Plays

by Susan Glaspell

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Title page.

PLAYS

BY SUSAN GLASPELL

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TRIFLES A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First Performed by the Provincetown Players at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass., August 8, 1916

ORIGINAL CAST

George Henderson, County AttorneyRobert Rogers Henry Peters, SheriffRobert Conville Lewis Hale, A Neighboring FarmerGeorge Cram Cook Mrs. PetersAlice Hall Mrs. HaleSusan Glaspell

TRIFLES

Scene: The kitchen in the now abandoned farmhouse of John Wright, a gloomy kitchen, and left without having been put in order—unwashed pans under the sink, a

loaf of bread outside the bread-box, a dish-towel on the table—other signs of incompleted work. At the rear the outer door opens and the Sheriff comes in followed by the County Attorney and Hale. The Sheriff and Hale are men in middle life, the County Attorney is a young man; all are much bundled up and go at once to the stove. They are followed by the two women—the Sheriff's wife first; she is a slight wiry woman, a thin nervous face. Mrs. Hale is larger and would ordinarily be called more comfortable looking, but she is disturbed now and looks fearfully about as she enters. The women have come in slowly, and stand close together near the door.

County Attorney

[Rubbing his hands.] This feels good. Come up to the fire, ladies.

Mrs. Peters

[After taking a step forward.] I'm not—cold.

Sheriff

[Unbuttoning his overcoat and stepping away from the stove as if to mark the beginning of official business.] Now, Mr. Hale, before we move things about, you explain to Mr. Henderson just what you saw when you came here yesterday morning.

County Attorney

By the way, has anything been moved? Are things just as you left them yesterday?

Sheriff

[Looking about.] It's just the same. When it dropped below zero last night I thought I'd better send Frank out this morning to make a fire for us—no use getting pneumonia with a big case on, but I told him not to touch anything except the stove—and you know Frank.

County Attorney

Somebody should have been left here yesterday.

Sheriff

Oh—yesterday. When I had to send Frank to Morris Center for that man who went crazy—I want you to know I had my hands full yesterday. I knew you could get back from Omaha by today and as long as I went over everything here myself—

County Attorney

Well, Mr. Hale, tell just what happened when you came here yesterday morning.

Hale

Harry and I had started to town with a load of potatoes. We came along the road from my place and as I got here I said, “I’m going to see if I can’t get John Wright to go in with me on a party telephone.” I spoke to Wright about it once before and he put me off, saying folks talked too much anyway, and all he asked was peace and quiet—I guess you know about how much he talked himself; but I thought maybe if I went to the house and talked about it before his wife, though I said to Harry that I didn’t know as what his wife wanted made much difference to John—

County Attorney

Let’s talk about that later, Mr. Hale. I do want to talk about that, but tell now just what happened when you got to the house.

Hale

I didn’t hear or see anything; I knocked at the door, and still it was all quiet inside. I knew they must be up, it was past eight o’clock. So I knocked again, and I thought I heard somebody say, “Come in.” I wasn’t sure, I’m not sure yet, but I opened the door—this door [indicating the door by which the two women are still standing] and there in that rocker—[pointing to it] sat Mrs. Wright.

[They all look at the rocker.

County Attorney

What—was she doing?

Hale

She was rockin' back and forth. She had her apron in her hand and was kind of—pleating it.

County Attorney

And how did she—look?

Hale

Well, she looked queer.

County Attorney

How do you mean—queer?

Hale

Well, as if she didn't know what she was going to do next. And kind of done up.

County Attorney

How did she seem to feel about your coming?

Hale

Why, I don't think she minded—one way or other. She didn't pay much attention. I said, "How do, Mrs. Wright, it's cold, ain't it?" And she said, "Is it?"—and went on kind of pleating at her apron. Well, I was surprised; she didn't ask me to come up to the stove, or to set down, but just sat there, not even looking at me, so I said, "I want to see John." And then she—laughed. I guess you would call it a laugh. I thought of Harry and the team outside, so I said a little sharp: "Can't I see John?" "No," she says, kind o' dull like. "Ain't he home?" says I. "Yes," says she, "he's home." "Then why can't I see him?" I asked her, out of patience. "'Cause he's dead," says she. "Dead?" says I. She just nodded her head, not getting a bit excited, but rockin' back and forth. "Why—where is he?" says I, not knowing what to say. She just pointed upstairs—like that [himself pointing to the room above]. I got up, with the

idea of going up there. I walked from there to here—then I says, “Why, what did he die of?” “He died of a rope round his neck,” says she, and just went on pleatin’ at her apron. Well, I went out and called Harry. I thought I might—need help. We went upstairs and there he was lyin’—

County Attorney

I think I’d rather have you go into that upstairs, where you can point it all out. Just go on now with the rest of the story.

Hale

Well, my first thought was to get that rope off. It looked ... [Stops, his face twitches] ... but Harry, he went up to him, and he said, “No, he’s dead all right, and we’d better not touch anything.” So we went back down stairs. She was still sitting that same way. “Has anybody been notified?” I asked. “No,” says she, unconcerned. “Who did this, Mrs. Wright?” said Harry. He said it business-like—and she stopped pleatin’ of her apron. “I don’t know,” she says. “You don’t know?” says Harry. “No,” says she. “Weren’t you sleepin’ in the bed with him?” says Harry. “Yes,” says she, “but I was on the inside.” “Somebody slipped a rope round his neck and strangled him and you didn’t wake up?” says Harry. “I didn’t wake up,” she said after him. We must ’a looked as if we didn’t see how that could be, for after a minute she said, “I sleep sound.” Harry was going to ask her more questions but I said maybe we ought to let her tell her story first to the coroner, or the sheriff, so Harry went fast as he could to Rivers’ place, where there’s a telephone.

County Attorney

And what did Mrs. Wright do when she knew that you had gone for the coroner?

Hale

She moved from that chair to this one over here [Pointing to a small chair in the corner] and just sat there with her hands held together and looking down. I got a feeling that I ought to make some conversation, so I said I had come in to see if John

wanted to put in a telephone, and at that she started to laugh, and then she stopped and looked at me—scared. [The County Attorney, who has had his notebook out, makes a note.] I dunno, maybe it wasn't scared. I wouldn't like to say it was. Soon Harry got back, and then Dr. Lloyd came, and you, Mr. Peters, and so I guess that's all I know that you don't.

County Attorney

[Looking around.] I guess we'll go upstairs first—and then out to the barn and around there. [To the Sheriff.] You're convinced that there was nothing important here—nothing that would point to any motive.

Sheriff

Nothing here but kitchen things.

[The County Attorney, after again looking around the kitchen, opens the door of a cupboard closet. He gets up on a chair and looks on a shelf. Pulls his hand away, sticky.

County Attorney

Here's a nice mess.

[The women draw nearer.

Mrs. Peters

[To the other woman.] Oh, her fruit; it did freeze. [To the Lawyer.] She worried about that when it turned so cold. She said the fire'd go out and her jars would break.

Sheriff

Well, can you beat the women! Held for murder and worryin' about her preserves.

County Attorney

I guess before we're through she may have something more serious than preserves to worry about.

Hale

Well, women are used to worrying over trifles.

[The two women move a little closer together.

County Attorney

[With the gallantry of a young politician.] And yet, for all their worries, what would we do without the ladies? [The women do not unbend. He goes to the sink, takes a dipperful of water from the pail and pouring it into a basin, washes his hands. Starts to wipe them on the roller-towel, turns it for a cleaner place.] Dirty towels! [Kicks his foot against the pans under the sink.] Not much of a housekeeper, would you say, ladies?

Mrs. Hale

[Stiffly.] There's a great deal of work to be done on a farm.

County Attorney

To be sure. And yet [With a little bow to her] I know there are some Dickson county farmhouses which do not have such roller towels.

[He gives it a pull to expose its full length again.

Mrs. Hale

Those towels get dirty awful quick. Men's hands aren't always as clean as they might be.

County Attorney

Ah, loyal to your sex, I see. But you and Mrs. Wright were neighbors. I suppose you were friends, too.

Mrs. Hale

[Shaking her head.] I've not seen much of her of late years. I've not been in this house—it's more than a year.

County Attorney

And why was that? You didn't like her?

Mrs. Hale

I liked her all well enough. Farmers' wives have their hands full, Mr. Henderson. And then—

County Attorney

Yes—?

Mrs. Hale

[Looking about.] It never seemed a very cheerful place.

County Attorney

No—it's not cheerful. I shouldn't say she had the homemaking instinct.

Mrs. Hale

Well, I don't know as Wright had, either.

County Attorney

You mean that they didn't get on very well?

Mrs. Hale

No, I don't mean anything. But I don't think a place'd be any cheerfuller for John Wright's being in it.

County Attorney

I'd like to talk more of that a little later. I want to get the lay of things upstairs now.

[He goes to the left, where three steps lead to a stair door.

Sheriff

I suppose anything Mrs. Peters does'll be all right. She was to take in some clothes for her, you know, and a few little things. We left in such a hurry yesterday.

County Attorney

Yes, but I would like to see what you take, Mrs. Peters, and keep an eye out for anything that might be of use to us.

Mrs. Peters

Yes, Mr. Henderson.

[The women listen to the men's steps on the stairs, then look about the kitchen.

Mrs. Hale

I'd hate to have men coming into my kitchen, snooping around and criticising.

[She arranges the pans under sink which the Lawyer had shoved out of place.

Mrs. Peters

Of course it's no more than their duty.

Mrs. Hale

Duty's all right, but I guess that deputy sheriff that came out to make the fire might have got a little of this on. [Gives the roller towel a pull.] Wish I'd thought of that sooner. Seems mean to talk about her for not having things slicked up when she had to come away in such a hurry.

Mrs. Peters

[Who has gone to a small table in the left rear corner of the room, and lifted one end of a towel that covers a pan.] She had bread set.

[Stands still.

Mrs. Hale

[Eyes fixed on a loaf of bread beside the bread-box, which is on a low shelf at the other side of the room. Moves slowly toward it.] She was going to put this in there. [Picks up loaf, then abruptly drops it. In a manner of returning to familiar things.] It's a shame about her fruit. I wonder if it's all gone. [Gets up on the chair and

looks.] I think there's some here that's all right, Mrs. Peters. Yes—here; [Holding it toward the window] this is cherries, too. [Looking again.] I declare I believe that's the only one. [Gets down, bottle in her hand. Goes to the sink and wipes it off on the outside.] She'll feel awful bad after all her hard work in the hot weather. I remember the afternoon I put up my cherries last summer.

[She puts the bottle on the big kitchen table, center of the room. With a sigh, is about to sit down in the rocking-chair. Before she is seated realizes what chair it is; with a slow look at it, steps back. The chair which she has touched rocks back and forth.

Mrs. Peters

Well, I must get those things from the front room closet. [She goes to the door at the right, but after looking into the other room, steps back.] You coming with me, Mrs. Hale? You could help me carry them.

[They go in the other room; reappear, Mrs. Peters carrying a dress and skirt, Mrs. Hale following with a pair of shoes.

Mrs. Peters

My, it's cold in there.

[She puts the clothes on the big table, and hurries to the stove.

Mrs. Hale

[Examining the skirt.] Wright was close. I think maybe that's why she kept so much to herself. She didn't even belong to the Ladies Aid. I suppose she felt she couldn't do her part, and then you don't enjoy things when you feel shabby. She used to wear pretty clothes and be lively, when she was Minnie Foster, one of the town girls singing in the choir. But that—oh, that was thirty years ago. This all you was to take in?

Mrs. Peters

She said she wanted an apron. Funny thing to want, for there isn't much to get you

dirty in jail, goodness knows. But I suppose just to make her feel more natural. She said they was in the top drawer in this cupboard. Yes, here. And then her little shawl that always hung behind the door. [Opens stair door and looks.] Yes, here it is.

[Quickly shuts door leading upstairs.

Mrs. Hale

[Abruptly moving toward her.] Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters

Yes, Mrs. Hale?

Mrs. Hale

Do you think she did it?

Mrs. Peters

[In a frightened voice.] Oh, I don't know.

Mrs. Hale

Well, I don't think she did. Asking for an apron and her little shawl. Worrying about her fruit.

Mrs. Peters

[Starts to speak, glances up, where footsteps are heard in the room above. In a low voice.] Mr. Peters says it looks bad for her. Mr. Henderson is awful sarcastic in a speech and he'll make fun of her sayin' she didn't wake up.

Mrs. Hale

Well, I guess John Wright didn't wake when they was slipping that rope under his neck.

Mrs. Peters

No, it's strange. It must have been done awful crafty and still. They say it was such a—funny way to kill a man, rigging it all up like that.

Mrs. Hale

That’s just what Mr. Hale said. There was a gun in the house. He says that’s what he can’t understand.

Mrs. Peters

Mr. Henderson said coming out that what was needed for the case was a motive; something to show anger, or—sudden feeling.

Mrs. Hale

[Who is standing by the table.] Well, I don’t see any signs of anger around here. [She puts her hand on the dish towel which lies on the table, stands looking down at table, one half of which is clean, the other half messy.] It’s wiped to here. [Makes a move as if to finish work, then turns and looks at loaf of bread outside the breadbox. Drops towel. In that voice of coming back to familiar things.] Wonder how they are finding things upstairs. I hope she had it a little more red-up up there. You know, it seems kind of sneaking. Locking her up in town and then coming out here and trying to get her own house to turn against her!

Mrs. Peters

But Mrs. Hale, the law is the law.

Mrs. Hale

I s’pose ’tis. [Unbuttoning her coat.] Better loosen up your things, Mrs. Peters. You won’t feel them when you go out.

[Mrs. Peters takes off her fur tippet, goes to hang it on hook at back of room, stands looking at the under part of the small corner table.

Mrs. Peters

She was piecing a quilt.

[She brings the large sewing basket and they look at the bright pieces.

Mrs. Hale

It’s log cabin pattern. Pretty, isn’t it? I wonder if she was goin’ to quilt it or just knot it?

[Footsteps have been heard coming down the stairs. The Sheriff enters followed by Hale and the County Attorney.

Sheriff

They wonder if she was going to quilt it or just knot it!

[The men laugh, the women look abashed.

County Attorney

[Rubbing his hands over the stove.] Frank’s fire didn’t do much up there, did it? Well, let’s go out to the barn and get that cleared up.

