



AN I. O. U.

By Margaret Sutton Briscoe.

Dramatis Personæ: MR. ATWOOD and ALINE, his ward.

Time: A first of April morning.

ACT I.

The curtain rises on a lawyer's office, the walls lined with sad-colored books, the shelves tipped with dark-green leather and brass-headed tacks, once bright, but now succumbing to the prevailing neutral tint. The heavy mahogany chairs are covered with the same dark leather. The green-felt top of the desk at which MR. ATWOOD is discovered sitting is black where the ink-spots are new, rusty where they are old, and half-covered by papers and pamphlets. The April sunshine sifts in through an open window at the left of the desk, and falls on a deep chair placed there. A door at the back of the room opens softly.

Enter ALINE, dressed as a school-girl. She moves timidly across the floor and pauses before the desk.

Aline. I knew you would not be very angry with me. Are you?

Mr. Atwood (looking up with a start and dropping his pen). Aline!

Aline (tremulously). Are you very angry?

Mr. Atwood (thrusting back his chair and rising). Angry, my dear child! No. *(He moves to her side, taking her hand in both of his.)* But why did you not send for me to come to you? And we must not leave Madame Armand outside in this fashion. *(He walks toward the door as he speaks.)*

Aline (hurriedly). You needn't look for her. She's not there I—I have run away.

Mr. Atwood (turning sharply, his hand still on the lock). What!

Aline (faintly). I have run away.

Mr. Atwood (opening the door, throws a hasty direction into the outer room). Admit no one. Engaged on important business. No one—you understand. *(ALINE stands alone by the desk. She shrinks back as MR. ATWOOD closes the door and approaches her.)*

Mr. Atwood (reassuringly). What is it, my child? What has happened?

Aline (gaspingly). Nothing.

Mr. Atwood. You must not be afraid to tell me. I am not angry, my dear.

Aline (raising her hand to her throat and compressing it slightly). I wouldn't speak to me in that way, if I were you.

Mr. Atwood. I did not mean to be stern.

Aline. I didn't think you were. I meant that if you speak to me so kindly I shall cry, and I don't want to. *(MR. ATWOOD draws her hand from her throat and holds it in his, stroking it soothingly.)*

Mr. Atwood (smiling). Shall I scold you then? If nothing has happened, I am afraid that is your guardian's duty.

Aline (glancing up quickly). If you scold me, I shall surely cry.

Mr. Atwood. Then I had better say nothing about it just now. How did you find your way to my office?

Aline. I knew your address, and I came in a cab.

Mr. Atwood. Alone!

Aline. Why not?

Mr. Atwood (anxiously). My child, that must not happen again. Send for me and I will come to you at any hour of the day or night. You know that.

Aline. I did not think you would mind the cab. I was not afraid.

Mr. Atwood. But I am. Tell me, what will Madame Armand say when she knows that you have run away from her to your stern guardian?

Aline. You are not stern.

Mr. Atwood. Ah, you do not know me. I am going to be very stern now.

Aline (with a quick glance). You couldn't: *(She smiles.)*

Mr. Atwood (smiling also and shaking his head). No, I'm afraid you are right. But you have not yet told me what Madame Armand is going to say to this escapade?

Aline. Nothing—she won't know. I slipped away so cleverly.

Mr. Atwood (cautiously). Then you did not mean to run away for good?

Aline (laughing). Oh, no; did you think so? I only wanted to see you quite alone. I had something to say to you.

Mr. Atwood (with a breath of relief). Ah! Shall you be afraid when you go back to Madame Armand, if she should find you out, Aline?

Aline. No—o. But she won't.

Mr. Atwood. I am afraid we shall have to take her into our confidence, my child.

Aline. You are not going to tell her of me?

Mr. Atwood. I am going to take you back to her myself. But she shall say nothing to you. I promise you that. I will come to the school to-night, and you shall then see me entirely alone, and tell me all you want; but I must take you back to Madame Armand—and at once, Aline!

Aline. You are going to drive me away?

Mr. Atwood. I am going to drive you away in a carriage, with myself on the seat beside you—that's all.

