

AUNT JANE'S NIECES

Adapted by

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Based on, Aunt Jane's Nieces, by Edith Van Dyne (L. Frank Baum)
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INT. DE GRAF HOUSE - DAY

Sunlight streams through the kitchen windows. PROFESSOR DE GRAF thumbs through the mail. The year is 1902, America.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
Here's a letter for you, Beth.

BETH
(reading)
Miss Elizabeth De Graf, Cloverton,
Ohio.

Fifteen year-old BETH opens the envelope and reads:

BETH (CONT'D)
My Dear Niece: It will please me to
have you spend the months of July
and August as my guest at Elmhurst.
I am in miserable health, and wish
to become better acquainted with
you before I die. A check for
necessary expenses is enclosed and
I shall expect you to arrive
promptly on the first of July...
Your Aunt, JANE MERRICK.

MRS. DE GRAF, an energetic woman with an apron around her
thick waist, purses her lips in disapproval.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
How big is the check, Beth?

BETH
A hundred dollars.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
Huh! Of course you won't go near
that dreadful old cat! We can use
the money to better advantage.

MRS. DE GRAF
Adolph!

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
Your sister Jane is a mean,
selfish, despicable old female.
You've said so a thousand times
yourself, Julia.

MRS. DE GRAF
My sister, Jane, is a very wealthy
woman, and she's a Merrick. How
dare you! A common De Graf!

Beth continues to calmly eat her toast.

MRS. DE GRAF (CONT'D)
Elizabeth must go to Elmhurst.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
She shan't. No daughter of mine is going to Elmhurst to be bullied and insulted by Jane Merrick.

MRS. DE GRAF
Adolph, try to conceal the fact that you're a fool. Jane's in a desperate state of health, and can't live much longer. She's decided to leave her money to Elizabeth, or she never would have invited her to visit.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
How much do you suppose Jane is worth?

MRS. DE GRAF
A half million, at the very least. Beth will be one of the wealthiest girls in the country!

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
If she gets the money, which I doubt.

MRS. DE GRAF
Why should you doubt it, after this letter?

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
You had another sister and a brother who both had children. And a brother who didn't.

MRS. DE GRAF
Yes, two other girls, I admit. But Jane has never favored them any more than she has mine. And this invitation, coming when Jane's on her death bed, is a guarantee that Beth will get the money.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF
I hope she will.
(sigh)
We need it bad enough, I'm sure.

Beth quietly stands and gathers her school books.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF (CONT'D)

Just sign your name on the back of this, Beth, and I'll get it cashed for you.

BETH

No, Father. If I decide to go to Aunt Jane's, I must buy some clothes. If you get the money I'll never see a cent of it.

PROFESSOR DE GRAF

When will you decide?

BETH

There's no hurry. I'll take time to think it over. If I go, I must be a hypocrite, and pretend to like her, or she won't leave me her property.

MRS. DE GRAF

But think of the money!

BETH

I do think of it. I must decide if I'm willing to let my desire to have this money corrupt me.

She walks out the front door with her head high.

INT. MERRICK HOUSE - DAY

LOUISE, seventeen, is draped across a sofa with a LETTER in one hand, and the other hand hovering over a bowl of bonbons.

LOUISE

Who is this woman, Mamma? Jane Merrick?

MRS. MERRICK looks up from her novel. She is neatly dressed, in an unimaginative way.

MRS. MERRICK

Jane is your father's sister.

LOUISE

Why have I never heard of her before?

MRS. MERRICK

I assumed you knew of your Aunt Jane. You were so young when your father died it's possible we never mentioned her name.

LOUISE

Yes, I suppose.

MRS. MERRICK

They were not on friendly terms, you know. Jane is rich, having inherited a fortune and a handsome country estate from Mr. Bradley whom she was engaged to marry, but he died on the eve of their wedding.

LOUISE

How romantic!

MRS. MERRICK

It does seem romantic, related in this way, but with the inheritance all romance disappeared from your aunt's life. She became a crabbed, disagreeable old woman.

Louise pops a bonbon in her mouth.

LOUISE

Thank Heavens Father left the life insurance.

MRS. MERRICK

Yes, we would've been beggared without it. I often wonder how we managed to live upon the interest of that money for so many years.

LOUISE

We didn't live. We existed.

(yawns)

We scrimped and pinched, and denied ourselves everything but bare necessities.

MRS. MERRICK

We're plunging now, Louise; and it may be into a bottomless pit.

LOUISE

The income of that insurance money was insignificant, but the capital is a very respectable sum. I'm just seventeen years-old, and in three years I shall be a wealthy married woman. Don't worry Mother.

MRS. MERRICK

You ought to succeed because you're quite beautiful, but if you fail, we shall be entirely ruined.

LOUISE

A strong incentive to succeed.

MRS. MERRICK

I think, Louise, you will do well to cultivate your rich aunt, and so have two strings to your bow.

LOUISE

You mean that I should accept her invitation to visit her?

MRS. MERRICK

Yes.

LOUISE

She has sent me a check for a hundred dollars. Isn't it funny?

Louise stands leisurely and strolls to the window, her long skirt rustling.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Tell me more of my father's family. Is this rich aunt of mine the only relative he had?

MRS. MERRICK

No, indeed. There were two other sisters and a brother. A very uninteresting lot.

LOUISE

Are there other nieces besides myself.

MRS. MERRICK

Perhaps two. Her youngest sister, Violet, married a vagabond Irishman and had a daughter about a year younger than you.

(MORE)

MRS. MERRICK (CONT'D)

And Julia married a music teacher
and they also had a daughter I
believe.

INT. PATSY'S HOUSE - DAY

Sixteen years-old and tiny, red-headed PATSY is standing on a stool brushing her father's suit.

PATSY

Now, Major, stand up straight and
behave yourself! How do you expect
me to brush your vest when you're
wriggling around in that way?

MAJOR DOYLE grins down at her mischievously. His huge white mustache twitches as he tries too restrain a smile.

MAJOR DOYLE

(strong Irish brogue)

Patsy, dear, you're so sweet this
evening, I just had to kiss the
freckles on your little nose.

PATSY

Okay, father, you're fairly decent
again, so put on your hat and we'll
go out to dinner.

INT. DANNY'S RESTAURANT - CONTINUOUS

They are seated at a corner table.

PATSY

Did you get paid tonight?

MAJOR DOYLE

To be sure, my Patsy.

PATSY

Then hand over the coin.

He obeys.

PATSY (CONT'D)

Remember, Major, no riotous living!
Here's an allowance. Make that go
as far as you can.

MAJOR DOYLE

Yes, Patsy.

PATSY

And now I'll order our dinner.
 (to the waiter)
 We'll share the fish and two bowls
 of soup with bread please.

The waiter turns to go.

PATSY (CONT'D)

And a bottle of claret for the
 Major.

MAJOR DOYLE

(gasps)
 Patsy!

PATSY

I'm not crazy a bit, Major. I've
 just had a raise, that's all, and
 we'll celebrate the occasion.

MAJOR DOYLE

Tell me, Patsy.

PATSY

Madam Borne said I am a credit to
 her salon, and my wages will be ten
 dollars a week, from now on. Ten
 dollars, Daddy!

MAJOR DOYLE

Sufferin' Moses! If this kapes on,
 we'll be millionaires, Patsy.

PATSY

We're millionaires now, because
 we've each other and enough money
 to keep us from worrying.

The waiter appears with the claret and a glass for the Major.

PATSY (CONT'D)

Do you know what I've decided,
 Major, dear? You shall go visit
 your friend the colonel. The
 vacation will do you good, and you
 can get away all during July.

MAJOR DOYLE

Ah, Patsy, Patsy, it's an angel you
 are, and nothing less.

PATSY

Rubbish, Major. Try your claret,
and see if it's right. And eat your
fish before it gets cold.

The Major looks anxious about something.

PATSY (CONT'D)

I'll not treat you again, sir,
unless you try to look happy. Why,
you seem as glum as old Scrooge
himself!

He nervously takes a sip of the claret.

PATSY (CONT'D)

Now, then... out with it!

MAJOR DOYLE

It's a letter. It came yesterday,
or mayhap the day before. I don't
rightly remember.

PATSY

A letter! From whom?

