

THE AUTHOR'S EVENING AT HOME

By Alice Dunbar

(Mrs. Paul Laurence Dunbar)

SCENE — *Library. Weather — Ninety in the shade.*

AUTHOR, *tired, nervous.*

WIFE, *fidgety.*

MOTHER.

SERVANT.

WIFE *discovered lying on lounge.*
AUTHOR *enters, and seats himself by her side.*

AUTHOR—Well, little girl, how are you?

WIFE—Oh, I am so sick!

AUTHOR—Let me go for a doctor.

WIFE—No, I don't need a doctor; I just have a headache.

AUTHOR—Well, lie quiet, dear.

WIFE—I don't want to lie quiet. (*Struggles to a sitting posture.*)

AUTHOR—Do you want to go out for a walk, dear? (*Kisses her.*)

WIFE (*crossly*)—No! (*Lies down again.*)

AUTHOR (*going to desk*)—Well, dear, I thought over that final chapter to-day, and I think I'll write it out.

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Yes, dear.

WIFE—You have kissed me only once.

AUTHOR (*dutifully rising and kissing her on her forehead*)—Poor little woman! (*Goes back to desk.*)

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Yes, dear.

WIFE—If you only knew how my head aches!

AUTHOR (*seating himself again on lounge*)—I can imagine, dear.

WIFE—Why don't you do something to amuse me?

AUTHOR—I, dear? What can I do?

WIFE (*petulantly*)—What have you

been doing to-day? You never tell me a thing.

AUTHOR—Well, I finished two chapters. Would you like to hear them, dear?

WIFE—Of course.

(AUTHOR *begins to read aloud.*)

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Yes, dear.

WIFE—Mrs. De Smythe was here to-day, and you have no idea how elegant she looked. She wore a gray satin suit trimmed with cut steel and gray chiffon, and her hat was a gray toque with violets.

AUTHOR—Have you finished, dear?

WIFE—Oh, yes; go on.

(AUTHOR *reads to end of chapter and looks to WIFE for approval.*)

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Yes, dear.

WIFE—Do you know that bald spot on your head has changed its form completely? Now it's almost a heart-shape.

(AUTHOR *says things under his breath and goes to his desk again.*)

WIFE (*pettishly*)—How cross you are!

(*Silence for thirty-three seconds.*
AUTHOR *writes industriously.* WIFE *sits up and begins to embroider.* Enter SERVANT.)

SERVANT—I've come for the breakfast order, mum.

WIFE—Oh, yes. Well, Mary, we'll have—let me see— John, would you like a mackerel to-morrow?

(AUTHOR *mutters unpublished things and grunts for reply.*)

WIFE—All right. Well, Mary, we'll have broiled mackerel and cakes, and—well, just anything.

SERVANT—Yes, mum. (*Exit.*)

(*Silence for twenty-six seconds. WIFE fidgets in her chair; drops scissors; hums one of Sousa's marches.*)

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Well?

WIFE—John, if England whips the Boers, it will change things about in Africa, won't it?

AUTHOR—Yes, I suppose so.

WIFE—John, where is the Boer country?

AUTHOR—Get an atlas and find out.

(*WIFE spends some noisy moments finding an atlas on the book shelves, drops a book on her foot and cries out.*)

AUTHOR *groans.*)

WIFE—John!

AUTHOR—Well?

WIFE—Come and see the map; here it is.

(*AUTHOR rises and seats himself beside her on the lounge.*)

WIFE—I don't understand what the Orange Free State is. Tell me.

(*AUTHOR explains tersely, shuts the atlas and goes back to his desk. Enter MOTHER; sighs, and sits in an arm-chair.*)

MOTHER—Oh, my, how warm it is!

AUTHOR—Let me open the window. (*Rises and opens window. WIFE resignedly puts on a shawl.*)

AUTHOR—Are you cold, dear?

WIFE—Oh, it makes no difference about me. (*AUTHOR goes back to desk with lines deepening on his face. MOTHER and WIFE converse in sibilant whispers.*)

AUTHOR—For heaven's sake!

WIFE—You're disturbing John,

mother. (*Exit into next room, where she can be heard moving about and humming the Sousa march.*)

MOTHER—Are you busy, dear?

AUTHOR—Oh, no; just amusing myself, trying to make some bread and butter.

MOTHER—I'm sorry to disturb you, dear, but then, you know, I just like to be about and see you at work. Of course, I sha'n't bother you at all. You can go right on. I sha'n't make a bit of noise or be in your way. I don't disturb you, do I?

AUTHOR—Oh, no, mother, not at all.

MOTHER—I thought not. You see, it's just as I was saying to-day to Mrs. Blackwell; when John comes home in the evening, Bess and I love to sit in the library while he writes, and watch him and learn repose by keeping still.

(*Enter WIFE on tiptoe; her shoes creak audibly. Goes to lounge, knocking against a chair on the way. Lies down with heavy sigh. Silence for three minutes, broken by the scratching of AUTHOR's pen and alternate sighs from WIFE and MOTHER. Bell rings.*)

WIFE—Mercy me, I hope it's no one to disturb John! (*Enter SERVANT.*)

SERVANT—Mr. and Mrs. Cartwright are in the parlor, mum, and Mrs. Cartwright says as how they've come over for a rubber of whist.

MOTHER—What a pity!

WIFE—Just as John was in such a good train of thought, too.

AUTHOR—Thank heavens!



TO MAIDENS

BUT believe what you please
 When they swear they adore you;
 Let them rest on their knees,
 But believe what you please—
 Let them argue and tease
 If the thing doesn't bore you,
 But believe what you please
 When they swear they adore you.

S. G. S.