

Close The Book

BY SUSAN GLASPELL

A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

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1917

ORIGINAL CAST

JHANSI EDITH UNGER PEYTON ROOT, *an Instructor in the University*
JAMES LIGHT MRS. ROOT, PEYTON'S *Mother*
SUSAN GLASPELL MRS. PEYTON, *His Grandmother*
CLARA SAVAGE UNCLE GEORGE PEYTON, *President of the Board of Regents*
JUSTUS SHEFFIELD BESSIE ROOT ALICE
MACDOUGAL STATE SENATOR BYRD DAVID CARB MRS.
STATE SENATOR BYRD ESTHER PINCH

CLOSE THE BOOK

SCENE: The library in the ROOT home, the library of middle-western people who are an important family in their community, a university town, and who think of themselves as people of culture. It is a room which shows pride of family: on the rear wall are two large family portraits--one a Revolutionary soldier, the other a man of a later period. On the low book-cases, to both sides of door rear, and on the mantel, right, are miniatures and other old pictures. There is old furniture--mahogany recently done over: an easy chair near the fireplace, a divan left. A Winged Victory presides over one of the book-cases, a Burne Jones is hung. It is a warmly lighted, cheerful room--books and flowers about. At the rear is a door opening on the hall, at the left a door into another room. There is a corner window at the right. JHANSI and PEYTON are seated on the divan. MRS. ROOT is just going into the hall. She seems perturbed. JHANSI is dressed as

a non-conformist, but attractively. PEYTON is a rather helpless young man, with a sense of humor that is itself rather helpless.

MRS. ROOT

I'll see, Peyton, if your grandmother isn't ready to come down.

[She leaves them.]

JHANSI

[Springing up.] It's absurd that I should be here!

PEYTON

I know, Jhansi, but just this once--as long as it means so much to mother, and doesn't really hurt us.

JHANSI

But it does hurt me, Peyton. These walls stifle me. You come of people who have been walled in all their lives. It doesn't cage you. But me--I am a gypsy! Sometimes I feel them right behind me--all those wanderers, people who were never caught; feel them behind me pushing me away from all this!

PEYTON

But not pushing you away from me, dear. You love me, Jhansi, in spite of my family?

JHANSI

If I didn't love you do you think I could endure to come to this dreadful place? *[A look about the comfortable room]*--and meet these dreadful people? Forgive me for alluding to your home and family, Peyton, but I must not lose my honesty, you know.

PEYTON

No, dear; I don't think you are losing it. And perhaps I'd better not lose mine either. There's one thing I haven't mentioned yet. [*Hesitates.*] Mr. Peyton is coming to dinner tonight.

JHANSI

Mr. Peyton. *What* Peyton?

PEYTON

Yes--that one.

JHANSI

And you ask me--standing for the things I do in this university--to sit down to dinner with the president of the board of regents!

PEYTON

Mother'd asked him before I knew it.

JHANSI

[*With scorn.*] Your uncle!

PEYTON

He's not my uncle--he's mother's. And you see it's partly on account of grandmother just getting back from California. He's grandmother's brother-in-law, you know. I suppose she doesn't realize what it means to have to sit down to dinner with him--she's done it so much. And then mother thought it would be nice for you to meet him.

JHANSI

Nice!

PEYTON

He's pleasant at dinner.

JHANSI

Pleasant!

PEYTON

Mother's a little worried about my position in the university.

JHANSI

It would be wonderful for you to lose your position in the university.

PEYTON

Yes--wonderful.

JHANSI

And then you and I could walk forth free!

PEYTON

Free--but broke.

JHANSI

Peyton, you disappoint me. Just the fact that that man is coming to dinner changes you.

PEYTON

Oh, no. But you are fortunately situated, Jhansi, having no people. It's easier to be free when there's nobody who minds.

JHANSI

I am going!

PEYTON

Oh come now, dearest, you can't go when you're expected for dinner.
Nobody's that free.

JHANSI

Dinner! A dinner to celebrate our engagement! It's humiliating,
Peyton. I should take you by the hand and you and I should walk
together down the open road.

PEYTON

We will, Jhansi; we will--in time.

JHANSI

We should go now.

PEYTON

Think so? Mother's going to have turkey.

