

**PERUSAL SCRIPT**

**THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN**

The Life and Times of L. Frank. Baum

by

**J. D. Newman**



Newport, Maine

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## PRODUCTION NOTES

- The spacing of lines between the sections of the script are not required to have any time pass at all as the dialog should be continuous, unless noted specifically in the script. The separations are for rehearsal purposes, only. The action throughout should remain fluid.
- The greyed sections are optional and can be performed or not performed as time limits may demand. It is the author's wish that they be included, unless a shorter play is desired.
- The individual (Alphabetized) scene headings are not intended to be spoken aloud.
- A large suitcase or small trunk can be used to store and retrieve the necessary props.
- The setting is a Stage. The Hudson Theatre in NYC. A back drop, painted or curtain, could be used.
- The time is 1908.
- Hats may come from the trunk or be placed around the stage, say on several chairs, if desired.

**THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN** The Life and Times of L. Frank Baum. A One-man play by J.D. Newman. 1m. Simple theatre stage with a possible backing drop or curtain and a suitcase, or trunk, full of props and hats. One "Ice Cream Suit" type of costume. 50 minutes to 70 minutes. A one-man play that tells the story of the creation of the Land of Oz and the memorable characters of Dorothy Gale, the Scarecrow, the Tin Man, The Lion and Toto, among others, as originally conceived by author L. Frank Baum. The play also details the personal journey of Baum, a native New Yorker, as he finds his way in the world, receives encouragement from his mother-in-law suffragette Matilda Joslyn Gage, and enjoys commercial success with "The Wonderful Wizard of Oz." **THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN** has toured extensively throughout the country over the last 4 years and is now available for performances by your group. It would make an excellent entry into Virtual/Zoom Theatre, as well as a live show. Just one man and a suitcase of small props and the show is on. **Order # 3300**

**J.D. Newman** — Dr. Newman is a professor of theatre at Utah Valley University and the Director of the Theatre for Youth and Education (TYE) Center, and currently serves as Chair of the Theatre Department. He lives with his family in Sandy City, Utah. Dr. Newman became the first recipient of the Reba R. Robertson Award from the Children's Theatre Foundation of America. At UVU, Dr. Newman has directed such plays as *The Secret Garden*, *Princess Academy*, and *Androcles and the Lion* in the Bastian Theatre. He has also served as the director of the Noorda Theatre Summer Camp and has produced or co-produced touring productions including *A Village Fable*, *The Princess and the Goblin*, *Honk!*, and *Pedro's Magic Shoes*. As a playwright, he has adapted scripts for Newbery medalists including Avi, Paul Fleischman, and Richard Peck. Newman taught and directed at Highland High School for eighteen years, from 1991 to 2010 with a sabbatical to Texas in 1998-99. He served as Artistic Director of the Salt Lake School for the Performing Arts during the 2009-2010 school year. Newman earned his B.F.A. and M.Ed. from the University of Utah, his M.A. from the University of Texas, and his Ph.D. from New York University. With Judy Matetzschk-Campbell, he co-authored *Tell Your Story: The Plays and Playwriting of Sandra Fenichel Asher*, and his book *Playwriting in Schools: Dramatic Navigation* received the 2020 Distinguished Book Award from the American AATE. Dr. Newman chairs the Playwrights In Our Schools Project and served three years on the board of the American Alliance for Theatre and Education. *Sandy and the Weird Sisters*, his first novel, has been followed by 2 sequels, *Sandy and the Dance of Faith* and *Clara and the Mermaids (soon to be published)*. His stand alone young reader's story, *Make-Believe Friends* is also published by Leicester Bay Books.

# THE MAN BEHIND THE CURTAIN

by J. D. Newman

*SETTING: The stage of the Hudson Theater on 44<sup>th</sup> Street in Manhattan, December 31, 1908.*

*AT RISE: The stage is empty, except for a few hats. There may be a gauze curtain that may be manipulated during the show. Frank Baum enters. He may carry a trunk that he may sit on and might pull props from during the performance.*

## *Audience*

Good evening. I'm L. Frank Baum, the Royal Historian of Oz.

