

The Road to Health

CHARACTERS:

Mrs. Jackson (A widow)

Mrs. King (A friend)

Frances (Mrs. King's daughter)

Frank (Mrs. Jackson's son)

Mollie (Mrs. Jackson's daughter)

Miss Brooks (Frank's teacher)

Katie (Mrs. Jackson's daughter)

ACT I

SETTING: A room in Mrs. Jackson's house.

TIME: Afternoon.

(Mrs. Jackson is sewing, and Mollie is lying on sofa, ill.)

MRS. JACKSON: *(Going to sofa.)* Are you feeling better, dear?

MOLLIE: No, not much, Mother.

MRS. JACKSON: Well, I think we better have the doctor, although I don't know how I can pay him.

MOLLIE: *(Crying.)* No, I don't want the doctor.

MRS. JACKSON: Well, don't cry.

(Enter Katie, unobserved, very downcast.)

MRS. JACKSON: Why, Katie, I didn't see you come in. What's the matter, dear?

KATIE: Oh, Mother, my report card; it's so poor. I tried so hard this month, but got only a C in proficiency.

MRS. JACKSON: Dear, dear, dear, are you sure you tried hard?

KATIE: Yes, Mother.

MRS. JACKSON: I wonder where Frank is.

KATIE: Oh, he has a poor card, too.

MRS. JACKSON: How do you know?

KATIE: I know a girl in his class. She told me. Oh, Mother, I nearly forgot! Mollie's teacher called me in today and asked why Mollie isn't in school. She says that if she stays out very much more she can't get promoted. I don't think any of us will be promoted this term. *(Both Katie and Mollie cry.)*

MRS. JACKSON: Dear, dear, dear. *(A knock at the door.)* Come in!

(Enter Mrs. King and Frances.)

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, come in, Mrs. King. *(To Frances,)* How do you do? Sit down. *(Indicating seats for both Mrs. King and Frances.)*

MRS. KING: We are all well, thank you. How are you?

MRS. JACKSON: Not very well; Mollie, as you see, is sick, and I have just had discouraging reports from school. *(To Frances)* How are you getting along, my dear?

FRANCES: Oh, fine, I got A-A-A on my report card today.

MRS. JACKSON: That's good! And you look so well, too. I wish my children looked well.

MOLLIE: I want a drink, Mother.

(Mrs. Jackson starts to get Mollie a drink.)

MRS. KING: Let Frances get it for her, Mrs. Jackson.

(Frances gets glass of water. Mollie pushes it away.)

MOLLIE: I don't want water, I want coffee.

MRS. JACKSON: All right, dear, I'll get it for you.

MRS. KING: Coffee! Surely, Mrs. Jackson, you aren't going to give that child coffee?

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, yes, she always drinks coffee.

MRS. KING: No wonder she's sick! Why, coffee isn't fit for any child to drink. My advice to you is to give her a drink of milk. She ought to have at least a pint a day.

MRS. JACKSON: Milk is so expensive. I don't feel I can afford it. Everything is so expensive. If Frank didn't help me a little by working for Mr. Adams, the grocer, I don't know how I should get along. Besides, my children don't like milk.

FRANCES: I didn't like it very much at first, either, but Mother kept telling me if I wanted to have a big, strong body and a big, strong brain, I must drink milk. Now, I love it and wouldn't give it up for anything.

(Enter Frank, very downcast.)

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, here's Frank. Well, Frank, can't you say "How do you do, Mrs. King?"

FRANK: How do you do, Mrs. King? Hullo, Frances. *(To Mrs. Jackson.)* Mother, I might as well tell you now, I got a bad report from school.

MRS. JACKSON: So Katie told me.

FRANK: And here is something that is still worse: Mr. Adams has turned me off. He says he can't put up with me any longer.

MRS. JACKSON: But, what did you do, Frank?

FRANK: Mother, I can't carry those baskets of groceries. My arm gives out. I have to sit down and rest all the time. Mr. Adams says I am worthless.

MRS. JACKSON: Now, Frank, you could carry those baskets just as well as not. The idea of a big boy like you—

MRS. KING: *(Interrupting.)* Wait a minute, Mrs. Jackson. I think I see what the matter is. All of your children are too thin and pale and weak. I have often wanted to talk to you about it. Now, I am going to do so. Mrs. Jackson, I don't believe you feed your children right.

MRS. JACKSON: Why, Mrs. King, the idea! Certainly, I feed my children right.

