



Title	JOHN HOWARD LAWSON'S UNPUBLISHED THE SPICE OF LIFE
Author(s)	Robinson, LeRoy
Citation	経営と経済, 59(1), pp.91-113; 1979
Issue Date	1979-07-01
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10069/28068
Right	

This document is downloaded at: 2020-09-18T06:28:01Z

JOHN HOWARD LAWSON'S UNPUBLISHED
THE SPICE OF LIFE

Le Roy Robinson

On August 18, 1915, about one month before his 21st birthday, John Howard Lawson copyrighted a play entitled *The Butterfly Lady*, which he called "A Fantastic Comedy." This play was neither produced nor published. However, settings or characters or themes similar to some in *The Butterfly Lady* appear in *Servant-Master-Lover* and *Standards*, both written and copyrighted in 1915 and both produced (unsuccessfully) in 1916.

On October 22, 1919, about one month after his 25th birthday, Lawson copyrighted a play entitled *The Spice of Life*, which he called "A Temperamental Play." *The Spice of Life* (originally written in 1916, according to Lawson's autobiography) also contains settings or characters or themes similar to some in *The Butterfly Lady*, and is evidently a revised version of that play.

In 1916 Lawson's agent Mary Kirkpatrick sold *The Spice of Life* (or *The Butterfly Lady*) to actress Dorothy Donnelly, who was interested in the role of its main female character. But *The Spice of Life* was not produced.

In 1920 Mary Kirkpatrick sold *The Spice of Life* again, for \$5,000, to Famous Players-Lasky, later Paramount Pictures Corporation, but it was never filmed, and it has not been published.

In "A Calendar of Commitment" (his unfinished and as yet unpublished autobiography) Lawson comments only briefly on *The Spice of Life*. He describes the play as a series of "illustrative episodes": The first act is "drawing room comedy" -- a rich girl about to be married decides she is in love with another man. The second act is "melodrama" -- the rejected bridegroom tries to kill his rival. The third act is "farce" -- all sorts of complications." The fourth act is "musical comedy."

Lawson's comments on *The Spice of Life* were written about 50 years after the writing of the play itself. These comments are not only brief

but also somewhat misleading, perhaps. The version of *The Spice of Life* that this summary is based on does not accord with at least one aspect of Lawson's description, e. g., in the second act, the rejected bridegroom says he would like to see his rival's blood run, but he neither directly threatens him nor kills him.

Lawson's comments suggest slightly¹⁾ but not altogether correctly that this play (written when he was about 21 or 22 years old and perhaps revised when he was about 25 or 26) has little of aesthetic value. Be that as it may, *The Spice of Life* does have biographical value. It may even have historical value, too.

In any case, the main purpose of this article, the first lengthy summary of *The Spice of Life* to be published, is to provide historians of American drama with basic factual material about John Howard Lawson's early career in the commercial theatre before his first Broadway production in 1923.²⁾

1) Lawson's apparent censure of *The Spice of Life* (and by extension all of his own dramas of the 1920s is based upon his censure in *Theory and Technique of Playwriting* of plays whose actions is "illustrative and not functional," "illustrative rather than progressive," because "contradiction between cause and effect is not dramatised as it strikes the conscious wills of the characters and drives them to revise and intensify their decisions." In *Theory and Technique* (1936) Lawson rejects plays in which characters are governed by whim or fate, rather than by "conscious will," plays in which psychic generalizations are substituted for specific acts of will, plays in which action tends to follow a pattern of repetition. Lawson rejects the mode of thought which in drama accepts emotional drift as a substitute for rational causation; which in drama shows a "series of situations in which the immediacy of sensation, the fleeting feeling of frustration or anger or desire takes precedence over the testing and carrying out of decisions." Lawson approvingly quotes John Gassner: "A play lives by its logic and reality... Conceptual confusion is the disease that halts its pace, dulls its edge, and disturbs its balance." About this "disease," Lawson adds: "The disease is a nervous disorder growing out of the playwright's maladjustment to his environment."

The Spice of Life, "A Tempermental Play," has four acts: Act I "problem play"; Act II "farce"; Act III "melodrama"; Act IV (missing) "tableau." The action of the play takes place on a single day in New York City in Springtime. It is a little after 10 a. m. in Mary Jefferson's boudoir:

Latticed windows with lace curtain, through which streams morning sunlight. Right of windows, a small dressing table; above it, a mirror. Walls of yellow panelling; in the panels, little yellow-shaded lamps. Near center stage, a couch with dainty yellow upholstery. Nearby, a chair and a low, yellow table.³⁾ Bunches of flowers are scattered about the room. "A general atmosphere of perfumed comfort fills the air."⁴⁾