MAJOR DOYLE

An ould vixen.

PATSY

And who might that be?

MAJOR DOYLE

Your mother's sister, Jane. I can
tell by the emblem on the flap of
the envelope.

PATSY

Oh, *that* person... Whatever induced
her to write to me?

MAJOR DOYLE

You ought to read it and find out.

Patsy's brow furrows ominously as she reads.

MAJOR DOYLE (CONT'D)

What is it, Mavoureen?

PATSY

An insult! Light your pipe, Daddy,
dear. Here-I'll strike the match.

INT. MERRICK HOUSE - DAY

MRS. MERRICK

How did you enjoy the reception last night, Louise?

LOUISE

Well enough, but I made the discovery that my escort, Harry Wyndham, is only a poor cousin of the rich Wyndham family, and will never have a penny he doesn't earn himself.

MRS. MERRICK

I knew that. But Harry has the entree into some very exclusive social circles. I hope you treated him nicely, Louise. He can be of use to us.

LOUISE

Oh, yes, I think I interested him; but he's a very stupid boy. By the way, Mamma, I had an adventure last evening, which I've had no time to tell you of before.

MRS. MERRICK

Yes?

LOUISE

Did you notice the girl you ordered to come from Madam Borne to style my hair for the reception?

MRS. MERRICK

I merely saw her. Was she unsatisfactory?

LOUISE

My hair never looked prettier, I'm sure. But I hardly noticed her until she dropped a letter from her clothing. It fell just beside me, and I saw that it was addressed to Miss Jane Merrick, at Elmhurst. Curious to know why a hair-dresser should be in correspondence with Aunt Jane, I managed to conceal the letter under my skirts until the girl was gone.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Then I put it away until after the reception. It was sealed and stamped, all ready for the post, but I moistened the flap and easily opened it. Guess what I read?

MRS. MERRICK

I've no idea.

LOUISE

Here it is.

Louise produces a letter and carefully unfolds it.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Listen to this, if you please:
'Aunt Jane.' She doesn't even say
'dear' or 'respected,' you observe.

Louise flutters the letter.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

(reading)

Your letter to me, asking me to visit you, is an insult after your years of silence and neglect and your refusals to assist my poor mother when she was in need. Thank God we can do without your friendship and assistance now, for my father, Major Gregory Doyle, is very prosperous and earns all we need. I return your check with my compliments. If you are really ill, I am sorry for you, and would go to nurse you were you not able to hire twenty nurses, each of whom would have fully as much love and far more respect for you than I ever could. Your indignant niece,
Patricia Doyle.

(looking up)

What do you think of that, Mamma?

MRS. MERRICK

How odd, Louise. This hair-dresser is your own cousin.

LOUISE

So it seems. She must be poor, or she wouldn't go out as a sort of lady's maid.

(MORE)

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I remember scolding her severely for pulling my hair, and she was as meek as a mouse, and never answered a word.

MRS. MERRICK

She has a temper though, as this letter proves.

LOUISE

I agree and it removes a rival from my path. You will notice that Aunt Jane has sent her a check for the same amount she sent me. Here it is, folded in the letter. Probably my other cousin, the De Graf girl, is likewise invited to Elmhurst. Aunt Jane wanted us all, to see what we were like, and perhaps to choose between us.

MRS. MERRICK

Quite likely.

Mrs. Merrick, uneasily watches her daughter's face.

LOUISE

That being the case, I intend to enter the competition. With this child Patricia out of the way, it will be a simple duel with my unknown De Graf cousin for my aunt's favor, and the excitement will be agreeable even if I loose.

MRS. MERRICK

There's no danger of that. But the stakes are high, Louise. I've learned that your Aunt Jane is rated as worth a half million dollars.

LOUISE

It shall be mine. Unless, indeed, the De Graf girl is most wonderfully clever. What is her name?

MRS. MERRICK

Elizabeth, if I remember rightly. But I am not sure she is yet alive, my dear. I haven't heard of the De Grafs for a dozen years.

LOUISE

I shall accept my Aunt Jane's invitation, and make the acceptance as sweet as Patricia Doyle's refusal is sour. Aunt Jane will be simply furious when she gets the little hair-dresser's note.

MRS. MERRICK

Will you send it on?

LOUISE

Why not? It's only a question of resealing the envelope and mailing it. And it will be sure to settle Miss Doyle's chances of sharing the inheritance, for good and all.

MRS. MERRICK

And the check?

LOUISE

Oh, I shall leave the check inside the envelope. It wouldn't be at all safe to cash it, you know.

MRS. MERRICK

But if you took it out, Jane would think the girl had kept the money, after all, and would be even more against her.

LOUISE

No... I'll not do a single act of dishonesty that could be traced back to me. If I can't win honestly, mother dear, I'll quit the game, for even money can't compensate a girl for the loss of her self-respect.

Mrs. Merrick casts a fleeting glance at her daughter and smiles.

INT. ELMHURST - DAY

JANE MERRICK, a frail and withered woman, is slumped in her wheelchair. Her attendant, Phibbs, is adjusting her.

AUNT JANE

Lift me up, Phibbs--no, not that way! Do you want to break my back? There! That's better. Now the pillow at my head. What are you blinking at, you old owl?

PHIBBS, Jane's caregiver, stares at her with barely concealed dislike.

PHIBBS

Are you better this morning, Miss Jane?

AUNT JANE

No, I'm worse.

PHIBBS

You look brighter, Miss Jane.

AUNT JANE

Don't be stupid, Martha Phibbs. I know how I am, better than any doctor, and I tell you I'm on my last leg.

PHIBBS

I hope not, Miss. I'm sure you'll feel better soon. Can't I wheel you into the garden? It's a beautiful day, and quite sunny and warm already.

AUNT JANE

Be quick about it, then. And don't tire me out with your eternal doddering. When a thing has to be done, do it. That's my motto.

PHIBBS

Yes, Miss Jane.

EXT. JANE'S PRIVATE GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Jane looks longingly at her garden from the porch.

AUNT JANE

I'll go down into the garden, I guess, Phibbs. This may be my last day on earth, and I'll spend an hour with my flowers before I bid them good-bye forever.

JAMES, the elderly gardener arrives. He's a skinny nervous fellow with a subtle tic at his right eye. He avoids the old woman's gaze.

AUNT JANE (CONT'D)

How are the roses coming on, James?

JAMES

Goodly, Miss.

James walks quickly away and nervously tends to the roses.

AUNT JANE

It's hard to die and leave all this, Phibbs, but it's got to be done.

PHIBBS

Not for a while yet, I hope, Miss Jane.

AUNT JANE

It won't be long, Phibbs. But I must try to live until my nieces come. Then I can decide which of them is most worthy to care for the old place when I am gone.

PHIBBS

Yes, Miss.

AUNT JANE

I've heard from two of them, already. They jumped at the bait, but that's only natural. And the letters are very sensible ones, too. They both say they will be glad to come. A very proper feeling; but I'm not deceived, Phibbs.

PHIBBS

Of course not, Miss Jane.

AUNT JANE

And somebody's got to have my money and dear Elmhurst when I'm gone. Who will it be, Phibbs?

PHIBBS

I'm sure I don't know, Miss.

AUNT JANE

Nor do I. The money's mine, and I can do what I please with it. I'm under no obligation to anyone.

SILAS (O.S.)

Except Kenneth.

Aunt Jane is startled at the voice of SILAS WATSON, her lawyer and friend. He's a slender balding gentleman in his late fifties.

AUNT JANE

Stuff and nonsense! I know my duties, Silas Watson.

SILAS

True, but your recent acts, I confess, puzzle me. Why should you choose from a lot of inexperienced, incompetent girls a successor to Tom's fortune, when he especially requested you in his will to look after his relatives? Kenneth Forbes, his own nephew is alone in the world now, an orphan, and has had no advantages to help him along in life. I think Tom would want you to help Kenneth now.

AUNT JANE

He placed me under no obligations to leave the boy any money. You know that well enough, Silas Watson, for you drew up the will.

SILAS

Yes, I drew up the will, and I remember that he gave to you, his betrothed bride, all that he possessed... gave it gladly and lovingly, and without reserve. But perhaps his conscience pricked him a bit, after all, for he added the words: 'I shall expect you to look after the welfare of my only relative, my sister, Katherine Bradley or any of her heirs.' It appears to me, Miss Jane, that's a distinct obligation. The boy is now sixteen and is fine fellow.

