

ACT I

SCENE: *Sitting-room of the Morton farmhouse in the middle west — on the rolling prairie just back from the Mississippi. A room that has been long and comfortably lived in, and showing that first-hand contact with materials which was pioneer life. The hospitable table was made on the place — well and strongly made; there are braided rugs, and the wooden chairs have patchwork cushions. There is a corner closet — left rear. A picture of Abraham Lincoln. On the floor a home-made toy boat. At rise of curtain there are on the stage an old woman and a young man. GRANDMOTHER MORTON is in her rocking-chair near the open door, facing left. On both sides of door are windows, looking out on a generous land. She has a sewing basket and is patching a boy's pants. She is very old. Her hands tremble. Her spirit remembers the days of her strength.*

SMITH *has just come in and, hat in hand, is standing by the table. This was lived in the year 1879, afternoon of Fourth of July.*

SMITH

But the celebration was over two hours ago.

GRANDMOTHER

Might as well set down. When them boys that fought together all get in one square — they have to swap stories all over again. That's the worst of a war — you have to go on hearing about it so long. Here it is — 1879 — and we haven't taken Gettysburg yet. Well, it was the same with the war of 1832.

SMITH

(who is now seated at the table) The war of 1832?

GRANDMOTHER

News to you that we had a war with the Indians?

SMITH

That's right — the Blackhawk war. Were your men in that war?

GRANDMOTHER

I was in that war. I threw an Indian in the cellar and stood on the door. I was heavier then.

SMITH

Those were stirring times.

GRANDMOTHER

More stirring than you'll ever see. This war — Lincoln's war — it's all a cut and dried business now. We used to fight with anything we could lay hands on — dish water — whatever was handy.

SMITH

I guess you believe the saying that the only good Indian is a dead Indian.

GRANDMOTHER

I dunno. We roiled them up considerable. They was mostly friendly when let be. Didn't want to give up their land — but I've noticed something of the same nature in white folks.

SMITH

Your son has — something of that nature, hasn't he?

GRANDMOTHER

He's not keen to sell. Why should he? It'll never be worth less.

SMITH

But since he has more land than any man can use, and if he gets his price —

GRANDMOTHER

Well, you're not the first. Many a man older than you has come to argue it.

SMITH

(smiling) They thought they'd try a young one.

GRANDMOTHER

Silas'd help a young one if he could. What is it you're set on buying?

SMITH

Oh...If we could have the hill *(looking off to the right)* at a fair price —

GRANDMOTHER

The hill above the town? Silas'd rather sell me and the cat.

SMITH

But if the development of the town demands its use —

GRANDMOTHER

(smiling) You the development of the town?

SMITH

I represent it. This town has been growing so fast —

GRANDMOTHER

This town began to grow the day I got here.

SMITH

You — you began it?

GRANDMOTHER

My husband and I began it — and our baby Silas. 1820, that was.

SMITH

And — you mean you were here all alone?

GRANDMOTHER

No, we weren't alone. We had the Owens ten miles down the river.

SMITH

But how did you get here?

GRANDMOTHER

Got here in a wagon, how do you s'pose? (*gayly*) Think we flew?

SMITH

But wasn't it unsafe?

GRANDMOTHER

Them set on safety stayed back in Ohio.

SMITH

But one family! I should think the Indians would have wiped you out.

GRANDMOTHER

The way they wiped us out was to bring fish and corn. We'd have starved to death that first winter hadn't been for the Indians.

SMITH

But if they were such good neighbors — why did you throw dish water at them?

GRANDMOTHER

That was after other white folks had roiled them up — white folks that didn't know how to treat

‘em. This very land — land you want to buy — was the land they loved — Blackhawk and his Indians. This was where their fathers were buried. I’ve seen my husband and Blackhawk climb that hill together. *(a backward point right)* He used to love that hill — Blackhawk. He talked how the red man and the white man could live together. But what he didn’t know was how many white man there was. When he saw the white man’s cities — it was a different Indian came back. He just let his heart break without ever turning a hand.

SMITH

But we paid them for their lands.

(She looks at him.)

