

ACT II

Scene I

SCENE: *A corridor in the library of Morton College, October of the year 1920, upon the occasion of the fortieth anniversary of its founding. This is an open place in the stacks of books, which are seen at both sides. There is a reading table before the big rear window. This window opens out, but does not extend to the floor; only a part of its height is seen, indicating a very high window. Outside is seen the top of a tree.*

This outer wall of the building is on a slant, so that the entrance right is rear, and the left is front. Right front is a section of a huge square column. On the rear of this, facing the window, is hung a picture of SILAS MORTON. Two men are standing before this portrait.

SENATOR LEWIS *is the middle western state senator. He is not of the city from which Morton College rises, but of a more country community farther in-state. FELIX FEJEVARY, now nearing the age of his father in the first act, is an American of the more sophisticated type — prosperous, having the poise of success in affairs and place in society.*

SENATOR

And this was the boy who founded the place, eh? It was his idea?

FEJEVARY

Yes, and his hill. I was there the afternoon he told my father there must be a college here. I wasn't any older then than my boy is now.

(As if himself surprised by this.)

SENATOR

Well, he enlisted a good man when he let you in on it. I've been told the college wouldn't be what it is today but for you, Mr. Fejevary.

FEJEVARY

I have a sentiment about it.

SENATOR

Yes. Well, it was those mainsprings of sentiment that won the war.

(He is pleased with this.)

FEJEVARY

(nodding) Morton College did her part in winning the war.

SENATOR

I know. A fine showing.

FEJEVARY

And we're holding up our end right along. You'll see the boys drill this afternoon. It's a great place for them, here on the hill. They're a fine lot of fellows. They went in as strike-breakers during the trouble down here at the steel works. The plant would have had to close but for Morton College. That's one reason I venture to propose this thing of a state appropriation for enlargement. Why don't we sit down a moment? Our [college] is an important one — industrially speaking. The state will lose nothing in having a good strong college here — one-hundred-per-cent-American.

SENATOR

I admit I am very favorably impressed.

FEJEVARY

I hope you'll tell your committee so — and let me talk to them.

SENATOR

Let's see, haven't you a pretty radical man here?

FEJEVARY

You mean Holden?

SENATOR

Holden's the man. I've read things that make me question his Americanism.

FEJEVARY

Oh — (*gesture of depreciation*) I don't think he is so much a radical as a particularly human human-being.

SENATOR

But we don't want radical human beings.

FEJEVARY

He has a genuine sympathy with youth. That's invaluable in a teacher, you know. And then — he's a scholar. (*He betrays here his feeling of superiority, but too subtly for his companion to get it.*)

SENATOR

We can get scholars enough. What we want is Americans.

FEJEVARY

Americans who are scholars.

SENATOR

You can pick ‘em off every bush — pay them a little more than they’re paid in some other cheap John College. Excuse me —I don’t mean this is a cheap John College.

FEJEVARY

Of course not. But that — pay[ing] them a little more, interests me. We claim to value education and then we let highly trained, gifted men fall behind the plumber.

SENATOR

Well, that’s the plumber’s fault. Let the teachers talk to the plumber.

FEJEVARY

(with a smile) Better not let them talk to the plumber. He might tell them what to do about it.

SENATOR

They can’t serve both God and mammon.

FEJEVARY

Then let God give them mammon. I mean, let the state appropriate.

SENATOR

This state, Mr. Fejevary, appropriates no money for radicals. Excuse me, but why do you keep this man Holden?

FEJEVARY

In the scholar’s world we’re known because of him. And really, Holden’s not a radical — in the worst sense. What he doesn’t see is — expediency. He’s an idealist. Something of the — man of vision.

SENATOR

Oh, I sometimes think the man of affairs has the only vision. Take you, Mr. Fejevary — a

banker. These teachers! — (*pushing all books back*) Why, if they had to take for one day the responsibility that falls on your shoulders — all the worries, with labor riding the high horse! I went to the State House because my community persuaded me it was my duty. But I'm the man of affairs, myself.

FEJEVARY

I know. Your company did much to develop that part of the state.

SENATOR

Well, that's why I'm chairman of the appropriations committee. So — teacher? That would be a perpetual vacation to me. If you want my advice, Mr. Fejevary, — your case before the state would be stronger if you let this fellow Holden go.