AUNT JANE

Bah! An imbecile. An awkward, ill-mannered brat who is only fit for a stable-boy! I know him, Silas, and he'll never amount to a hill of beans. Leave him my money? Not if I hadn't a relative on earth!

SILAS

You misjudge him, Jane. Kenneth is all right if you'll treat him decently. But he won't stand your abuse and I don't think the less of him for it.

AUNT JANE

What abuse? Haven't I given him a home and an education? And he's been rebellious and pig-headed and sullen in return for my kindness, so naturally there's little love lost between us.

SILAS

You resented your one obligation, Jane; and although you fulfilled it to the letter, you didn't in the spirit of Tom Bradley's request. I don't blame the boy for not liking you.

AUNT JANE

Sir!

SILAS

All right, Jane; fly at me if you will, but I intend to tell you frankly what I think of your actions as long as we remain friends.

AUNT JANE

That's why we are friends, Silas; and it's useless to quarrel with me now that I'm on my death bed. A few days more will end me, I'm positive; so bear with me a little longer, my friend.

SILAS

You're not so very bad, Jane, and I'm almost sure you will be with us for a long time to come.

(MORE)

SILAS (CONT'D)

But I fear this invasion of your nieces won't be good for you. Are they really coming?

AUNT JANE

Two of them are, I'm sure, for they've accepted my invitation.

SILAS

Here's a letter just arrived. Perhaps it contains news from the third niece.

AUNT JANE

My glasses, Phibbs!

SILAS

What do you know about these girls?

AUNT JANE

Nothing whatever. I scarcely knew of their existence until you hunted them out for me and found they were alive. But I'm going to know them, and study them, and the one who's most capable and deserving shall have my property.

SILAS

(sighs)
And Kenneth?

AUNT JANE

I'll provide an annuity for the boy, although it's more than he deserves.

SILAS

I see. But if none of the three are worthy?

AUNT JANE

Then I'll leave every cent to charity... except Kenneth's annuity.

Phibbs arrives with the glasses, and Jane reads the letter.

SILAS

Well, another acceptance?

AUNT JANE

No, a refusal... A refusal from the Irishman's daughter, Patricia Doyle. Here.

She hands the letter to Silas to read. He reads it.

SILAS

That's bad.

AUNT JANE

The girl is right. It's the sort of letter I'd have written. I'll write again, Silas, and humble myself, and try to get her to come.

SILAS

You surprise me!

AUNT JANE

I surprise myself, but I mean to know more of this Patricia Doyle. Perhaps I've found a gold mine, Silas Watson!

EXT. ELMHURST GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Silas walks through garden toward the stables. He climbs the exterior stairs to KENNETH BRADLEY'S room. Ken is sitting on the windowsill and doesn't acknowledge the lawyer's approach.

INT. KENNETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Silas picks up an open book next to Ken. The page is covered with various drawings of cats, people, flowers, etc.

SILAS

Morning Ken.

Ken grabs the book and throws it out window.

SILAS (CONT'D)

Why'd you do that? I didn't know you have a talent for drawing.

The teen grunts rudely.

SILAS (CONT'D)

Your Aunt is failing fast.

(waits)

I don't think she'll live much longer.

Ken doesn't look at Silas.

SILAS (CONT'D)

When she dies, there will be a new mistress at Elmhurst and you will have to move out.

(pause)

You're sixteen, and you're not ready for college. You would be of no use in the commercial world. You don't even have the capacity to become a clerk. What will you do, Kenneth? Where will you go?

KENNETH

When will Aunt Jane die?

SILAS

I hope she will live many days yet, but she may die tomorrow.

KENNETH

When she dies, I'll answer your question. I'll do something... I don't know what, and I won't bother about it till the time comes.

SILAS

Could you earn a living?

KENNETH

Perhaps not... but I'll get along. Will I be a beggar?

SILAS

I don't know. It depends on how much Aunt Jane leaves you in her will.

KENNETH

I hope she won't leave me a cent! I hate her, and will be glad when she is dead and out of my way!

SILAS

Kenneth, my lad!

KENNETH

I hate her! She has insulted me, scorned me, humiliated me every moment since I've been here. I'll be glad to have her die, and I don't want a cent of her miserable money.

SILAS

Money is very necessary to one who is unable to earn his living. And the money she leaves you--if she does leave you any--won't be hers, remember, but your Uncle Tom's.

KENNETH

Uncle Tom was good to my mother.

SILAS

Well, Uncle Tom gave his money to Aunt Jane, whom he had expected to marry; the place will go to someone else, which means you must move on.

KENNETH

Who will have Elmhurst?

SILAS

One of your aunt's nieces, probably. She has three, it seems, all of them young girls, and she has invited them to come here to visit her.

KENNETH

Girls! Girls at Elmhurst?

SILAS

To be sure. One of the nieces, it seems, refuses to come; but there will be two of them to scramble for your aunt's affection.

KENNETH

She has none.

SILAS

Or her money, which is the same thing. The one she likes the best will get the estate.

KENNETH

Poor Aunt! I'm almost tempted to feel sorry for her. Three girls fighting one against the other for Elmhurst and fawning before a cruel and malicious old woman who could never love anyone but herself.

SILAS

And her flowers.

KENNETH

Oh, yes, and her flowers.

SILAS

The girls needn't worry you, Kenneth. It'll be easy for you to keep out of their way.

KENNETH

When will they come?

SILAS

Next week, I believe.

KENNETH

Perhaps they won't know I'm here.

SILAS

Perhaps not. I'll tell Misery to bring all your meals to this room, and no one ever comes to this end of the garden. But if they find you, Kenneth, and scare you out of your den, run over to me, and I'll keep you safe until the girls are gone.

KENNETH

Thank you, Mr. Watson, it isn't that I'm afraid of girls in general, you know, but they may be as cruel as their aunt.

SILAS

I know nothing about them, so I can't vouch in any way for Aunt Jane's nieces. But they're young, and it's probable they'll be as shy and uncomfortable here at Elmhurst as you are. And after all, Kenneth, the most important thing just now is your own future. What in the world is to become of you?

KENNETH

Oh, that, I can't see that it matters much one way or another. Anyhow, I'll not bother my head about it until the time comes.

INT ELMHURST DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Beth enters the drawing room on a sunny morning.

AUNT JANE

So, this is Elizabeth, is it? You may kiss me, child.

Beth approaches her withered cheek with a pinched look on her face. She gives Jane a quick peck and backs up.

AUNT JANE (CONT'D)

Well, what do you think of me?

BETH

Surely, it is too early to ask me that. I'm going to try to like you, and my first sight of my new aunt leads me to hope I shall succeed.

AUNT JANE

Why shouldn't you like me? Why must you *try* to like your mother's sister?

BETH

There are reasons why your name is seldom mentioned in my father's family. Until your letter came I scarcely knew I possessed an aunt. I hope we shall become friends, Aunt Jane, but until then, it is better we should not discuss the past.

The old woman stares hard at the girl for a moment.

AUNT JANE

Your journey has tired you. I'll have Misery show you to your room.

BETH

I'm not tired, but I'll go to my room, if you'd like. When may I see you again?

AUNT JANE

When I send for you.

(pause)

I suppose you know I am a paralytic, and liable to die at any time?

BETH

I am very sorry. You do not seem very ill.

AUNT JANE

I'm on my last leg. I may not live an hour. But that's not your problem, I suppose. By the way, I expect your cousin on the afternoon train.

BETH

My cousin?

AUNT JANE

Yes, Louise Merrick.

BETH

Oh!

AUNT JANE

What do you mean by that?

BETH

I did not know I had a cousin... That is, I did not know whether Louise Merrick was alive or not. Mother has mentioned her name once or twice in my presence; but not lately.

AUNT JANE

Well, she's alive. Very much alive, I believe. And she's coming to visit me... while you are here. I expect you to be friends.

BETH

To be sure.

AUNT JANE

We dine at seven. I always lunch in my own room, and you may do the same.

INT. BETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

The housekeeper, MISERY, escorts Beth into her room. She has a kind face and looks at Beth with concern as Beth glances about the elegant room.

