

*THE WORKMAN'S WIFE*

(1885)

A PLAY IN FIVE ACTS

## CHARACTERS

RISTO, *a workman*  
JOHANNA, *his wife*  
HELKA, *an old Gypsy woman*  
HOMSANTUU, *real name Kerttu, her daughter's daughter*  
HAGERT, *her son*  
ILONA, *Hagert's wife*  
HENRIK GABRIEL,  
ILONA, *their children*  
LEENA-KAISA  
ANNA-MAIJA  
VAPPU, *a market vendor*  
KATRI,  
LAURA,  
LOTTA,  
LIISA, *servants*  
YRJÖ, *a smith*  
TOPPO,  
KUSTAA,  
HEIKKI,  
JANNE, *workmen*  
MRS VÖRSKY  
MR VÖRSKY  
MRS HANHINEN  
FIRST POLICEMAN  
SECOND POLICEMAN  
SELLER OF SONGS  
ONLOOKER  
GENTLEMEN. WEDDING GUESTS. BUYERS AND SELLERS.  
Set in the city of Kuopio.

## ACT 1

*The wedding room of RISTO and JOHANNA. On the right is a door to an adjoining room, on the left is a window. At the back is a door to the hall. Shouts of 'Bring the bride!' The curtain rises. JOHANNA, wearing her wedding dress, stands in front of the window; KATRI and LAURA stand on both sides of her, holding candles. VAPPU stands downstage on the right. Farther at the back: RISTO, YRJÖ, TOPPO, KUSTAA, HEIKKI, JANNE, LOTTA, LIISA, LEENA-KAISA, ANNA-MAIJA and other wedding guests. Cheers are heard from the other side of the window.*

RISTO. What's on your mind, Vappu? Wouldn't it surely be fun to stand over there?

VAPPU. To be the bride?

RISTO. Just so. To be honoured like that. You should follow Johanna's example and get yourself a husband too.

VAPPU. I would pay him no mind.

RISTO. But why not? You must have as many suitors to choose from as there are striped cats to be seen. What makes you hesitate?

VAPPU. There are many forks in the road, many fellows on the way.

RISTO. You're too cautious.

VAPPU. Better safe than sorry.

*Cheers are heard again. JOHANNA nods happily.*

JOHANNA. Do you see the girl over there who has climbed up on the fence on the other side of the street?

KATRI. The one who is standing there in the moonlight and waving her hands so wildly? It's a marvel that she doesn't tumble down head over heels.

JOHANNA. Isn't that Homsantuu?

KATRI. Indeed. That's her.

LAURA. Without a doubt. Now I recognise her too.

LOTTA. That's Homsantuu? Not a chance. Homsantuu hasn't been seen in town for half a year. Why would she have left wherever she's been to rush over here so suddenly?

JOHANNA. That I do not know, but it is indeed her. Dear Katri, send someone to tell her to come in.

KATRI. I'll be. You want Homsantuu invited here? Dressed in rags, the way she probably is?

JOHANNA. Yes, what does it matter? After all, clothes don't make the man.

KATRI. Well, as you wish.

*She goes to the doorway and speaks quietly to HEIKKI, who goes outside. Tea is served.*

LAURA. You'll regret having Homsantuu fetched here. You'll see, she'll behave improperly again, as always.

JOHANNA. Nonsense. Homsantuu is not so wicked when she's treated fairly.

RISTO. How I'd like to hear what the uninvited guests out there are saying about my bride.

YRJÖ. You don't need to hear them to know that they're praising Johanna.

RISTO. And envying me. Yes, yes, Yrjö, aren't you doing that too? They say that you had your eye on Johanna for many years, but I came along and snatched the girl from you in a snap.

YRJÖ. Why go on about it? She had the right to choose whoever she wanted. But I do say this to you, Risto: when you won Johanna, you won the finest of treasures.

RISTO. Well, you're not exaggerating at all. Do you know something? She has six hundred marks in the bank, no lie, and interest on top of that. Wait and I'll show you. I already took custody of the passbook for Johanna's savings. Have a look at this.