-
- 2) This summary is based on a reading of a microfilm copy of an incomplete manuscript entitled *The Spice of Life*, dated 1915, one title page of which shows a change in title from *The Butterfly Lady*. Internal evidence suggests this manuscript may be at least in part a later revision, copyrighted in 1919 and sold to Famous Players-Lasky in 1920. In *Film: The Creative Process* (1964) Lawson says of the 1920 manuscript: "I imagine it is still filed away in some vast repository of unproduced manuscripts at the studio." In a letter to me (August 24, 1977) Philip J. Meldman, Director of Literary Affairs, Paramount Pictures Corporation, says: "Because of the date of this property, if it exists anywhere in Paramount files, it would be locked away in our vaults and retrieval... would be prohibitive." I wish to thank Dr. Kenneth W. Duckett, Director of Special Collections and curator of the Lawson Papers at Morris Library, Southern Illinois University at Carbondale, for making this microfilm available to me.
 - 3) This emphasis on yellow is deliberate. Among Lawson's notes for *Souls* (1915) there is an elaborate description of the relation in that play between colors and the desires of characters, e. g., yellow represents the Desire for Romance.
 - 4) When Lawson was 13 he wrote a verse drama "Savitri" one of whose settings is a golden room with a gold throne; the stage directions say: "The whole... seems to be pervaded with incense." (In "A Calendar of Commitment," his unfinished as yet unpublished autobiography, Lawson says: "This golden room pervaded with incense was more real to me than the city in which I lived.") When he was not quite 18 Lawson wrote a short story whose setting is a church whose musty edifice is pervaded by the faint smell of incense. "The Wrong Cue," *Williams Literary Monthly*, June 1913.

The French maid Jeanette, dressed "trimly," arranges the yellow cushions on the couch. Mary enters in a "handsome flowing lace negligee" and "rather untidy" bedroom slippers. Mary speaks with a "little touch of boredom and worry" - - but, as it appears later, her natural manner is "rather jumpy, excitable, efferevescent." Mary's hair flows down her back. She yawns "luxuriously," for she enjoys sleeping "immensely."⁵⁾

The purpose of the rest of this scene is to illustrate Mary's character and to introduce one of the main themes of the play, the conflict between personal desire and public duty.

Jeanette apologizes for not helping Mary dress. Mary says she is old enough to dress herself. Enters Mary's younger friend Ruth Hancock ("dark, medium height, compactly built") who lets us know today is Mary's wedding day.⁶⁾ To Ruth's question, Mary shrugs: "I just got up. I don't know how it feels yet." Ruth praises Mary's beautiful trousseau-- filmy lace, chiffon, silk. Mary says it's not the clothes so much as the man that makes a wedding. Ruth describes the man in this case as "wonderful, rich, handsome." Mary wouldn't call him handsome so much as "just he looks well-varnished." Ruth is excited to be a bridesmaid. Mary says she has never been married before "so it might be fun for both of us." Ruth thinks Mary takes marriage "as if it were a practical joke instead of a religious rite." Mary says: "Marriage is always more or less a practical joke." Mary wonders if she is "really in love." She is never sure of the way she feels about anything.⁷⁾ As for marriage: "Deciding whether you'll marry a

-
- 5) The flowing negligee, the flowing hair, the luxurious yawning probably symbolize Mary's desire for romance; they are Lawson's discreet reference to Freudian notions about repression of sexual desire. Lawson's notes for *Souls* directly refer to Freud in whose ideas he was interested some years before the "Freudian 20s."
- 6) Throughout the play Ruth almost always functions as a "feeder" with conservative tendencies.
- 7) This is one of several submerged, undeveloped themes in this play.

man is just the same as deciding whether you'd go to tea with him. Only more so." Ruth thinks Mary will never learn to "look at life sensibly." Mary agrees: "I never will. I'll never be sensible and commonplace like you."⁸⁾ Ruth is offended, but Mary adds: "You pretend to like Debussy. You've taken up charity. You put in your time patting Bowery babies on their heads."⁹⁾ Well, I don't. In my entire life I've never done anything useful. I've never been charitable. I've been useless and happy and tolerably ornamental." Ruth tries to get Mary to understand today is the "solemnest" day of her life. "Now," says Mary. "That's the difference between us. If you were getting married, you'd be excited about it, you'd mix it all up with your ideas about duty and love."

The next scene continues the illustration of Mary's character, suggests the upperclass formality in which she must live, and illustrates the stolidity of her unimpassioned middleclass fiancé.

Mary's mother Mrs. Jefferson enters. She wears a "rather handsome housedress." She is stout and motherly and evidently very rich. She carries a newspaper with a story about the wedding-to-be and photos of Mary and her fiancé. Mary is tired of seeing herself in the newspapers, annoyed they always mention her fiancé's name first: "Robert Rollins, eminent banker, large type." Mrs. Jefferson thinks this should make Mary proud: "Such a distinguished man." Mary asks: "What's the good of distinction?" Distinction may get them on the front page, but after all they're not going to

-
- 8) Mary's attitude here strongly resembles that of Roger Bloomer, the 18 year old hero of *Roger Bloomer* (begun in France in 1917 and produced in 1923), who also rejects being sensible and common-place.
- 9) In *Standards* the Dramatist says many people give money to charity but do not give themselves.

live there.¹⁰⁾ Ruth comments that Mary's wedding gifts (a great big silver candelabrum, silver plates with filigree work, silver bon bon dishes) are not only expensive but useful. Mary says: "Nonsense. I'll give them to the Salvation Army to take up collections at street meetings." Ruth talks about Mary's fiance, who leads an interesting life, the life of a successful financier,¹¹⁾ a "master of money, so noble, so splendid."¹²⁾ Mary says Ruth is so enthusiastic about Rollins it's a shame Ruth is not marrying him. Ruth and Robert are both people of reason and sense. *She* is a "creature of instinct" and likely to elope with the chauffeur. Ruth is "utterly scandalized." Mary says a woman marries for novelty as much as for anything else. She was brought up rich.¹³⁾ So it would be exciting for her to marry a poor man -- "a poor poet with a moony face and an Italian complexion, a man sort of flooded with moonlight." Mary confesses she almost eloped with such a poet.

