

The Exchange

BY ALTHEA THURSTON

The Exchange is reprinted by permission of Althea Thurston. This play is one of the farces written in the Course in Dramatic Composition (English 109) in the University of Utah. For permission to perform, address B. Roland Lewis, Department of English, University of Utah, Salt Lake City, Utah.

ALTHEA THURSTON

Althea Cooms-Thurston, one of the promising writers of the younger set of American dramatists, was born in Iowa, but soon moved with her parents to Colorado, where she spent her girlhood. She was educated in the public schools of Colorado Springs and Denver. Her collegiate training was received in the University of Utah, Salt Lake City. In 1902 she married Walter R. Thurston, a well-known engineer. At present she resides in Dallas, Texas.

Mrs. Thurston has travelled widely and has resided for periods of time in Mexico City and Havana, Cuba. She is an able linguist and has made a special study of her native English tongue and of Spanish and French, all of which she uses fluently.

From childhood she has shown dramatic ability. Her dramatic composition has been more or less directly associated with the courses in playwriting and the history of the drama which she completed in the University of Utah. Among her one-act plays are *When a Man's Hungry*, *And the Devil Laughs*, and *The Exchange*.

Mrs. Thurston has an aptitude for delicate and satirical farce. *The Exchange* is an excellent example of farce-comedy in the contemporary one-act play.

CHARACTERS

JUDGE, *the exchanger of miseries* IMP, *office boy to the* JUDGE A
POOR MAN A VAIN WOMAN A RICH CITIZEN

THE EXCHANGE[C]

SCENE I

The curtain rises upon an office scene. Seemingly there is nothing unusual about this office: it has tables, chairs, a filing cabinet, and a hat-rack. A portion of the office is railed off at the right. Within this enclosed space is a commodious desk and swivel-chair; and the filing cabinet stands against the wall. This railed-off portion of the office belongs, exclusively, to the JUDGE. Here he is wont to spend many hours--sometimes to read or write, and again, perhaps, he will just sit and ponder upon the vagaries of mankind. The JUDGE is a tall, spare man with rather long gray hair, which shows beneath the skull-cap that he always wears. When we first see him, he is reading a letter, and evidently he is not pleased, for he is tapping with impatient fingers upon his desk.

At the left of the stage is a heavily curtained door which leads to an inner room. At centre rear is another door which evidently leads to the street, as it is through this door that the POOR MAN, the VAIN WOMAN, and the RICH CITIZEN will presently enter, each upon his special quest. The hat-rack stands near the street door, and we glimpse a soft black hat and a long black overcoat hanging upon it.

Down stage to the left is a flat-topped desk, littered with papers and letters. This desk has two large drawers, wherein a number of miscellaneous articles might be kept. It is at this desk that we catch our first glimpse of IMP. He is busily writing in a huge ledger, and he seems to be enjoying his work, for he chuckles the while. IMP is a little rogue; he looks it and acts it, and we feel that he has a Mephistophelian spirit. He wears a dark-green tight-fitting uniform, trimmed with red braid. His saucy little round cap is always cocked over one eye. He is ever chuckling impishly, and we feel that he is slyly gleeful over the weaknesses of mankind and the difficulties that beset them.

IMP. [*Throws down his pen, chuckles, and half standing on the rungs of his chair and balancing himself against his desk, surveys the*

ledger.] Your honor, I've all the miseries listed to date and a fine lot there is to choose from. Everything from bunions to old wives for exchange.

JUDGE. [*Scowls and impatiently taps the letter he is reading.*] Here is another one. A woman suspects her husband of a misalliance. Wants to catch him, but is so crippled with rheumatism she can't get about. Wants us to exchange her rheumatism for something that won't interfere with either her walking or her eyesight.

IMP. [*Referring to the ledger and running his finger along the lines.*] We have a defective heart or a lazy liver that we could give her.

JUDGE. [*Irritably tossing the letter over to IMP.*] She would not be satisfied. People never are. They always want to change their miseries, but never their vices. Each thinks his own cross heavier than others have to bear, but he is very willing to make light of his own weaknesses and shortcomings. He thinks they are not half so bad as his neighbor's. I have tried for years to aid distressed humanity, but I can't satisfy them. I am growing tired of it all, Imp. People need a lesson and they're going to get it, too. I am going to----

[*Knock is heard at the street door. JUDGE sighs, turns to his desk and begins to write. IMP sweeps the litter of papers on his desk into a drawer, closes ledger, and goes to answer knock.*

IMP. Here comes another misery.