MRS. KING: Now, don't be angry. Let's look at this matter in the right way, Mrs. Jackson. Here you have three nice children, yet they are stupid in school.

MOLLIE: I get so tired that I can't study, so I get behind my class.

KATIE: So do I.

MRS. KING: Here's Frank, a boy of 14—too weak to carry a basket of groceries upstairs. Why should the children be stupid? Why should Frank be weaker than other boys? I tell you, Mrs. Jackson, they don't get the right kind of food. Now, I think I can help you if you will let me. It will do no harm anyway. Come now, let's try, will you?

MRS. JACKSON: Perhaps, but I don't think it's that. I am a good mother, Mrs. King, and I wouldn't give my children poor food for anything.

MRS. KING: I know you're a good mother—it's just that you don't know how to feed your family. That's all. Now, let's begin. First, what did the children eat for breakfast this morning?

MRS. JACKSON: Why, we each had a hot roll and some coffee.

MOLLIE: I couldn't eat any rolls; I just drank some coffee.

MRS. KING: Now, Mrs. Jackson, do you know that children have to work and work hard in school? Do you know that anyone who works hard must have good food and enough of it? Children have to work 33 or more hours in school every week. If they don't have enough food for breakfast, and the right kind of food, their bodies can't do the work the teacher wants them to do, and if the body can't work, the brain can't either.

MRS. JACKSON: Well, my children are satisfied with bread and coffee and—

MRS. KING: Mrs. Jackson, excuse me for interrupting you, but do you know just what coffee does to children's bodies?

KATIE: I know, my teacher says coffee has something in it very bad for children. She says it makes them thin and pale and nervous or something.

MRS. KING: Right, Katie. Coffee really is poisonous to some people, and doesn't do one thing to help the body get strong. Now, why not give the children something to make their bodies strong instead of weak? Milk, for instance. Katie and Mollie should each drink at least a pint of milk a day. Frank should have a pint and you should have a cupful yourself. That's about four pints.

MRS. JACKSON: And I only buy a pint a day. I am afraid the children won't drink it and it will be wasted.

MRS. KING: Well, you can put it in the food—in cocoa, for instance, and give them cereal in the morning with milk on it.

MRS. JACKSON: I am afraid the children won't eat cereal.

MRS. KING: Come here, Katie and Frank and Mollie. You love your mother, don't you?

CHILDREN: Sure we do.

MRS. KING: And want to keep her from worry, and make her happy?

CHILDREN: Sure we do.

MRS. KING: Well, then, will you drink a cup of cocoa and eat a saucer of oatmeal every morning and bring a happy smile to your mother's face?

CHILDREN: Sure we will.

MRS. KING: There, Mrs. Jackson, your children are willing. Will you begin tomorrow morning?

MRS. JACKSON: I guess I'll have to answer as my children did and say "Sure I will."

MRS. KING: Will you let me help you get your breakfast tomorrow morning and also buy the things?

MRS. JACKSON: Oh, thank you, Mrs. King. I shall be very glad of your help.

MRS. KING: Suppose we go now and buy some oatmeal, cocoa and brown bread for tomorrow.

MRS. JACKSON: All right—let's all go. Mollie ought to have a little air—she's been in the house all day.

MRS. KING: Yes, indeed. Fresh air and exercise are just as necessary as good food.

(All go out.)

ACT II

SETTING: Mrs. Jackson's dining room.

TIME: Next morning.

(Mrs. King and Mrs. Jackson putting things on the table.)

MRS. JACKSON: It's very kind of you to come in and help me this morning, Mrs. King.

MRS. KING: Oh, that's all right. I am anxious to see how the children act.

MRS. JACKSON: So am I. Come children, breakfast is ready.

(Children come in and sit down at table.)

MOLLIE: I want to sit by Mother, Katie.

KATIE: Oh, all right.

FRANK: Oh, sit down and eat your breakfast. Girls are always quarreling.

MRS. JACKSON: Won't you sit down with us, Mrs. King?

MRS. KING: No thank you, I can only stay for a few minutes.

(Children begin to eat.)

MRS. KING: Mrs. Jackson, I wish you would let me help you get your dinner and your supper today, will you? You have only used up a part of your milk. Perhaps I could show you some way to use milk in food.

MRS. JACKSON: Why, yes, if you can spare the time.

MRS. KING: I think I could tell you just what you ought to have for your meals. We could go marketing together. You know, the body needs certain kinds of food every day.

