



Title	JOHN HOWARD LAWSON'S "HUMANLIKE" (c. 1919)
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Citation	経営と経済, 60(3), pp.139-164; 1980
Issue Date	1980-12-25
URL	http://hdl.handle.net/10069/33867
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JOHN HOWARD LAWSON'S "HUMANLIKE" (c. 1919)

By LeRoy Robinson

In his as yet unpublished autobiography John Howard Lawson refers to his brief collaboration at playwriting in late 1919 with novelist James Oppenheim, former anti-war editor of the then already defunct magazine *The Seven Arts* (1916-17).

Lawson had been borrowing money from his father (gifts in the form of loans, that is), and he was happy to accept the suggestion of his show-biz oriented agent Mary Kirkpatrick that he do a stage version of Oppenheim's popular Mrs. Polly stories about a woman detective.

Mary Kirkpatrick, whose literary agency Galbraith Welch had sold this series of stories, introduced Lawson to Oppenheim. In his autobiography Lawson at about 70 years old looks back at his meetings with Oppenheim (when he was about 25 years old), saying: "It seems unbelievable that I was so completely cut off from the heritage he helped to create—he was to a large extent cut off from it himself."¹

Lawson says that in late 1919 Oppenheim was a tired man who did not want to speak to Lawson about *The Seven Arts*, which Oppenheim had let die rather than permit it to be compromised. "Perhaps he did not trust me," Lawson says, "and there is no reason why he should."

Be that as it may, Lawson was introduced to Oppenheim as a

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- 1) Lawson seems to be speaking here of a political heritage. In the case of cultural heritage, it may have been otherwise. It is likely that in his youth Lawson had read other stories by James Oppenheim, e. g., "Dancing Blood" which appeared in the October 26, 1912 issue of *The Outlook* (whose Theodore Roosevelt Lawson supported as a presidential candidate that same year). "Dancing Blood" is set in Spring. Its main characters wants the Unknown. He says: "I'm a wild thing... I don't belong to civilization... I'm a tramp... I'm like a gypsy... I go seeing things and meeting people..." Lawson's Tommy Weed in *The Mad Moon* (c. 1917) has very similar attitudes toward himself. In *Roger Bloomer*, also set in Spring, Roger, who wants what he does not know, has somewhat similar attitudes, too. Lawson also shared the anti-Puritan sentiments expressed by Oppenheim in "Dancing Blood."

promising young playwright who would turn the popular Mrs Polly stories into a "popular comedy-melodrama with a great part for a woman star." Lawson and Oppenheim met several times at the Brevoort Hotel. "We ate eggs Benedict and sat for hours over coffee planning the play."

Lawson says that Mary Kirkpatrick had a tentative agreement with a producer and that he and Oppenheim expected to receive a large payment as soon as he completed an outline of the play. But, Lawson says, early in 1920 Mary Kirkpatrick sold his *The Spice of Life* (c. 1916, 1919) to Famous Players-Lasky and, as soon as he received his money, he went to Europe—and "the outline was never made."

Lawson seems to be incorrect: In the name of John Howard Lawson Galbraith Welch copyrighted a three-act play entitled "*Humanlike*"—"Based on the MRS. POLLY stories by JAMES OPPENHEIM." The Library of Congress copy of this play (D-41948) is 122 pages long and is a complete play not an outline. The Library of Congress copy is, furthermore, dated October 9, 1915, but this is probably a mistake.

In any case, the purpose of the present article is to provide historians of American drama the first published summary of "*Humanlike*" so that they can bring more perspective to the history of John Howard Lawson's work in the commercial theatre before 1923, the year of his first Broadway production, *Roger Bloomer*.

The first scene of Act I of "*Humanlike*" begins at five p. m. on a cold day in late fall.

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The setting is the office of New York City's Assistant District Attorney. Walls of modern panelling are decorated with pictures of policemen and jurists. There are filing cabinets. Assistant District Attorney Charles Cassidy is 35, a little stout, good-natured, a little unpolished. Detective Lieutenant Morley is tall and thin, getting old, has a habit of continual observation, his voice hard and harsh.

Cassidy and Morley, talking about Mrs Lampton, the lady Cassidy is going to marry, mention Mrs Kyra Polly as a possible marriage partner for Morley, her professional superior. Morley has observed marriage closely:

Women are uncertain. You can't tell what they're gonna do next. The only time you can be sure of a woman is when she's dead. ²⁾ Even then she may be fakin'. Mrs Polly is a damned fine woman, different from the average, a good looker, an' brainy, knows the detective business. But marriage is another thing. Besides, she ain't an easy woman to ask a question like that to...

Cassidy explains that Mrs Lampton has had some jewelry stolen. He wants Morley to look into it. This case is important to Cassidy for personal reasons. Cassidy walks up and down uncomfortably. Mrs Lampton's got influential friends. If Cassidy and Morley clean up the stolen jewelry case quickly, she'll tell her friends how efficient they are.

Morley recalls Cassidy's career:

"Five years ago you was an ordinary cop. Now you sit in an office pulling the stuff about personal reasons an' influential friends like you was a financier." Morley takes his hat off to any guy that studies law at night school, gets appointed assistant district attorney, and finds a widow with a handsome face and dough who's one of the Four Hundred.

Cassidy says he's fond of Mrs Lampton and it wouldn't matter to him if she was poor or what she was.

Mrs Lampton enters. She is middle-aged. Good looking. Dressed elaborately and expensively, rather unnecessarily elegant. In manner and speech, distant. This is her first visit to Cassidy's office, which she expected to see full of convicts with stripes and chains. Chains are the only way to handle the criminal classes. The best way would be to kill them off just the way we swat the fly. ³⁾

2) In *The Mad Moon* (1916, 1917, unpublished) Tommy Weed tells Priscilla Emerson she will only be safe when she is dead.

3) Mrs Lampton has affinity with the Social Darwinist Imperialist in *Standards* (1916, unpublished) who expresses similar attitudes about the helpless poor.