JHANSI

Better a dinner of berries and nuts--!

PEYTON

We'll have berries--cranberries, and nuts, too.

JHANSI

Where is my coat?

PEYTON

[*Seizing her and kissing her.*] Some day, serene and unhampered,
we'll take to the open road--a road with berries and nuts.

[*GRANDMOTHER PEYTON and MRS. ROOT are at the door.*]

MRS. ROOT

Mother, this is Peyton's friend Miss Mason. One of our important students.

GRANDMOTHER

[*In her brittle way.*] Yes? I never was a very important student myself. I didn't like to study. Because my family were professors, I suppose.

MRS. ROOT

Peyton's grandmother is a descendant of Gustave Phelps--one of the famous teachers of pioneer days.

JHANSI

[*Her head going up.*] I am a descendant of people who never taught anybody anything!

PEYTON

Jhansi and I were just going to finish an article on Free Speech which must get to the Torch this evening.

GRANDMOTHER

[*Moving toward the big chair near the fire.*] Free Speech? How amusing.

PEYTON

You may be less amused some day, grandmother.

[*JHANSI and PEYTON go into the other room.*]

GRANDMOTHER

That may be a free speech. I wouldn't call it a pleasant one.

MRS. ROOT

[*Sinking to the divan.*] Oh, he was speaking of the open road again--berries and nuts--!

GRANDMOTHER

[*Beginning to knit.*] Berries and nuts? Well, it sounds quite innocuous to me. Some of our young people are less simple in their tastes.

MRS. ROOT

[*In great distress.*] Mother, how would you like to see your grandson become a gypsy?

GRANDMOTHER

Peyton a gypsy? You mean in a carnival?

MRS. ROOT

No, not in a carnival! In *life*.

GRANDMOTHER

But he isn't dark enough.

MRS. ROOT

And is *that* the only thing against it! I had thought you would be a help to me, mother.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, my dear Clara, I have no doubt I will be a help to you--in time. This idea of Peyton becoming a gypsy is too startling for me to be a help instantly. In the first place, could he be? You can't be anything you take it into your head to be--even if it is undesirable. And then,

why should he be? Doesn't he still teach English right here in the university?

MRS. ROOT

I don't know how much longer he'll teach it. He said the other day that American literature was a toddy with the *stick* left out. Saying that of the very thing he's paid to teach! It got in the papers and was denounced in an editorial on "Untrue Americans." Peyton--a descendant of John Peyton of Valley Forge! [*Indicates the Revolutionary portrait*]--denounced in an article on Untrue Americans! And in one of those awful columns--those silly columns--they said maybe the stick hadn't been left out of his toddy. But it isn't that. Peyton doesn't drink--to speak of. It's this girl. *She's* the stick. And I tell you people don't like it, mother. It's not what we pay our professors *for*. Peyton used to be perfectly satisfied with civilization. But now he talks about society. Makes light remarks.

GRANDMOTHER

I should say that was going out of his way to be disagreeable. What business has a professor of English to say anything about society? It's not in his department.

MRS. ROOT

I told Peyton he should be more systematic.

GRANDMOTHER

How did this gypsy get here?

MRS. ROOT

She was brought up by a family named Mason. But it seems she was a gypsy child, who got lost or something, and those Masons took her in. I'm sure it was very good of them, and it's too bad they weren't able to make her more of a Christian. She is coming to have a following in the university! There are people who seem to think that because you're outside society you have some superior information about it.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, don't you think you're needlessly disturbed? In my day, a young man would be likely enough to fall in love with a good-looking gypsy, not very likely to marry her.

MRS. ROOT

Times have changed, mother. They marry them now. [*Both sigh.*] Of course, it's very commendable of them.

GRANDMOTHER

[*Grimly.*] Oh, quite--commendable.

MRS. ROOT

I was brought up in university circles. I'm interested in *ideas*. But sometimes I think there are too *many* ideas.

GRANDMOTHER

An embarrassment of riches. So you have set out to civilize the young woman?

MRS. ROOT

I'd rather have her sit at my table than have my son leave some morning in a covered wagon!

GRANDMOTHER

I wonder how it is about gypsies. About the children. I wonder if it's as it is with the negroes.

MRS. ROOT

Mother!