Aline (passionately withdrawing from him). If you send me away now, I will never come back to you. I am not a baby. I won't be taken home by my hand, and have my nurse told not to scold me. I am going away alone. *(As she reaches the door Mr. Atwood follows and detains her.)*

Mr. Atwood (gravely). Stay, Aline. I will listen now, my dear. *(She resists*

for a moment, but is conquered by a flood of excited tears. Mr. Atwood leads her to the arm-chair by the window.)

Mr. Atwood. Sit here and rest, first.

Aline (rubbing her eyes with her hands childishly). May I take off my h-hat?

Mr. Atwood. Of course you may. See, here is my chair close by yours, and here am I in it. Now, what is it? *(He unties her ribbons, lays the hat on the floor, and seats himself in a chair near ALINE.)*

Aline (still brokenly). I want to know what you are going to do with me?

Mr. Atwood. Do with you?

Aline. Yes; you are not going to do what Madame Armand says, are you?

Mr. Atwood. What does she say?

Aline (indignantly). That I am to spend next winter with her, and that she is to take me out into what she calls "de world"—and that you said so.

Mr. Atwood (frowning slightly). Madame Armand should have let me tell you my plans. Why do you object, Aline?

Aline. Then you did say it.

Mr. Atwood. Madame Armand knows the world and could show it to you very well and pleasantly. She has done so with many other girls. And you like her, do you not? I thought so.

Aline. I have not minded learning from her, but is that to be my home?

Mr. Atwood. It has been your home for many years. You called it that just now yourself.

Aline. She can't even say home in her language. That's not a home. It's only the place where I live.

Mr. Atwood. Doesn't that mean home?

Aline (reproachfully). You know it does not.

Mr. Atwood (smiling). No, not always, I admit. I have no home myself, you know, outside of my club. But I thought you were happy with Madame Armand.

Aline. I was quite willing to go to school to her, but next year will be different. I shall be a woman then, and I did not think I should have to wait longer than that.

Mr. Atwood (perplexed). For what?

Aline. To live with you.

Mr. Atwood. With me, my dear!

Aline. If I had known only Madame Armand, it would have satisfied me, I suppose, but I was seeing you always, and always looking forward to our living together. You surely remember our plans?

Mr. Atwood (after a moment's silence). Tell me them over again, Aline.

Aline (surprised). Why, you used to be saying it over and over again whenever you came to see me. You used to say we should live together in a little house, and that you would never marry, and I should keep the house for you. Surely you have not forgotten!

Mr. Atwood. When and where did we last speak of that, Aline?

Aline. In the garden at Madame's summer home. You were sitting on a bench and you lifted me on your knee, and we even decided on our furniture.

Mr. Atwood (rising and looking out of the window, his back to ALINE). And you never remember my saying this after you grew too old to be perched on my knee?

Aline. No, but I never forgot it. That has always been home to me. Why don't you speak to me? I believe you don't want me.

Mr. Atwood (turning quickly). Dear child, you must never think that. (*He rests his hand on the back of her chair, looking down at her.*) How can I make you understand? You know about as much of the world as the roar of life out there in the street might tell you, and that is all.

Aline (eagerly). You could teach it to me—and far better than Madame Armand.

Mr. Atwood. No, here I have only a tiny corner of life to show you, and see how I stammer and stutter over it. (*He seats himself again by ALINE and covers her hands, which lie in her lap, with his own.*) Tell me, my dear, did you ever see just such a household as you describe? Did you ever hear or read of one? Run over your school-mates' lives—what became of them as they went out from the school?

Aline (sadly). That is not the same thing. They all had a father or a mother to go to, or at least an uncle or an aunt. I have never had anyone but you, and

now I do think you don't want me. (*She tries to withdraw her hands. Mr. Atwood holds them fast.*)

Mr. Atwood (earnestly). Aline, I do want you. What could give me greater happiness than to keep you with me always, and have you care for me, and I for you. I have no home either, you know. Do you suppose I am never lonely? Remember all that, and then realize how hard it must be for me to say no.

Aline (tearfully). Then what makes you say it?

Mr. Atwood (very gently). Think a moment, dear child. I am an old man to you, but the world still calls me young; and you are a child to me, but the world would call you a woman. We are too young and too old, and we cannot possibly stretch out the years between us, try as we might. Do you understand now? Look about your own small world, and you will see that kind of household only belonging to married people.

