All God's Chillun Got Wings, and Welded

by Eugene O'Neill

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ALL GOD’S CHILLUN GOT WINGS and WELDED

BY

EUGENE O’NEILL

Black-and-white emblem showing a stylized globe or circular seal with the letters “B & L” at the top and irregular dark shapes suggesting continents, rendered in a rough, high-contrast, inked style.

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ACT I

ACT ONE SCENE ONE

Scene—A corner in lower New York, at the edge of a colored district. Three narrow streets converge. A triangular building in the rear, red brick, four-storied, its ground floor a grocery. Four-story tenements stretch away down the skyline of the two streets. The fire escapes are crowded with people. In the street leading left, the faces are all white; in the street leading right, all black. It is hot Spring. On the sidewalk are eight children, four boys and four girls. Two of each sex are white, two black. They are playing marbles. One of the black boys is Jim Harris. The little blonde girl, her complexion rose and white, who sits behind his elbow and holds his marbles is Ella Downey. She is eight. They play the game with concentrated attention for a while. People pass, black and white, the Negroes frankly participants in the spirit of Spring, the whites laughing constrainedly, awkward in natural emotion. Their words are lost. One only hears their laughter. It expresses the difference in race. There are street noises—the clattering roar of the Elevated, the puff of its locomotives, the ruminative lazy sound of a horse-car, the hooves of its team clacking on the cobbles. From the street of the whites a high-pitched, nasal tenor sings the chorus of "Only a Bird in a Gilded Cage." On the street of the blacks a Negro strikes up the chorus of: "I Guess I'll Have to Telegraph My Baby." As this singing ends, there is laughter, distinctive in quality, from both streets. Then silence. The light in the street begins to grow brilliant with the glow of the setting sun. The game of marbles goes on.

White Girl—[Tugging at the elbow of her brother.] Come on, Mickey!

Her Brother—[Roughly.] Aw, gwan, youse!

White Girl—Aw right, den. You kin git a lickin' if you wanter. [Gets up to move off.]

Her Brother—Aw, git off de eart'!

White Girl—De old woman'll be madder'n hell!

Her Brother—[Worried now.] I'm comin', ain't I? Hold your horses.

Black Girl—[To a black boy.] Come on, you Joe. We gwine git frailed too, you don't hurry.

Joe—Go long!

Mickey—Bust up de game, huh? I gotta run! [Jumps to his feet.]

Other White Boy—Me, too! [Jumps up.]

Other Black Girl—Lawdy, it's late!

Joe—Me for grub!

Mickey—[To Jim Harris.] You's de winner, Jim Crow. Yeh gotta play tomorrer.

Jim—[Readily.] Sure t'ing, Mick. Come one, come all! [He laughs.]

Other White Boy—Me too! I gotta git back at yuh.

Jim—Aw right, Shorty.

Little Girls—Hurry! Come on, come on! [The six start off together. Then they notice that Jim and Ella are hesitating, standing awkwardly and shyly together. They turn to mock.]

Joe—Look at dat Jim Crow! Land sakes, he got a gal! [He laughs. They all laugh.]

Jim—[Ashamed.] Ne'er mind, you Chocolate!

Mickey—Look at de two softies, will yeh! Mush! Mush! [He and the two other boys take this up.]

Little Girls—[Pointing their fingers at Ella.] Shame! Shame! Everybody knows your name! Painty Face! Painty Face!

Ella—[Hanging her head.] Shut up!

Little White Girl—He's been carrying her books!

Colored Girl—Can't you find nuffin better'n him, Ella? Look at de big feet he got! [She laughs. They all laugh. Jim puts one foot on top of the other, looking at Ella.]

Ella—Mind yer own business, see! [She strides toward them angrily. They jump up

and dance in an ecstasy, screaming and laughing.]

All—Found yeh out! Found yeh out!

Mickey—Mush-head! Jim Crow de Sissy! Stuck on Painty Face!

Joe—Will Painty Face let you hold her doll, boy?

Shorty—Sissy! Softy! [Ella suddenly begins to cry. At this they all howl.]

All—Cry-baby! Cry-baby! Look at her! Painty Face!

Jim—[Suddenly rushing at them, with clenched fists, furiously.] Shut yo' moufs! I kin lick de hull of you! [They all run away, laughing, shouting, and jeering, quite triumphant now that they have made him, too, lose his temper. He comes back to Ella, and stands beside her sheepishly, stepping on one foot after the other. Suddenly he blurts out:] Don't bawl no more. I done chased 'em.

Ella—[Comforted, politely.] T'anks.

Jim—[Swelling out.] It was a cinch. I kin wipe up de street wid any one of dem. [He stretches out his arms, trying to bulge out his biceps.] Feel dat muscle!

Ella—[Does so gingerly—then with admiration.] My!

Jim—[Protectingly.] You mustn't never be scared when I'm hanging round, Painty Face.

Ella—Don't call me that, Jim—please!

Jim—[Contritely.] I didn't mean nuffin'. I didn't know you'd mind.

Ella—I do—more'n anything.

Jim—You oughtn't to mind. Dey's jealous, dat's what.

Ella—Jealous? Of what?

Jim—[Pointing to her face.] Of dat. Red 'n' white. It's purty.

Ella—I hate it!

Jim—It's purty. Yes, it's—it's purty. It's—outa sight!

Ella—I hate it. I wish I was black like you.

Jim—[Sort of shrinking.] No you don't. Dey'd call you Crow, den—or Chocolate—or Smoke.

Ella—I wouldn't mind.

Jim—[Somberly.] Dey'd call you nigger sometimes, too.

Ella—I wouldn't mind.

Jim—[Humbly.] You wouldn't mind?

Ella—No, I wouldn't mind. [An awkward pause.]

Jim—[Suddenly.] You know what, Ella? Since I been tuckin' yo' books to school and back, I been drinkin' lots o' chalk 'n' water tree times a day. Dat Tom, de barber, he tole me dat make me white, if I drink enough. [Pleadingly.] Does I look whiter?

Ella—[Comfortingly.] Yes—maybe—a little bit——

Jim—[Trying a careless tone.] Reckon dat Tom's a liar, an' de joke's on me! Dat chalk only makes me feel kinder sick inside.

Ella—[Wonderingly.] Why do you want to be white?

Jim—Because—just because—I lak dat better.

Ella—I wouldn't. I like black. Let's you and me swap. I'd like to be black. [Clapping her hands.] Gee, that'd be fun, if we only could!

Jim—[Hesitatingly.] Yes—maybe——

Ella—Then they'd call me Crow, and you'd be Painty Face!

Jim—They wouldn't never dast call you nigger, you bet! I'd kill 'em! [A long pause. Finally she takes his hand shyly. They both keep looking as far away from each other as possible.]

Ella—I like you.

Jim—I like you.

Ella—Do you want to be my feller?

Jim—Yes.

Ella—Then I'm your girl.

Jim—Yes. [Then grandly.] You kin bet none o' de gang gwine call you Painty Face from dis out! I lam' 'em good! [The sun has set. Twilight has fallen on the street. An organ grinder comes up to the corner and plays "Annie Rooney." They stand hand-in-hand and listen. He goes away. It is growing dark.]

Ella—[Suddenly.] Golly, it's late! I'll git a lickin'!

Jim—Me, too.

Ella—I won't mind it much.

Jim—Me nuther.

Ella—See you going to school tomorrow?

Jim—Sure.

Ella—I gotta skip now.

Jim—Me, too.

Ella—I like you, Jim.

Jim—I like you.

Ella—Don't forget.

Jim—Don't you.

Ella—Good-by.

Jim—So long. [They run away from each other—then stop abruptly, and turn as at a signal.]

Ella—Don't forget.

Jim—I won't, you bet!

Ella—Here! [She kisses her hand at him, then runs off in frantic embarrassment.]

Jim—[Overcome.] Gee! [Then he turns and darts away, as

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT ONE SCENE TWO

Scene—The same corner. Nine years have passed. It is again late Spring at a time in the evening which immediately follows the hour of Scene One. Nothing has changed much. One street is still all white, the other all black. The fire escapes are laden with drooping human beings. The grocery store is still at the corner. The street noises are now more rhythmically mechanical, electricity having taken the place of horse and steam. People pass, white and black. They laugh as in Scene One. From the street of the whites the high-pitched nasal tenor sings: “Gee, I Wish That I Had a Girl,” and the Negro replies with “All I Got Was Sympathy.” The singing is followed again by laughter from both streets. Then silence. The dusk grows darker. With a spluttering flare the arc-lamp at the corner is lit and sheds a pale glare over the street. Two young roughs slouch up to the corner, as tough in manner as they can make themselves. One is the Shorty of Scene One; the other the Negro, Joe. They stand loafing. A boy of seventeen or so passes by, escorting a girl of about the same age. Both are dressed in their best, the boy in black with stiff collar, the girl in white.

Shorty—[Scornfully.] Hully cripes! Pipe who’s here. [To the girl, sneeringly.] Wha’s matter, Liz? Don’t yer recernize yer old fr’ens?

Girl—[Frightenedly.] Hello, Shorty.

Shorty—Why de glad rags? Goin’ to graduation? [He tries to obstruct their way, but, edging away from him, they turn and run.]

Joe—Har-har! Look at dem scoot, will you! [Shorty grins with satisfaction.]

Shorty—[Looking down other street.] Here comes Mickey.

Joe—He won de semi-final last night easy?

Shorty—Knocked de bloke out in de thoid.

Joe—Dat boy's suah a-comin'! He'll be de champeen yit.

Shorty—[Judicially.] Got a good chanct—if he leaves de broads alone. Dat's where he's wide open. [Mickey comes in from the left. He is dressed loudly, a straw hat with a gaudy band cocked over one cauliflower ear. He has acquired a typical "pug's" face, with the added viciousness of a natural bully. One of his eyes is puffed, almost closed, as a result of his battle the night before. He swaggers up.]

Both—Hello, Mickey.

Mickey—Hello.

Joe—Hear you knocked him col'.

Mickey—Sure. I knocked his block off. [Changing the subject.] Say. Seen 'em goin' past to de graduation racket?

Shorty—[With a wink.] Why? You int'rested?

Joe—[Chuckling.] Mickey's gwine roun' git a good conduct medal.

Mickey—Sure. Dey kin pin it on de seat o' me pants. [They laugh.] Listen. Seen Ella Downey goin'?

Shorty—Painty Face? No, she ain't been along.

Mickey—[With authority.] Can dat name, see! Want a bunch o' fives in yer kisser? Den nix! She's me goil, understan'?

Joe—[Venturing to joke.] Which one? Yo' number ten?

Mickey—[Flattered.] Sure. De real K. O. one.

Shorty— [Pointing right—sneeringly.] Gee! Pipe Jim Crow all dolled up for de racket.

Joe—[With disgusted resentment.] You mean tell me dat nigger's graduatin'?

Shorty—Ask him. [Jim Harris comes in. He is dressed in black, stiff white collar,

etc.—a quiet-mannered Negro boy with a queerly-baffled, sensitive face.]

Jim—[Pleasantly.] Hello, fellows. [They grunt in reply, looking over him scornfully.]

Joe—[Staring resentfully.] Is you graduatin' tonight?

Jim—Yes.

Joe—[Spitting disgustedly.] Fo' Gawd's sake! You is gittin' high-falutin'!

Jim—[Smiling deprecatingly.] This is my second try. I didn't pass last year.

Joe—What de hell does it git you, huh? Whatever is you gwine do wid it now you gits it? Live lazy on yo' ol' woman?

Jim—[Assertively.] I'm going to study and become a lawyer.

Joe—[With a snort.] Fo' Chris' sake, nigger!

Jim—[Fiercely.] Don't you call me that—not before them!

Joe—[Pugnaciously.] Does you deny you's a nigger? I shows you——

Mickey—[Gives them both a push—truculently.] Cut it out, see! I'm runnin' dis corner. [Turning to Jim insultingly.] Say, you! Painty Face's gittin' her ticket tonight, ain't she?

Jim—You mean Ella——

Mickey—Painty Face Downey, dat's who I mean! I don't have to be perlite wit' her. She's me goil!

Jim—[Glumly.] Yes, she's graduating.

Shorty—[Winks at Mickey.] Smart, huh?

Mickey—[Winks back—meaningly.] Willin' to loin, take it from me! [Jim stands tensely as if a struggle were going on in him.]

Jim—[Finally blurts out.] I want to speak to you, Mickey—alone.

Mickey—[Surprised—insultingly.] Aw, what de hell——!

Jim—[Excitedly.] It's important, I tell you!

Mickey—Huh? [Stares at him inquisitively—then motions the others back carelessly and follows Jim down front.]

Shorty—Some noive!

Joe—[Vengefully.] I gits dat Jim alone, you wait!

Mickey—Well, spill de big news. I ain't got all night. I got a date.

Jim—With—Ella?

Mickey—What's dat to you?

Jim—[The words tumbling out.] What—I wanted to say! I know—I've heard—all the stories—what you've been doing around the ward—with other girls—it's none of my business, with them—but she—Ella—it's different—she's not that kind——

Mickey—[Insultingly.] Who told yuh so, huh?

Jim—[Draws back his fist threateningly.] Don't you dare—! [Mickey is so paralyzed by this effrontery that he actually steps back.]

Mickey—Say, cut de comedy! [Beginning to feel insulted.] Listen, you Jim Crow! Ain't you wise I could give yuh one poke dat'd knock yuh into next week?

Jim—I'm only asking you to act square, Mickey.

Mickey—What's it to yuh? Why, yuh lousy goat, she wouldn't spit on yuh even! She hates de sight of a coon.

Jim—[In agony.] I—I know—but once she didn't mind—we were kids together——

Mickey—Aw, ferget dat! Dis is now!

Jim—And I'm still her friend always—even if she don't like colored people——

Mickey—Coons, why don't yuh say it right! De trouble wit' you is yuh're gittin' stuck up, dat's what! Stay where yeh belong, see! Yer old man made coin at de

truckin' game and yuh're tryin' to buy yerself white—graduatin' and law, for Hell's sake! Yuh're gittin' yerself in Dutch wit' everyone in de ward—and it ain't cause yer a coon neider. Don't de gang all train wit' Joe dere and lots of others? But yuh're tryin' to buy white and it won't git yuh no place, see!

Jim—[Trembling.] Some day—I'll show you——

Mickey—[Turning away.] Aw, gwan!

Jim—D'you think I'd change—be you—your dirty white——!

Mickey—[Whirling about.] What's dat?

Jim—[With hysterical vehemence.] You act square with her—or I'll show you up—I'll report you—I'll write to the papers—the sporting writers—I'll let them know how white you are!

Mickey—[Infuriated.] Yuh damn nigger, I'll bust yer jaw in! [Assuming his ring pose he weaves toward Jim, his face set in a cruel scowl. Jim waits helplessly but with a certain dignity.]

Shorty—Cheese it! A couple bulls! And here's de Downey skoit comin', too.

Mickey—I'll get yuh de next time! [Ella Downey enters from the right. She is seventeen, still has the same rose and white complexion, is pretty but with a rather repelling bold air about her.]

Ella—[Smiles with pleasure when she sees Mickey.] Hello, Mick. Am I late? Say, I'm so glad you won last night. [She glances from one to the other as she feels something in the air.] Hello! What's up?

Mickey—Dis boob. [He indicates Jim scornfully.]

Jim—[Diffidently.] Hello, Ella.

Ella—[Shortly, turning away.] Hello. [Then to Mickey.] Come on, Mick. Walk down with me. I got to hurry.

Jim—[Blurts out.] Wait—just a second. [Painfully.] Ella, do you hate—colored

people?

Mickey—Aw, shut up!

Jim—Please answer.

Ella—[Forcing a laugh.] Say! What is this—another exam?

Jim—[Doggedly.] Please answer.

Ella—[Irritably.] Of course I don't! Haven't I been brought up alongside—Why, some of my oldest—the girls I've been to public school the longest with——

Jim—Do you hate me, Ella?

Ella—[Confusedly and more irritably.] Say, is he drunk? Why should I? I don't hate anyone.

Jim—Then why haven't you ever hardly spoken to me—for years?

Ella—[Resentfully.] What would I speak about? You and me've got nothing in common any more.

Jim—[Desperately.] Maybe not any more—but—right on this corner—do you remember once——?

Ella—I don't remember nothing! [Angrily.] Say! What's got into you to be butting into my business all of a sudden like this? Because you finally managed to graduate, has it gone to your head?

Jim—No, I—only want to help you, Ella.

Ella—Of all the nerve! You're certainly forgetting your place! Who's asking you for help, I'd like to know? Shut up and stop bothering me!

Jim—[Insistently.] If you ever need a friend—a true friend——

Ella—I've got lots of friends among my own—kind, I can tell you. [Exasperatedly.] You make me sick! Go to—hell! [She flounces off. The three men laugh. Mickey follows her. Jim is stricken. He goes and sinks down limply on a box in front of the

grocery store.]

Shorty—I'm going to shoot a drink. Come on, Joe, and I'll blow yuh.

Joe—[Who has never ceased to follow every move of Jim's with angry, resentful eyes.] Go long. I'se gwine stay here a secon'. I got a lil' argyment. [He points to Jim.]

Shorty—Suit yerself. Do a good job. See yuh later. [He goes, whistling.]

Joe—[Stands for a while glaring at Jim, his fierce little eyes peering out of his black face. Then he spits on his hands aggressively and strides up to the oblivious Jim. He stands in front of him, gradually working himself into a fury at the other's seeming indifference to his words.] Listen to me, nigger: I got a heap to whisper in yo' ear! Who is you, anyhow? Who does you think you is? Don't yo' old man and mine work on de docks togidder befo' yo' old man gits his own truckin' business? Yo' ol' man swallers his nickels, my ol' man buys him beer wid dem and swallers dat—dat's the on'y diff'rence. Don't you 'n' me drag up togidder?

Jim—[Dully.] I'm your friend, Joe.

Joe—No, you isn't! I ain't no fren o' yourn! I don't even know who you is! What's all dis schoolin' you doin'? What's all dis dressin' up and graduatin' an' sayin' you gwine study be a lawyer? What's all dis fakin' an' pretendin' and swellin' out grand an' talkin' soft and perlite? What's all dis denyin' you's a nigger—an' wid de white boys listenin' to you say it! Is you aimin' to buy white wid yo' ol' man's dough like Mickey say? What is you? [In a rage at the other's silence.] You don't talk? Den I takes it out o' yo' hide! [He grabs Jim by the throat with one hand and draws the other fist back.] Tell me befo' I wrecks yo' face in! Is you a nigger or isn't you? [Shaking him.] Is you a nigger, Nigger? Nigger, is you a nigger?

Jim—[Looking into his eyes—quietly.] Yes. I'm a nigger. We're both niggers. [They look at each other for a moment. Joe's rage vanishes. He slumps onto a box beside Jim's. He offers him a cigarette. Jim takes it. Joe scratches a match and lights

both their cigarettes.]

Joe—[After a puff, with full satisfaction.] Man, why didn't you 'splain dat in de fust place?

Jim—We're both niggers. [The same hand-organ man of Scene One comes to the corner. He plays the chorus of "Bonbon Buddie," the "Chocolate Drop." They both stare straight ahead listening. Then the organ man goes away. A silence. Joe gets to his feet.]