[The men go outside.

Mrs. Hale

[Resentfully.] I don’t know as there’s anything so strange, our takin’ up our time with little things while we’re waiting for them to get the evidence. [She sits down at the big table smoothing out a block with decision.] I don’t see as it’s anything to laugh about.

Mrs. Peters

[Apologetically.] Of course they’ve got awful important things on their minds.

[Pulls up a chair and joins Mrs. Hale at the table.

Mrs. Hale

[Examining another block.] Mrs. Peters, look at this one. Here, this is the one she was working on, and look at the sewing! All the rest of it has been so nice and even. And look at this! It’s all over the place! Why, it looks as if she didn’t know what she was about!

[After she has said this they look at each other, then start to glance back at the door.

After an instant Mrs. Hale has pulled at a knot and ripped the sewing.

Mrs. Peters

Oh, what are you doing, Mrs. Hale?

Mrs. Hale

[Mildly.] Just pulling out a stitch or two that's not sewed very good. [Threading a needle.] Bad sewing always made me fidgety.

Mrs. Peters

[Nervously.] I don't think we ought to touch things.

Mrs. Hale

I'll just finish up this end. [Suddenly stopping and leaning forward.] Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters

Yes, Mrs. Hale?

Mrs. Hale

What do you suppose she was so nervous about?

Mrs. Peters

Oh—I don't know. I don't know as she was nervous. I sometimes sew awful queer when I'm just tired. [Mrs. Hale starts to say something, looks at Mrs. Peters, then goes on sewing.] Well I must get these things wrapped up. They may be through sooner than we think. [Putting apron and other things together.] I wonder where I can find a piece of paper, and string.

Mrs. Hale

In that cupboard, maybe.

Mrs. Peters

[Looking in cupboard.] Why, here's a bird-cage. [Holds it up.] Did she have a bird, Mrs. Hale?

Mrs. Hale

Why, I don't know whether she did or not—I've not been here for so long. There was a man around last year selling canaries cheap, but I don't know as she took one; maybe she did. She used to sing real pretty herself.

Mrs. Peters

[Glancing around.] Seems funny to think of a bird here. But she must have had one, or why would she have a cage? I wonder what happened to it.

Mrs. Hale

I s'pose maybe the cat got it.

Mrs. Peters

No, she didn't have a cat. She's got that feeling some people have about cats—being afraid of them. My cat got in her room and she was real upset and asked me to take it out.

Mrs. Hale

My sister Bessie was like that. Queer, ain't it?

Mrs. Peters

[Examining the cage.] Why, look at this door. It's broke. One hinge is pulled apart.

Mrs. Hale

[Looking too.] Looks as if someone must have been rough with it.

Mrs. Peters

Why, yes.

[She brings the cage forward and puts it on the table.

Mrs. Hale

I wish if they're going to find any evidence they'd be about it. I don't like this place.

Mrs. Peters

But I'm awful glad you came with me, Mrs. Hale. It would be lonesome for me sitting here alone.

Mrs. Hale

It would, wouldn't it? [Dropping her sewing.] But I tell you what I do wish, Mrs. Peters. I wish I had come over sometimes when she was here. I—[Looking around the room]—wish I had.

Mrs. Peters

But of course you were awful busy, Mrs. Hale—your house and your children.

Mrs. Hale

I could've come. I stayed away because it weren't cheerful—and that's why I ought to have come. I—I've never liked this place. Maybe because it's down in a hollow and you don't see the road. I dunno what it is, but it's a lonesome place and always was. I wish I had come over to see Minnie Foster sometimes. I can see now—

[Shakes her head.

Mrs. Peters

Well, you mustn't reproach yourself, Mrs. Hale. Somehow we just don't see how it is with other folks until—something comes up.

Mrs. Hale

Not having children makes less work—but it makes a quiet house, and Wright out to work all day, and no company when he did come in. Did you know John Wright, Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters

Not to know him; I've seen him in town. They say he was a good man.

Mrs. Hale

Yes—good; he didn't drink, and kept his word as well as most, I guess, and paid his

debts. But he was a hard man, Mrs. Peters. Just to pass the time of day with him—[Shivers.] Like a raw wind that gets to the bone. [Pauses, her eye falling on the cage.] I should think she would 'a wanted a bird. But what do you suppose went with it?

Mrs. Peters

I don't know, unless it got sick and died.

[She reaches over and swings the broken door, swings it again, both women watch it.

Mrs. Hale

You weren't raised round here, were you? [Mrs. Peters shakes her head.] You didn't know—her?

Mrs. Peters

Not till they brought her yesterday.

Mrs. Hale

She—come to think of it, she was kind of like a bird herself—real sweet and pretty, but kind of timid and—fluttery. How?—she—did—change. [Silence; then as if struck by a happy thought and relieved to get back to every day things.] Tell you what, Mrs. Peters, why don't you take the quilt in with you? It might take up her mind.

Mrs. Peters

Why, I think that's a real nice idea, Mrs. Hale. There couldn't possibly be any objection to it, could there? Now, just what would I take? I wonder if her patches are in here—and her things.

[They look in the sewing basket.

Mrs. Hale

Here's some red. I expect this has got sewing things in it. [Brings out a fancy box.]

What a pretty box. Looks like something somebody would give you. Maybe her scissors are in here. [Opens box. Suddenly puts her hand to her nose.] Why—[Mrs. Peters bends nearer, then turns her face away.] There's something wrapped up in this piece of silk.

Mrs. Peters

Why, this isn't her scissors.

Mrs. Hale

[Lifting the silk.] Oh, Mrs. Peters—its—

[Mrs. Peters bends closer.

Mrs. Peters

It's the bird.

Mrs. Hale

[Jumping up.] But, Mrs. Peters—look at it! Its neck! Look at its neck! It's all—other side to.

Mrs. Peters

Somebody—wrung—its—neck.

[Their eyes meet. A look of growing comprehension, of horror. Steps are heard outside. Mrs. Hale slips box under quilt pieces, and sinks into her chair. Enter Sheriff and County Attorney. Mrs. Peters rises.

County Attorney

[As one turning from serious things to little pleasantries.] Well, ladies, have you decided whether she was going to quilt it or knot it?

Mrs. Peters

We think she was going to—knot it.

County Attorney

Well, that's interesting, I'm sure. [Seeing the bird-cage.] Has the bird flown?

Mrs. Hale

[Putting more quilt pieces over the box.] We think the—cat got it.

County Attorney

[Preoccupied.] Is there a cat?

[Mrs. Hale glances in a quick covert way at Mrs. Peters.

Mrs. Peters

Well, not now. They're superstitious, you know. They leave.

County Attorney

[To Sheriff Peters, continuing an interrupted conversation.] No sign at all of anyone having come from the outside. Their own rope. Now let's go up again and go over it piece by piece. [They start upstairs.] It would have to have been someone who knew just the—

[Mrs. Peters sits down. The two women sit there not looking at one another, but as if peering into something and at the same time holding back. When they talk now it is in the manner of feeling their way over strange ground, as if afraid of what they are saying, but as if they can not help saying it.

Mrs. Hale

She liked the bird. She was going to bury it in that pretty box.

Mrs. Peters

[In a whisper.] When I was a girl—my kitten—there was a boy took a hatchet, and before my eyes—and before I could get there—[Covers her face an instant.] If they hadn't held me back I would have—[Catches herself, looks upstairs where steps are heard, falters weakly]—hurt him.

Mrs. Hale

[With a slow look around her.] I wonder how it would seem never to have had any children around. [Pause.] No, Wright wouldn't like the bird—a thing that sang. She used to sing. He killed that, too.

Mrs. Peters

[Moving uneasily.] We don't know who killed the bird.

Mrs. Hale

I knew John Wright.

Mrs. Peters

It was an awful thing was done in this house that night, Mrs. Hale. Killing a man while he slept, slipping a rope around his neck that choked the life out of him.

Mrs. Hale

His neck. Choked the life out of him.

[Her hand goes out and rests on the bird-cage.

Mrs. Peters

[With rising voice.] We don't know who killed him. We don't know.

Mrs. Hale

[Her own feeling not interrupted.] If there'd been years and years of nothing, then a bird to sing to you, it would be awful—still, after the bird was still.

Mrs. Peters

[Something within her speaking.] I know what stillness is. When we homesteaded in Dakota, and my first baby died—after he was two years old, and me with no other then—

Mrs. Hale

[Moving.] How soon do you suppose they'll be through, looking for the evidence?

Mrs. Peters

I know what stillness is. [Pulling herself back.] The law has got to punish crime, Mrs. Hale.

Mrs. Hale

[Not as if answering that.] I wish you'd seen Minnie Foster when she wore a white dress with blue ribbons and stood up there in the choir and sang. [A look around the room.] Oh, I wish I'd come over here once in a while! That was a crime! That was a crime! Who's going to punish that?

Mrs. Peters

[Looking upstairs.] We mustn't—take on.

Mrs. Hale

I might have known she needed help! I know how things can be—for women. I tell you, it's queer, Mrs. Peters. We live close together and we live far apart. We all go through the same things—it's all just a different kind of the same thing. [Brushes her eyes, noticing the bottle of fruit, reaches out for it.] If I was you I wouldn't tell her her fruit was gone. Tell her it ain't. Tell her it's all right. Take this in to prove it to her. She—she may never know whether it was broke or not.

Mrs. Peters

[Takes the bottle, looks about for something to wrap it in; takes petticoat from the clothes brought from the other room, very nervously begins winding this around the bottle. In a false voice.] My, it's a good thing the men couldn't hear us. Wouldn't they just laugh! Getting all stirred up over a little thing like a—dead canary. As if that could have anything to do with—with—wouldn't they laugh!

[The men are heard coming down stairs.

Mrs. Hale

[Under her breath.] Maybe they would—maybe they wouldn't.

County Attorney

No, Peters, it's all perfectly clear except a reason for doing it. But you know juries when it comes to women. If there was some definite thing. Something to show—something to make a story about—a thing that would connect up with this strange way of doing it—

[The women's eyes meet for an instant. Enter Hale from outer door.

Hale

Well, I've got the team around. Pretty cold out there.

County Attorney

I'm going to stay here a while by myself. [To the Sheriff.] You can send Frank out for me, can't you? I want to go over everything. I'm not satisfied that we can't do better.

Sheriff

Do you want to see what Mrs. Peters is going to take in?

[The Lawyer goes to the table, picks up the apron, laughs.

County Attorney

Oh, I guess they're not very dangerous things the ladies have picked out. [Moves a few things about, disturbing the quilt pieces which cover the box. Steps back.] No, Mrs. Peters doesn't need supervising. For that matter, a sheriff's wife is married to the law. Ever think of it that way, Mrs. Peters?

Mrs. Peters

Not—just that way.

Sheriff

[Chuckling.] Married to the law. [Moves toward the other room.] I just want you to come in here a minute, George. We ought to take a look at these windows.

County Attorney

[Scoffingly.] Oh, windows!

Sheriff

We'll be right out, Mr. Hale.

[Hale goes outside. The Sheriff follows the County Attorney into the other room. Then Mrs. Hale rises, hands tight together, looking intensely at Mrs. Peters, whose eyes make a slow turn, finally meeting Mrs. Hale's. A moment Mrs. Hale holds her, then her own eyes point the way to where the box is concealed. Suddenly Mrs. Peters throws back quilt pieces and tries to put the box in the bag she is wearing. It is too big. She opens box, starts to take bird out, cannot touch it, goes to pieces, stands there helpless. Sound of a knob turning in the other room. Mrs. Hale snatches the box and puts it in the pocket of her big coat. Enter County Attorney and Sheriff.

County Attorney

[Facetiously.] Well, Henry, at least we found out that she was not going to quilt it. She was going to—what is it you call it, ladies?

Mrs. Hale

[Her hand against her pocket.] We call it—knot it, Mr. Henderson.

(Curtain)

THE PEOPLE A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First performed by the Provincetown Players, New York, March 9, 1917

ORIGINAL CAST

Edward Wills, Editor of "The People"George Cram Cook Oscar Tripp, Associate EditorPendleton King The ArtistDonald Corley SaraNina Moise Tom Howe, PrinterLewis B. Ell The Boy from GeorgiaLeslie C. Bemis The Man from the CapeIra Remsen The Woman from IdahoSusan Glaspell The Earnest ApproachLew Parrish The Light TouchPierre Loving The FirebrandHarry Kemp The PhilosopherHutchinson Collins

THE PEOPLE

Scene: The office of “The People,” a morning in March, 1917. There is little furniture—a long table strewn with manuscripts and papers, a desk. On the walls are revolutionary posters; wads of paper are thrown about on the floor—the office of a publication which is radical and poor. This is an inner office; at the rear is the door into the outer one. Oscar is seated at the table writing. Tom, a printer who loves the cause—or the crowd—almost enough to print for it, comes from the other room, a galley-proof in his hand.

Tom

Why are you writing?

Oscar

[Jauntily.] Because I am a writer.

Tom

But I thought you said there wasn’t going to be another issue of The People.

Oscar

[With dignity.] I am writing.

Tom

There’s a woman here with a suit case.

Oscar

What’s in it?

Tom

She wants to see the Editor.

Oscar

[After writing.] All right.

[Tom goes out and a moment later the woman appears. She is middle aged, wears plain clothes not in fashion. Her manner is a little shrinking and yet as she stands in the doorway looking about the bare room, her face is the face of one who has come a long way and reached a wonderful place.

The Woman

This is the office of The People?

Oscar

Um-hum.

The Woman

[In a bated way.] I came to see the author of those wonderful words.

Oscar

[Rising.] Which wonderful words?

The Woman

About moving toward the beautiful distances.

Oscar

Oh. Those are Mr. Wills' wonderful words.

[Begins to write as one who has lost interest.

The Woman

Could I see him?

Oscar

He isn't here yet. He's just back from California. Won't be at the office till a little later.

The Woman

[With excitement.] He has been to California? He has just ridden across this country?

Oscar

Yes. Long trip. He was very cross over the ’phone.

The Woman

Oh—no. I think you’re mistaken.

Oscar

Anything you care to see me about?

The Woman

[After considering.] I could see him a little later, couldn’t I?

Oscar

Yes, if its important. Of course he’ll be very busy.