GRANDMOTHER

For fifteen million acres of this Mississippi Valley land — best on this globe, we paid two thousand two hundred and thirty-four dollars and fifty cents, and promised to deliver annually goods to the value of one thousand dollars. Not a fancy price — even for them days. *(Children’s voices are heard outside. She leans forward and looks through the door, left.)* Ira! Let that cat be!

SMITH

(looking from the window) These, I suppose, are your grandchildren?

GRANDMOTHER

The boy’s my grandson. The little girl is Madeline Fejevary — Mr. Fejevary’s youngest child. We’ve been neighbors ever since the Fejevarys came here from Hungary after 1848. He was a count at home — and he’s a man of learning. But he was a refugee because he fought for freedom in his country. Nothing Silas could do for him was too good.

SMITH

(thinking of his own project, looking off toward the hill — the hill is not seen from the front) I

suppose then Mr. Fejevary has great influence with your son?

GRANDMOTHER

More ‘an anybody. Silas thinks ‘twas a great thing to have a family like theirs next place to. Old

Mrs. Fejevary *(with her shrewd smile)* — she weren’t stuck up — but she did have an awful

ladylike way of feeding the chickens.

SMITH

And Mr. Fejevary — is he a veteran?

GRANDMOTHER

(dryly) You don’t seem to know these parts well — for one that’s all stirred up about the

development of the town. Yes — Felix Fejevary and Silas Morton went off together, down that

road *(motioning with her hand, right)* — when them of their age was wanted. Fejevary came

back with one arm less than he went with. So now they set more store by each other ‘an ever.

Seems nothing draws men together like killing other men. *(a boy’s voice teasingly imitating a*

cat) Madeline, make Ira let that cat be. *(a whoop from the girl — a boy’s whoop)* *(looking)* There

they go, off for the creek. If they set in it — *(seems about to call after them, gives this up)* Well,

they’re not the first. *(rather dreams over this)*

SMITH

You must feel as if you pretty near owned this country.

GRANDMOTHER

We worked. A country don't make itself. (*as if this renews the self of those days*) Here — let me set out something for you to eat. (*gets up with difficulty*)

SMITH

Oh, no, please — I had something in town before I came out.

GRANDMOTHER

Dunno as that's any reason you shouldn't have something here.

(She goes off, right; he stands at the door, looking toward the hill until she returns with a glass of milk, a plate of cookies.)

SMITH

Well, this looks good.

GRANDMOTHER

I've fed a lot of folks — what's ten or fifteen more when you're up and around. But to *get* up — after sixteen hours on your feet — *I* was willin', but my bones complained some.

SMITH

But did you — keep a tavern?

GRANDMOTHER

Every house is a tavern when houses are sparse. You think the way to settle a country is to go on ahead and build hotels? Why, I never went to bed without leaving something on the stove for the new ones that might be coming. And we never went away from home without seein' there was aplenty for them that might stop.

SMITH

They'd come right in and take your food?

GRANDMOTHER

What else could they do? There was a woman I always wanted to know. She made a kind of bread I never had before — and left aplenty for our supper when we got back. I often wondered about her. (*As she dreams over this there is laughing and talking at the side of the house.*) There come the boys.

(MR. FEJEVARY *comes in, followed by* SILAS MORTON. *They are men not far from sixty, wearing their army uniforms, carrying the muskets they used in the parade.*

FEJEVARY *has a lean, distinguished face, his dark eyes are penetrating and rather wistful. The left sleeve of his old uniform is empty.* SILAS MORTON *is a strong man who has borne the burden of the land, and not for himself alone — the pioneer. Seeing the stranger, he sets his musket against the wall and holds out his hand to him, as MR. FEJEVARY goes up to GRANDMOTHER MORTON.)*

SILAS

How'do, stranger?

FEJEVARY

And how are you today, Mrs. Morton?

GRANDMOTHER

I'm not abed — and don't expect to be. This young man's been waiting to see you, Silas.

SMITH

Yes, I wanted to have a little talk with you.

SILAS

Well, why not? (*as he talks, hangs his hat in the corner closet*) Everybody visitin' with anybody that'll visit with them. Wish you could have gone.