You've come to see my stage spectacular that brings the stories of Oz to the stage with motion pictures, music, and actors.

You want to see how motion picture magic lets me step into the silver screen and bring my characters out of their books in full color.

You've come to hear my ten-piece orchestra play their 27 original songs.

You've want to meet Dorothy, the Scarecrow, the Tin Woodman, and the Cowardly Lion as they speak to you here from the stage.

And I want to show you everything behind this curtain... but I can't; my stage spectacular has been cancelled.

I insisted I tell you myself. It's not the ushers' fault. I'm a very good storyteller but I'm a very bad book-keeper.

I wanted to give you one last performance on this New Year's Eve, before the show closes, but the bankers repossessed the films. My son, Frank Junior, is up in the projection booth, but he has nothing to project. I'm glad they didn't repossess him. I could have brought out my actors so you could meet your favorite characters, but the costumers took back their costumes, except for a few of their hats.

*(He produces a stack of bills)*

I should tear up these bills and declare bankruptcy.... but I owe this money to men who believed in my dream and I won't let them down. All I'll have left when I pay off these bills is the suit on my back, a trunkful of books, and a ten-year-old typewriter. And now I'm in your debt as well.

I've ruined your New Year's Eve.

*(He gestures downright)*

Thousands of people are out there in Times Square. You can join them and celebrate the arrival of the year 1909. The New York Times says they're dropping an electric ball down a flag-pole on top of their building. Children, your parents might like that, but you deserve something better.

I've let you down, but you're young! You have hope! You can get back up when you fall! When the

Scarecrow gets flattened, he picks himself up, pats his straw into shape, and faces whatever comes next. When the Woodman lost his arms and legs, he replaced them with tin and kept chopping. When the Lion is frightened, he roars all the louder and never gives into his fears. But how can I keep pressing forward when my hope is crushed time after time?

Dorothy expected to find a great Wizard and she found a great humbug instead. You came to see my Oz books presented on stage and all you find is the writer... but I won't disappoint you!

When I was twelve years old, my favorite author, Charles Dickens, came to my home-town of Syracuse to give a public reading of *A Christmas Carol*. Mr. Dickens was a trained actor. He didn't just read his book, he brought it to life on stage! With my stage show, I wanted to be like Charles Dickens and speak directly to my readers. I can't give you my show, but I can give you my story, the story of how I made my way to *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz*.

### ***Boyhood***

I grew up at Rose Lawn... a small family farm upstate in New York, outside Syracuse. Picture green grass with a rainbow of roses. Along the estate runs the Wooden Plank Road that stretches fifteen miles to the Erie Canal that leads west. As a boy I dream of the marvelous lands that I'll find when I follow that road. Until I grow up, I read books that hold even more magic than roads.

I enjoy a happy childhood but I'm haunted by fears. In every grain-field in the county, a scarecrow stands guard. In my nightmares, a scarecrow comes to life and chases me till I wake up.

Father! Father!

*(He struggles in the curtain as if with his bedcovers.)*

But what scares me more than scarecrows are the men who return from Civil War missing arms and legs. They wear metal limbs as replacements and I fear I might end up like them. They tell us boys that when we grew up, we'll go to war in their place. I worry how much of myself I could lose and still be myself. When I write about the Scarecrow and the Tin Woodman, I change my childhood nightmares into other children's dreams.

### ***Cardiac Arrest***

The Tin Man wanted a strong heart, and so did I. My heart was weakened by rheumatic fever when I was very young. I'm tutored at home and can read and learn as I please. But when I'm twelve years old, the doctor decides I'm well enough to go to school. My father sends me to the Peekskill Military Academy. Father says Peekskill will make a man out of me and cure me of my fanciful imagination.

So I journey down the Wooden Plank Road but rather than going west on the Erie Canal, I go south down Hudson's River to Peekskill. From the dock to the school, there are roads of yellow bricks, brought up the river by the old Dutch ships. I'm miserable at school, marching in straight lines on the field and learning in straight lines in the classroom, so I stare out the windows at that winding brick road that

some day will lead me back home.

