

TOM'S HUSBAND

Aadapted by Jolene Goldenthal

***from the story
by Sarah Orne Jewett***

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STORY OF THE PLAY

It is New England a century ago during the time of the industrial revolution. Newlyweds Tom and Mary discover that house-keeping is not Mary's forte. Mary proposes to start up and run the family textile mill that has fallen into disrepair after Tom's father died. Tom, a self-proclaimed modern man, agrees to the unusual (for its time) division of labor and takes over the household. Mary, with the help of Mr. Jackson, a trusted employee of Tom's father, is soon in her element as an entrepreneur. The mill prospers, taking all of Mary's time and energy; Tom braves village gossips and manages a series of housekeepers. But he becomes increasingly bored and frustrated. When he complains, Mary suggests that he perhaps needs to find some meaningful activity for himself.

A delightful comedy of manners, this adaptation of a Sara Orne Jewett story written over a hundred years ago, is a prescient and humorous look at the tensions in contemporary marriage relationships.

Running Time: 30 minutes

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 m, 7 w, doubling possible)

TOM WILSON: Educated New Englander.

MARY WILSON: Similar background.

SUSAN*: Housemaid.

MR. JACKSON: Factory clerk.

ALICE ASHTON*: Tom's sister.

MRS. HALL: Village gossip.

MRS. DUNN: Gossip.

ANNIE*: Housemaid.

CHARLOTTE*: Mary's schoolmate.

* These roles can be doubled.

TIME: 1880s.

PLACE: A town in New England.

NOTES TO THE DIRECTOR

The play is a comedy and should be played with style and humor. A light, bright musical theme is suggested, using music of the period if possible.

The **Set** consists of a dining table, two chairs and a sideboard UC; and a sofa with a side table SL. A small working desk SR represents Mary's office in the factory. All other indoor and outdoor scenes play in the open area DC.

Costumes should be period - a dark suit for Tom; long skirts and blouses for Mary and the other ladies; pants, work shirt and leather apron for Jackson; maid's uniforms with aprons for Susan and Annie.

Props as needed – keeping them minimal will work best.

Letters

Table setting, including napkins

Dinner bell

Silver coffee service

Ledgers, papers, ink blotter, pencils

Sheet of paper (Mr. Jackson)

Two parasols

Book

Newspaper

Covered silver serving platter

TOM'S HUSBAND

(AT RISE: MUSIC. LIGHTS up DS on TOM, addressing the audience. MARY is seated at a dining table UC, in a freeze tableau.)

TOM: I consider myself a modern man. After all, this is 1882. But when my charming wife first suggested the idea, I can tell you I was astonished. We were at dinner that evening when Mary ...

(TOM joins MARY at the dining table, sitting across from her. She unfreezes. Tom dabs his mouth and puts the napkin on the table.)

TOM: Well, my dear. A very nice dinner.

MARY: *(Laughing.)* Oh, Tom! It is not! It is really quite dreadful!

TOM: Not that bad.

MARY: I don't believe I keep this house half as well as you did before we were married.

TOM: I must agree with you. If I'm honest.

MARY: I never know what to plan for breakfast. And I probably shouldn't tell you ... but I don't mind the sight of dust one bit.

TOM: I know, my dear. I know.

MARY: Can't you simply manage to look the other way?

TOM: I shall look only at you.

MARY: Lovely. *(A sigh.)* I look upon housekeeping as my life's great discipline.

TOM: I've a good mind to take it off your hands, Mary. I always rather liked it, to tell the truth.

MARY: You are very welcome to it. *(Pause.)* Oh, Tom! I forgot to tell you. There is a letter ... from Nagasaki. *(SHE hands TOM a letter.)*

TOM: Sister Alice. What complaints this time?

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(ALICE appears in a SPOTLIGHT DR. She speaks as TOM reads the letter.)

ALICE: Dear brother Tom. (*Reproachful.*) I am writing to tell you how surprised we are here to learn from your last letter that the income from Father's estate has grown so small. Since so much of our money is invested in the mill, I am sorry that you seem to have no idea of putting in a proper person as superintendent and opening it once again. Living as we do here, on a Navy captain's pay, is very expensive, Tom. We are obliged to entertain a great deal. You must know that it costs us much more to live than it does you. And you ought to think of our interests. Your loving sister, Alice. (*SHE exits.*)

TOM: Well! That is a famous letter! I am afraid the captain has been growling over his pay. Or they have been giving too many little dinners on board ship.

MARY: Perhaps that's it.

TOM: Now if only we were rid of the responsibility for the mill, you and I might go out to Japan this winter.

MARY: But what will you do about the mill?

TOM: I don't honestly know. I don't think it's safe just now to put money into it. I don't know anything about the business myself. And on top of that ... (*HE rings a small dinner bell.*) On top of that, who will work there?

SUSAN: (*Entering UL.*) Yes, sir? Missus?

TOM: Susan, we'll have our coffee in here please.

SUSAN: I'll get it now, sir. (*SHE exits.*)

MARY: Oh, you see? I forgot again! I was so interested in what you were saying about the mill ...

TOM: I think the day is past for people who live in this part of the country to go into the factory again to work.

MARY: Well, I don't know. There are still a good many of the old employees living in the village ...

TOM: (*Teasing.*) I'll put you in for superintendent, if you like.

MARY: Don't laugh at me, Tom. I should like nothing in the world as much as to be the head of a large business.

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TOM: I suppose the best thing we can do is to sell the place.

MARY: Is that what you'd like?

TOM: Alice seems to think that all we have to do is to re-open the mill. I'm sure she imagines that the minute it is going again we shall be making money hand over fist, as Father did when we were children.

MARY: When I was a child, I used to follow my father around his factory after school. He liked to call me his right-hand man. Perhaps I'm too independent for a wife ...

TOM: I admire that independence.

MARY: Tom ... I ... I want to propose something to you.

TOM: Go right ahead.

MARY: I wish you would really do as you said and take all the home affairs under your care and let me start the mill.

TOM: Will you please say that again?

MARY: I don't see why it isn't sensible. You will be living exactly as you were before you were married. And since it was a good thing then for you to know something about housekeeping, I can't imagine why you shouldn't go on with it, since it makes me miserable and I am wasting a fine business talent while I do it.

TOM: Well. You want to start the mill up by yourself?

MARY: Yes. I do.

TOM: Do you know there are a thousand things about it that you don't know?

MARY: I can learn. I can learn as well as you and perhaps a good deal better. You forget, Tom. I like business and you don't.

TOM: True enough.

MARY: I can get people to teach me.

TOM: It's a very chancy venture in these times.

MARY: I'll bear the cost of starting up myself.

TOM: Do you have any idea how expensive that could be?

MARY: I think I have enough money. Or I can borrow it. And if I have not put affairs in the right by the end of one year, I will stop and you can make some other arrangement.

End of Freeview

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