KUSTAA. Six hundred it is, damn straight. Oh, fellow. Your life is worth living. I wish I were as happy. Did you hear that, Toppo? That lucky dog got six hundred marks as his wife's dowry. Shouldn't we go courting too?

TOPPO. Like hell we should! There's not enough rich girls for every man. Others have to settle for poor girls or do without. And for my part, I'd rather do without, because then I can live the way I want.

KUSTAA. Don't talk like that. Even if the girl you marry is a poor one, you still get someone to mend your trousers so you don't have to go about with bare knees.

RISTO. Yes, and what is that nonsense, saying that a man won't be allowed to live the way he wants if he takes a missus? An old wives' tale? Put some tobacco in the pipe, men.

KUSTAA. Still, I'd rather have a rich girl too. It's a shame that you can't just pick one from a shelf since they tend to have so many suitors out to catch them. How on earth did you, Risto, bend that Johanna to your will? I sure would like to know.

RISTO. What will you pay me if I tell you?

TOPPO. Don't waste your time making any promises, Kustaa. I'll tell you the trick for free.

RISTO. You? Well, let's hear it.

TOPPO. There's nothing to it, just hoodwink the girls a little. And that's easily done since those poor things hardly know anything about the ways of the world.

JOHANNA. But remember that I told you this: Homsantuu will learn to behave, given time.

LAURA. That wild one? Never. She's such an odd creature. You can't make her stick to her work, not even if you work miracles. One time when she was to help me wash clothes, she decided out of the blue to begin dancing next to the ice hole. I don't know what Gypsy dance that must have been, but I couldn't help laughing at the rascal. Imagine, her skirt was so frozen from the waist down that it hung stiffly around her, but this girl just flew and twirled across the glaze ice like a whirlwind. She'll learn to behave? I bet!

LIISA. Don't say that. Mistress Soininen from Riistavesi praised Homsantuu to the heavens just the other day. Told she had been at their farm all summer and worked like a horse.

JOHANNA. There, you see.

LIISA. But they mocked her anyway, poor girl, especially the young hotheads. You know that sort. They can't bring themselves to stop being spiteful.

KATRI. Maybe she gave them reason to be.

LIISA. In no way. She was so careful that she could barely bring herself to eat properly because, you see, she plans to get married this autumn. She said that she has a groom here in town.

KATRI. Someone must have made a fool of her.

JOHANNA. We don't know that.

KATRI. We do indeed know. Who would marry someone like that?

LAURA. She's a Gypsy too, on top of all the rest.

LIISA. No, she's not. Her father was one of the Väänänen of Tuusniemi.

LAURA. But the mother was of Gypsy blood, and such a scoundrel too, they say. She couldn't even bear to settle down with her husband but ran away, and she would have taken Homsantuu with her if Väänänen's kin hadn't given chase and taken the child away from her. Then those worthless Gypsies did spells that made Väänänen

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drink so horribly that in a few years he lost his farm and all. He drank himself to death, in the end.

JOHANNA. And left his child to wander the earth unprotected. Poor Homsantuu! Perhaps she would have fared better with her mother after all.

RISTO. Don't talk nonsense, Toppo. Never will I ever be afraid of my missus if I want to have a drink. Oh, indeed!

TOPPO. Well, well, we'll see. What can you do when your missus says: the money is mine, you won't spend it as you please.

RISTO. What can I do? Ha, now there's a question. Who controls the fortune, the husband or the wife? Do you know that much about Finnish law, my good fellow?

TOPPO. I do know that the law gives the power to the husband, but all the same, that doesn't seem to stop wives from knowing how to stand up for themselves.

RISTO. I suppose wicked wives have their tools and tricks, but Johanna isn't that kind of woman.

*TOPPO hums mockingly and puts tobacco in his pipe.*

RISTO. Yes, yes, you go ahead and laugh. As though I didn't know Johanna. Soon you'll see whether I really am a man or wear these trousers just for the fun of it. [*Goes to JOHANNA.*] When will they bring those drinks?