I go home for Christmas, and Easter, and summer vacation, but my time at home is over too soon. At the end of the break, I beg Father, “Don’t send me back to that school!”

- Frank, Peekskill Academy will prepare you for any future you can imagine!
- Father, the teachers are heartless and cruel. The boys? They’re about as human as a school of fish! The teachers will slap a boy in the face or beat him with a cane if he violates the slightest rule!
- Be brave, go back, and follow their rules.
- I don’t mind following reasonable rules, but the academy’s rules are senseless!
- Son, don’t be a coward! Will you go back, or will you disgrace our family name?

I go back. Like a lion, I act like I’m never afraid, but I am. For Father’s sake, I try my best to obey, but a school like that is no place for a dreamer like me. They won’t even let me write with my left hand — a teacher slaps it with a yardstick if I try — so I learn to scribble with my right. I act as if I’m like everyone else, but I’m not.

One afternoon in class, I stare out the window at a bird singing in a tree. The teacher spots me and starts beating me with his cane. I clutch at my heart and faint to the floor. That ends my career at Peekskill and sends me down that yellow brick road for good.

The school doctor said it was a heart attack. My father asks if it was real or if I pretended like an actor. Either way, I’m free!

### *TraDe*

Since I won’t be going back to school, I need to learn a trade to support myself, but what can I do that I’ll find satisfying and will earn me a decent living?

One day in town, I pass a printer’s shop. Every time the door swings open, I smell the sweet odor of ink and fresh cut paper. I’m hooked!

My father buys me a foot-treadle press, some fonts of type, and enough ink and paper to get me started. I produce a monthly newspaper with my younger brother Harry. We call it “The Rose Lawn Home Journal” and share it with family and friends. My sister writes the poems and my brother and I write the stories and riddles.

What’s a fish without a fin that wears its bones outside its skin? An oyster!

But that’s not all I do with my press. I help my father raise his prize-winning Hamburg chickens, and I print everything I know in *The Book of the Hamburgs*. I love seeing my words in print, even if they’re all about chickens. I want to be a newspaperman! I don’t have the schooling to be a serious writer.

Father pushes me toward more “honorable trades.” He takes me on a tour of the family businesses in the Pennsylvania oil fields. I have no interest in his barrel factory or in his refinery that produces Baum’s Castorine Oil. Then we drop by a theatre that he owns in Gillmor and I find my way onto the stage. The theatre is a profession I could love!

### *Elocution*

I'm determined to become a professional actor! I take elocution lessons from my Aunt Kate, who was a notable actress in her day.

- Friends, Romans, Countryman, lend me your ears, I come to bury Caesar, not to praise him.

Aunt Kate says I have an excellent stage voice; the directors I approach are less impressed. But there's a Shakespeare troupe that comes through Syracuse and their manager sees potential in me. He agrees to make me a member of his company if I'll supply myself with costumes for all the starring roles they might ask me to play:

- But hark what light through yonder window breaks? It is the east and Juliet is the sun!

Father is skeptical, but mother is determined for me to find my calling, so my mother and I convince my father, who insists that I perform under a stage name, lest I cheapen the respected name of Baum. I adopt the stage name George Brooks.

Father has my costumes made by a noted New York costumer. I fill my trunk with the wonderful garments made of silk and velvet with imported lace and real gold trim!

The first role I play is Peter in *Romeo and Juliet*. It's not a large part, a servant, in fact a servant of a servant, but I'm on stage and my future is as bright as New Year's Day!

Romeo complains that his doublet is torn and begs for my assistance.

- Might I borrow yours, just for this evening, until I can have mine resewn?

It would be selfish to say no. And Mercutio laments that he left his hat in the last theatre, so I lend him one of mine. By the end of the week, there's not a member of the company who isn't wearing something from my trunk...

None of my costumes are ever returned and I never play more than a servant. I return to Syracuse with my empty trunk.

### *Fool*

I feel like a straw-headed fool, but my misadventure helps convince my father that I'm serious about making my career in the theatre. After acting in New York City for a year, Father has a small opera house built in Richburg, Pennsylvania for me to run. In his mind, I'm a manager who happens to work in his theatre. In my mind, I'm a theatre artist who happens to work as a manager.