Mrs Lampton takes off a glove, showing a heavily ringed hand, and explains her loss:

"It's all very simple. I live in an apartment on 83rd Street near West End Avenue.⁴⁾ I came home last night at ten. I walked into my bedroom. The lights were lighted. There was a man standing by the dressing table. I saw him plainly. He had a sort of a scar on his cheek. Before I could say anything, a woman jumped on me, put her hand over my eyes and pushed me backward. I stumbled against the bed and fell. They got away. With the money (only a little over \$1,000 cash) and a pendant with one ruby in it, some other stones, and a string of pearls.

Mrs Lampton wants these people, who've caused her great inconvenience, to be punished—the electric chair. (Cassidy explains the electric chair is not used in cases like this.)

Morley says Mrs Polly will handle the case. Mrs Lampton is interested in how Morley handles criminals. He says, with handcuffs. Mrs Lampton wonders how Mrs Polly will do it. "Surely she doesn't just walk about the streets with handcuffs and a gun." Morley explains their detective system:

There's what you call a crook population in this town. They know each other, hang around together, get drunk together. Crooks, gangsters. Mrs Polly is one of them. That's her business. She gives herself a fake name, Mrs Smith or Mrs Brown. They think she's a crook like the rest of them. They trust her. They tell her things. When a crime is committed, it's bound to belong to one o' that crook population. Which one is all, which one? It generally ain't hard to figger out. Each crook does a job his own way. Some of 'em does things neat and ladylike. Others spills dynamite all over the place. Our detectives know these crooks. We know their little ways. That's Mrs Polly. That's what she does. She knows that crook

4) Her apartment is on the sixth floor of the "Ellston Apartments".

population like you know your friends. She knows where they are and what they're doing an' why an' how.

Mrs Polly appears, shutting the door and leaning against it tiredly.⁵⁾ She is about thirty, her manner vivacious and changeable, just a touch of Bowery slanginess in her speech, wearing plain neat coat and skirt and black hat. Morley explains Mrs Lampton's case to her.

Mrs Polly suggests the male thief is young and sallow and looks unhealthy "Like he'd been sunburnt by an ultra-violet ray." She suggests the woman thief has a baby face with curls. "It's the cherub faces can fool people." The man's a young fellow about twenty-two, the girl's not more'n nineteen. Call 'emselves Fergie Bliss and Cissie Bliss. They ain't married reg'lar but they live together pretty steady. Fergie treats Cissie well and that ain't any too ordinary for people like them.⁶⁾ Mrs Polly now shocks Mrs Lampton. Fergie and Cissie Bliss are sort of friends of hers. "How would I be a detective if I didn't be friends with crooks. An', say, a crook can be as good a pal as a minister an' better than some."⁷⁾

Morley insists the Blisses be arrested immediately: "Run 'em in on suspicion." Mrs Polly asks to handle the case her own way. If Fergie and Cissie Bliss stole the jewelry, she'll have 'em in a cell an' a full confession in Cassidy's hands before dawn.

Mrs Lampton, satisfied the police are as systematic as a bank, will consider giving Mrs Polly a reward. This idea disgusts Mrs Polly: "Give your reward to the City. I'm doing their business." Some people, Mrs Polly says to Morley, get on her nerves.

Next Mrs Polly and Morley are alone. Mrs Polly notices it's

5) In his early plays most of Lawson's heroines are tired. Their epitome is Louise Chamberlain in *Roger Bloomer* (1923) introduced as the Tired Girl; so tired of living Louise commits suicide.

6) Mrs Polly says the Blisses are "exceptionally white."

7) In *Standards* Lawson presents a minister of the gospel who is cold-hearted.

getting dark. Going to be a cold night. When she was a kid, she used to recite a poem about a cold, dark night. Morley does not remember this or any poem. Mrs Polly laughs. They discuss Mrs Lampton.

Mrs Polly refers to Mrs Lampton as "some swell dame." Morley says in admiration when it comes to swells, Mrs Lampton's got the Atlantic Ocean beat a mile. Mrs Polly jumps up in surprise at the news Cassidy is to marry Mrs Lampton. Morley notes Mrs Lampton and Cassidy don't act none too affectionate, they don't pull off any of the bill-and-coo stuff. Morley thinks Mrs Lampton is a splendidly built woman but she ain't Cassidy's type. Mrs Polly says Mrs Lampton ain't homelike. Morley explains Cassidy's feelings: "He's risen in the world sort o' sudden. He ain't got his balance."⁸⁾ Mrs Lampton sort o' dazzled Cassidy.

Morley returns to the subject of Fergie and Cissie Bliss.

Mrs Polly hates to run 'em in, 'cause she'd rather see Mrs Lampton lose her "jools" than run two human beings into a cell. Fergie and Cissie are just a feller an' his girl tryin' their best to make a dishonest living. "Some people are brought up to steal." Morley is annoyed: "Somebody's been fillin' you full o' this reform stuff."

Mrs Polly talks about her job—she's sick of the "stool pigeon stunt"—sometimes she gets sore at herself—it's a woman's point of view—and Mrs Polly prepares for her night's work.

She's gotta make herself look like a crook. She takes off her coat and swishes it in the dust on the floor. She cuts a ragged line in her skirt. She tilts her hat at an angle. She pulls some of her hair out of place. She says this is the worst part of her job. She likes her clothes neat. She doesn't think women was made to be detectives. Women

8) In *Success Story* (1932) Sol Ginsburg rises in the advertising world sort of sudden and is said to lose his balance.

was made for makin' pies an' knittin' an' bein' men's wives.

Cassidy returns with two detectives under Mrs Polly's orders. (Grayson is heavily built, a roughman with brawny shoulders, his massive head crowned with a crop of bright red hair. His voice is so harsh it gives the impression he's continually angry. Gale is small and wiry, his voice is shrill.) Cassidy tells Mrs Polly not to take chances, some crooks are desperate. Morley says Mrs Polly ain't afraid o' nothin'.