[*IMP opens the door to admit the POOR MAN, who is very shabbily dressed. He hesitates, looks around the room as if he were in the wrong place, and then addresses IMP in a loud whisper.*

POOR MAN. [*Indicating the JUDGE with a motion of his head.*] Is that him?

IMP. [*Whispering loudly his reply.*] Yes, that is his honor.

POOR MAN. [*Still whispering and showing signs of nervousness.*] Do I dare speak to him?

IMP. [*Enjoying the situation and still whispering.*] Yes, but be careful what you say.

POOR MAN. [*Takes off his hat, approaches slowly to the railing, and speaks humbly.*] Your honor. I--[*Swallows hard, clears throat.*] Your honor, I've a little favor--to ask of you.

JUDGE. [*Looking coldly at the POOR MAN.*] Well?

POOR MAN. You see, your honor, I've been poor all my life. I've never had much fun. I don't ask for a lot of money, but--I would like enough so that I could have some swell clothes, and--so that I could eat, drink, and be merry with the boys. You know, I just want to have a good time. Do you think you could fix it for me, Judge?

JUDGE. [*Gazes at him sternly for a moment.*] So you just want to have a good time? Want me to take away your poverty? I suppose you have no moral weakness you want to change, no defects in your character that you want to better?

POOR MAN. [*Stammering and twirling his hat.*] Why, w-hy, Judge, I--I am not a bad man. Of--of course, I have my faults, but then--I've never committed any crimes. I guess I stack up pretty fair as men go. I'm just awful tired of being poor and never having any fun. Couldn't you help me out on that point, Judge?

JUDGE. [*Sighs wearily and turns to IMP.*] Bring me the ledger.

[*IMP gives him the ledger in which he has been writing.* JUDGE opens it, and then speaks sharply to the POOR MAN.

JUDGE. You understand, do you, my good man, that if I take away your poverty and give you enough money for your good time, you will have to accept another misery?

POOR MAN. [*Eagerly.*] Yes, your honor, that's all right. I'm willing.

JUDGE. [*Scanning ledger.*] Very well. Let us see. Here is paralysis.

POOR MAN. [*Hesitatingly.*] Well. I--I couldn't have a--very good time, if--if I was paralyzed.

JUDGE. [*Shortly.*] No. I suppose not. How about a glass eye?

POOR MAN. [*Anxiously.*] Please, your honor, if I'm going to have a good time I need two good eyes. I don't want to miss anything.

JUDGE. [*Wearily turning over the leaves of the ledger.*] A man left his wife here for exchange, perhaps you would like her.

POOR MAN. [*Shifting from one foot to the other and nervously twirling his hat.*] Oh, Judge, oh, no, please, no. I don't want anybody's old cast-off wife.

JUDGE. [*Becoming exasperated.*] Well, choose something, and be quick about it. Here is lumbago, gout, fatness, old age, and----

IMP. [*Interrupting, and walking quickly over to the railing.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the indigestion that Mr. Potter left when he took old Mrs. Pratt's fallen arches.

POOR MAN. [*Eagerly.*] Indigestion? Sure! That will be fine! I won't mind a little thing like indigestion if I can get rid of my poverty.

JUDGE. [*Sternly.*] Very well. Raise your right hand. Repeat after me: "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

POOR MAN. [*Solemnly.*] "I swear to accept indigestion for better or for worse as my portion of the world's miseries, so help me God."

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show this gentleman to the changing-room.

[*POOR MAN follows IMP, who conducts him to the heavily curtained door. The POOR MAN throws out his chest and swaggers a bit, as a man might who had suddenly come into a fortune. IMP swaggers along with him.*]

IMP. Won't you have a grand time, though. I'll get you a menu card, so that you can be picking out your dinner.

POOR MAN. [*Joyfully slapping IMP on the back.*] Good idea, and I'll pick out a regular banquet.

[*Pausing a moment before he passes through the curtains, he smiles and smacks his lips in anticipation. Exit.*]

JUDGE. [*Speaks disgustedly to IMP.*] There you are! He's perfectly satisfied with his morals. Has no defects in his character. Just wants to have a good time.