-
- 10) Here Jeanette announces the arrival of the caterer: "He have ze Francais name but he talk no Francais: he call me 'kid, -- it ees not Francais." Early in his career as a playwright Lawson used stage brogues to elicit laughter. Finally, he used accents in the interest of realism.
- 11) In another version, Rollins is head of Independent Steel Company, the only steel company successful in becoming independent of the steel trust, which he is said to fight.
- 12) This "noble, splendid" diction derives from Lawson's reading of *The Golden Bowl* from which he took narrative ideas for *Souls*, in whose notes he several times refers to the novel by Henry James.
- 13) Mary says when she was a little girl her father (not otherwise mentioned in the play) made his money suddenly. She also refers to her rich uncle Harrison Gale, coming from Keokuk, Iowa, to give her away. In *Roger Bloomer* Roger's father is a rich department store owner in a place called Excelsior, Iowa.

Ruth says Mary is the "most theatrical person" she has ever met.¹⁴⁾ The maid announces the arrival of Mary's fiance. Mary says: "Now if Robert really understood me, instead of sending up the maid to announce him, he'd climb the trellis to my window and appear suddenly, shouting 'What Ho!..'"

Before and after her fiance enters, Mary continues her theatrical imagery, which is partly reflexive, that is, it refers to the structure of *The Spice of Life* itself.

Life is like a play, Mary says. In fact, life is better than a play. Plays are generally all in one key. Life changes and moves and shifts "like an Italian table d'hote." She herself lives more dramas in a day than you see in a month of theatre-going. Her life is like a lot of plays mixed together, changing according to mood and fancy. One minute it's farce. Then melodrama, romance. Next -- "That's the advantage, you never know." "What are we doing?" she asks. "Conversation around a tray with china on it -- society comedy. Think of all the things that might

14) In another version of this scene, Mary says she almost eloped with a dramatist. Not a successful one, for his plays were different, wonderful, clever, a little bit odd. Producers called them fantastic and silly but they weren't that, Mary says, they were full of variety. The dramatist said life was like a lot of plays mixed together, farces and problem plays and frothy comedies, and that is what his plays were like. Ruth objects: "Unity." Mary responds: "Nonsense!" Plays stopped having unity 20 years ago. Plays now go forwards or backwards. Artistic unity is unfashionable. Besides there is no artistic unity in life, life changes and shifts and moves and changes.

This passage probably expresses the point of view of John Howard Lawson whose Broadway productions of the 20s were experimental plays full of variety, lacking conventional artistic unity, expressing the theme that life changes and shifts and moves. Interestingly, film producer Cecil B. Demille's first talking picture, *Dynamite*, written mostly by Lawson in 1928, was described as an "astonishing mixture, with artificiality vying with realism, and comedy hanging on the heels of grim melodrama." Mordaunt Hall, "Cecil B. Demille's First Talker," *New York Times*, December 28, 1929.

happen in five minutes." Her fiance might draw a revolver--melodrama. He might take a "withered rose" from his pocket and kiss it -- romance. *She* might decide to say her soul was "stifled" -- problem play. A drunken man might climb through the window and throw the tray of dishes at someone's head -- farce. "That's what makes our being here so exciting. None of us can tell what the others are going to do next."

Mary's fiance Rollins, however, says as he is expected to say: "What in heaven's name is this?" Mary says: "Suspense." Anything might happen. Rollins might die. His heart might stop.¹⁵⁾ Mary calls this idea just a joke. Rollins ignores it and turns the conversation to business.¹⁶⁾ He is in conflict with a trust. Ruth listens with "rapt attention" and says: "Modern business is like a battle."¹⁷⁾ Mary asks Rollins what will happen to his business affairs while they're on their honeymoon. He answers that on their two-week honeymoon at Virginia Hot Springs he will install a ticker-tape machine.¹⁸⁾ To herself Mary whispers: "Romeo!" Rollins exits to wait downstairs. Mary "stamps her foot angrily" and complains: "Undemonstrative! Did you see the way he didn't kiss me?" Rollins

-
- 15) Later in the play the poet Richard Moulton says he has a weak heart, but this theme is not further developed. In *Parlor Magic* (1964) Mrs. Merton suffers a heart disease which seems partly symbolic, and her daughter-in-law wants to be a heart surgeon to help people.
- 16) Rollins refers to an appointment with someone named Wolff not further identified but apparently a businessman, maybe a banker. (It is possible Lawson knew of Henry W. Wolff, author of *Cooperative Banking* 1907, *People's Banks* 1910, etc.) but this is probably an allusion to Abraham Woolf of Kuhn, Loeb. Lawson's Wolff may be the germ of Sonnenberg, the financier in *Success Story* (1932) who is to Wall Street what Einstein is to science.
- 17) This business-as-battle theme is marginal in this play, though talked about again in the third act, but Lawson returns to it in *The International* (1928) and *Success Story* in greater depth.
- 18) As "cable editor" for Reuters in 1914-15 Lawson worked daily with a tickertape machine. But he probably knew of Bronson Howard's *The Henrietta* (1887) in which a financier is more interested in his tickertape than in his romance.

flows like water instead of leaping like fire. Abominable.

The next scene illustrates Mary's theatrical idea that anything might suddenly happen. Mary looks through her morning mail. Letters of congratulations from her Uncle Howard, a clergyman in England, and from her Aunt Josephine in Chicago, who never married.