GRANDMOTHER

It would be startling, wouldn't it?--if one of them should turn out to be a real gypsy and take to this open road.

MRS. ROOT

[*Covering her face.*] Oh!

GRANDMOTHER

Quite likely they'd do it by motor.

MRS. ROOT

[*Rising.*] Mother!--how can you say such dreadful things--and just when I have this *trying* dinner. Oh, I wish Bessie would come! [*Goes to the window.*] She is a comfort to me.

GRANDMOTHER

Where is Bessie?

MRS. ROOT

She's away in the motor. [*Again shudders.*] Bessie feels dreadfully about her brother. She is trying to do something. She said it would be a surprise--a happy surprise. [*Someone heard in the hall.*] Perhaps this is Bessie. [*Enter MR. PEYTON.*] Oh, it's Uncle George.

UNCLE GEORGE

Early I know. Came to have a little visit with Elizabeth. [*Goes to GRANDMOTHER and shakes hands.*] How are you, young woman?

GRANDMOTHER

My nerves seem to be stronger than the nerves I see around me. And how are you, George?

UNCLE GEORGE

Oh, I'm *well*.

GRANDMOTHER

But--?

UNCLE GEORGE

Responsibilities.

GRANDMOTHER

The bank?

UNCLE GEORGE

I'd rather run ten banks than a tenth of a university. You can control money.

MRS. ROOT

I'm sorry, Uncle George, that Peyton should be adding to your worries.

UNCLE GEORGE

What's the matter with Peyton?

GRANDMOTHER

Wild oats.

UNCLE GEORGE

Well, I wish he'd sow them in less intellectual fields.

MRS. ROOT

I am prepared to speak freely with you, Uncle George. The matter with Peyton is this girl. Well, they're going to be married. Yes [*Answering his gesture of protest*] and I think it's a good thing. She won't be in a position to say so much about freedom after she is married.

UNCLE GEORGE

But they say she's a gypsy.

MRS. ROOT

She won't be a gypsy after she's Peyton's wife. She'll be a married woman.

UNCLE GEORGE

Yes, but in the meantime we will have swallowed a gypsy.

GRANDMOTHER

And I was just wondering how it would be about the children.

MRS. ROOT

Mother, please don't be indelicate again.

[*Pause.*

GRANDMOTHER

Well, if there's nothing else we may speak of, let's talk about free speech. They're writing a paper on it in there.

UNCLE GEORGE

I don't know what this university is coming to! An institution of learning! It isn't that I don't believe in free speech. Every true American believes in free speech, but--

[Slight Pause.

GRANDMOTHER

[With Emphasis.] Certainly.

UNCLE GEORGE

Ask them to come out here with their paper on free speech. I'll be glad to give them the benefit of my experience.

MRS. ROOT

Yes, it will be delightful to all be together.

[She goes to get PEYTON and JHANSI.

GRANDMOTHER

This girl doesn't look to me like one who is thirsting for the benefit of another person's experience.

UNCLE GEORGE

She's a bad influence. She's leading our young people to criticise the society their fathers have builded up.

GRANDMOTHER

There's a great deal of ingratitude in the world.

[MRS. ROOT returns, followed by the two young people.

MRS. ROOT

I told Uncle George you were eager to bring him and Jhansi together. Jhansi, this is Mr. Peyton, who looks after the affairs of the university for you students. Of course you've heard about Miss Mason, Uncle George, one of our--cleverest students.

UNCLE GEORGE

Yes, we were speaking of Miss Mason's cleverness just the other day--in board meeting.

JHANSI

And just the other day--at the student assembly--we were speaking of how you look after the affairs of the university for us.

GRANDMOTHER

I hope you both spoke affectionately.

UNCLE GEORGE

Well, Peyton, very busy I take it. You're adding to your duties, aren't you?

PEYTON

Not that I know of.

UNCLE GEORGE

Your grandmother said something about a high falutin paper on free speech.

PEYTON

I suppose that's an inherited tendency. You know one of my ancestors signed a paper on free speech. It had a high falutin name: "The Declaration of Independence"!

MRS. ROOT

I wish Bessie would come!

UNCLE GEORGE

Do you think much about your ancestors, Peyton?

PEYTON

Not a great deal.