[*Sighs heavily and turns back to his writing. IMP nods his head in agreement and chuckles slyly.*]

[*The street door opens slowly and the VAIN WOMAN stands upon the threshold. She does not enter at once, but stands posing-- presumably she desires to attract attention, and she is worthy of it. She has a superb figure, and her rich gowning enhances it. Her fair face reveals a shallow prettiness, but the wrinkles of age are beginning to leave telltale lines upon its smoothness. As IMP hurries forward to usher her in, she sweeps grandly past him to the centre of the stage. IMP stops near the door, with his hands on his hips, staring after her, then takes a few steps in imitation of her. She turns around slowly and, sauntering over to the railing, coughs affectedly, and as the JUDGE rises and bows curtly, she speaks in a coaxing manner.*]

VAIN WOMAN. Judge, I have heard that you are very kind, and I have been told that you help people out of their troubles, so I have a little favor to ask of you.

JUDGE. [*Coldly.*] Yes, I supposed so; go on.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Archly.*] Well, you know that I am a famous beauty; in fact, both my face and my form are considered very lovely. [*She turns around slowly that he may see for himself.*] Great and celebrated men have worshipped at my feet. I simply cannot live without admiration. It is my very life. But, Judge [*plaintively*], horrid wrinkles are beginning to show in my face. [*Intensely.*] Oh, I would

give anything, do anything, to have a smooth, youthful face once more. Please, oh, please, won't you take away these wrinkles [*touching her face with her fingers*] and give me something in their stead.

JUDGE. [*Looking directly at her and speaking coldly.*] Are you satisfied with yourself in other ways? Is your character as beautiful as your face? Have you no faults or weaknesses that you want exchanged?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Uncertainly.*] Why, I--don't know what you mean. I am just as good as any other woman and lots better than some I know. I go to church, and I subscribe to the charities, and I belong to the best clubs. [*Anxiously.*] Oh, please, Judge, it's these wrinkles that make me so unhappy. Won't you exchange them? You don't want me to be unhappy, do you? Please take them away.

JUDGE. [*Wearily looking over the ledger.*] Oh, very well, I'll see what I can do for you. [*To IMP.*] Fetch a chair for this lady.

[*IMP gives her a chair and she sits facing front. IMP returns to his desk, perches himself upon it and watches the VAIN WOMAN interestedly. JUDGE turns over the leaves of the ledger.*]

JUDGE. I have a goitre that I could exchange for your wrinkles.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Protestingly, clasping her hands to her throat.*] Oh, heavens, no! That would ruin my beautiful throat. See. [*Throwing back her fur and exposing her neck in a low-cut gown.*] I have a lovely neck. [*IMP makes an exaggerated attempt to see.*]

JUDGE. [*Glances coldly at her and then scans ledger again.*] Well, how about hay-fever?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Reproachfully.*] Oh, Judge, how can you suggest such a thing! Watery eyes and a red nose, the worst enemy of beauty there is. I simply couldn't think of it. I want something that won't show.

JUDGE. [*Disgustedly turns to filing cabinet and looks through a series of cards, withdraws one, and turns back to VAIN WOMAN.*] Perhaps this will suit you. [*Refers to card.*] A woman has grown very tired of her husband and wants to exchange him for some other burden.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Indignantly.*] What! I accept a man that some other woman doesn't want! Certainly not! I prefer one that some other woman does want.

JUDGE. [*Irritated, puts the card back in its place, and turns upon the VAIN WOMAN crossly.*] I fear that I cannot please you and I do not have time to----

IMP. [*Interrupts and runs over to the railing, speaking soothingly to the JUDGE.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the lady would like deafness in exchange for her wrinkles. Deafness wouldn't show, so it couldn't spoil her face or her elegant figure.

JUDGE. [*Wearily.*] No, it won't show. Deafness ought to be a good thing for you.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Consideringly.*] Why--yes--that might do. But--well, it wouldn't show. I've a notion to take it. [*Pause--she seems to consider and meditate. The JUDGE stares at her coldly. IMP grins impudently. She rises leisurely, sighs.*] All right. I'll accept it.