The Woman

It is important. At least—yes, it is important.

Oscar

Very well then—later in the morning.

The Woman

[Thinking aloud.] I will stand down on the street and watch the people go by.

Oscar

What?

The Woman

The people. It’s so wonderful to see them—so many of them. Don’t you often just stand and watch them?

Oscar

No, madam, not often. I am too busy editing a magazine about them.

The Woman

Of course you are busy. You help edit this magazine?

[Looks about at the posters.

Oscar

I am associate editor of The People.

The Woman

That’s a great thing for you—and you so young. Does Mr. Wills write in this room?

Oscar

That is his desk.

The Woman

[Looking at the desk.] It must be a wonderful thing for you to write in the same room with him.

Oscar

Well, I don’t know; perhaps it is a wonderful thing for him to—I am Oscar Tripp, the poet.

The Woman

[Wistfully.] It would be beautiful to be a poet. [Pause.] I will come back later.

[Picks up suit-case.

Oscar

Just leave that if you aren’t going to be using it in the meantime.

The Woman

[Putting it down near the door.] Oh, thank you. I see you are a kind young man.

Oscar

That is not the general opinion.

The Woman

I wonder why it is that the general opinion is so often wrong?

[Stands considering it for a moment, then goes out.

Oscar

I don’t quite understand that woman.

[Tom comes back.

Tom

If this paper can’t go on, I ought to know it. I could get a job on the Evening World. [Oscar continues writing.] Can it go on?

Oscar

I don’t see how it can, but many a time I haven’t seen how it could—and it did. Doubtless it will go on, and will see days so much worse than these that we will say, “Ah, the good old days of March, 1917.”

Tom

But can it pay salaries?

Oscar

[Shocked.] Oh, no, I think not; but we must work because we love our work.

Tom

We must eat because we love our food.

Oscar

You’ll know soon. There’s to be a meeting here this morning.

[Enter Sara. Tom goes into the other room. Sara has the appearance of a young business woman and the simple direct manner of a woman who is ready to work for a thing she believes in.

Sara

Ed not here yet?

Oscar

No.

Sara

Did he get any money?

Oscar

Doesn’t look like it. He was snappish over the phone. Guess he’s for giving it up this time.

Sara

I don’t want to give it up.

[She takes a seat at the table where Oscar is writing and unfolds a manuscript she has brought with her.

Oscar

Well, it’s not what we want, it’s what people want, and there aren’t enough of them who want us.

Sara

The fault must lie with us.

Oscar

I don’t think so. The fault lies with the failure to—

[The Artist has entered.

Artist

I’ll tell you where the fault lies. We should give more space to pictures and less to stupid reading matter.

Oscar

We have given too much expensive white paper to pictures and too little to reading matter—especially to poetry. That’s where the fault lies.

[Enter Edward Wills, editor.

Ed

I'll tell you where the fault lies. [Points first to The Artist, then to Oscar.] Here! Just this! Everybody plugging for his own thing. Nobody caring enough about the thing as a whole.

Oscar

[Rising.] I'll tell you where the fault lies. [Points to Ed.] Here! This. The Editor-in-chief returning from a long trip and the first golden words that fall from his lips words of censure for his faithful subordinates.

Sara

How are you Ed?

Ed

Rotten. I hate sleeping cars. I always catch cold.

Sara

Any luck?

Ed

[His hand around his ear.] What's the word?

[Enter The Earnest Approach.

Earnest Approach

I have heard that you may have to discontinue.

Ed

[Sitting down at his desk, beginning to look through his mail.] It seems we might as well.

Earnest Approach

Now just let me tell you what the trouble has been and how you can remedy it. The

People has been afraid of being serious. But you deal with ideas, and you must do it soberly. There is a place for a good earnest journal of protest, but all this levity—this fooling—

[Enter The Light Touch.

Light Touch

Came in to see you, Ed, to say I hope the news I'm hearing isn't true.

Ed

If it's bad, it's true.

Light Touch

Well, it's an awful pity, but you've been too damn serious. A lighter touch—that's what The People needs. You're as heavy as mud. Try it awhile longer along frivolous lines. I was in the building and just ran in to let you have my idea of what's the matter with you.

Oscar

If we had as many subscribers as we have people to tell us what's the matter with us—

[Enter Philosopher and Firebrand, Tom follows them in, a page of manuscript in his hand.

Ed

Now the Philosopher and the Firebrand will tell us what's the matter with us.

Firebrand

Too damn bourgeois! You should print on the cover of every issue—"To hell with the bourgeoisie!" Pigs!

Philosopher

The trouble with this paper is efficiency.

[This is too much for all of them. The Printer falls back against the wall, then staggers from the room.

Ed

Dear God! There are things it seems to me I can not bear.

Philosopher

It should be more carelessly done, and then it would be more perfectly done. You should be less definite, and you would have more definiteness. You should not know what it is you want, and then you would find what you are after.

Oscar

You talk as if we had not been a success. But just last night I heard of a woman in Bronxville who keeps The People under her bed so her husband won't know she's reading it.

Firebrand

If you had been a success you would have fired that woman with so great a courage that she would proudly prop The People on the pillow!

Artist

[Who is sketching The Firebrand.] It was my pictures got us under the bed.

Oscar

[Haughtily.] I was definitely told it was my last "Talk with God" put us under the bed.

Firebrand

Can you not see that she puts you under the bed because you yourselves have made concessions to the bourgeoisie? Cows! Geese!

Artist

It must be more frivolous!

Oscar

It must print more poetry.

[They glare at one another.

Earnest Approach

It should be more serious.

Light Touch

It must be more frivolous!

[Enter The Boy from Georgia—dressed like a freshman with a good allowance.

The Boy

Is this the office of The People?

Oscar

No, this is a lunatic asylum.

The Boy

[After a bewildered moment.] Oh, you're joking. You know [Confidentially], I wondered about that—whether you would joke here. I thought you would. [Stepping forward.] I came to see the Editor—I want to tell him—

Ed

So many people are telling me so many things, could you tell yours a little later?

The Boy

Oh, yes. Of course there must be many important things people have to tell you.

Ed

Well—many.

[The Boy goes out—reluctantly.

Artist

[Who has all the time been glaring at Oscar.] Speaking for the artists, I want to say right now—

Oscar

Speaking for the writers, I wish to say before we go further—

Earnest Approach

A more serious approach—

Light Touch

A lighter touch—

Firebrand

Speaking for myself—

Philosopher

Speaking for the truth—

[Phone rings, Oscar answers. Enter The Man from the Cape—slow, heavy.

Ed

You have come to tell us something about this paper?

The Man

Yes.

Ed

There are a number ahead of you. Will you wait your turn? [A look of disappointment.] I'll be glad to see you as soon as I can. There in the outside office?

[A moment The Man stands there, a mute ponderous figure, then very slowly goes out.

Oscar

[Hanging up receiver.] Moritz Paper Company. Bill got to be paid today. And here—

[Takes from his drawer a huge packet of bills.

Earnest Approach

You could pay your bills if you were not afraid to be serious!

Light Touch

You could pay your bills if you were not afraid to be gay!

Earnest Approach

[From the door, solemnly.] A more earnest approach would save The People.

Light Touch

A lighter touch would turn the trick!

[With that they leave.

Firebrand

[Going over and pounding on The Editor's desk.] To hell with the bourgeoisie! Apes!

Philosopher

Efficiency has put out the spark.

Ed

Well, as long as the spark appears to be good and out, may I, in the name of efficiency, ask you who do not belong here to retire, that we may go ahead with our work?

Philosopher

There would be greater efficiency in our remaining. There would be form. You have lacked form.

Firebrand

You have lacked courage! Donkeys!

Ed

It would be illuminating, Leo, to hear you run through the animal kingdom—toads, crocodiles, a number of things you haven't mentioned yet, but the animal kingdom is large—and we have work to do.

Philosopher

You lack form in your work. By form I do not mean what you think I mean. I mean that particular significance of the insignificant which is the fundamental—

Ed

We couldn't understand it. Why tell us?

Philosopher

No. You couldn't understand it.

[He leaves them to their fate.

Firebrand

Rest in peace. [Gesture of benediction. Then hissingly.] Centipedes!

[He goes—leaving a laugh behind him.

Ed

What's the matter with us is our friends.

Sara

[Quietly.] Well, to be or not to be. I guess it's up to you, Ed.

Ed

Just what would we be going on for? To make a few more people like the dear ones who have just left us? Seems to me we could best serve society by not doing that. Precisely what do we do?—aside from getting under the bed in Bronxville. Now and then something particularly rotten is put over and we have a story that gets a rise out of a few people, but—we don't change anything.

Sara

We had another hope. We were going to express ourselves so simply and so truly that we would be expressing the people.

Ed

[Wearily.] The People. I looked at them all the way across this continent. Oh, I got so tired looking at them—on farms, in towns, in cities. They're like toys that you wind up and they'll run awhile. They don't want to be expressed. It would topple them over. The longer I looked the more ridiculous it seemed to me that we should be giving our lives to—[Picks up the magazine and reads.] The People—"A Journal of the Social Revolution." Certainly we'd better cut the sub-title. The social revolution is dead.

Oscar

You don't think you are bringing back any news, do you, Ed?

Artist

[Taking up magazine.] Instead of a sub-title we could have a design. Much better.

[Glares at Oscar, then begins to draw.

Sara

This is a long way from what you felt a year ago, Ed. You had vision then.

Ed

You can't keep vision in this office. It's easy enough to have a beautiful feeling about the human race when none of it is around. The trouble about doing anything for your fellow-man is that you have to do it with a few of them. Oh, of course that isn't fair. We care. I'll say that for us. Even Oscar cares, or he wouldn't work the way he has. But what does our caring come to? It doesn't connect up with anything, and God knows it doesn't seem to be making anything very beautiful of us. There's something rather pathetic about us.

Oscar

Or is it merely ridiculous?

Sara

Let me read you something, Ed. [She takes The People and reads very simply.] “We are living now. We shall not be living long. No one can tell us we shall live again. This is our little while. This is our chance. And we take it like a child who comes from a dark room to which he must return—comes for one sunny afternoon to a lovely hillside, and finding a hole, crawls in there till after the sun is set. I want that child to know the sun is shining upon flowers in the grass. I want him to know it before he has to go back to the room that is dark. I wish I had pipes to call him to the hilltop of beautiful distances. I myself could see farther if he were seeing at all. Perhaps I can tell you: you who have dreamed and dreaming know, and knowing care. Move! Move from the things that hold you. If you move, others will move. Come! Now. Before the sun goes down.” [Very quietly.] You wrote that, Ed.

Ed

Yes, I wrote it; and do you want to know why I wrote it? I wrote it because I was sore at Oscar and wanted to write something to make him feel ashamed of himself.

[While Sara is reading, The Woman has appeared at the door, has moved a few steps into the room as if drawn by the words she is hearing. Behind her are seen The Boy from Georgia, The Man from the Cape.

The Woman

[Moving forward.] I don’t believe that’s true! I don’t believe that’s true! Maybe you think that’s why you wrote it, but it’s not the reason. You wrote it because it’s the living truth, and it moved in you and you had to say it.

Ed

[Rising.] Who are you?

The Woman

I am one of the people. I have lived a long way off. I heard that call and—I had to come.

The Boy

[Blithely.] I've come too. I'm from Georgia. I read it, and I didn't want to stay at school any longer. I said, "I want something different and bigger—something more like this." I heard about your not being able to sell your paper on the newsstands just because lots of people don't want anything different and bigger, and I said to myself, "I'll sell the paper! I'll go and sell it on the streets!" And I got so excited about it that I didn't even wait for the dance. There was a dance that night, and I had my girl too.

The Woman

He didn't even wait for the dance.

Oscar

The idealists are calling upon the intellectuals, and "calling" them.

Ed

[To The Man.] And what did you leave, my friend?

The Man

[Heavily.] My oyster bed. I'm from the Cape. I had a chance to go in on an oyster bed. I read what you wrote—a woman who had stopped in an automobile left it, and I said to myself, "I'm nothing but an oyster myself. Guess I'll come to life."

Ed

But—what did you come here for?

The Man

Well—for the rest of it.

Ed

The rest of what?

The Man

The rest of what you've got.

The Boy

Yes—that's it; we've come for the rest of what you've got.

Oscar

This is awkward for Ed.

The Woman

Give it to us.

Ed

What?

The Woman

The rest of it.

Ed

[An instant's pause.] I haven't got anything more to give.

The Boy

But you made us think you had. You led us to believe you had.

The Woman

And you have. If you hadn't more to give, you couldn't have given that.

Oscar

Very awkward.

The Woman

You said—"I call to you. You who have dreamed, and dreaming know, and knowing care." Well, three of us are here. From the South and the East and the West we've

come because you made us want something we didn't have, made us want it so much we had to move the way we thought was toward it—before the sun goes down.

The Boy

We thought people here had life—something different and bigger.

Oscar

Perhaps we'd better go. Poor Ed.

Ed

I wish you'd shut up, Oscar.

The Woman

I know you will give it to us.

Ed

Give what to you?

The Woman

What you have for the people. [Oscar coughs.] What you made us know we need.

Oscar

You shouldn't have called personally. You should have sent in your needs by mail.

Ed

Oscar, try and act as if you had a soul.

The Woman

I think he really has. [A look at Oscar—then, warmly.] At least he has a heart. It's only that he feels he must be witty. But you—you're not going to let us just go away again, are you? He gave up his oyster bed, and this boy didn't even wait for the dance, and me—I gave up my tombstone.

Ed

Your—?

The Woman

Yes—tombstone. It had always been a saying in our family—"He won't even have a stone to mark his grave." They said it so much that I thought it meant something. I sew—plain sewing, but I've often said to myself—"Well, at least I'll have a stone to mark my grave." And then, there was a man who had been making speeches to the miners—I live in a town in Idaho—and he had your magazine, and he left it in the store, and the storekeeper said to me, when I went there for thread—"Here, you like to read. Don't you want this? I wish you'd take it away, because if some folks in this town see it, they'll think I'm not all I should be." He meant the cover.

Artist

[Brightening.] That was my cover.