FEJEVARY

I'm going to have a talk with Professor Holden.

SENATOR

Tell him it's for his own good. The idea of a college professor standing up for conscientious objectors!

FEJEVARY

That doesn't quite state the case. Fred Jordan was one of Holden's students. He felt Jordan was perfectly sincere in his objection.

SENATOR

Sincere in his objections!

FEJEVARY

He was expelled from college — you may remember; that was how we felt about it. Holden fought that, but within the college. What brought him into the papers was his protest against the way the boy has been treated in prison.

SENATOR

You know how I'd treat him? (*a movement as though pulling a trigger*) If I didn't know you for the American you are, I wouldn't understand your speaking so calmly.

FEJEVARY

I'm simply trying to see it all sides around.

SENATOR

Makes me see red.

FEJEVARY

(*with a smile*) But we mustn't meet red with red.

SENATOR

What's Holden fussing about — that they don't give him caviar on toast?

FEJEVARY

That they didn't give him books.

SENATOR

Well, when your own boy 'stead of whining about his conscience, stood up and offered his life!

FEJEVARY

Yes. And [Fred], my nephew, Silas Morton's grandson[,] died in France. My sister Madeline married Ira Morton. (*speaking with reserve*) They played together as children and married as soon as they were grown up.

SENATOR

So this was your sister's boy? (FEJEVARY *nods*) One of the mothers to give her son!

FEJEVARY

(speaking of her with effort) My sister died — long ago. *(pulled to an old feeling; with an effort releasing himself)* But Ira is still out at the old place. Why, a hundred years ago Grandmother Morton was the first white woman in this county.

SENATOR

Oh, our pioneers! If they could only see us now! (FEJEVARY *is silent; he does not look quite happy*) I suppose Silas Morton's son is active in the college management.

FEJEVARY

No, Ira is not a social being. Fred's death about finished him. He had been — strange ever since my sister died — when the children were little. *(again pulled back to that old feeling)*

SENATOR

Seems to me I've heard something about Silas Morton's son —

FEJEVARY

Yes. His corn has several years taken the prize — best in the state. He's experimented with it — created a new kind. It's about the only thing he does care for now. Oh, Madeline, of course. He has a daughter — Madeline Morton, senior this year — one of our best students. She's a great girl, though — peculiar.

SENATOR

Sounds as if her home life might make her a little peculiar.

FEJEVARY

Madeline stays here in town with us a good part of the time. Mrs. Fejevary is devoted to her — we all are. ([HORACE] *starts to come through from right.*) Hello, this is my boy. Horace, this is Senator Lewis.

HORACE

(shaking hands) How do you do?

SENATOR

Pleased to see you, my boy.

FEJEVARY

What are you doing in the library?

HORACE

I'm looking for a book.

FEJEVARY

(affectionately bantering) You are, Horace? Now how does that happen?

HORACE

I want the speeches of Abraham Lincoln. I'll show those dirty dagoes where they get off!

FEJEVARY

Are you talking about the Hindus?

HORACE

Yes, the dirty dagoes.

FEJEVARY

Hindus aren't dagoes you know, Horace.

HORACE

Well, what's the difference? This foreign element gets my goat.

SENATOR

My boy, you talk like an American. But what do you mean — Hindus?

FEJEVARY

There are two young Hindus here as students. And they're good students. But they must preach the gospel of free India — non-British India.

SENATOR

Oh, that won't do.

HORACE

They're nothing but Reds, I'll say. Well, one of 'em's going back to get *his*. (*grins*)

SENATOR

I remember now. He's to be deported.

HORACE

And when they get him — (*movement as of pulling a rope*) They hang there.

FEJEVARY

The other two protest against our not fighting the deportation of their comrade. They insist it means death to him. (*brushing off a thing that is inclined to worry him*) But we can't handle India's affairs.

SENATOR

I should think not!

HORACE

Why, England's our ally! That's what I told them. But you can't argue with people like that. Just wait till I find the speeches of Abraham Lincoln! (*Passes through to left*)

SENATOR

Fine boy you have, Mr. Fejevary.

FEJEVARY

You should see him in a football game. Wouldn't hurt my feelings in the least to have him a little more of a student, but —

SENATOR

Oh, well, you want him to be a regular fellow, don't you?