Joe—I'll go get me a cold beer. [He starts to move off—then turns.] Time you was graduatin', ain't it? [He goes, Jim remains sitting on his box staring straight before him as

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT ONE SCENE THREE

Scene—The same corner five years later. Nothing has changed much. It is a night in Spring. The arc-lamp discovers faces with a favorless cruelty. The street noises are the same but more intermittent and dulled with a quality of fatigue. Two people pass, one black and one white. They are tired. They both yawn, but neither laughs. There is no laughter from the two streets. From the street of the whites the tenor, more nasal than ever and a bit drunken, wails in high barber-shop falsetto the last half of the chorus of "When I Lost You." The Negro voice, a bit maudlin in turn, replies with the last half of "Waitin' for the Robert E. Lee." Silence. Shorty enters. He looks tougher than ever, the typical gangster. He stands waiting, singing a bit drunkenly, peering down the street.

Shorty—[Indignantly.] Yuh bum! Ain't yuh ever comin'? [He begins to sing: "And sewed up in her yeller kimona, She had a blue-barreled forty-five gun, For to get her man Who'd done her wrong." Then he comments scornfully.] Not her, dough! No gat for her. She ain't got de noive. A little sugar. Dat'll fix her. [Ella enters. She is dressed poorly, her face is pale and hollow-eyed, her voice cold and tired.]

Shorty—Yuh got de message?

Ella—Here I am.

Shorty—How yuh been?

Ella—All right. [A pause. He looks at her puzzledly.]

Shorty—[A bit embarrassedly.] Well, I s'pose yuh'd like me to give yuh some dope on Mickey, huh?

Ella—No.

Shorty—Mean to say yuh don't wanter know where he is or what he's doin'?

Ella—No.

Shorty—Since when?

Ella—A long time.

Shorty—[After a pause—with a rat-like viciousness.] Between you'n me, kid, you'll get even soon—you'n all de odder dames he's tossed. I'm on de inside. I've watched him trainin'. His next scrap, watch it! He'll go! It won't be de odder guy. It'll be all youse dames he's kidded—and de ones what's kidded him. Youse'll all be in de odder guy's corner. He won't need no odder seconds. Youse'll trow water on him, and sponge his face, and take de kinks out of his socker—and Mickey'll catch it on de button—and he won't be able to take it no more—'cause all your weight—you and de odders—'ll be behind dat punch. Ha ha! [He laughs an evil laugh.] And Mickey'll go—down to his knees first—[He sinks to his knees in the attitude of a groggy boxer.]

Ella—I'd like to see him on his knees!

Shorty—And den—flat on his pan—dead to de world—de boidies singin' in de trees—ten—out! [He suits his action to the words, sinking flat on the pavement, then rises and laughs the same evil laugh.]

Ella—He's been out—for me—a long time. [A pause.] Why did you send for me?

Shorty—He sent me.

Ella—Why?

Shorty—To slip you this wad o' dough. [He reluctantly takes a roll of bills from his pocket and holds it out to her.]

Ella—[Looks at the money indifferently.] What for?

Shorty—For you.

Ella—No.

Shorty—For de kid den.

Ella—The kid's dead. He took diphtheria.

Shorty—Hell yuh say! When?

Ella—A long time.

Shorty—Why didn't you write Mickey——?

Ella—Why should I? He'd only be glad.

Shorty—[After a pause.] Well—it's better.

Ella—Yes.

Shorty—You made up wit yer family?

Ella—No chance.

Shorty—Livin' alone?

Ella—In Brooklyn.

Shorty—Workin'?

Ella—In a factory.

Shorty—You're a sucker. There's lots of softer snaps fer you, kid——

Ella—I know what you mean. No.

Shorty—Don't yuh wanter step out no more—have fun—live?

Ella—I'm through.

Shorty—[Mockingly.] Jump in de river, huh? T'ink it over, baby. I kin start yuh right in my stable. No one'll bodder yuh den. I got influence.

Ella—[Without emphasis.] You're a dirty dog. Why doesn't someone kill you?

Shorty—Is dat so! What're you? They say you been travelin' round with Jim Crow.

Ella—He's been my only friend.

Shorty—A nigger!

Ella—The only white man in the world! Kind and white. You're all black—black to the heart.

Shorty—Nigger-lover! [He throws the money in her face. It falls to the street.] Listen, you! Mickey says he's off of yuh for keeps. Dis is de finish! Dat's what he sent me to tell you. [Glances at her searchingly—a pause.] Yuh won't make no trouble?

Ella—Why should I? He's free. The kid's dead. I'm free. No hard feelings—only—I'll be there in spirit at his next fight, tell him! I'll take your tip—the other corner—second the punch—nine—ten—out! He's free! That's all. [She grins horribly at Shorty.] Go away, Shorty.

Shorty—[Looking at her and shaking his head—maudlinly.] Groggy! Groggy! We're all groggy! Gluttons for punishment! Me for a drink. So long. [He goes. A Salvation Army band comes toward the corner. They are playing and singing "Till We Meet at Jesus' Feet." They reach the end as they enter and stop before Ella. The Captain steps forward.]

Captain—Sister——

Ella—[Picks up the money and drops it in his hat—mockingly.] Here. Go save yourself. Leave me alone.

A Woman Salvationist—Sister——-

Ella—Never mind that. I'm not in your line—yet. [As they hesitate, wonderingly.] I want to be alone. [To the thud of the big drum they march off. Ella sits down on a box, her hands hanging at her sides. Presently Jim Harris comes in. He has grown into a quietly-dressed, studious-looking Negro with an intelligent yet queerly-baffled face.]

Jim—[With a joyous but bewildered cry.] Ella! I just saw Shorty——

Ella—[Smiling at him with frank affection.] He had a message from Mickey.

Jim—[Sadly.] Ah!

Ella—[Pointing to the box behind her.] Sit down. [He does so. A pause—then she says indifferently.] It's finished. I'm free, Jim.

Jim—[Wearily.] We're never free—except to do what we have to do.

Ella—What are you getting gloomy about all of a sudden?

Jim—I've got the report from the school. I've flunked again.

Ella—Poor Jim.

Jim—Don't pity me. I'd like to kick myself all over the block. Five years—and I'm still plugging away where I ought to have been at the end of two.

Ella—Why don't you give it up?

Jim—No!

Ella—After all, what's being a lawyer?

Jim—A lot—to me—what it means. [Intensely.] Why, if I was a Member of the Bar right now, Ella, I believe I'd almost have the courage to——

Ella—What?

Jim—Nothing. [After a pause—gropingly.] I can't explain—just—but it hurts like fire. It brands me in my pride. I swear I know more'n any member of my class. I ought to, I study harder. I work like the devil. It's all in my head—all fine and

correct to a T. Then when I'm called on—I stand up—all the white faces looking at me—and I can feel their eyes—I hear my own voice sounding funny, trembling—and all of a sudden it's all gone in my head—there's nothing remembered—and I hear myself stuttering—and give up—sit down—— They don't laugh, hardly ever. They're kind. They're good people. [In a frenzy.] They're considerate, damn them! But I feel branded!

Ella—Poor Jim.

Jim—[Going on painfully.] And it's the same thing in the written exams. For weeks before I study all night. I can't sleep anyway. I learn it all, I see it, I understand it. Then they give me the paper in the exam room. I look it over, I know each answer—perfectly. I take up my pen. On all sides are white men starting to write. They're so sure—even the ones that I know know nothing. But I know it all—but I can't remember any more—it fades—it goes—it's gone. There's a blank in my head—stupidity—I sit like a fool fighting to remember a little bit here, a little bit there—not enough to pass—not enough for anything—when I know it all!

Ella—[Compassionately.] Jim. It isn't worth it. You don't need to——

Jim—I need it more than anyone ever needed anything. I need it to live.

Ella—What'll it prove?

Jim—Nothing at all much—but everything to me.

Ella—You're so much better than they are in every other way.

Jim—[Looking up at her.] Then—you understand?

Ella—Of course. [Affectionately.] Don't I know how fine you've been to me! You've been the only one in the world who's stood by me—the only understanding person—and all after the rotten way I used to treat you.

Jim—But before that—way back so high—you treated me good. [He smiles.]

Ella—You've been white to me, Jim. [She takes his hand.]

Jim—White—to you!

Ella—Yes.

Jim—All love is white. I've always loved you. [This with the deepest humility.]

Ella—Even now—after all that's happened!

Jim—Always.

Ella—I like you, Jim—better than anyone else in the world.

Jim—That's more than enough, more than I ever hoped for. [The organ grinder comes to the corner. He plays the chorus of "Annie Laurie." They sit listening, hand in hand.] Would you ever want to marry me, Ella?

Ella—Yes, Jim.

Jim—[As if this quick consent alarmed him.] No, no, don't answer now. Wait! Turn it over in your mind! Think what it means to you! Consider it—over and over again! I'm in no hurry, Ella. I can wait months—years——

Ella—I'm alone. I've got to be helped. I've got to help someone—or it's the end—one end or another.

Jim—[Eagerly.] Oh, I'll help—I know I can help—I'll give my life to help you—that's what I've been living for——

Ella—But can I help you? Can I help you?

Jim—Yes! Yes! We'll go abroad where a man is a man—where it don't make that difference—where people are kind and wise to see the soul under skins. I don't ask you to love me—I don't dare to hope nothing like that! I don't want nothing—only to wait—to know you like me—to be near you—to keep harm away—to make up for the past—to never let you suffer any more—to serve you—to lie at your feet like a dog that loves you—to kneel by your bed like a nurse that watches over you sleeping—to preserve and protect and shield you from evil and sorrow—to give my life and my blood and all the strength that's in me to give you peace and joy—to

become your slave!—yes, be your slave—your black slave that adores you as sacred! [He has sunk to his knees. In a frenzy of self-abnegation, as he says the last words he beats his head on the flagstones.]

Ella—[Overcome and alarmed.] Jim! Jim! You're crazy! I want to help you, Jim—I want to help——

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT ONE SCENE FOUR

Scene—Some weeks or so later. A street in the same ward in front of an old brick church. The church sets back from the sidewalk in a yard enclosed by a rusty iron railing with a gate at center. On each side of this yard are tenements. The buildings have a stern, forbidding look. All the shades on the windows are drawn down, giving an effect of staring, brutal eyes that pry callously at human beings without acknowledging them. Even the two tall, narrow church windows on either side of the arched door are blanked with dull green shades. It is a bright sunny morning. The district is unusually still, as if it were waiting, holding its breath.

From the street of the blacks to the right a Negro tenor sings in a voice of shadowy richness—the first stanza with a contented, childlike melancholy—

Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,

Sometimes I feel like a mourning dove,

I feel like a mourning dove.

The second with a dreamy, boyish exultance—

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,

Sometimes I feel like an eagle in the air,

I feel like an eagle in the air.

The third with a brooding, earthbound sorrow—

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

Sometimes I wish that I'd never been born,

I wish that I'd never been born.

As the music dies down there is a pause of waiting stillness. This is broken by one startling, metallic clang of the church-bell. As if it were a signal, people—men, women, children—pour from the two tenements, whites from the tenement to the left, blacks from the one to the right. They hurry to form into two racial lines on each side of the gate, rigid and unyielding, staring across at each other with bitter hostile eyes. The halves of the big church door swing open and Jim and Ella step out from the darkness within into the sunlight. The doors slam behind them like wooden lips of an idol that has spat them out. Jim is dressed in black. Ella in white, both with extreme plainness. They stand in the sunlight, shrinking and confused. All the hostile eyes are now concentrated on them. They become aware of the two lines through which they must pass; they hesitate and tremble; then stand there staring back at the people as fixed and immovable as they are. The organ grinder comes in from the right. He plays the chorus of "Old Black Joe." As he finishes the bell of the church clangs one more single stroke, insistently dismissing.

Jim—[As if the sound had awakened him from a trance, reaches out and takes her hand.] Come. Time we got to the steamer. Time we sailed away over the sea. Come, Honey! [She tries to answer but her lips tremble; she cannot take her eyes off the eyes of the people; she is unable to move. He sees this and, keeping the same tone of profound, affectionate kindness, he points upward in the sky, and gradually persuades her eyes to look up.] Look up, Honey! See the sun! Feel his warm eye lookin' down! Feel how kind he looks! Feel his blessing deep in your heart, your bones! Look up, Honey! [Her eyes are fixed on the sky now. Her face is calm. She tries to smile bravely back at the sun. Now he pulls her by the hand, urging her gently to walk with him down through the yard and gate, through the lines of people. He is maintaining an attitude to support them through the ordeal only by a terrible

effort, which manifests itself in the hysteric quality of ecstasy which breaks into his voice.] And look at the sky! Ain't it kind and blue! Blue for hope. Don't they say blue's for hope? Hope! That's for us, Honey. All those blessings in the sky! What's it the Bible says? Falls on just and unjust alike? No, that's the sweet rain. Pshaw, what am I saying? All mixed up. There's no unjust about it. We're all the same—equally just—under the sky—under the sun—under God—sailing over the sea—to the other side of the world—the side where Christ was born—the kind side that takes count of the soul—over the sea—the sea's blue, to——. Let's not be late—let's get that steamer! [They have reached the curb now, passed the lines of people. She is looking up to the sky with an expression of trancelike calm and peace. He is on the verge of collapse, his face twitching, his eyes staring. He calls hoarsely:] Taxi! Where is he? Taxi!

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT II

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

Scene—Two years later. A flat of the better sort in the Negro district near the corner of Act One. This is the parlor. Its furniture is a queer clash. The old pieces are cheaply ornate, naïvely, childishly gaudy—the new pieces give evidence of a taste that is diametrically opposed, severe to the point of somberness. On one wall, in a heavy gold frame, is a colored photograph—the portrait of an elderly Negro with an able, shrewd face but dressed in outlandish lodge regalia, a get-up adorned with medals, sashes, a cocked hat with frills—the whole effect as absurd to contemplate as one of Napoleon's Marshals in full uniform. In the left corner, where a window lights it effectively, is a Negro primitive mask from the Congo—a grotesque face, inspiring obscure, dim connotations in one's mind, but beautifully done, conceived in a true religious spirit. In this room, however, the mask acquires an arbitrary accentuation. It dominates by a diabolical quality that contrast imposes upon it.

There are two windows on the left looking out in the street. In the rear, a door to the hall of the building. In the right, a doorway with red and gold portières leading into the bedroom and the rest of the flat. Everything is cleaned and polished. The dark brown wall paper is new, the brilliantly figured carpet also. There is a round mahogany table at center. In a rocking chair by the table Mrs. Harris is sitting. She is a mild-looking, gray-haired Negress of sixty-five, dressed in an old-fashioned Sunday-best dress. Walking about the room nervously is Hattie, her daughter, Jim's sister, a woman of about thirty with a high-strung, defiant face—an intelligent head showing both power and courage. She is dressed severely, mannishly.

It is a fine morning in Spring. Sunshine comes through the windows at the left.

Mrs. Harris—Time dey was here, ain't it?

Hattie—[Impatiently.] Yes.

Mrs. H.—[Worriedly.] You ain't gwine ter kick up a fuss, is you—like you done wid Jim befo' de weddin'?

Hattie—No. What's done is done.

Mrs. H.—We mustn't let her see we hold it agin' her—de bad dat happened to her wid dat no-count fighter.

Hattie—I certainly never give that a thought. It's what she's done to Jim—making him run away and give up his fight——!

Mrs. H.—Jim loves her a powerful lot, must be.

Hattie—[After a pause—bitterly.] I wonder if she loves Jim!

Mrs. H.—She must, too. Yes, she must, too. Don't you forget dat it was hard for her—mighty, mighty hard—harder for de white dan for de black!

Hattie—[Indignantly.] Why should it be?

Mrs. H.—[Shaking her head.] I ain't talkin' of shoulds. It's too late for shoulds. Dey's o'ny one should. [Solemnly.] De white and de black shouldn't mix dat close.

Dere's one road where de white goes on alone; dere's anudder road where de black goes on alone——

Hattie—Yes, if they'd only leave us alone!

Mrs. H.—Dey leaves your Pa alone. He comes to de top till he's got his own business, lots o' money in de bank, he owns a building even befo' he die. [She looks up proudly at the picture. Hattie sighs impatiently—then her mother goes on.] Dey leaves me alone. I bears four children into dis worl', two dies, two lives, I helps you two grow up fine an' healthy and eddicated wid schoolin' and money fo' yo' comfort——

Hattie—[Impatiently.] Ma!

Mrs. H.—I does de duty God set for me in dis worl'. Dey leaves me alone. [Hattie goes to the window to hide her exasperation. The mother broods for a minute—then goes on.] The worl' done change. Dey ain't no satisfaction wid nuffin' no more.

Hattie—Oh! [Then after a pause.] They'll be here any minute now.

Mrs. H.—Why didn't you go meet 'em at de dock like I axed you?

Hattie—I couldn't. My face and Jim's among those hundreds of white faces—— [With a harsh laugh.] It would give her too much advantage!

Mrs. H.—[Impatiently.] Don't talk dat way! What makes you so proud? [Then after a pause—sadly.] Hattie.

Hattie—[Turning.] Yes, Ma.

Mrs. H.—I want to see Jim again—my only boy—but—all de same I'd ruther he stayed away. He say in his letter he's happy, she's happy, dey likes it dere, de folks don't think nuffin' but what's natural at seeing 'em married. Why don't dey stay?

Hattie—[Vehemently.] No! They were cowards to run away. If they believe in what they've done, then let them face it out, live it out here, be strong enough to conquer all prejudice!

Mrs. H.—Strong? Dey ain't many strong. Dey ain't many happy neider. Dey was happy ovah yondah.

Hattie—We don't deserve happiness till we've fought the fight of our race and won it! [In the pause that follows there is a ring from back in the flat.] It's the door bell! You go, Ma. I—I—I'd rather not. [Her mother looks at her rebukingly and goes out agitatedly through the portières. Hattie waits, nervously walking about, trying to compose herself. There is a long pause. Finally the portières are parted and Jim enters. He looks much older, graver, worried.]

Jim—Hattie!

Hattie—Jim! [They embrace with great affection.]

Jim—It's great to see you again! You're looking fine.

Hattie—[Looking at him searchingly.] You look well, too—thinner maybe—and tired. [Then as she sees him frowning.] But where's Ella?

Jim—With Ma. [Apologetically.] She sort of—broke down—when we came in. The trip wore her out.

Hattie—[Coldly.] I see.

Jim—Oh, it's nothing serious. Nerves. She needs a rest.

Hattie—Wasn't living in France restful?

Jim—Yes, but—too lonely—especially for her.

Hattie—[Resentfully.] Why? Didn't the people there want to associate——?

Jim—[Quickly.] Oh, no indeedy, they didn't think anything of that. [After a pause.] But—she did. For the first year it was all right. Ella liked everything a lot. She went out with French folks and got so she could talk it a little—and I learned it—a little. We were having a right nice time. I never thought then we'd ever want to come back here.

Hattie—[Frowning.] But—what happened to change you?

Jim—[After a pause—haltingly.] Well—you see—the first year—she and I were living around—like friends—like a brother and sister—like you and I might.

Hattie—[Her face becoming more and more drawn and tense.] You mean—then——? [She shudders—then after a pause.] She loves you, Jim?

Jim—If I didn't know that I'd have to jump in the river.

Hattie—Are you sure she loves you?

Jim—Isn't that why she's suffering?

Hattie—[Letting her breath escape through her clenched teeth.] Ah!