BETH (V.O.)

(inner monologue)

Here is an opportunity to win a fortune and a home beautiful enough for a royal princess.

(MORE)

BETH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

If I fail to get it I shall deserve
to live in poverty forever
afterward.

Beth notices Misery watching her.

BETH

(to Misery)

Thank you for being so kind. I've
never been away from home before
and you must be a mother to me
while I'm at Elmhurst.

MISERY

Bless you child! Of course I'll be
a mother to you. You'll need a bit
of comforting now and then, my
dear, if you're going to live with
Jane Merrick.

BETH

Is she terribly cross?

MISERY

At times she's a fiend, but don't
you mind her tantrums, or lay 'em
to heart, and you'll get along with
her all right.

BETH

Thank you... I'll try to not let it
bother me.

MISERY

Do you need anything else, deary?

BETH

Nothing at all, thank you.

BETH (V.O.)

That was one brilliant move, at any
rate. I've made a friend at
Elmhurst who will be of use to me;
and I shall make more. Come as soon
as you like, Cousin Louise! You'll
have to be more clever than I am,
if you hope to win Elmhurst.

EXT. AUNT JANE'S PRIVATE GARDEN - DAY

Aunt Jane is in her garden, amidst her flowers, surrounded by
a high box-hedge.

It is distinct from the vast expanse of shrubbery and flower-beds which make up the grounds at Elmhurst.

Oscar, the butler and chauffeur, comes through an opening in the hedge and touches his hat.

AUNT JANE

Has my niece arrived?

OSCAR

She's on the way, mum. She stopped outside the grounds to pick wild flowers, an' said I was to tell you she'd walk the rest o' the way.

AUNT JANE

Oscar, has this girl been questioning you?

OSCAR

She asked a few questions, mum.

AUNT JANE

About me?

OSCAR

Some of 'em, if I remember right, mum, was about you.

AUNT JANE

And you told her I was fond of flowers?

OSCAR

I may have just mentioned that you liked 'em, mum.

Jane gives a scornful snort.

AUNT JANE

You may go, Oscar. Have the girl's luggage placed in her room.

OSCAR

Yes, mum.

Soon the graceful form of Louise appears through the same hedge opening.

LOUISE

Oh, my dear, dear aunt! How glad I am to see you at last, and how good of you to let me come here!

AUNT JANE

This is Louise, I suppose. You are welcome to Elmhurst.

Louise drops to her knees and takes up her aunt's hands.

LOUISE

Tell me how you are? Do you suffer any? And are you getting better, dear aunt, in this beautiful garden with the birds and the sunshine?

AUNT JANE

Get up... You're spoiling your gown.

LOUISE

Never mind the gown. Tell me about yourself. I've been so anxious since your last letter.

Aunt Jane's face relaxes a bit as she talks about her health.

AUNT JANE

I'm dying, as you can plainly see. My days are numbered, Louise. If you stay long enough you can gather scrawny wild flowers for my coffin.

LOUISE

Don't laugh at these poor things! I'm so fond of flowers, and we find none growing wild in New York, you know.

AUNT JANE

How old are you, Louise.

LOUISE

Just seventeen, Aunt.

AUNT JANE

I had forgotten you are so old as that. Let me see; Elizabeth cannot be more than fifteen.

LOUISE

Elizabeth?

AUNT JANE

Elizabeth De Graf, your cousin. She arrived at Elmhurst this morning, and will be your companion while you are here.

LOUISE

That is nice.

AUNT JANE

I hope you will be friends.

LOUISE

Why not, Aunt? I haven't known much of my relations in the past, you know, so it pleases me to find an aunt and a cousin at the same time. I am sure I shall love you both.

Louise flits about admiring the flowers, and circles back to Jane.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Let me fix your pillow--you do not seem comfortable. There! Isn't that better?

(lowers her voice)

I'm afraid you have needed more loving care than a paid attendant can give you, but for a time, at least, I mean to be your nurse, and look after your wants. You should have sent for me before, Aunt Jane.

Jane rolls her eyes at this little speech.

AUNT JANE

Don't trouble yourself; Phibbs knows my ways, and does all that is required. Run away, now, Louise. The housekeeper will show you to your room. It's opposite Elizabeth's, and you will do well to make her acquaintance at once. I shall expect you both to dine with me at seven.

LOUISE

Can't I stay here a little longer. We haven't spoken two words together, and I'm not a bit tired or anxious to go to my room. What a superb rose this is! Is it one of your favorites, Aunt Jane?

AUNT JANE

Run off. I want to be alone.

Louise sighs and strokes the gray hair lightly.

LOUISE

Very well; I'll go, but I don't intend to be treated as a stranger, dear Aunt. You are my father's eldest sister, and I mean to make you love me, if you will give me the least chance to do so.

AUNT JANE

That is the way. Misery will show you your room. Remember, I dine promptly at seven.

LOUISE

I shall count the minutes.

AUNT JANE

(mutters)

Were she in the least sincere, Louise might prove a very pleasant companion. But she's not sincere; she's coddling me to win my money, and if I don't watch out she'll succeed.

(stares off in space)

Yet I might do worse than to leave Elmhurst to a clever woman.

INT. BETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

Beth is gazing moodily out her window when a knock is heard.

BETH

Come in.

With a little cry, Louise runs forward and catches Beth in her arms and kisses her cheek.

LOUISE

You must be my Cousin Elizabeth, and I'm awfully glad to see you at last!

Beth doesn't respond to her cousin's enthusiasm. They stand at arms length assessing each other.

LOUISE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

She's pretty enough, but has no style whatsoever. She wears her new gown in a frumpy manner and one can read her face easily.

(MORE)

LOUISE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

There's little danger in this quarter, I'm sure, so I may as well be friends with the poor child.

BETH

Won't you sit down?

BETH (V.O.) (CONT'D)

This is not going to be an easy opponent with her fancy ways.

LOUISE

Of course; we must get acquainted. I didn't know you were here, until an hour ago, but as soon as Aunt Jane told me I ran to my room, unpacked, and here I am--prepared for a good long chat and to love you just as dearly as you will let me.

BETH

I knew you were coming, but not until this morning. Perhaps had I known, I would not have come.

LOUISE

Ah! Why not?

BETH

Have you known Aunt Jane before today?

LOUISE

No.

BETH

Nor I. The letter asking me to visit her was the first I've ever received from her. Even my mother, her own sister, does not correspond with her. I was brought up to hate her very name, as a selfish old woman. But, since she asked me to visit her, we judged she had softened and might wish to become friendly, and so I accepted the invitation. I had no idea you were also invited.

Louise strolls around the room trailing her fingers over Beth's belongings.

LOUISE

(smiling)

But why should you resent my being here? Surely, two girls will have a better time in this lonely old place than one could have alone. For my part, I'm happy to find you at Elmhurst.

BETH

Thank you. That's a nice thing to say, but I doubt it's true. Don't let's beat around the bush. I hate hypocrisy, and if we're going to be friends let's be honest with one another from the start.

LOUISE

Well?

BETH

It's plain to me that Aunt Jane has invited us here to choose which one of us shall inherit her money and Elmhurst. She's old and feeble, and she hasn't any other relations.

LOUISE

Oh, yes, she has.

BETH

You mean Patricia Doyle?

LOUISE

Yes.

BETH

What do you know of her?

LOUISE

Nothing at all.

BETH

Where does she live?

LOUISE

I haven't the faintest idea.

BETH

Has Aunt Jane mentioned her?

LOUISE

Not in my presence.

BETH

Then we may conclude she's been left out of the arrangement. And, as I said, Aunt Jane is likely to choose one of us to inherit her wealth. I'd hoped to have it all to myself, but I was mistaken. You'll fight for your chance and fight mighty hard!

LOUISE

How funny!

(laughs)

Why, we could split it fifty-fifty! But my dear cousin, I don't want Aunt Jane's money.

BETH

You don't?

LOUISE

Not a penny of it; nor Elmhurst; nor anything you can possibly lay claim to, my dear. My mother and I are amply provided for, and I'm only here to have a break from my social duties and to get acquainted with my aunt. That is all.

BETH

Oh!