It's hard to get troupes to tour the oil fields, so I organize my own company. We tour a production of Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* and I play the title role!

- To be or not to be; that is the question!

### *Ghost*

One night, we set up in a town hall that doesn't even have a stage. The oil workers bring in some saw-horses and cover them with planks, but they refuse to ruin the boards by nailing them down. In the first act,

Horatio points at the ghost of Hamlet's father and says to me, "Look, my Lord, he comes!" The ghost comes... and steps on the end of a plank that flips up and throws him under the stage. I cry, "Angels and ministers of grace defend us!" The poor ghost... The audience makes us replay the bit five times before they let us continue!

### *Hugh Holcombe*

My audience isn't ready for Shakespeare, but I'm sure they'd love a melodrama. I write and direct a musical drama I call *The Maid of Arran*. I play the lover Hugh Holcomb who comes to Ireland to paint the ruins of the Castle Arran and falls madly in love with Shelia, the brave young lass who would have been Princess of Arran.

- Shelia, let me add you to my painting, for there is nothing in Arran so beautiful. You have the depth of the sea in your eyes, the music of the far-off hills in your voice, and all the brilliance and purity of these summer skies lie mirrored in your soul.

My audience eats it up!

Playing the lover Hugh Holcombe prepares me to play the most important role of my life: the suitor of a brilliant young woman. When I come home to Syracuse for Christmas and New Year's, my sister Hattie invites me to a party at her home so she can introduce me to a student who rooms with our sister at Cornell College.

- Frank, I'm sure you'll love Maud. She has long dark hair and merry mischievous eyes —
- Hattie, I'll be glad to meet her just to please you, but show business doesn't leave me much time to run around with girls. I haven't found one yet I could stay interested in.
- Frank, she's different from the girls you've known. Maud Gage is clever and independent with a mind and will of her own.
- Maud *Gage* did you say? Is she related to—
- She's the daughter of Matilda Joslyn Gage.

Matilda Gage! Our local "suffragette?!" Matilda Josslyn Gage, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony have literally written the book on women's rights. Together they marched up to vice president in front of 100,000 people and presented him with a declaration of the rights of women! They were lucky they weren't shot! Could any man dare to woo the daughter of Matilda Gage?

For my sister's sake, I keep my promise. I drive the buggy up the Wooden Plank Road to Hattie's house.

- Frank, I want you to know Maud Gage. I'm sure you will love her.
- Miss Gage, consider yourself loved.
- Thank you, Mr. Baum. That's a promise. See that you live up to it!

### *Impression*

We talk all evening, starting with the books we've both read. I tell her how I escaped from military school



and she tells me how she deals with the male students who harass her at Cornell. We couldn't be more different: she a learned lady and me an un-schooled actor, but somehow we complete each other. We dance and sing and play the piano, wishing the evening will never end.

Maud makes me feel smart, lovable, and bold. I'll need to be bold if I'm going to impress mother. According to the rules of courtship, the invitation for our second meeting would have to come from Mrs. Gage. Nothing seems more unlikely. But when I return to Syracuse for Easter, Mrs. Gage invites me to call.

Maud must have convinced her, and it couldn't have been easy. I don't offer much as a suitor. I have no diploma, I have a weak heart, and I work as a traveling actor. How can I impress Matilda Gage?

In May, I bring *The Maid of Arran* to the Syracuse Opera House. I'm eager for Maud to see the play I've written and for her mother to see its portrayal of an independent wife. The play receives rave reviews from critics, especially for the stagecraft, which includes a man-o'-war ship on stage. But how will it play for the woman I love, and for her mother? — a man-o'-war of a woman!

After the show, I meet Maud and her mother. Mrs. Gage nods slowly and declares:

- The idea you present in your play that a woman could decide for herself whether or not she'll stay married is an enlightened one. Your play deserves the accolades it receives.

Maud smiles at me and says:

- Mr. Baum, you've lived up to your promise.