JUDGE. [*Sharply.*] Hold up your right hand. [*She raises hand.*] Do you swear to accept deafness for better or for worse, as your portion of the world's miseries, so help you God?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Sweetly.*] Oh, yes. I do, Judge.

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show the lady to the changing-room.

IMP. [*Escorts her to the curtained door with rather mock deference.*] No, deafness won't show at all, and you'll have 'em all crazy about you. [*Draws aside curtains for her to pass.*] Take second booth to your right.

[VAIN WOMAN *stands posing a moment. She smiles radiantly and pats her cheeks softly with her hands, then with a long-drawn sigh of happiness, she exits. IMP bows low and mockingly after her vanishing form, his hand on his heart.*

JUDGE. [*Sarcastically.*] Do her faults or shortcomings trouble her? Not at all! Perfectly satisfied with herself, except for a few wrinkles in her face. Vain women! Bah!

IMP. Yes, sir; women have queer notions.

[*An imperative rap at the street-door, immediately followed by the rapper's abrupt entrance. We see an important-appearing personage. His arrogant bearing and commanding pose lead us to believe that he is accustomed to prompt attention. It is the RICH CITIZEN, exceedingly well groomed. His manner is lordly, but he addresses the JUDGE in a bored tone. When IMP scampers to meet him, the RICH CITIZEN hands him his hat and cane and turns at once to the JUDGE. IMP examines the hat and cane critically, hangs them on the hat-rack, and returns to his desk, where he again perches to watch the RICH CITIZEN.*

RICH CITIZEN. [*Lighting a cigarette.*] I am addressing the Judge, am I not?

JUDGE. [*Shortly.*] You are.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Languidly, between puffs of his cigarette.*] Well, Judge, life has become rather boresome, so I thought I would drop in and ask you to do me a small favor.

JUDGE. [*Wearily.*] Yes? We--What is your grievance?

RICH CITIZEN. [*Nonchalantly.*] Oh, I wouldn't say grievance exactly. You see, my dear Judge, it is this way. I am a very rich and influential citizen, a prominent member of society, and I am very much sought after.

JUDGE. [*Frigidly.*] Oh, indeed!

RICH CITIZEN. [*In a very bored manner.*] Yes. Women run after me day and night. Ambitious mothers throw their marriageable daughters at my head. Men seek my advice on all matters. I am compelled to head this and that committee. [*Smokes languidly.*]

JUDGE. [*Sharply.*] Well, go on.

RICH CITIZEN. Really, Judge, my prestige has become a burden. I want to get away from it all. I would like to become a plain, ordinary man with an humble vocation, the humbler the better, so that people will cease bothering me.

JUDGE. [*Sarcastically.*] Is your prestige all that troubles you? Don't worry about your morals, I suppose. Satisfied with your habits and character?

RICH CITIZEN. [*Coldly.*] What have my habits or morals got to do with my request? [*Scornfully.*] Certainly I am not one of your saintly men. I live as a man of my station should live, and I think I measure up very well with the best of them. I am simply bored and I would like a change. I would like to be a plain man with an humble calling.

JUDGE. [*Ironically.*] I'll see what we have in humble callings. [*He looks at the ledger, turning the leaves over slowly.*] We have several bartenders' vocations.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Wearily smoking.*] No. Too many people about all the time, and too much noise.

JUDGE. Well, here's a janitor's job open to you.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Impatiently throwing away his cigarette.*] No. I don't like that, either. Too confining. Too many people bickering at you all the time. I want to get out in the open, away from crowds.

JUDGE. [*Sighing, and turning over the leaves of the ledger, then hopefully.*] Here's the very thing for you, then--postman in a rural district.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Showing vexation.*] No, no, *no*. Too many old women that want to gossip. I tell you, I want to get away from women. Haven't you something peaceful and quiet; something that would take me out in the quiet of the early morning, when the birds are singing?

JUDGE. [*Closing ledger with a bang, and rising.*] Well, you're too particular, and I have not time to bother with you. I bid you good after----

IMP. [*Slides from his desk, runs to railing, and speaks suavely.*] Excuse me, Judge, but maybe the gentleman would like the vocation of milkman. That is early-morning work. And, you remember, a milkman left his job here when he took that old, worn-out senator's position.

