## 

*The*

CHOIR REHEARSAL

A PLAY IN ONE ACT

BY

CLARE KUMMER

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PROPERTY PLOT

Candle for ESMERALDA to bring on lighted.

Two candlesticks on mantle.

Hymn book on organ.

Beads for ESMERALDA.

The song, “A Wonderful Thing” is published by Jerome H. Remich & Co., New York.

Pitch pipe.

Cuckoo clock in wall L.U.

Originally produced at the Palace Theatre, New York, Feb. 19, 1917, with the following cast:

PERSONS OF THE PLAY

WILLIAM, who plays the organ JOHN F. RYAN

ENOCH, who sings tenor AL. STEWART

AMOS, who sings bass JOHN KEEFE

ABIGAIL, a neighbor MAY ELLISON

ALAN WYLIE, the new Minister JOHN HOGAN

ESMERALDA, who had to be prayed for -

SALLIE FISHER

###### The living room of ESMERALDA’s house in Tuckerton.

###### Eight o’clock on a Spring evening long ago. The room indicates that this family is well-to-do, containing a parlor organ and horsehair furniture of that period.

###### Door with 2 steps U.S.R. Door into entry, L.2E. A window R, through which the moonlight is shining. Except for this there is no light in the room.

###### On rise, cuckoo clock is striking eight. Outer door is heard to close and WILLIAM’s voice off L.

## WILLIAM

# Anybody home?

### 

### (HE enters, crosses briskly to organ and, sitting down, begins to play. After the first few chords, he sings cheerfully)

## 

##### “LIFE IS THE TIME TO SERVE THE LORD; THE TIME TO INSURE THE GREAT REWARD FOR WHAT THE LIGHT MAY HOLDS OUT TO BURN THE VILEST SINNER MAY RETURN.”

### (ESMERALDA opens door R.U., looks into the room. She carries a light and on perceiving WILLIAM comes down steps, closing door after her)

## 

## ESMERALDA

# Why, William -

## WILLIAM

#### (Stops playing)

# I thought that’d bring someone.

## ESMERALDA

# It’s after eight o’clock and father’s gone to bed.

## WILLIAM

# Well, I don’t want to see him - I want to ask you somethin’, Esmeraldy.

### (Rising, goes to her.)

## ESMERALDA

# Don’t, William - it’s no use.

## WILLIAM

# Oh, not that - I ain’t goin’ to ask you that again - so soon, anyhow.

## ESMERALDA

# Well, then, what is it?

### (Lights candelabra on mantel.)

## WILLIAM

# The organ over to the Hoopers’ has broke down, an’ they want to come over here for choir rehearsal.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh - just the very idea of it fills me with the most wicked, sinful thoughts.

## WILLIAM

# An’ hearin’ ‘em ’ll fill you with the more. Oh, it’s awful since you left, Esmeraldy! Tabitha Hole’s voice gets worse every Sunday.

## ESMERALDA

# Worse? How can it?

## WILLIAM

# Well, it does.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh, I suppose I’ll have to say yes. It would be too un-christian not to let them practice. I know they need it. Yes - let them come. I can go for a walk up the street. I wanted to, anyway. There’s such a lovely moon to-night.

## WILLIAM

# Is there? Maybe I can go with you.

## ESMERALDA

# You couldn’t - who’d play the organ?

## WILLIAM

# Oh, let old Miss Hooper play with one foot and sing with the other.

## ESMERALDA

# Anyway - I’d rather walk alone.

## WILLIAM

# Just since the Rev’rend Hiram Hallowell went away.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes - just since he went away.

## WILLIAM

# Was you sweet on him, Esmeraldy?

## ESMERALDA

# Perhaps. Everybody said I was.

## WILLIAM

# Why, he wasn’t hardly any better lookin’ than I am.

## ESMERALDA

# No - but you didn’t notice it with him. How beautifully he could talk. Why, you couldn’t understand him at all!

## WILLIAM

# The new one can talk just as good.

## ESMERALDA

#### (faintly interested)

# Can he?

## WILLIAM

# An’ his hair ain’t red. My sister’s just crazy about him.

## ESMERALDA

#### (sadly)

# Is she? How happy they must be.

## WILLIAM

# Yes - she is. He don’t know about it yet.

### (tinkle of doorbell)

## ESMERALDA

#### (starting to door R.U.)

# Let them in, William -

## WILLIAM

# They ain’t comin’ till I let ‘em know if you’re willin’ - must be someone else.

### (ESMERALDA pauses, her hand on the doorknob. WILLIAM goes out onto entry. Sound of door)

## ALAN

#### (voice off)

# Why, good evening, William.

## WILLIAM

# Evening, Parson.

#### (re-enter WILLIAM - to ESMERALDA)

# It’s Mr. Wylie, the new minister. I’ll go an’ tell ‘em they can come.

### (Exit WILLIAM as ALAN enters. ESMERALDA comes down)

## ALAN

# I hope you don’t mind my calling - it’s such a lovely night out - I thought I’d just come in.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh, I’m so sorry -