Aline (sobbing). Then why don't you marry me?

Mr. Atwood (dropping ALINE's hands and rising hastily). My dear child! (*he stands near her hesitatingly, then continues with effort*) I must have done very wrongly, but it was without intention to deceive or play on your feelings. I drew a pathetic picture of a homeless life which does not exist, and of a loneliness which is not mine. I am neither lonely nor unhappy. I am not even uncomfortable, and you must not feel sorry for me, Aline. (*ALINE sobs on, and Mr. Atwood continues, entreatingly.*) Suppose I were to marry you, my dear. Can't you see that I should be doing a very wicked thing?

Aline (brushing away her tears). No, you would not be wicked. If you knew how I hated the thought of being with Madame Armand, you wouldn't say so.

Mr. Atwood (his expression relaxing suddenly into relief and amusement). Child, what an unnecessary scare you gave me. Come, dry your eyes, and we will talk it all over. What a watery little woman it is! See how you have tear-stained your white glove. It is quite wet. Let me pull it off for you. (*He sits down again and draws her glove*

from her hand, finger by finger.) Now we will talk this all out comfortably, and leave nothing to think of afterward. Did you suppose I could be tempted into robbing baby carriages? And what a baby you are, Aline!

Aline (with dignity). I shall be eighteen next autumn.

Mr. Atwood. And I shall be two score in a few years. How would you like being hampered with a gray-haired husband then?

Aline. I should like it dearly.

Mr. Atwood (hastily). You don't know what you would like when you are a woman. Do you know what even my best friends would say? That I had kept a little heiress in a pill-box, and married her before she had a chance to peep out; and it would be quite true.

Aline (impatiently). If having money is only to make me unhappy, I shall give it all to Madame Armand the day I come of age.

Mr. Atwood (gravely). Even then, my child, it would not be honorable for me to marry you.

Aline (reproachfully). And you care more for that than for me.

Mr. Atwood. No, you have been as my own child for so many years that I am afraid, if your happiness and my honor were put in the scales, my honor would kick the beam. But it is your happiness that I am considering now; for I could not make you happy, try as I might.

Aline. Why not?

Mr. Atwood (decidedly). Because you do not love me.

Aline. I do love you.

Mr. Atwood. No, you do not, or you would be less sure of it, and you would not tell me so. You are fond of me as I am of you, but you do not love me, my dear.

Aline. What is the difference?

Mr. Atwood (smiling). You will know some day, and then I will let you marry him.

Aline. How shall I know?

Mr. Atwood. Ah, that was just the order of question I wanted to leave Madame Armand to answer.

Aline. No, tell me yourself.

Mr. Atwood. Well, first of all, you will know without asking, and deny it,

even to yourself. You will stand in the shadow of a needle and fancy yourself concealed. You will be troubled when with him, and miserable when away from him. And then I will give you to him, and not before.

Aline. But I am miserable at the thought of being away from you.

Mr. Atwood. You are miserable at the thought of being with Madame Armand. Tell me the truth, Aline, do you ever miss me after I leave you?

Aline. Indeed I do.

Mr. Atwood. How much, and for how long?

Aline (thoughtfully). I don't have much time between lessons, but I want you to come back soon, and I always cry until the class-bell rings after you go. (Mr. Atwood stoops and kisses her hand with exaggerated gallantry.)

Mr. Atwood. That is good of you, Aline; you miss me more than I thought, my dear. But some day, although your eyes may cry less, your heart will cry more. You won't want him back soon, but at once and forever. And no lesson-books or class-bells on earth will be able to make you forget. Then you will remember your old guardian's words, and laugh at the idea of loving me.

Aline. No; for indeed I do love you.

Mr. Atwood (tenderly). I know you do, and I love you dearly, my child. We are not ashamed to confess our loves, are we? There lies the defect.

Aline. You don't love me, or you wouldn't let me be so unhappy.

Mr. Atwood. You are not to be unhappy.

Aline. I shall be unhappy with Madame Armand.

Mr. Atwood. You are not to be left with Madame Armand.