At the next envelope Mary stares "open-mouthed." She fingers it gingerly. She says: "I'm seeing a ghost!" This letter is from the poet (a little younger than her) whom she almost married, Richard "Dickie" Moulton.¹⁹⁾ Moulton had gone to France. "Oh, he's been brave," Mary says. "He was dreadfully in love with me." She reads bits of this letter out loud: "Eternal affection... underneath the stars... whispered your name." Mary is delighted with this letter: "I was desperately in love with him in a flowery poetic sort of way." Ruth considers it bad taste for Moulton, after not writing for 18 months, to have written on her wedding day.²⁰⁾ Ruth says: "Wake up, you're about to marry another man." Mary says she is very puzzled and must think. Then the maid carries in a calling card. Mary, her voice "weak and gasping with excitement," can "hardly bear" to take the card but "steels herself half-comically" to look at it -- to be "slowly astonished at the workings of Fate."²¹⁾ Moulton is downstairs in the library, with Rollins. Mary, her heart a "sea of uncertainty,"

19) In 1909 Lawson read Richard G. Moulton's *Ancient Classical Drama*; on June 23, 1909, at the Fine Arts Building in Chicago he attended Moulton's lecture on *Macbeth* and Greek tragedy.

20) In another version it is said Moulton gave a letter for Mary to her cousin, who did not deliver it. Moulton interpreted Mary's silence as the negative answer to his proposal of marriage. Not receiving the letter, Mary, bored, lonely, at 30 feeling like an old maid -- "nasty feeling" -- decided to marry Rollins. (In *Parlor Magic* Owen, at war in the Pacific in 1945, does not write to his girlfriend Abigail for about 18 months during which time she has a sexual affair with Owen's brother whom she marries because of her pregnancy.)

21) In his childhood play "Savitri" and in college poems and *A Hindoo Love Drama* (1914) Lawson dealt with the workings of Fate.

rejects Ruth's suggestion she rest until she gets over her "nerves": "Can't rest! Can't rest! My soul is stifled, and I've got to air it."²²⁾

The next scene takes place in the library downstairs. At first the lighting is dim. Then through a large bay window (with panes of leaded glass) sunlight streams in on Moulton and Rollins who look at each other unpleasantly. Moulton, having just returned from France,²³⁾ has just learned about the wedding scheduled for that night. He offers his "heart-felt good wishes for a lifetime of happiness."

Ruth and then Mary enter. There is an "awkward moment." Mary asks for "time to breath," then abruptly says she'd rather die than be married. She wants to keep her problem in the open, to thrash it out squarely before witnesses. Ruth says: "We're all abominably in the dark."²⁴⁾ Mary cries. Moulton and Rollins quarrel.²⁵⁾ Mary asks them to be reasonable.

Mary tries to explain herself but emphasizes she is all mixed up and doesn't know her own mind or her own heart. Rollins says until this morning she hasn't had any difficulty. "Haven't I?" Mary asks. "I've been seething inside. My soul is in torment. I've suppressed it, to be respectable. Do you realize that nine girls out of ten feel this way, but they don't dare to say so, girls who marry beautifully with expensive flowers. All they feel is an over-powering disgust, a desire to escape. I dare to say so. I dare to face it

-
- 22) In the 1920s and 1930s various drama critics considered John Howard Lawson pre-eminently a playwright of stifled souls.
- 23) In another version Moulton says he returned from Berlin and Moscow where he studied continental drama.
- 24) Almost all the characters in *Nirvana* (1926) admit to being in the dark, but their lack of understanding extends to the confusion of the whole world.
- 25) Mary says they quarrel "like angry children." In *Roger Bloomer* Roger fights offstage for Louise "like a knight," but Louise says: "What a child you are, Roger."

squarely." Mary suggests all her problems would be solved "if there were such a thing as trial marriage."²⁶⁾ She asks: "What's the use of the marriage ceremony, anyway?"²⁷⁾

Mary's cousin Gaston Brown enters, carrying a hat, stick and gloves. Slim and elegant, he lives on an independent income. Bored, he drinks steadily enough to be in a "continual state of mild muddle-headedness." But he quickly senses the mood: "Where is the corpse?"

In a discussion of marriage Mary rejects marrying for comfort (she has all the comfort she wants) or for children (she is not a motherly woman). Moulton says: "Sometimes a marriage is a poem -- high romance, trailing glory." Mary finds more romance in a good musical show than in a lifetime of matrimony. There's no use in marrying just to please society. "If I loved a man in the desperate cave-woman way, I'd go and live with him on a desert island without rules or conventions."²⁸⁾ Anyway she doesn't feel that way, and besides there are no men like that around.²⁹⁾ All the men she knows are "sentimental frock-coated beasts." She will stay single and "frowsy." She "messes her hair with her hand significantly."

Brown, mildly drunk, calls Moulton a "romantic ass" to want to marry a "brainless wifely little woman." Moulton protests: "Wildest, most poetic soul I ever knew."

Moulton urges Mary to do something "decisive." He loves her. "Over there, in the waste places, with the guns belching red under the stars," she was his dream. Mary

26) In Rachel Crothers' *Young Wisdom* (1914) two young women express a desire to experiment with trial marriage.

27) In *Processional* (1925) a marriage ceremony is simultaneously solemnized and satirized.

28) In *Servant-Master-Lover* Cinders says she'd rather be a cavewoman than a doll.