FEJEVARY

It was he who organized our boys for the steel strike — went right in himself and took a striker's job. He came home with a black eye one night, presented to him by a picket who call[ed] him a scab. But Horace wasn't thinking about his eye. According to him, it was not in the class with the striker's upper lip. "Father," he said, "I gave him more red than he could swallow." (*going to the window*) Let me show you something. You can see the old Morton place on that first little hill. (*pointing left*)

SENATOR

The long low house?

FEJEVARY

That's it. You see, the town for the most part swung around the other side of the hill, so the Morton place is still a farm.

SENATOR

But you're growing all the while. The town'll take the cornfield yet. And this old boy (*turning to the portrait of SILAS MORTON*) can look out on his old home — and watch the valley grow.

FEJEVARY

Yes — that was my idea. (*with a laugh*) I confess to being a little sentimental.

SENATOR

We Americans have lots of sentiment, Mr. Fejevary. It's what makes us — what we are.

(*FEJEVARY does not speak; there are times when the senator seems to trouble him.*) Well, this is a great site for a college.

FEJEVARY

Yes, that was Uncle Silas' idea. (*looking at the picture*) He gave this hill for a college that we might become a deeper, more sensitive people —

(*HORACE comes back, carrying an open book.*)

HORACE

Say, this must be a misprint.

HORACE

From his first inaugural address to Congress, March 4, 1861. (*reads*) "This country with its institutions belongs to the people who inhabit it." Well, that's all right. "Whenever they shall grow weary of the existing government they can exercise their constitutional right of amending it" — (*after a brief consideration*) I suppose that that's all right — but listen! "or their *revolutionary* right to dismember or overthrow it."

FEJEVARY

He was speaking in another age. An age of different values.

SENATOR

Terms change their significance from generation to generation.

HORACE

I suppose they do — but that puts me in bad with these lice. They quoted this and I said they were liars.

SENATOR

And what's the idea? They're weary of our existing government and are about to dismember or overthrow it?

HORACE

I guess that's the dope.

FEJEVARY

Look here, Horace — speak accurately. Was it in relation to America they quoted this?

HORACE

Well, maybe they were talking about India then. But they were standing up for being revolutionists. Got their nerve quoting Lincoln to us.

SENATOR

The fact that they are quoting it shows it's being misapplied.

HORACE

(approvingly) I'll tell them that. But gee — Lincoln oughta been more careful what he said.

Ignorant people don't know how to take such things.

(goes back with book)

FEJEVARY

Want to take a look through the rest of the library? We haven't been up this way yet —

(motioning left) We need a better scientific library. *(They are leaving now.)* Oh, we simply must have more money. The whole thing is fairly bursting its shell.

DORIS

(venturing in cautiously from the other side, looking back, beckoning) They've gone.

FUSSIE

Sure?

DORIS

Well, are they here? They went up to science.

FUSSIE

(moving the SENATOR's hat on the table) But they'll come back.

DORIS

What if they do? We're only looking at a book. *(running her hand along the books)* Matthew Arnold.

(Takes a paper from FUSSIE, puts it in the book. They are bent with giggling as

HORACE returns.)

HORACE

For the love o' Pete, what's the joke? *(taking the book from the helpless girl)* Matthew Arnold.

Nowhere to go for a laugh. When I wrote my theme on him he was so dry I had to go out and get a Morton Sundee.

(The girls are freshly attacked, though all of this in a subdued way, mindful of others in the library.)

HORACE

(seeing the paper) Say, what's this?

DORIS

(*trying to get it from him*) Horace, now *don't*. (*a tussle*) You great strong mean thing! You're just *horrid*.

HORACE

Sure, I'm horrid. (*takes the paper, reads*)

“To Eben

You are the idol of my dreams

I worship from afar.”

FUSSIE

Now, listen, Horace, and don't you *tell*. You know Eben Weeks. He's the homeliest man in school.

HORACE

Awful jay.

DORIS

Of course, no girl would *look* at him. So we've thought up the most *killing* joke. (*stopped by giggles from herself and FUSSIE*) Now, he hasn't handed in his Matthew Arnold dope. I heard old Mac hold him up for it — and what'd you think he said? That he'd been *ploughing*. Said he was trying to run a farm and go to college at the same time! Isn't it *a scream*?