Grayson wants to arrest the Blisses and bully a confession out of them. Cassidy suggests they get evidence before they arrest them. Mrs Polly says she'll wheedle a full confession before they put the handcuffs on them. Mrs Polly and the two detectives leave for Morton's Saloon on East 39th Street—the rottenest neighborhood in town—where the Blisses rent a room over the saloon.⁹⁾

As Mrs Polly exits, she repeats: "Sometimes being a detective makes me feel like a skunk." She feels tender-hearted. But she straightens up and salutes: "I'm right on the job." Morley's curtain line is: "Women, they're all alike. All full of damned fool sentiment."

The second scene of Act I of "*Humanlike*" begins at midnight outside Morton's Saloon.

The window is decorated with the usual signs and advertisements for liquor. The saloon window is bright. Outside, a lamppost throws a shallow yellow light. One side of the stage is comparatively bright, the other side very dim. Underneath the window a ragged boy is lying, evidently fast asleep, his ragged coat pulled up over his head.

Outside in the cold—"cold enough to freeze a hunk of lead"—Detectives Grayson and Gale, collars turned up, wave their arms to keep warm and move around. Gale almost stumbles over the ragged boy, whom Grayson wants to kick to see if he's dead. "This is a Hell of a street." Gale points to a grey house—Morrie's gambling

9) Grayson says a guy tried to knife him in that saloon recently.

joint, raided last winter, but now runnin' same as ever, at the cost of a couple o' thousand a week cold to keep the police off. Grayson would like to get his mitts on a little o' that boodle.

As they move down the street, the ragged boy sits up abruptly. Lefty Levinsky, a thin ragged man with a slouchy manner, comes out of the saloon.¹⁰⁾ From behind the momentarily opened door comes the noise of coarse laughter and clinking glasses. Lefty stands smoking, as the ragged boy tells him about the detectives hanging around. Lefty thinks the two men "Johnnies" waitin' for some woman, but he'll take a look. He throws away his cigarette, which the ragged boy picks up and puffs. The detectives reappear, and he hurriedly lies down again. Lefty pretends to be drunk and staggers toward the two men and mumbles incoherently. He strikes a match and swaying drunkenly he holds it up to see the two men's faces more clearly. As he staggers away, Grayson and Gale admire how well he tried to fool them with a gag like that. They move on.

Lefty runs into Fergie and Cissie Bliss.

Fergie wears a suit of very pronounced check pattern. His manner is that of a tough guy. His face is sallow and unhealthy and is seamed by a red scar on one cheek. Cissie wears a plain black coat and a plain black dress. She is slim and pretty with a rather childish face. In one hand, she carries a black cloth bag.

Lefty holds on to Fergie's shoulder and takes Cissie under the chin. Fergie pushes him away. Lefty warns them the two men may be detetives. The ragged boy creeps over and speaks in a hoarse whisper. Lefty kicks him brutally. The boy whimpers. (The Ragged Boy is Lefty's brother, who Lefty lets hang around to keep his eyes open and get Lefty good tips.) Cissie comforts him. Cissie gives him five cents to get some gin to keep himself warm. The Ragged Boy crawls inside the saloon. The Ragged Boy is lame.

10) Lefty may be the prototype for the Ragged Man in *Roger Bloomer*.

A whistle is heard. Mrs Polly appears in a nearby doorway but stays in its shadow.

Grayson and Gale saunter in carelessly. Mrs Polly seizes them and excitedly tells them Fergie and Cissie just came home. "I'm gonna make them two people gimme a complete confession before we arrest 'em. All you gotta do is wait in the alley, watch their window. When I want you I'll life the shade and lower it twice. Then come in an' come quick."

Her voice dies away as the stage becomes dark. When the light brightens, we see Fergy and Cissie in

a dingy and tattered bedroom. The furniture is covered with badly spotted and faded red cloth. The wall paper, originally of a gaudy scarlet design, is thoroughly faded, here and there peeled off showing cracked plaster. The walls are decorated here and there with gaudy pictures of Venus rising from the sea and similar subjects.

Cissie is tired. Fergie tells her to put her black bag away but she opens it and holds up a few silver spoons: "Why, them ain't worth twenty dollars." Just the same, Fergie says, if they were caught with the spoons, they'd get twenty years. At his command, Cissie hides the spoons under the closet floor.

Cissie rises from the floor right into Fergie's arms and he gives her a long kiss: "Damn you, you little lump of crystal domino," he says. She laughingly pushes him back on the bed and tells him to rest quiet. She also suggests he rest from crime; they've cleaned up enough to be rich. But Fergie says it may be six months before they can hock any o' the boodle. She says: "Waiting is hell." He says Hell wouldn't be Hell with the two of them together.¹¹⁾ They

11) In *Atmosphere* (1914, unpublished) psychologist Howells tells a story about two lovers who learn that although there is a Hell for sinners there is no Hell for those who love each other.

hug. (Cissie likes to have his arms around her as close as the coat on a sausage.) They kiss.

Fergie coughs two or three times. Cissie, worried, says his cough ain't natural. Fergie says a feller oughtn't never pull off a job on a cold night, especially in the suburbs—it ain't healthy. Cissie, slowly, sadly, says: "It's a lot healtheir than starvin'."

The doorknob on the door rattles violently. Cissie opens the door. Mrs Polly slinks into the room, slowly and uneasily, as if evading somebody. Mrs Polly (known to these two as Mrs Smith) wants to talk to them. Fergie coughs. Mrs Polly fears he has consumption. She knows how he feels. "I got traces of it myself—con—most of us have when we gets over thirty." (Later she says doctors say she ain't goin' to live none too long.) Fergie, sour, wants her to get to the point.

Mrs Polly tells them to speak low and be careful what they say. They may not be safe. Cops. At this, Fergie laughs unnaturally. Mrs Polly says the cops are after her—and Fergie and Cissie. The cops think the three of them is workin' a game together. Mrs Polly collapses weepingly into a chair: "They'll get me, they'll get me." Fergie tells her to keep cool.