Aline (radiantly). You mean to keep me yourself, after all.

Mr. Atwood. Practically, since you are foolish enough to want me. I don't see it all quite clearly yet, but do you think you would like to live with my sister?

Aline. With your sister? I thought you said—

Mr. Atwood. I will take a house for you both near my own rooms. She is



"No, we will keep those for the lover to come."—Page 310.

a widow, you know, and, as she is quite as mistaken as yourself regarding me, will do all I wish. You will see me every day, and oftener, perhaps. That will be your own home, and my second home. Will that satisfy you?

Aline (starting to her feet). You are in earnest?

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Mr. Atwood (rising also). In dead earnest.

Aline. I can't—no, I can't believe it.

Mr. Atwood (laughing). Shut your eyes and try hard, and whatever you do, don't cry again. You have been a naughty child and gotten all you cried for. Now be good and thank me pret-

tily. (*ALINE, with a cry of delight, clasps her hands on his arm and lifts her face, offering him her lips. MR. ATWOOD looks at her and hesitates. He lays his finger lightly on her lips.*) No, we will keep those for the lover to come. You are pleased then? You want nothing more? Think now while I am in the melting mood.

Aline (knitting her brows with difficulty). I don't think of anything more that I could want.

Mr. Atwood (quizzically). Not even me?

Aline. You said I should see you.

Mr. Atwood. And you don't want to marry me now?

Aline (shyly). I do, if you want me to. You have been so good.

Mr. Atwood. Aline, confess the truth. Now that you have escaped Madame Armand, you want to throw me over. You never loved me at all.

Aline. It was you who said that. I told you I did.

Mr. Atwood. In the past tense already, I vow! Do you?

Aline (hanging her head). If all that you told me just now is true, then perhaps I don't.

Mr. Atwood (laughing aloud). Very well, then, I shall never ask you to marry me again. I have been refused by a chit of seventeen, on this first day of April.

Aline (looking at him thoughtfully). You have been so good to me. Will you take me home now? (*She moves apart from him and speaks softly, lowering her eyes.*) I shall love you forever for what you did then. But all the same—

Mr. Atwood (looking at her keenly. Aside). Have I said too much? (*Aloud.*) Here is your hat, Aline. (*He lifts her hat from the floor and watches her tie it on. ALINE avoids his eyes. They move to the door, which MR. ATWOOD opens. As he stands aside for her to pass out, ALINE glances back over her shoulder.*)

Aline (mischievously). You must never tell anyone that I offered myself to you, you know.

Mr. Atwood (following her). Aline!

CURTAIN.

ACT II.

SCENE : the Same.

Time : One year later.

Curtain rises on MR. ATWOOD seated at his desk, looking at the calendar he holds in his hand. The date marked is April 1st. He lays down the calendar thoughtfully, draws his paper toward him, dips his pen in the ink, and begins to write. The door at the back of the room opens softly.

Enter ALINE, dressed in walking costume. She crosses the floor on tiptoe, and stands laughing at the other side of the desk.

Aline. How angry are you this time? (*As MR. ATWOOD looks up and attempts to rise, she motions him back.*) Don't move, I am coming to you. (*She rounds the desk and drops in a chair by his side, still laughing and holding out her hand.*) You have not bade me good-morning yet.

Mr. Atwood (holding the hand she offers). Aline, you are incorrigible. How did you get here this time?

Aline. In the same way—a cab. Now, why don't you scold?

Mr. Atwood. Because I cannot, and you know it. This is a flagrant abuse of power. Is my sister in town?

Aline. Oh, no, she is at the seaside, where you left her.

Mr. Atwood (reproachfully). And where I left you.

Aline. I know, I have run away again. I took the early train this morning. I wanted to see you.

Mr. Atwood. I should be more than human to scold now. That was cleverly done, Aline. What do you want? Experience, alas, has taught you that you have only to ask.

Aline. I wanted to see you—

Mr. Atwood. You saw me three days ago.

Aline. I wanted to see you again. Are you busy?

Mr. Atwood. No—as usual, I am at your disposal.

Aline. You were writing when I came in.

Mr. Atwood. Did you expect to find me kicking my heels? No, to tell the truth, if a penny postage stamp had been put on my thoughts, I am afraid you would have received them.