JUDGE. [*Sharply, to RICH CITIZEN.*] Well, how about it? Does a milkman's vocation suit you? It's early-morning hours, fresh air, and no people about.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Musingly.*] Well, the very simplicity and quietness of it is its charm. It rather appeals to me. [*He ponders a moment.*] Yes, by Jove, I'll take it.

JUDGE. [*Sternly.*] Hold up your right hand. "Do you solemnly swear to accept, for better or for worse, the vocation of milkman as your lot in life, so help you God?"

RICH CITIZEN. I do.

JUDGE. [*To IMP.*] Show this gentleman to the changing-room.

IMP. [*While escorting him to the curtained door.*] Yes, sir, you will lead the simple life. Fresh air, fresh milk, no people, just cows--and they can't talk. [*Holding aside the curtains.*] Third booth, sir.

RICH CITIZEN. [*Musingly.*] The simple life--peace and quietness.

[*Exit.*]

JUDGE. [*In disgust.*] It's no use, Imp. They all cling to their vices, but they are very keen to change some little cross or condition that vexes them--or think vexes them.

IMP. It's strange that people always want something different from what they have.

[*IMP opens a drawer in his desk and takes out a bottle, evidently filled with tablets, which he holds up, shaking it and chuckling. He hunts in the drawer again, and this time brings forth a huge ear-trumpet, which he chucklingly places on his table beside the bottle of tablets.*]

JUDGE. Don't let any more in, Imp. I can't stand another one to-day. I am going to write a letter and then go home.

IMP. All right, sir.

JUDGE. I am feeling very tired; what I really need is a vacation. A sea-trip would put me right. By the way, Imp, where is that transatlantic folder that I told you to get?

[*IMP picks up the folder from his desk and takes it to the JUDGE, who studies it attentively. IMP returns to his own desk, where he again looks in a drawer and brings forth a menu card, which he glances over, grinning mischievously.*]

[*The former POOR MAN re-enters from the changing-room. He is well dressed, and taking a well-filled wallet from his pocket, he looks at it gloatingly. However, from time to time, a shade of annoyance passes over his face, and he puts his hand to the pit of his stomach. IMP runs to meet him, and hands him the menu that he has been reading.*]

IMP. Here's a menu from the Gargoyle. Say, you sure do look swell! [*Looking him over admiringly.*]

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Grinning happily.*] Some class to me now, eh! [*Looking at menu.*] And you watch me pick out a real dinner. [*Sits down at left front.*] First, I'll have a cocktail, then--let's see--I'll have--

another cocktail. Next, oysters, and [*he frowns and presses his hand to the pit of his stomach, keeping up a massaging motion*]--green-turtle soup, sand dabs--chicken breasts--

[*They become absorbed over the menu.*]

[*The VAIN WOMAN re-enters from the changing-room. She now has a smooth face, and she is looking at herself in a hand-glass, smiling and touching her face delightedly, She walks over to the railing, and leans over it to the JUDGE. He looks up questioningly.*]

VAIN WOMAN. [*Smiling.*] Oh, I am so happy again. Am I not beautiful?

JUDGE. [*Pityingly.*] You are a vain, foolish woman.

[*Since she is deaf, she does not hear his words, but thinks he is complimenting her. She smiles at him coyly.*]

VAIN WOMAN. Ah, Judge, you too are susceptible to my charms.

[*The JUDGE, in great exasperation, puts away his papers, thrusts the transatlantic folder in his pocket, hastily closes his desk, and hurries to the hat-rack, puts on his overcoat, slips his skull-cap into his pocket and puts on his soft black hat. Then, with a shrug of his shoulders and a wave of his hand indicative of disgust, he slips quietly out.*]

[*The VAIN WOMAN saunters past the FORMER POOR MAN, stops near him, posing, and begins to put on her gloves. He looks at her admiringly, then, getting to his feet, makes an elaborate but awkward bow.*]

FORMER POOR MAN. Excuse me, lady, but I've had a big piece of luck to-day, and I want to celebrate, so I am having a big dinner. Won't you join me and help me have a good time?

VAIN WOMAN. [*Looking at him blankly, and trying to fathom what he has said.*] Oh--why, what did you say?