## ALAN

# Are you?

## ESMERALDA

# Did you want to see my father?

## ALAN

# Well - I - is your father in?

## ESMERALDA

# Why, yes, he is. He’s in bed. Did you want to see him about anything important?

## ALAN

# Well, no - well - yes - his soul.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh, well, maybe that could wait until to-morrow.

## ALAN

# Your father doesn’t come to church -

## ESMERALDA

# Well, you see - he’s been to church so much. He counted it all up on Sunday. It was over eight thousand times with prayer meeting - and he just said, “If that isn’t enough, it’s no use.”

## ALAN

# But *you* don’t come to church.

## ESMERALDA

# No - I don’t.

## ALAN

# It’s very discouraging! May I sit down?

## ESMERALDA

# Please do.

### (With a little curtsey ALAN sits L. of table. ESMERALDA sits R. of table)

## ALAN

# I’ve always wanted to come into this house.

## ESMERALDA

# Have you? Why?

## ALAN

# Why, it’s the oldest house in Tuckertown, isn’t it?

## ESMERALDA

# Yes. It was built by my great grandfather, Ephraim Tucker. He settled Tuckertown. I wish he hadn’t. That’s his picture there over the mantle.

### (Turning to look at picture)

## ALAN

# Is it? Why, he looks just like my great grandfather.

## ESMERALDA

# Does he? I think all great grandfathers look alike, don’t you? But you were saying, “It’s very discouraging.”

## ALAN

# Was I? Oh, yes, of course it is. This is such a little parish - everyone in it would only make a small congregation - but they don’t come to church - they don’t seem to care where they go, after this life. Don’t you care?

## ESMERALDA

# No - all I want is just to leave Tuckertown.

## ALAN

# But after you leave Tuckertown, you want to go to heaven, don’t you?

## ESMERALDA

# I’d rather go to Duxbury. I want to live a little before I go to heaven.

### (ESMERALDA rises, goes and sits on an ottoman near ALAN)

## ALAN

# Duxbury - that’s near where the Rev. Hiram Hallowell went.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes - oh, it’s a wonderful place. I have a picture of the railroad station, and the Town Hall. They hold a Country Fair there and once they gave a ball - for the man who was nearly elected Governor. These beads came from there -

### (Holding out coral chain around her neck)

## ALAN

# Did they? They’re very pretty - but we must forget the things of this world. All is vanity.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes, that’s what the Reverend Hiram Hallowell used to say.

## ALAN

# *He* was very successful here.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes - he got away.

## ALAN

# I’m a failure. I knew it last Sunday. I sat up all night working on my sermon. I painted the picture of the afterlife for sinners. I tried to make them see the flames and the smoke, but in the morning my congregation sat unmoved.

## ESMERALDA

# It’s been such a long, hard winter - and these old houses are so cold I suppose the flames sounded sort of warm and pleasant.

## ALAN

# You used to come to church, when the Reverend Hiram Hallowell was here.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes - I did -

## ALAN

# I suppose you’ve heard how bad my sermons are.

## ESMERALDA

# Yes, but that’s not the reason I don’t come to church.

## ALAN

# Isn’t it?

## ESMERALDA

# No - I wouldn’t care if there wasn’t any sermon.

## 

## ALAN

# No - I don’t suppose anyone would.

## ESMERALDA

# It was the singing I loved so.

## ALAN

# (Surprised) Did you? I’ll confess that it takes all my strength of character to realize the grace of our Lord when Sister Tabitha Hole starts the Doxology.

## 

## ESMERALDA

# I sang in her place - yes - but I was dismissed - and reproved by the Elders. I did a dreadful thing - yes, they all had to pray for me - it was terrible. That’s why I don’t come to church. I had to be prayed for.

### (Sound of door off. ESMERALDA exits hastily r.u., Closes door after her. ALAN follows a few steps, stands looking at door. Enter WILLIAM. He goes direct to organ).

## 

## WILLIAM

# Well, they’re on the way - the folks are coming over for Choir Rehearsal.

## 

## ALAN

#### (Comes down c.)

#### Oh, that was why they came. Well - er - tell me, why isn’t she singing now?

#### 

## WILLIAM

# Why, she sang a song in church one Sunday morning - a regular song with a tune and everything - she was dismissed - and reproved by the Elders for doing it.