Mrs Polly explains. She is a shoplifter—Gimbel's, Macy's. But business ain't very good. Money comes in slow. Fergie says: "It's always like that. People think there's money in stealin'. But it ain't easy. It's hard an' slow, an' unhealthy." Cissie tells Mrs Polly that Fergie and she will stick by her.

Mrs Polly speaks more and more excitedly of her health: "I'm sick. My lungs is bad, an' my heart just a bit weak from usin' the needle."¹²⁾ She warns Cissie never to do "needlework." Fergie says they keep away from them

12) In *The Spice of Life* would-be playwright Dickie Moulton mentions in passing he has heart trouble but drops the subject. In *Parlor Magic* (1963) Mother Merton's heart disease partly leads her sons to cater to her. (Her daughter-in-law Bettina wants to be a heart surgeon.)

things. Mrs Polly likes to see that—a girl that lives clean, no dope, and sticks to one man like Gawd meant, and no booze. Cissie says getting soused once in a while ain't no harm, but she's cuttin' it out.

Mrs Polly says she is sick, worn out, fagged. If the police send her up the river, it'll kill her. Fergie tells her not to lose her nerve. Mrs Polly now lifts the windowshade a little and steps back with a shriek: "Look down there. See 'em watchin'. Two men watchin'."

Cissie asks Fergie what they're going to do. (Mrs Polly, off her guard, in a sudden burst of sympathy, says: "Poor kids.") Fergie has a gun in his hip pocket and has half a mind to take a shot at the detectives. But Mrs Polly puts a hand on his arm: "That wouldn't help."

Mrs Polly says she's been told the cops are after the Blisses for a robbery on 83rd Street, a swell flat, a couple of pendants and sparklers. Fergie says it ain't true. Cissie, very nervous, half weeps, then says hysterically: "We done it. We thought we made a clean get-away."

Mrs Polly says the three of them gotta stand together, where's the joolry? Fergie says it's hidden—and they expect to get a thousand dollars for it—and not even the cops can't find it.

Fergie explains how he and Cissie robbed Mrs Lampton.

"We walked in there with a pass-key. Swell flat. Lace curtains. An' I tell yer it's a thousand dollar boodle. An' there I was wid the sparklers in one hand, an' in comes the dame that owns the flat, one of those heavy-built—she had jools on her fingers and down her chest. why we coulda picked a pile o' kale right offen her carcass... Cissie gave the big dame a punch that keeled her over before she seen us, an' it was us for outdoors..."

Mrs Polly says the dame's got friends in the police department and the police'll catch the Blisses. Then Mrs Polly wants to know where the jewelry's hidden—the secret would be safe with her.

Fergie, already suspicious, is more so. He says they ain't asking her secrets. She's been making them talk. He warns Mrs Polly: "If you try to put over anything phony..."

Mrs Polly backs away. Accidentally she hits the window shade, causing it to rise. As she pulls it down, it slips through her fingers and again rises. Fergie thinks this a signal. In any case, the police "don't dare put their fingers on him while he's got a gun." Mrs Polly deftly slips behind him and pulls the gun out of his pocket and covers both Fergie and Cissie as detectives Grayson and Gale enter.

In a tired voice, Mrs Polly, feeling sad about doing her duty, tells how she did it—"the human way, sob stuff, played on their feelings, poor kids."

Fergie says the police can't prove anything—it's Mrs Polly's word against theirs. Mrs Polly then reveals a hidden dictating machine on which is recorded the "completest little confession that ever played Exhibit A in a law court."

Mrs Polly is not proud of what she has done, but now Cissie makes her feel ashamed of herself:

"If I wuz you, I'd feel so damned cheap. You don't play your game square. You sneaks around. You told us you wuz sick an' lonely. You made us talk. Oh, yes, we ain't angels. Anyway, we ain't legal angels. Lemme tell you law is Hell. Catches you like mice in traps. An' you send us up the river." 13)

"You lock us up for five years. You knock the slats out of our bodies and you knock the fight out of our hearts. You call that law. I call it Hell. Sure, we steal. We gotta steal. We don't know nuthin' but steal. I wuz brought up

13) Cissie adds: "You send me to one o' them women's jails, where I'll get in a cell with some nigger or Chinese woman from one o' them Bowery vice holes, me, wot's tried to live decent, an' she'll gimme a needle an' I'll use it to keep from dyin'." In his autobiography Lawson admits it took him a long time to eliminate his own racist attitudes.

in a gutter. Where would I learn to do something swell like an actress or a chambermaid? Why don't you give us a chance? Why don't you treat us decent?"

Cissie looks around bitterly, then shrugs her shoulders.

Mrs Polly, deeply moved by what Cissie has said, looks about uncomfortably. She wipes her eyes with a handkerchief. "Then with a movement of assumed carelessness, but which the audience sees to be done purposefully, she lets the record in her hand slip through her fingers. It falls on the floor and scatters into a thousand pieces." There is silence.

Mrs Polly says: "There goes the evidence." She decides to arrest only Fergie and tells the detectives Cissie was not involved in the robbery. She will take Cissie home with her. "You said you wanted a chance. I'll treat you good. I'm going to make a woman out of you." Mrs Polly is going to make a princess out a slum baby whether she likes it or not. She's going to send Cissie to a business school to learn her an honest living. She's going to reform the reluctant Cissie if she has to use a gun to do it.

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Act II of "*Humanlike*" takes place the next morning in Assistant District Attorney Cassidy's office. Bright sunlight comes through the windows. Cassidy sits thoughtfully at his desk. Morley paces the floor. Grayson stands, having already reported Mrs Polly's behavior of the night before.

Morley says: "Ain't it just like a woman to do a thing like that." Cassidy quietly says maybe Mrs Polly had a reason. As for Fergie Bliss, Cassidy says, "he's as silent as a cemetery"—according to Garrison, Fergie won't tell what he did with the loot he stole, "not if you *kill* him."

Morley wonders what Cassidy's lady friend Mrs Lampton will say about this sloppy case, which ain't complete because Mrs Polly "spilled" it. As for the loot, there was a thorough search of the Blisses' room—a policeman broke the wall with an axe—¹⁴) and they found "nothin' but a couple of

silver-plated spoons."