GRANDMOTHER

I've heard it all. (*to FEJEVARY*) Your folks well?

FEJEVARY

All well, Mrs. Morton. And my boy Felix is home. He'll stop in here to see you by and by.

SILAS

(*cordially including the young man*) Mr. Fejevary's son has been to Harvard College.

SMITH

Well, Mr. Morton, I hope this is not a bad time for me to — present a little matter to you?

SILAS

(*genially*) That depends, of course, on what you're going to present. (*attracted by a sound outside*) Mind if I present a little matter to your horse? Like to uncheck him so's he can get a bit o'grass.

SMITH

I suppose he would like that.

SILAS

(*going out*) You bet he'd like it. Wouldn't you, old boy?

SMITH

Your son is fond of animals.

GRANDMOTHER

Lots of people's fond of 'em — and good to 'em. Silas — I dunno, it's as if he was that animal.

FEJEVARY

He has imagination.

SILAS

(returning and sitting down at the table by the young man) Now, what's in your mind, my boy?

SMITH

This town is growing very fast, Mr. Morton.

SILAS

Yes. *(slyly — with humor)* I know that.

SMITH

I presume you, as one of the early settlers — as in fact a son of the earliest settler, feel a certain responsibility about the welfare of —

SILAS

I haven't got in mind to do the town a bit of harm. So — what's your point?

SMITH

More people — more homes. And homes must be in the healthiest places — the — the most beautiful places. Isn't it true, Mr. Fejevary, that it means a great deal to people to have a beautiful outlook from their homes? A — well, an expanse.

SILAS

What is it they want to buy — these fellows that are figuring on making something out of — expanse? *(a gesture for expanse, then a reassuring gesture)*

SMITH

I am prepared to make you an offer — a gilt-edged offer for that *(pointing toward it)* hill above the town.

SILAS

(shaking his head — with the smile of the strong man who is a dreamer) The hill is not for sale.

SMITH

But wouldn't you consider a — particularly good offer, Mr. Morton?

(SILAS, *who has turned so he can look out at the hill, slowly shakes his head.*)

SMITH

Do you feel you have the right — the moral right to hold it?

SILAS

It's not for myself I'm holding it.

SMITH

Oh, — for the children?

SILAS

Yes, the children.

SMITH

But — if you'll excuse me — other investments might do the children even more good.

SILAS

This seems to me — the best investment.

SMITH

But after all there are other people's children to consider.

SILAS

That's it.

SMITH

I wonder if I understand you, Mr. Morton?

SILAS

(kindly) I don't see how you could. And I can't explain myself just now. So — the hill is not for sale.

SMITH

I am prepared to offer you —

SILAS

You're not prepared to offer me anything I'd consider alongside what I am considering. So — I wish you good luck in your business undertakings.

SMITH

We could make you a rich man, Mr. Morton. Do you think what you have in mind will make you so much richer?

SILAS

Much richer.

SMITH

Well, good-bye. Good day, sir. Good day, ma'am.

(Following him to the door SILAS stands in the doorway and looks off at the hill.)

GRANDMOTHER

What are you going to do with the hill, Silas?

SILAS

After I get a little glass of wine — to celebrate Felix and me being here instead of farther south — I'd like to tell you what I want for the hill. *(to FEJEVARY rather bashfully)* I've been wanting to tell you.

FEJEVARY

I want to know.

SILAS

(getting the wine [and glasses] from the closet) Just a little something to show our gratitude with.

GRANDMOTHER

I'll get more cookies. *[Rises with difficulty, goes off right]*

SILAS

(seeing how hard it is for her) I wish mother would let us do things for her.

FEJEVARY

That strength is a flame frailness can't put out. It's a great thing for us to have her, — this touch with the life behind us.

SILAS

Yes. And it's a great thing for us to have you — who can see those things and say them.

FEJEVARY

Oh, you only think that because you've got to be generous.

SILAS

I'm not generous. *I'm* seeing something now. Something about you. I've been thinkin' what it's meant all these years to have a family like yours next place to. They did something pretty nice for the corn belt when they drove you out of Hungary. Funny — Set out to do something for your own country — and maybe you don't quite do the thing you set out to do —

FEJEVARY

I'm afraid I've not done much for any country.