29) In *Servant-Mastel-Lover* Cinders makes a similar complaint.

is proud of him because of his "service" in the war. She herself is worthless. Moulton rejects Mary's opinion of herself. She needs to be understood. The "stolid people" who surround her do not understand her. He, Moulton, does. He says he can see in Mary's eyes the "call of romance, the thirst for wilderness -- mountains and magic forests."³⁰⁾ He too has felt that call "in the battle lines, in the scared hush of the trenches at dawn." He and she are poets. Mary finds this "beautiful" but "so very vague." Moulton says: "Elope with me this afternoon to California, Hawaii, and the East."³¹⁾ He says: "We won't be sentimental and cheap and conventional. We'll be big and high-minded. We'll go to find Romance."³²⁾

Mary admits that's what she's sometimes dreamed of doing. Moulton catches her and kisses her. They separate. Mary retreats. Mary says: "Tomorrow would be as well as today" to elope.

Rollins, "very grim and determined," stands "surveying" them. Mary looks from one man to the other and with a "little gasp and sigh" she exits. Rollins thinks Mary is in a "pathological condition" and he, an old-fashioned man, believes in protecting women. Moulton says Mary does not need protection: "She has all of us guessing and her head's as clear as crystal." Rollins and he are "flies in the spider's web." When the spider wants to eat one of them, she will. They are "absolutely helpless."

30) In *Nirvana* poet Bill Weed also recalls magic forests.

31) In *Roger Bloomet* Roger and Louise Chamberlain imagine themselves going to the East but realize they cannot. In *Loud Speaker* (1927) Johnny and Clare elope to the East but discover that even in a gaily lanterned Chinese junk they are still frustrated.

32) In a college essay ("The Oriental Drama," *Williams Literary Monthly*, February 1914) Lawson described *A Thousand Years Ago* and *Omar the Tentmaker*: "An atmosphere of romance pervaded them." He denied that romance is "childish simplicity" or "senile sentimentality."

The first act of *The Spice of Life* ends as Moulton "nervously" lights a cigarette and as Rollins, "nerves tense," stands with his fists clenched.

* *

The multi-episodic action³³⁾ of the second act begins in Mary's boudoir.³⁴⁾ Rollins tells Ruth he would like to see flow the blood of that "damned poet" Moulton. Earlier, in a "state very nearly approaching insanity," Rollins went out and bought a gun, in what seemed like the "wildest dream." Now he laughs at it, but in his "fury" he could have killed Moulton.³⁵⁾ Rollins says: "You can't ever tell what things go on in a man's soul."

The maid announces Mary's coming. Rollins waits in the next room to see what mood Mary is in.³⁶⁾

Mary is "hilariously gay." She wants to inform Moulton she is going to "life and freedom" with him. Ruth calls this "completely absurd." Mary says: "That's the beauty of it." She says: "No more problems. No more solemnity. I'm through with thinking. I don't care what happens as long as I do as I please. I'm so bewildered and frivolous." She rushes out. Ruth says: "There's a farce for you." Rollins rushes in, pushes Ruth aside, and rushes out after Mary.³⁷⁾

-
- 33) There are almost as many (brief) scenes in this act as in all of *Roger Bloomer*, and the very hectic pace of the action is similar to that in *Loud Speaker*. One of the submerged themes in this play is related to multiplicity of events in limited periods of time.
- 34) At first, Mary is not there. Ruth says "new-fangled freedom" has led Mary to get marital advice from the cook. Mary calls this "naturalness." Ruth calls it "license."
- 35) This "horrifies" Ruth.
- 36) Ruth says: "By this time she may have decided to be a man." In *Roger Bloomer* Roger and Louise Chamberlain enjoy a brief mood of sailing the sea to Shanghai, and Louise suggests cutting her hair and dressing like a boy to be able to stow away with Roger.
- 37) Here the French maid comments: "M'amselle, I'm so disturbed. I understand nothing. But I smell." Ruth: "What do you smell?" Jeanette: "I smell beaucoup trouble."

The next scene takes place in Gaston Brown's apartment, elegantly furnished with a certain amount of ("but not too much") taste. "The scene is played swiftly and with a great deal of snap." In a flashback to and repetition of a telephone conversation made in the previous scene, stoutish man-servant Hughes is at the telephone. He informs Brown an unidentified woman with the "peculiar voice of one in pain" is coming right over.³⁸⁾

As they wait for the lady Moulton asks Brown if he has ever felt a "serious eternal affection." Brown says: "Yes. Last night." He saw a "perfect woman" in the chorus in a show at the Broadway Frolic. He was half-drunk but he knew she was perfect because he could see "a good deal of her." He sent her orchids and his card with his telephone number and address. Moulton thinks the woman may be "dangerous." Brown says she's a "delicate winsome little thing, refinement in every line, culture in every feature of her noble face." Brown tells Moulton to get out of his head the "mistaken idea" about chorus girls. "Some of the sweetest girls are kicking their heels at the footlights." This particular chorus girl is probably "one of those minister's daughters who take to the stage to support an entire family." Brown wants to know if Moulton "wasted" his time in France: "No Bebe or Paulette or Marcelle?" Moulton admits to one Marcelle. But he does not want to be made to feel unworthy of Mary, to whom he has already lied once that day. He spoke to her of his being at the front, but he never saw the front. He spent all his time in

38) There is a brief conversation about alcohol. Brown offers Moulton a chartreuse. Moulton says: "You've got a regular young bar there." Brown says: "Luckily." Brown then adds: "When this is gone, a bit of bichloride in the last clover club, and all will be over. This theme of poison is not taken up again in this play. In *Roger Bloomer* Louise Chamberlain commits suicide by poisoning herself with an unidentified poison. Earlier Roger tries to buy bichloride of mercury but the drug store clerk can sell him only rat poison.