Cassidy wonders what could a' got into Mrs Polly. Grayson says: "If she hadn't interfered..." To which Morley thunders: "She's a woman and she's gone nutty." Mrs Polly ain't any different from an ordinary woman. And she's told Morley over the telephone she wouldn't have any more to do with this case. Anyway, as Cassidy says, their whole case is legally indefinite. Only Mrs Polly can give definite proof.

Cassidy requests Grayson to bring Fergie Bliss from the Tombs (prison) to him for questioning.¹⁵⁾

Morley wants to frame Fergie: "You bring him yourself, Grayson. Leave him alone with Cassidy for five minutes. Then burst in sudden an' tell Cassidy his woman / Cissie / has confessed, peached on him. That'll weaken 'im." Cassidy believes in treating a prisoner square, but Morley does not: "Square treatment only sours 'em." Cassidy does not like framing Fergie, but if Fergie is a hard nut, this method won't do any harm.

Cassidy telephones Mrs Lampton to come to his office to identify Fergie.¹⁶⁾ Grayson arrives with Fergie, who stumbles in sullenly, his suit considerably mussed up after his night in jail. Cassidy and Fergie look at each other with mutual dislike.

Cassidy tells Fergie he'll get into trouble if he doesn't answer questions. Fergie says: "I don't have to answer nothin'. I know the law. I'll get me own lawyer when I'm ready. You can't make me talk. I needn't answer nothin'.

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- 14) In the first draft of *Processional*, 1920, Jim Flimmins knocks down the wall of a house with an axe.
- 15) At this, Grayson says: "Thumbscrews is all that'll make him talk—it's a shame we ain't got some of those what they call medieval torture instruments."
- 16) Mrs Lampton's telephone number is River 9039. (After the telephone conversation Cassidy says Mrs Lampton is worried her stolen pendant will be bent.)

I can say what I want. I can tell you to go to Hell—an' I do too." Cassidy says that talk won't get Fergie anywhere. There's only one way for Fergie to make the long sentence he's sure to get shorter: "Tell me the truth and I'll look out for you. I'll see you through." Fergie thinks all the "detectuf muckers" trapped him once—"all your tricks an' your lawyers an' your third degrees won't make me talk."

At that moment, Grayson comes in and says Cissie has confessed all the details of the robbery and given a description of the stolen goods: "We're gettin' it in writin'." At first Fergie does not indicate the least emotion. Then when Grayson says Cissie cut up at first but they handled her: "We got her feelin' like a lamb", Fergie's face is seen working as he tries hard for self-control.

Cassidy tells Fergie there's only one chance for both the Blisses: "Be on the level, gimme straight talk." Fergie, calmed, speaks disgustedly: "You're framin' this whole thing on me. Think you can fool me with tricks like that. D'you think this is amateur night? Thought I was a simp. Well, I ain't a goin' to talk."

Mrs Polly enters. Wearing a plain street suit and hat, she looks exceedingly neat. Fergie approaches her in passionate excitement: Where's Cissie? "You got her hid in some hole. If you treat her dirty, I'll..." Fergie coughs. He is taken out. Mrs Polly tries to explain to Cassidy what happened the night before.

Tenderheartedness is a disease. It breaks out sudden like measles. It spreads like a rash. She got sorry for Cissie, wanted to help her. For Cissie is a bright kid. All she needs is polishing. If she was sent to the cooler, she'd get so rusty she couldn't never be polished. Mrs Polly sometimes feels more like a mother than a cop—like last night, "it iust busted out o' me sudden."

Cassidy says he can't get a confession from Fergie. Mrs Polly spontaneously says: "Good for him." She is going to

resign from the police force. She's gone stale on the job. "Bein' a detective is a game—like ping-pong or golf—you like it for a while—exciting—then you begin to think it's foolish. I want to be something honest for a change." Cassidy thinks Mrs Polly's got this reform stuff bad. She admits she'd like to reform Cissie.¹⁷⁾ Cassidy says he's seen lots of women like Cissie, women of the streets, and "you might as well try to line Hell with asbestos as reform one o' them." Mrs Polly says society owes Cissie something that it ain't never given her.

Cassidy says society is now going to give Cissie a clean cell in a strong jail. Mrs Polly says he'll have to catch Cissie first: "I took her home—put her to bed—locked the door—this morning she was gone—she took a lot o' silver with her—and some o' the linen." Mrs Polly doesn't blame Cissie: "I'd a done it in her place. It's humanlike for a creature to do a thing like that."

Cassidy raises his hands in a gesture of despair: Tender-hearted! Mrs Polly says if she has a chance with Cissie she might still reform her: "Why that girl's exceptional. She's got spirit." Cassidy calls Mrs Polly an anarchist. She says: "No, just a woman." She'd take Cissie back in her house again. In two weeks... Cissie ain't trained. She's got the brain of a child. She's innocent, not stupid. "You'd oughter hear that girl's flow of language when she gets goin'. She'd beat any suffrage speaker."

Cassidy calls in Morley to tell him about Cissie's escape from Mrs Polly's and about Mrs Polly's desire to reform Cissie privately. Grayson comes in with Fergie. Soon detective Gale opens the door and brings in Cissie, holding her arm tightly. She looks dazed and bedraggled, her hat on her head at a crazy angle, her hair half down her back. She has been drinking. (Morley: "Soused little street chicken.")

17) When Cassidy asks Mrs Polly what she did with Cissie, she answers sarcastically: "I spanked her and taught her the Ten Commandments."

Cassidy reminds Mrs Polly: "That's what they always do when they're up against it, drink." And the girl Mrs Polly wants to reform is just a half-drunk girl of the streets. Mrs Polly excuses Cissie's behavior: "It's cold this morning. The girl knew she was being hunted like a rabbit." Mrs Polly'd be drunk herself if she was in for it like Cissie. Grayson brutally separates Fergie and Cissie. Mrs Polly says Cissie looks half dead: "Lemme take her to a bed an' lay her down." But Morley decides to question Cissie at once. He grabs a little package out of Cissie's hand and unwraps is and shows a small brown bottle of Mother Mercy's Cough Medicine. Cissie implores the men to let Fergie have the medicine for his cough. Morley says the medicine is heroin, and he has Grayson throw the little brown bottle out the window.¹⁸⁾ Cissie gives a helpless sigh.