UNCLE GEORGE

Peyton has some rather interesting ancestors, Miss Mason. There's Captain John Peyton. That's his picture. He helped win one of the battles which made this country possible--the country in which you are living. And a descendant of John Peyton--Richard Peyton [*Points out the picture*] gave the money which founded this university--the university in which you are now acquiring your education.

JHANSI

[*Lightly.*] Perhaps it would be quite as well if this university--and this country--never had existed.

MRS. ROOT

I don't see why Bessie *doesn't* come!

JHANSI

Of course I look at it as an outsider. I am not a part of your society.

UNCLE GEORGE

Peyton is.

MRS. ROOT

There's Bessie!

[*Bessie rushes in.*

BESSIE

Grandmother! [*Swiftly kissing her.*] How wonderful to have you with us again! Dear Uncle George!

UNCLE GEORGE

Glad you got here, Bessie. Your mother has been looking for you.

BESSIE

[*A movement of greeting to JHANSI.*] Isn't it beautiful to all be together? A real family party! And now--we have a moment or two before dinner, mother?

MRS. ROOT

The man who brought the turkey in from the country had a runaway, so it was a little late in arriving.

BESSIE

How fortunate! Oh, it does seem that all things work together for the best. Mother, I have had a completely successful day!

GRANDMOTHER

Where've you been, Bessie?

BESSIE

I've been fifty miles to the north--in Baxter County. Does that mean anything to you, Jhansi?

JHANSI

Not a thing.

BESSIE

[*Still breathlessly.*] Dear uncle, I hope you will understand what I am about to do. It might seem unrestrained--not in the best of taste, but

it's just because you stand for so much in Peyton's life that I want you to hear our good news as soon as we hear it ourselves. You knew that these two children were in love and going to be married. [*A bow from UNCLE GEORGE.*] You know--Jhansi dear, I may speak very freely, may I not?

JHANSI

I believe in free speech.

BESSIE

Yes--how dear of you. Jhansi has endured in proud silence a great grief. And now, dear child, because of the touching dignity with which you have stood outside and alone, it is a moment of special joyfulness to me when I can say--Welcome Within!

PEYTON

What are you talking about, Bessie?

BESSIE

You must not stand outside society! You belong *within* the gates. You are one of us!

JHANSI

I'm *not*.

BESSIE

Dear child you are as respectable as we are.

JHANSI

[*Rising.*] I am *not*.

BESSIE

Of course, you can't grasp it in an instant. But I have looked it all up, dear. I have the proofs.

PEYTON

Well it wasn't your affair, Bessie.

BESSIE

I made it my affair because I love my brother. Jhansi dear, [*As one who tells tremendous good news*] your father was Henry Harrison, a milkman in the town of Sunny Center--an honorable and respected man. Your parents were married in the Baptist Church!

JHANSI

I deny it! I deny this charge!

BESSIE

[*Stepping to the hall.*] Dear Senator and Mrs. Byrd, will you come now?

[*Enter STATE SENATOR BYRD and MRS. STATE SENATOR BYRD, MRS. BYRD carrying a large book.*

BESSIE

Jhansi dear, you are about to enter upon the happiest moment of your life, for State Senator Byrd, one of our law-making body, is a cousin of your dear dead mother.

SENATOR BYRD

Aggie's little girl!

[*He goes to JHANSI with outstretched hands. But AGGIE'S little girl stands like a rock.*

BESSIE

And here, Jhansi, is your cousin Mrs. Byrd, who has come all this way to assure you you have a family.

MRS. BYRD

Indeed you have! There's Ella Andrews, one of our teachers--a lovely girl. She's your first cousin. We are second cousins. You may have some little family pride in knowing that I was last spring elected President of the Federated Clubs of Baxter County. Just last week I entertained the officers of all the clubs at our home--our new home, erected last year after your cousin Ephraim completed his first term in the upper house of the State Legislature. Your cousin Ephraim has been re-elected. He is on the Ways and Means Committee.

UNCLE GEORGE

[*Approaching SENATOR BYRD.*] I have heard of Senator Ephraim Byrd of the Ways and Means Committee. That was good work you fellows--

[*They talk of this.*]

MRS. ROOT

And to think, Jhansi, that your cousin Mrs. Byrd is a prominent clubwoman!