The Woman

[After a smile at The Artist.] So I took it home, and when my work was done that night, I read your wonderful words. They're like a spring—if you've lived in a dry country, you'll know what I mean. And they made me know that my tombstone was as dead as—well, [With a little laugh] as dead as a tombstone. So I had to have something to take its place.

Sara

[Rising and going to The Woman.] Talk to him. Tell him about it. Come, Oscar!

The Boy

As long as there seems to be so much uncertainty about this, perhaps I'd better telegraph father. You see, the folks don't know where I am. I just came.

The Woman

He didn't even stay for the dance.

The Boy

I'll be glad to sell the papers. [Seeing a pile of them on the table.] Here, shall I take these?—and I'll stop people on the street and tell why I'm selling them.

Oscar

No, you can't do that. You'd be arrested.

The Woman

Let him sell them. What's the difference about the law, if you have the right idea?

Oscar

The right idea has given us trouble enough already.

The Man

There's something sure about an oyster bed.

Oscar

You come with me and have a drink. Something sure about that too.

The Woman

He could have had a drink at home.

Sara

[To Artist.] Coming, Joe? [To The Boy.] It was corking of you to want to help us. We must talk about—

[All go out except The Woman and The Editor. A Pause.

The Woman

I am sorry for you.

Ed

Why?

The Woman

[Feeling her way and sadly.] Because you have the brain to say those things, and not

the spirit to believe them. I couldn't say them, and yet I've got something you haven't got. [With more sureness.] Because I know the thing you said was true.

Ed

Will you sit down?

The Woman

No—I'll go. [Stands there uncertainly.] I don't know why I should be disappointed. I suppose it's not fair to ask you to be as big as the truth you saw. Why should I expect you would be?

Ed

I'm sorry. I suppose now you'll regret your tombstone.

The Woman

No—it was wonderful to ride across this country and see all the people. The train moving along seemed to make something move in me. I had thoughts not like any thoughts I'd ever had before—your words like a spring breaking through the dry country of my mind. I thought of how you call your paper "A Journal of The Social Revolution," and I said to myself—This is the Social Revolution! Knowing that your tombstone doesn't matter! Seeing—that's the Social Revolution.

Ed

Seeing—?

The Woman

[As if it is passing before her.] A plain, dark trees off at the edge, against the trees a little house and a big barn. A flat piece of land fenced in. Stubble, furrows. Horses waiting to get in at the barn; cows standing around a pump. A tile yard, a water tank, one straight street of a little town. The country so still it seems dead. The trees like—hopes that have been given up. The grave yards—on hills—they come so fast. I noticed them first because of my tombstone, but I got to thinking about the

people—the people who spent their whole lives right near the places where they are now. There's something in the thought of them—like the cows standing around the pump. So still, so patient, it—kind of hurts. And their pleasures:—a flat field fenced in. Your great words carried me to other great words. I thought of Lincoln, and what he said of a few of the dead. I said it over and over. I said things and didn't know the meaning of them 'till after I had said them. I said—"The truth—the truth—the truth that opens from our lives as water opens from the rocks." Then I knew what that truth was. [Pause, with an intensity peculiarly simple.] "Let us here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain." I mean—all of them. [A gesture, wide, loving.] Let life become what it may become!—so beautiful that everything that is back of us is worth everything it cost.

[Enter Tom.

Tom

I've got—[Feeling something unusual.] Sorry to butt in, but I can still get that job on The Evening World. If this paper is going to stop, I've got to know it.

Ed

Stop! This paper can't stop!

Tom

Can't stop! Last I heard, it couldn't do anything else.

Ed

That was—long ago.

Tom

Oh—you've got something to go on with?

Ed

Yes, something to go on with.

Tom

I see. [Looks at woman, as if he doesn't see, glances at her suit-case.] I'm glad. But—I've got to be sure. This—is the truth?

Ed

The truth. The truth that opens from our lives as water opens from the rocks.

[Tom backs up.

The Woman

[Turning a shining face to The Printer.] Nobody really needs a tombstone!

(Curtain)

CLOSE THE BOOK A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

First Performed by the Provincetown Players, New York, Nov. 2, 1917

ORIGINAL CAST

JhansiEdith Unger Peyton Root, an Instructor in the UniversityJames Light Mrs. Root, Peyton's MotherSusan Glaspell Mrs. Peyton, His GrandmotherClara Savage Uncle George Peyton, President of the Board of RegentsJustus Sheffield Bessie RootAlice MacDougal State Senator ByrdDavid Carb Mrs. State Senator ByrdEsther Pinch

CLOSE THE BOOK

Scene: The library in the Root home, the library of middle-western people who are an important family in their community, a university town, and who think of themselves as people of culture. It is a room which shows pride of family: on the rear wall are two large family portraits—one a Revolutionary soldier, the other a man of a later period. On the low book-cases, to both sides of door rear, and on the mantel, right, are miniatures and other old pictures. There is old furniture—mahogany recently done over: an easy chair near the fireplace, a divan left. A Winged Victory presides over one of the book-cases, a Burne Jones is hung.

It is a warmly lighted, cheerful room—books and flowers about. At the rear is a door opening on the hall, at the left a door into another room. There is a corner window at the right. Jhansi and Peyton are seated on the divan. Mrs. Root is just going into the hall. She seems perturbed. Jhansi is dressed as a non-conformist, but attractively. Peyton is a rather helpless young man, with a sense of humor that is itself rather helpless.

Mrs. Root

I'll see, Peyton, if your grandmother isn't ready to come down.

[She leaves them.

Jhansi

[Springing up.] It's absurd that I should be here!

Peyton

I know, Jhansi, but just this once—as long as it means so much to mother, and doesn't really hurt us.

Jhansi

But it does hurt me, Peyton. These walls stifle me. You come of people who have been walled in all their lives. It doesn't cage you. But me—I am a gypsy! Sometimes I feel them right behind me—all those wanderers, people who were never caught; feel them behind me pushing me away from all this!

Peyton

But not pushing you away from me, dear. You love me, Jhansi, in spite of my family?

Jhansi

If I didn't love you do you think I could endure to come to this dreadful place? [A look about the comfortable room]—and meet these dreadful people? Forgive me for alluding to your home and family, Peyton, but I must not lose my honesty, you

know.

Peyton

No, dear; I don't think you are losing it. And perhaps I'd better not lose mine either. There's one thing I haven't mentioned yet. [Hesitates.] Mr. Peyton is coming to dinner tonight.

Jhansi

Mr. Peyton. What Peyton?

Peyton

Yes—that one.

Jhansi

And you ask me—standing for the things I do in this university—to sit down to dinner with the president of the board of regents!

Peyton

Mother'd asked him before I knew it.

Jhansi

[With scorn.] Your uncle!

Peyton

He's not my uncle—he's mother's. And you see it's partly on account of grandmother just getting back from California. He's grandmother's brother-in-law, you know. I suppose she doesn't realize what it means to have to sit down to dinner with him—she's done it so much. And then mother thought it would be nice for you to meet him.

Jhansi

Nice!

Peyton

He’s pleasant at dinner.

Jhansi

Pleasant!

Peyton

Mother’s a little worried about my position in the university.

Jhansi

It would be wonderful for you to lose your position in the university.

Peyton

Yes—wonderful.

Jhansi

And then you and I could walk forth free!

Peyton

Free—but broke.

Jhansi

Peyton, you disappoint me. Just the fact that that man is coming to dinner changes you.

Peyton

Oh, no. But you are fortunately situated, Jhansi, having no people. It’s easier to be free when there’s nobody who minds.

Jhansi

I am going!

Peyton

Oh come now, dearest, you can’t go when you’re expected for dinner. Nobody’s that free.

Jhansi

Dinner! A dinner to celebrate our engagement! It's humiliating, Peyton. I should take you by the hand and you and I should walk together down the open road.

Peyton

We will, Jhansi; we will—in time.

Jhansi

We should go now.

Peyton

Think so? Mother's going to have turkey.

Jhansi

Better a dinner of berries and nuts—!

Peyton

We'll have berries—cranberries, and nuts, too.

Jhansi

Where is my coat?

Peyton

[Seizing her and kissing her.] Some day, serene and unhampered, we'll take to the open road—a road with berries and nuts.

[Grandmother Peyton and Mrs. Root are at the door.

Mrs. Root

Mother, this is Peyton's friend Miss Mason. One of our important students.

Grandmother

[In her brittle way.] Yes? I never was a very important student myself. I didn't like to study. Because my family were professors, I suppose.

Mrs. Root

Peyton's grandmother is a descendant of Gustave Phelps—one of the famous teachers of pioneer days.

Jhansi

[Her head going up.] I am a descendant of people who never taught anybody anything!

Peyton

Jhansi and I were just going to finish an article on Free Speech which must get to the Torch this evening.

Grandmother

[Moving toward the big chair near the fire.] Free Speech? How amusing.

Peyton

You may be less amused some day, grandmother.

[Jhansi and Peyton go into the other room.

Grandmother

That may be a free speech. I wouldn't call it a pleasant one.

Mrs. Root

[Sinking to the divan.] Oh, he was speaking of the open road again—berries and nuts—!

Grandmother

[Beginning to knit.] Berries and nuts? Well, it sounds quite innocuous to me. Some of our young people are less simple in their tastes.

Mrs. Root

[In great distress.] Mother, how would you like to see your grandson become a gypsy?

Grandmother

Peyton a gypsy? You mean in a carnival?

Mrs. Root

No, not in a carnival! In life.

Grandmother

But he isn't dark enough.

Mrs. Root

And is that the only thing against it! I had thought you would be a help to me, mother.

Grandmother

Well, my dear Clara, I have no doubt I will be a help to you—in time. This idea of Peyton becoming a gypsy is too startling for me to be a help instantly. In the first place, could he be? You can't be anything you take it into your head to be—even if it is undesirable. And then, why should he be? Doesn't he still teach English right here in the university?

Mrs. Root

I don't know how much longer he'll teach it. He said the other day that American literature was a toddy with the stick left out. Saying that of the very thing he's paid to teach! It got in the papers and was denounced in an editorial on "Untrue Americans." Peyton—a descendant of John Peyton of Valley Forge! [Indicates the Revolutionary portrait]—denounced in an article on Untrue Americans! And in one of those awful columns—those silly columns—they said maybe the stick hadn't been left out of his toddy. But it isn't that. Peyton doesn't drink—to speak of. It's this girl. She's the stick. And I tell you people don't like it, mother. It's not what we pay our professors for. Peyton used to be perfectly satisfied with civilization. But now he talks about society. Makes light remarks.

Grandmother

I should say that was going out of his way to be disagreeable. What business has a professor of English to say anything about society? It's not in his department.

Mrs. Root

I told Peyton he should be more systematic.

Grandmother

How did this gypsy get here?

Mrs. Root

She was brought up by a family named Mason. But it seems she was a gypsy child, who got lost or something, and those Masons took her in. I'm sure it was very good of them, and it's too bad they weren't able to make her more of a Christian. She is coming to have a following in the university! There are people who seem to think that because you're outside society you have some superior information about it.

Grandmother

Well, don't you think you're needlessly disturbed? In my day, a young man would be likely enough to fall in love with a good-looking gypsy, not very likely to marry her.

Mrs. Root

Times have changed, mother. They marry them now. [Both sigh.] Of course, it's very commendable of them.

Grandmother

[Grimly.] Oh, quite—commendable.

Mrs. Root

I was brought up in university circles. I'm interested in ideas. But sometimes I think there are too many ideas.

Grandmother

An embarrassment of riches. So you have set out to civilize the young woman?

Mrs. Root

I'd rather have her sit at my table than have my son leave some morning in a covered wagon!

Grandmother

I wonder how it is about gypsies. About the children. I wonder if it's as it is with the negroes.

Mrs. Root

Mother!

Grandmother

It would be startling, wouldn't it?—if one of them should turn out to be a real gypsy and take to this open road.

Mrs. Root

[Covering her face.] Oh!

Grandmother

Quite likely they'd do it by motor.

Mrs. Root

[Rising.] Mother!—how can you say such dreadful things—and just when I have this trying dinner. Oh, I wish Bessie would come! [Goes to the window.] She is a comfort to me.

Grandmother

Where is Bessie?

Mrs. Root

She's away in the motor. [Again shudders.] Bessie feels dreadfully about her

brother. She is trying to do something. She said it would be a surprise—a happy surprise. [Someone heard in the hall.] Perhaps this is Bessie. [Enter Mr. Peyton.] Oh, it's Uncle George.

Uncle George

Early I know. Came to have a little visit with Elizabeth. [Goes to Grandmother and shakes hands.] How are you, young woman?

Grandmother

My nerves seem to be stronger than the nerves I see around me. And how are you, George?

Uncle George

Oh, I'm well.

Grandmother

But—?

Uncle George

Responsibilities.

Grandmother

The bank?

Uncle George

I'd rather run ten banks than a tenth of a university. You can control money.

Mrs. Root

I'm sorry, Uncle George, that Peyton should be adding to your worries.

Uncle George

What's the matter with Peyton?

Grandmother

Wild oats.

Uncle George

Well, I wish he'd sow them in less intellectual fields.

Mrs. Root

I am prepared to speak freely with you, Uncle George. The matter with Peyton is this girl. Well, they're going to be married. Yes [Answering his gesture of protest] and I think it's a good thing. She won't be in a position to say so much about freedom after she is married.

Uncle George

But they say she's a gypsy.

Mrs. Root

She won't be a gypsy after she's Peyton's wife. She'll be a married woman.

Uncle George

Yes, but in the meantime we will have swallowed a gypsy.

Grandmother

And I was just wondering how it would be about the children.

Mrs. Root

Mother, please don't be indelicate again.

[Pause.

Grandmother

Well, if there's nothing else we may speak of, let's talk about free speech. They're writing a paper on it in there.

Uncle George

I don't know what this university is coming to! An institution of learning! It isn't that I don't believe in free speech. Every true American believes in free speech, but—

[Slight Pause.

Grandmother

[With Emphasis.] Certainly.

Uncle George

Ask them to come out here with their paper on free speech. I'll be glad to give them the benefit of my experience.

Mrs. Root

Yes, it will be delightful to all be together.

[She goes to get Peyton and Jhansi.

Grandmother

This girl doesn't look to me like one who is thirsting for the benefit of another person's experience.

Uncle George

She's a bad influence. She's leading our young people to criticise the society their fathers have builded up.