France putting peanuts in bags. He wonders how he can accept Mary's love under false pretenses."³⁹⁾

The doorbell rings. The two men go into the dining room, closing the folding doors slightly so they watch whoever enters. Hughes shows in Elaine Charm.⁴⁰⁾ She wears a big bouquet of orchids. (Brown, in a sentimental whisper: "My orchids!") She is winsome. She is "beautifully dressed." But her "too bright" handbag "betrays the real vulgarity of her dainty person." She observes the surroundings "uncertainly, but with an appraising eye." She waves Hughes away "elegantly."

Alone but quite at home, Elaine hums. Opens an ornamental cigarette box, puts several cigarettes into her handbag. Lifts up the gold clock, weighs it, tries to put it in her handbag. It doesn't fit. Brown comes forward: "You have-- taking ways." Elaine lisps a little: "Don't joke with me. It makes me nervous. And when I get nervous I'm terrible." Brown suggests they be terrible together. Elaine does not know if he's a gentleman. She "coyly" admits she knows a gentleman by his bank account. Then, the stage directions say, she "decides to play a different game." She is just an "innocent little kid" who used to live on a farm. Brown tries to interest Elaine in leaving his apartment and a bit of burlesque breaks in. Elaine: "Are you trying to shake me?" Brown: "Shake you? Er-- do you shake well?" Elaine: "Shake a shimie. Shake a cocktail. I can shake anything."⁴¹⁾

39) The theme of Moulton's unworthiness is dropped at this point.

40) In another version she is named Elaine Pommeroy. Lawson may have derived the name Elaine from two novels, *The Exploits of Elaine* (1915) and *The Romance of Elaine* (1916), by Arthur B. Reeves, whose name (only) Lawson mentions in his notes for *Souls*, quoting Reeves on Freud's notion of repression of the libido.

41) In *Processional* teen-ager Sadie Cohen shakes a mean shimie.

Brown now seems to lose his identity: "You're not the girl -- I am not the man -- I mean I wish I wasn't the man -- I'm not who I am -- I'm --." The stage directions say he is "abruptly desperate."⁴²⁾ Brown starts to speak "violently," then abruptly changes his tone. He asks Elaine to wait in the next room.⁴³⁾

Brown and Moulton discuss Elaine. Brown: "Do me a favor? Take that g_rl and drop her gracefully down the elevator shaft?"⁴⁴⁾¹ Moulton wants Brown to get rid of "that objectionable female" himself, before Mary arrives: "Throw her out. Call the police." Brown rejects this advice: "She'd make a scandal." Moulton agrees to take Elaine out. But before that he writes a letter which he asks Brown to give Mary. Meanwhile, Elaine expects Moulton to join her and is getting undressed. (Brown peeks.) Moulton calls her a "professional trouble maker." Brown calls her a "specialist in misery." Brown asks Hughes to persuade Elaine to dress herself. Hughes: "Is she averse, sir?" Brown: "Perverse!" Hughes says: "Wild beasts. Yes. Fire and the sword at your service. But, to dress a perverse woman." Hughes is reluctant to perform this service without first having a "glance" through the keyhole.

As Hughes peeks, Mary enters. The three men "shield" the door. There is "dainty rapping." They listen, "stricken." Moulton leads Mary away. Brown now tells Hughes if Moulton and Mary elope "it would make a mess of both their lives," and he is going to prevent them from doing so.

At this point, the comings and goings increase (this summary omits quite a few) and the tempo of the action speeds up. Brown

42) This loss of identity theme is not developed, although in the play as a whole it seems to be a covert theme.

43) Here Elaine says she expects to be treated in a refined way. Brown understands: "You scream if you're pinched." Elaine protests: "I'm no jailbird, never been pinched in my life." In *Servant-Master-Lover* teen-ager Cinders refers to herself as a jailbird.

44) The undercurrent of violence in this play is generally dammed up.

drinks more whiskey. Elaine appears in her underclothes. Hughes keeps an eye on Elaine. She thinks him the "liveliest member of this congregation." Hughes controls himself with difficulty. Elaine finds Moulton's letter to Mary. "Evidence!" She stumbles offstage, her skirt only half on. Moulton shows the suspicious Mary "not a soul here." Mary is annoyed he's lost her love letter but she's ready to elope. Moulton wants to avoid seeing Rollins but Mary says "that'd be cowardly."

Rollins discovers Elaine's blouse and jumps to a hasty conclusion about Mary and Moulton. Elaine comes on stage half-dressed, screams, dashes back and forth. Hughes asks: "Everything all right?" Brown dissuades Mary from eloping: "Not good for you--not suited--you're an impulsive woman--like a butterfly-- if you get the habit you'll be eloping every day." Elaine wonders if she's in a "madhouse" or a "prison." Brown pays her to wait in the next room half-undressed. Hughes asks: "Everything all right?" Mary and Rollins quarrel. Brown locks Moulton in the room with Elaine. The maid Jeanette comes to tell Mary her mother is worried about her: "She scream--like the--hyena." From the next room there is a wild scream.

Hughes unlocks the door. Elaine appears, wrapped in a bedspread, then Moulton, "drooping, head bent, a broken man." Mary calls him a beast. Rollins says: "This is an outrage..." but he unwraps Elaine, revealing her in "all the splendor of her underwear." Moulton explains his resistance: it was not "debauchery" but "war."