GRANDMOTHER

[*After a look at JHANSI.*] Her cup runneth over.

MRS. ROOT

Isn't Bessie wonderful, mother? How did you find it all out, Bessie?

BESSIE

From clue to clue I worked my way to Sunny Center. I would say to myself--Do this for Peyton; do this for Jhansi. And so, I heard of an

old minister who had been there years and years. I went to him and-- he had married Jhansi's father and mother! Dearest child, your mother taught in his Sunday-School!

SENATOR BYRD

Oh, yes, Aggie loved the Baptist Sunday-School!

JHANSI

It's very strange that my mother--I am referring to Mrs. Mason--never told me of this!

BESSIE

But she never told you you were a gypsy, either, did she? No; she just wanted you to think you were their own child. And then I suppose you heard some foolish tale at school.

MRS. BYRD

You see Jhansi's mother and father--her real ones--died of typhoid fever before she was two years old. They got it from the cows. Well, the Harrisons were friends of the Mason's--they all worked together in the church--and so they took Jhansi, and soon after that they moved away and we lost track of them. You know what a busy world it is--particularly for people who have duties in their community.

JHANSI

I haven't accepted this story! You can't prove it!

[MRS. BYRD impressively hands her husband the book.]

SENATOR BYRD

"Iowa descendants of New England families."

MRS. ROOT

Oh, yes; that is *one* of the books in which our family is written up! [*To PEYTON.*] My dearest boy, from my heart I congratulate you!

SENATOR BYRD

Pages fifty-seven to sixty-one--inclusive, are devoted, Jhansi, to our family.

MRS. BYRD

My own family appears on page 113.

[*SENATOR BYRD holds the book out to JHANSI, who once more stands like a rock. UNCLE GEORGE steps forward to look at the book.*

UNCLE GEORGE

Oh, you are a descendant of Peter Byrd.

SENATOR BYRD

One of those dare-devils whose leg was shot under him at Bull Run.

BESSIE

You heard that, Jhansi?

MRS. ROOT

A descendant of Peter Byrd!--whose leg was shot *under* him--

JHANSI

So *this* is what I was brought here for, is it? To have my character torn down--to ruin my reputation and threaten my integrity by seeking to muzzle me with a leg at Bull Run and set me down in the Baptist Sunday-School in a milk-wagon! I see the purpose of it all. I understand the hostile motive behind all this--but I tell you it's a *lie*. Something here [*Hand on heart*] tells me I am not respectable!

UNCLE GEORGE

Reaction.

JHANSI

I am Jhansi--Jhansi--a child of the gypsies! I am a wanderer! I am an outlaw!

MRS. BYRD

Yes, you are Jhansi. And did you ever stop to think how you came by that outlandish name?

JHANSI

It has always assured me of my birthright.

MRS. BYRD

Well, you'd better look in your geography. You were named after a town in India where your mother's missionary circle was helping to support a missionary.

SENATOR BYRD

Aggie was crazy about the missionaries.

JHANSI

[*Falling back, breaking.*] Peyton, I release you from our engagement.

PEYTON

No. N-o; don't do that. [*Stoutly.*] I love you for yourself alone--in spite of anything that may be true. But I must say Bessie--!

JHANSI

[*Beginning to sob.*] I can't bear it. I can't bear it! And to think that *Peyton's* mother was an illegitimate child.

MRS. ROOT

[*Dazed.*] What's that?

GRANDMOTHER

[*Rising.*] Yes; what is that?

MRS. ROOT

Am I to understand--?

GRANDMOTHER

Am I to be told--at my age--that I gave birth to an illegitimate child?
This is a surprise to me--and not a pleasant one!

PEYTON

[*To JHANSI.*] It would have been better not to have mentioned that.

UNCLE GEORGE

This *is* reaction. I think perhaps we need a physician.

JHANSI

I don't need a physician. Peyton certainly told me that his mother was an illegitimate child. Of course, Peyton, if you were just *boasting* about your family--say so.

UNCLE GEORGE

What have you to say, Peyton?

GRANDMOTHER

Before he says anything, Bessie, you bring me that portfolio from the lower right-hand corner of my desk. Key in the upper left hand pigeon hole.

