

DON'T DARKEN MY DOOR

1-Act "Mellerdrama"

*Updated by Susan Shore
from the original by Harry Githens*

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The purpose of this stunt is to burlesque an amateur performance, making the mistakes as absurd as possible, and clearly enough so the audience will get the point of each. Memorizing speaking parts is necessary to a degree, but this should not be difficult, since the dialogue is largely questions and answers. When prompting is necessary it should be made a noticeable feature of the stunt, as suggested by one or two illustrations in the script. A copy of the script is placed upon a table and when lines are forgotten, the actor noticeably refers to it.

Characters include the director, a stagehand, a pianist or small orchestra, and the four actors. Stage settings should be just sufficient to indicate the location of the dialogue.

DIRECTOR: Ladies and gentlemen, members of the (name organization) present for your entertainment, that soul-stirring mellerdrama entitled, "Don't Darken My Door." Please note that all mistakes are really a part of our show. We present:

(Name): as **AMOS HOLLISTER**, a farmer.

(Name): as **JUDITH**, his wife.

(Name): as **MATILDA**, their daughter.

(Name): as **ROGER CAMERON**, the reason for this story..

Our story opens in the living room of the Hollister home at 10:30 on a night in May. (*HE goes behind scenes and a bell rings, followed by a pause and then the bell again. He peers from behind curtain and speaks to MUSICIANS.*) We're ready for the overture. Didn't you hear the signal? (*More MUSIC, then silence. DIRECTOR'S head appears again.*) Give 'em another. (*Names actor impersonating ROGER.*) ain't quite made up yet. (*More MUSIC, and before it is finished the FOOTLIGHTS flash on, the CURTAIN rises or opens part-way, then sticks. Offstage.*) Hey, Bill, raise that curtain.

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STAGEHAND: *(Offstage.)* It's stuck. *(HE comes out, pretends to fix it, and it finally rises. Dialogue of actors begins.)*

AMOS: If Mattie isn't here in fifteen minutes, I'll hitch up old Nell to the wagon and drive to the church and get her.

JUDITH: I wouldn't humiliate her that way - a girl of twenty. The League socials often hold until eleven o'clock.

AMOS: Well, I don't care to have my daughter out so late.

JUDITH: *(Looking off.)* I think she's coming now, I hear a car.

AMOS: A car! You know they haven't been invented yet! You mean you hear voices. *(There is a long, silent pause then -)*

DIRECTOR: *(Offstage.)* Hey, Bill, the house lights are still on. *(All stage LIGHTS go off.)* No, no, no! The house lights. *(House LIGHTS go off, leaving everything dark.)* Put those stage lights on again. *(House LIGHTS come on while stage remains dark. DIRECTOR rushes out and when half-way across stage, the LIGHTS go on. Director exits, ACTORS continue.)*

AMOS: Let's see, where were we?

JUDITH: In the dark, for a moment.

(MATTIE and ROGER enter.)

AMOS: It's about time you got here. Did you come straight from the church?

MATTIE: No, father, we drove out to Bishop's mill and back.

AMOS: Roger Cameron, I don't want you to come to see my daughter any more or to bring her home from places. You're not her kind. You don't belong to the church, you smoke cigars, and I'm told that you drink beer. I won't have my girl associating with such a man. So don't darken my door again.

ROGER: Very well, Mr. Hollister; but one of these days I'll make you admit that your accusations are false. Furthermore, it may amaze you to hear that Mattie has promised to marry me and if you think that you can

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ROGER: (*Cont'd.*) come between us (*AMOS stands between THEM.*) and spoil our happiness, you don't know either of us. Good-night, sweetheart. (*HE leaves.*)

AMOS: (*Turning.*) Mattie, is it true, you are engaged to Roger?

MATTIE: I suppose so. I told him that I would marry him - sometime.

AMOS: (*Sternly.*) What do you mean by sometime?

MATTIE: When it may be pleasanter for him to come into our family; when you know him better, perhaps.

AMOS: I know him well enough now. He's a flighty business man. He ... he ... you ... (*To the DIRECTOR, offstage.*) Give me my line.

DIRECTOR: I've ... I've lost the place!

AMOS: I've lost the place ... No! He ... he ... What in Sam Hill comes next?

DIRECTOR: "Your future happiness is at stake ..."

AMOS: Huh? ... MY future happiness ... Sure! I know THAT! Oh, yeah! I get it now! (*To MATTIE.*) Your future happiness is at stake and it's my business to safeguard it. (*Shakes finger at HER.*) Now listen, my girl, and mark me well. You will never marry Roger Cameron with my consent, and if you marry him without it, you will cease to be my daughter. (*Dramatic MUSIC.*) I shall treat you as a stranger and cut off your inheritance. Now, go to your room! (*MATTIE smiles sneeringly as she turns to go.*)

CURTAIN and MUSIC

DIRECTOR: A week passes and we find Amos and Judith Hollister in conversation again. (*CURTAIN rises on preceding setting.*)

AMOS: Where's Mattie, mother?