Jim—[Suddenly springs up and shouts almost hysterically.] Why d'you ask me all those damn questions? Are you trying to make trouble between us?

Hattie—[Controlling herself—quietly.] No, Jim.

Jim—[After a pause—contritely.] I'm sorry, Hattie. I'm kind of on edge today. [He sinks down on his chair—then goes on as if something forced him to speak.] After that we got to living housed in. Ella didn't want to see nobody, she said just the two of us was enough. I was happy then—and I really guess she was happy, too—in a way—for a while. [Again a pause.] But she never did get to wanting to go out any place again. She got to saying she felt she'd be sure to run into someone she knew—from over here. So I moved us out to the country where no tourist ever comes—but it didn't make any difference to her. She got to avoiding the French folks the same as if they were Americans and I couldn't get it out of her mind. She lived in the house and got paler and paler, and more and more nervous and scarey, always imagining things—until I got to imagining things, too. I got to feeling blue. Got to sneering at myself that I wasn't any better than a quitter because I sneaked away right after getting married, didn't face nothing, gave up trying to become a Member of the Bar—and I got to suspecting Ella must feel that way about me, too—that I wasn't a real man!

Hattie—[Indignantly.] She couldn't!

Jim—[With hostility.] You don't need to tell me! All this was only in my own mind. We never quarreled a single bit. We never said a harsh word. We were as close to each other as could be. We were all there was in the world to each other. We were alone together! [A pause.] Well, one day I got so I couldn't stand it. I could see she couldn't stand it. So I just up and said: Ella, we've got to have a plain talk, look everything straight in the face, hide nothing, come out with the exact truth of the way we feel.

Hattie—And you decided to come back!

Jim—Yes. We decided the reason we felt sort of ashamed was we'd acted like cowards. We'd run away from the thing—and taken it with us. We decided to come back and face it and live it down in ourselves, and prove to ourselves we were strong in our love—and then, and that way only, by being brave we'd free ourselves, and gain confidence, and be really free inside and able then to go anywhere and live in peace and equality with ourselves and the world without any guilty uncomfortable feeling coming up to rile us. [He has talked himself now into a state of happy confidence.]

Hattie—[Bending over and kissing him.] Good for you! I admire you so much, Jim! I admire both of you! And are you going to begin studying right away and get admitted to the Bar?

Jim—You bet I am!

Hattie—You must, Jim! Our race needs men like you to come to the front and help—— [As voices are heard approaching she stops, stiffens, and her face grows cold.]

Jim—[Noticing this—warningly.] Remember Ella's been sick! [Losing control—threateningly.] You be nice to her, you hear! [Mrs. Harris enters, showing Ella the way. The colored woman is plainly worried and perplexed. Ella is pale, with

a strange, haunted expression in her eyes. She runs to Jim as to a refuge, clutching his hands in both of hers, looking from Mrs. Harris to Hattie with a frightened defiance.]

Mrs. H.—Dere he is, child, big's life! She was afraid we'd done kidnapped you away, Jim.

Jim—[Patting her hand.] This place ought to be familiar, Ella. Don't you remember playing here with us sometimes as a kid?

Ella—[Queerly—with a frown of effort.] I remember playing marbles one night—but that was on the street.

Jim—Don't you remember Hattie?

Hattie—[Coming forward with a forced smile.] It was a long time ago—but I remember Ella. [She holds out her hand.]

Ella—[Taking it—looking at Hattie with the same queer defiance.] I remember. But you've changed so much.

Hattie—[Stirred to hostility by Ella's manner—condescendingly.] Yes, I've grown older, naturally. [Then in a tone which, as if in spite of herself, becomes bragging.] I've worked so hard. First I went away to college, you know—then I took up post-graduate study—when suddenly I decided I'd accomplish more good if I gave up learning and took up teaching. [She suddenly checks herself, ashamed, and stung by Ella's indifference.] But this sounds like stupid boasting. I don't mean that. I was only explaining——

Ella—[Indifferently.] I didn't know you'd been to school so long. [A pause.] Where are you teaching? In a colored school, I suppose. [There is an indifferent superiority in her words that is maddening to Hattie.]

Hattie—[Controlling herself.] Yes. A private school endowed by some wealthy members of our race.

Ella—[Suddenly—even eagerly.] Then you must have taken lots of examinations and managed to pass them, didn't you?

Hattie—[Biting her lips.] I always passed with honors!

Ella—Yes, we both graduated from the same High School, didn't we? That was dead easy for me. Why I hardly even looked at a book. But Jim says it was awfully hard for him. He failed one year, remember? [She turns and smiles at Jim—a tolerant, superior smile but one full of genuine love. Hattie is outraged, but Jim smiles.]

Jim—Yes, it was hard for me, Honey.

Ella—And the law school examinations Jim hardly ever could pass at all. Could you? [She laughs lovingly.]

Hattie—[Harshly.] Yes, he could! He can! He'll pass them now—if you'll give him a chance!

Jim—[Angrily.] Hattie!

Mrs. Harris—Hold yo' fool tongue!

Hattie—[Sullenly.] I'm sorry. [Ella has shrunk back against Jim. She regards Hattie with a sort of wondering hatred. Then she looks away about the room. Suddenly her eyes fasten on the primitive mask and she gives a stifled scream.]

Jim—What's the matter, Honey?

Ella—[Pointing.] That! For God's sake, what is it?

Hattie—[Scornfully.] It's a Congo mask. [She goes and picks it up.] I'll take it away if you wish. I thought you'd like it. It was my wedding present to Jim.

Ella—What is it?

Hattie—It's a mask which used to be worn in religious ceremonies by my people in Africa. But, aside from that, it's beautifully made, a work of Art by a real artist—as real in his way as your Michael Angelo. [Forces Ella to take it.] Here. Just notice the

workmanship.

Ella—[Defiantly.] I'm not scared of it if you're not. [Looking at it with disgust.] Beautiful? Well, some people certainly have queer notions! It looks ugly to me and stupid—like a kid's game—making faces! [She slaps it contemptuously.] Pooh! You needn't look hard at me. I'll give you the laugh. [She goes to put it back on the stand.]

Jim—Maybe, if it disturbs you, we better put it in some other room.

Ella—[Defiantly aggressive.] No. I want it here where I can give it the laugh! [She sets it there again—then turns suddenly on Hattie with aggressive determination.] Jim's not going to take any more examinations! I won't let him!

Hattie—[Bursting forth.] Jim! Do you hear that? There's white justice!—their fear for their superiority!——

Ella—[With a terrified pleading.] Make her go away, Jim!

Jim—[Losing control—furiously to his sister.] Either you leave here—or we will!

Mrs. H.—[Weeping—throws her arms around Hattie.] Let's go, chile! Let's go!

Hattie—[Calmly now.] Yes, Ma. All right. [They go through the portières. As soon as they are gone, Jim suddenly collapses into a chair and hides his head in his hands. Ella stands beside him for a moment. She stares distractedly about her, at the portrait, at the mask, at the furniture, at Jim. She seems fighting to escape from some weight on her mind. She throws this off and, completely her old self for the moment, kneels by Jim and pats his shoulder.]

Ella—[With kindness and love.] Don't, Jim! Don't cry, please! You don't suppose I really meant that about the examinations, do you? Why, of course, I didn't mean a word! I couldn't mean it! I want you to take the examinations! I want you to pass! I want you to be a lawyer! I want you to be the best lawyer in the country! I want you to show 'em—all the dirty sneaking; gossiping liars that talk behind our

backs—what a man I married. I want the whole world to know you're the whitest of the white! I want you to climb and climb—and step on 'em, stamp right on their mean faces! I love you, Jim. You know that!

Jim—[Calm again—happily.] I hope so, Honey—and I'll make myself worthy.

Hattie—[Appears in the doorway—quietly.] We're going now, Jim.

Ella—No. Don't go.

Hattie—We were going to, anyway. This is your house—Mother's gift to you, Jim.

Jim—[Astonished.] But I can't accept—— Where are you going?

Hattie—We've got a nice flat in the Bronx—[with bitter pride] in the heart of the Black Belt—the Congo—among our own people!

Jim—[Angrily.] You're crazy—I'll see Ma—— [He goes out. Hattie and Ella stare at each other with scorn and hatred for a moment, then Hattie goes. Ella remains kneeling for a moment by the chair, her eyes dazed and strange as she looks about her. Then she gets to her feet and stands before the portrait of Jim's father—with a sneer.]

Ella—It's his Old Man—all dolled up like a circus horse! Well, they can't help it. It's in the blood, I suppose. They're ignorant, that's all there is to it. [She moves to the mask—forcing a mocking tone.] Hello, sport! Who d'you think you're scaring? Not me! I'll give you the laugh. He won't pass, you wait and see. Not in a thousand years! [She goes to the window and looks down at the street and mutters.] All black! Every one of them! [Then with sudden excitement.] No, there's one. Why, it's Shorty! [She throws the window open and calls.] Shorty! Shorty! Hello, Shorty! [She leans out and waves—then stops, remains there for a moment looking down, then comes back into the room suddenly as if she wanted to hide—her whole face in an anguish.] Say! Say! I wonder?—No, he didn't hear you. Yes, he did, too! He must have! I yelled so loud you could hear me in Jersey! No, what are you talking about? How would he hear with all kids yelling down there? He never heard a word,

I tell you! He did, too! He didn't want to hear you! He didn't want to let anyone know he knew you! Why don't you acknowledge it? What are you lying about? I'm not! Why shouldn't he? Where does he come in to—for God's sake, who is Shorty, anyway? A pimp! Yes, and a dope-peddler, too! D'you mean to say he'd have the nerve to hear me call him and then deliberately——? Yes, I mean to say it! I do say it! And it's true, and you know it, and you might as well be honest for a change and admit it! He heard you but he didn't want to hear you! He doesn't want to know you any more. No, not even him! He's afraid it'd get him in wrong with the old gang. Why? You know well enough! Because you married a—a—a—well, I won't say it, but you know without my mentioning names! [Ella springs to her feet in horror and shakes off her obsession with a frantic effort.] Stop! [Then whimpering like a frightened child.] Jim! Jim! Jim! Where are you? I want you, Jim! [She runs out of the room as

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

Scene—The same. Six months later. It is evening. The walls of the room appear shrunken in, the ceiling lowered, so that the furniture, the portrait, the mask look unnaturally large and domineering. Jim is seated at the table studying, law books piled by his elbows. He is keeping his attention concentrated only by a driving physical effort which gives his face the expression of a runner's near the tape. His forehead shines with perspiration. He mutters one sentence from Blackstone over and over again, tapping his forehead with his fist in time to the rhythm he gives the stale words. But, in spite of himself, his attention wanders, his eyes have an uneasy, hunted look, he starts at every sound in the house or from the street. Finally, he remains rigid, Blackstone forgotten, his eyes fixed on the portières with tense grief. Then he groans, slams the book shut, goes to the window and throws it open and sinks down beside it, his arms on the sill, his head resting wearily on his arms,

staring out into the night, the pale glare from the arc-lamp on the corner throwing his face into relief. The portières on the right are parted and Hattie comes in.

Hattie—[Not seeing him at the table.] Jim! [Discovering him.] Oh, there you are. What're you doing?

Jim—[Turning to her.] Resting. Cooling my head. [Forcing a smile.] These law books certainly are a sweating proposition! [Then, anxiously.] How is she?

Hattie—She's asleep now. I felt it was safe to leave her for a minute. [After a pause.] What did the doctor tell you, Jim?

Jim—The same old thing. She must have rest, he says, her mind needs rest——[Bitterly.] But he can't tell me any prescription for that rest—leastways not any that'd work.

Hattie—[After a pause.] I think you ought to leave her, Jim—or let her leave you—for a while, anyway.

Jim—[Angrily.] You're like the doctor. Everything's so simple and easy. Do this and that happens. Only it don't. Life isn't simple like that—not in this case, anyway—no, it isn't simple a bit. [After a pause.] I can't leave her. She can't leave me. And there's a million little reasons combining to make one big reason why we can't. [A pause.] For her sake—if it'd do her good—I'd go—I'd leave—I'd do anything—because I love her. I'd kill myself even—jump out of this window this second—I've thought it over, too—but that'd only make matters worse for her. I'm all she's got in the world! Yes, that isn't bragging or fooling myself. I know that for a fact! Don't you know that's true? [There is a pleading for the certainty he claims.]

Hattie—Yes, I know she loves you, Jim. I know that now.

Jim—[Simply.] Then we've got to stick together to the end, haven't we, whatever comes—and hope and pray for the best? [A pause—then hopefully.] I think maybe this is the crisis in her mind. Once she settles this in herself, she's won to the other side. And me—once I become a Member of the Bar—then I win, too! We're both

free—by our own fighting down our own weakness! We're both really, truly free! Then we can be happy with ourselves here or anywhere. She'll be proud then! Yes, she's told me again and again, she says she'll be actually proud!

Hattie—[Turning away to conceal her emotion.] Yes, I'm sure—but you mustn't study too hard, Jim! You mustn't study too awfully hard!

Jim—[Gets up and goes to the table and sits down wearily.] Yes, I know. Oh, I'll pass easily. I haven't got any scarey feeling about that any more. And I'm doing two years' work in one here alone. That's better than schools, eh?

Hattie—[Doubtfully.] It's wonderful, Jim.

Jim—[His spirit evaporating.] If I can only hold out! It's hard! I'm worn out. I don't sleep. I get to thinking and thinking. My head aches and burns like fire with thinking. Round and round my thoughts go chasing like crazy chickens hopping and flapping before the wind. It gets me crazy mad—'cause I can't stop!

Hattie—[Watching him for a while and seeming to force herself to speak.] The doctor didn't tell you all, Jim.

Jim—[Dully.] What's that?

Hattie—He told me you're liable to break down too, if you don't take care of yourself.

Jim—[Abjectly weary.] Let 'er come! I don't care what happens to me. Maybe if I get sick she'll get well. There's only so much bad luck allowed to one family, maybe. [He forces a wan smile.]

Hattie—[Hastily.] Don't give in to that idea, for the Lord's sake!

Jim—I'm tired—and blue—that's all.

Hattie—[After another long pause.] I've got to tell you something else, Jim.

Jim—[Dully.] What?

Hattie—The doctor said Ella's liable to be sick like this a very long time.

Jim—He told me that too—that it'd be a long time before she got back her normal strength. Well, I suppose that's got to be expected.

Hattie—[Slowly.] He didn't mean convalescing—what he told me. [A long pause.]

Jim—[Evasively.] I'm going to get other doctors in to see Ella—specialists. This one's a damn fool.

Hattie—Be sensible, Jim. You'll have to face the truth—sooner or later.

Jim—[Irritably.] I know the truth about Ella better'n any doctor.

Hattie—[Persuasively.] She'd get better so much sooner if you'd send her away to some nice sanitarium——

Jim—No! She'd die of shame there!

Hattie—At least until after you've taken your examinations——

Jim—To hell with me!

Hattie—Six months. That wouldn't be long to be parted.

Jim—What are you trying to do—separate us? [He gets to his feet—furiously.] Go on out! Go on out!

Hattie—[Calmly.] No, I won't. [Sharply.] There's something that's got to be said to you and I'm the only one with the courage—— [Intensely.] Tell me, Jim, have you heard her raving when she's out of her mind?

Jim—[With a shudder.] No!

Hattie—You're lying, Jim. You must have—if you don't stop your ears—and the doctor says she may develop a violent mania, dangerous for you—get worse and worse until—Jim, you'll go crazy too—living this way. Today she raved on about "Black! Black!" and cried because she said her skin was turning black—that you had poisoned her——

Jim—[In anguish.] That's only when she's out of her mind.

Hattie—And then she suddenly called me a dirty nigger.

Jim—No! She never said that ever! She never would!

Hattie—She did—and kept on and on! [A tense pause.] She'll be saying that to you soon.

Jim—[Torturedly.] She don't mean it! She isn't responsible for what she's saying!

Hattie—I know she isn't—yet she is just the same. It's deep down in her or it wouldn't come out.

Jim—Deep down in her people—not deep in her.

Hattie—I can't make such distinctions. The race in me, deep in me, can't stand it. I can't play nurse to her any more, Jim,—not even for your sake. I'm afraid—afraid of myself—afraid sometime I'll kill her dead to set you free! [She loses control and begins to cry.]

Jim—[After a long pause—somberly.] Yes, I guess you'd better stay away from here. Good-by.

Hattie—Who'll you get to nurse her, Jim,—a white woman?

Jim—Ella'd die of shame. No, I'll nurse her myself.

Hattie—And give up your studies?

Jim—I can do both.

Hattie—You can't! You'll get sick yourself! Why, you look terrible even as it is—and it's only beginning!

Jim—I can do anything for her! I'm all she's got in the world! I've got to prove I can be all to her! I've got to prove worthy! I've got to prove she can be proud of me! I've got to prove I'm the whitest of the white!

Hattie—[Stung by this last—with rebellious bitterness.] Is that the ambition she's given you? Oh, you soft, weak-minded fool, you traitor to your race! And the thanks you'll get—to be called a dirty nigger—to hear her cursing you because she can

never have a child because it'll be born black——!

Jim—[In a frenzy.] Stop!

Hattie—I'll say what must be said even though you kill me, Jim. Send her to an asylum before you both have to be sent to one together.

Jim—[With a sudden wild laugh.] Do you think you're threatening me with something dreadful now? Why, I'd like that. Sure, I'd like that! Maybe she'd like it better, too. Maybe we'd both find it all simple then—like you think it is now. Yes. [He laughs again.]

Hattie—[Frightenedly.] Jim!

Jim—Together! You can't scare me even with hell fire if you say she and I go together. It's heaven then for me! [With sudden savagery.] You go out of here! All you've ever been aiming to do is to separate us so we can't be together!

Hattie—I've done what I did for your own good.

Jim—I have no own good. I only got a good together with her. I'm all she's got in the world! Let her call me nigger! Let her call me the whitest of the white! I'm all she's got in the world, ain't I? She's all I've got! You with your fool talk of the black race and the white race! Where does the human race get a chance to come in? I suppose that's simple for you. You lock it up in asylums and throw away the key! [With fresh violence.] Go along! There isn't going to be no more people coming in here to separate—excepting the doctor. I'm going to lock the door and it's going to stay locked, you hear? Go along, now!

Hattie—[Confusedly.] Jim!

Jim—[Pushes her out gently and slams the door after her—vaguely.] Go along! I got to study. I got to nurse Ella, too. Oh, I can do it! I can do anything for her! [He sits down at the table and, opening the book, begins again to recite the line from Blackstone in a meaningless rhythm, tapping his forehead with his fist. Ella enters

noiselessly through the portières. She wears a red dressing-gown over her night-dress but is in her bare feet. She has a carving-knife in her right hand. Her eyes fasten on Jim with a murderous mania. She creeps up behind him. Suddenly he senses something and turns. As he sees her he gives a cry, jumping up and catching her wrist. She stands fixed, her eyes growing bewildered and frightened.]

Jim—[Aghast.] Ella! For God's sake! Do you want to murder me? [She does not answer. He shakes her.]

Ella—[Whimperingly.] They kept calling me names as I was walking along—I can't tell you what, Jim—and then I grabbed a knife——

Jim—Yes! See! This! [She looks at it frightenedly.]

Ella—Where did I——? I was having a nightmare—— Where did they go—I mean, how did I get here? [With sudden terrified pleading—like a little girl.] Oh, Jim—don't ever leave me alone! I have such terrible dreams, Jim—promise you'll never go away!