HORACE

Gives the school a bad name.

FUSSIE

But, listen, Horace — you'll just *die*. He said he was going to get the book this afternoon. (*both girls are convulsed*)

DORIS

It'll get him all fussed up! And for nothing at all!

HORACE

Too bad that class of people come here. I think I'll go to Harvard next year.

DORIS

Don't you think Morton's a good school, Horace?

HORACE

Morton's all right. Fine for the — (*kindly*) people who would naturally come here. But one gets an acquaintance at Harvard. (*eye falling on the page where he opens the book*) Say, old Bones could spill the English — what? Listen to this. “For when we say that culture is to know the best that has been thought and said in the world, we simply imply that for culture a system directly tending to that end is necessary in our reading.” (*He reads it with mock solemnity, delighting FUSSIE and DORIS.*) “The best that has been thought and said in the world!”

(*MADLINE MORTON comes in from right; she carries a tennis racket.*)

MADLINE

(*both critical and good-humored*) You haven't made a large contribution to that, have you, Horace?

HORACE

Madeline, you don't want to let this sarcastic habit grow on you.

MADLINE

Thanks for the tip.

HORACE

Want me to play with you, Madeline?

MADLINE

(genially) I'd rather play with you than talk to you.

HORACE

Same here.

FUSSIE

Aren't cousins affectionate?

MADLINE

(moving through to the other part of the library) But first I'm looking for a book.

HORACE

Well, I can tell you without your looking it up, he did say it. But that was an age of different values. Anyway, the fact that they're quoting it shows it's being misapplied.

MADLINE

(smiling) Father said so.

HORACE

(on his dignity) Oh, of course — if you don't want to be serious.

(MADLINE laughs and passes on through.)

DORIS

What are you two talking about?

FUSSIE

Sometimes I think Madeline Morton is a highbrow in disguise.

HORACE

Madeline's all right. She and I treat each other rough — but that's being in the family.

FUSSIE

Well, I heard Professor Holden say Madeline Morton has a great deal more mind than she'd let herself know.

HORACE

Oh, well — Holden, he's erratic. Look at how popular Madeline is. Guess it don't hurt her much at a dance. Say, what's this new jazz they were springing last night?

DORIS

I know! Now look here, Horace — L'me show you. *(She shows him a step.)*

HORACE

I get you.

(He begins to dance with her; the book he holds slips to the floor. He kicks it under the table.)

FUSSIE

(from her post) They're coming! I tell you, they're coming!

DORIS

Horace, come on.

(He teasingly keeps hold of her, continuing the dance. At sound of voices, they run off, right. FUSSIE considers rescuing the book, decides she has not time.)

SENATOR

(at first speaking off) Yes, it could be done. There is that surplus, and as long as Morton College is socially valuable — *(He has picked up his hat.)* But your Americanism must be unimpeachable, Mr. Fejevary.

FEJEVARY

I'm going to have a talk with Professor Holden this afternoon. If he remains he will — (*It is not easy for him to say.*) give no trouble. (MADELINE *returns.*) Oh, here's Madeline — Madeline Fejevary Morton. This is Senator Lewis, Madeline.

SENATOR

(*holding out his hand*) How do you do, Miss Morton. This is a great day for you.

MADELINE

Why — I don't know.

SENATOR

The fortieth anniversary of the founding of your grandfather's college? You must be very proud of your illustrious ancestor.

MADELINE

I get a bit bored with him.

SENATOR

My dear young lady!

MADELINE

I've heard so many speeches about him — “The sainted pioneer” — “the grand old man of the prairies” — I haven't any idea what he really was like.

SENATOR

I should think you would be proud to be the granddaughter of this man of vision.

MADELINE

(*her smile flashing*) Wouldn't you hate to be the granddaughter of a phrase?

FEJEVARY

(trying to laugh it off) Madeline! How absurd.

MADELINE

Well, I'm off for tennis.

(Nods good-bye and passes on.)

FEJEVARY

(after a look at his companion) Queer girl, Madeline. Rather — moody. *(again trying to laugh it off)* She's been hearing a great many speeches about her grandfather.

SENATOR

She should be proud to hear them.

