

STAGE DOOR

BIG M. Well, some people must pay.

(Doorbell. MATTIE enters from dining room. Looks back.)

MATTIE. Did you put a new electric bulb up in Miss Kendall's room?

FRANK. (Enters from dining room.) I will.

MATTIE. Give Miss Terry that telephone message? From Mr. Kingsley.

FRANK. (Entering.) Land-sakes, I forgot.

MATTIE. Well, you better tell her—he's important. And you can close up the dining room—everybody's been in that's going to eat. (FRANK closes dining room. At outer door.) Well, I declare!

(The reason for her exclamation becomes apparent as KEITH comes into the room. He is a figure of splendor in full evening regalia—white tie, top hat, white muffler, beautifully tailored top-coat. MATTIE goes toward stairs with her astonished gaze so fixed on this dazzling apparition as to make her ascent a somewhat stumbling one. KEITH, waiting, puts coat on R. bookcase, drops down C., takes out platinum-and-gold cigarette case, symbol of his seduction, taps a cigarette smartly, lights it. JUDITH, the last to finish her dinner, comes out of dining room eating a large banana. As KEITH bursts open her vision she stops dead, and all progress with the banana is temporarily suspended.)

KEITH. (Removing his hat.) Hello, Judith.

(JUDITH advances slowly to him, grasps the band that holds the hat, moves it up so that the hat is held at about shoulder height, backs up, lifts her skirts a little, and is about to kick when KEITH, outraged, breaks his position and walks away from her.)

JUD. Well, if you don't want to play. (Takes final bite of her banana.)

KEITH. Pixie, eh?

(JUDITH tosses banana skin on the floor between them, beckons him enticingly.)

MATTIE. (Descending stairs.) Miss Terry'll be right down.

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JUD. (Shakes head dolefully as she picks up banana skin.) You were more fun in the other costume.

KEITH. You'd better watch your figure, eating those bananas. Starches and show business don't go together.

JUD. (Putting on coat which was on piano at rise.) They do in my show. I got nothing to compete with but elephants.

KEITH. Are there idiots who really go to those childish things—pay money?

JUD. Say, you can't have all the idiots. You're doing pretty good; give us some of the overflow.

KEITH. I suppose you know we broke the house-record last week.

JUD. Oh, sure. I staved up all Saturday night to get the returns.

KEITH. (Under his breath.) Wise-cracker.

(TERRY'S voice is heard as she comes running downstairs.)

TERRY. So-o-o sorry, Mr. Burgess! At the last minute I had a run in my stocking and I had to — (She steps short down C., as she sees KEITH'S magnificent effect. She herself is wearing her everyday clothes.)

JUD. (Sensing trouble.) Well, I'll—I'll leave you two young people together. (She aims the effect of placing out of scene axis up R.)

TERRY. (Dazzled.) Keith! (She curtseys to the floor.) Did you remember to bring the glass slipper?

KEITH. What's the idea, Terry? I told you on the phone we were dressing.

TERRY. I thought you were joking. You said, "We'll dress, of course," and I said, "Of course!" But I didn't dream you were serious.

KEITH. We're going to an opening night! And our seats are third row center!

TERRY. Downstairs?

KEITH. Down — Where do you think?

TERRY. Darling, we've been to openings before, and we always sat in the gallery.

KEITH. Gallery! We're through with the gallery! I've got a table at Twenty One for dinner, and after the theatre we're invited to a party at Gilman's pent-house. You can't go like that!

TERRY. (As she starts for stairs.) Give me just ten minutes—I'll go up and change. (She suddenly recoils—stops.) Oh, dear!

KEITH. What's the matter?

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TERRY. I loaned my evening dress to Susan.

KEITH. Oh, for God's — (~~For my —~~)

TERRY. (~~Starts again.~~) It's all right. I'll borrow Judy's pink — (~~Stops.~~) Oh, no! Olga's wearing it.

KEITH. (~~Seems to be~~) This is the damndest dump I was ever in! Sordid kind of life! Wearing each other's clothes! I suppose you use each other's toothbrushes, too!

TERRY. (~~Seems to be~~) Would you rather I didn't go, Keith?

KEITH. I didn't say that I —

TERRY. (~~Starts again.~~) Yes—but would you rather?

KEITH. Now you're playing it for tragedy. What's the matter with you, anyhow!

TERRY. (~~Seems to be~~) There's nothing the matter with me, Keith. I just can't see us as third-row first-nighters. We always went to see the play, Keith. That whole crowd—it makes the audience more important than the show.

KEITH. Listen, I don't like those people any better than you do. They don't mean anything to me.

TERRY. Then why do you bother with them?

KEITH. They can't hurt me. I watch them as you'd watch a hill of ants. Insects, that's what they are.

TERRY. Keith, listen, you wrote your last play about people you understood and liked. You lived with them, and you knew them, and they gave you something. You'll starve to death in third row center.

KEITH. I'm going back to them. I'm no fool. They're keeping my room for me just as it was.

TERRY. Keeping it? How do you mean?

KEITH. Oh, I don't want to talk about it now. Come on, let's get out of here.

TERRY. But I've got to know. Do you mean you've moved without even telling me?

KEITH. (~~Seems to be~~) Well, I was going to break it to you later. I knew you'd jump on me. But as long as you've gone this far—I'm going to Hollywood.

TERRY. Hollywood!

KEITH. Yes, to write for pictures.

TERRY. No, no, Keith!

KEITH. Now don't start all over again! If you don't watch yourself you'll turn into one of those nagging — (~~Starts again.~~)

(~~She is dressed for the street. Throws a glance into the room, in passing, and notices Keith's unusual attire.~~)

KEITH. (~~Starts again.~~) Hello!

KEITH. (~~With no cordiality.~~) Hello!

KEN. (~~Seems to be~~) ~~Has walked into a hornet's nest.~~ Good-bye.

(~~Starts a hasty retreat and front door up it.~~)

KEITH. Let's get out of here.

TERRY. Keith, you can't go to Hollywood! I won't let you! You said you'd never go no matter how broke you were, and now that your play's a big hit you're going. Why? Why?

KEITH. Well, they didn't want me before it was a hit.

TERRY. Keith, listen —

KEITH. I know what you're going to say. All that junk about its shriveling up my soul. Listen! I'm going to use Hollywood. It's not going to use me. I'm going to stay one year at two thousand a week. That's one hundred thousand dollars. I'll write their garbage in the daytime, but at night I'll write my own plays.

TERRY. But will you? That's what I'm afraid of. Will you?

KEITH. You bet I will! And in between I'll keep fit with sunshine, and swimming, and tennis, and —

TERRY. Little ermine jackets, up to here.

KEITH. Huh?

TERRY. It doesn't matter.

KEITH. Believe me, they'll never catch me at their Trocadero or their Brown Derbies.

TERRY. (~~Starts again.~~) When are you going, Keith?

KEITH. I don't know. Next week.

TERRY. Well—good-bye.

KEITH. What!

TERRY. Good-bye, Keith, and good luck. It's been swell. (~~She turns, runs swiftly upstairs.~~)

(KEITH goes to foot of stairs and culls.)

KEITH. Terry! What's the — Terry! . . . Terry! Terry!

END

(Only silence from above. He claps his hat on his head, and goes.)

Door slams loudly after him. Immediately on the slam of the door

BERNICE tiptoes downstairs with a catlike swiftness and soundlessness. Obviously she has been eavesdropping. A quick comprehen-