Jim—I promise, Honey.

Ella—[Her manner becoming more and more childishly silly.] I'll be a little girl—and you'll be old Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years—— Will you play that?

Jim—Yes, Honey. Now you better go back to bed.

Ella—[Like a child.] Yes, Uncle Jim. [She turns to go. He pretends to be occupied by his book. She looks at him for a second—then suddenly asks in her natural woman's voice.] Are you studying hard, Jim?

Jim—Yes, Honey. Go to bed now. You need to rest, you know.

Ella—[Stands looking at him, fighting with herself. A startling transformation comes over her face. It grows mean, vicious, full of jealous hatred. She cannot contain herself but breaks out harshly with a cruel, venomous grin.] You dirty

nigger!

Jim—[Starting as if he'd been shot.] Ella! For the good Lord's sake!

Ella—[Coming out of her insane mood for a moment, aware of something terrible, frightened.] Jim! Jim! Why are you looking at me like that?

Jim—What did you say to me just then?

Ella—[Gropingly.] Why, I—I said—I remember saying, are you studying hard, Jim? Why? You're not mad at that, are you?

Jim—No, Honey. What made you think I was mad? Go to bed now.

Ella—[Obediently.] Yes, Jim. [She passes behind the portières. Jim stares before him. Suddenly her head is thrust out at the side of the portières. Her face is again that of a vindictive maniac.] Nigger! [The face disappears—she can be heard running away, laughing with cruel satisfaction. Jim bows his head on his outstretched arms but he is too stricken for tears.]

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT TWO SCENE THREE

Scene—The same, six months later. The sun has just gone down. The Spring twilight sheds a vague, gray light about the room, picking out the Congo mask on the stand by the window. The walls have shrunken in still more, the ceiling now barely clears the people's heads, the furniture and the characters appear enormously magnified. Law books are stacked in two great piles on each side of the table. Ella comes in from the right, the carving-knife in her hand. She is pitifully thin, her face is wasted, but her eyes glow with a mad energy, her movements are abrupt and spring-like. She looks stealthily about the room, then advances and stands before the mask, her arms akimbo, her attitude one of crazy mockery, fear and bravado. She is dressed in the red dressing-gown, grown dirty and ragged now, and is in her bare feet.

Ella—I'll give you the laugh, wait and see! [Then in a confidential tone.] He thought I was asleep! He called, Ella, Ella—but I kept my eyes shut, I pretended to snore. I fooled him good. [She gives a little hoarse laugh.] This is the first time he's dared to leave me alone for months and months. I've been wanting to talk to you every day but this is the only chance—— [With sudden violence—flourishing her knife.] What're you grinning about, you dirty nigger, you? How dare you grin at me? I guess you forget what you are! That's always the way. Be kind to you, treat you decent, and in a second you've got a swelled head, you think you're somebody, you're all over the place putting on airs, why, it's got so I can't even walk down the street without seeing niggers, niggers everywhere. Hanging around, grinning, grinning—going to school—pretending they're white—taking examinations——[She stops, arrested by the word, then suddenly.] That's where he's gone—down to the mail-box—to see if there's a letter from the Board—telling him—— But why is he so long? [She calls pitifully.] Jim! [Then in a terrified whimper.] Maybe he's passed! Maybe he's passed! [In a frenzy.] No! No! He can't! I'd kill him! I'd kill myself! [Threatening the Congo mask.] It's you who're to blame for this! Yes, you! Oh, I'm on to you! [Then appealingly.] But why d'you want to do this to us? What have I ever done wrong to you? What have you got against me? I married you, didn't I? Why don't you let Jim alone? Why don't you let him be happy as he is—with me? Why don't you let me be happy? He's white, isn't he—the whitest man that ever lived? Where do you come in to interfere? Black! Black! Black as dirt! You've poisoned me! I can't wash myself clean! Oh, I hate you! I hate you! Why don't you let Jim and I be happy? [She sinks down in his chair, her arms outstretched on the table. The door from the hall is slowly opened and Jim appears. His bloodshot, sleepless eyes stare from deep hollows. His expression is one of crushed numbness. He holds an open letter in his hand.]

Jim—[Seeing Ella—in an absolutely dead voice.] Honey—I thought you were asleep.

Ella—[Starts and wheels about in her chair.] What's that? You got—you got a letter——?

Jim—[Turning to close the door after him.] From the Board of Examiners for admission to the Bar, State of New York—God's country! [He finishes up with a chuckle of ironic self-pity so spent as to be barely audible.]

Ella—[Writhing out of her chair like some fierce animal, the knife held behind her—with fear and hatred.] You didn't—you didn't—you didn't pass, did you?

Jim—[Looking at her wildly.] Pass? Pass? [He begins to chuckle and laugh between sentences and phrases, rich, Negro laughter, but heart-breaking in its mocking grief.] Good Lord, child, how come you can ever imagine such a crazy idea? Pass? Me? Jim Crow Harris? Nigger Jim Harris—become a full-fledged Member of the Bar! Why the mere notion of it is enough to kill you with laughing! It'd be against all natural laws, all human right and justice. It'd be miraculous, there'd be earthquakes and catastrophes, the seven Plagues'd come again and locusts'd devour all the money in the banks, the second Flood'd come roaring and Noah'd fall overboard, the sun'd drop out of the sky like a ripe fig, and the Devil'd perform miracles, and God'd be tipped head first right out of the Judgment seat! [He laughs, maudlinly uproarious.]

Ella—[Her face beginning to relax, to light up.] Then you—you didn't pass?

Jim—[Spent—giggling and gasping idiotically.] Well, I should say not! I should certainly say not!

Ella—[With a cry of joy, pushes all the law books crashing to the floor—then with childish happiness she grabs Jim by both hands and dances up and down.] Oh, Jim, I knew it! I knew you couldn't! Oh, I'm so glad, Jim! I'm so happy! You're still my old Jim—and I'm so glad! [He looks at her dazedly, a fierce rage slowly gathering on his face. She dances away from him. His eyes follow her. His hands clench. She stands in front of the mask—triumphantly.] There! What did I tell you? I told you

I'd give you the laugh! [She begins to laugh with wild unrestraint, grabs the mask from its place, sets it in the middle of the table and plunging the knife down through it pins it to the table.] There! Who's got the laugh now?

Jim—[His eyes bulging—hoarsely.] You devil! You white devil woman! [In a terrible roar, raising his fists above her head.] You devil!

Ella—[Looking up at him with a bewildered cry of terror.] Jim! [Her appeal recalls him to himself. He lets his arms slowly drop to his sides, bowing his head. Ella points tremblingly to the mask.] It's all right, Jim! It's dead. The devil's dead. See! It couldn't live—unless you passed. If you'd passed it would have lived in you. Then I'd have had to kill you, Jim, don't you see—or it would have killed me. But now I've killed it. [She pats his hand.] So you needn't ever be afraid any more, Jim.

Jim—[Dully.] I've got to sit down, Honey. I'm tired. I haven't had much chance for sleep in so long—— [He slumps down in the chair by the table.]

Ella—[Sits down on the floor beside him and holds his hand. Her face is gradually regaining an expression that is happy, childlike and pretty.] I know, Jim! That was my fault. I wouldn't let you sleep. I couldn't let you. I kept thinking if he sleeps good then he'll be sure to study good and then he'll pass—and the devil'll win!

Jim—[With a groan.] Don't, Honey!

Ella—[With a childish grin.] That was why I carried that knife around—[she frowns—puzzled]—one reason—to keep you from studying and sleeping by scaring you.

Jim—I wasn't scared of being killed. I was scared of what they'd do to you after.

Ella—[After a pause—like a child.] Will God forgive me, Jim?

Jim—Maybe He can forgive what you've done to me; and maybe He can forgive what I've done to you; but I don't see how He's going to forgive—Himself.

Ella—I prayed and prayed. When you were away taking the examinations and I was

alone with the nurse, I closed my eyes and pretended to be asleep but I was praying with all my might: O God, don't let Jim pass!

Jim—[With a sob.] Don't, Honey, don't! For the good Lord's sake! You're hurting me!

Ella—[Frightenedly.] How, Jim? Where? [Then after a pause—suddenly.] I'm sick, Jim. I don't think I'll live long.

Jim—[Simply.] Then I won't either. Somewhere yonder maybe—together—our luck'll change. But I wanted—here and now—before you—we—I wanted to prove to you—to myself—to become a full-fledged Member—so you could be proud——[He stops. Words fail and he is beyond tears.]

Ella—[Brightly.] Well, it's all over, Jim. Everything'll be all right now. [Chattering along.] I'll be just your little girl, Jim—and you'll be my little boy—just as we used to be, remember, when we were beaux; and I'll put shoe blacking on my face and pretend I'm black and you can put chalk on your face and pretend you're white just as we used to do—and we can play marbles—only you mustn't all the time be a boy. Sometimes you must be my old kind Uncle Jim who's been with us for years and years. Will you, Jim?

Jim—[With utter resignation.] Yes, Honey.

Ella—And you'll never, never, never, never leave me, Jim?

Jim—Never, Honey.

Ella—'Cause you're all I've got in the world—and I love you, Jim. [She kisses his hand as a child might, tenderly and gratefully.]

Jim—[Suddenly throws himself on his knees and raises his shining eyes, his transfigured face.] Forgive me, God—and make me worthy! Now I see Your Light again! Now I hear Your Voice! [He begins to weep in an ecstasy of religious humility.] Forgive me, God, for blaspheming You! Let this fire of burning suffering

purify me of selfishness and make me worthy of the child You send me for the woman You take away!

Ella—[Jumping to her feet—excitedly.] Don't cry, Jim! You mustn't cry! I've got only a little time left and I want to play. Don't be old Uncle Jim now. Be my little boy, Jim. Pretend you're Painty Face and I'm Jim Crow. Come and play!

Jim—[Still deeply exalted.] Honey, Honey, I'll play right up to the gates of Heaven with you! [She tugs at one of his hands, laughingly trying to pull him up from his knees as

[The Curtain Falls]

WELDED

A Play in Three Acts

CHARACTERS

Michael Cape

Eleanor Owen, his wife

John Darnton

A Woman

ACT I

Scene—The Capes' apartment.

ACT II

Scene I—Library, Darnton's home

Scene II—A room

ACT III

Scene—Same as Act I

ACT I

ACT ONE

Scene—The Capes' studio apartment on Fifty-ninth Street, New York City—a large room with a high ceiling. In the rear there is a balcony with a stairway at center leading down to the studio floor. This balcony is the second story of the apartment, on which are situated the bedrooms, bathroom, etc. The section of the studio beneath the balcony is used as a dining room. The studio proper is a combination of tasteful comfort with the practicability of a workroom. Well-filled bookcases line the walls. There is a typewriting table with a machine on it, a big desk, a reading and writing table with books, magazines, etc. Easy chairs, a chaise longue, rugs, etc.

It is about eleven-thirty. The room is in darkness except for the reading lamp on the table. The chaise longue has been pulled up within the circle of light and Eleanor is lying back on this, reading from a manuscript. She is a woman of thirty. Her figure is tall, with the lithe lines of nervous strength. Her face, with its high, rather prominent cheek-bones, lacks harmony; but each feature is in itself arresting. It is dominated by passionate, blue-gray eyes, restrained by a high forehead from which the mass of her dark brown hair is combed straight back. The first impression of her whole personality is one of charm, partly innate, partly imposed by years of self-discipline. The motions of her body are free and sure. Each movement is a complete reason for itself. The low notes of her voice are disturbing. She is something of every character she has ever played, of every woman one has ever met.

She reads, puts the script down, and her lips move as if she were memorizing. She hesitates, frowns, utters an exclamation of annoyance, looks at the script, finally flings it on the table with a sigh of irritation at her mistakes, gets up, lights a cigarette, resumes her former position, starts to take up the script again but instead, with a sudden impulse which has something in it of girlish embarrassment, picks up

a letter from the table. This she opens and reads, an expression of delight and love coming over her face. She kisses the letter impulsively—then gives a gay laugh at herself. She lets the letter fall on her lap and stares straight before her, lost in a sentimental reverie.

The door at right, underneath the balcony, is noiselessly opened and Cape appears. He is thirty-five, tall and dark. His unusual face impresses one. It is older and wiser than he, a harrowed battlefield of super-sensitiveness, the features at war with one another though the general effect is of a handsome face. He has the forehead of a thinker, the eyes of a dreamer, the nose and mouth of a sensualist. One feels a powerful imagination tinged with somber sadness—a driving force of creation which can be sympathetic and cruel at the same time. His manner is extraordinarily nervous and self-conscious. He is never at ease, is always watching himself. There is something tortured about him. Yet at moments he can be astonishingly boyish and outpouring. His body is gracefully made but his nervousness gives his movements an uncoördinated quality. One feels perpetual strain about him, a passionate tension, a self-protecting and intellectually arrogant defiance of life and his own weakness, a deep need to love and be loved, for a faith in which to relax.

He has a suitcase, hat, and overcoat which he sets inside on the floor by wall to rear of door, glancing toward his wife, trying not to make the slightest noise. But she suddenly becomes aware of some presence in the room, starts nervously, then turns boldly to face it. She gives an exclamation of delighted astonishment when she sees Cape and jumps up to meet him as he strides toward her.

Eleanor—Michael!

Cape—[With a boyish grin.] You've spoiled it, Nelly; I wanted a kiss to announce me. [They are in each other's arms. He kisses her tenderly.]

Eleanor—[Kissing him—joyfully.] This is a surprise!

Cape—[Straining her in his arms and kissing her passionately.] Own little wife!

Eleanor—Dearest! [They look into each other's eyes for a long moment.]

Cape—[Tenderly.] Happy?

Eleanor—Yes, yes! Why do you always ask? You know. [She kisses him again and nestles her face against his shoulder.]

Cape—[Pressing her to him.] Darling!

Eleanor—[Suddenly pushing him to arms' length—with a happy laugh.] It's positively immoral for an old married couple to act this way. [She leads him by the hand to the chaise longue.] And you must explain. You wrote not to expect you till the end of the week. [She sits down.] Get a cushion. Sit down here. [He puts a cushion on the floor beside the chaise longue and sits down.] Tell me all about it.

Cape—[Notices the letter lying on the floor.] Were you reading my letter? [She nods. He gives a happy grin.] Do you mean to say you still read them over—after five years of me?

Eleanor—[With a tender smile.] Oh—sometimes.

Cape—[Kissing her hand.] Sweetheart! [Smiling.] What were you dreaming about when I intruded?

Eleanor—Never mind. You're enough of an egotist already. [Her hand caressing his face and hair.] I've been feeling so lonely—and it's only been a few weeks, hasn't it?—but it's seemed—ages. [She laughs.] How was everything in the country? [Suddenly kissing him.] Oh, I'm so happy you're back. [With mock severity.] But ought I? Have you finished the fourth act? You know you promised not to return until you did.

Cape—This afternoon!

Eleanor—That's splendid!

Cape—When I wrote you last it was dragging damnably—then suddenly everything cleared and there was nothing to do but write like the devil. [With smiling elation.]

From then on it rode me unmercifully to the finish!

Eleanor—You're sure you didn't force it—[with a tender smile at him]—because you were lonely, too?

Cape—[With a sudden change in manner that is almost stern.] No. I wouldn't—I couldn't—— You know that.

Eleanor—[Her face showing a trace of hurt in spite of herself.] I was only fooling. [Then rousing herself as if conquering a growing depression.] Tell me about the last act. I'm terribly anxious to hear what you've done.

Cape—[Enthusiastically.] It's real, Nelly! You'll see when I read you—— The whole play has power and truth, I know it! And you're going to be marvelous! I could see you in it every second I was writing! It's going to be the finest thing we've ever done!

Eleanor—[Kissing him impulsively.] Dear! I love you for saying "we." But the "we" is you. I only—[with a smile of ironical self-pity]—act a part you've created.

Cape—[Impetuously.] Nonsense! You're an artist. Each performance of yours has taught me something new. Why, my women used to be—death masks. But now I flatter myself they're as alive as you are—[with a sudden grin]—at least, when you play them, Wonderful! [He kisses her hand.]

Eleanor—[Her eyes shining with excited pleasure.] You don't know how much it means to have you talk like that! Oh, I'm going to work so hard on this play, Michael! I've been studying the first three acts—— [Impetuously.] You've simply got to read me that last act right now!

Cape—[Jumping to his feet eagerly.] All right. [He walks toward his bag—then stops when he is half-way and, hesitating, turns slowly and comes back. He bends down and lifts her face to his and kisses her tenderly, looking into her eyes—with a loving smile, slowly.] No, on second thoughts, I won't read it now.

Eleanor—[Disappointed—but tenderly.] Oh. Why not, dear?

Cape—[With a smile.] Because——

Eleanor—[Smiling.] Plagiarist!

Cape—Because I've been hoping for this night as our own. Let's forget the actress and playwright. Let's just be—us—lovers.

Eleanor—[With a tender smile—musingly.] We have remained lovers—in spite of marriage—haven't we?

Cape—[With a grin.] Fights and all.

Eleanor—[With a little frown.] We don't fight so much.

Cape—[Frowning himself.] Too much.

Eleanor—[Forcing a smile.] Perhaps that's the price.

Cape—[With a wry smile.] Don't grow fatalistic—just when I was about to propose reform.

Eleanor—[Smiling—quickly.] Oh, I'll promise to be good—if you will. [Gently reproachful.] Do you think I enjoy fighting with you? [Intensely.] Don't you realize how it destroys me?

Cape—[With deep seriousness.] Then let's resolve—once and for all—to refuse to wound each other again—— [With passion.] It's wrong, Nelly. It's evil! We love too deeply.

Eleanor—Ssshh! We promise, dear.

Cape—[Kissing her; then, hesitatingly.] We've been taking each other too much for granted. That may do very well with the earthly loves of the world—but ours has a God in it! And when the worshipers nod, the God deserts their shrine. [He suddenly laughs with awkward self-consciousness.] I'm afraid that sounds like preaching. [He suddenly pulls her head down and kisses her impulsively.] But you understand! Oh, Nelly, I love you—love you with all my soul!

Eleanor—[Deeply moved.] And I love you, Michael—always and forever! [They sit close, she staring dreamily before her, he watching her face.]

Cape—[After a pause.] What are you thinking?

Eleanor—[With a tender smile.] Of the first time we met—at rehearsal, remember? I was thinking of how mistakenly I had pictured you before that. [She pauses—then frowning a little.] I'd heard such a lot of gossip about your love affairs.

Cape—[With a wry grin.] You must have been disappointed if you expected Don Juan. [A pause—then forcing a short laugh.] I also had heard a lot of rumors about your previous—— [He stops abruptly with an expression of extreme bitterness.]

Eleanor—[Sharply.] Don't! [A pause—then she goes on sadly.] It was only our past together I wanted to remember. [A pause—then with a trace of scornful resentment.] I was forgetting your morbid obsession——

Cape—[With gloomy irritation.] Obsession? Why——? [Then determinedly throwing off this mood—reproachfully forcing a joking tone.] We're not "starting something" now, are we—after our promise?

Eleanor—[Impulsively kissing him and straining her arms around him.] No, no—of course not! Dearest!

Cape—[After a pause—a bit awkwardly.] But you guessed my desire, at that. I wanted to dream with you in our past—to find together in our old love—a new faith——

Eleanor—[Smiling—a bit mockingly.] Another Grand Ideal for our marriage?