Elaine produces Moulton's letter: "Dearest, adored, beautiful." Mary refuses to believe Moulton wrote the letter to her. Moulton buys the letter back from Elaine for \$ 500.⁴⁵⁾ Brown indulges in byplay with Jeanette about "love." She calls him "Singe, bete, monkey, son of a Spanish Cow."

There are searches for Elaine's blouse. Mary asks Rollins to "revenge" her. Ruth urges Rollins not to shoot Moulton, and they struggle for the gun. Mary misunderstands, laughs hysterically: "Making love..." She calls Rollins a Don Juan and says she doesn't

want him.⁴⁶⁾ Hughes and Elaine are found in "excessively cozy attitudes." Mary faces the audience and sighs.⁴⁷⁾ Brown congratulates Hughes warmly. Elaine finds her blouse.⁴⁸⁾ Mary again laughs hysterically: "Nobody loves me." She decides to start "man-hunting on a tremendous scale."⁴⁹⁾ She seizes rouge and powder, applying them "vigorously and excessively." She faints. "Give her air... give her air." As the others gather around Mary, Elaine ends the second act of *The Spice of Life* by taking all the whiskey bottles she can carry and, balancing them carefully,⁵⁰⁾ escapes.

* * *

The action of the third act begins in Mary's boudoir later that afternoon. Mary now considers the happenings at her cousin's the result of "scrambled circumstances." On the other hand, Moulton ran away from Rollins there, so he might run away from her.

Mary adds she is now "without emotions:" She has had time to think: "Thinking is an acid that wipes out all emotion." She does not wish to be made love to: "Love and marriage are out of my life." She is going to take up charity⁵¹⁾, or join the Salvation Army. She has learned

-
- 45) At the time, \$500 was the standard fee producers paid for an option on a play.
- 46) Mar says after what she's seen of men that day she wouldn't believe the prophet Isaiah. It is not clear why she introduces the name of any Old Testament prophet.
- 47) Mary's facing the audience directly seems Lawson's attempt to "open" the stage, which he did more strongly in the 1920s.
- 48) According to the stage directions, Elaine nurses the blouse as if it were a baby and refers to it as "the child!"
- 49) Mary says: "Every man here shall beg to me for mercy." She puts herself in a position similar to that of a goddess. In a college short story "The Wrong Cue" (*Williams Literary Monthly*, June 1913), Lawson has an actor in a trance appeal to the Virgin Mary for mercy.
- 50) Elaine does a juggling act, that is; as before, when stumbling offstage with her skirt twisted around her knees, she did burlesque.
- 51) In another version of this line Mary says: "I'm probably destined to be an old maid and give money to charity" and "flirt with icemen and errand boys."

a lesson: "The most pathetic thing in the world is a woman who doesn't know her own mind. I've been a tragic fool-- a grown creature of thirty, who reads books, plays a piano, who has a brain and a heart, and too much of a fool to know her own mind. My instinct tells me that I don't love anyone. Perhaps I'm incapable of loving."⁵²)

Ruth interrupts: "It's all very well to sit here discussing your feelings while the preparations for the wedding go calmly on." Mary sends for her mother. She "nervously and rapidly" says: "Mother, I'm going to speak out brutally -- it's the best way -- there'll be no wedding." There is silence.

Mary's mother is "utterly broken." She knows argument is "useless." She brings a tiny handkerchief to her eyes. "Shaken with unshed tears," she moves "difficultly" to the door. She turns to Mary: "You've always been a queer girl. I've feared that you'd disgrace me. When you were fifteen, you kissed a man in public. But this. I can't bear the scandal. (She draws herself up to "matronly dignity.") Nothing will be altered. The guests will come. The wedding arrangements will be complete. I'm your mother. You can't mean it. It's a whim. You'll change. Somehow it will, it must, take place. Nothing will be altered."

Mrs. Jefferson leaves. There is a pause. Mary says: "I love my mother."

The telephone rings. Mary starts to talk to Rollins. Suddenly she drops the receiver and "steps away from it with a shriek." Her face "white and tense," she says: "A pistol shot!" Rollins is in great trouble. "Something horrible has happened. He needs me." She shudders and controls herself. "He may be dead." She rushes out. Moulton and Ruth rush out after her.

The action of the second scene of Act III takes place in Rollins'

52) In *Nirvana* poet Bill Weed is in a similar emotional state.

office.⁵³⁾ Rollins is in "feverish" inspection of some papers. His face is beaded with perspiration. To his young "nervous, unstrung" confidential male secretary Bennett, Rollins says:

"It's all over. The bank is done for. You know what it means to me. My life. I've built it myself, made it an institution. It's gone to smash. I feel smashed too." Bennett can hardly control himself. Rollins asks him to open the vault⁵⁴⁾ and bring him correspondence about the "missing securities." Bennett is so nervous he cannot dial the combination ("I have no control over my fingers"), so Rollins pushes him aside: "My hands are all right, let me do it." Rollins wonders if Bennett had anything to do with the theft of the securities. Bennett: "No, no, no!"