## 

## ALAN

# Oh, that’s what she did - poor child - that’s why she had to be prayed for. What was the song?

## WILLIAM

# It went something like this -

#### (plays refrain of “A Wonderful Thing”)

## 

## ALAN

# Why, that sounds like a hymn.

## WILLIAM

# Yes, it does, but it’s not in the book. Old Tabitha Hole made all the trouble. She wanted to sing in Esmeraldy’s place. She says you can dance to this tune.

## ALAN

# I wonder if you can -

### (He takes a few furtive steps)

## WILLIAM

# You can dance to any tune if you want to.

### (ESMERALDA enters in cape and bonnet R.U. Sees ALAN dancing. He stops suddenly.)

## ALAN

# I was just seeing if you could dance to it.

## ESMERALDA

# And you found you could?

## ALAN

# You thought it was a hymn, didn’t you?

# 

## ESMERALDA

# I did, didn’t I?

## ALAN

# Well, perhaps it is. Are you going?

## ESMERALDA

# Yes, I don’t want to be here when they come.

# 

## ALAN

# Wait a moment, please - I want to hear you sing it.

## ESMERALDA

# My wicked song?

## ALAN

# Yes - William told me. Sing.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh, I couldn’t.

## 

## WILLIAM

# Of course you can.

### (ESMERALDA hesitates a moment. Sings, “A Wonderful Thing.” She stands R. of ALAN, who sits on arm of chair R. of table).

1

##### UNTIL TO-DAY THIS WORLD, TO ME

##### SEEMED FAR FROM WHAT A WORLD SHOULD BE -

##### SOMETIMES I HEARD ITS LAUGHTER GAY

##### BUT, OH, IT SEEMED SO FAR AWAY…

##### UNTIL TO-DAY I WALKED ALONE -

##### THERE WAS NO HAND TO TAKE MY OWN

##### UNTIL TO-DAY I DREAMED MY DREAMS --

##### NOW THEY HAVE ALL COME TRUE, IT SEEMS

*Refrain*

##### A WONDERFUL THING HAS COME INTO MY LIFE,

##### A BEAUTIFUL, WONDERFUL THING.

##### MY HEART IS A GARDEN THAT WAKENS TO FIND

##### IT IS SPRING, AND A THOUSAND BIRDS SING,

##### THE WONDER TO ME IS THAT NO ONE CAN SEE,

##### THAT THE WORLD DOESN’T PAUSE TO LOOK IN

##### WHEN A WONDERFUL THING HAS COME INTO MY LIFE

##### IT’S WORTH ALL THE LIVING TO WIN

2

##### IF I HAD KNOWN THE PATH TO YOU

##### I WOULD HAVE FLOWN ON WINGS, IT’S TRUE

##### I WOULD HAVE SUNG ALONG MY WAY

##### NOR BEEN SO WEARY EVERY DAY-

##### OUT OF THE SHADOW SHINES THE SUN,

##### AFTER THE RAIN THE FLOWERS COME

##### AND TO THE HEART THAT WAITS ALONE,

##### COMES EVERYTHING A HEART CAN OWN.

## 

## ALAN

### (Who has listened intently, rises, goes to her)

# Why, it’s beautiful and so far I see nothing that is not in accord with the Scriptures. The Wonderful Thing!- Why, we all know what that is. It is- Religion. The happiness is the joy of a contrite heart - and the hand referred to - (*He is about to put his hand on hers, but does not*) - is the hand of the Lord, of course. Now, the third and fourth verses--

## ESMERALDA

# But there aren’t any more - and hymns always have nine or ten - don’t they?

## 

## ALAN

# Oh, well, perhaps they were left out for some very good reason - after all, it’s very satisfying as it is.

## WILLIAM

# I think it’s a good hymn. It’s got more sense than a lot of them.

## 

## ALAN

# Quite right, William. I want it sung and I want you to sing it - I shall take it up with the Elders.

## 

## ESMERALDA

# When?

## ALAN

# Now.

## ESMERALDA

# Oh, please don’t - I don’t want *you* to go away, too.

## 

## ALAN

# Don’t you? *(Bell)*

## ESMERALDA

# No.

## 

## WILLIAM

# There they be.

### (Enter ABIGAIL, AMOS and ENOCH)

## ABIGAIL

# Good evenin’, Esmeraldy - well here’s Parson Wylie.

## AMOS

# How be, Esmeraldy - evenin’, Parson.

## 

## ABIGAIL

# Was you goin’ out?

## AMOS

# Why, you’ve got to stay and sing first sopranny, Esmeraldy - Tabitha Hole’s got a cold and two yards of red flannel wrapped round her throat.