[*Bessie goes.*

MRS. ROOT

Peyton!

PEYTON

Why I didn't mean any harm, mother. I certainly didn't mean anything against you, or grandmother. Quite the contrary. I was just anxious that Jhansi should have a little respect for our family. It didn't seem to have a leg to stand on.

JHANSI

So you made it up--out of whole cloth?

PEYTON

No, not out of whole cloth.

GRANDMOTHER

Out of what cloth, then? Kindly tell me, out of what cloth?

MRS. ROOT

Peyton is not himself.

PEYTON

Well, it just came into my head that it was possible. You see, grandmother, your having moved--I do wish you could see that I meant nothing against your character. Absolutely the contrary. But your having *moved*--

GRANDMOTHER

My having moved where?

PEYTON

Your having moved from New York State to Ohio at just that time--

GRANDMOTHER

I always did like to travel. Is that anything against a person's character?

PEYTON

I was claiming that you *had* character.

GRANDMOTHER

I'll stick to my own, thank you. I've had it quite a while and am used to it. But I'd like to know right now what there is so immoral in moving from one state to another--even if you are going to have a baby?

JHANSI

[*Raising her head.*] There is nothing immoral in anything.

GRANDMOTHER

Fiddlesticks. [*BESSIE hands her the folio.*] You found it, Bessie? The key? Here, Peyton; come here. [*Opens portfolio, takes out a rolled paper.*] Happily preserved for this defense of my character in my old age, is my wedding certificate.

MRS. BYRD

This is painful.

[With ostentatious tact she turns and looks at a print on the rear wall; motions SENATOR BYRD to join her.]

GRANDMOTHER

I want you to look at the date--right there beside that pink cupid--cherub, perhaps it is--anyway, read aloud the figures you see.

PEYTON

[Sullenly.] 1869.

GRANDMOTHER

And here, in this other document, very fortunately at hand to meet the attacks of my only grandson upon my integrity, what do you read there?

PEYTON

Clara--aged six weeks.

GRANDMOTHER

And the date?

[MRS. ROOT, BESSIE, UNCLE GEORGE, all listen a little anxiously.]

PEYTON

December, 1871.

[A sigh of relief.]

GRANDMOTHER

I trust now, Peyton, you will admit that a woman may move from one state to another without being dissolute.

[*At this word MRS. ROOT is unable to bear more and hides her face in her handkerchief.*

UNCLE GEORGE

[*As one saving the situation.*] Genealogy is interesting. One is democratic, of course, but when there is behind one what there is behind us, Senator, it enhances one's powers--responsibility--obligation. [*He has taken up the book and been running through the pages.*] Descendants of John Peyton. Here, Peyton, are some things about your ancestors. Read them. Perhaps then instead of tearing down you will have an impulse to build up. I commend this book to you young people for study. It will do you no harm to think a little of those worthy men from whom you come.

[*Marks the place with a card and gives the book to PEYTON.*

JHANSI

[*Springing up.*] I shall waste no time thinking of the worthy men from whom I come! If I am related to a law-maker--I owe it to my soul to become a law-breaker!

MRS. ROOT

You see, Bessie, what you have done.

JHANSI

When I thought there was in me no taint of civilization, I could put up with your silly conventions, but if in a material sense I am part of your society, then I have a spiritual obligation to fulfil in leaving it! Peyton, respectability threatens to wall us in and stifle us. Are you ready to walk from this house with me tonight, entering upon a free union that says that--[*A snap of the finger*] for law?

PEYTON

Why--certainly.

MRS. BYRD

Well, if it comes to a matter of not caring to claim relationship, *we* certainly hesitated some time. Those Harrisons were not all they should be.

JHANSI

[*A note of hope in her voice.*] No?

MRS. BYRD

I said to Senator Byrd, now that the girl is marrying into one of the best families in the state--not that that influenced us especially, but I said, if she is trying to make something of herself, we must stand by her, and we will mention only pleasant things. We will not allude to what her grandfather did!

JHANSI

What did he do?

SENATOR BYRD

He burned down his neighbor's house because that neighbor chased home his pigs.

JHANSI

Really? Yes!--my grandfather would do that!

PEYTON

Were any of the family found in the charred remains?