Cape—[Frowning.] Don't mock.

Eleanor—[Smiling teasingly.] But you're such a relentless idealist. You needn't frown. That was exactly what drew me to you in those first days. [Earnestly.] I had lost faith in everything. Your love saved me. Your work saved mine. [Intensely.] I owe you myself, Michael! [She kisses him. Then she goes on intensely.] Do you

remember—our first night together?

Cape—[Kissing her hand—tenderly reproachful.] Do you imagine I could've forgotten?

Eleanor—[Continuing as if she hadn't heard.] The play was such a marvelous success! I knew I had finally won recognition—through your work. I loved myself! I loved you! You came to me—and my whole being strained out—— [More and more intensely.] Oh, it was beautiful madness! I found and lost myself, I began living in you. I wanted to die and become you!

Cape—[Passionately.] And I, you!

Eleanor—[Softly.] And do you remember the dawn creeping in—and how we began to discuss our future? [He kisses her hand. She exclaims impulsively.] Oh, I'd give anything in the world to live those days over again!

Cape—[Smiling reproachfully.] Why? Hasn't our marriage kept the spirit of that time—with a growth of something deeper—finer——

Eleanor—Yes,—but—— Oh, you know what I mean! It was revelation, then—a miracle out of the sky.

Cape—[Insistently.] But haven't we realized the ideal we conceived of our marriage—— [Smiling but with deep earnestness nevertheless.] We approached our wedding extremely cautiously, if you'll remember, even after months of successful living together. Not for us the convenient sanction, the family rite. We swore to have a true sacrament—our own—or nothing! Our marriage must be a consummation of creative love, demanding and combining the best in each of us! Hard, difficult, guarded from the commonplace, kept sacred as the outward form of our deep, inner harmony! [With an awkward sense of having become rhetorical he adds self-mockingly.] We'd tend our flame on an altar, not in a kitchen range! [He forces a grin—then abruptly changing again, with a sudden fierce pleading.] It has been what we dreamed, hasn't it, Nelly?

Eleanor—[Thoughtfully.] Our ideal was difficult—for human beings. But even when we've hurt each other most cruelly—I've always known——

Cape—[Putting his arms about her and straining her to him.] We must learn to love even the things we hate in each other. We must accept each other wholly, as we are, as we must become!

Eleanor—[Sadly.] Sometimes I think we have loved too intensely—demanded too much of each other. Now there's nothing left but that something which can't give itself. And I blame you for this—because I can neither take more nor give more—and you blame me! [She smiles tenderly.] And then we fight!

Cape—[Excitedly.] Then let's be proud of our fight! It's the penalty of a love that strives to surpass itself—by regaining unity. It began with the splitting of a cell a hundred million years ago into you and me, leaving an eternal yearning to become one life again.

Eleanor—[Kissing him passionately.] At moments—we do.

Cape—Yes! Yes! [He kisses her—then intensely.] You and I—year after year—together—forms of our two bodies coalescing into one form; rhythm of our separate lives beating against each other, forming slowly the one rhythm—the life of Us—our life created by us—outside, beyond, above! [With sudden furious anger.] God, what I feel of the truth of this—the beauty!—but how can I express it?

Eleanor—[Kissing him.] I understand.

Cape—[Straining her to him with fierce passion.] Oh, My Own, My Own—and I your own—to the end of time! I love you! I love you!

Eleanor—[Returning his kisses.] I love you!

Cape—[With passionate exultance.] Why do you regret our first days? Their fire still burns in us—but deeper—more sacred. Don't you feel that? [Kissing her again and again.] My Own! My Own! I have become you! You have become me! One

heart! One blood! Ours! [He pulls her to her feet and kisses her.] My wife!——Come!

Eleanor—[Almost swooning in his arms.] My lover—yes—— My lover——

Cape—Come! [With his arms around her he leads her to the stairway. As they get to the foot, there is a noise from the hall. She hears it, starts, seems suddenly brought back to herself. Cape is oblivious and continues up the stairs. She stands swaying, holding on to the banister as if in a daze. At the top, Cape turns in surprise at not finding her, as if he had felt her behind him. He looks down passionately, stretching out his arms, his eyes glowing.] Come!

Eleanor—[Weakly.] Ssshh! A moment—— Listen!

Cape—[Bewilderedly.] What? What is it?

Eleanor—Ssshh—Listen—Someone—— [She speaks in an unnatural, mechanical tone. A knock comes at the door. She gives a sort of gasp of relief.] There.

Cape—[Still bewilderedly as if something mysterious were happening that he cannot grasp.] What—what——? [Then as she takes a slow, mechanical step toward the door—with tense pleading.] Nelly! Come here! [She turns to look at him and is held by his imploring eyes. She sways irresolutely toward him, again reaching to the banister for support. Then a sharper knock comes at the door. It acts like a galvanic shock on her. Her eyes move in that direction, she takes another jerky step, Cape stammers in a fierce whisper.] No! Don't go!

Eleanor—[Without looking at him—mechanically.] I must.

Cape—[Frantically.] They'll go away. Nelly, don't! Don't! [Again she stops irresolutely like a hypnotized person torn by two conflicting suggestions. The knock is repeated, this time with authority, assurance. Her body reacts as if she were throwing off a load.]

Eleanor—[With a return to her natural tone—but hysterically.] Please—don't be

silly, Michael. It might be—something important. [She hurries to the door.]

Cape—[Rushing down the stairs—frantically.] No! No! [He just gets to the bottom as she opens the door. He stands there fixed, disorganized, trembling all over.]

Eleanor—[As she sees who it is—in a relieved tone of surprise.] Why, hello, John. Come in! Here's Michael. Michael, it's John. [Darnton steps into the room. He is a man of about fifty, tall, loose-limbed, a bit stoop-shouldered, with iron-gray hair, and a long, gaunt, shrewd face. He is not handsome but his personality compels affection. His eyes are round and childlike. They seem to understand sorrow without ever having known it. They see everyone with understanding, they never judge. The whole man has the quality of steadfastness. You feel he will always be there, unchanged, unchangeable, always serene and kindly, a cool rock for the fevered. He has no nerves. His voice is low and calming. He is dressed negligently but in expensive tweed.]

Darnton—[Shaking Eleanor by the hand.] Hello, Nelly. I was on my way home from the theater and I thought I'd drop in for a second. Hello, Michael. When'd you get in? Glad to see you back. [He comes to him and shakes his hand which Cape extends jerkily, as if in spite of himself, without a word.]

Eleanor—[After a glance at her husband—in a forced tone.] We're so glad you've come. Sit down.

Darnton—[He becomes aware of the disharmonious atmosphere his appearance has created.] I can't stay a second. [To Cape.] I wanted some news of the big play. I thought Nelly'd probably have heard from you. [He slaps Cape on the back with jovial familiarity.] Well, how's it coming?

Cape—[In a frozen tone.] Oh,—all right—all right.

Eleanor—[Uneasily.] Won't you have a cigarette, John? [She takes the box from the table and holds it out to him.]

Darnton—[Taking one.] Thanks, Nelly. [He half-sits on the arm of a chair. She

holds out a light to him.] Thanks.

Eleanor—[Nervously.] Why don't you sit down, Michael? [He doesn't answer. She goes to him with the cigarettes.] Don't you want a cigarette? [Cape stares at her with a hot glance of scorn. She recoils from it, turning quickly away from him, visibly shaken. Without appearing to notice, Darnton scrutinizes their faces keenly, sizing up the situation.]

Darnton—[Breaking in matter-of-factly.] You look done up, Michael.

Cape—[With a guilty start.] I—I—I'm tired out.

Eleanor—[With a forced air.] He's been working too hard. He finished the last act only this afternoon.

Darnton—[With a grunt of satisfaction.] Glad to hear it—mighty glad. [Abruptly.] When can I see it?

Cape—In a day or so—I want to go over——

Darnton—All right. [Getting to his feet.] Well, that's that. I'll run along.

Eleanor—[Almost frightenedly.] Do stay. Why don't you read us the last act now, Michael?

Cape—[Fiercely.] No! It's rotten! I hate the whole play!

Darnton—[Easily.] Suffering from the reaction. This play's the finest thing you've done. [He comes to Cape and slaps him on the back reassuringly.] And it's the biggest chance the lady here has ever had. It'll be a triumph for you both, wait and see. So cheer up—and get a good night's rest. [Cape smiles with bitter irony.] Well, good-night. [Cape nods without speaking, Darnton goes to the door, Eleanor accompanying him.] Good-night, Nelly. Better start on your part—only don't you overdo it, too. [He pats her on the back.] Good-night.

Eleanor—Good-night. [She closes the door after him. She remains there for a moment staring at the closed door, afraid to turn and meet Cape's fiercely accusing

eyes which she feels fixed upon her. Finally, making an effort of will, she walks back to the table, avoiding his eyes, assuming a careless air.]

Cape—[Suddenly explodes in furious protest.] Why did you do that?

Eleanor—[With an assumed surprise but with a guilty air, turning over the pages of a magazine.] Do what?

Cape—[Tensely, clutching her by the arm.] You know what I mean! [Unconsciously he grips her tighter, almost shaking her.]

Eleanor—[Coldly.] You are hurting me. [A bit shamefacedly, Cape lets go of her arm. She glances quickly at his face, then speaks with a kind of dull remorse.] I suppose I can guess—my going to the door?

Cape—He would have gone away—— [With anguish.] Nelly, why did you?

Eleanor—[Defensively.] Wasn't it important you should see John?

Cape—[With helpless anger.] Don't evade! [With deep feeling.] I should think you'd be ashamed.

Eleanor—[After a pause—dully.] Perhaps—I am. [A pause.] I couldn't help myself.

Cape—[Intensely.] You should have been oblivious to everything! [Miserably.] I—I can't understand!

Eleanor—That's you, Michael. The other is me—or a part of me—I hardly understand myself.

Cape—[Sinking down on a chair, his head in his hands.] After all we'd been to each other tonight—! [With bitter despondency.] Ruined now—gone—a rare moment of beauty! It seems at times as if some jealous demon of the commonplace were mocking our love—— [With a violent gesture of loathing.] Oh, how intolerably insulting life can be! [Then brokenly.] Nelly, why, why did you?

Eleanor—[Dully.] I—I don't know. [Then after a pause she comes over and puts her hand on his shoulder.] Don't brood, dear. I'm sorry. I hate myself. [A pause. She

looks down at him, seeming to make up her mind to something—in a forced tone.] But—why is it gone—irrevocably—our beautiful moment? [She strokes his hair.] We have the whole night—— [He stares up at her wonderingly. She forces a smile, half turning away.]

Cape—[In wild protest.] Nelly, what are you offering me—a sacrifice? Please!

Eleanor—[Revolted.] Michael! [Then hysterically.] No, forgive me! I'm the disgusting one! Forgive me! [She turns away from him and throws herself on a chair, staring straight before her. Their chairs are side by side, each facing front, so near that by a slight movement each could touch the other, but during the following scene they stare straight ahead and remain motionless. They speak, ostensibly to the other, but showing by their tone it is a thinking aloud to oneself, and neither appears to hear what the other has said.]

Cape—[After a long pause.] More and more frequently. There's always some knock at the door, some reminder of the life outside which calls you away from me.

Eleanor—It is so beautiful—and then—suddenly I'm being crushed. I feel a cruel presence in you paralyzing me, creeping over my body, possessing it so it is no longer my body—then grasping at some last inmost thing which makes me me—my soul—demanding to have that, too! I have to rebel with all my strength—seize any pretext! Just now at the foot of the stairs—the knock on the door was—liberation. [In anguish.] And yet I love you! It's because I love you! If I am destroyed, what is left to love you, what is left for you to love?

Cape—I've grown inward into our life. But you keep trying to escape as if it were a prison. You feel the need of what is outside. I am not enough for you.

Eleanor—Why is it I can never know you? I love you—and you're strange. I try to know you and I can't. I desire to take all of you into my heart, but there is a great alien force—— I hate that unknown power in you which would destroy me. [Pleadingly.] Haven't I a right to myself as you have to yourself?

Cape—You fight against me as if I were your enemy. Every word or action of mine which affects you, you resent. At every turn you feel your individuality invaded—while at the same time you are jealous of any separateness in me. You demand more and more while you give less and less. And I have to acquiesce. Have to? Yes, because I love you. I cannot live without you! You realize that! You take advantage of it while you despise me for my helplessness! [This seems to goad him to desperation.] But look out! I still have the strength to——! [He turns his head and stares at her challengingly.]

Eleanor—[As before.] You insist that I have no life at all outside you. Even my work must exist only as an echo of yours. You hate my need of easy, casual associations. You think that weakness. You hate my friends. You are jealous of everything and everybody. You would wall me in——[Resentfully.] I have to fight. You are too severe. Your ideal is too inhuman. Why can't you understand and be generous—be just! [She turns to meet his eyes, staring back with resentful accusation. They look at each other in this manner for a long moment.]

Cape—[Averting his eyes and addressing her directly in a cold, sarcastic tone.] Strange—that Darnton should pop in on us suddenly like that.

Eleanor—[Resentfully.] I don't see anything strange about it.

Cape—It's past twelve——

Eleanor—You're in New York now.

Cape—[Sharply.] I'm quite aware of that. Nevertheless——

Eleanor—[Shortly.] He explained. Didn't you hear him? He wanted news of the play and thought I might have a letter——

Cape—That's just the point. He had no idea he would find me here.

Eleanor—[About to fly at him, checks herself after a pause, coldly.] Why shouldn't he come to see me? He's the oldest friend I've got. He gave me my first chance and

he's always helped me since. I owe whatever success I've made of my acting to his advice and direction.

Cape—[Stung—sarcastically.] Oh, undoubtedly!

Eleanor—I suppose you think I ought to have said it's to you I owe everything?

Cape—[Dryly.] I'd prefer to say it was to yourself, and no one else. [After a pause—attempting a casual tone.] Has he been in the habit of calling here while I've been gone? [Hurriedly.] Don't misunderstand me. I'm merely asking a question.

Eleanor—[Scornfully.] Oh! [A pause. She bites her lips—then coldly.] Yes, he's been here once before. [Mockingly.] And after the theater, too! Think of that!

Cape—[Sneeringly.] The same insatiable curiosity about my play?

Eleanor—[Angrily.] Michael! [A pause—then scornfully.] Don't tell me you're becoming jealous of John again!

Cape—[Meaningly.] Again. That's just it.

Eleanor—[Springing from her chair—excitedly.] This is insufferable! [Then calming herself with an effort—with a forced laugh.] Please don't be so ridiculous, Michael. I'll only lose my temper if you keep on. [Then suddenly she makes up her mind and comes to him.] Please stop, dear. We've made up our minds not to quarrel. Let's drop it. [She pats his head with a friendly smile.]

Cape—[Impulsively takes her hand and kisses it.] All right. Forgive me. I'm all unstrung. His breaking in on us like that—— [He relapses into frowning brooding again. She sits down, this time facing him, and looks at him uneasily.]

Eleanor—[After a pause—rather irritably.] It's too absolutely silly, your being jealous of John.

Cape—I'm not jealous of him. I'm jealous of you—the perverse something in you that repulses our love—the stranger in you.

Eleanor—[With a short laugh.] I should think after five years——

Cape—[Unheeding.] And what makes me hate you at those times is that I know you like to make me jealous, that my suffering pleases you, that it satisfies some craving in you—for revenge!

Eleanor—[Scornfully.] Can't you realize how absurd you are? [Then with a forced placating laugh.] No, really, Michael, it would be funny—if it weren't so exasperating.

Cape—[After a pause—somberly.] You mentioned our years together as proof. What of the years that preceded?

Eleanor—[Challengingly.] Well, what of them?

Cape—By their light, I have plausible grounds for jealousy in Darnton's case. Or don't you acknowledge that?

Eleanor—I deny it absolutely!

Cape—Why, you've told me yourself he was in love with you for years, that he once asked you to marry him!

Eleanor—Well, did I marry him?

Cape—But he still loves you.

Eleanor—Don't be stupid!

Cape—He does, I tell you!

Eleanor—If you had any sense you'd know that his love has become purely that of an old friend. And I refuse to give up his friendship for your silly whims.

Cape—[After a pause in which they each brood resentfully—sarcastically.] You were a shining exception, it appears. The other women he helped could hardly claim he had remained—merely their friend.

Eleanor—[Vehemently.] It's a lie! You're repeating low Broadway scandal. And even if it were true, you'd find it was they who offered themselves.

Cape—[Significantly.] Ah! [Then after a pause.] Perhaps because they felt it

necessary for their careers.

Eleanor—[Dryly.] Perhaps. [Then after a pause.] But they discovered their mistake, then. John isn't that type.

Cape—[Suddenly.] Why do you act so jealous—of those others?

Eleanor—[Flushing angrily.] I don't. It's your stupid imagination.

Cape—Then why lose your temper?

Eleanor—Because I resent your superior attitude that John had to bribe women to love him. Isn't he as worthy of love—as you are?

Cape—[Sarcastically.] If I am to believe your story, you didn't think so.

Eleanor—[Irritably.] Then let's stop arguing, for heaven's sake! Why do you always have to rake up the past? For the last year or so you've begun to act more and more as you did when we first lived together—jealous and suspicious of everything and everybody! [Hysterically.] I can't bear it, Michael!

Cape—[Ironically.] You used to love me for it then.

Eleanor—[Calming herself.] Well, I can't endure it now. It's too degrading. I have a right to your complete faith. [Reaching over and grasping his hands—earnestly.] You know I have in your heart of hearts. You know I love you, that there can never be anyone but you. Forget the past. It wasn't us. For your peace—and mine, Michael!

Cape—[Moved—pressing her hands.] All right. Let's stop. It's only that I've thought I've felt you drawing away——! Perhaps it's all my super-sensitiveness—— [Patting her hand and forcing a smile.] Let's talk of something else. [Cheerfully—after a pause.] You can't imagine how wonderful it's been up in the country. There's just enough winter in the air to make one energetic. No summer fools about. Solitude and work. I was happy—that is, as happy as I ever can be without you.

Eleanor—[Withdrawing her hands from his with a quick movement—sarcastically.] Thanks for that afterthought—but do you expect me to believe it? When you're working I might die and you'd never know it.

Cape—[Amused but irritated.] There you go! You denounce my jealousy, but it seems to me your brand of it is much more ridiculous.

Eleanor—[Sharply.] You imagine I'm jealous of your work? You—you flatter yourself!

Cape—[Stung—bitingly.] It's an unnatural passion certainly—in your case. And an extremely ungrateful passion, I might add!

Eleanor—[Losing her temper completely.] You mean I ought to be grateful for—— I suppose you think that without your work I—— [Springing to her feet.] Your egotism is making a fool of you! You're becoming so exaggeratedly conceited no one can stand you! Everyone notices it!

Cape—[Angrily.] You know that's untrue. You only say it to be mean. As for my work, you've acknowledged a million times——

Eleanor—If I have—but please remember there are other playwrights in the world!

Cape—[Bitingly.] You were on the stage seven years before I met you. Your appearance in the work of other playwrights—you must admit you were anything but successful!

Eleanor—[With a sneer of rage.] And I suppose you were?

Cape—Yes! Not in your Broadway sense, perhaps, but——

Eleanor—You're contemptible! You know that's the very last thing you can say of me. It was exactly because I wasn't that kind—because I was an artist—that I found it so hard!