FEJEVARY

Of course she should. *(looking in the direction MADELINE has gone)* I want you to meet my wife, Senator Lewis. And you haven't met our president yet. I'm merely president of the board of trustees.

SENATOR

'Merely!' Guess I've met the real president.

FEJEVARY

(with a laugh) I'll just take a look up here, then we can go down the shorter way.

(He goes out right. SENATOR LEWIS turns and examines the books. FUSSIE slips in, looks at him, hesitates, and then stoops under the table for the Matthew Arnold (and her poem) which HORACE has kicked there. He turns.)

FUSSIE

(not out from under the table) Oh, I was just looking for a book.

SENATOR

Quite a place to look for a book.

FUSSIE

(crawling out) I thought I'd put it back. Somebody — might want it.

SENATOR

I see, young lady, that you have a regard for books.

FUSSIE

Oh, yes, I do have a regard for them.

SENATOR

(holding out his hand) And what is your book?

FUSSIE

Oh — it's — it's nothing.

(As he continues to hold out his hand, she reluctantly gives the book.)

SENATOR

(solemnly) Matthew Arnold? Nothing? A master of English!

FUSSIE

Oh yes, I'm — awfully fond of it.

(Growing more and more nervous as in turning the pages, he nears the poem.)

SENATOR

What is your favorite study?

FUSSIE

Well — *(an inspiration)* I like all of them.

SENATOR

Morton College is coming on very fast, I understand.

FUSSIE

Oh yes, it's getting more and more of the right people. Of course, the Fejevarys give it class. Mrs. Fejevary — isn't she wonderful? (*worried*) Oh, I must — be going. Shall I put the book back? (*holding out her hand*)

SENATOR

No, I'll just look it over a bit. (*sits down*) Thank you.

(Reluctantly she goes out. SENATOR LEWIS pursues Matthew Arnold with the conscious air of a half literate man reading a "great book". The FEJEVARYS come in)

FEJEVARY

I found my wife, Senator Lewis.

AUNT ISABEL

(a woman of social distinction and charm) How do you do? *(They shake hands.)*

SENATOR

It's a great pleasure to meet you, Mrs. Fejevary.

AUNT ISABEL

Why don't we carry Senator Lewis home for lunch?

SENATOR

Why, you're very kind.

AUNT ISABEL

I'm sure there's a great deal to talk about, so why not talk comfortably? And we want to tell you the whole story of Morton College — the good old American spirit behind it.

SENATOR

I am glad to find you an American, Mrs. Fejevary.

AUNT ISABEL

Oh, we are that. Our boys —

(Her boy HORACE rushes in.)

HORACE

(wildly) Father! Will you go after Madeline? The police have got her!

FEJEVARY

What!

HORACE

(as he is getting his breath) Awful row down on the campus. The Hindus. I told them to keep their mouths shut about Abraham Lincoln —

FEJEVARY

Never mind what you told them! What happened?

HORACE

Why they had *handbills* *(holding one up as if presenting incriminating evidence — the SENATOR takes it from him)* telling America what to do about deportation! So we were — we were putting a stop to it. They resisted — particularly the fat one. The cop at the corner came up. When the dirty anarchist didn't move along fast enough, he took hold of him — well, a bit rough, you might say, when up rushes Madeline and calls, "Let that boy alone!" Next thing I knew Madeline hauled off and patted the policeman a fierce one with her tennis racket!

SENATOR

She *struck* the officer?

HORACE

Twice. The second time —

AUNT ISABEL

Horace. (looking at her husband) I — I can't believe it.

HORACE

I told the policeman that she didn't understand — that I was her cousin and apologized for her. And she called over at me, "Better apologize for yourself!" She looked like *a tiger*. Honest, everybody was afraid of her. I kept trying to square it, told the cop that you were her uncle — but Madeline balled it up again — didn't care who was her uncle — *(He throws open the window.)* There! You can see them, at the foot of the hill.

FEJEVARY

(to the SENATOR) Will you excuse me? *(he is hurrying out)*

AUNT ISABEL

(trying to return to the manner of pleasant social things) Come when you can. *(to the SENATOR)* Madeline is such a high-spirited girl.

SENATOR

She might — on this day of all others — have considered her grandfather's memory.

(Raises his eyes to the picture of SILAS MORTON.)

HORACE

Gee! Wouldn't you *say* so?

CURTAIN