JOHANNA. Dear Katri, go and urge them to make haste.

RISTO. They'd better quit dawdling now! Why on earth are they taking so long over there? The men should've been served their spirits ages ago.

*KATRI moves to the right.*

JOHANNA. What do you think, Risto? The beginning of our life together is like the dawning of a spring day, isn't it?

RISTO. Is that what it feels like to you? Dear Lord, how beautiful you are tonight. It's a delight to look at you. And that dress too is handsome enough for a rich bride. I tell you, it feels good to flaunt my bride.

JOHANNA. As long as you're pleased with me, I don't care about the rest. And you are, aren't you, Risto?

RISTO. Well, that's for sure. You don't even need to ask. I feel as fancy as a three-mark horse. Take a guess, how many would like to be in my place tonight? Boys' hearts are feeling sore, you can bet on that. Every single one of them is thinking to himself: damn it, if only I could get myself a rich and beautiful girl like that.

JOHANNA. Never mind them.

RISTO. And that smith! Believe me, he's fit to burst with envy, hide it though he might. Well, they're finally bringing the drinks.

*KATRI sets the tray on the table. RISTO pours drink into the glasses.*

KATRI. What is keeping those girls so busy? Everyone must be happy tonight. It's not every day that a feast like this is celebrated.

LIISA. I hear there will be dancing too. Isn't that right, Johanna?

JOHANNA. You can dance as much as you please. Risto told Janne Hakala to bring the fiddle with him.

LIISA. That's good to hear. I'm so ready for a spin that my toes are already itching. Shall I show you how to dance the old maid? Make a little room. [*Sings under her breath and dances.*]

On the shelf, on the shelf we'll put the old maids,

There on that, there on that witches' mountain,

So that boys, so that boys won't marry them.

LAURA. Stop that capering. Everyone is looking this way.

LIISA [*stops dancing*]. Let them look. What is it to me!



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JOHANNA. Tell me, Liisa, when can you dance if not at a wedding?

LIISA. Do you see, Janne is already taking out his fiddle. Soon the merriment will begin. And the bride will be the first on the floor. You must surely be happy tonight, Johanna.

JOHANNA. At this moment, my happiness knows no bounds. I have never had a day like this in my life.

LIISA. Lucky girl. When will it be my turn?

JOHANNA. When he appears, dear Liisa, the one that God has made for you.

LIISA. Well, who can say? Maybe no one was made for me.

JOHANNA. I'm sure of it. For you just like for others.

RISTO. I drink to your health, good guests. Come and have a taste. Tonight, men, you can drink as much as you want. I guarantee you that we won't run out of spirits. There you go. Go on, all the way to the bottom now. There, like that. We'll soon pour another. No wedding guest of mine will complain that too much time has passed between swigs.

KATRI. If only they wouldn't get too drunk tonight.

JOHANNA. Surely not. Risto will be on guard.

KATRI. If he remembers to do that.

JOHANNA. Of course he will. There's no need to doubt.

LIISA. And even if they did drink a little, what of it? That's when men are the most fun, when they're a little drunk.

VAPPU. You're not stopping to think, Liisa. If you got yourself a drunkard for a husband, I say you'd soon tire of such fun.

LAURA. But it is true that men hardly show any good cheer these days unless they have a bottle with them.

JOHANNA. Even so, that can't be said about everyone. There are still decent men left. Isn't that true, Vappu?

RISTO. Now the glasses are full again. Take yours, men. Drink, and drink deeply, drink until the world is spinning around you, and the noise that's buzzing and roaring in your ears is louder than the cotton factory in Tampere. Then you'll know that you drank to Risto's wedding.

TOPPO. Well said. It's a poor feast when men go home sober.

RISTO. And then we'll begin the polska. Isn't that fiddle of yours in tune already, Janne? Let's hear an air that's fit for dancing. Hey, hey, there! That Janne sure knows how to play. Hurry up, men. Let each take his own and I'll catch my chicken. [*Goes to JOHANNA, hums.*] 'Hush, hush, what a fuss. You and me and the lady's maid, the tailor and the farmer, the drunkard and the miller—'

JOHANNA. Listen, Risto. Let me say a couple of words first.