Morley questions Cissie sternly: "Just gimme your name." Cissie says in a sad voice: "D tty Dillpickle." Morley shakes his fist in her face: "You dirty little bunch o' rags. I'll make you talk if I have to bust your block off." Mrs Polly intercedes. Morley's way is all wrong. "You guys that think you can bully. She ain't a donkey to be kicked. She's a woman. You guys forget a crook is human." Cassidy agrees. Cissie cries. Mrs Polly says: "See, she's cryin'. The way you talked drove her into Hell. She's got a soul, a soul that cries, an' a heart." Fergie now thinks Mrs Polly is on the level.

Mrs Lampton enters and at once identifies Fergie as the thief of her jewelry. She scrutinizes Cissie's tear-stained face, and, contrary to what she'd said the day before, she identifies Cissie as the woman who'd pushed her down during the robbery.

Mrs Polly is disturbed: "Her face bein' familiar may mean ten years in a cell. D'you know what ten years in prison is

18) In *Nirvana* philanthropist Holz claims he once had a little brown bottle containing an Asian elixir of life but threw it out the window.

like? ¹⁹⁾ It would turn a nun into a she-devil." That's of no consequence to Mrs Lampton. (Cassidy sides with Mrs Polly; Morley, with Mrs Lampton.) Morley says to Mrs Polly: "You'd think the girl's too good for jail. Why she's a born cell-bird. She's half soused. She's living with this man." For Mrs Polly, Cissie is as much Fergie's wife "as if she was tied by the Pope."

Mrs Polly is going to oppose Morley. She's going to fight for Cissie's soul. Although Mrs Lampton doesn't see what Cissie's soul means to *her*, Mrs Polly says: "When we're talking about somebody's soul, it ought to matter to everybody." Cissie now confesses: "You might as well fight Gawd himself as fight wot we're up against." She wants to be taken where she, "sick an' nutty," can rest. "I'm so tired, I'd sleep on the top of a spiked fence." ²⁰⁾ Mrs Polly says the fight is just beginning. She ain't through with this yet—not by a long shot.

Fergie asks Cassidy to make a deal. If Cassidy'll let Cissie free, Fergie'll come across with a confession; then Mrs Polly'd take care of Cissie. Morley rejects this deal: „We're doin' law, not charity." Fergie says he won't tell where Mrs Lampton's sparklers are unless Cissie is freed. Mrs Lampton says: "This is outrageous." She says Cissie's disreputable and belongs in jail, but she accepts Cassidy's decision to make this deal with Fergie. Fergie then confesses. ²¹⁾

As the curtain descends on Act II of "*Humankind*", Cissie is sobbing in Mrs Polly's arms.

* * *

Act III of "*Humanlike*" takes place on a late afternoon two weeks later in Cassidy's office.

19) Mrs Polly refers to Bedford Prison.

20) In the 1920 draft of *Processional* labor agitator Psinski is caught by the seat of his pants on the top of a spiked fence.

21) Fergie says the jools are in a safe deposit vault in the Seventh Avenue Bank, corner Thirty-Second Street, in the name of Richard Randolph.

As the curtain rises, Cissie is sitting on the edge of Cassidy's desk. She wears a plain but very neat dark-colored coat and skirt and a hat to match. She has on tan gloves. "The contrast between her present neatness and the sloveliness of the preceding act is startling." She swings her legs against the desk thoughtfully.

Grayson enters. Then Fergie does. Grayson exits and locks the door.

For a moment Fergie stares at Cissie uncertainly. Then she rushes into his arms. He holds her close. He releases her, holding her hands. He observes her gloves, with disgust. Cissie, shame-faced, hurriedly pulls them off: "They make me wear 'em. It's the thing." Whenever a lady does somethin' an' she don't know, she says it's the thing. Fergie, bewildered, says: "I don't know you. Different hands. Different face. Different talk." Cissie says: "It ain't me. It's wot they done to me."

Fergie wants to know if Cissie's heart is still the same. She clings to him. Close. Closer. Actually, Fergie thinks she looks grand. Cissie laughs: "D'you know wot done it? Ever hear of a stuff called cold cream? I stole a jar of it—well, they washed me in that stuff an' face powder. That's why I look different." ²²⁾

Cissie explains how she tried to see Fergie before but wasn't permitted to do so until she "laid down an' prayed" to Mrs Polly and to Cassidy. "They wanted to do us right," she says. "They thought it would make it worse if we seen one another." Now, just before Fergie's trial, they can be alone together. "That's fair."

Cissie tells how Cassidy visits Mrs Polly's flat every day to see how Cissie is getting on. Fergie breaks out in sudden

22) In *Success Story* Sol Ginsburg writes a successful advertisement for cold cream.

anger: "Wot the Hell business is it of his?" Cissie says: "Cut the profanity." *Hell* is profanity. Fergie thinks Mrs Polly and Cassidy have got Cissie chuck full of fool notions. Cissie says Cassidy is stuck on Mrs Polly but doesn't know it himself. So, Cissie thought she could work 'im for Fergie, make him handle Fergie easier, on account or Cassidy's liking Mrs Polly. "He could let you off." Fergie says: "None of that. I ain't a fourflusher. I made a deal. I ain't goin' back on it. I'm sittin' in this game to play square." Cissie says she'd stack the cards against Gawd himself to get Fergie off. When Fergie hears her talk like that, a prison sentence doesn't matter, he says. Cissie actually tried to make Cassidy let Fergie off easy: "I yelled my little head off at him—an' I cried. I wasn't actin'. I told 'im I loved you so, an' you'd go straight. Oh, I tried."

It is now after four p. m. Fergie wishes his trial would begin. But while they wait he wants to know more about Cissie.