SILAS

(brusquely) Where's your left arm — may I be so bold as to inquire?

FEJEVARY

When I think of what I dreamed as a young man — it seems to me my life has failed.

SILAS

(raising his glass) Well, if your life's failed — I like failure.

(GRANDMOTHER MORTON returns with her cookies.)

GRANDMOTHER

There's two kinds — Mr. Fejevary. These have seeds in 'em.

SILAS

Mother, you'll have a glass of wine?

GRANDMOTHER

Well, just a mite to warm me up. *(FEJEVARY brings it to her, and the cookies.)* The Indians used to like cookies. One time I saw an Indian watching me from a bush. *(points)* Right out there. I was never afraid of Indians when you could see the whole of 'em — but when you could see nothin' but their bright eyes — movin' through leaves — I declare they made me nervous. After he'd been there an hour I couldn't seem to put my mind on my work. So I thought, Red or White, a man's a man — I'll take him some cookies.

FEJEVARY

It succeeded?

GRANDMOTHER

So well that those leaves had eyes next day. But he brought me a fish to trade. He was a nice boy.

SILAS

Probably we killed him.

GRANDMOTHER

I dunno. Maybe he killed us. Will Owens' family was massacred just after this. Like as not my cookie Indian helped out there.

SILAS

(to FEJEVARY) I wonder if I'm wrong. You see, I never went to school —

GRANDMOTHER

I don't know why you say that, Silas. There was two winters you went to school.

SILAS

Yes, mother, and I'm glad I did, for I learned to read there, and liked the geography globe. And one day the teacher told us all about the stars, and I had that to think of when I was driving at night. The other boys didn't believe it was so. But I knew it was so! But I mean school — the way Mr. Fejevary went to school. He went to universities. The wisest and finest things men have thought — all that was put before them.

FEJEVARY

(with a gentle smile) I fear I left a good deal of it untouched.

SILAS

You took aplenty. It makes something of men — learning. A house that's full of books makes a different kind of people. Oh, of course, if the books aren't there just to show off. (*trying hard to see it*) It's not the learning itself — it's the life that grows up from learning. Learning's like soil. Like — like fertilizer. Get richer. See more. Feel more. You believe that?

FEJEVARY

Culture should do it.

SILAS

Does in your house. You somehow know how it is for the other fellow more'n we do.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, Silas Morton, when you've your wood to chop an' your water to carry, when you kill your own cattle and hogs, tend your own horses and hens, make your butter, soap, and cook for whoever the Lord sends — there's none too many hours of the day left to be polite in.

SILAS

You're right, mother. It had to be that way. But now that we buy our soap — we don't want to say what soap-making made us.

GRANDMOTHER

We're honest.

SILAS

Yes. In a way. But there's another kind o' honesty, seems to me. To look out at that hill sometimes makes me ashamed.

GRANDMOTHER

Land sakes, you didn't do it. It was the government.

SILAS

Why is *he* here? Why is Felix Fejevary not rich and grand in Hungary today? 'Cause he was ashamed of what his government was.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, that was a foreign government.

SILAS

A seeing how 'tis for the other person — a *bein'* that other person, kind of honesty. 'Twould 'a done something for us to have *been* Indians a little more. I saw Blackhawk once — when I was a boy. (*to FEJEVARY*) He looked like the great of the earth. Noble like the forests — and the Mississippi — and the stars. His face was long and thin and you could see the bones, and the bones were beautiful. Looked like something that's never been caught. He was something many nights in his canoe had made him. Sometimes I feel that the land itself has got a mind and that the land would rather have had the Indians.

GRANDMOTHER

Well, don't let folks hear you say it. They'd think you was plum crazy.

SILAS

I s'pose they would. (*turning to FEJEVARY*) But after you've walked a long time over the earth — and you all alone, didn't you ever feel something coming up from it that's like thought?

FEJEVARY

I'm afraid I never did. But — I wish I had.

SILAS

I love land — this land. I suppose that's why I never have the feeling that I own it.