Grandmother

There's a great deal of ingratitude in the world.

[Mrs. Root returns, followed by the two young people.

Mrs. Root

I told Uncle George you were eager to bring him and Jhansi together. Jhansi, this is Mr. Peyton, who looks after the affairs of the university for you students. Of course you've heard about Miss Mason, Uncle George, one of our—cleverest students.

Uncle George

Yes, we were speaking of Miss Mason's cleverness just the other day—in board meeting.

Jhansi

And just the other day—at the student assembly—we were speaking of how you look after the affairs of the university for us.

Grandmother

I hope you both spoke affectionately.

Uncle George

Well, Peyton, very busy I take it. You're adding to your duties, aren't you?

Peyton

Not that I know of.

Uncle George

Your grandmother said something about a high falutin paper on free speech.

Peyton

I suppose that's an inherited tendency. You know one of my ancestors signed a paper on free speech. It had a high falutin name: "The Declaration of Independence"!

Mrs. Root

I wish Bessie would come!

Uncle George

Do you think much about your ancestors, Peyton?

Peyton

Not a great deal.

Uncle George

Peyton has some rather interesting ancestors, Miss Mason. There's Captain John Peyton. That's his picture. He helped win one of the battles which made this country possible—the country in which you are living. And a descendant of John

Peyton—Richard Peyton [Points out the picture] gave the money which founded this university—the university in which you are now acquiring your education.

Jhansi

[Lightly.] Perhaps it would be quite as well if this university—and this country—never had existed.

Mrs. Root

I don't see why Bessie doesn't come!

Jhansi

Of course I look at it as an outsider. I am not a part of your society.

Uncle George

Peyton is.

Mrs. Root

There's Bessie!

[Bessie rushes in.

Bessie

Grandmother! [Swiftly kissing her.] How wonderful to have you with us again! Dear Uncle George!

Uncle George

Glad you got here, Bessie. Your mother has been looking for you.

Bessie

[A movement of greeting to Jhansi.] Isn't it beautiful to all be together? A real family party! And now—we have a moment or two before dinner, mother?

Mrs. Root

The man who brought the turkey in from the country had a runaway, so it was a little late in arriving.

Bessie

How fortunate! Oh, it does seem that all things work together for the best. Mother, I have had a completely successful day!

Grandmother

Where’ve you been, Bessie?

Bessie

I’ve been fifty miles to the north—in Baxter County. Does that mean anything to you, Jhansi?

Jhansi

Not a thing.

Bessie

[Still breathlessly.] Dear uncle, I hope you will understand what I am about to do. It might seem unrestrained—not in the best of taste, but it’s just because you stand for so much in Peyton’s life that I want you to hear our good news as soon as we hear it ourselves. You knew that these two children were in love and going to be married. [A bow from Uncle George.] You know—Jhansi dear, I may speak very freely, may I not?

Jhansi

I believe in free speech.

Bessie

Yes—how dear of you. Jhansi has endured in proud silence a great grief. And now, dear child, because of the touching dignity with which you have stood outside and alone, it is a moment of special joyfulness to me when I can say—Welcome Within!

Peyton

What are you talking about, Bessie?

Bessie

You must not stand outside society! You belong within the gates. You are one of us!

Jhansi

I’m not.

Bessie

Dear child you are as respectable as we are.

Jhansi

[Rising.] I am not.

Bessie

Of course, you can’t grasp it in an instant. But I have looked it all up, dear. I have the proofs.

Peyton

Well it wasn’t your affair, Bessie.

Bessie

I made it my affair because I love my brother. Jhansi dear, [As one who tells tremendous good news] your father was Henry Harrison, a milkman in the town of Sunny Center—an honorable and respected man. Your parents were married in the Baptist Church!

Jhansi

I deny it! I deny this charge!

Bessie

[Stepping to the hall.] Dear Senator and Mrs. Byrd, will you come now?

[Enter State Senator Byrd and Mrs. State Senator Byrd, Mrs. Byrd carrying a large book.

Bessie

Jhansi dear, you are about to enter upon the happiest moment of your life, for State Senator Byrd, one of our law-making body, is a cousin of your dear dead mother.

Senator Byrd

Aggie's little girl!

[He goes to Jhansi with outstretched hands. But Aggie's little girl stands like a rock.

Bessie

And here, Jhansi, is your cousin Mrs. Byrd, who has come all this way to assure you you have a family.

Mrs. Byrd

Indeed you have! There's Ella Andrews, one of our teachers—a lovely girl. She's your first cousin. We are second cousins. You may have some little family pride in knowing that I was last spring elected President of the Federated Clubs of Baxter County. Just last week I entertained the officers of all the clubs at our home—our new home, erected last year after your cousin Ephraim completed his first term in the upper house of the State Legislature. Your cousin Ephraim has been re-elected. He is on the Ways and Means Committee.

Uncle George

[Approaching Senator Byrd.] I have heard of Senator Ephraim Byrd of the Ways and Means Committee. That was good work you fellows—

[They talk of this.

Mrs. Root

And to think, Jhansi, that your cousin Mrs. Byrd is a prominent clubwoman!

Grandmother

[After a look at Jhansi.] Her cup runneth over.

Mrs. Root

Isn’t Bessie wonderful, mother? How did you find it all out, Bessie?

Bessie

From clue to clue I worked my way to Sunny Center. I would say to myself—Do this for Peyton; do this for Jhansi. And so, I heard of an old minister who had been there years and years. I went to him and—he had married Jhansi’s father and mother! Dearest child, your mother taught in his Sunday-School!

Senator Byrd

Oh, yes, Aggie loved the Baptist Sunday-School!

Jhansi

It’s very strange that my mother—I am referring to Mrs. Mason—never told me of this!

Bessie

But she never told you you were a gypsy, either, did she? No; she just wanted you to think you were their own child. And then I suppose you heard some foolish tale at school.

Mrs. Byrd

You see Jhansi’s mother and father—her real ones—died of typhoid fever before she was two years old. They got it from the cows. Well, the Harrisons were friends of the Mason’s—they all worked together in the church—and so they took Jhansi, and soon after that they moved away and we lost track of them. You know what a busy world it is—particularly for people who have duties in their community.

Jhansi

I haven’t accepted this story! You can’t prove it!

[Mrs. Byrd impressively hands her husband the book.

Senator Byrd

“Iowa descendants of New England families.”

Mrs. Root

Oh, yes; that is one of the books in which our family is written up! [To Peyton.] My dearest boy, from my heart I congratulate you!

Senator Byrd

Pages fifty-seven to sixty-one—inclusive, are devoted, Jhansi, to our family.

Mrs. Byrd

My own family appears on page 113.

[Senator Byrd holds the book out to Jhansi, who once more stands like a rock. Uncle George steps forward to look at the book.

Uncle George

Oh, you are a descendant of Peter Byrd.

Senator Byrd

One of those dare-devils whose leg was shot under him at Bull Run.

Bessie

You heard that, Jhansi?

Mrs. Root

A descendant of Peter Byrd!—whose leg was shot under him—

Jhansi

So this is what I was brought here for, is it? To have my character torn down—to ruin my reputation and threaten my integrity by seeking to muzzle me with a leg at Bull Run and set me down in the Baptist Sunday-School in a milk-wagon! I see the purpose of it all. I understand the hostile motive behind all this—but I tell you it’s a lie. Something here [Hand on heart] tells me I am not respectable!

Uncle George

Reaction.

Jhansi

I am Jhansi—Jhansi—a child of the gypsies! I am a wanderer! I am an outlaw!

Mrs. Byrd

Yes, you are Jhansi. And did you ever stop to think how you came by that outlandish name?

Jhansi

It has always assured me of my birthright.

Mrs. Byrd

Well, you'd better look in your geography. You were named after a town in India where your mother's missionary circle was helping to support a missionary.

Senator Byrd

Aggie was crazy about the missionaries.

Jhansi

[Falling back, breaking.] Peyton, I release you from our engagement.

Peyton

No. N-o; don't do that. [Stoutly.] I love you for yourself alone—in spite of anything that may be true. But I must say Bessie—!

Jhansi

[Beginning to sob.] I can't bear it. I can't bear it! And to think that Peyton's mother was an illegitimate child.

Mrs. Root

[Dazed.] What's that?

Grandmother

[Rising.] Yes; what is that?

Mrs. Root

Am I to understand—?

Grandmother

Am I to be told—at my age—that I gave birth to an illegitimate child? This is a surprise to me—and not a pleasant one!

Peyton

[To Jhansi.] It would have been better not to have mentioned that.

Uncle George

This is reaction. I think perhaps we need a physician.

Jhansi

I don’t need a physician. Peyton certainly told me that his mother was an illegitimate child. Of course, Peyton, if you were just boasting about your family—say so.

Uncle George

What have you to say, Peyton?

Grandmother

Before he says anything, Bessie, you bring me that portfolio from the lower right-hand corner of my desk. Key in the upper left hand pigeon hole.

[Bessie goes.

Mrs. Root

Peyton!

Peyton

Why I didn’t mean any harm, mother. I certainly didn’t mean anything against you, or grandmother. Quite the contrary. I was just anxious that Jhansi should have a little respect for our family. It didn’t seem to have a leg to stand on.

Jhansi

So you made it up—out of whole cloth?

Peyton

No, not out of whole cloth.

Grandmother

Out of what cloth, then? Kindly tell me, out of what cloth?

Mrs. Root

Peyton is not himself.

Peyton

Well, it just came into my head that it was possible. You see, grandmother, your having moved—I do wish you could see that I meant nothing against your character. Absolutely the contrary. But your having moved—

Grandmother

My having moved where?

Peyton

Your having moved from New York State to Ohio at just that time—

Grandmother

I always did like to travel. Is that anything against a person's character?

Peyton

I was claiming that you had character.

Grandmother

I'll stick to my own, thank you. I've had it quite a while and am used to it. But I'd like to know right now what there is so immoral in moving from one state to another—even if you are going to have a baby?

Jhansi

[Raising her head.] There is nothing immoral in anything.

Grandmother

Fiddlesticks. [Bessie hands her the folio.] You found it, Bessie? The key? Here, Peyton; come here. [Opens portfolio, takes out a rolled paper.] Happily preserved for this defense of my character in my old age, is my wedding certificate.

Mrs. Byrd

This is painful.

[With ostentatious tact she turns and looks at a print on the rear wall; motions Senator Byrd to join her.

Grandmother

I want you to look at the date—right there beside that pink cupid—cherub, perhaps it is—anyway, read aloud the figures you see.

Peyton

[Sullenly.] 1869.

Grandmother

And here, in this other document, very fortunately at hand to meet the attacks of my only grandson upon my integrity, what do you read there?

Peyton

Clara—aged six weeks.

Grandmother

And the date?

[Mrs. Root, Bessie, Uncle George, all listen a little anxiously.

Peyton

December, 1871.

[A sigh of relief.

Grandmother

I trust now, Peyton, you will admit that a woman may move from one state to another without being dissolute.

[At this word Mrs. Root is unable to bear more and hides her face in her handkerchief.

Uncle George

[As one saving the situation.] Genealogy is interesting. One is democratic, of course, but when there is behind one what there is behind us, Senator, it enhances one's powers—responsibility—obligation. [He has taken up the book and been running through the pages.] Descendants of John Peyton. Here, Peyton, are some things about your ancestors. Read them. Perhaps then instead of tearing down you will have an impulse to build up. I commend this book to you young people for study. It will do you no harm to think a little of those worthy men from whom you come.

[Marks the place with a card and gives the book to Peyton.

Jhansi

[Springing up.] I shall waste no time thinking of the worthy men from whom I come! If I am related to a law-maker—I owe it to my soul to become a law-breaker!

Mrs. Root

You see, Bessie, what you have done.

Jhansi

When I thought there was in me no taint of civilization, I could put up with your silly conventions, but if in a material sense I am part of your society, then I have a spiritual obligation to fulfil in leaving it! Peyton, respectability threatens to wall us in and stifle us. Are you ready to walk from this house with me tonight, entering upon a free union that says that—[A snap of the finger] for law?

Peyton

Why—certainly.

Mrs. Byrd

Well, if it comes to a matter of not caring to claim relationship, we certainly hesitated some time. Those Harrisons were not all they should be.

Jhansi

[A note of hope in her voice.] No?

Mrs. Byrd

I said to Senator Byrd, now that the girl is marrying into one of the best families in the state—not that that influenced us especially, but I said, if she is trying to make something of herself, we must stand by her, and we will mention only pleasant things. We will not allude to what her grandfather did!

Jhansi

What did he do?

Senator Byrd

He burned down his neighbor's house because that neighbor chased home his pigs.

Jhansi

Really? Yes!—my grandfather would do that!

Peyton

Were any of the family found in the charred remains?

Senator Byrd

The family, I believe, escaped.

Mrs. Byrd

But no thanks to old man Harrison.

Jhansi

No!—I'm sure grandfather meant them to burn. [Seizing book.] I wonder if grandfather's protest is recorded in this book!

Mrs. Byrd

That book does not emphasize unfortunate occurrences.

Mrs. Root

And how right it is! One should think only of the good in human nature.

Peyton

[Looking with Jhansi.] What is this fine print at the bottom of the page?

Mrs. Byrd

[Hastily.] That is not important.

Senator Byrd

It is in fine print because it is not important.

Peyton

One of the descendants of Peter Byrd. [To Jhansi.] The leg at Bull Run, you know. He—

Mrs. Root

Peyton, remember that you are in your own house.

Peyton

“Unfaithful to the high office of treasurer of the Baxter County Cemetery Association.”

Jhansi

[Gasping, then beaming.] Why—why!—a grave robber! Was he a near relative?

Mrs. Byrd

I must say, Miss Root, that we did not come here to have our family inquired into as far back as ancient history!

Mrs. Root

No, Mrs. Byrd, I quite agree with you that it is not necessary to go too far back in any family.

Grandmother

Neither necessary nor desirable.

Bessie

Those early days must have been very trying.

Peyton

Jhansi! The fine print of your family is thrilling. Here is a man—

Mrs. Root

Peyton, stop reading from that tiresome and obsolete book. It is not hospitable.

Mrs. Byrd

Turn to your own family history and read a little fine print in it!