### *aJar*

That summer Maud consents to be my wife, but we also need the consent of her mother. I'll need to ask Maud's father Henry for his daughter's hand in marriage, but since Matilda makes all the decisions in the family, we know she's the one we'll have to convince. One evening, I hear Maud and her mother shouting about me behind the panels of their parlor.

*(He may listen at the curtain as he produces the voices he hears.)*

- I will not have my daughter be a darned fool and marry an actor!
- All right, Mother, if that's the way you feel, then goodbye!
- What do you mean goodbye?!
- Well, Mother, you just told me I would be a darned fool to marry an actor. I'm going to marry Frank, so naturally you don't want a darned fool around the house.

I wait for the explosion but instead I hear laughter... and it's coming from Mrs. Gage!

- Maud, I hoped to raise an independent daughter and I succeeded all too well. All right. If you really love Frank and are determined to marry him, you can be married right here in our parlor.

### *Kansas*

Maud and I are married in November in the Gage family home in Fayetteville. Much to her mother's

chagrin, Maud leaves Cornell College and joins me in the road company of *The Maid of Arran*. It's like a four-month honeymoon! We join up with the company in Michigan and tour the Midwest. As we pass through Kansas on the train. Maud looks out the window and declares:

- I don't think much of Kansas as a state; I couldn't be hired to live there!

Dorothy loves Kansas because it's her home. After Dorothy rescues the Scarecrow, he declares:

- I cannot understand why you should wish to leave this beautiful country and go back to the dry, gray place you call Kansas.
- That is because you have no brains. No matter how dreary or gray our homes are, we people of flesh and blood would rather live there than in any other country, be it ever so beautiful!
- If your heads were stuffed with straw, like mine, you would probably all live in the beautiful places, and then Kansas would have no people at all. It is fortunate for Kansas that you have brains.

My colorful life with my theatre company is a dream come true: doing what I like with the woman I love... why would I ever go home?

### *Lubricant*

In March, Maud announces that she is with child... with you, Frank Junior! I hate to give up acting, but I'm thrilled to become a father! I tell Maud, "If I had my way, I'd always have a baby in the house." And Maud says, "If I had my way, I wouldn't."

What an adventure fatherhood is! You can awaken a dozen times each night to soothe your crying child. Or you can walk the floor with your son over your shoulder, and have a friend point out, on reaching the store, a streak of milky substance down the back of your best coat.

I'd like nothing better than to stay at home and coddle my baby, but I have to put bread on the table. Maud and I settle down in Syracuse and the theatre company goes on without us. In order to support my family, I start selling the most boring product ever known to man: Baum's Castorine Oil!

- A petroleum lubricant with the consistency of castor oil, Baum's Castorine is the perfect lubricant for buggy and wagon axles. Live a life free of friction; no more squeaky wheels! Castorine is so smooth it makes horses laugh... imagine what it can do for you!

It doesn't exactly spark my imagination. The Tin Woodman would have made a better oil salesman.

- I was rusted solid like a statue for years, until Dorothy oiled my joints with Baum's Castorine. It made a new man out of me.

It's not my first choice of jobs, but being a salesman helps me imagine what people want to hear. I sell Castorine to every drugstore in the region and Maud takes charge on the home-front. In our home, Maud is in command and I learn not to disobey her orders.

### *Maud CoMMands*

I learn my lesson the hard way. One afternoon, when I pass the local bakery, I can't resist the sweet smell of

Bismarck donuts, so I buy a dozen and bring them home. When I put the sack of Bismarcks on the table, Maud asks:

- Frank, are you dissatisfied with the food that I buy and prepare?
- No, Maud, I like your meals just fine, but I also like Bismarcks for breakfast.

On the first day, I top off Maud's bounteous breakfast with two of the Bismarcks, and on the second day, I have two more. On the third day, when Maud puts the eight remaining Bismarcks on the table, I complain:

- You know, Maud, it looks like the Bismarcks are getting a little bit stale –
- You bought them, so you will have to eat them.