Cissie says: She hasn't had a drop of booze. No, she doesn't miss it. She forgot the taste of it. "An'"—she goes swiftly to Cassidy's desk and writes on a piece of paper at which Fergie looks mystified: "Looks like Chinese." But it ain't. It's shorthand. Cissie goes to business school every morning.²³⁾ Shorthand is easy.

Fergie speaks in disgust: He wishes he hadn't made a deal with Cassidy. For Cissie ain't his anymore. She's a plute. Fergie throws her gloves on the floor. She wears gloves and she talks about profanity and cold cream and shorthand. She's so damned ladylike she's [scared to hug him like she used to, close, close.

Cissie says he's got it wrong: "I ain't changed, it's just the outside." Fergie says: "No, it ain't. It's inside yer. Your eyes is different. I seen it down in your eyes. They got

23) Cissie's school is Hays and Hammond Business College on 18th Street.

you changed. An' you're driftin' away, farther and farther, with me in a cell, beatin' at the bars. An' I can't get out to grab yer an' hold yer an' make yer love me an' tell yer that yer gotta be mine... mine... mine...

Cissie excitedly says that's what she's gonna be. His. But different. Married. Before they send him away. Fergie: "There you are. Married. Swell notions. You're different. They learned you all their notions. Ain't we better than married already?" Cissie: "Not like they does it. Swearin' solemn an' a church an' all that rot." Fergie: "Wot does Gawd care how we does it?"

Cissie explains how Mrs Polly took her to church on Sunday where the guy who preached preached about marriage. Fergie interrupts: "Damn wot he preached. Damn the whole mess of it. Business schools an' church—it's took you away from me." Cissie continues: Mrs Polly'd fix it so they could get married before Fergie goes to prison. Fergie: "Wot do I care for marriage if I love you—ain't love better?" Cissie (desperately): "It's the thing."

Mrs Polly, Cassidy and Grayson enter. Fergie and Cissie's time is up. The trial will begin soon. Fergie will be taken back to his cell. Cissie is given permission to see him at the cell. But Cassidy tells Grayson not to permit Cissie to stay with Fergie too long.²⁴⁾ Cassidy and Mrs Polly are alone.

Cassidy says he doesn't know how in two weeks Mrs Polly'd made Cissie pretty near a lady. Mrs Polly is the only one who could've done it. Mrs Polly says any female's a lady if you give her kid gloves an' teach her how to do her hair. Cassidy adds he's learned a lot these two weeks, too. He never had any sense at all about a lot of things. Mrs Polly made him look at his job differently. She's a wonder.

24) Cissie cannot go with Fergie to his cell. It is against the rules for her to go through the prisoner's passageway. She can go round through the building and meet him at the cell. Cassidy gives her a pass to show to the police guards.

Mrs Polly says you can make any creature do anything if you treat it humanlike. ²⁵⁾

Cassidy and Mrs Polly discuss Fergie's trial. The trial will just get started that afternoon. There will be no testimony. The court's calendar is crowded. Cassidy will rush the case through and ask for a maximum sentence. He doesn't want to, but what else can he do? Mrs Polly is silent.

Cassidy speaks: "Haven't I told you. I believe in 'em both. But it's not my choice. I know he's guilty. It's my duty. He's made a deal with me. I can't set an example like that—make a deal with a feller so's to convict him an' then let him off. Gossip travels. Every crook in New York would be on to it. They'd talk. An' there's a complaint against him. I can't shelve it." Mrs Polly suggests the complaint be dropped. Cassidy says Mrs Lampton refuses to do that.

Cassidy and Mrs Polly change the subject.

Cassidy tells Mrs Polly not to bring Cissie to Fergie's trial. She may make trouble, bust things up. Yes, she's a lady now, but she's still got a bit of cavewoman in her. ²⁶⁾ Besides, Cissie likes Cassidy and he hates to have her hear him ask for the maximum sentence for Fergie. Mrs Polly says: "I like you too. Don't you hate to have me hear you" Cassidy agrees they both want the same thing, "only we can't have everything we want."

There is a moment of tenderness between them. Then Mrs Polly leaves.

Cassidy slams the door behind her viciously. He sits at his desk and goes over papers excitedly. He stops, his hands on the

25) Here she starts to talk about a little terrier she once had that had been kicked around...

26) In *Servant-Master-Lover* (1916, unpublished) Cinders says she'd rather be a cavewoman than a doll. Cinders resembles Cissie in several ways.

desk, and he stares moodily. He mumbles to himself half-audibly: "Not everything." Morley brings in Mrs Lampton, who is *so* interested in hearing Cassidy prosecute—especially when he's doing it for her. Cassidy is nervous.

Mrs Lampton wants Cassidy to tell the judge how Fergie kept one of the stones in her pendant. Cassidy refuses. The pendant stone was lost in Fergie's safe deposit vault; it must have been loose. Mrs Lampton: "It wasn't loose, my dear." Cassidy says it doesn't matter anyway because he's bought her a new stone.

Cassidy's male secretary Jones brings in a letter which he puts on Cassidy's desk along with the keys to Cassidy's office, and he goes home. Mrs Lampton, Morley and Cassidy leave to go to court.²⁷⁾

Mrs Polly and Cissie enter. Cissie wants Cassidy to get Fergie to agree to marry her before his trial. Mrs Polly tells Cissie to wait there, and she goes to get Cassidy.

Cissie sits in Cassidy's chair at the desk. She sees the bunch of keys. She picks it up. She jumps up, hurries to one door, opens it, looks out, closes it stealthily, locks it, tries the knob, unlocks it, opens it, looks out. She does the same with another door, which she keeps locked. She takes hold of the telephone wire and traces it down to the floor. She tries to pull it up by the roots but cannot. She finds a scissors and cuts the telephone wire near the floor, concealing what she has done, puts the scissors away, and puts the keys in her coat pocket. She goes to windows and opens one a little. She turns scaredly when Cassidy and Mrs Polly enter.