JUDITH: She'll not be back, Amos. By this time she is Roger Cameron's wife.

AMOS: (*Puts hand to HIS head and stares at HER.*) You knew she was going?

JUDITH: Yes.

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AMOS: And you did nothing?

JUDITH: What was there to do? It was bad enough for her to be married at the parsonage, and only the legal witnesses present ... as if she hadn't a home or a relative in the world. I... you ... she ... oh, dear, what do I say now? (*Stage LIGHTS go out.*) Oh, yes, would you have forced her to run away at night? (*LIGHTS on.*)

AMOS: No, you couldn't have stopped her. She's the kind that can't be stopped. Well, she has made her bed, so now she will have to lie upon it.

JUDITH: (*Sharply.*) And you've made yours, and a hard one you'll find it, I predict. She doesn't expect to be forgiven. She knows that you, for all your boasted Christian affiliations, never forgave anyone who opposed you. She ... you ... I ... (*Takes play copy from table and looks for her lines.*) But I warn you that you have at last met your match. You love her ... you love her ... you love her as you love nothing else in this world, and through your love she will break you.

(*Someone from orchestra or audience throws a twisted roll of paper at AMOS.*)

AMOS: (*Pacing floor.*) This is the most cruel wound that life could deal me. But I will bear it like a man. And may God have pity on her, too, for Cameron will bring her to sorrow.

JUDITH: (*Taking a sly peek at HER copy.*) Why don't you have pity on her?

AMOS: I did - do; but I passed my word. I cannot - I will not - compromise with wrong. I played with her in childhood and taught her to love truth and purity. (*Bawls.*) And now she has flung me aside for a pretty boy. Like a viper that a man has warmed back to life in his bosom, she - she -

DIRECTOR: (*Offstage.*) "She has stung me."

AMOS: Oh, yes ... she has stung me. (*Another missile hits HIM.*) Ouch!

JUDITH: Oh, (*Speaks HIS real name.*) I mean, Amos, take back those cruel words.

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AMOS: Cruel but true - cruel but true. And now, Judith, once and for all, let us have an understanding. You, as well as I, will suffer - will suffer. Go to see the girl when you please, but, remember - remember she is never to darken my door again. I wish - I wish - I wish this play was finished! No, that's wrong. What DO I say?

DIRECTOR: "I wish never to hear you speak - "

AMOS: *(To DIRECTOR.)* But I gotta finish this act - *(JUDITH sneaks a glance at her book and whispers his lines to HIM.)* Oh, yeah; I wish never to hear you speak her name again. *(Pause.)*

JUDITH: *(Prompts HIM again in whisper.)* "I shall try to forget -"

AMOS: That's what I AM doing - forgetting! Oh, yeah - I shall try to forget her. For me there is no other way out - except this door. *(Dashes off as JUDITH sinks into a chair and weeps convulsively.)*

CURTAIN and MUSIC

DIRECTOR: More than six months pass and the merchandising business of Roger Cameron is about to fail because Amos Hollister bought an interest in the firm of Roger's competitor and greatly improved their establishment. We return to the Hollister home.

(AMOS and JUDITH are reading. A KNOCK is heard.)

AMOS: Come in, please. *(ROGER enters, removes hat and wipes his brow. AMOS jumps up.)*

ROGER: Good evening, mother. *(Clears HIS throat.)* Mr. Hollister, I suppose you are surprised to see me, but I am on the brink of ruin. I can't borrow any money at the bank, yet a thousand dollars would tide me over this crisis, - this crisis - this crisis...oh, yes, I have come, I have come - -

AMOS: We know that, but what have you come for?

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ROGER: Oh, yes; I have come to ask you for that amount -
- a thousand dollars. For it, I will mortgage my little farm.

AMOS: Is that all you have to say?

ROGER: I'd like to say more, but I dassn't.

AMOS: (*Chuckling.*) Then consider the interview at an end.
You can't have a dollar of mine. Don't come again. Don't
you remember I told you not to darken my door again?

ROGER: Well, I thought that by coming at night you
wouldn't see my shadow. (*Exits.*)

CURTAIN and MUSIC

DIRECTOR: Another six months have passed, during which
Roger has closed his store and moved with Mattie to a
shack in the country. One afternoon Mrs. Hollister goes to
call on her daughter.

(*Furniture of the room very meager. JUDITH stands beside
a table taking provisions from a basket - a loaf of bread,
jellies, vegetables, microwave dinners - and places them
upon the table. MATTIE sits at opposite end of table,
sewing. On a chair beside her is a large basket-cradle.*)

MATTIE: (*Looking up.*) Thank you for the food, mother.
Without it we would go hungry. But why do you keep
bringing microwave dinners? You know microwave ovens
haven't been invented yet.

JUDITH: (*Putting dinners back into basket.*) I keep
forgetting. (*Changing the subject.*) Roger should have
known that Amos would never help him.

MATTIE: Yes; if he had told me I might have saved him that
humiliation. I would have told him that he could more
easily melt granite than father's heart.

JUDITH: Perhaps some day things will be better. (*ROGER
enters.*)

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