LOUISE

So it was really a splendid idea of yours to be honest with me at our first meeting, for it led to your learning the truth. Now tell me something about yourself and your people. Are you poor?

BETH

Poor as poverty. My father teaches music, and mother scolds him continually for not being able to earn enough money to keep out of debt.

LOUISE

Hasn't Aunt Jane helped you?

BETH

We've never seen a cent of her money, although father has tried at times to borrow enough to help him out of his difficulties.

LOUISE

That's strange. She seems like such a dear kindly old lady.

BETH

I think she's horrid, but I mustn't let her know it. I even kissed her, when she asked me to, and it sent a shiver all down my back.

LOUISE

For my part, I'm fond of everyone, and it delights me to fuss around invalids. I ought to have been a trained nurse, you know; but of course there's no necessity of my earning a living.

BETH

What's to prevent Aunt Jane leaving you her property, even if you are rich, and don't need it? You like to care for invalids, and I don't. Suppose Aunt Jane prefers you to me, and wills you all her money?

LOUISE

Well, that would be beyond my power to prevent. Maybe she'll give it to us both.

BETH

You're deceiving me. You're trying to make me think you don't want Elmhurst, when you're as anxious to get it as I am.

LOUISE

My dear Elizabeth--by the way, that's an awfully long name; what do they call you, Lizzie, or Bessie, or-

BETH

--They call me Beth.

LOUISE

Then, my dear Beth, let me beg you not to borrow trouble. Elmhurst would be a perfect bore to me. I wouldn't know what to do with it. I couldn't live in this out-of-the-way corner of the world, you know.

BETH

But suppose she leaves it to you? You wouldn't refuse it, I imagine.

LOUISE

I can't refuse to love and pet Aunt Jane, just because she has money and my sweet cousin Beth is anxious to inherit it. But if she selects me as her heir, I will agree to transfer half of the estate to you-- the half that consists of Elmhurst.

BETH

Is there much more?

LOUISE

I haven't any list of Aunt Jane's possessions, so I don't know. But you shall have Elmhurst, if I get everything, because the place would be of no use to me.

BETH

It's a magnificent mansion.

LOUISE

It shall be yours, dear, whatever Aunt Jane decides. See, this is a compact, and I'll seal it with a kiss.

Louise springs up and drops to her cousin's side and kisses her hand.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Now shall we be friends?

BETH

Were I in your place, I would never promise to give up a penny of the inheritance. If I win it, I shall keep it all.

LOUISE

To be sure. I should want you to,
my dear.

BETH

Then, since we have no cause to
argue, we may as well become
friends.

INT. AUNT JANE'S DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

AUNT JANE

Which of my nieces do you prefer?

SILAS

I cannot say on so short an
acquaintance. Which do you prefer?

AUNT JANE

I cannot imagine Elmhurst belonging
to either girl, Silas. You must go
to New York for me, at once. I must
see the other niece... the one who
defies me and refuses to answer my
second letter.

SILAS

Patricia Doyle?

AUNT JANE

Yes. I shall not die happy unless
she comes to Elmhurst. Bribe her,
threaten her. Kidnap her if
necessary, Silas; but get her to
Elmhurst as quickly as possible.

SILAS

I'll do my best, Jane. But why are
you so anxious?

AUNT JANE

My time is drawing near, old
friend, and this matter of my will
lies heavily on my conscience. What
if I should die tonight?

Silas sits quietly watching her.

SILAS

She may prove even more
undesirable.

AUNT JANE

In that case, I'll pack her back again and choose between these two. But you must fetch her, Silas, and you must fetch her at once!

SILAS

I'll do the best I can, Jane.

EXT. STABLES - DAY

It's early the next morning. DUNCAN, bald-headed but with white and bushy side-whiskers, is engaged in the business of oiling and polishing a harness.

DUNCAN

What do ye think o' 'em, Kenneth lad?

Kenneth looks up from the pine box lid he's drawing on.

KENNETH

Think o' whom, Don?

DUNCAN

The young leddies.

KENNETH

What young ladies?

DUNCAN

Miss Jane's nieces, the ones Oscar brought from the station yesterday.

KENNETH

Tell me, Don... I was away with my gun all yesterday, and heard nothing of it.

DUNCAN

Why, it seems Miss Jane's invited 'em to make her a visit.

KENNETH

But not yet, Duncan! Not so soon.

DUNCAN

Na'theless, they're here.

KENNETH

How many?

DUNCAN

Two, lad. A bonny young thing came on the morning train, an' a nice, wide-awake one by the two o'clock.

KENNETH

Will they be running about the place, then?

DUNCAN

Most likely, 'Twould be a shame to shut them up with the missus. But why not? They'll be company for ye, Kenneth lad.

KENNETH

How long will they stay?

DUNCAN

Maybe for a yer'. Oscar foresees one or the ither o' 'em will own the place when Miss Jane gi'es up the ghost.

Ken stands up and throws the lid down and dashes out of the tack room. Duncan picks it up and looks at the sketch of himself. He carries it over to a shelf and hides it.

Ken, in a fury throws the halter over the mare's neck and jumps on without the saddle.

INT. HALLWAY TO BETH'S BEDROOM - DAY

That same morning, Beth leaves her room with a school book.

PHIBBS

Good morning, miss.

BETH

Oh, good morning Phibbs.

Beth looks thoughtfully at the elderly servant.

BETH (CONT'D)

Do your feet hurt you?

PHIBBS

Yes, miss; in the mornin' they's awful bad. It's being on 'em all the day, 'tendin' to Miss Jane, you know. But after a time I gets more used to the pain, and don't feel it. The mornin's always the worst.

BETH
Come into my room.

Phibbs reluctantly follows Beth who goes to a box and pulls out a jar of lotion.

BETH (CONT'D)
Mother has the same trouble you complain of, and here's a remedy that always gives her relief. I brought it with me in case I should take long walks and get sore feet.

She gently pushes Phibbs into the chair, and to Phibbs amazement, removes her shoes and socks and rubs in the lotion.

BETH (CONT'D)
There. Now they're sure to feel better, and you must take this jar to your room, and use it every night and morning.

PHIBBS
Bless your dear heart! I'm sure I feel twenty years younger a'ready. But you shouldn't 'a' done it, miss, indeed you shouldn't.

BETH
I'm glad to help you. It would be cruel to let you suffer when I can ease your pain.

PHIBBS
But what'll Miss Jane say?

BETH
It's our secret, and I'm sure if I ever need a friend you'll be there for me.

PHIBBS
I'll do anything for you, Miss Elizabeth.

EXT. ELMHURST GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

Beth walks down a garden path and sits in a rose arbor with a bench. She opens her textbook and begins to study.

The sound of snipping shears draws closer. James appears around the corner, intent upon his job.

BETH
Good morning.

James stares, says nothing, but nods his head slightly.

BETH (CONT'D)
Am I in your way?

He turns his back on her and resumes clipping.

Beth rises and places a hand on his arm, preparing to speak. James throws his hands up, dropping the shears, and runs away.

Beth stares. Misery laughs as she comes up behind Beth.

MISERY
It's just his way, Miss; don't you be scared by anything that James does. Why, at times he won't even speak to Miss Jane.

BETH
He isn't mute, is he?

MISERY
Lor', no! But he's so odd an' contrary he won't talk to a soul. Not since the day Master Tom were killed. James was travellin' with Master Tom, you know, and there was an accident, an' the train run off'n the track an' tipped over. James weren't hurt a'tall, but he dragged Master Tom outta the wreck and sat by him 'til he died. Then James brought Master Tom's body back home again; but his mind seemed to have got a shock, and he never was the same afterwards.

BETH
Poor man! But how did I frighten him?

MISERY
You tried to make him talk, and you're a stranger. Strangers always affect James that way. But breakfast is ready, Miss.

INT. BETH'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

LOUISE

Good morning, I'm here to keep my
cousin company.

Louise enters wearing her silk kimono and carrying her
breakfast tray.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

I should have slept an hour longer,
but old Misery, who seems rightly
named, insisted on waking me, just
that I might eat. Isn't this a
funny establishment?

BETH

It's different from everything I'm
used to, but it seems very pleasant
here, and everyone is very kind and
attentive.

LOUISE

I'll dress when we finish, and
we'll take a long walk together,
and see the place.