Aline (*opening her purse laughingly, selects a coin which she lays on the table*). A penny for your thoughts, then, as you have put your price on them.

Mr. Atwood (*taking possession of the coin and laughing also*). I will give you an I. O. U. See here. (*He takes up his pen and writes rapidly. ALINE looks over his shoulder.*)

Mr. Atwood (*reads*). "I. O. U. my thoughts, to be delivered in ripe season." Does that answer? (*ALINE takes the paper, folds it, and lays it away in her reticule with mock carefulness.*)

Mr. Atwood (*watching her*). And now what? I am not vain enough to believe that you only wanted to see me. Let me think. You were afraid I would buy your new dining-room table without you, after all. Is that it?

Aline. I told you I didn't care about selecting it.

Mr. Atwood. And I told you I would not buy it without you. I am a creature of habit. The old table is just right. Suppose your new table proved too wide for you to hand my coffee cup across, yourself. I should never dine with you again if you invited me every night. You must go with me and test it.

Aline. Indeed I shall not. What would the cabinet-maker think?

Mr. Atwood. He would think me an old fool, I imagine, and (*pausing and looking at ALINE*) I fear he would be quite right. I must content myself with taking him the measurement, I suppose. But come, Aline, I want you to sit over there in the arm-chair by the window, where you sat the first time you came here, one year ago to-day. I have held it sacred to you since then. (*He leads ALINE to the arm-chair and seats himself near her.*) I sat just here opposite to you, did I not? But then you were my obedient ward—and to-day I am your obedient guardian.

Aline (*lifting her hat from her head and laying it on her knee*). You have not told me that I might take off my hat yet, and you did the time before. (*She passes her hands over her hair.*)

Mr. Atwood (*smiling*). Mark the year's difference! Then you humbly asked my permission. To-day you don't wait for it. Time flies, but we fly also. Are you satisfied with the changes of your year, Aline?

Aline (*using the crown of her hat as a cushion for her bonnet-pins, thrusting them in and out as she talks*). Yes, I am satisfied, but your sister is not satisfied for me.

Mr. Atwood. What displeases her?

Aline. That I am not married.

Mr. Atwood (*quickly*). Did she say that to you?

Aline. Not that exactly, but I know how anxious she is to see me settled. She thinks I am in danger of throwing myself away, you know.

Mr. Atwood. Why?

Aline (*indifferently*). Oh, because I am wealthy and because I am pretty.

Mr. Atwood (*laughing*). You know that you are wealthy, because I could not well keep that from you. But how do you know you are pretty?

Aline (*demurely*). I have been told so.

Mr. Atwood. I never told you so.

Aline (*looking up at him and raising her eyebrows*). You are telling me so now.

Mr. Atwood (*drawing back slightly*). What kind of discipline does this show? You ought to stand in awe of me, Aline.

Aline. I do sometimes. I was horribly afraid of you the night before I left home. I was afraid you would be angry as your sister was.

Mr. Atwood. Was she angry with you—and why?

Aline (*thrusting the pins into her hat and looking down*). Because I couldn't do what she wanted me to—you remember. I was afraid to tell you I had sent him away, because I knew you wanted it so much too; but indeed I had tried my very best.

Mr. Atwood (*leaning toward her*). And you thought I should be angry! That I wanted you to marry!

Aline. But you did, did you not? You kept asking him here and there, and making me go about with him. I didn't want to.

Mr. Atwood. No, Aline, I did not want you to marry him. When you

told me you could not, I was indecently happy to hear it.

Aline. Then why did you feel one way and act another? Of course I misunderstood you.

Mr. Atwood. Can you see no reason?

Aline. I call it very unreasonable.

Mr. Atwood (earnestly). No, he had everything to offer you, strength of body and mind, a real devotion, I think, wealth, position—and youth. I determined that he should have every chance, but as for wishing it—no, *Aline.* (*He rises and moves to the desk, where he unlocks a drawer and takes from it a long white glove which he hands ALINE.*) You left it here on your last visit. Do you remember?

Aline (puzzled and turning the glove over). No—why, yes, I do remember. I searched everywhere for it afterward, and finally threw away the mate. Why did you not give me this before?