Cape—[Unheeding.] My plays had been written. The one you played in first was written three years before. The work was done. That's the proof.

Eleanor—[Scathingly.] That's absurd! You know very well if it hadn't been for John, you——

Cape—[Violently.] Nonsense! There were other managers who——

Eleanor—They didn't want your work, you know it!

Cape—[Enraged.] I see what you're driving at! You'd like to pretend I was as much dependent on Darnton as you were! [Trembling all over with the violence of his passion.] I should think you'd be ashamed to boast so brazenly—to me!—of what he had done for you!

Eleanor—Why should I be ashamed of my gratitude?

Cape—To drag that relationship out of the past and throw it in my face!

Eleanor—[Very pale—tensely.] What relationship?

Cape—[Incoherently, strangled by his passion.] Ask anyone—here—to Forty-second Street! [Then suddenly with anguished remorse.] No, no! I don't mean that! [Torturedly.] Wounds! Wounds! For God's sake, let's stop!

Eleanor—[Trembling with rage.] I'll never forget you said that! You cur!

Cape—[Stung—in a passion again at once.] Cur? Because I resent that man's being here—late at night—when I was away? I would be a cur if I didn't! Oh, I don't mean I suspect you—now——

Eleanor—[Viciously.] What noble faith! Maybe you're going to discover I don't deserve it!

Cape—[Unheeding.] But there was scandal enough about you and him, and if you had any respect for me——

Eleanor—I've lost it now!

Cape—You wouldn't deliberately open the way——

Eleanor—[Tensely.] So you believe—that gutter gossip? You think I——? Then all these years you've really believed——? Oh, you mean hypocrite!

Cape—[Stung—bitingly.] Don't act moral indignation! What else could I have thought? When we first fell in love, you confessed frankly you had had lovers—not Darnton but others——

Eleanor—[Brokenly—with mingled grief and rage.] I was an idiot! I should have lied to you! But I thought you'd understand—that I'd been searching for something—that I needed love—something I found at last in you! I tried to make you see the truth—the truth!—that those experiences had only served to make me appreciate you all the more when I found you! I told you how little these men had meant to me. I tried to convince you that in the state of mind I had been in it had no significance either one way or the other, and that such an attitude is possible for a woman without her being base. I thought you understood. But you didn't, you're not big enough for that! By your own experiences in the past you had made sex a degradation to yourself—and physical virtue the highest virtue in women! [With a gesture of loathing.] Always the physical! As if there could be only one attitude toward it for women!

Cape—[Angrily protesting.] What has all this silly generalizing to do with us? You forget that when we conceived the ideal of our marriage we both agreed that unfaithfulness would be the unpardonable sin—not because we regarded it as a crime in itself but because it was a symbol of our separate weak attitudes toward love in the past,—a sin against love, do you hear?—our love which we wished to make unique, beautiful, finer than other loves!

Eleanor—[With a wild ironical laugh.] Words! Now I know why the women in your plays are so wooden! You ought to get down on your knees and thank me for breathing life into them!

Cape—[Furiously.] Good God, how dare you criticize creative work, actress!

Eleanor—[Violently.] You deny that I create——? Perhaps if I'd consent to give up the stage, have children and a home, take up knitting—— [She laughs wildly.] I'd

be safe then, wouldn't I?—reliable, guaranteed not to—— [Her face seems suddenly to congeal.] So you think that I was Darnton's mistress—that I loved him—or do you believe I just sold myself for a career?

Cape—[In agony.] No, no! For God's sake, stop! I may have thought you once loved——

Eleanor—[Frozenly.] Well, it was—that—just that! When he first engaged me—I'd heard the gossip—I thought he expected—and I agreed with myself—it meant nothing to me one way or the other—nothing meant anything then but a chance to do my work, live my life—yes, I agreed—but you see he didn't, he didn't agree. He loved me but he saw I didn't love him—that way—and he's a finer man than you dream!

Cape—[Hoarsely.] You're lying! [Bewilderedly.] I can't believe——

Eleanor—[Fiercely.] Oh, yes you can! You want to! You do! And you're glad! It makes me seem a lower creature than you thought, but you're glad to know it just the same! You're glad because now you can really believe that—nothing ever happened between us! [She stares into his eyes and seems to read some confirmation of her statement there, for she cries with triumphant bitterness.] It's true! You can't deny it!

Cape—[Wildly.] No! You devil, you, you read thoughts into my mind!

Eleanor—[With wild hysterical scorn.] It's true! How can I love you? How could I ever love you?

Cape—[Clutching her in his arms fiercely.] Stop! Stop! You do love me! [He kisses her frantically. For a moment she submits, appears even to return his kisses in spite of herself. Cape cries triumphantly.] You do! [She suddenly pushes him away and glares at him at arms' length. Her features are working convulsively. Her whole tortured face expresses an abysmal self-loathing, a frightful hatred for him.]

Eleanor—[As if to herself—in a strangled voice.] No! You cannot crush—my

loathing! [Her face becomes deadly calm. She speaks with intense, cold hatred.] Don't kiss me. I despise you! I love him. He was—my lover—when you were away!

Cape—[Stares dumbly into her eyes for a long moment—hoarsely, in agony.] You lie! You lie! You only want to torture——

Eleanor—[Deathly calm.] It's true! [Cape stares at her another second—then, with a snarl of fury like an animal's he seizes her about the throat with both hands. He chokes her, forcing her down to her knees. She does not struggle but continues to look into his eyes with the same defiant hate. At last he comes to himself with a shudder and steps away from her. She remains where she is, only putting out her hand on the floor to support herself.]

Cape—[In a terrible state, sobbing with rage and anguish.] Gone! Dead! All our beauty gone! Oh, how I hate you! And you don't love him! You lie! You did this out of hatred for me! You dragged our ideal in the gutter—with delight! [Wildly.] And you pride yourself you've killed it, do you, you actress, you barren soul? [With savage triumph.] But I tell you only a creator can really destroy! [With a climax of frenzy.] And I will! I will! I won't give your hatred the satisfaction of seeing our love live on in me—to torture me! I'll drag it lower than you! I'll stamp it into the vilest depth! I'll leave it dead! I'll murder it—and be free! [Again he threatens her, his hands twitching back toward her neck—then he rushes out of the door as if furies were pursuing him, slamming it shut behind him.]

Eleanor—[With a cry of despair.] Michael! [She stops as hatred and rage overpower her again—leaps up and runs to the door—opens it and screams after him violently.] Go! Go! I'm glad! I hate you. I'll go, too! I'm free! I'll go—— [She turns and runs up the stairs. She disappears for a moment, then comes back with a hat and coat on and, hurrying down the stairs again, rushes out leaving the door open behind her.]

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT II

ACT TWO SCENE ONE

Scene—Library of John Darnton's home in Connecticut, an hour or so from the city. The room is spacious, furnished in excellent taste. The rear wall is lined with bookshelves. On the wall above the shelves are hung framed photographs of stage-sets. A door is in the rear, toward right. A grand piano at left of door. Near it a round table with a bronze lamp. A smaller table with another lamp is in the left corner. In the right corner a big cushioned chair and an expensive Victrola. In the right wall, French windows opening on a porch. In the left wall, an open fireplace in which logs are burning. Before the fireplace, a double couch facing left and right. The lamp in the left corner is the only one lit. Over the fireplace, a framed, enlarged portrait study of Eleanor, evidently taken some years before.

As the curtain rises, John Darnton is discovered. He is sitting in front of the fireplace, lost in an apathetic dream. His body is bent over wearily, the shoulders bowed, his long arms resting on his knees, his hands dangling. He sits on the extreme edge in the exact middle of the big couch, and this heightens the sense of loneliness about him, of a man growing old among dreams which become profitless as he feels the lack of a love that could understand and share them.

Suddenly he starts as the sound of a motor comes from the driveway. The car is heard driving up; it stops before the front door; its door is slammed, it drives off; a ringing of the doorbell sounds from somewhere back in the house. Darnton has gotten up, gone toward the door in the rear, exclaiming irritably as the bell continues to ring—All right, damn it! Who the devil——? [He is heard opening the front door—in blank amazement.] Nelly! [Then her voice in a strained, hysterical pitch.] John! I—— [The rest is lost incoherently. Then his voice soothingly.] Come in by the fire! Come in. [He follows her into the room. Her face is pale, distraught, desperate. She comes quickly to the couch and flings herself down in one corner,

staring into the fire. He stands nearby uncertainly, watching her. His face holds a confused mixture of alarm, tenderness, perplexity, passionate hope.]

Darnton—You're shivering. Come closer to the fire.

Eleanor—[With a startled movement.] No—I—I'm warm. [A pause. He waits for her to speak, not knowing what to think. She gradually collects herself. Memory crowds back on her and her face twitches with pain which turns to hatred and rage. She becomes conscious of Darnton's eyes, forces this back, her face growing mask-like and determined. She looks up at Darnton and forces the words out slowly.] John—you said, if ever—— You once said I might always come——

Darnton—[His face lights up for a second with a joy that is incongruously savage—at once controlling this—simply.] Yes, Nelly.

Eleanor—[A bit brokenly now.] I hope—you meant that.

Darnton—[Simply.] Yes, I meant it.

Eleanor—I mean—that you still mean it——?

Darnton—[Forcing an awkward smile.] Then—now—forever after, amen—any old time at all, Nelly. [Then overcome by a rush of bewildered joy—stammering.] Why—you ought to know——!

Eleanor—[Smiling tensely.] Would I still be welcome if I'd come—to stay?

Darnton—[His voice quivering.] Nelly! [He starts toward her, then stops—in a low, uncertain voice.] And Michael?

Eleanor—[With an exclamation of pain.] Don't! [Quickly recovering herself—in a cold, hard voice.] That's—dead! [Darnton lets a held-back breath of suspense escape him. Eleanor stammers a bit hysterically.] Don't talk of him! I've forgotten—as if he'd never lived! Do you still love me? Do you? Then tell me! I must know someone——

Darnton—[Still uncertain, but coming nearer to her—simply.] You knew once.

Since then—— My God, you've guessed, haven't you?

Eleanor—I need to hear. You've never spoken—for years——

Darnton—There was—Michael.

Eleanor—[Wildly, putting her hands up to her ears as if to shut out the name.] Don't!

Darnton—You loved him.

Eleanor—[Intensely.] I hate him! And he hates me! [She shudders—then, driven by a desperate determination, forces a twisted smile.] Why do you stand there? Are you afraid? I'm beginning to suspect—perhaps, you've only imagined you loved me——

Darnton—Nelly! [He seizes one of her hands awkwardly and covers it with kisses—confusedly, with deep emotion.] I—— You know—— Don't joke—— You know I love you!

Eleanor—[With the same fixed smile.] You must put your arms around me—and kiss me—on the lips——

Darnton—[Takes her in his arms awkwardly and kisses her on the lips—with passionate incoherence.] Nelly! I'd given up hoping—I—I can't believe—— [She submits to his kisses with closed eyes, her face like a mask, her body trembling with revulsion. Suddenly he seems to sense something disharmonious—confusedly.] But you—you don't care for me.

Eleanor—[Still with closed eyes—dully.] Yes. [With a spurt of desperate energy she kisses him wildly several times, then sinks back again closing her eyes.] I'm so tired, John—so tired!

Darnton—[Immediately all concern.] You're trembling all over. I'm an idiot not to have seen—— Forgive me. [He puts his hand on her forehead.] You're feverish. You'd better go to bed, young lady, right away. Come. [He raises her to her feet.]

Eleanor—[Wearily.] Yes, I'm tired. [Bitterly.] Oh, it's good to be loved by someone who is unselfish and kind—after all the hate——

Darnton—Ssshh! [Forcing a joking tone.] I'm cast for the Doctor now. Doctor's orders: don't talk, don't think, sleep. Come, I'll show you your room.

Eleanor—[Dully.] Yes. [As if she were not aware of what she is doing, she allows him to lead her to the door at right, rear. There she suddenly starts as if awakening—frightenedly.] Where are we going?

Darnton—[With gentle bullying.] You're going upstairs to bed.

Eleanor—[With a shudder—incoherently.] No, no! Not now—no—wait—you must wait—— [Then calming herself and trying to speak matter-of-factly.] I'd rather stay up and sit with you. I must have gotten chilled. I want to sit by the fire.

Darnton—[Worriedly, but giving in to her at once.] All right. Whatever suits you. [They go back to the fire. She sits in a chair which he pushes near it. He puts a cushion in back of her.] How's that?

Eleanor—[With a wan, grateful smile.] You're so kind, John. You've always been kind. You're so different—— [She checks herself, her face growing hard, and stares into the fire. Darnton watches her face. There is a long pause.]

Darnton—[Finally—in a gentle tone.] Nelly, don't you think it'd help if you told me—everything that's happened?

Eleanor—[With a shudder.] No! It was all horror—and hatred—and disgust! [Wildly resentful.] Why do you make me remember? I've come to you. Why do you ask for reasons? [With a harsh laugh.] Are you jealous—of him?

Darnton—[Quietly.] I've always envied Michael.

Eleanor—If you'd seen him tonight, you wouldn't envy him. You'd despise him as I do. He is mean and contemptible! He makes everything as low as he is! He went away threatening, boasting he would——[Hysterically.] Why do you make me think

of him? I hate him, I tell you! I want to be yours—yours! [She throws herself into his arms.]

Darnton—[Straining her to him—with awkward passion.] Nelly! Yes—yes—[Under his kisses her face again becomes mask-like, her body rigid, her eyes closed. Darnton suddenly grows aware of this. He stares down at her face, his own growing bewildered and afraid. He stammers.] Nelly! What is it?

Eleanor—[Opening her eyes—in alarm.] What——?

Darnton—[With a sigh of relief.] You gave me a scare. You were like a corpse.

Eleanor—[Breaks away from him and bends over the fire with her trembling hands spread out to it.] I—I'm so cold. I believe I do feel ill. I'll go to bed. [She moves toward the door.]

Darnton—[Uneasily—with a forced heartiness.] Now you're talking sense. Come on. [He leads the way into the hall. She goes as far as the doorway—then stops. A queer struggle is apparent in her face, her whole body, as if she were fighting with all her will to overcome some invisible barrier which bars her way. Darnton is watching her keenly now, a sad foreboding coming into his eyes. He steps past her back into the room, saying kindly but with a faint trace of bitterness.] It's the first door upstairs on your right—if you'd rather go alone. [He walks still further away, then turns to watch her, his face growing more and more aware and melancholy.]

Eleanor—[Vaguely.] No—you don't understand—— [She stands swaying, reaching out her hand to the side of the doorway for support—dully.] The first door to the right—upstairs?

Darnton—Yes.

Eleanor—[Struggles with herself, confused and impotent, trying to will—finally turns to Darnton like a forlorn child.] John. Can't you help me?

Darnton—[Gravely.] No—not now when I do understand. You must do it alone.

Eleanor—[With a desperate cry.] I can! I'm as strong as he! I do! [This breaks the spell which has chained her. She grows erect and strong. She walks through the doorway.]

Darnton—[With a triumphant exclamation of joy.] Ah! [He strides toward the doorway—then stops as he notices that she also has stopped at the bottom of the stairs, one foot on the first stair, looking up at the top. Then she wavers and suddenly bolts back into the room, gropingly, her face strained and frightened. Darnton questions her with fierce disappointment.] What is it? Why did you stop?

Eleanor—[Forcing a twisted smile—wildly.] You're right. I must be feverish. [Trying to control herself—self-mockingly.] Seeing spooks, that's pretty far gone, isn't it? [Laughing hysterically.] Yes—I swear I saw him—standing at the head of the stairs waiting for me—just as he was standing when you knocked at our door, remember? [She laughs.] Really, it was too ridiculous—so plain——

Darnton—Ssshh! [Glancing at her worriedly.] Won't you lie down here? Try and rest.

Eleanor—[Allowing him to make her comfortable on the couch before the fire.] Yes. [Her eyes glance up into his bewilderedly.]

Darnton—[After a long pause—slowly.] You don't love me, Nelly.

Eleanor—[Pitifully protesting.] But I do, John! I do! You're kind! You're unselfish and fine! I do love you!

Darnton—[With a wry smile.] That isn't me. You don't love me.

Eleanor—[Desperately defiant, leaps to her feet.] I do! [She takes his face between her hands and bringing her own close to it, stares into his eyes. He looks back into hers. She mutters fiercely between her clenched teeth.] I do! I do love you! [For a long moment they remain there, as she brings her face nearer and nearer striving with all her will to kiss him on the lips. Finally her eyes falter, her body grows limp, she turns away and throws herself on the couch in a fit of abandoned sobbing.]

Darnton—[With a sad smile.] You see?

Eleanor—[Her voice muffled—between sobs.] But I—want to! And I will—I know—some day—I promise!

Darnton—[Forcing a light tone.] Well, I'll be resigned to wait and hope then—and trust in your good intentions. [After a pause—in a calming, serious tone.] You're calmer now? Tell me what happened between you and Michael.

Eleanor—No! Please!

Darnton—[Smiling but earnestly.] It'll relieve your mind, Nelly—and besides, how can I help you otherwise?

Eleanor—[After a pause—with resigned dullness.] We've quarreled, but never like this before. This was final! [She shudders—then suddenly bursts out wildly.] Oh, John, for God's sake don't ask me! I want to forget! We tore each other to pieces, we destroyed one another! I realized I hated him! I couldn't restrain my hate! I had to crush him as he was crushing me! [After a pause—dully again.] And so that was the end.

Darnton—[Tensely, hoping again now—pleadingly.] You're sure, Nelly? You're sure your love is dead——

Eleanor—[Fiercely.] I hate him!

Darnton—[After a pause—earnestly.] Then stay here. I think I can help you forget. Never mind what people say. Make this your home—and maybe—in time—— [He forces a smile.] You see, I'm already starting to nurse along that crumb of hope you gave. [She is looking down, preoccupied with her own thoughts. He looks at her embarrassedly, then goes on gently, timidly persuasive.] I don't mind waiting. I'm used to it. And I've been hoping ever since I first met you—eight years ago, isn't it? [Forcing a half laugh.] I'll admit when you married him the waiting and hoping seemed excess labor. I tried to fire them—thought I had—but when you came tonight—there they were right onto the job again! [He laughs—then catching

himself awkwardly.] But hell! I don't want to bother you now. Forget me. Will you stay here and rest up—treat this as your house? That's the point.

Eleanor—[In a bland, absent-minded tone which wounds him.] You're so kind, John. [Then following her own line of thought, she breaks out savagely.] I told him I'd been your mistress while he was away!

Darnton—[Amazed.] Nelly!

Eleanor—I had to tell that lie! He was degrading me! I had to revenge myself!

Darnton—But certainly he could never believe——

Eleanor—[With fierce triumph.] Oh, I made him believe! [Then dully.] Then—he went away. He said he would kill our love as I had—worse—— [With a twisted smile.] That's what he's doing now. He has gone to one of those women he lived with before—— [Laughing harshly.] No! They wouldn't be vile enough—for his beautiful revenge on me! He has a wonderful imagination. Everyone acknowledges that! [She laughs with wild bitterness—this is transformed into a frenzy of rage.] Oh, how I loathe him! [Then in agony.] My God, why do I think——? Help me, John! Help me to forget—to love you!