## 

## ABIGAIL

### (Sniffling)

# Oh well, if she’s walkin’ out with the minister -

## ESMERALDA

# I’m not - I never thought of such a thing. I- I’ve just come in - and he’s just going. Aren’t you? (*To* ALAN)

## ALAN

### (Disappointed)

# Yes - yes - I must begin my Sunday’s sermon to-night.

## 

## WILLIAM

# It’s going to be a long one.

## 

## ALAN

### (To ESMERALDA)

# Good night -

## 

## ESMERALDA

### (Following him to door L.)

# Good night.

## ABIGAIL

# She’s startin’ on him just the way she did on Parson Hallowell.

## 

## WILLIAM

# Come on - I got to be home by ten.

## 

## AMOS

# Here, Abby - you set down here. (*Standing behind chair R. of table*) Well, what’s to sing at prayer meeting? (*Taking chair.*)

## ABIGAIL

# I thought as sister Mordecai’s boy has turned from grace and gone to the haunts of sin, it would be very comforting to her if we was to sing “Where is My Wandering Boy To-night.”

## 

## ENOCH

# A lovely thought, Abby. They do say as how he took ten dollars out of his father’s cash drawer, and went to New York. You know the temptations for a boy in New York City - with money.

## ESMERALDA

### (Comes back, overhears)

# New York City - how do you go there?

## AMOS

# Well, you take the stagecoach to Duxbury to start with -

### (They look at one another).

## ABIGAIL

# You think’ of going’?

## ESMERALDA

# It would be too wonderful.

## ENOCH

# Too wonderful to go to perdition?

## ABIGAIL

# Come, Enoch - give us the note.

### (Rising. They gather about the organ. ENOCH trys to get note with pitch pipe)

## AMOS

# Stop it, stop it - you start it for us, Esmeraldy.

### (“Where Is My Wand’ring Boy.” They sing the hymn through. After hymn.)

## 

## WILLIAM

# Now, shall we gather at the river?

## 

## ESMERALDA

# I hope not --

### (ABIGAIL returns to chair R of table. ESMERALDA sits L of table. ENOCH brings chair down and sits L. of ESMERALDA.)

## 

## AMOS

# It sounds good to hear ye again, Esmeraldy. (*To the rest)* Don’t it?

## ABIGAIL

# Yes. If Esmeraldy’d only had her mind on serious things, she’d be singing now in the choir. Bubt she had her mind on Hiram Hallowell.

## 

## ESMERALDA

# Well, he was very serious.

## AMOS

# Sister Tabitha Hole say you was led astray by gewgaws and flummeries, Esmeraldy --

## 

## ESMERALDA

# What do you mean?

## ABIGAIL

# Why, there wa’n’t a time the peddler came from Duxbury that he didn’t stop here and sell to you, Esmeraldy.

## ESMERALDA

# Well, what of that?

## AMOS

# And she said you powdered your face - I don’t know.

## ESMERALDA

# What’s wrong in that? Do you think it makes you good to have a shiny nose? Yes, I did buy powder - and soap.

## ABIGAIL

# Scented soap.

## AMOS

# Well, if the Lord had intended us to be scented, he’d a made us so -

## 

## ESMERALDA

# Well, at least the Lord invented soap.

## ABIGAIL

# Why, Esmeraldy! She’s blasphemin’, Amos!

## AMOS

# Oh, let her - You don’t know what blasphemin’ is. It’s like old times to hear her sing again, ain’t’ it Enoch?

# 

## ENOCH

# ‘Tis so, an’ I was just thinkin’ maybe Tabitha’s voice won’t get better - we can only hope for the best. If it don’t, and Esmeraldy was to ask Elder Dogbery for forgiveness -

# 

## ABIGAIL

# She’d have to ask higher than Elder Dogberry for forgiveness -

## ESMERALDA

# But I don’t want to be forgiven.

## ABIGAIL

#### (shocked, turning to AMOS)

# Why, Amos, she’s unregenerate.

## ENOCH

# Why don’t you want to be forgiven, - dear?

## ESMERALDA

# Because I loved the song. I thought it sounded just beautiful that Sunday morning - and so did the Reverend Hiram Hallowell.

## ABIGAIL

# Don’t bring him in. He wa’n’t to blame. ‘Twa’n’t him you cared for. ‘Twas the gay life of Duxbury - the goin’s on and doin’s!