After breakfast, I wrap them in the newspaper and hide them in the cupboard. On the fourth day, the Bismarcks are back on the table. After breakfast, I slip them into the garbage pail. On the fifth day, the Bismarcks are back on the table. After breakfast, I bury them in a corner of the backyard! On the sixth day, the Bismarcks are back on the table. I say:

- Maud, let's stop this nonsense. Those things aren't fit to eat and you know it!
- You bought them without consulting me, so you will have to eat them until they'. I am not going to have food wasted.
- All right, Maud. That's a reasonable rule.
- I'll let you off this one time if you will promise never to buy food again unless I ask you to get it.

And by the seventh day, Maud has created a husband, and we rest.

Maud has to be the disciplinarian in the family. After my military school experiences, I don't have the heart to punish my sons.

Frank, you may have been too young to remember, but there was a time when you managed to fall into pan of wallpaper paste... twice... in the same day! After your mother got you cleaned up, for the second time, she insisted that I spank you. I gave you a few, half-hearted blows and sent you to bed without supper. I felt so guilty that I woke you up, gave you a plate of food, and told you a story till you went back to sleep. Frank, your mother tried to keep you from falling into paste, and your father tried to let you know that we loved you when you did.

Three years after Frank Junior, our second son Rob is born. We move into a bigger house in Syracuse, so I needed to bring home a bigger salary. But the family fortunes suffer more reverses than a melodrama:

My father is thrown from a buggy and never recovers. When *The Maid of Arran* performs at our theatre in Gillmor, the stage catches fire, along with our sets and costumes. Maud fall ill with peritonitis and is bedridden for months. My Uncle John gets sick and leaves the Castorine business in the hands of a manager who manages to gamble away all of our assets. Rose Lawn has to be sold and I have to find a new way to support my family. Our prospects in the east are grim, so we decide to take our chances out west.

*Aberdeen*

I move my family to Aberdeen in the Dakota Territory... hot, shadeless summers, sub-zero winters, and not

a tree in sight, but Aberdeen had seven rail lines, twenty hotels, four restaurants, seven newspapers, nine churches, eight doctors, five music teachers, and thirty-five lawyers, all in a town of six thousand! Aberdeen has raised wooden sidewalks, telephones, electricity, and a small opera house where I could — no, I have to support my family! Two growing sons with my third son, Harry, on the way.

I want to run my own store, but Maud's brother runs the general mercantile. He doesn't mind me opening my own store as long as it doesn't compete with his business. My brother-in-law's slogan is "if we don't have it, you don't need it." How can I not compete with a store like that? As the Wizard of Oz says,

- How can I help being a humbug when people make me do things that everyone knows can't be done?"

Well, since my brother-in-law's store sells everything that people need... my own store sells everything that people *don't* need, and that's a larger market! Sporting goods, outdoor games, baseball equipment, bicycles, photography supplies, stationery, toys, crockery, cheap books, and great literature.

I take out an ad in the local papers to announce the grand opening of Baum's Bazaar. As I explain to the readers, the poem in the ad was created by a new-fangled device called a "poetry grinder."

- "At Baum's Bazaar, you'll find by far the finest goods in town.  
The cheapest too, as you'll find true, if you'll just step around.  
There's glassware neat and new and sweet; their crockery is a wonder.  
There are sets of water cups and saucers at twenty cents and under.  
And then their line is extra fine in goods real Japanese.  
The albums lush go with a rush, the lamps can't fail to please.  
Then the toys for girls and boys are surely..."

As I explain to the readers, at this point, the poetry grinder got stuck, and on taking the machine apart, I found it so full of enthusiasm that I was obliged to send it to one of the old-fashioned stores up town to ooze it out.

I start clubs for amateur photography, lawn tennis, bicycle riding, stamp collecting, and scrapbooking and sell them the necessary accoutrements. Am I selling them worthless merchandise? No, I'm selling them on the story of what their lives could be and what the town could be when it grows up.

Goods don't sell themselves; it's the stories behind the products that make people buy them. I sell grown-ups on the stories of my products and tell some amazing tales to children. You don't make a lot of money selling penny candy, but children are my future customers. The business is so much fun that I forget it's a business.

### ***O (Baseball)***

I spend the summer of 1889 helping to manage Aberdeen's first baseball team in the new South Dakota League: The Hub City Nine. North and South Dakota are going to become states in the fall, and you can't have a state without a baseball league!