Darnton—[After a pause—with a sad, bitter helplessness.] You mean—to hate him! Help you—to revenge yourself! But don't you realize I can't—you can't—because—I see this damn clear now so don't deny it!—because you still love him!

Eleanor—[Fiercely.] No! [After a pause—brokenly.] Don't! I know! I hate myself for loving him! I hate him because I love him! [She sobs heart-brokenly.]

Darnton—[After a pause, as her sobbing grows quieter—sadly.] Go home.

Eleanor—No! [After a pause, brokenly.] He hates me.

Darnton—[With a grim smile.] Because he loves you.

Eleanor—He'll never come back now.

Darnton—[With bitter humor.] Oh, yes he will; take my word for it. I know—because I happen to love you, too.

Eleanor—[Faintly.] And do you—hate me?

Darnton—[After a pause—with melancholy self-disgust.] No. I'm too soft. That's why you've always liked me and never loved me. [Bitterly.] I ought to hate you! Twice now you've treated my love with the most humiliating contempt—— Once, years ago, when you were willing to endure it as the price of a career—again tonight, when you try to give yourself out of hate and love—love!—for him! [In sudden furious revolt.] Christ! What am I, eh? [Then checking his anger and forcing a wry smile.] I think your treatment has been rather hard to take, Nelly—and even now I'm not cured, at that! [He laughs harshly and turns away to conceal his real hurt.]

Eleanor—[With deep grief.] Forgive me.

Darnton—[As if to himself—reassuringly.] Still—I would have been the poorest slave. I couldn't have fought you like Michael. Perhaps, deep down, I'm glad——

Eleanor—Don't say that! If I could have loved you—if I could love you now—I'd be happy.

Darnton—You'd have grown to despise a slave long ago. [Then bluntly.] You'd better go home right away.

Eleanor—[Dully.] Even if he has——

Darnton—[Brusquely.] You know you've got to—no matter what!

Eleanor—How can I have faith? And how can I ever make him believe I lied about you? How can he ever trust me about us—here—tonight? [Miserably.] Oh, don't you see how impossible——!

Darnton—[Impatiently.] But evidently you must. Face the truth in yourself. Must you—or mustn't you?

Eleanor—[After a moment's defiant struggle with herself—forlornly.] Yes. [After a pause, with a gesture toward the door and a weary, beaten smile.] Upstairs—if I could have gone—I'd have been free. But he's trained me too well in his ideal. And I love him. From the depths of my humiliation I love him! [Despairingly.] But when I think of what he's doing, of what he will do to crush——! I hate him! I hate him so terribly that——! [She stops, trembling with passion, her face convulsed—then, shrugging her shoulders, fatalistically.] It's broken me. I'm no longer anything. So what does it matter how weak I am? Let him win. [A slight pause.] I begin to know—something. [With a sudden queer, exultant pride.] I love him! But my love for him is my own, not his! My love for him he can never possess! It is my own! It is my life! [She turns to Darnton determinedly.] I must go home now.

Darnton—[Wonderingly.] Good. I'll drive you back. [He starts for the door.]

Eleanor—[Suddenly grasping his arm.] Wait. [Affectionately.] I was forgetting you—as usual. How can you forgive me? What can I do——?

Darnton—[With a wry smile.] Forget, Nelly. Remember me as a manager. Study your part; help Michael; and we'll all three be enormously successful! [He laughs mockingly.]

Eleanor—[Tenderly.] I'll always believe Fate should have let me love you, instead.

Darnton—[With the same wry smile.] While I begin to suspect that in a way I'm lucky—to be heart-broken. Our might-have-beens are more enjoyable—as dreams, eh? [With a laugh.] Curtain! You'll want to go upstairs and powder your nose. There's no angel with a flaming sword there now, is there? [He points to the doorway.]

Eleanor—[With a tired smile.] No. [She goes to the doorway. He follows her. They both stop there for a moment instinctively and smile forlornly at each other.]

Darnton—[Impulsively.] One question: That time you stood here and called to me for help—if I could have given you a push, mental, moral, physical——?

Eleanor—[Smiling.] Might-have-beens, John! [Then earnestly.] You didn't because you couldn't. It wouldn't have helped, anyway. The angel was here. [She touches her breast.]

Darnton—[With a sigh.] Thanks. That saves me a life-long regret.

Eleanor—[Earnestly—gripping his right hand in hers and holding his eyes.] There must be no regrets—ever—between old friends.

Darnton—[Gripping her hand in turn.] No, I promise, Nelly. [Then, letting her hand drop and turning away to conceal his emotion—forcing a joking tone.] After all, friendship is sounder, saner—more in the picture for my type, eh?

Eleanor—[Absent-minded again now—vaguely.] I don't know. [Then briskly.] We must hurry. I'll be right down. [She goes out and up the stairway in the hall.]

Darnton—[Stares up after her for a second, then smiling grimly.] Well, business of living on as usual. [He passes his arm here and there in the open doorway as if he were a magician—with bitter irony.] You see—nothing there! Invisible cobwebs—cast-iron cobwebs! [He laughs harshly.] Catching title for a play. I'll tell Michael! [He laughs again—checks himself—then walks out, calling up the stairs.] I'm going to get the car, Nelly.

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT TWO SCENE TWO

Scene—A dingy bedroom in a Sixth Avenue "bed house." In the rear, center, a door leading into the hall. A chair to left of door. In the left corner, a washstand with bowl, pitcher, towels, etc. In the left wall, center, a small window with a torn dark shade pulled down. On the right, a bed. A filthy threadbare carpet on the floor. Ugly wall paper, dirty, stained, criss-crossed with match-strokes.

When the curtain rises, the room is in darkness except for a faint glow on the window shade from some street lamp. Then the door is opened and a woman's

figure is silhouetted against the dim, yellow light of the hall. She turns and speaks to someone who is following her. Her voice is heavy and slow with the strong trace of a foreign intonation, although the words are clearly enough defined.

Woman—Got a match? [A man's figure appears behind hers. He fumbles in his pockets, hands her a match without speaking. She strikes it on the wall, lights the gas jet near the door. The room is revealed in sordid detail in the tarnished yellow light. The Woman is fairly young. Her face, rouged, powdered, penciled, is broad and stupid. Her small eyes have a glazed look. Yet she is not ugly—rather pretty for her bovine, stolid type—and her figure is still attractive although its movements just now are those of a tired scrubwoman's. She takes off her coat, hangs it on a hook, then goes to a mirror on the wall over the washstand, and removes her hat.

The man is Michael Cape. He is bare-headed, his hair disheveled, his eyes wild, his face has a feverish, mad expression. He stands in the doorway watching each movement of the Woman's with an unnatural preoccupied concentration.]

Woman—[Having removed her hat and put it on the washstand, turns to him impatiently.] Ain't you comin' in? [He starts and nods stupidly, moving his lips as if answering but not making a sound.] Come in! Shut the door. [He does so and locks it mechanically—then looks from her around the room with a frightened, puzzled glance as if he were aware of his surroundings for the first time.]

Woman—[Forcing a trade smile—with an attempt at lightness.] Well, here we are, dearie. [Then with a sigh of physical weariness as she sits on the side of the bed.] Gawd, I'm tired! My feet hurt fierce! I been walkin' miles. I got corns, too. [She sighs again, this time with a sort of restful content.] It's good 'n' warm in this dump, I'll hand it that. [A pause.] I'd gave up hope and was beatin' it home when you come along. [A pause during which she takes him in calculatingly.] How'd you lose your hat? [He starts, passes a trembling hand through his hair bewilderedly but does not answer. A pause—then the Woman sighs and yawns wearily—bored.] Can't you

say nothin'? You was full enough of bull when you met me. Gawd, I thought you'd get us both pinched. You acted like you was crazy. Remember kissing me on the corner with a whole mob pipin' us off?

Cape—[With a start—evidently answering some train of thought in his mind—with a wild laugh.] Remember? [He sinks on the chair with his head in his hands. There is a pause.]

Woman—[Insinuatingly.] Goin' to stay all night? [He glances up at her stupidly but doesn't answer. The Woman insists dully.] Say, you got ear-muffs on? I ast you, d'you wanta stay all night?

Cape—[After a moment's groping, nods emphatically again and again, swallowing hard several times as if he were striving to get control of his voice—finally blurts out in a tone of desperation.] Yes—yes—of course!—Where else would I go?

Woman—Home. [Indifferently.] That's where most of 'em goes—afterwards.

Cape—[With a sudden burst of wild laughter.] Ha-ha-ha. Home! Is that your private brand of revenge—to go with men with homes? I congratulate you! [He laughs to himself with bitter irony—then suddenly deadly calm.] Yes, I have a home, come to think of it—from now on Hell is my home! I suspect we're fellow-citizens. [He laughs.]

Woman—[Superstitiously.] You oughtn't to say them things.

Cape—[With dull surprise.] Why?

Woman—Somep'n might happen. [A pause.] Don't you believe in no God?

Cape—I believe in the devil!

Woman—[Frightened.] Say! [Then after a pause, forcing a smile.] I'm wise to what's wrong with you. You been lappin' up some bum hooch.

Cape—[Jerkily.] No. I'm not drunk. I thought of that—but—it's evasion. [Wildly.] And I must be conscious—fully conscious, do you understand?—of what I do! I will

this act as a symbol of release—of the end of all things! [He stops, shuddering. She looks at him stolidly. A pause. He presses his hands to his forehead.] My brain burns up! [Suddenly striking his head with both fists—in a frenzy.] Stop thinking, damn you! Stop! [Then after a pause—dully.] How long——? What time is it?

Woman—Little after two, I guess.

Cape—[Amazed.] Only that? [She nods.] Only two hours since——? [A pause.] I remember streets—lights—dead faces—— Then you—your face alone was alive for me, alive with my deliverance! That was why I kissed you. You shall avenge me!

Woman—[Looking at him queerly.] Say, you talk nutty. Been dopin' up on coke, I bet you.

Cape—[With an abrupt exclamation.] Ha! [He stares at her with unnatural intensity.] You seem to take it quite casually that men must be either drunk or doped—otherwise——! Marvelous! You,—you are the last depth—— [With a strange, wild exultance, leaps to his feet.] You are my salvation! You have the power—and the right—to defile beauty and murder love! You can satisfy hate and exhaust it! Will you let me kiss you again? [He strides over to her.]

Woman—[In a stupid state of bewilderment, feeling she has been insulted but not exactly knowing by what or how to resent it—angrily, pushing him away.] No! Get away from me! [Then afraid she may lose his trade by this rebuff.] Aw, all right. Sure you can. [Making a tremendous visible effort he kisses her on the lips, then shrinks back with a shudder and forces a harsh laugh. She stares at him and mutters resentfully.] O'ny don't get so fresh, see? I don't like your line of talk. [He slumps down on the chair again, sunk in a somber stupor. She watches him. She yawns. Finally she asks insinuatingly.] Ain't you gettin' sleepy?

Cape—[Starting—with wild scorn.] Sleep! Do you think I——? [Staring at her.] Oh—I see—you mean, what did I come here for?

Woman—[In same tone.] It's gettin' late.

Cape—[Dully, with no meaning to his question—like an automaton.] A little after two?

Woman—Yes. [She yawns.] You better let me go to bed and come yourself.

Cape—[Again staring at her with strange intensity—suddenly with a queer laugh.] How long have you and I been united in the unholy bonds of—bed-lock? [He chuckles sardonically at his own play on words.]

Woman—[With a puzzled grin.] Say!

Cape—Ten thousand years—about—isn't it? Or twenty? Don't you remember?

Woman—[Keeping her forced grin.] Tryin' to kid me, ain't you?

Cape—Don't lie about your age! You were beside the cradle of love, and you'll dance dead drunk on its grave!

Woman—I'm only twenty-six, honest.

Cape—[With a wild laugh.] A fact! You're right. Thoughts keep alive. Only facts kill—deeds! [He starts to his feet.] Then hate will let me alone. Love will be dead. I will be as ugly as the world. My dreams will be low dreams. I'll "lay me down among the swine." Will you promise me this, you?

Woman—[Vaguely offended—impatiently.] Sure, I'll promise anything. [She gets up to start undressing. She has been pulling the pins out of her hair and, as she rises, it falls over her shoulders in a peroxided flood. She turns to him, smiling with childish pride.] D'you like my hair, kid? I got a lot of it, ain't I?

Cape—[Laughing sardonically.] "O love of mine, let down your hair and I will make my shroud of it."

Woman—[Coquettishly pleased.] What's that—po'try? [Then suddenly reminded of something she regards him calculatingly—after a pause, coldly.] Say, you ain't broke, are you? Is that what's troubling you?

Cape—[Startled—then with bitter mockery.] Ha! I see you're a practical person. [He

takes a bill from his pocket and holds it out to her—contemptuously.] Here!

Woman—[Stares from the bill to him, flushing beneath her rouge.] Say! I don't like the way you act. [Proudly.] I don't take nothin' for nothin'—not from you, see!

Cape—[Surprised and ashamed.] I'll leave it here, then. [He puts it on top of the washstand and turns to her—embarrassedly.] I didn't mean—to offend you.

Woman—[Her face clearing immediately.] Aw, never mind. It's all right.

Cape—[Staring at her intently—suddenly deeply moved.] Poor woman!

Woman—[Stung—excitedly.] Hey, none of that! Nix! Cut it out! I don't stand for that from nobody! [She sits down on the bed angrily.]

Cape—[With unnatural intensity.] Do you know what you are? You're a symbol. You're all the tortures man inflicts on woman—and you're the revenge of woman! You're love revenging itself upon itself! You're the suicide of love—of my love—of all love since the world began! [Wildly.] Listen to me! Two hours ago—— [Then he beats his head with both clenched hands—distractedly.] Leave me alone! Leave me alone, damn you! [He flings himself on the chair in a violent outburst of dry sobbing.]

Woman—[Bewilderedly.] Say! Say! [Then touched, she comes to him and puts her arms around his shoulders, on the verge of tears herself.] Aw, come on, kid. Quit it. It's all right. Everything's all right, see. [As his sobbing grows quieter—helpfully.] Say, maybe you ain't ate nothin', huh? Maybe soup'd fix you. S'posin' I go round the corner, huh? Sure, all I got to do is put up my hair——

Cape—[Controlling hysterical laughter—huskily.] No—thanks. [Then his bitter memories rush back agonizingly. He stammers wildly.] She confessed—with hate! She was proud of her hate! She was proud of my torture. She screamed: "I hate you! I'll go too." Go where? Did she go? Yes, she must——! Oh, my God! Stop! Stop! [He springs up, his face distorted, and clutches the Woman fiercely in his arms.] Save me, you! Help me to kill this beauty which she defiled! Help me to gain the

peace which is the death of love. [He kisses her again and again frenziedly. She submits stolidly. Finally with a groan he pushes her away, shuddering with loathing, and sinks back on the chair.] No! I can't—I can't!

Woman—[Wiping her lips with the back of her hand—a vague comprehension coming into her face—scornfully.] Huh! I got a hunch now what's eatin' you. [Then with a queer sort of savage triumph.] Well, I'm glad one of youse guys got paid back like you oughter!

Cape—[With dull impotent rage.] I can't! I love her! [As if he were defying himself by this confession.] Yes, I still love her! And I can't! I only hate because I love—I'm the weaker. Our love must live on in me. There is no death for it. There is no freedom—while I live. [Struck by a sudden thought.] Then, why——? [A pause.] An end of loathing—in a second, peace—no wounds, no memories—sleep!

Woman—[With a shudder.] Say, you're beginning to give me the creeps.

Cape—[Startled—with a forced laugh.] Am I? Well, never mind. [He shakes his head as if to drive some thought from his mind and forces a trembling, mocking smile.] That's over. The great temptation, isn't it? I suppose you've known it. But also the great evasion. Too simple for the complicated,—too weak for the strong, too strong for the weak. One must go on, eh?—even wounded, on one's knees—if only out of curiosity to see what will happen—to oneself. [He laughs harshly and turns with a quick movement toward the door.] Well, good-by, and forgive me. It isn't you, you know. You're the perfect death—but I'm too strong, or weak—no, merely I'm myself—and that myself can't, you understand—can't! So, good-by. [He goes to the door.]

Woman—[Frightenedly.] Say! What're you goin' to do?

Cape—Go on in the dark.

Woman—You better beat it home, that's what.

Cape—[Violently.] No! [Then bitterly.] I came home once tonight——

Woman—[Wearily.] Aw, forget it. She's your wife, ain't she?

Cape—How do you know? [He comes back to her, curiously attracted.]

Woman—[Cynically.] Aw, I'm wise. Stick to her, see? You'll get over it. You can get used to anything, take it from me!

Cape—[In anguish.] Don't! But it's true—it's the insult we all swallow as the price of life. [Rebelliously.] But I——!

Woman—[With a sort of forlorn chuckle.] Oh, you'll go back, aw right! Don't kid yourself. You'll go back no matter what, and you'll learn to like it. Don't I know? You love her, don't you? Well, then! There's no use buckin' that game. Go home. Kiss and make up. Ferget it. It's easy to ferget—when you got to! [She finishes up with a cynical, weary scorn.]

Cape—[Very pale—stammering.] You—you make life despicable.

Woman—[Angrily.] Say! [Then with groping, growing resentment.] I don't like your talk! You've pulled a lot of bum cracks about—about—never mind, I got you, anyhow! You ain't got no right—— What'd you wanter pick me up for, anyway? Wanter just get me up here to say rotten things? Wanter use me to pay her back? Say! Where do I come in? Guys go with me 'cause they like my looks, see?—what I am, understand?—but you, you don't want nothin'. You ain't drunk, neither! You just don't like me. And you was beatin' it leavin' your money there—without nothin'. I was goin' to let you then, I ain't now. [She suddenly gives him a furious push which sends him reeling back against the wall.] G'wan! Take your lousy coin and beat it! I wouldn't take nothin', nor have nothin' to do with you if you was to get down on your knees!

Cape—[Stares at her—an expression comes as if he were seeing her for the first time—with great pity.] So—it still survives in you. They haven't killed it—that lonely life of one's own which suffers in solitude. [Shamefacedly.] I should have known. Can you forgive me?

Woman—[Defensively.] No!

Cape—Through separate ways love has brought us both to this room. As one suffering, lonely human being to another, won't you——?

Woman—[Struggling with herself—harshly.] No!

Cape—[Gently.] Not even if I ask it on my knees? [He kneels before her, looking up into her face.]

Woman—[Bewildered, with hysterical fierceness.] No! Git up, you——! Don't do that, I tell you! Git up or I'll brain yuh! [She raises her fist threateningly over his head.]

Cape—[Gently.] Not until you——

Woman—[Exhaustedly.] Aw right—aw right—I forgive——

Cape—[Gets up and takes her face between his hands and stares into her eyes—then he kisses her on the forehead.] Sister.

Woman—[With a half sob.] Nix! Lay off of me, can't you?

Cape—But I learned that from you.

Woman—[Stammering.] What?—loined what? [She goes away from him and sinks on the bed exhaustedly.] Say, you better beat it.

Cape—I'm going. [He points to the bill on the washstand.] You need this money. You'll accept it from me now, won't you?

Woman—[Dully.] Sure. Leave it there.

Cape—[In the same gentle tone.] You'll have to give it to him in the morning?

Woman—[Dully.] Sure.

Cape—All of it?

Woman—Sure.

Cape—Or he'd beat you?

Woman—Sure. [Then suddenly grinning.] Maybe he'll beat me up, anyway—just for the fun of it.