GRANDMOTHER

If you don't own it — I want to know! What do you think we come here for — your father and me? What do you think we left the world of white folks — schools and stores and doctors and set out in a covered wagon for we didn't know what? We lost a horse. Lost our way — weeks longer than we thought 'twould be. You were born in that covered wagon. You don't know what *that's* like - without your own roof — or fire — without —

(She turns her face away.)

SILAS

No, mother, of course not. I don't say things right. It's because I never went to school.

GRANDMOTHER

(her face shielded) You went to school two winters.

SILAS

Yes, mother. So I did.

GRANDMOTHER

(with the determination of one who will not have her own pain looked at) Suppose it was pretty fine-sounding speeches they had in town?

FEJEVARY

Too fine-sounding to seem much like the war.

SILAS

I'd like to go to a war celebration where they never mentioned war. There'd be a way to celebrate victory. *(hearing a step, looking out)* Mother, here's Felix.

(FELIX, a well-dressed young man, comes in.)

FELIX

And how do you do, Grandmother Morton?

GRANDMOTHER

Well, I'm still here.

SILAS

(who is pouring a glass of wine for FELIX) Your father and I come on home 'cause I wanted to have a talk with him.

FELIX

Getting into the old uniforms makes you want to talk it all over again?

SILAS

The war? Well, we did do that. But all that makes me want to talk about what's to come. Great things are to come, Felix.

FELIX

I've been thinking about them myself — walking around the town to-day. It's grown so much this year — that big glucose plant going up down the river, the new lumber mill —

FEJEVARY

And they've even bought ground for a steel works.

SILAS

Yes, a city will rise from these cornfields — a big rich place. It's written in the lay o' the land and the way the river flows. But first tell us about Harvard College, Felix. Ain't it a fine thing for us all to have Felix coming home from that wonderful place!

FELIX

You make it seem wonderful.

SILAS

Ah, you know it's wonderful — this place where all that the world has learned is to be drawn from like — like a spring.

FELIX

Matthew Arnold — a distinguished new English writer[—] speaks of: "The best that has been thought and said in the world."

SILAS

“The best that has been thought and said in the world!” (*slowly rising, and as if the dream of years is bringing him to his feet*) That’s what that hill is for! (*pointing*) Don’t you see it? End of our trail, we climb a hill and plant a college. After we are gone that college says for us, “This is why we took this land!”

GRANDMOTHER

(*incredulous*) You mean, Silas, you’re going to *give the hill away*?

SILAS

The hill at the end of our trail — how could we keep that?

GRANDMOTHER

Well, I want to know why not! Land’s land and not a thing you give away.

SILAS

Well, don’t scold *me*. I’m not giving it away. It’s giving itself away.

GRANDMOTHER

Don’t talk to me as if I was feeble-minded.

SILAS

I’m talking with all the mind I’ve got. (*to FEJEVARY, humorously*) You ought to know. Seeing as you gave it to me.

FEJEVARY

Ah, no —

SILAS

Well, you made me know 'twas there. You woke things in me and I thought about them as I ploughed. And that made me know there had to be a college there — wake things in minds — so ploughing's more than ploughing. What do you say, Felix?

FELIX

It — it's a big idea, Uncle Silas. I love the way you put it. It's only that I'm wondering —

SILAS

— how it can ever be a Harvard College? Well, it can't. And it needn't be. (*stubbornly*) It's a college in the cornfields — where the Indian maize once grew. And it's for the boys of the cornfields — and the girls. There's few can go to Harvard College — but more can climb that hill. (SILAS *turns back to the hill*) A college should be on a hill. They can see it then from far around. 'Twill make a difference — even to them that never go.

GRANDMOTHER

Now, Silas — don't be hasty.

SILAS

Hasty? It's been company to me for years. Came to me one night — must 'a' been ten years ago — middle of a starry night as I was comin' home from your place (*to FEJEVARY*) I'd gone over to lend a hand with a sick horse an' —

FEJEVARY

(*with a grateful smile*) That was nothing new.

SILAS

There were stars that night had never been there before. And the hill — Felix, in all your travels east, did you ever see anything more beautiful than that hill?