[The other members of the Peyton-Root family give each other startled, nervous glances.

Peyton

Why what a lovely idea. Uncle has marked it for us. [After looking.] Fine print in our family?

Mrs. Byrd

It’s there.

Bessie

Genealogy is so confusing. I never could understand it.

Mrs. Root

And I don’t see why one should try to understand it. Live well in the present—that is sufficient.

Grandmother

It looks to me as if that book was not thoughtfully edited. I'm surprised it has sold.

Peyton

[Snatching book from Jhansi.] Jhansi! I don't want to boast! I hope I shall not become a snob. You too have a family—and they had their impulsive moments—but what was the most largely low-down thing a man of early days could do? [Peytons and Roots draw together anxiously; the Byrds wait complacently.] As uncle has pointed out, Jhansi, I am a descendant of Captain John Peyton. But when you have a remote ancestor, you also have his less remote descendants—a fact sometimes overlooked. Well, Stuart Peyton—

Bessie

Mother, I wonder if the turkey isn't ready now?

Mrs. Root

It's time for it to be ready.

[She hurries out.

Peyton

Stuart Peyton—"convicted of selling whiskey and firearms to the Indians."

[Assumes an overbearing attitude.

Mrs. Byrd

I guess the early days were trying, in more than one family.

Peyton

[Peering into the book.] And what is this? What is this? Stuart Peyton was the father of Richard Peyton—

Jhansi

Who founded this university!

Peyton

[In the voice of Uncle George.] The university in which you are now acquiring your education.

Mrs. Byrd

Oh, I have no doubt that inducing the Indians to massacre the whites was profitable.

Peyton

A good sound basis for the family fortune.

Uncle George

Young man, you go too far!

Peyton

[Holding book out to Uncle George.] In thinking of these worthy men from whom I come? [Turns to the wall on which hang portraits of John and Richard Peyton.] We don't seem to have Stuart's picture. Jhansi, I don't know that we need to leave society. There seems little—crevices in these walls of respectability.

Jhansi

And whenever we feel a bit stifled we can always find air through our family trees!

Mrs. Byrd

I think, Senator, that we will not remain longer.

[Mrs. Root returns.

Mrs. Root

Mary was just coming. Now we'll have dinner!

Bessie

Yes, a little family party to celebrate the happy—

Peyton

[Again bent over his family history.] Grandmother! Here's something about your ancestor, Gustave Phelps.

Grandmother

[Rising. With weight.] Peyton—close that book.

(Curtain)

THE OUTSIDE A PLAY IN ONE ACT

First Performed by the Provincetown Players, December 28, 1917

ORIGINAL CAST

Captain of “The Bars” Life-Saving Station, Abram Gillette Bradford, a Live-saverHutchinson Collins Tony, a Portuguese Live-SaverLouis Ell Mrs. Patrick, who lives in the abandoned StationIda Rauh Allie Mayo, who works for herSusan Glaspell

THE OUTSIDE

Scene: A room in a house which was once a life-saving station. Since ceasing to be that it has taken on no other character, except that of a place which no one cares either to preserve or change. It is painted the life-saving gray, but has not the life-saving freshness. This is one end of what was the big boat room, and at the ceiling is seen a part of the frame work from which the boat once swung. About two thirds of the back wall is open, because of the big sliding door, of the type of barn door, and through this open door are seen the sand dunes, and beyond them the woods. At one point the line where woods and dunes meet stands out clearly and there are indicated the rude things, vines, bushes, which form the outer uneven rim of the woods—the only things that grow in the sand. At another point a sand-hill is menacing the woods. This old life-saving station is at a point where the sea curves, so through the open door the sea also is seen. [The station is located on the outside shore of Cape Cod, at the point, near the tip of the Cape, where it makes that final curve which forms the Provincetown Harbor.] The dunes are hills and strange forms

of sand on which, in places, grows the stiff beach grass—struggle; dogged growing against odds. At right of the big sliding door is a drift of sand and the top of buried beach grass is seen on this. There is a door left, and at right of big sliding door is a slanting wall. Door in this is ajar at rise of curtain, and through this door Bradford and Tony, life-savers, are seen bending over a man's body, attempting to restore respiration. The captain of the life-savers comes into view outside the big open door, at left; he appears to have been hurrying, peers in, sees the men, goes quickly to them.

Captain

I'll take this now, boys.

Bradford

No need for anybody to take it, Capt'n. He was dead when we picked him up.

Captain

Dannie Sears was dead when we picked him up. But we brought him back. I'll go on awhile.

[The two men who have been bending over the body rise, stretch to relax, and come into the room.

Bradford

[Pushing back his arms and putting his hands on his chest.] Work,—tryin' to put life in the dead.

Captain

Where'd you find him, Joe?

Bradford

In front of this house. Not forty feet out.

Captain

What'd you bring him up here for?

[He speaks in an abstracted way, as if the working part of his mind is on something else, and in the muffled voice of one bending over.

Bradford

[With a sheepish little laugh.] Force of habit, I guess. We brought so many of 'em back up here. [Looks around the room.] And then it was kind of unfriendly down where he was—the wind spittin' the sea onto you till he'd have no way of knowin' he was ashore.

Tony

Lucky I was not sooner or later as I walk by from my watch.

Bradford

You have accommodating ways, Tony. Not sooner or later. I wouldn't say it of many Portagees. But the sea [Calling it in to the Captain] is friendly as a kitten alongside the women that live here. Allie Mayo—they're both crazy—had that door open [Moving his head toward the big sliding door] sweepin' out, and when we come along she backs off and stands lookin' at us, lookin'—Lord, I just wanted to get him somewhere else. So I kicked this door open with my foot [Jerking his hand toward the room where the Captain is seen bending over the man] and got him away. [Under his voice.] If he did have any notion of comin' back to life, he wouldn't a come if he'd seen her. [More genially.] I wouldn't.

Captain

You know who he is, Joe?

Bradford

I never saw him before.

Captain

Mitchell telephoned from High Head that a dory came ashore there.

Bradford

Last night wasn't the best night for a dory. [To Tony, boastfully.] Not that I couldn't 'a' stayed in one. Some men can stay in a dory and some can't. [Going to the inner door.] That boy's dead, Capt'n.

Captain

Then I'm not doing him any harm.

Bradford

[Going over and shaking the frame where the boat once swung.] This the first time you ever been in this place, ain't it, Tony?

Tony

I never was here before.

Bradford

Well, I was here before. [A laugh.] And the old man—[Nodding toward the Captain] he lived here for twenty-seven years. Lord, the things that happened here. There've been dead ones carried through that door. [Pointing to the outside door.] Lord—the ones I've carried. I carried in Bill Collins, and Lou Harvey and—huh! 'sall over now. You ain't seen no wrecks. Don't ever think you have. I was here the night the Jennie Snow was out there. [Pointing to the sea.] There was a wreck. We got the boat that stood here [Again shaking the frame] down that bank. [Goes to the door and looks out.] Lord, how'd we ever do it? The sand has put this place on the blink all right. And then when it gets too God-forsaken for a life-savin' station, a lady takes it for a summer residence—and then spends the winter. She's cheerful one.

Tony

A woman—she makes things pretty. This not like a place where a woman live. On the floor there is nothing—on the wall there is nothing. Things—[Trying to express it with his hands] do not hang on other things.

Bradford

[Imitating Tony's gesture.] No—things do not hang on other things. In my opinion the woman's crazy—sittin' over there on the sand—[A gesture towards the dunes] what's she lookin' at? There ain't nothin' to see. And I know the woman that works for her's crazy—Allie Mayo. She's a Provincetown girl. She was all right once, but—

[Mrs. Patrick comes in from the hall at the right. She is a "city woman," a sophisticated person who has been caught into something as unlike the old life as the dunes are unlike a meadow. At the moment she is excited and angry.

Mrs. Patrick

You have no right here. This isn't the life-saving station any more. Just because it used to be—I don't see why you should think—This is my house! And—I want my house to myself!

Captain

[Putting his head through the door. One arm of the man he is working with is raised, and the hand reaches through the doorway.] Well I must say, lady, I would think that any house could be a life-saving station when the sea had sent a man to it.

Mrs. Patrick

[Who has turned away so she cannot see the hand.] I don't want him here! I—[Defiant, yet choking] I must have my house to myself!

Captain

You'll get your house to yourself when I've made up my mind there's no more life in this man. A good many lives have been saved in this house, Mrs. Patrick—I believe that's your name—and if there's any chance of bringing one more back from the dead, the fact that you own the house ain't goin' to make a damn bit of difference to me!

Mrs. Patrick

[In a thin wild way.] I must have my house to myself.

Captain

Hell with such a woman!

[Moves the man he is working with and slams the door shut.

[As the Captain says, “And if there’s any chance of bringing one more back from the dead,” Allie Mayo has appeared outside the wide door which gives on the dunes, a bleak woman, who at first seems little more than a part of the sand before which she stands. But as she listens to this conflict one suspects in her that peculiar intensity of twisted things which grow in unfavoring places.

Mrs. Patrick

I—I don’t want them here! I must—

[But suddenly she retreats, and is gone.

Bradford

Well, I couldn’t say, Allie Mayo, that you work for any too kind-hearted a lady. What’s the matter with the woman? Does she want folks to die? Appears to break her all up to see somebody trying to save a life. What d’ you work for such a fish for? A crazy fish—that’s what I call the woman. I’ve seen her—day after day—settin’ over there where the dunes meet the woods, just sittin’ there, lookin’. [Suddenly thinking of it.] I believe she likes to see the sand slippin’ down on the woods. Pleases her to see somethin’ gettin’ buried, I guess.

[Allie Mayo, who has stepped inside the door and moved half across the room, toward the corridor at the right, is arrested by this last—stands a moment as if seeing through something, then slowly on, and out.

Bradford

Some coffee’d taste good. But coffee, in this house? Oh, no. It might make

somebody feel better. [Opening the door that was slammed shut.] Want me now, Capt'n?

Captain

No.

Bradford

Oh, that boy's dead, Capt'n.

Captain

[Snarling.] Dannie Sears was dead, too. Shut that door. I don't want to hear that woman's voice again, ever.

[Closing the door and sitting on a bench built into that corner between the big sliding door and the room where the Captain is.

Bradford

They're a cheerful pair of women—livin' in this cheerful place—a place that life savers had to turn over to the sand—huh! This Patrick woman used to be all right. She and her husband was summer folks over in town. They used to picnic over here on the outside. It was Joe Dyer—he's always talkin' to summer folks—told 'em the government was goin' to build the new station and sell this one by sealed bids. I heard them talkin' about it. They was sittin' right down there on the beach, eatin' their supper. They was goin' to put in a fire-place and they was goin' to paint it bright colors, and have parties over here—summer folk notions. Their bid won it—who'd want it?—a buried house you couldn't move.

Tony

I see no bright colors.

Bradford

Don't you? How astonishin'! You must be color blind. And I guess we're the first party. [Laughs.] I was in Bill Joseph's grocery store, one day last November, when

in she comes—Mrs. Patrick, from New York. “I’ve come to take the old life-saving station,” says she. “I’m going to sleep over there tonight!” Huh! Bill is used to queer ways—he deals with summer folks, but that got him. November—an empty house, a buried house, you might say, off here on the outside shore—way across the sand from man or beast. He got it out of her, not by what she said, but by the way she looked at what he said, that her husband had died, and she was runnin’ off to hide herself, I guess. A person’d feel sorry for her if she weren’t so stand-offish, and so doggon mean. But mean folks have got minds of their own. She slept here that night. Bill had men hauling things till after dark—bed, stove, coal. And then she wanted somebody to work for her. “Somebody,” says she, “that doesn’t say an unnecessary word!” Well, when Bill come to the back of the store, I said, “Looks to me as if Allie Mayo was the party she’s lookin’ for.” Allie Mayo has got a prejudice against words. Or maybe she likes ’em so well she’s savin’ of ’em. She’s not spoke an unnecessary word for twenty years. She’s got her reasons. Women whose men go to sea ain’t always talkative.

[The Captain comes out. He closes door behind him and stands there beside it. He looks tired and disappointed. Both look at him. Pause.

Captain

Wonder who he was.

Bradford

Young. Guess he’s not been much at sea.

Captain

I hate to leave even the dead in this house. But we can get right back for him. [A look around.] The old place used to be more friendly. [Moves to outer door, hesitates, hating to leave like this.] Well, Joe, we brought a good many of them back here.

Bradford

Dannie Sears is tendin’ bar in Boston now.

[The three men go; as they are going around the drift of sand Allie Mayo comes in carrying a pot of coffee; sees them leaving, puts down the coffee pot, looks to the door the Captain has closed, moves toward it, as if drawn. Mrs. Patrick follows her in.

Mrs. Patrick

They’ve gone?

[Mrs. Mayo nods, facing the closed door.

Mrs. Patrick

And they’re leaving—him? [Again the other woman nods.] Then he’s—? [Mrs. Mayo just stands there.] They have no right—just because it used to be their place—! I want my house to myself!

[Snatches her coat and scarf from a hook and starts through the big door toward the dunes.

Allie Mayo

Wait.

[When she has said it she sinks into that corner seat—as if overwhelmed by what she has done. The other woman is held.

Allie Mayo

[To herself.] If I could say that, I can say more. [Looking at the woman she has arrested, but speaking more to herself.] That boy in there—his face—uncovered something—[Her open hand on her chest. But she waits, as if she cannot go on; when she speaks it is in labored way—slow, monotonous, as if snowed in by silent years.] For twenty years, I did what you are doing. And I can tell you—it’s not the way. [Her voice has fallen to a whisper; she stops, looking ahead at something remote and veiled.] We had been married—two years. [A start, as of sudden pain.

Says it again, as if to make herself say it.] Married—two years. He had a chance to go north on a whaler. Times hard. He had to go. A year and a half—it was to be. A year and a half. Two years we'd been married.

[She sits silent, moving a little back and forth.

The day he went away. [Not spoken, but breathed from pain.] The days after he was gone.

I heard at first. Last letter said farther north—not another chance to write till on the way home.

[A wait.

Six months. Another. I did not hear. [Long wait.] Nobody ever heard.