EXT. ELMHURST GARDEN - DAY

The two girls explore the garden and find Ken's stairs. They
sit on the bottom step and chat. Phibbs arrives.

PHIBBS

Louise, Miss Jane would like to see
you.

INT. AUNT JANE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Aunt Jane is in her wheelchair as usual.

AUNT JANE

Sit down.

Louise kisses her cheek and fluffs her pillows first.

AUNT JANE (CONT'D)

I want you to talk to me, and to
tell me something of the city and
the society in which you live. I've
been so long dead to the world that
I've lost track of people and
things.

LOUISE

Let me dress your hair at the same time. It looks really frowsy, and I can talk while I work.

AUNT JANE

(rude embarrassment)

I can't lift my head.

LOUISE

Never mind, I can make it look beautiful in half a jiffy. It pleases me to fuss over someone.

AUNT JANE

Do you go to parties or the theater?

LOUISE

Oh my, yes, it seems we're always at some event or another. Just the other day whilst at the Grey's Ball I saw none other than the Earl of Shelby. He's newly married, you know, and his young wife is quite charming... and rich. That's the reason for the marriage of course.

Aunt Jane sits spellbound as Louise gossips.

AUNT JANE

However did your mother manage to gain an entree into society? Your father was a poor man and of little importance. I know, for he was my own brother.

LOUISE

He left us a very respectable life insurance, and my mother's friends were glad to introduce us to good society when we were able to afford such a luxury. Father died twelve years ago, you know. While I was at school, mother lived quietly. Then she decided it was time I made my debut. For the last season we have been rather social, I admit.

AUNT JANE

Are you rich, then?

LOUISE

Mercy no! But we have enough for our requirements, and that makes us feel quite independent. By the way, Auntie, I want to return that check you sent me. It was awfully good and generous of you, but I don't need it, you know, and so I want you to take it back.

Hands Jane the check, which Jane takes with a tremulous hand.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

It's quite enough for you to give me this nice treat in the country. You look tired, and I mustn't fatigue you.

Louise gives her a kiss on the cheek and crosses the room.

LOUISE (V.O.) (CONT'D)

That was one hundred dollars well spent.

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - CONTINUOUS

Kenneth slows his horse when he sees a short stout man walking down the lane with a small red bundle in hand.

UNCLE JOHN MERRICK raises a hand to ask a question.

UNCLE JOHN

Sorry to trouble you, lad, but I ain't just certain about my way.

KENNETH

Where do you want to go?

UNCLE JOHN

To Jane Merrick's place. They call it Elmhurst, I guess.

KENNETH

It's straight ahead.

UNCLE JOHN

Far from here?

KENNETH

A mile perhaps.

UNCLE JOHN

They said it was three from the village, but I feel I've come a dozen a'ready... Know Jane Merrick?

Ken nods.

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

Like her?

KENNETH

I hate her.

Uncle John laughs uneasily.

UNCLE JOHN

Then it's the same Jane as ever. I sort o' hoped she'd reformed, and I'd be glad to see her again. They tell me she's got money.

KENNETH

She owns Elmhurst, and has mortgages on a dozen farms around here, and property in New York, and thousands of dollars in the bank. Aunt Jane's rich all right.

UNCLE JOHN

Aunt Jane? What's your name, lad?

KENNETH

Kenneth Forbes.

UNCLE JOHN

Don't recollect any Forbes' in the family.

KENNETH

She isn't really my aunt, and she doesn't treat me as an aunt would either; but she's my guardian, and I've always called her Aunt.

UNCLE JOHN

She's never married, has she?

KENNETH

No. She was engaged to my Uncle Tom, who owned Elmhurst. He was killed in a railway accident. He left her all he had.

UNCLE JOHN

I see.

KENNETH

So, when my parents died, Aunt Jane took me for Uncle Tom's sake, and keeps me out of charity.

Ken slides off the horse and walks alongside John.

UNCLE JOHN

Are Jane's sisters living? Julia and Violet?

KENNETH

I don't know. But there are two of her nieces at Elmhurst.

UNCLE JOHN

Ha! Who are they?

KENNETH

(bitterly)

Girls... I haven't seen them.

UNCLE JOHN

Don't like girls, I take it?

KENNETH

Never met one worth liking.

Uncle John nods solemnly while hiding a smile.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

You know Aunt--Miss Merrick, sir?

UNCLE JOHN

I used to, when we were younger.

KENNETH

Any relation, sir?

UNCLE JOHN

Just her brother, John, that's all.

KENNETH

I didn't know she had a brother, sir--that is, living.

UNCLE JOHN

She had two; but Will's dead, years ago, I'm told. I'm the other.

KENNETH

Where've you been all this time?

UNCLE JOHN

I went west a long time ago; before you were born, I guess.

KENNETH

You lived in California?

UNCLE JOHN

No, Oregon. I was a tinsmith. I've come back to look up the family and find how many are left. Curious sort of a task, isn't it?

KENNETH

I don't know. Perhaps it's natural, but I'm sorry you came to Aunt Jane first.

UNCLE JOHN

Why?

KENNETH

She's in bad health--quite ill, you know--and her temper's dreadful.

UNCLE JOHN

She's always been dreadful, but she's my sister. I heard she'd suddenly become rich, and a great lady, and that was a surprising thing to happen to a Merrick. We've always been a poor lot, you know.

Kenneth looks pityingly at John's little bundle and nods politely.

KENNETH

I'm sure she'll ask you to stay, sir. And if she doesn't, you come out to the stable and let me know, and I'll drive you to town again.

UNCLE JOHN

Thank you, lad. I thought a little exercise would do me good, but this three miles has seemed like thirty to me!

KENNETH

We're here at last. Seeing that you're her brother, sir, I advise you to go to the front door and ring the bell.

UNCLE JOHN

I will.

KENNETH

I always go around the back way, myself.

UNCLE JOHN

I see.

KENNETH

Another thing...

Uncle John pauses and looks at Kenneth.

KENNETH (CONT'D)

You'd better not say you met me, you know. It wouldn't be a good introduction. She hates me as much as I hate her.

UNCLE JOHN

Very good, my lad. I'll keep mum.

John shakes his head sadly as he watches the boy walk away.

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

(whispers)

Poor boy!

INT. JANE'S ROOM - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Beth arrives as Louise leaves. She awkwardly approaches her aunt and stands before her in her serious way.

AUNT JANE

I want to be amused. Can you read aloud?

BETH

Not very well, I'm afraid. But I'll be glad to try. What do you like?

AUNT JANE

Select your own book.

Beth looks through the books and chooses one and begins;

BETH

The American Revolutionary War was
fought from 1775 to 1783...

Jane immediately feigns sleep. But Beth is uncertain if Jane is asleep or not, so she keeps reading the monotonous book.

INT. ENTRY HALL - SIMULTANEOUSLY

Oscar lets Uncle John in the front door.

OSCAR

Can I help you, sir?

UNCLE JOHN

Could you tell Miss Jane Merrick
that her brother John is here?

OSCAR

Certainly.

Oscar takes John's red bundle, and sets it on the hall chair.
Then he leads John to the drawing room.

INT. JANE'S ROOM - CONTINUOUS

Misery arrives and Beth stops reading.

MISERY

Miss.

Jane jolts awake.

AUNT JANE

What's the matter?

MISERY

There's a man to see you, Miss.

AUNT JANE

Send him about his business!

MISERY

But--

AUNT JANE

I won't see him, I tell you!

MISERY

But he says he's your brother,
Miss.

AUNT JANE

Who?

MISERY

Your brother John, Miss.

AUNT JANE

I thought he was dead, long ago,
but if he's alive I suppose I'll
see him. Elizabeth, leave the room.
Misery, send the man here!

EXT. STABLES - CONTINUOUS

Louise is standing near the stables watching Kenneth brush a horse when Beth walks up.

BETH

Something has happened.

LOUISE

What?

BETH

A man has arrived who says he's
Aunt Jane's brother.

LOUISE

Impossible! Have you seen him?

BETH

No, but he says he's John Merrick.

LOUISE

Oh, I know. The peddler, or tinker,
or something or other who
disappeared years ago. But it
doesn't matter.

BETH

It may matter a great deal. Aunt
Jane may leave *him* her money.