Mrs Polly says: "Talk quick, kid," The trial can't start until Cassidy gets there. Cissie explains she wants to marry Fergie before he goes to prison. Cassidy says Fergie may be in prison a long time. Is she sure she won't meet anybody else? Mrs Polly says Fergie and Cissie's hearts

27) "Judge Klein's Court."

are glued together, with Portland cement. Cassidy will try to arrange the marriage.

Cissie then asks Cassidy to try to shorten Fergie's prison sentence. "Love makes people sort o' wild." Cissie tells Cassidy to look at Mrs Polly; "Supposin' you stole an' you loved her, supposin' you loved her like Hell an' you wuz gonna be took away, an', an'..." Cissie's voice dies down; at a loss for words, she stops. Her face is white and tense with real emotion. Then she bursts out: "An' you wuz driftin' farther an' farther an' you in a cell beatin' at the bars an' you can't get out to grab her an' hold her..."

Cassidy stands without saying a word.

Mrs Lampton enters hurriedly to tell Cassidy the Court's waiting for him. Unseen, Cissie locks the one unlocked door, swiftly crosses the room, and throws the bunch of keys out the window: They can't have a trial till you get 'there, Mrs Cassidy. Mrs Polly looks on with interest as Cassidy checks the doors and Mrs Lampton suggests banging on them to attract attention. But "everybody's gone home, nobody would hear."

Cassidy tries the telephone. Cissie holds up the cut end of the telephone cord. Mrs Polly laughs. Mrs Lampton looks out one window—too high to attract anyone's attention. Mrs Polly says: "We're here for the night." Cissie laughs a little hysterically: In the court room they're waitin' an' Fergie's waitin'. Funny, isn't it? Mrs Polly says Cissie is not helping Fergie, Cissie is being foolish. Cissie says maybe she is, but she'll delay Fergie's being sent to prison. And she doesn't care if she is sent up for what she's doin' either.

Mrs Lampton says: "How dare you?" Cissie answers: "'cause I ain't a lady, that's why I dare. 'tain't ladylike, wot I done. I don't care. All I know an' all I care for is Fergie." Cissie says Mrs Polly will understand her, but not Mrs Lampton, for: "She's a lady, she don't understand. A lady, all dolled up in corsets and jools, nothin' but a bunch o' stiffened

rags, without no heart inside."

Cissie does not take Mrs Polly's advice to be careful about what she says: "I'm just lettin' out wot's inside me, an' there's Hell inside me. I learned a lot these two weeks, I learned love. Bein' away from Fergie, it made me feel, an' Mrs Polly's tellin' me a lot o' new things. I began to love so's it makes you go crazy when a guy touches you an' you wanter nestle his head to your heart an' kiss his lips an' feel him close. Mrs Lampton never felt nothin' like that blazin' inside her, blazin' up so's it burns out your mouth an' your eyes."

Cissie continues: "Mrs Lampton thinks she's gonna marry Cassidy but she doesn't know wot it is, that feelin' so's your heart blazes up like a Fourth o' July rocket burstin' all over the sky. Mrs Lampton doesn't know what love is, so she's sendin' Fergie away." Cissie points to Cassidy and Mrs Polly: "They know what love is." Cassidy would let Fergie off if he had the chance, wouldn't he? Cassidy nods silently. Mrs Lampton desperately says: „Stop!"

But Cissie won't stop even if the building falls. She says to Mrs Lampton: "It's you that's sendin' him away 'cause your skin is just stretched over your bones, it ain't full of blood that burns." Like Cissie's blood is burning, like Cassidy's is, like Mrs Polly's is. "It's them two that loves each other." Cissie seen it. "Mrs Polly cries an' covers up her face with her hands. She won't say nothin'. She's afraid 'cause she's a lady. But I ain't a lady. That's why I locked you in here when I seen my chance, not so's to save Fergie it ain't Fergie, it's her. I locked you in so's to stand here an' tell you that she's stuck on him an' him on her."

Mrs Lampton screams in terror: "For God's sake, let me out of here."

There is a violent knocking on the door. Morley's. Cassidy tells him to get the door open or knock it down. Morley says: "There's the Devil to pay." Cissie takes one key out of her bosom.

She threw away the others but saved this one. She opens the door and tells Mrs Lampton: "You wanted to go away, now go away." Mrs Lampton dabs at her eyes with a handkerchief and asks Morley to see her to her car. She is not going to any trial. Morley is upset but accompanies her. Cassidy strides out.

Cissie says she's done it. Mrs Polly says Fergie'll be sent to prison anyway. In perplexity, Cissie looks at Mrs Polly, then leaves quietly. Mrs Polly sits for a moment as immovable as a stone image. Then she smiles happily.

Morley returns to ask: "What happened? Mrs Lampton looked like a ghost. She told me it was all over, her and Cassidy. What happened?" Mrs Polly says: "Somebody told the truth."²⁸ Morley is angry at Cissie, "that little Bowery sucker," whose "tongue stuck a long ways outa her face." If that kid has been handin' out any rough talk to Mrs Lampton... Mrs Lampton is Morley's idea of a fine woman, brains an' looks. He likes her fine. She asked him to come around and call.

Cassidy returns to announce Fergie's been released. Cassidy asked the judge to dismiss the case after speaking to Fergie, who promised he'd go straight and report to him regularly. Morley says he's absolutely through. He says Cassidy's gone crazy. He marches out angrily.

Cassidy tells Mrs Polly he's been such a fool about Mrs Lampton, about his status, about his job. Mrs Polly ways: "We all been fools. I guess it's humanlike to be a fool."

Fergie and Cissie appear in the doorway and hear Mrs Polly say to Cassidy: "I told you I was more like a mother than a cop." Fergie and Cissie watch Cassidy seize Mrs Polly in his arms. And Cissie looks on triumphantly as the curtain descends on "*Humanlike*".

28) This is one of Lawson's most important themes in almost all his early plays, *Atmosphere* (1914), *Souls* (1915), *The Mad Moon* (1916), *The Spice of Life* (1916), *Roger Bloomer* (1920 version).