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Hesitating, and a bit surprised.*] Why--er--I said that I had a big piece of luck to-day, and I am going to celebrate. I am having a fine dinner, and I just asked if--if--you wouldn't have dinner with me.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Still looking blank and a little confused, then smiling archly and acting as though she had been hearing compliments, she speaks affectedly.*] Really, do you think so? [*Looking down and smoothing her dress.*] But, then, every one tells me that I am.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Puzzled, turns to IMP for help.*] Just what is her trouble, Nut?

IMP. [*Secretly gleeful.*] She is stone-deaf. You had better write it.

FORMER POOR MAN. Never! No deaf ones for me.

[*Turns away and consults menu again. VAIN WOMAN poses and frequently looks in hand-glass to reassure herself.*

[*FORMER RICH CITIZEN re-enters from the changing-room. He is dressed in shabby overalls, jumper, and an old hat. He has a pipe in his mouth. He walks arrogantly over to the FORMER POOR MAN and addresses him.*

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Give me a light.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Trying to live up to his fine clothes and wallet full of money, looks the FORMER RICH CITIZEN over snubbingly.*] Say, who do you think you are? You light out, see?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Very much surprised, stands nonplussed a moment.*] Well, upon my word, I--I----

[*He stops short in his speech, walks haughtily over to the railing, where he stands glowering at the FORMER POOR MAN. The FORMER POOR MAN starts for the street door, but IMP runs after him, waving the bottle of tablets.*

IMP. I'll sell you these for two bits.

FORMER POOR MAN. What is that?

IMP. [*Grinning.*] Indigestion tablets.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Puts his hand to his stomach and laughs a little lamely.*] Keep 'em; I don't need 'em.

[*VAIN WOMAN fastens her fur and starts for the street-door, giving the FORMER RICH CITIZEN a snubbing look as she passes him. IMP stops her and offers the ear-trumpet.*

IMP. You might need this; I'll sell it for a dollar.

[*She does not hear what he says, but she looks her scorn at the ear-trumpet and walks proudly out.*

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Fumbling at his pocket, as if to find a watch.*] Boy, what time is it? I haven't my watch.

IMP. [*Grinning mischievously.*] Time to milk the cows.

[*The FORMER RICH CITIZEN starts angrily toward IMP, then evidently thinking better of it, shrugs his shoulders and stalks majestically to the street-door. He pauses with it partly open, turns as if to speak to IMP, drawing himself up haughtily--a ludicrous figure in his shabby outfit--then he goes abruptly out, slamming the door.*

[*IMP doubles himself up in a paroxysm of glee as the curtain falls.*

SCENE II

A fortnight has passed. The curtain rises upon the same stage-setting. The JUDGE is not about, but we see IMP asleep in a chair. All seems quiet and serene. But suddenly the street-door opens noisily, and the FORMER POOR MAN bursts into the room. He is panting, as though he had been running. He is haggard and seems in great pain, for occasionally he moans. He looks wildly about the room, and seeing

IMP *asleep in the chair, he rushes to him and shakes him roughly.*
IMP *wakes slowly, yawning and rubbing his eyes.*

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Frantically.*] The Judge, where is he? I must see him at once.

IMP. [*Yawning.*] You're too early. He isn't down yet.

[*Settles himself to go to sleep again.*

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Walking the floor, and holding his hands to his stomach.*] Don't go to sleep again. I'm nearly crazy. What time does the Judge get here? Where does he live? Can't we send for him?

IMP. [*Indifferently.*] Oh, he is liable to come any minute--and then he may not come for an hour or two.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Pacing the floor, moaning and rubbing his stomach.*] Oh, I can't stand it much longer. It's driving me wild, I tell you. I do wish the Judge would come.

IMP. [*Getting up from his chair and keeping step with the FORMER POOR MAN.*] What's the matter? I thought all you wanted was to eat, drink, and be merry.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Frantically waving his arms.*] Eat, drink, and be merry be----! Everything I eat gives me indigestion something awful; everything I drink gives it to me worse. How can I be merry when I am in this torment all the time? I tell you this pain is driving me mad. I want to get rid of it quick. Oh, why doesn't the Judge come?

IMP. What's the Judge got to do with it?

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Pathetically.*] I am going to beg him to take back this indigestion and give me back my poverty. It was not so bad, after all; not nearly so bad as this pain in my stomach.