I donate the uniforms, knowing that if the sport catches on in town, I'll make it all back and more.

The Hub City Nine are the best players in Dakota, when we can find other teams who can play them. In one

home game against Wahpeton, they run up the score 35 to 8. The fans are more excited when we barely defeat Claremont in what the papers call “the best game ever played in Dakota!”

In Oz, the people work half the time and play half the time. If half my work feels like play, I can be happy. I spend half my time supporting the baseball club and the other half running the store, and I enjoy doing both. I could have been happy for years! What could go wrong in South Dakota?

### *Parched*

Drought. For the second year in a row, the rains don’t come. The fields dry up and so do the customers. No one can pay me for what I let them have on credit. People have no money or time for games.

The time I devoted to supporting the team I should have spent keeping Baum’s Bazaar alive. Christmas sales might save my store, but it’s too little too late.

Baum’s Bazaar closes its doors on New Year’s Eve, 1889. I’m broke on the South Dakota Prairie with a wife and three sons to support. How can I hope the new decade will be any better?

In Oz, the travelers are helped by the Sorceress Glinda, who works out their problems with tools and potions like a scientist. In my life, Maud works out my problems with her financial wizardry. Put business in the hands of the women and men will see a difference!

Maud sells Baum’s Bazaar to my brother-in-law, who restocks the shelves with more sensible goods, and the deal Maud makes leave me with \$100 to start a new business, so I buy a newspaper and rename it the Aberdeen Saturday Pioneer!

### *Quotes*

I collect the news, write the editorials, sell ads to local businesses, buy the boiler plate articles, set the type by hand, and print the weekly edition on an old flatbed press.

You might not think there’s much to write about in Aberdeen, but 1890 is a banner year. South Dakota is writing its state constitution, based on the results of the fall election.

My mother-in-law comes to stay with us. Mother Gage hopes that South Dakota will become the first state to recognize a woman’s right to vote. In my newspaper, I make the case for women’s rights.

“Women are capable not only of becoming voters and politicians but upright, moral, and conscientious politicians. The moment a woman’s hand is felt at the reins of government will begin an era of unparalleled prosperity.”

In writing my editorials, I have to engage my readers without offending them. So I start writing a humor column called “Our Landlady” It features Mrs. Bilkins, an Irish woman who runs a boarding house in Aberdeen. Between dropping her teeth in the soup, losing her hairpins in the mashed potatoes, and popping her buttons into the batter. Mrs. Bilkins speaks her mind on every issue “defecting the citizens of Aberdeen.”

- There’s no end to the sufferin’ right here in our own neighborhood. Why only yesterday I saw a poor

woman from the country beggin' the grocery man to trust her for a pint o' kerosene and he wouldn't let her have it. It made my heart bleed, an' if any o' you boarders had a paid up lately, I'd have 'gin it to her myself.

- They say the great airship is going to be a success after all. If it does, it will ruin the railroads, and serve 'em right, I say. They've beat up the people and tyranixed over them with a rod of iron, and I for one would be glad to see them shut up shop.
- I tell Chief Sitting Bull, "The Whites is afraid of you swoopin' down on us." The chief laughs and says to me, "What have they got that we want? Nothin! But the Indians have land that the Whites would like to have for themselves. So which of us should be concerned about protecting their property?"
- I asked Jake how he fed his six horses in the drought. Jake says "Oh, I put green goggles on my hosses. Then I feed 'em wood shavin's an' they think it's grass."

Mrs. Bilkins shows me how much truth I can tell in the voice of a fictional character. But I don't just write humor columns, I also write serious editorials.

I advocate making Huron the state capital, supporting the Republican ticket, and giving women the right to vote. The voters disagree with me on every issue. Pierre becomes the state capital, the Progressives sweep the state races, and women's suffrage is defeated by a ratio of two to one.

I accept the losses gracefully, but it's clear I'm out of touch with my subscribers. My circulation is half of what it was six months ago.

### ***8 MORE PAGES TO THE END OF THE PLAY***