FELIX

It's like sculpture.

SILAS

(the wistfulness with which he speaks of that outside his knowledge) It's the way it rises — somehow — as if it knew it rose from wide and fertile lands. I climbed the hill that night. *(to FEJEVARY)* You told me about your life as a young man. All you'd lived through seemed to — open up to you that night — way things do at times. Seemed to — bring your life to life again. You told me what you studied in that fine old university you loved — in Vienna, — and why you became a revolutionist. The old dreams took hold o' you and you talked — way you used to, I suppose. When I went away — “Go to bed?” I said to myself. “When you've never had it before, may never have it again?” I climbed the hill. Blackhawk was there.

GRANDMOTHER

Why, he was *dead*.

SILAS

He was there — on his own old hill, with me and the stars. And I said to him —

GRANDMOTHER

Silas!

SILAS

Says I to him, “Yes — that's true; you had it first and loved it best. But it's neither yours nor mine, — though both yours and mine. Hill of vision,” said I to him. “Here shall come visions of a better world than was ever seen by you or me, old Indian chief.” Oh, I was drunk, plum drunk.

GRANDMOTHER

I should think you was.

SILAS

Ain't it queer how things blow from mind to mind — like seeds. Lord A'mighty — you don't know where they'll take hold.

(Children's voices off.)

GRANDMOTHER

There come those children up from the creek — soppin' wet, I warrant. I buried three [children] — first ten years I was here. Needn't 'a' happened — if we'd known what we know now, and if we hadn't been alone. *(With all her strength.)* I worked for that hill! And I tell you to leave it to your own children.

SILAS

There's other land for my own children. This is for all the children.

GRANDMOTHER

What's all the children to you?

SILAS

(derisively) Oh, mother — what a thing for you to say! You who were never too tired to give up your own bed so the stranger could have a better bed.

GRANDMOTHER

That was different. They was folks on their way.

FEJEVARY

So are we.

(SILAS turns to him with quick appreciation.)

GRANDMOTHER

That's just talk. We're settled now. Children of other old settlers are getting rich. I should think you'd want yours to.

SILAS

I want to pay my debts 'fore I'm too old to know they're debts.

GRANDMOTHER

(momentarily startled) Debts? Huh! More talk. You don't owe any man.

SILAS

I owe him *(nodding to FEJEVARY)*. And the red boys here before me.

GRANDMOTHER

Fiddlesticks.

FELIX

You haven't read Darwin, have you, Uncle Silas?

SILAS

Who?

FELIX

Darwin, the great new man — and his theory of the survival of the fittest?

SILAS

No, I don't know things like that, Felix.

FELIX

I think he might make you feel better about the Indians. In the struggle for existence many must go down. The fittest survive.

SILAS

Us and the Indians? Guess I don't know what you mean — fittest.

FELIX

Best fitted to the place in which one finds one's self, having the qualities that can best cope with conditions — do things. From the beginning of life it's been like that. He shows the growth of life from the lowest forms — jellyfish — up to man.

SILAS

Oh, yes, that's the thing the churches are so upset about — that we come from monkeys.

FELIX

One family of ape is the direct ancestor of man.

GRANDMOTHER

You'd better read your Bible, Felix.

SILAS

Do people believe this?

FELIX

The whole intellectual world is at war about it. The best scientists accept it. Teachers are losing their positions for believing it. Of course, ministers can't believe it.

GRANDMOTHER

I should think not. Anyway, what's the use believing a thing that's so discouraging?

FEJEVARY

(gently) But is it that? It almost seems to me we have to accept it because it is so encouraging.

(holding out his hand) Why have we hands?

GRANDMOTHER

Cause God gave them to us, I s'pose.

FEJEVARY

But that's rather general, and there isn't much in it to give us self-confidence. When you think we have hands because ages back — before life had taken form as man, there was an impulse to do what had never been done — when you think that we have hands today because from the first of life there have been adventurers — those of best brain and courage who wanted to be more than life had been, and that from aspiration has come doing, and doing has shaped the thing with which to do — it gives our hand a history which should make us want to use it well.

SILAS

(breathed from deep) Well, by God! Why didn't you tell me?