[*The street-door opens slowly, and a sorrowful woman enters. She is weeping softly. It is the VAIN WOMAN. Gone is her posing and her*

proud manner. She walks humbly to the railing, and not seeing the JUDGE, she turns to IMP. The FORMER POOR MAN looks at the VAIN WOMAN, frowningly muttering: "What's she here for?" Then he sits down at the left and rocks back and forth in misery.

VAIN WOMAN. [*Tearfully.*] I must see the Judge right away, please.

IMP. [*Languidly.*] He isn't down yet. You're too earl----

VAIN WOMAN. [*Interrupting.*] Tell him that it is very important, that I am in great distress and that he must see me at once.

IMP. [*Loudly.*] I said that he was not down yet.

[Seeing that she does not understand, he takes a writing-pad from his desk, scribbles a few words, and standing in front of her, holds it up for her to read.

VAIN WOMAN. [*After reading.*] Oh, when will he be here? Can't you get him to come right away? Oh, I am so unhappy. [*She walks the floor in agitation.*

[The FORMER POOR MAN grunts in irritation and turns his back on her.

VAIN WOMAN. I cannot hear a word that is said to me. No one seems to want me around, and I am not invited out any more. I have the feeling that people are making fun of me instead of praising my beauty. Oh, it is dreadful to be deaf. [*Getting hysterical.*] I want the Judge to take away this deafness. I would rather have my wrinkles.

[IMP shakes his head in pretended sympathy, saying: "Too bad, too bad."

[She misunderstands and cries out.

VAIN WOMAN. Has the Judge given away my wrinkles? I want them back. I want my very own wrinkles, too. Wrinkles are distinguished-looking. [*Beginning to sob.*] I don't want to be deaf any longer.

IMP. [*Running over to the FORMER POOR MAN.*] Say, this lady feels very bad. Can't you cheer her up a little?

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Who is still rocking back and forth with his own misery, looks up at IMP in disgust.*] Cheer--her--up! Me? What's the joke?

[*The VAIN WOMAN walks to the curtained door, looks in as if seeking something, then returns to a chair, where she sits, weeping softly.*

[*A peculiar thumping is heard at the street-door. The FORMER POOR MAN jumps to his feet in expectancy, hoping it is the JUDGE. IMP, also, stands waiting. The door opens as though the person that opened it did so with difficulty. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN hobbles in. He is ragged and dirty, and one foot is bandaged, which causes him to use a crutch. He carries a large milk-can. He hobbles painfully to the centre of the stage. The FORMER POOR MAN grunts with disappointment, and sits down again, rubbing away at his stomach. The VAIN WOMAN sits with bowed head, silently weeping. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN looks about, then addresses IMP in a rather husky voice.*

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. I wish to see the Judge at once. It is most urgent.

IMP. [*With an ill-concealed smile.*] You can't see the Judge at once.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Impatiently.*] Why not? I told you it was most urgent.

IMP. [*Grinning openly.*] Because he isn't here. He hasn't come in yet. What's your trouble?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Vehemently.*] Trouble! Everything's the trouble! I have been abused, insulted, overworked--even the cows have kicked me. [*Looking down at his bandaged foot.*] I can't stand it. I won't stand it. I want back my proper place in the world, where I am

respected, and where I can rest and sleep and mingle with my kind.
[He hobbles to a chair and sits down wearily.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Getting up from his chair, walks over to the FORMER RICH CITIZEN, waggles his finger in his face and speaks fretfully.]* What cause have you to squeal so? If you had indigestion like I have all the time, you might be entitled to raise a holler. Why, I can't eat a thing without having the most awful pain right here *[puts his hand to the pit of his stomach]*, and when I take a drink, oh, heavens, it----

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Interrupting contemptuously.]* You big baby, howling about the stomachache. If you had a man-sized trouble, there might be some excuse for you. Now I, who have been used to wealth and respect, have been subjected to the most gruelling ordeals; why, in that dairy there were a million cows, and they kicked me, and horned me, and I----

VAIN WOMAN. *[Walks over to them, interrupting their talk, and speaks in a voice punctuated with sniffing sobs.]* Have--*[sniff]* either of you gentlemen *[sniff]* ever been deaf? *[Sniff, sniff.]* It is a terrible thing *[sniff]* for a beautiful woman like I am *[sniff]* to have such an affliction. *[Sniff, sniff, sniff.]*

[FORMER RICH CITIZEN shrugs his shoulders indifferently and limps to the other side of the stage, where he sits.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[Stalks over to the railing, where he leans limply.]* Lord deliver me from a sniffing woman.