LOUISE

He's older than she is. I've heard
Mother say he was the eldest of the
family. Aunt Jane won't leave her
money to an old man.

Kenneth is finished grooming. Oscar tips his hat respectfully and leads the mare away. Ken leaves without seeing the girls.

BETH

I wonder who that is?

LOUISE

We'll find out. I took him for a stable boy, at first. But Oscar seemed to treat him as a superior.

Louise, with Beth trailing behind her, approaches Oscar.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Who was the young man?

OSCAR

Which young man, miss?

LOUISE

The one who just arrived with the horse.

OSCAR

Oh, that's Master Kenneth, miss.

LOUISE

Where did he come from?

OSCAR

Master Kenneth? Why he lives here.

LOUISE

At the house?

OSCAR

Yes, Miss.

LOUISE

Who is he?

OSCAR

Master Tom's nephew. Tom used to own Elmhurst, you know.

LOUISE

Mr. Thomas Bradley?

OSCAR

The same, Miss.

LOUISE

Ah. How long has Master Kenneth lived here?

OSCAR

A good many years. I can't just remember how long.

LOUISE

Thank you, Oscar.

They walk away.

LOUISE (CONT'D)

Here is a more surprising discovery than Uncle John, Beth. The boy has a better right than any of us to inherit Elmhurst.

BETH

Then why did Aunt Jane send for us?

LOUISE

It's a mystery, dear. Let's try to solve it.

BETH

Come; we'll ask the housekeeper. I'm sure old Misery will tell us all we want to know.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - CONTINUOUS

MISERY

Master Kenneth? Why, he's just Master Tom's nephew, that's all.

Misery sets the polishing rag in her little wood box.

BETH

Is this his home?

MISERY

All the home he's got, my dear. His father and mother are both dead, and Miss Jane took him in, just because she thought Master Tom would 'a' liked it.

LOUISE

Is she fond of him?

MISERY

Fond of the boy? Why, Miss Jane just hates him, for a fact. She won't even see him, or have him near her.

(MORE)

MISERY (CONT'D)

So he keeps to his little room in the left wing, and eats and sleeps there.

BETH

That's strange, isn't he a nice boy?

MISERY

We're all very fond of Master Kenneth, but I'll admit he's a strange lad, and has a bad temper. It may be due to his lack of bringin' up, you know, for he just runs wild. I don't know what will become of him, when Miss Jane dies.

BETH

Thank you.

As they exit, Louise says quietly;

LOUISE

There's no danger in that quarter, after all. The boy is a mere hanger-on. You see, Aunt Jane's old sweetheart, Thomas Bradley, left everything to her when he died, and she can do as she likes with it.

EXT. ELMHURST GARDEN - DAY

The cousins are slowly strolling along the many garden paths that afternoon. As they round a corner they see a short robust old man seated on a bench puffing on a pipe.

LOUISE

Are you Uncle John?

UNCLE JOHN

If you are my nieces, then I am Uncle John. Sit down, my dears, and let's get acquainted.

LOUISE

You have just arrived, we hear.

UNCLE JOHN

Yes. Walked up from the station this morning. Come to see Jane, you know, but hadn't any idea I'd find two nieces.

(MORE)

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

Hadn't any idea I possessed two nieces, to be honest about it.

LOUISE

I believe you have three.

UNCLE JOHN

Three? Who's the other?

LOUISE

Why, Patricia Doyle.

UNCLE JOHN

Doyle? Doyle? Don't remember that name.

BETH

I believe your sister Violet married a man named Doyle.

UNCLE JOHN

So she did. Captain Doyle-or Major Doyle-or some such fellow. But what're your names?

LOUISE

I'm Louise Merrick, your brother Will's daughter.

UNCLE JOHN

Oh... And you?

BETH

My mother was Julia Merrick. She married Professor De Graf. I am Elizabeth De Graf.

UNCLE JOHN

Yes, yes, I remember Julia very well, as a girl. She used to put on a lot of airs, and hassle father because he wouldn't have the old buggy painted every spring.

Uncomfortable silence.

LOUISE

Where did you come from?

UNCLE JOHN

From out on the west coast.

LOUISE

What brought you back here after
all of these years?

UNCLE JOHN

Family affection, I guess. Wanted
to find out what family I had left.

BETH

Now that you're here, what are you
going to do?

UNCLE JOHN

Nothing my dear.

LOUISE

Have you any money?

UNCLE JOHN

Might have expected that question,
my dear, but it's rather hard to
answer. If I say no, you'll be
afraid I'll want to borrow a little
spendin' money, now an' then; and
if I say yes, you'll take me for a
Rockefeller.

Louise looks at his stained black neck tie and smiles.

LOUISE

Not exactly.

UNCLE JOHN

Well, here's Jane, my sister, just
rolling in wealth she don't know
what to do with. And she's invited
me to stay a while. So let's call
the money question settled, my
dears.

Beth looks bored and Louise looks satisfied with her
interrogation. They start to move away when John speaks
again.

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

Jane won't last long.

LOUISE

You think not?

UNCLE JOHN

She says she's half dead a'ready,
and I believe it. Pretty soon
she'll blow out, like a candle.

(MORE)

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

All that worries her is to keep alive until she can decide who to leave her money to. That's why you're here, I s'pose, my dears. How do you like being on exhibition, an' goin' through your paces, like a bunch o' trotting hosses, to see which is worth the most?

BETH

Uncle John, I'd hoped I would like you. But if you're going to be so very disagreeable, I'll have nothing more to do with you!

Both girls turn their noses up and strut away. Uncle John laughs silently.

BETH (CONT'D)

He's a strange old man and a fool.

LOUISE

Don't judge hastily, Beth. I can't make up my mind, just yet, whether Uncle John is a fool or not.

BETH

Anyhow, he's laughing at us.

LOUISE

And that is the strongest evidence of his sanity. Beth, my dear, Aunt Jane has placed us in a most ridiculous position.

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

Aunt Jane is in her rich black silk dress she wears for dining. Uncle John is seated opposite her at the great table with his same rumpled clothes but has a soiled white neck tie on. The girls are dressed in their best and seated opposite each other. The meal is finished.

Jane signals Phibbs that she is ready to go to the library.

INT. LIBRARY - CONTINUOUS

They all follow Phibbs pushing Jane's chair to the library.

AUNT JANE

Do you play bridge?

BETH

Yes, aunt.

LOUISE

Not very well, I'm afraid.

They all sit at the game table.

INT. LIBRARY - NIGHT

Later, Jane and John are sitting in front of the fire alone.

AUNT JANE

Well, what do you think of the girls?

UNCLE JOHN

During my lifetime, I've noticed that girls are just girls-and nothing more. Jane, your sex is a puzzle that ain't worth the trouble solving. You're all alike, and what little I've seen of my nieces convinces me they're regulation females-no better nor worse than their kind.

AUNT JANE

Louise seems a capable girl. I didn't care much for her, at first; but she improves on acquaintance. She has been well trained by her mother, and is very ladylike and agreeable.

UNCLE JOHN

She's smarter than the other one, but not so honest.

AUNT JANE

Beth has no tact at all and is very serious, but then, she's younger than Louise.

UNCLE JOHN

Where's the other niece? Aren't there three of them?

AUNT JANE

Yes. The other's coming. Silas Watson, my lawyer, has just telegraphed from New York that he's bringing Patricia back with him.

UNCLE JOHN

Had to send for her, eh?

AUNT JANE

Yes. She's Irish, and if I remember rightly her father is a disgraceful old reprobate, who caused poor Violet no end of worry. The girl may be like him, for she wrote me a dreadful letter, scolding me because I hadn't kept her parents supplied with money, and refusing to be my guest.

UNCLE JOHN

But she's changed her mind?

AUNT JANE

I sent Watson after her, and he's bringing her. I wanted to see what the girl is like.

Uncle John leans back in his chair with his hands behind his head.

UNCLE JOHN

My advice is to let 'em draw cards for Elmhurst. If you want to leave your money to the best o' the lot, you're as sure of striking it right that way as any other.

AUNT JANE

Nonsense! I don't want to leave my money to the best of the lot.

UNCLE JOHN

No?

AUNT JANE

By no means. I want to leave it to the one I prefer--whether she's the best or not.