Cape—But you love him, don't you?

Woman—Sure. I'm lonesome.

Cape—Yes. [After a slight pause.] Why did you smile when you said he'd beat you, anyway?

Woman—I was thinkin' of the whole game. It's funny, ain't it?

Cape—[Slowly.] You mean—life and love?

Woman—Sure. You got to laugh, ain't you? Sure! You got to loin to like it!

Cape—[This makes an intense impression on him. He nods his head several times.] Yes! That's it! That's exactly it! That goes deeper than wisdom. To learn to love the truth of life—to accept it and be exalted—that's the one faith left to us! [Then with a tremulous smile.] Good-by, I've joined your church. I'm going home.

Woman—[With a grin that is queerly affectionate.] Sure. That's the stuff. Close your eyes and your feet'll take you there.

Cape—[Impressed again.] Yes! Yes! Of course they would! They've been walking there for thousands of years—blindly. However, I'll keep my eyes open—— [He smiles back at her affectionately.] ——and learn to like it!

Woman—[Grinning.] Sure. Good luck.

Cape—Good-by. [He goes out, closing the door after him. She stares at the door for a moment, listening to his footsteps as they die out down the stairs. Then she takes a comb from her bag and, going to the mirror, starts to comb her hair. She is preoccupied and her hand suddenly stops.]

Woman—[Confusedly.] Say——? [She stares at herself with a vaguely-troubled, ruminating stolidity. Then with a sigh she goes on combing her hair.]

[The Curtain Falls]

ACT III

ACT THREE

Scene—Same as Act One, the Capes' apartment, about five o'clock the same morning. The door to the hall is still open, the reading lamp alight, everything exactly as at the close of Act One.

Eleanor is standing by the table, leaning her back against it, facing the door, her whole attitude strained, expectant but frightened, tremblingly uncertain whether to run and hide from, or run forward and greet Cape, who is standing in the doorway. For a long, tense moment they remain fixed, staring into each other's eyes with an apprehensive questioning. Then, as if unconsciously, falteringly, with trembling smiles, they come toward each other. Their lips move as if they were trying to speak. When they come close, they instinctively reach out their hands in a strange conflicting gesture of a protective warding off and at the same time a seeking possession. Their hands clasp and they again stop, searching each other's eyes. Finally their lips force out words.

Eleanor—[Penitently.] Michael!

Cape—[Humbly.] Nelly! [They smile with a queer understanding, their arms move about each other, their lips meet. They seem in a forgetful, happy trance at finding each other again. They touch each other testingly as if each cannot believe the other is really there. They act for the moment like two persons of different races, deeply in love but separated by a barrier of language.]

Eleanor—[Rambling tenderly.] Michael—I—— Dearest—I was afraid——

Cape—[Stammering.] Nelly—it's so good!—I thought—my own—you'd gone—— [They stare at each other—a pause.]

Eleanor—[Beginning to be aware—a bit bewilderedly, breaking away from him with a little shiver—stupidly.] I feel—there's a draught, isn't there?

Cape—[Becoming aware in his turn—heavily.] I'll shut the door. [He goes and does so. She walks to her chair and sits down. He comes and sits beside her. They are now side by side as in Act One. A pause. They stare ahead, each frowningly abstracted. Then each, at the same moment, steals a questioning side glance at the other. Their eyes meet, they look away, then back, they stare at each other with a peculiar dull amazement, recognition yet non-recognition. They seem about to speak, then turn away again. Their faces grow sad, their eyes begin to suffer, their bodies become nervous and purposeless. Finally Cape exclaims with a dull resentment directed not at her but at life.] What is—it? [He makes a gesture of repulsing something before him.]

Eleanor—[In his tone.] I don't know.

Cape—[Harshly.] A moment ago—there—— [He indicates where they had stood in an embrace.] We knew everything. We understood!

Eleanor—[Eagerly.] Oh, yes!

Cape—[Bitterly.] Now—we must begin to think—to continue going on, getting lost——

Eleanor—[Sadly.] It was happy to forget. Let's not think—yet.

Cape—[Grimly.] We've begun. [Then with a harsh laugh.] One must explain. Thinking explains. It eliminates the unexplainable—by which we live.

Eleanor—[Warningly.] By which we love. Sssh! [A pause.]

Cape—[Wonderingly—not looking at her.] You have learned that, too?

Eleanor—[With a certain exultance.] Oh, yes, Michael—yes! [She clasps his hand. A pause. Then she murmurs.] Now—we know peace. [Their hands drop apart. She sighs.]

Cape—[Slowly.] Peace isn't our meaning.

Eleanor—[Suddenly turns and addresses him directly in a sad, sympathetic tone.]

You've something you want to ask me, Michael?

Cape—[Turns to her with an immediate affirmative on his lips, checks it as he meets her eyes, turns away—a pause—then he turns back humbly.] No.

Eleanor—[Her head has been averted since he turned away—without looking at him.] Yes.

Cape—[Decisively.] No, Nelly. [She still keeps her head averted. After a pause he asks simply.] Why? Is there something you want to ask me?

Eleanor—No. [After a pause—with a trace of bitter humor.] I can't be less magnanimous than you, can I?

Cape—Then there is something——?

Eleanor—Haven't you something you want to tell?

Cape—[Looks at her. Their eyes meet again.] Yes—the truth—if I can. And you?

Eleanor—Yes, I wish to tell you the truth. [They look into each other's eyes. Suddenly she laughs with a sad self-mockery.] Well, we've both been noble. I haven't asked you; you haven't asked me; and yet—— [She makes a helpless gesture with her hands. A pause. Then abruptly and mechanically.] I'll begin at the beginning. I left here right after you did.

Cape—[With an involuntary start.] Oh! [He checks himself.]

Eleanor—[Her eyes reading his—after a pause—a bit dryly.] You thought I'd stayed here all the time? [Mockingly.] Waiting for you?

Cape—[Wounded.] Don't! [After a pause—painfully.] When I found you—perhaps I hoped——

Eleanor—[Dully.] I had only been back a few minutes. [After a pause.] Was that why you seemed so happy—there——? [She points to the spot where they had stood embraced.]

Cape—[Indignantly.] No, no! Don't think that! I'm not like that—not any more!

[Without looking at her he reaches out and clasps her hand.]

Eleanor—[Looks at him—after a pause, understandingly.] I'm sorry——

Cape—[Self-defensively.] Of course, I knew you must have gone, you'd have been a fool to stay. [Excitedly.] And it doesn't matter—not a damn! I've gotten beyond that.

Eleanor—[Misunderstanding—coldly.] I'm glad. [A pause. She asks coldly.] Shall I begin again?

Cape—[Struggling with himself—disjointedly.] No—not unless—I don't need—— I've changed. That doesn't matter. I—[With a sudden twisted grin.] I'm learning to like it, you see.

Eleanor—[Looks at him, strangely impressed—a pause—slowly.] I think I know what you mean. We're both learning.

Cape—[Wonderingly.] You——? [She has turned away from him. He turns to stare at her.]

Eleanor—[After a pause, taking up her story matter-of-factly.] I went to John.

Cape—[Trying with agony to take this stoically—mumbling stupidly.] Yes—of course—I supposed——

Eleanor—[In the same mechanical tone.] He drove me back here in his car. He predicted you'd be back any moment, so he went right home again.

Cape—[A wild, ironical laugh escapes his control.] Shrewd—Ha!

Eleanor—[After a pause—rebukingly.] John is a good man.

Cape—[Startled, turns and stares at her averted face—then miserably humble, stammers.] Yes, yes—I know—I acknowledge—good—— [He breaks down, cursing pitiably at himself.] God damn you!

Eleanor—Oh!

Cape—Not you! Me! [Then he turns to her—with fierce defiance.] I love John!

Eleanor—[Moved, without looking at him reaches and clasps his hand.] That—is beautiful, Michael. [A pause.]

Cape—[Begins to frown somberly—lets go of her hand.] It's hard—after what you confessed——

Eleanor—[Frightenedly.] Ssshh! [Then calmly.] That was a lie. I lied to make you suffer more than you were making me suffer. [A pause—then she turns to him.] Can you believe this?

Cape—[Humbly.] I want to believe——

Eleanor—[Immediately turning away—significantly.] Oh!

Cape—[Fiercely—as if to himself.] I will believe! But what difference does it make—believing or not believing? I've changed, I tell you! I accept!

Eleanor—I can't be a lie you live with!

Cape—[Turning to her resentfully.] Well, then—— [As if she were goading him to something against his will—threateningly.] Shall I tell you what happened to me?

Eleanor—[Facing him defiantly.] Yes. [He turns away. Immediately her brave attitude crumbles. She seems about to implore him not to speak.]

Cape—[After a pause—hesitatingly.] You said that years ago you had offered yourself—to him—— [He turns suddenly—hopefully.] Was that a lie, too?

Eleanor—No.

Cape—[Turns away with a start of pain.] Ah. [A pause. Suddenly his face grows convulsed. He turns back to her, overcome by a craving for revenge—viciously.] Then I may as well tell you I—— [He checks himself and turns away.]

Eleanor—[Defensively—with feigned indifference.] I don't doubt—you kept your threat.

Cape—[Glares at her wildly.] Oho, you don't doubt that, do you? You saw I'd changed, eh?

Eleanor—I saw—something.

Cape—[With bitter irony.] God! [A pause.]

Eleanor—[Turning on him doggedly as if she were impersonally impelled to make the statement.] I want to tell you that tonight—John and I—nothing you may ever suspect—— [She falters, turns away with a bitter smile.] I only tell you this for my own satisfaction. I don't expect you to believe it.

Cape—[With a wry grin.] No. How could you? [Then turning to her—determinedly—after a pause.] But it doesn't matter.

Eleanor—I wanted revenge as much as you. I wanted to destroy—and be free of our love forever!

Cape—As I did.

Eleanor—[After a pause—simply.] I couldn't.

Cape—[Turns and stares at her—a pause—then he asks wonderingly, eagerly.] Why couldn't you? Tell me that.

Eleanor—[After a pause—simply.] Something stronger.

Cape—[With a passionate triumph.] Love! [With intense pleading.] Nelly! Will you believe that I, too——? [He tries to force her eyes to return to his.]

Eleanor—[After a pause—looking before her—sadly.] You should have been generous sooner.

Cape—It's the truth, Nelly! [Desperately.] I swear to you——!

Eleanor—[After a pause—wearily.] We've sworn to so much.

Cape—Everything is changed, I tell you! Something extraordinary happened to me—a revelation!

Eleanor—[With bitter cynicism.] A woman?

Cape—[Wounded, turns away from her.] Don't. [Then after a pause—with deep

feeling.] Yes—she was a woman. And I had conceived of her only as revenge—the lowest of the low!

Eleanor—[With a shudder.] Ah!

Cape—[With feeling.] Don't judge, Nelly. She was—good!

Eleanor—[With another shudder.] Not her! You!

Cape—[Desperately.] I tell you I——! [He checks himself helplessly. She gives no sign. Then he asks sadly.] If you can think that, how could you come back?

Eleanor—[Stammering hysterically.] How? How? [Bursting into tears.] Because I love you! [Then turning on him fiercely as if defying him.] I love you! I love you!

Cape—[Starting up from his chair and trying to take her in his arms—exultantly.] Nelly!

Eleanor—[Pushing him away—violently.] No! I didn't come back to you! I came back to my love which is mine—mine! It conquered me, not you! Something in me—myself—not you! [She stares him in the eyes defiantly, triumphantly.]

Cape—[Gently.] It doesn't matter. [After a pause.] Did I come back to you?

Eleanor—[Taken aback, turning away.] No, I suppose—— [Cape stares at her uncertainly, then sits down in his chair again.]

Cape—[After a pause, looking before him—assertively, as if taking a pledge.] But I have faith!

Eleanor—[Wearily.] Now—for a moment.

Cape—No!

Eleanor—Yes. We shall believe—and disbelieve. We are—that.

Cape—[Protestingly.] Nelly! [For a time they both sit staring bleakly before them. Suddenly he turns to her—desperately.] If there is nothing left but—resignation!—what use is there?

Eleanor—I know I love.

Cape—[Bitterly—beginning to work himself into a passion.] How can we endure having our dream perish in this?

Eleanor—Have we any choice?

Cape—[Intensely.] No! It’s not Fate! Fate lives—moves on! We are merely victims of our dead selves. [He seems to collect all his forces and turns on her with a fierce challenge.] We can choose—an end!

Eleanor—[Shudders instinctively as she reads his meaning.] Michael! [A pause—then looking into his eyes—as a calm counter-challenge.] Yes—if you wish.

Cape—[With passionate self-scorn.] We! We have become ignoble.

Eleanor—As you wish. [She again accents the you.]

Cape—I?

Eleanor—I accept. I can live—or I can die. [A pause—gently.] I love you. You must not suffer too much. [She reaches out her hand and clasps his comfortingly.] It is I who have changed most, Michael. [Then she speaks sadly but firmly as if she had come to a decision.] There is only one way we can give life to each other. We must redeem our love from ourselves!

Cape—[Sharply.] How?

Eleanor—By releasing each other.

Cape—[With a harsh laugh.] Are you forgetting we tried that once tonight?

Eleanor—With hate. This would be because we loved.

Cape—[Violently.] Don’t be a fool! [Controlling himself—forcing a smile.] Forgive me. [Excitedly.] But, my God, what solution——?

Eleanor—It will give you peace for your work—freedom——

Cape—Nonsense!

Eleanor—I will continue to love you. I'll work for you! We'll no longer stand between each other. Then I can really give you my soul and possess yours. [Rising to her feet in a pitch of dreamy enthusiasm.] Oh, Michael, isn't that a finer love than the old?

Cape—[Controlling himself with difficulty.] You're talking rot!

Eleanor—[Hurt.] Michael!

Cape—You're mad! [Then, suddenly glaring at her suspiciously.] Why did you come back? Why do you want to go? What are you hiding behind all this?

Eleanor—[Wounded.] Your faith? You see?

Cape—[Brokenly.] I—I didn't mean—— [Then after a struggle with desperate bitterness.] Well—I accept! I love you enough for that. Go—if you want to!

Eleanor—[Hurt.] Michael! It isn't—— [Then determinedly.] But even if you misunderstand, I must be strong for you!

Cape—[Almost tauntingly.] Then go—go now if you can—if you're strong enough. [Harshly.] Let me see you act nobility! [Then suddenly remorseful, catching her hand and covering it with kisses.] No! I love you! Go now before—— Do whatever seems good. Be strong! Be free! I—I cannot!

Eleanor—[Brokenly.] We can try—— [She bends down swiftly and kisses his head, turns away quickly.] Good-by.

Cape—[In a strangled voice.] Good-by. [He sits in anguish, in a tortured restraint. She grabs her cloak from the chair, goes quickly to the door, puts her hand on the knob—then stops as tense as he. Suddenly he can stand it no longer, he leaps to his feet and jumps toward the door with a pleading cry.] Nelly! [He stands fixed as he sees her before the door as if he had expected to find her gone. She does not turn but remains staring at the door in front of her. Finally she raises her hand and knocks on the door softly—then stops to listen.]

Eleanor—[In a queer far-away voice.] No. Never again. “Come out.” [She opens the door and turns to Cape with a strange smile.] It opens inward, Michael. [She closes it again, smiles to herself and walks back to the foot of the stairway. Then she turns to face Cape. She looks full of some happy certitude. She smiles at him and speaks with a tender weariness.] It must be nearly dawn. I’ll say good-night instead of good-by. [They stare into each other’s eyes. It is as if now by a sudden flash from within they recognized themselves, shorn of all the ideas, attitudes, cheating gestures which constitute the vanity of personality. Everything, for this second, becomes simple for them—serenely unquestionable. It becomes impossible that they should ever deny life, through each other, again.]

Eleanor—[With a low tender cry as if she were awakening to maternity.] Michael!

Cape—[Passionately sure of her now—in a low voice.] Nelly! [Then unable to restrain his triumphant exultance.] You’ve failed!

Eleanor—[Smiling at him simply.] Yes. Again. [Smiling dimly at herself.] My acting—didn’t convince me.

Cape—We’ve failed!

Eleanor—Are we weak? [Dreamily.] I’m happy.

Cape—Strong! We’ve passed through! We can live again!

Eleanor—[With a strange dreamy exultance.] We love!

Cape—[Exultantly—but as if testing her, warningly.] But we’ll hate!

Eleanor—[In her same tone.] Yes!

Cape—And we’ll torture and tear, and clutch for each other’s souls!

Eleanor—[Nodding her head in a simple emphasis of agreement.] Yes.

Cape—We’ll have to strive on for perfect union—fight each other—fail again—blame each other—fail and hate again—[he raises his voice in aggressive triumph]—but!—fail and hate with pride—with joy!

Eleanor—[Exulted by his exultation rather than by his words.] Yes!

Cape—Our life is to bear together our burden which is our goal—on and up!

Eleanor—[Dreamily.] Your dream.

Cape—Above the world, beyond its vision—our height—our love—our meaning!

Eleanor—[Her eyes fixed on him—passionately.] My love!

Cape—[Half-sobbing as the intensity of his passion breaks the spell of his exultation.] Oh, Nelly, Nelly, I want to say so much that I feel but I can only stutter like an idiot! [He has fallen on his knees before her.]

Eleanor—[Intensely moved—passionately.] Like an angel! My lover! I know! [She bends over and kisses him.]

Cape—[Straining passionately for expression.] Listen! Often I wake up in the night—terrified—in a black world, alone in time—a hundred million years of darkness. I feel like crying out to God for mercy because life lives! Then instinctively I seek you—my hand touches you! You are there—beside me—alive—with you I become a whole, a truth! Life guides me back through the hundred million years to you. It reveals a beginning in unity that I may have faith in the unity of the end! [He bows his head and kisses her feet ecstatically.] I love you! Forgive me all I've ever done, all I'll ever do.

Eleanor—[Brokenly.] No. Forgive me—my child, you! [She begins to sob softly.]

Cape—[Looking at her—gently.] Why do you cry?

Eleanor—Because I'm happy. [Then with a sudden tearful gayety.] You be happy! You ought to be! Isn't our future as hard as you could wish? Haven't we your old dreams back again?

Cape—Deeper and more beautiful!

Eleanor—[Smiling.] Deeper and more beautiful! [She ascends the stairs slowly.] Come! [She reaches the top of the stairway and stands there looking down at

him—then stretches out her arms with a passionate, tender gesture.] Come!

Cape—[Leaping to his feet—intensely.] My Own!

Eleanor—[Dreamily.] Love—and sleep. [With deep, passionate tenderness.] My lover!

Cape—My wife! [His eyes fixed on her he ascends. As he does so her arms move back until they are stretched out straight to right and left, forming a cross. Cape stops two steps below her—in a low, wondering tone.] Why do you stand like that?

Eleanor—[Her head thrown back, her eyes shut—slowly, dreamily.] Perhaps I'm praying. I don't know. I love.

Cape—[Deeply moved.] I love you!

Eleanor—[As if from a great distance.] We love! [He moves close to her and his hands reach out for hers. For a moment as their hands touch they form together one cross. Then their arms go about each other and their lips meet.]

[The Curtain Falls]

TRANSCRIBER'S NOTES

Typos fixed; non-standard spelling and dialect retained.

*** END OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK ALL GOD'S CHILLUN GOT WINGS, AND WELDED ***

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