Mr. Atwood. I have not given it to you now.

Aline (turning the glove over again, laughs). It may not be wasted after all, as it happens to be a right-hand glove. It will do for my wedding-day. Keep it for me. When I want it I will ask you for it. (*Mr. Atwood takes the glove from her and puts it in his pocket silently.*)

Aline (laughing). How seriously you take it!

Mr. Atwood. I am thinking of a confession I have to make to you. I was going down to the seaside to see you this afternoon.

Aline. But you wrote that you were very busy, and that you couldn't possibly come!

Mr. Atwood. And it was quite true.

Aline. Then how could you?

Mr. Atwood. I can't from that point of view, but I was coming. I wanted to see you.

Aline (mischievously). You saw me three days ago. That was your reply to me.

Mr. Atwood. I wanted to see you again. That was your answer.

Aline. Then you do miss me a little?

Mr. Atwood (smiling). A little.

Aline. Only a little?

Mr. Atwood (taking her two hands in his and raising them to his lips). I have

not paid you that homage since the day when you last sat in this chair. You say that you have wanted me, *Aline.* Multiply that tenfold, and you will know how I was wanting you. I told you I was a creature of habit. Three days ago, when you left town, I turned back again to my old lines of life and it was as if they had never fitted me. I had drifted from them and in revenge they would not have me again. My old haunts were but places revisited. Do you know what I mean? What am I to do? I was coming to ask you.

Aline (touching the reticule at her side). Was that the thought you sold me?

Mr. Atwood. That and something further. Will you present your paper now, *Aline*? I am more than ready to tell my thought.

Aline. Let me tell something first. I was not quite honest when I said I came for nothing. (*She turns her face from him as she continues, speaking softly.*) Last year when I sat in this chair, you told me that if I really cared, I would be so unhappy in a separation that nothing could make me forget—

Mr. Atwood (eagerly). Yes!

Aline (her face still averted). And that I would then learn the difference between—just being fond of someone—and something else.

Mr. Atwood (bending nearer and half circling her with his arm). Go on, *Aline*!

Aline. And that when my eyes cried less than my heart, I would understand.

Mr. Atwood. And now, dear?

Aline (turning to him suddenly and hiding her face against his arm). You told me then that if I cared really, I couldn't say it, and I don't think I can say it at all.

Mr. Atwood. Let me say it for you, *Aline.*

Aline. That was what I came for. When we were separated, then I knew, as you said I would—Will you bring him back to me? (*Mr. Atwood bends over her in silence. As ALINE attempts to rise he gently prevents her by laying his hand on her head. Once his lips touch her hair, and then he releases her and stands beside her. ALINE rising also, glances up at him eagerly. As she clasps*

her hands appealingly on his arm, he looks down at her.)

Mr. Atwood (slowly). Yes, I will bring him back to you.

Aline (anxiously). You are not vexed with me?

Mr. Atwood. No, my child.

Aline. And you will still love me?

Mr. Atwood. Always, Aline. (As she still clings to him he rouses with effort.) All is as it should be. I shall do my part. I will give you to him as I promised, and dance at your wedding, dear. Are you satisfied?

Aline. How good you are to me! (She lifts her face, offering him her lips.)

Mr. Atwood (framing her face in his hands). No, those are not for me, Aline. (As he releases her and turns away, a rap at the door calls him. MR. ATWOOD crosses the room and opens the door to receive a card which is handed in to him. He reads it and then looks at ALINE.

Returning to ALINE's side he speaks steadily.) Aline, someone is waiting to see me in the outer office, someone who can offer you a great deal, my dear—an honorable name, an eager devotion, and the pride of strength and youth. He asks me if I can spare him a few moments. What shall I tell him, dear? Shall I say that I will spare him far more than that—and that it is waiting for him here? (He takes her glove from his pocket and holds it toward her.) Take your glove if that is to be my answer. (As ALINE, with bowed head, holds out her hand, MR. ATWOOD lays the white glove across her palm, and gently opening her reticule, draws out the written form. As he passes the open window on his way from the room he pauses to tear the paper into fragments, fluttering the white scraps out into the air.)

CURTAIN.