[After it seems she is held there, and will not go on.] I used to talk as much as any girl in Provincetown. Jim used to tease me about my talking. But they'd come in to talk to me. They'd say—"You may hear yet." They'd talk about what must have happened. And one day a woman who'd been my friend all my life said—"Suppose he was to walk in!" I got up and drove her from my kitchen—and from that time till this I've not said a word I didn't have to say. [She has become almost wild in telling this. That passes. In a whisper.] The ice that caught Jim—caught me. [A moment as if held in ice. Comes from it. To Mrs. Patrick simply.] It's not the way. [A sudden change.] You're not the only woman in the world whose husband is dead!

Mrs. Patrick

[With the cry of the hurt.] Dead? My husband's not dead.

Allie Mayo

He's not? [Slowly understands.] Oh.

[The woman in the door is crying. Suddenly picks up her coat which has fallen to the floor and steps outside.

Allie Mayo

[Almost failing to do it.] Wait.

Mrs. Patrick

Wait? Don’t you think you’ve said enough? They told me you didn’t say an unnecessary word!

Allie Mayo

I don’t.

Mrs. Patrick

And you can see, I should think, that you’ve bungled into things you know nothing about!

[As she speaks, and crying under her breath, she pushes the sand by the door down on the half buried grass—though not as if knowing what she is doing.

Allie Mayo

[Slowly.] When you keep still for twenty years you know—things you didn’t know you knew. I know why you’re doing that. [She looks up at her, startled.] Don’t bury the only thing that will grow. Let it grow.

[The woman outside still crying under her breath turns abruptly and starts toward the line where dunes and woods meet.

Allie Mayo

I know where you’re going! [Mrs. Patrick turns, but not as if she wants to.] What you’ll try to do. Over there. [Pointing to the line of woods.] Bury it. The life in you. Bury it—watching the sand bury the woods. But I’ll tell you something! They fight too. The woods! They fight for life the way that Captain fought for life in there!

[Pointing to the closed door.

Mrs. Patrick

[With a strange exultation.] And lose the way he lost in there!

Allie Mayo

[Sure, sombre.] They don’t lose.

Mrs. Patrick

Don’t lose? [Triumphant.] I have walked on the tops of buried trees!

Allie Mayo

[Slow, sombre, yet large.] And vines will grow over the sand that covers the trees, and hold it. And other trees will grow above the buried trees.

Mrs. Patrick

I’ve watched the sand slip down on the vines that reach out farthest.

Allie Mayo

Another vine will reach that spot. [Under her breath, tenderly.] Strange little things that reach out farthest!

Mrs. Patrick

And will be buried soonest!

Allie Mayo

And hold the sand for things behind them. They save a wood that guards a town.

Mrs. Patrick

I care nothing about a woods to guard a town. This is the outside—these dunes where only beach grass grows, this outer shore where men can’t live. The Outside. You who were born here and who die here have named it that.

Allie Mayo

Yes, we named it that, and we had reason. He died here [Reaches her hand toward the closed door] and many a one before him. But many another reached the harbor! [Slowly raises her arm, bends it to make the form of the Cape. Touches the outside of her bent arm.] The Outside. But an arm that bends to make a harbor—where men

are safe.

Mrs. Patrick

I'm outside the harbor—on the dunes, land not life.

Allie Mayo

Dunes meet woods and woods hold dunes from a town that's shore to a harbor.

Mrs. Patrick

This is the Outside. Sand. [Picking some of it up in her hand and letting it fall on the beach grass.] Sand that covers—hills of sand that move and cover.

Allie Mayo

Woods. Woods to hold the moving hills from Provincetown. Provincetown—where they turn when boats can't live at sea. Did you ever see the sails come round here when the sky is dark? A line of them—swift to the harbor—where their children live. Go back! [Pointing.] Back to your edge of the woods that's the edge of the dunes.

Mrs. Patrick

The edge of life. Where life trails off to dwarfed things not worth a name.

[Suddenly sits down in the doorway.

Allie Mayo

Not worth a name. And—meeting the Outside!

[Big with the sense of the wonder of life.

Mrs. Patrick

[Lifting sand and letting it drift through her hand.] They're what the sand will let them be. They take strange shapes like shapes of blown sand.

Allie Mayo

Meeting the Outside. [Moving nearer; speaking more personally.] I know why you

came here. To this house that had been given up; on this shore where only savers of life try to live. I know what holds you on these dunes, and draws you over there. But other things are true beside the things you want to see.

Mrs. Patrick

How do you know they are? Where have you been for twenty years?

Allie Mayo

Outside. Twenty years. That's why I know how brave they are. [Indicating the edge of the woods. Suddenly different.] You'll not find peace there again! Go back and watch them fight!

Mrs. Patrick

[Swiftly rising.] You're a cruel woman—a hard, insolent woman! I knew what I was doing! What do you know about it? About me? I didn't go to the Outside. I was left there. I'm only—trying to get along. Everything that can hurt me I want buried—buried deep. Spring is here. This morning I knew it. Spring—coming through the storm—to take me—take me to hurt me. That's why I couldn't bear—[She looks at the closed door] things that made me know I feel. You haven't felt for so long you don't know what it means! But I tell you, Spring is here! And now you'd take that from me—[Looking now toward the edge of the woods] the thing that made me know they would be buried in my heart—those things I can't live and know I feel. You're more cruel than the sea! "But other things are true beside the things you want to see!" Outside. Springs will come when I will not know that it is spring. [As if resentful of not more deeply believing what she says.] What would there be for me but the Outside? What was there for you? What did you ever find after you lost the thing you wanted?

Allie Mayo

I found—what I find now I know. The edge of life—to hold life behind me—

[A slight gesture toward Mrs. Patrick.

Mrs. Patrick

[Stepping back.] You call what you are life? [Laughs.] Bleak as those ugly things that grow in the sand!

Allie Mayo

[Under her breath, as one who speaks tenderly of beauty.] Ugly!

Mrs. Patrick

[Passionately.] I have known life. I have known life. You're like this Cape. A line of land way out to sea—land not life.

Allie Mayo

A harbor far at sea. [Raises her arm, curves it in as if around something she loves.] Land that encloses and gives shelter from storm.

Mrs. Patrick

[Facing the sea, as if affirming what will hold all else out.] Outside sea. Outer shore. Dunes—land not life.

Allie Mayo

Outside sea—outer shore, dark with the wood that once was ships—dunes, strange land not life—woods, town and harbor. The line! Stunted straggly line that meets the Outside face to face—and fights for what itself can never be. Lonely line. Brave growing.

Mrs. Patrick

It loses.

Allie Mayo

It wins.

Mrs. Patrick

The farthest life is buried.

Allie Mayo

And life grows over buried life! [Lifted into that; then, as one who states a simple truth with feeling.] It will. And Springs will come when you will want to know that it is Spring.

[The Captain and Bradford appear behind the drift of sand. They have a stretcher. To get away from them Mrs. Patrick steps farther into the room; Allie Mayo shrinks into her corner. The men come in, open the closed door and go in the room where they left the dead man. A moment later they are seen outside the big open door, bearing the man away. Mrs. Patrick watches them from sight.

Mrs. Patrick

[Bitter, exultant.] Savers of life! [To Allie Mayo.] You savers of life! “Meeting the Outside!” Meeting—[But she cannot say it mockingly again; in saying it, something of what it means has broken through, rises. Herself lost, feeling her way into the wonder of life.] Meeting the Outside!

[It grows in her as slowly.

(Curtain)

WOMAN’S HONOR A COMEDY IN ONE ACT

First Performed by the Provincetown Players, April 26, 1918

Mr. Foster, The LawyerJustus Sheffield Gordon Wallace, The PrisonerClark Branyon BoyMurray Cooper The Shielded OneMarjory Lacey The Motherly OneDorothy Upjohn The Scornful OneTheIda Rauh The Silly OneWomenNorma Millay The Mercenary OneAlice Macdougal The Cheated OneSusan Gaspell

WOMAN’S HONOR

Scene: A room in the sheriff’s house which is used for conferences. At the rear is a

door into the hall, at the left a door leads to an adjoining room. There is also a door at the right, going to the corridor which connects this house with the jail.

Lawyer and Prisoner are found in heated conversation. The prisoner, an attractive young man, is seated, and has just turned away from the Lawyer, irritated.

Lawyer

Do you know that murder is no laughing matter?

Prisoner

Well, was I laughing?

Lawyer

[Shoots it at him.] Where were you on the night of October 25? [Prisoner sits like one who never means to speak again.] Your silence shields a woman's honor. Do you know what's going to be said of you? You're going to be called old-fashioned! [A worried look flits over the prisoner's face.] A man will not tell where he is because it involves a woman's honor! How quaint! [In a different voice.] Say, do you think she's worth it?

[Prisoner rises angrily.

Yes, get red in the face, I should think you would. Blush. Blush for shame. Shame of having loved a woman who'd let a man face death to shield her own honor!

Prisoner

You don't know what you're talking about.

Lawyer

It's just like a woman, the cowards. That's what I most despise in women. Afraid they won't be looked upon as the pure noble sensitive souls they spend their lives trying to make us believe they are. Sickening!

Prisoner

There are things you don't understand.

Lawyer

Oh, yes, I do. I suppose she's got a husband. I suppose he'd divorce her. Then she wouldn't be asked out to tea quite so often. Good Lord—die for something real!

Prisoner

You and I have different ideals, Mr. Foster. There are things we don't discuss.

Lawyer

There are things we have to discuss. If you insist upon this romantic course, then at least we will have to get something out of that.

Prisoner

What do you mean?

Lawyer

Simply that public feeling has got to swing toward you or the jury will say you murdered Erwalt. If we can't have an alibi, let us by all means have a hero!

Prisoner

[Outraged.] Have you given out a story to the newspapers?

Lawyer

[Drawing paper from his pocket.] Very delicately done. "A life for a life." Isn't that moving? "While Gordon Wallace languishes in his cell, some woman is safe in a shielded home. Charged with the murder of John Erwalt, young Wallace fails to cut his chain of circumstantial evidence with an alibi. Where was Gordon Wallace on the night of October 25? He maintains a dogged silence. Behind that silence rests a woman's honor"—and so on, at some length.

Prisoner

You had no right to give out a story without my consent!

Lawyer

Oh, yes, I have. If I can't get your consent for saving your life, then, my young friend, I shall save it without your consent. Pardon my rudeness.

Prisoner

How will this save it?

Lawyer

How little romantic young men know the romantic sex. Wives—including, I hope, jurors' wives—will cry, "Don't let that chivalrous young man die!" Women just love to have their honor shielded. It is very touching to them.

Prisoner

Mr. Foster, I tell you again, I dislike your attitude toward women! Laugh at me if you will, but I have respect and reverence for women. I believe it is perfectly true that men must guard them. Call me a romantic young fool if it pleases you, but I have had a mother—a sister—sweetheart. Yes, I am ready to die to shield a woman's honor!

[As he says this the door slowly opens and a woman steps in.

Shielded One

No! You shall not!

[Quite taken aback, the men stand looking at her. She has breeding, poise—obviously she has stepped out of a world where women are shielded. She maintains a front of her usual composure, but there is an intensity—an excitement—which indicates she is feeling some big new thing. Lawyer looks from her to the Prisoner, who is staring at the Woman.

Lawyer

[To Woman.] Oh—you've come?

Shielded One

[Firmly, but with emotion.] I have come.

Prisoner

I don’t understand.

Lawyer

You were not willing to let him die?

Shielded One

No.

Lawyer

Good. This young man—[He pauses, embarrassed, for it does not seem a thing to say to this lady] was with you on the night of October 25?

Shielded One

Yes.

Prisoner

Why, no I wasn’t.

Lawyer

There is no use, Gordon, in trying to keep the lady from doing what she has apparently determined to do.

Shielded One

No. You cannot keep me from doing what I have determined to do.

Lawyer

For my part, I respect you for it. Then you are prepared to testify that on the night of October 25 Gordon Wallace was with you from twelve o’clock midnight till eight next morning?

Shielded One

[A little falteringly, yet fervent.] Yes.

Lawyer

Was with you—continuously?

Shielded One

Yes.

Lawyer

Your name is—?

[He takes out his note-book.

Prisoner

[In distress.] Don't give him your name! He'll use it! I tell you this is all a mistake. I don't know this lady. I never saw her before. [To the Woman.] You mustn't do this!

Shielded One

[Proudly, and with relief.] I have done it!

Lawyer

And as I said, madam, I greatly respect you for doing it. You are, if I may say so, unlike most of your sex. Now—your name?

Shielded One

[This is not easy for her.] Mrs. Oscar Duncan.

Lawyer

And Mrs. Duncan you live at—? [A noise in the hall.] I fear some one is coming in. Will you just step in here?

[He shows her into the room at the left. They hear the corridor door open and turn. A woman is coming in—rather plump, middle-aged—a pleasant, motherly looking woman. She looks from the Lawyer to the Prisoner, moves to get a better look at the young man, who becomes nervous under this scrutiny; then she seems to have it straight in her mind, nods pleasantly.

Motherly One

[Cheerily.] Good morning.

Lawyer

Good morning.

Motherly One

[To Prisoner.] Good morning.

Prisoner

[Not cheerily.] Good morning.

Motherly One

There was no one out there, so I just walked right in. [Lawyer nods.] I thought you might be glad to see me.

Lawyer

Oh—we are. [To Gordon.] Aren't we?

Motherly One

I suppose I am in the right place.

Lawyer

Well, it is the right place for some things.

Motherly One

Is it the place to tell the truth about Gordon Wallace?

Lawyer

It seems to be.

Motherly One

[Very cheerfully.] Well, then, on the night of October 25 that young man—[Steps for a better look at the Prisoner] this young man—was with me.

Lawyer

From twelve o’clock midnight until eight next morning?

Motherly One

[Placidly.] From twelve o’clock midnight till eight next morning.

[She takes a muffler from her bag and sits down and begins to knit.

Lawyer

Was with you—continuously?

Motherly One

Oh, certainly—continuously.

[She knits serenely on.

Lawyer

Well—Gordon.

Motherly One

[Pleasantly.] It seems that mufflers get longer and longer. [Looking up at Lawyer.] Doesn’t it?

Lawyer

Why—perhaps they do. But—you are willing to leave your name and address?

Motherly One

Certainly, I’m willing to leave my name and address. What else would I be here for? Oh—but could I use the telephone first. [Rises.] It will be better to let them know that I’ll probably be late getting home for lunch.

