

**ROBERT.** I'll sit here to the end of the world sooner nor go along to be wed with Miss over there.

**MARY.** 'Tis midsummer heat have turned their brains. But I know a cooling draught that will heal them of their sickness. Jeremy, do you step into the garden and bring me a handful of fresh violet leaves, one blossom from the heartsease and a sprig of rosemary.

**JEREMY.** [*Sighing.*] What next?

**JOHN.** Get gone at once, Jerry.

[*JEREMY goes to the door—as he does so LIZ and JANE start up and follow him.*

**LIZ.** Sister and me will come along and help you, dear Mr. Jeremy.

**JANE.** And that us will, if our new gowns bain't hooked too tight for we to bend.

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*[They follow JEREMY to the garden. KITTY silently leaves the room also. ROSE and ROBERT remain lost in their sorrowful reflections. JOHN and MARY look at them for a moment and then turn to one another.]*

**JOHN.** Mary, I never thought to see such a thing as this.

**MARY.** You take my word for it, John, the storm will soon be blown away.

**JOHN.** I don't know how I should stand up against the worry of it all, wasn't it for you, Mary.

*[A short silence.]*

**JOHN.** *[Taking MARY'S hand.]* 'Twill be a bit lonesome for me here, when they've gone off, Mary.

**MARY.** You'll have Kitty to do for you then.

**JOHN.** Kitty be going to live along of them at Bristol too, after a while.

**MARY.** *[Looking round the room.]* Then I count as it might feel a bit desolate like in this great house alone.

**JOHN.** *[Taking MARY'S hand.]* I cannot face it, Mary. I've loved you many years, you know.

**MARY.** I know you have, dear John.

**JOHN.** Can't you forget he what was false to you, days gone by, and take me as your husband now?

**MARY.** *[Doubtfully.]* I don't hardly know.

**JOHN.** You used to sing sommat—the grass that was trampled under foot, give it time, it will rise up again.

**MARY.** *[Drying her eyes.]* Ah, it has risen, dear John—and I count it have covered the wound of those past days—my heart do tell me so, this minute.

**JOHN.** *[Holding both her hands.]* Then 'tis one long midsummer afore you and me, Mary.

**MARY.** That's how 'twill be, dear John.

*[JEREMY, followed by the cousins, enters. He holds a bunch of leaves towards MARY.]*

**JEREMY.** There you be, mistress. Fools' drink for fools. A mug of good cider would have fetched them to their senses quicker.

*[MARY takes the bunch, and still holding JOHN'S hand, leads him to the kitchen. JEREMY watches the pair sarcastically.]*

**JEREMY.** 'Tis all finished with the master, then.

*[The sisters seat themselves on the couch and mop their faces with handkerchiefs.]*

**LIZ.** Dear me, 'tis warm.

**JANE.** I hope my face don't show mottled, sister?

**JEREMY.** I was saying as how 'twas all finished with the master.

*[MARY, followed by JOHN, comes forward carrying two glasses. She gives one to ROSE and the other to ROBERT.]*

**MARY.** Now do you take a good draught of this, the both of you. With violet leaves the fever of the mind is calmed, and heartsease lightens every trouble caused by love. Rosemary do put new life to anyone with its sweetness, and cold spring water does the rest.

*[She leaves the table and stands far back in the room by JOHN'S side. ROSE slowly lifts her glass and begins to drink. ROBERT does the same. They are watched with anxiety by all in the room. When they have emptied their glasses ROSE dries her tears and pushes the flowers a little way from her. ROBERT shakes himself and moves the cotton bonnet so that it falls unheeded to the floor. Meanwhile KITTY has come quietly to the garden door and stands there watching the scene intently.]*

**LIZ.** Bain't we going to get a drink too?

**JANE.** Seems as though master have been and forgot we.

**JEREMY.** *[Starting up and going to the kitchen.]* If I've been and forgot you two old women, I've remembered myself. Be blowed if I can get through any more of this foolishness without a wet of my mouth.

*[He goes out.]*

**ROSE.** *[Speaking faintly.]* Does it show upon my face, the crying, Robert?

**ROBERT.** *[Looking at her.]* No, no, Rose, your eyes be brighter nor ever they were.

**ROSE.** *[Pushing the forget-me-nots yet further away.]* Those flowers are dying. My fancy ones were best.

**KITTY.** *[Coming forward with the orange blossoms.]* Here they are, dear Rose.

**ROSE.** *[Taking them.]* O how beautiful they do look. I declare I can smell the sweetness coming out from them, Robert.

**ROBERT.** All the orange blossom in the world bain't so sweet as one kiss from your lips, Rose.

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**ROSE.** Now is that truly so?

**ROBERT.** Ah, 'tis heavy work a—waiting for the coach, Rose.

**JOHN.** [*Coming forward and taking MARY'S hand.*] And yours won't be the only marriage Rose—Anna. Did you never think that me and Mary might —

**KITTY.** [*Running forward.*] But I did—O so many times, John. [*JEREMY enters with LUBIN and ISABEL.*]

**JEREMY.** Servants be comed back. Man was to the Red Bull, I count. Female a—washing and a—combing of herself in the barn.

**ROSE.** [*Coldly.*] I don't care whether they be here or not. Set them to work, Jerry, whilst we are to church.

**LIZ.** That's it, Master Jeremy. I was never so put out in my life, as when sister did keep on ringing and the wench was not there to help us on with our gowns.

[*ROSE and ROBERT get up and go towards the door. They pause before LUBIN and ISABEL.*]

**ROSE.** The man puts me in mind of someone whom I knew before, called Lubin. I thought I had a fancy for him once—but 'twasn't really so.

**ROBERT.** And the girl do favour a little servant wench from Framilode.

**ROSE.** [*Jealously.*] You never went a—courting with a servant wench, now did you, my heart's dearest?

**ROBERT.** Never in all my days, Rose. 'Twas but the fanciful thoughts of a boy towards she, that I had.

**ROSE.** [*Putting her arm in ROBERT'S.*] Well, we have nothing to do with anything more of it now, dear Robert.

**ROBERT.** You're about right, my true love, we'll get us off to the church.

**JEREMY.** Ah, coach have been waiting a smartish while, I reckon. 'Tis on master as expense'll fall.

[*ROSE and ROBERT with cold glances at LUBIN and ISABEL, pass out of the door.*]

**JOHN.** [*Giving his arm to MARY.*] Now, Mary—now, Kitty. [*They pass out.*]

**LIZ.** Now, Jeremy, sister and me bain't going off all alone.

**JEREMY.** [*Offering an arm to each.*] No further than the church door, I say. I've better things to do nor a—giving of my arm to females be they never so full of wiles. And you two do beat many what bain't near so long in the tusk, ah, that you does.

[*JEREMY goes out with the sisters.*]

**LUBIN.** [*To ISABEL.*] And shall we go off into the meadows, Isabel, seeing that we are quite forgot?

**ISABEL.** No—'tis through these faithless ones as us have learnt to understand the hearts within of we. Let's bide and get the marriage dinner ready for them first.

[*She stretches both her hands towards LUBIN, who takes them reverently in his as the Curtain falls.*]