## ESMERALDA

# Yes, that’s true. I did long for the life and music. I did long for the lights of duxbury.

## ENOCH

# Did, eh? And did you *love* Hiram Hallowell, Esmeraldy?

## ESMERALDA

# No, I didn’t. But I’d have gone away with him if he’d asked me.

## ABIGAIL

# Gone with him - and not lovin’ him?

## AMOS

#### (Solemnly)

# Marriage without love is a cracklin’ thorn an’ a pitfall in the wilderness, Esmeraldy.

## ABIGAIL

# Do you mean to say you’d go to Duxbury with anybody that asked you to?

## ESMERALDA

# Yes, I do.

## ENOCH

#### (Leaning toward her eagerly)

# I’ve an uncle there in the shoe business - he’s just crazy to have me to go in with him.

## ABIGAIL

# It’s bad enough to marry a man lovin’ him - but not lovin’ him, it’s a deadly sin, ain’t it, Amos?

## AMOS

# I don’t know, Abby, it’s hard on the man either way. What say, Enoch?

## ENOCH

# All I can say is ‘tis if ‘tis, and ‘tain’t if ‘tain’t.

## ABIGAIL

# Men ain’t natural Christians, that’s the trouble - and there’s too many of ‘em in this town.

### (ALAN enters unobserved L.)

## AMOS

# What? I ain’t a Christian? Why I come from a whole line of ministers.

## WILLIAM

# Well, the minister always boards at our house and I guess if we weren’t Christians we couldn’t stand it.

## ENOCH

# Well, if I ain’t a Christian, there ain’t a Christian in this town!

## ESMERALDA

#### (Rising and appealing to the portrait)

# Oh great grandfather, why did you ever settle Tuckertown?

## ALAN

# One moment, please. What has all this to do with the hymns to be sung at prayer meeting?

## ABIGAIL

# If you want to know the truth, Parson, this daughter has worldly thoughts. She said she’d go to Duxbury with anybody -

## AMOS

# You want to watch her mighty careful, Parson.

## ALAN

# I intend to. (*To WILLIAM*) Now, William, that hymn you played for me, I want it sung. I want peace here - and love!

## ABIGAIL

# Love! Tut! Tut!

## ALAN

# 

# Heaven is what we’re striving for - and this is the song of one who has found it.

## ABIGAIL

# Praise the Lord - if I ain’t familiar with it I can read.

### (WILLIAM begins to play. They gather about the organ, all but ALAN and ESMERALDA, who are down C.)

# Can you see, Amos?

## AMOS

# Oh, I can foller anything.

### (They begin to sing, harmonizing “A Wonderful Thing.” “Until to-day this world to me,” etc. During the humming of the song ALAN speaks).

# Would you really go to Duxbury with - anybody?

## ESMERALDA

# Yes - but I’d stay here if anybody wanted me to.

## 

## ABIGAIL

#### (Shocked, as she recognizes the music)

# Why, land sakes - it’s the very song.

## AMOS

# So ‘tis - I sensed it from the beginning.

## 

## ALAN

#### (Turning to them)

# Well, why don’t you go on?

## ABIGAIL

# Do you mean to say, Parson, that ‘tis really a hymn?

## 

## ALAN

# Yes, I mean to say it.

## 

## AMOS

# I don’t see why ‘tain’t. It’s got a good bass.

## 

## ALAN

# I want it sung on Sunday morning - and I want Sister Esmeralda to sing it.

## AMOS

# Well, you’ll have to speak to the Elder about that, Parson.

## ALAN

# I have.

## AMOS

# Oh, well, then that settles it.

#### (They all bend over the music, rehearsing carefully.)

# 

## ESMERALDA

#### (Coming down with ALAN)

# It was splendid of you - splendid. (*Sadly.*)

## 

## ALAN

# Then why are you so sad?

## ESMERALDA

#### (Looking at him)

# Is the wonderful thing just being good? Is that all there is for us?

## ALAN

# We’ll find out about that in the next world.

## ESMERALDA

# But we’re not in the next world - we’re here and it’s now - to-night - and that’s all we know anything about.

## ALAN

#### (Looking at her)

# I don’t feel as if I know anything about that --

# 

## ESMERALDA

# I’m going to tell you something. I didn’t think that song was a hymn - I didn’t think the wonderful thing was religion - I thought it was - love.

## ALAN

# It is. There’s no difference - don’t you see?

## ESMERALDA

#### (Understanding, sings happily, joining in with the rest)

# “A wonderful thing has come into my life,” etc.

## CHOIR

## (After refrain)

# Amen.

## ESMERALDA

#### (Above them)

# Ah-men!

1. Transcribed from <https://ia802703.us.archive.org/18/items/choirrehearsala00kummgoog/choirrehearsala00kummgoog.pdf> on 24 May 2019 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)