SENATOR BYRD

The family, I believe, escaped.

MRS. BYRD

But no thanks to old man Harrison.

JHANSI

No!--I'm sure grandfather *meant* them to burn. [*Seizing book.*] I wonder if grandfather's protest is recorded in this book!

MRS. BYRD

That book does not emphasize unfortunate occurrences.

MRS. ROOT

And how right it is! One should think only of the *good* in human nature.

PEYTON

[*Looking with JHANSI.*] What is this fine print at the bottom of the page?

MRS. BYRD

[*Hastily.*] That is not important.

SENATOR BYRD

It is in fine print because it is not important.

PEYTON

One of the descendants of Peter Byrd. [*To JHANSI.*] The leg at Bull Run, you know. He--

MRS. ROOT

Peyton, remember that you are in your own house.

PEYTON

“Unfaithful to the high office of treasurer of the Baxter County Cemetery Association.”

JHANSI

[*Gasping, then beaming.*] Why--why!--a grave robber! Was he a *near* relative?

MRS. BYRD

I must say, Miss Root, that we did not come here to have our family inquired into as far back as ancient history!

MRS. ROOT

No, Mrs. Byrd, I quite agree with you that it is not necessary to go too far back in any family.

GRANDMOTHER

Neither necessary nor desirable.

BESSIE

Those early days must have been very trying.

PEYTON

Jhansi! The fine print of your family is *thrilling*. Here is a man--

MRS. ROOT

Peyton, stop reading from that tiresome and obsolete book. It is not hospitable.

MRS. BYRD

Turn to your own family history and read a little fine print in it!

[The other members of the PEYTON-ROOT family give each other startled, nervous glances.]

PEYTON

Why what a lovely idea. Uncle has marked it for us. *[After looking.]*
Fine print in our family?

MRS. BYRD

It's there.

BESSIE

Genealogy is so confusing. I never could understand it.

MRS. ROOT

And I don't see why one should *try* to understand it. Live well in the present--that is sufficient.

GRANDMOTHER

It looks to me as if that book was not thoughtfully edited. I'm surprised it has sold.

PEYTON

[Snatching book from JHANSI.] Jhansi! I don't want to boast! I hope I shall not become a snob. You too have a family--and they had their impulsive moments--but what was the most *largely* low-down thing a man of early days could do? *[PEYTONS and ROOTS draw together anxiously; the BYRDS wait complacently.]* As uncle has pointed out, Jhansi, I am a descendant of Captain John Peyton. But when you have a remote ancestor, you also have his less remote descendants--a fact sometimes overlooked. Well, Stuart Peyton--

BESSIE

Mother, I wonder if the turkey isn't ready now?

MRS. ROOT

It's time for it to be ready.

[She hurries out.]

PEYTON

Stuart Peyton--“convicted of selling whiskey and firearms to the Indians.”

[Assumes an overbearing attitude.]

MRS. BYRD

I guess the early days were trying, in more than one family.

PEYTON

[Peering into the book.] And what is this? What is *this*? Stuart Peyton was the father of *Richard* Peyton--

JHANSI

Who founded this university!

PEYTON

[In the voice of UNCLE GEORGE.] The university in which you are now acquiring your education.

MRS. BYRD

Oh, I have no doubt that inducing the Indians to massacre the whites was *profitable*.

PEYTON

A good sound basis for the family fortune.

UNCLE GEORGE

Young man, you go too far!

PEYTON

[*Holding book out to UNCLE GEORGE.*] In thinking of these worthy men from whom I come? [*Turns to the wall on which hang portraits of John and Richard Peyton.*] We don't seem to have Stuart's picture. Jhansi, I don't know that we need to leave society. There seems little--crevices in these walls of respectability.

JHANSI

And whenever we feel a bit stifled we can always find air through our family trees!

MRS. BYRD

I think, Senator, that we will not remain longer.

[*MRS. ROOT returns.*]

MRS. ROOT

Mary was just coming. Now we'll have dinner!

BESSIE

Yes, a little family party to celebrate the happy--

PEYTON

[*Again bent over his family history.*] Grandmother! Here's something about your ancestor, Gustave Phelps.

GRANDMOTHER

[*Rising. With weight.*] Peyton--close that book.

(CURTAIN)