RISTO. I'll even let you say three. Oh, is that so? Going away from the others so they can't hear us. Well, what on earth is it with you now?

JOHANNA. There won't be any wickedness here tonight, will there? I'm beginning to grow afraid.

RISTO. Wickedness. I'll be damned. Is that what made you look so grave? Such nonsense. What wickedness could we have here?

JOHANNA. The men might have too many swigs and get drunk.

RISTO. Then what? It happens from time to time, especially at a feast like this. There would be nothing too strange about it.

JOHANNA. It would ruin all the joy of our wedding. Dear Risto, will at least you take care?

RISTO. Oh, will I? [*Hums.*] Am I not allowed to get a little drunk at my own wedding?—A man who doesn't have the guts to drink spirits is no man at all, you know.

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JOHANNA. Quiet, quiet, don't talk so loudly. You're joking, Risto, you don't mean what you say. I would have to cover my face in shame if you got drunk.

RISTO. Well, well! It seems as though—Hear me, Johanna, don't you forget what the pastor told us just now.

JOHANNA. What was that?

RISTO. That 'the husband is the head of the wife'.

TOPPO. 'The husband is the head of the wife', just like the cat is the head of the mouse.

KUSTAA. And it's too late for the mouse to squeak when it's halfway to the cat's mouth.

RISTO. True, Kustaa, true, ha ha ha! It's too late for the mouse to squeak when it's halfway to the cat's mouth. Well, Johanna, do we begin now?

JOHANNA [*puts both of her hands in RISTO's hands*]. Let us begin!

*Everyone takes their place to dance the polska. The dance grows ever wilder, the merriment rises to its peak. Then the door opens and HEIKKI drags in HOMSANTUU, who resists him with all her might. The dancing stops; everyone remains in place.*

HOMSANTUU. I don't want to come, do you hear me, I don't want to! Let me go, you devil's dunce, or I'll bite off your fingers!

RISTO. Kerttu! [*Withdraws to the side.*] What on earth will come of this now?

HEIKKI. Behave, behave! Dear Lord, how she rages like a cat in the vicar's well. My, my, what sharp claws she has. The pest!

HOMSANTUU. Will you let me be?

HEIKKI. Don't you hiss when it's no use, you'll have to come here anyway. No chums can help you now. Kustaa, you take her by the other arm.

JOHANNA. No, no, don't bring her in by force.

KUSTAA. It would be the strangest thing if two men couldn't handle this little lassie. [*They hurl her as one to the middle of the floor.*] There! I'll huff and puff like this, said the logger when he banged his head against the timber.

TOPPO. What kind of forest goblin is that?

*All laugh and talk in low voices; the girls move to the left as they whisper. HOMSANTUU stands stiffly, her hands clenched at the waist, as she looks around in a fierce manner.*

JOHANNA. Be welcome, Kerttu!

HOMSANTUU. Now there's going to be clamour in the corners and noise in the nooks.

KUSTAA. Can't you hear, Homsantuu, that the bride is speaking to you?

HOMSANTUU. My name is Kerttu.

JOHANNA. Welcome to our wedding, Kerttu!

HOMSANTUU. Did you have me fetched here to be your laughingstock? [*Hands on her hips.*] Very well! Here I am now. Do your best. Try to get more out of me than the axe gets out of the stone.

TOPPO. Who is that slip of a girl with a hundred patches on her clothing, her teeth bared and eyes bulging?

KUSTAA. Haven't you seen Homsantuu before? All the rest of the world knows her.

HOMSANTUU. I am the very one that you have rushed to lash with your tongues and grind between your teeth. What good has that work of yours gotten you? Tell me, so that I'll get a laugh. You only got a heart full of sin, but you already had plenty of that.

TOPPO. Oh, the devil, that gall! Does a man even dare go near that one or will her mouth spit forth fire, will sparks fly out from under her tongue?