[IMP, who is perched on his desk, chuckles wickedly of their sufferings. VAIN WOMAN sinks dejectedly into the chair vacated by the FORMER RICH CITIZEN.]

[A knock is heard at the street-door. The FORMER POOR MAN and the FORMER RICH CITIZEN start forward eagerly, expecting the JUDGE. Even the VAIN WOMAN, seeing the others rise, gets to her feet hopefully. IMP hastily slides from his desk and, pulling down his tight little jacket and cocking his round little cap a little more over

one eye, goes to see who knocks. A messenger hands him a letter and silently departs.

IMP. [*Importantly.*] Letter for me from the Judge.

FORMER POOR MAN. A letter! Why doesn't he come himself?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Send for him, boy.

IMP. [*Grins at FORMER RICH CITIZEN in an insolent manner.*] Well, well, I wonder what the Judge is writing to me for. It's queer he would send me a letter.

[He looks the letter over carefully, both sides; holds it up to the light, smells it, shakes it. The two men and the woman grow more and more nervous.

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Extremely irritated.*] For goodness' sake, open it and read it.

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. Yes, yes, and don't be so long about it.

[VAIN WOMAN simply stands pathetically and waits. IMP walks over to his desk, hunts for a knife, finally finds one; looks letter over again, then slowly slits the envelope and draws out letter, which he reads silently to himself. They are breathlessly waiting. IMP whistles softly to himself.

IMP. Well, what do you think of that!

FORMER POOR MAN. [*Excitedly.*] What is it--why don't you tell us?

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. [*Pounding with his crutch on the floor.*] Come, come, don't keep me waiting like this.

IMP. [*Reads letter again, silently, chuckling.*] All right. Here it is. [*Reads.*]

"MY DEAR IMP:

"I have tried faithfully for years to aid distressed humanity, but they are an ungrateful lot of fools, and I wash my hands of them. When this letter reaches you I will be on the high seas, and I am never coming back. So write 'Finis' in the big old ledger of miseries, and shut up shop, for the Exchange is closed--forever.

Yours in disgust, THE JUDGE."

[They all stand dazed a moment. The VAIN WOMAN, sensing that something terrible has happened, rushes from one to the other, saying: "What is it? What has happened?" IMP gives her the letter to read.]

FORMER POOR MAN. *[In a perfect frenzy.]* My God! Indigestion all the rest of my days.

VAIN WOMAN. *[After reading letter collapses in a chair, hysterically sobbing out.]* Deaf, always deaf! Oh, what shall I do!

FORMER RICH CITIZEN. *[Leaning heavily on his crutch and shaking his free hand, clenched in anger.]* This is an outrage. I am rich and have influence, and I shall take steps to--to----

[IMP laughs mockingly. The man looks down at his milk-spattered clothes, his bandaged foot, and, letting his crutch fall to the floor, sinks dejectedly into a chair, burying his face in his hands.]

[IMP dangles his keys and opens the street-door, as an invitation for them to go. The FORMER POOR MAN is the first to start, moving dazedly and breathing hard. IMP offers him the bottle of indigestion tablets; the man grasps them, eagerly, tipping IMP, who chuckles as he pockets the money. The FORMER POOR MAN takes a tablet as he exits. The VAIN WOMAN, bowed with sorrow, moves slowly toward the door. IMP touches her arm and offers the ear-trumpet. She accepts it, with a wild sob, tipping IMP, who again chuckles as he pockets the money. The last we see of the VAIN WOMAN, she is trying to hold the ear-trumpet to her ear, and exits, sobbing. The FORMER RICH CITIZEN still sits in his chair, his head in his hands. IMP picks up the milk-can, and, tapping the man not too gently on the

shoulder, thrusts the milk-can at him and makes a significant gesture, indicative of--THIS WAY OUT. The man rises dejectedly, picks up his crutch, takes the milk-can, and hobbles painfully toward the door. IMP doubles himself up in wild Mephistophelian glee as the

CURTAIN FALLS