

*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

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<sup>1</sup> Transcribed from

<https://ia802703.us.archive.org/18/items/choirrehearsala00kummgoog/choirrehearsala00kummgoog.pdf>  
on 24 May 2019

*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 curtsy 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 tries 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. Bubb 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 blaspheming, Amos!

AMOS

Oh, let her - You don't know what blaspheming 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 Esmeralda was to ask Elder Dogberry 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, Esmeralda?

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!