FEJEVARY

I haven't known what to believe. This hurts — beliefs of earlier years.

FELIX

The things it hurts will have to go.

FEJEVARY

I don't know about that, Felix. Perhaps in time we'll find truth in them.

SILAS

But think! If it's true that we *made* ourselves — created ourselves you might say, by our own courage — our — what is it? — aspiration. Why, I haven't got the mind to take it in. And what mind I have got says no. It's too —

FEJEVARY

It fights with what's there.

SILAS

(nodding) But it's like I got this *(very slowly)* other way around. As if I'd known it all along — but have just found out! Yes. The earth told me. The beasts told me.

GRANDMOTHER

Fine place to learn things from.

SILAS

(to FEJEVARY) In your face haven't I seen thinking make a finer face? How long has this taken, Felix, to — well, bring us where we are now?

FELIX

We don't know how many millions of years since earth first stirred.

SILAS

Why, then we aren't *finished* yet!

FEJEVARY

No. We take it on from here.

(After a moment's pause SILAS gets up, opens the closet door.)

GRANDMOTHER

Silas, what [are] you doing?

SILAS

(who has taken out a box) I'm lookin' for the deed to the hill. *(he has it now)*

GRANDMOTHER

(rising) Give me that! *(She turns to FEJEVARY.)* Tell him he's crazy. We got the best land 'cause we was first here. We got a right to keep it.

FEJEVARY

(going soothingly to her) It's true, Silas, it is a serious thing to give away one's land.

SILAS

You ought to know. You did it. Are you sorry?

FEJEVARY

No. But wasn't that different?

SILAS

Yours was a fight to make life more, wasn't it? Well, let this be our way.

FELIX

I think you're entirely right, Uncle Silas. But it's the practical question.

FEJEVARY

I fear you don't realize the immense amount of money required to finance a college. You would have to interest rich men; you'd have to have a community in sympathy with the thing you wanted to do.

GRANDMOTHER

Can't you see, Silas, that we're all against you?

SILAS

(to FEJEVARY) But how can you be? Look at the land we walked in and took! Why, the buffalo here before us was more than we if we do nothing but prosper! God damn us if we sit here rich and fat and forget man's in the makin'. *(affirming against this)* There will one day be a college in these cornfields by the Mississippi because long ago a great dream was fought for in Hungary.

And I say, Wake up, old dream! Wake up and fight! *(holding it out, but it is not taken)*

I give you this deed to take to rich men. Show them one man believes enough in this to give the

best land he's got. That ought to make rich men stop and think.

GRANDMOTHER

Stop and think he's a fool.

SILAS

(to FEJEVARY) It's you can make them know he's not a fool. They'll feel in you what's more than them. They'll listen. Thought is not something *outside* the business of life. Thought — (*with his gift for wonder*) why, thought's our *chance*. I know now. Why I can't forget the Indians. We killed their joy before we killed them. We made them less. (to FEJEVARY, *and as if sure he is now making it clear*) I got to give it back — their hill. I give it back to joy — a better joy — joy o' aspiration.

FEJEVARY

(*moved but unconvinced*) But, my friend, there are men who have no aspiration. That's why, to me, this is as a light shining from too far.

GRANDMOTHER

(*old things waked in her*) Light shining from far. We used to do that. We never pulled the curtain. We always left a lighted window for the traveler who'd lost his way.

FELIX

I should think that would have exposed you to the Indians.

GRANDMOTHER

(*impatiently*) Well, you can't put out a light just because it may light the wrong person.

FEJEVARY

No. (*And this is as a light to him. He turns to the hill.*) No.

SILAS

(with gentleness, and profoundly) That's it. Don't you see it? That college rising as from the soil itself, as if it breathes from the earth. I want to know it's real before I stop knowing. Then maybe I can lie under the same sod with the red boys and not be ashamed. We're not old! Let's fight! Wake in other men what you woke in me!

FEJEVARY

And so could I pay my debt to America.

(His hand goes out.)

SILAS

(giving him the deed) And to the dreams of a million years!

(Standing near the open door their hands are gripped in compact.)

CURTAIN