KATIE: *(Interrupting.)* I know, the cooking teacher tells us we should eat cereals like oatmeal, cornmeal, and rice, bread and butter, eggs, all kinds of fat, and drink milk as well. Other foods like fish, dried beans, peas, and a very little meat, help to vary our diet.

MRS. KING: Yes, and I hope she told you that fruits and vegetables must be eaten every day, in order to help keep the blood right and the body in good condition.

FRANK: Say, Mother, I didn't know oatmeal tasted like this—it's good. Tomorrow morning I'll eat twice as much.

KATIE: I like mine, too.

MOLLIE: I don't like mine very much, but I'll eat it to please Mother.

MRS. JACKSON and MRS. KING: That's a good girl.

FRANK: *(Beginning to eat his bread and drink his cocoa.)* Say, Mother, I think this is a good breakfast.

MRS. JACKSON: I think so, too, son. Now, let's all say "Thank you" to Mrs. King for helping us.

ALL: Thank you, Mrs. King.

MRS. KING: I don't want any thanks; I just want to see you all well and happy. Now, I must go. Goodbye.

ALL: Goodbye.

ACT III

SETTING: A room in Mrs. Jackson's house.

TIME: 3 months later; Afternoon.

(Mrs. Jackson is alone sewing, when there is a knock on the door.)

MRS. JACKSON: Come in.

(Enter Miss Brooks)

MISS BROOKS: Is this Mrs. Jackson?

MRS. JACKSON: Yes, it is.

MISS BROOKS: Well, I am Miss Brooks, Frank's teacher.

MRS. JACKSON: How do you do, Miss Brooks? Won't you sit down?

MISS BROOKS: Thank you. *(Sits down.)* I was passing your house and thought I would come in to see you.

MRS. JACKSON: I'm so glad you did. I hope you are not having any trouble with Frank, Miss Brooks.

MISS BROOKS: No—no indeed, Mrs. Jackson. I came to tell you how splendidly he is doing in school. He does his work well and he is so industrious, so different from what he was a few months ago. I felt I must come and tell you how well he is doing. I used to be so worried about him.

MRS. JACKSON: You make me very happy, Miss Brooks, by telling me all this. And yesterday I heard something else that made me happy. I met Mollie's teacher on the street and she says Mollie is getting along beautifully. And last month Katie had such a good report card. *(A knock at the door.)*

MRS. JACKSON: Come in. *(Enter Mrs. King.)* Oh, how do you do, Mrs. King? Come right in. Let me introduce you to Miss Brooks, Frank's teacher.

(Mrs. King and Miss Brooks shake hands and say, "How do you do?")

MISS BROOKS: I have just been telling Mrs. Jackson how well her son is doing in school, and I was just going to ask her what has caused the change in him. Why, he is a different boy.

MRS. JACKSON: Miss Brooks, I am very glad, indeed, to tell you what has caused my children to change from weak and sickly children to well and active ones. My dear friend, Mrs. King, is really the one who did it.

MRS. KING: Nonsense, Mrs. Jackson.

MRS. JACKSON: Yes, it was you. You see, Miss Brooks, I was feeding my children very badly. I gave them a great deal of meat and white bread; let them eat too many sweets, and allowed them to drink tea and coffee. My friend here told me if I wanted my children to be well, I must give them plenty of milk, brown bread and cereal. She taught me that children must have plenty of fruits; either dried or fresh, and lots of green vegetables. Every day now, we use three quarts of milk and we all feel better. Why, I feel ten years younger than I did three months ago.

MRS. KING: Yes, and you look better, too.

(Enter Katie, Mollie and Frances talking.)

KATIE: I gained a pound last month. How much did you gain, Frances?

FRANCES: I gained a half a pound as I always do.

CHILDREN: Good afternoon, Miss Brooks, and Mrs. King and Mrs. Jackson.

ALL WOMEN: Good afternoon, children.

MRS. KING: How well Katie and Mollie look. Not much like that day three months ago!

(Enter Frank.)

FRANK: Mother, Mother! I have such good news! Mr. Adams wants me to work for him again after school and on Saturdays. He says he will give me \$5 a week. I have been doing errands for him lately without your knowing it, and he says he never saw such a change in a boy.

ALL: Oh, good, good, good, Frank.

MISS BROOKS: Well, this is a wonderful change.

MISS JACKSON: Yes, and we owe it all to Mrs. King. Come, let's all gather round her and give three cheers.

ALL: Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah!

THE END