The room grows fairly dim. Rollins is illuminated by the drop light's "shining yellow on his face." He turns his pistol over in his hand, "considering it with the grim humor of a desperate man." There is a flashback to and repetition of the telephone conversation with Mary in the previous scene. As Rollins speaks, Bennett furtively takes the pistol off Rollins' desk and goes behind a partition through whose window we see him "moving uncertainly like a hunted animal." He slowly raises the pistol to his head, shoots, and falls to the floor.⁵⁵⁾ Rollins drops the phone, hurries to the body, bends over

-
- 53) Rollins is identified here with the Universal Bank. In another version, with Globe Manufacturing Company. The two names suggest Lawson's symbolizing of the geographical extension of Rollins' business interests. In *Thunder Morning*, about 40 years later, Lawson uses the name Globe Manufacturing Company again to identify a multi-national corporation.
- 54) This is a large deposit vault whose massive steel door is "equipped with all the machinery connected with its use and protection." When the door is opened, there is revealed a "rounded interior" big enough to hold several people. The first scene of the missing fourth act is to take place inside this vault.
- 55) In *Roger Bloomer* Louise Chamberlain steals negotiable bonds, then commits suicide by poisoning herself. In *The Pure in Heart* Larry Goshen is involved in the theft of securities and is imprisoned; later he somewhat suicidally permits himself to be killed by the police.

it, and rises with the pistol in his hand, as stenographer Emma Blackburn rushes in, shrieks once, and throws herself on the body.

"Don't cry," Rollins says. "Do something, get a doctor. No. wait." He examines the body again. "Stone dead." Emma calls "Georgie!" Rollins says: "Don't carry on this way. Doesn't help." Emma wants to call a doctor. Rollins says: "You'd better phone the coroner or the police." Emma stands helplessly. She fears scandal. Rollins tries to call Mary again. Unsuccessfully. He goes to the body, opens Bennett's coat, picks out a few papers, examines them. Emma says: "I gotta go home. I'm scared. I can't stand it anymore." Rollins forces her to stay. Emma wants to search Bennett's pockets. Rollins says he found only timetables, "nothing important, nothing to show why he did it." Bennett was probably a thief.⁵⁶⁾ Emma "hysterically" rejects this idea: "He didn't. He was good an' he saved, an'... I'll go crazy if you don't let me go home."

The telephone rings. Rollins answers: "Morton? You've traced them? Of course, he had power of attorney. Made a mistake in him. Arrest him? He's dead!"

Emma refuses to accept Bennett's guilt: "It's a lie." Rollins says the bank's detectives have proved it. Emma cries out: "Dear God!" Rollins understands a little. Emma says: "I don't believe he shot himself. Left me like this. He promised to marry me. I didn't know a thing. It ain't like him. He was good. I loved him." Rollins says Bennett took advantage of her love. Emma accuses him: "You've framed this on him. I believe you done it. (Her fervor gradually rises) You had a fight. And you shot him down like a dog." Rollins says: "You're crazy."

Mary enters, then Moulton and Ruth. Mary says she thought "Perhaps, you -- the shot." Rollins gloomily says: "Perhaps it would

56) Rollins says Bennett stole the "Pennfield Securities."

be the best thing for me to do, but it was someone else." Emma accuses Rollins again. Rollins explains what happened.

Two men enter. One is Detective Hinton.⁵⁷⁾ Middle-aged, stout, "stupid and stubborn in his conclusions," he has a "quick eye for details." The other man is his assistant Morse. He is younger than Hinton but of the same type. Hinton verifies Bennett's death. He asks for more light. A "cluster of electric globes in the ceiling" is lighted. Hinton and Morse remove the limp body: "He doesn't look very pleasant here." The silence is broken by Emma's "convulsive sobbing."

Hinton begins his questioning.⁵⁸⁾ Emma accuses Rollins. Hinton says of Emma she wants the same thing he does, justice. He looks at Rollins suspiciously. He inspects the layout of the office and keeps Rollins' key to a private entrance.

Hinton suddenly confronts Rollins: "Do you carry a revolver?" "No." "Never?" "No." "Keep one in your desk?" "No."⁵⁹⁾ They look at each other with "mutual distaste." Mary now claims to have been in the office at the time of the suicide. Emma says Mary is lying. Hinton arrests Rollins as a "matter of form, not suspicion, as a witness."⁶⁰⁾ Hinton takes the addresses of the others.⁶¹⁾ He tells Morse to keep an eye on the body. Morse says: "Yes, sir. I'll watch it." The coroner will be there soon.

Emma is said to be lying on a long seat in the outer office. Lying flat on her face. Mary says of Emma: "That woman knows

57) This name may derive from Lawson's reading of Charles Hinton's *What is the Fourth Dimension?* (1883).

58) When Hinton asks the dead man's name, Rollins answers: "George Bennett...I don't think he had a middle name."

59) It is not made clear to this point why Rollins lies.

60) In *Roger Bloomer* Roger is similarly taken into custody as a witness to Louise's suicide.

61) Mary Jefferson: "218 Madison Avenue." Ruth Hancock: "The Elliott Morse Hotel," a "55th Street apartment house." Richard Moulton: "The Waldorf-Astoria Hotel." (An address on the title page of one version of *The Spice of Life* indicates Lawson may then have been residing at 139 W. 15th Street, New York City.)

what love is. Love means something to her. It means passion and tears. She's shown me how small and flippant I am. Don't think I could ever love anybody like that."

They wait for the coroner. Ruth "uncertainly" speaks the last line of this scene: "What's it all about?"

* * * *

Act IV, "tableau", is missing. The action of the first scene of the act was to take place inside the vault in Rollins' office⁶²⁾ and the second scene in Mary's house.

62) In an unpublished doctoral dissertation *The Screenwriting of John Howard Lawson, 1928-1947* (1975), Gary Lee Carr finds: „For Lawson confining spaces..bedrooms, jails, cells, cellars--become sites wherein his protagonist experiences a revelation and regeneration." There is some truth in this idea, and it is possible the missing scene in Rollins' vault would further verify it.