UNCLE JOHN

I see. Jane, I'll repeat my former observation. Your sex is a puzzle that ain't worth solving.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - DAY

Patsy sits down in front of her aunt still wearing her hat and her grey wrap.

PATSY

Well, here I am, but whether I ought to be here or not, I have my doubts.

AUNT JANE

You're an odd little thing. I wonder why I took so much trouble to get you.

PATSY

So do I. You'll probably be sorry for it.

SILAS

I explained to Miss Doyle that you were ill, and wanted to see her. And she kindly consented to come to Elmhurst for a few days.

PATSY

You see, I'd just got Daddy away on his vacation, so I was quite by myself when Mr. Watson came to me and wouldn't take no for an answer.

AUNT JANE

Why did you object to coming here?

PATSY

Well, I didn't know you, and I didn't especially want to know you. You've been little of a friend to my folks these past years. You're rich and selfish while we're poor and proud. We like to live our lives in our own way.

AUNT JANE

Are you a working girl?

PATSY

Surely, and drawing a big lump of salary every Saturday night. I'm a hair-dresser, you know, and by the way, your hair looks nice.

AUNT JANE

Louise dressed my hair this way.

PATSY

Your maid?

AUNT JANE
My niece, Louise Merrick.

PATSY
A cousin? Is she here?

AUNT JANE
Yes, and your other cousin,
Elizabeth De Graf, is here also.

PATSY
That's just the trouble. That's why
I didn't want to come, you know.

AUNT JANE
I don't understand you, Patricia.

PATSY
Why, it's as plain as the nose on
your face. You want us girls here
just to compare us with each other,
and pick out the one you like best.

AUNT JANE
Well?

PATSY
The others you'll throw over, and
the favorite will get your money.

AUNT JANE
Haven't I the right to do that?

PATSY
Perhaps you have. But we may as
well understand each other right
now, Aunt Jane. I won't touch a
penny of your money, under any
circumstances.

AUNT JANE
I think I agree, Patricia.

PATSY
Stick to that, Aunt, and there's no
reason we shouldn't be friends. I
don't mind coming to see you, for
it will give me a bit of a rest and
the country is beautiful just now.
Though you seem harsh and
disagreeable, I believe I shall
like you.

Patsy and Jane eye each other.

PATSY (CONT'D)

If you'd like me to stay a few days, I'll take off my things and make myself at home. But I'm out of the race for your money, and I'll pay my way from now on just as I have always done.

AUNT JANE

Misery, show my niece, Miss Patricia, to the Rose Chamber. And see that she is made comfortable.

PATSY

Thank you.

AUNT JANE

Make yourself perfectly free of the place, and have as good a time as you can. Stay as long as you please, but while you are here, if you ever feel like chatting with a harsh and disagreeable old woman, come to me at any time and you will be welcome.

Patsy stands to leave, but turns back at Jane's words.

PATSY

Ah! I've been cruel to you, and I didn't mean to hurt you at all, Aunt Jane. You must forgive me. It's just my blunt Irish way, you see; but if I hadn't been drawn to you from the first I wouldn't have said a word--good or bad!

AUNT JANE

Go now, but come to me again whenever you like.

Patsy follows Misery out of the room. Silas sits opposite his old friend for some moments in thoughtful silence.

SILAS

The child is impossible.

AUNT JANE

You think so?

SILAS

Absolutely. Either of the others would make a better Lady of Elmhurst.

(MORE)

SILAS (CONT'D)

Yet I like the little thing, I confess. She quite won my old heart after I had known her for five minutes. But Jane, you're making a grave mistake in all this. Why don't you do the right thing and leave Elmhurst to Kenneth?

AUNT JANE

You bore me, Silas. The boy is the most impossible of all.

SILAS

What is this I hear about John Merrick having returned from the West?

AUNT JANE

He came yesterday. It was a great surprise to me.

SILAS

I never knew of this brother, I believe.

AUNT JANE

No, he'd gone away before I became acquainted with either you or Tom.

SILAS

What sort of man is he?

AUNT JANE

Honest and simple, hard-headed and experienced.

SILAS

Is he independent?

AUNT JANE

I believe so. He didn't have much of an education, but he seems to be a good man, for all that. I'm glad he appeared at Elmhurst just at this time.

SILAS

You had believed him dead?

AUNT JANE

Yes. He had passed out of my life completely, and I never knew what became of him.

INT. KENNETH'S ROOM - DAY

Silas enters Ken's room silently. Uncle John and Ken are playing chess.

UNCLE JOHN

You're bound to lose the pawn,
whichever way you play.

Ken gives an angry cry and thrusts the table away and the chess pieces clatter to the floor. Uncle John grabs him and throws him over his lap and spanks him. When he's done, Ken mutters in anger but keeps a respectful eye on John.

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

(calmly)

You broke the bargain, and I kept
my word. The compact was if you
raised a rough-house, like you did
yesterday, and got unruly, that I'd
give you a good spanking. Now,
wasn't it?

KENNETH

Yes.

UNCLE JOHN

Well, that blamed temper o' your'n
got away with you again, and you're
well spanked for not heading it
off. Pick up the board, Ken, my
lad, and let's try it again.

Ken starts to comply, but sees the lawyer. He flings himself against his chest and cries dramatically.

UNCLE JOHN (CONT'D)

A bargain's a bargain.

KENNETH

(sobs)

He whipped me! He whipped me like a
child.

UNCLE JOHN

Your own fault. You wanted me to
play a game with you, and I agreed,
providin' you behaved yourself. And
you didn't. Now, look here. Do you
blame me any?

KENNETH

(sniff)

No.

UNCLE JOHN
No harm's done, is there?

KENNETH
No.

UNCLE JOHN
Then stop blubberin', and introduce me to your friend. Name's Watson, ain't it.

SILAS
Silas Watson, sir, at your service, and you must be John Merrick, who I understand has arrived during my absence.

UNCLE JOHN
Exactly.

SILAS
Glad to welcome you to Elmhurst, sir. I was good friends with Thomas Bradley.

UNCLE JOHN
Bradley must have been a fool to give this place to Jane.

SILAS
He was in love, sir.
(to Ken)
How are things going? Have the girls bothered you much, as yet?

KENNETH
No, I keep out of their way.

SILAS
That's a good idea.
(to John)
Bye the bye, sir, I've just brought you a new niece.

UNCLE JOHN
Patricia?

SILAS
She prefers to be called Patsy. A queer little thing; half Irish, you know.

UNCLE JOHN

And half Merrick. That's an odd combination, but the Irish may be able to stand it. These nieces are more than I bargained for. I came to see one relative, and find three more, and all women!

SILAS

I think you'll like Patsy, anyhow. And so will you, Kenneth.

KENNETH

I hate all girls!

SILAS

You won't hate this one. She's as wild and impulsive as you are, but better natured. She'll make a good comrade, although she may box your ears once in a while.

Ken turns away and begins picking up the chess pieces as the men go down the steps.

EXT. ELMHURST GARDEN - CONTINUOUS

They stroll through the garden.

UNCLE JOHN

A strange boy.

SILAS

I'm glad to see you've made friends with him. Until now he's had no one to befriend him but me, and at times he's so unmanageable it worries me dreadfully.

UNCLE JOHN

There's considerable character about the lad, but he's been spoiled and allowed to grow up wild, like a weed.

SILAS

He ought to go to a proper school, but I can't induce Jane to spend the money on him.

UNCLE JOHN

Jane's odd. In fact, Mr. Watson,
it's a odd world, and the longer I
live in it the stranger I find it.

Just then they encounter poor James who scurries away.

INT. DRAWING ROOM - NIGHT

LOUISE

It's a pleasure to meet you, Cousin
Patricia.

PATSY

Thank you.
(turns to Beth)
And you must be Elizabeth?

BETH

(coldly)
I am. It's good to meet you.

PATSY

You can call me Patsy, and there's
no use our trying to be chums just
because we're cousins. One of you
will get her money, for I've told
her I wouldn't touch a penny of it,
and she has told me I wouldn't get
the chance. So one of you will be a
great lady. I'll not stay long,
anyhow, so just forget I'm here.
I'll amuse myself and try not to
bother you.

As Patsy turns away, they exchange a skeptical look.