Lawyer

[Is about to open door of the room in which the Shielded One is waiting.] No—there’s some one in there. Here [Going to the door at the other side of the room], I’ll show you how to get through to the jail phone.

Motherly One

The jail! But we'll soon have you out of jail.

[She goes, giving the young man an encouraging smile. The Lawyer steps out with her. The young man hears the rear door opening—this door into the hall has a slight squeak—starts nervously, looks around to see a young woman come in. In a keen, cool amused way she is staring at him. He turns away, petulantly hitching his chair. She moves where she can see him better, takes from her bag a newspaper picture, looks from it to him. He turns, sees what she is doing; she smiles at him. He looks like one at bay. Enter Lawyer. Sees what is going on, smiles.

Lawyer

On the night of October 25—?

Scornful One

[To Lawyer.] I understand that down here a man is about to die for a woman's honor.

Lawyer

He had some such thing in mind.

Scornful One

[To Lawyer.] Now you can't get away with that. Sorry to upset your plans, but the death seems uncalled for. On the night of October 25—Gordon Wallace was with me.

Lawyer

From twelve o'clock midnight till eight next morning?

Scornful One

From twelve o'clock midnight until eight next morning.

Lawyer

[Rather feebly.] Con-tinuously?

Scornful One

[In an offhand voice.] Continuously.

Lawyer

Well—well, Gordon, I begin to understand why you hesitated to tell the truth about that momentous night. Rise and thank the lady, Gordon; it would seem the least you could do would be to rise and—

[As he is saying this to Gordon, in rushes a fussily dressed hysterical woman and throws her arms around the Lawyer's neck.

Silly One

Darling! I cannot let you die for me!

Lawyer

[Trying to free himself.] Pardon me, madam, but—

Silly One

Gordon! You call me madam after that night together. Oh my beloved, when I think of those hours I lay in your arms—

Lawyer

Pardon me, but you never lay in—

Silly One

I know. Ah—I understand. You pretend not to know me. You would die to shield me—but you shall not! You cannot escape me!

Lawyer

[Still unsuccessful in freeing himself.] Apparently not. But permit me to tell you, you are making a mistake.

Silly One

No! I am not making a mistake! You shall not die for me.

Lawyer

I really don't intend to—if I can help it.

Silly One

Love is so beautiful. So ennobling! [Overcome with emotion, loosens her hold.] When I think of that night—October 25—

[Sinks into a chair.

Lawyer

[After settling his collar.] Well, Gordon, have you a choice? [Pause.] You see you didn't understand women as well as you thought.

Prisoner

[Fiercely.] Neither did you!

[The Sheriff's Boy comes in.

Boy

While I was over at the bank, women came.

Lawyer

Yes, I know.

Boy

[Looking at the two women in the room.] But more women. [Prisoner starts in terror.] Six women are out there.

Prisoner

Don't let them in!

Lawyer

Tell the ladies we shall not need them. Thank them for coming. [Boy goes out. To Prisoner.] Well, come now. What shall we do with this embarrassment

of—generosity? You see dying for a woman's honor isn't as easy as you might think. It even looks as though there were a sort of conspiracy against it.

Prisoner

I'm not going to be made a fool of.

Lawyer

Are you sure you can help it?

[The Boy comes back, looking worried.

Boy

Some of those women won't go away. I don't know what to do with them.

Lawyer

No, it's not a matter the young can cope with.

[He goes out with the Boy. The amused young Woman sits looking the Prisoner over, to his embarrassment and final irritation.

Scornful One

So you were thinking of dying for a woman's honor. [He says nothing.] Now do you think that's a very nice way to treat the lady? [He turns away petulantly.] Seems to me you should think of her feelings. Have you a right to ruin her life?

Prisoner

[Startled into speech.] Ruin her life?

Scornful One

Why certainly. A life that somebody has died for is practically a ruined life. For how are you going to think of it as anything but—a life that somebody has died for? [She pulls her chair to a more confidential angle.] Did it ever strike you as funny that woman's honor is only about one thing, and that man's honor is about everything but that thing? [After waiting for the answer which does not come.] Now woman's

honor means woman’s virtue. But this lady for whom you propose to die has no virtue.

Prisoner

[Springing up.] Please be careful what you say.

Scornful One

I’m being very careful. I’m thinking it out just as carefully as I can. The night of October 25, or at some time previous to that, she lost her virtue, and you propose to die to keep us from knowing about this loss. Now, it has happened, hasn’t it? On the night of October 25, from twelve o’clock midnight till eight next morning continuously she lost her virtue. You aren’t dying to keep her virtuous. I fancy few lives have been laid upon that altar. But you’re dying to keep us from knowing she is what she is. Dear me, it seems rather sad.

Silly One

[Controlling her tears.] It is noble beyond words.

Scornful One

There’s where you’re going to get your approbation.

[The Motherly One now returns from her telephoning. She looks at the Silly Woman, then at the Scornful One—these two stand looking one another up and down.

Scornful One

[In her amused manner.] Can it be that we are two souls with but a single thought?

Motherly One

[In her mothering voice.] Perhaps we are two hearts that beat as one.

[They stand there a moment not knowing what to do; then, still uncertainly, they sit down, stealing glances at one another. Finally the Scornful One smiles.

Scornful One

We might draw lots.

Silly One

Love conquereth all things.

Scornful One

Even the female brain.

Motherly One

I wonder why you others came.

Scornful One

Why did you come?

Motherly One

Oh, I have children of my own. I thought, he's just a nice boy, and probably she's just some nice girl afraid of her mother. And I thought—well, now what an awful pity to let him die, or even spend a lot of time in prison. I said to myself, it would be just like a lot of men to fuss around about a woman's honor and really let it hurt somebody. So I decided—well, I'll go. What harm can it do me? [Resumes her knitting.] You see, I'm in the habit of trying to save lives. I do nursing—practical nursing—and I didn't happen to be on a case just now, so I thought—well, I'll just take this case. Some of the folks I nurse for may be shocked—but good sensible nurses aren't so easy to get. Of course my children may be upset about it—but they're awful nice children, and when they're a little older probably they'll be pleased to think their mother didn't want a nice boy to die. [Drops her knitting.] I wonder if she will come.

[Looks at the other two with new interest.

Scornful One

I wonder.

Silly One

“She” is here.

Scornful One

Oh, it’s not you. You thought it was the lawyer you were with. Anyway, people who do things don’t make so much fuss about them.

Motherly One

[Whose interest has not been diverted.] I think she will have to come.

[The door of the room into which the Shielded One was shown opens quietly and without the others being aware of it the Shielded One is standing in the doorway, bringing with her that sense of the ordered protected life out of which she has stepped.

Scornful One

I’m sure I don’t see how she could ever think of staying away. I hate a coward.

Motherly One

Some women think a great deal about their honor. I think usually it’s women who aren’t very well—or who haven’t much else to take up their time.

[Impulsively the Shielded One steps forward as if to speak. Hearing her, they turn, and in their interest rise and stand looking at her.

Motherly One

Oh—you’ve come?

[The Prisoner, who to get away from the women gives the impression of being crowded into a corner, also turns and rises.

Prisoner

[To Shielded One, rather crossly.] Please go away!

Scornful One

O-h.

Prisoner

Can’t you see there is no need for your staying?

Shielded One

[Quietly.] There is need of it.

[She sits down, the other women still surveying her.

Motherly One

It’s true we aren’t all needed. Who will be best—? [To Scornful One.] Tell me, why are you here?

Scornful One

Well, you see for myself I haven’t any honor to worry about, and haven’t had for some time. So I thought, if the sacrifice of a woman’s honor is going to save, a man’s life, let me, who have none, nobly sacrifice mine.

Motherly One

What do you mean, you haven’t had any honor for some time?

Scornful One

Oh, I haven’t had my honor around with me since I was seventeen.

Motherly One

[Kindly.] Do you miss it?

Scornful One

Well—yes; sometimes when I’m tired I might like to slump back into it. You see honor camouflages so many things—stupidity, selfishness—greed, lust, avarice, gluttony. So without it you’re almost forced to be a decent sort—and that’s sometimes wearing. [In another voice.] But I’ll tell you why I’m really here! When men begin to sob around about woman’s honor they get my goat. That lawyer—he

thought he was going to get away with it. Why, woman's honor would have died out long ago if it hadn't been for men's talk about it.

Motherly One

I suppose it really has to be kept up, as long as it gives men such noble feelings.

Scornful One

That man—the one when I was seventeen—he's that sort. He would be of course. Why, this instant his eyes would become "pools of feeling" if any one were to talk about saving a woman's honor. [Under her breath.] Gee!

Motherly One

[With a diffident glance at the Shielded One.] If she is here, she must be feeling quite upset. If she cares enough about her honor to have held back this long—it can't be easy to let it go.

Scornful One

She'll be better off without it.

Motherly One

I don't know. You see, she's had it quite a while. She's used to it. I was thinking—

[The door opens and a brisk young woman dressed in cheap, up-to-the-minute clothes darts in. All turn and look at her, continue to stare. Something in this scrutiny becomes disconcerting.

Mercenary One

While he was busy with the other women—I just slipped by. Is this—?

[Sees the young man, now huddled in terror.

Scornful One

Sit down and wait your turn.

Mercenary One

Are all of you ahead of me?

Scornful One

Your number seems to be five.

[Number five sits down; a pause in which they continue to look at her in this unusual way—she finally rather indignantly settles her coat, her hat, assuring herself nothing is the matter with her.

Motherly One

You look young for this.

Mercenary One

Well, if you'll excuse my saying so, the same objection can't be made to some of you.

Scornful One

What are you here for?

Mercenary One

Oh, I guess I'm here for about the same reason all of you are here.

Motherly One

But we are here for different reasons.

Mercenary One

Say, what are you tryin' to put over on me? Suppose I think you're here for your health? Or out of kindness? Or to show your great beauty? Hard-ly. Anybody not feeble-minded could dope out why you're sitting here like owls.

Scornful One

Well—why?

Mercenary One

Oh, not for money, of course.

[She has horrified them all.

Motherly One

I’m sorry you said that.

Silly One

How sordid! How desecrating!

Mercenary One

Say—I don’t like the atmosphere of this place.

Scornful One

We don’t like it as well as we did.

Mercenary One

A business proposition is a business proposition. What a man needs and can pay for—

Silly One

[Rising and wringing her hands.] I really must ask you—Love is so beautiful!

Mercenary One

Well, suppose it is? What’s that got to do with it?

Motherly One

You seem hard for one so young.

Mercenary One

I may be hard, but I’m not a nut.

Scornful One

Woman’s honor doesn’t play much part in your young life, does it? Or woman’s self-respect, either.

Mercenary One

[Rising.] Say, you think you can sit there and insult me? I don't know what you are, but I'll have you know I'm an honest working girl! I heard they were going to take on another stenographer down here, but I don't like the atmosphere of this place.

[She leaves.

Silly One

[Settling herself with relief.] It was a misunderstanding. Ah, life is paved with misunderstanding.

Motherly One

It will be said we did this for money.

Scornful One

Oh, a great deal will be said. If you care about what's said you'd better follow the honest working girl out that door.

Motherly One

What's said makes an awful difference in some people's lives.

[Her eyes turn toward the Shielded One.

Scornful One

They don't know how much difference until they've heard it said.

[She too looks at the Shielded One.

Motherly One

You get made into one thing and then it's not easy to be another. And as the honest working girl hinted, some of us aren't as young as—we'd like to be.

Scornful One

Age shouldn't discourage one. It's never too late to mend.

[The door swings, the women look expectantly around; the unfortunate young man, whose face has been buried in his hands, looks round in terror. They wait a moment

but no one comes in.

Motherly One

If “she” is here, and really minds losing her honor—well, she could just go home. [Silly One rises, simpers, sits down again.] We can’t all lose our honor. It might do the young man more harm than good. It’s different with you—[To Scornful One] you had an early start. And then you’ve got character. You don’t need honor to lean on.

Shielded One

[Breaking her silence with simple intensity.] What is woman’s honor?

Scornful One

A thing men talk about.

Motherly One

A safe corner.

Silly One

A star to guide them!

Shielded One

[Very earnestly.] Guide them where?

Scornful One

Yes, where? Many a woman who’s guided hasn’t guided anywhere.

Shielded One

[Passionately.] Aren’t we something more than things to be noble about?

Scornful One

Of course what we’ve really been is kind. We have not deprived them of the pleasures of being noble. If we do it now, it will leave them in a bleak world.

Shielded One

[Troubled but determined.] Can't we put something in its place, so they won't be too desolate and yet we won't be so—

Scornful One

Bored.

Motherly One

If we could only get them noble about something else. I should really hate to take it from them entirely. It's like giving up smoking or drinking. You have to do it gradually, and there should be something to put in its place.

Scornful One

If we could only think up a new vice for them.

Motherly One

They have all those.

Shielded One

Oh, I hope you women can work out some way to free us from men's noble feelings about it! I speak for all the women of my—[Hesitates] under-world, all those others smothered under men's lofty sentiments toward them! I wish I could paint for you the horrors of the shielded life. [Says "shielded" as if it were "shameful."] I know you would feel something must be done to save us. After all [Growing a little wild] are we not your sisters? Our honor has been saved so many times. We are tired. And so when I read in the paper this morning that woman's honor was being saved again—

Scornful One

[Excitedly going to her.] Read in the paper? Then you're not—the one?

Shielded One

Not that one, but—

[Slowly the door opens and a woman comes in—comes with a strange quiet. She droops, she has a queer passivity—she is unaccountably forceful. Gives a sense of one who has been cheated and is going to be cheated no more. She is scarcely aware of the other women. Her eyes, dead, or rather dogged with life, go to the unfortunate young man. He has turned to look at her; he is not able to look away.

Scornful One

[Nervously.] Are you a stenographer?

Cheated One

[Not interested in this.] No.

[In her dogged way she advances upon the Prisoner. He is afraid. She sits down close to him, as if to cut off escape.

Motherly One

[Low.] I wonder if she is here.

Scornful One

I wonder.

Shielded One

[With an effort bringing herself and the others back to her.] But don't turn against me because I'm not this particular woman. What a detail that is. I am—those victims of men's dreadful—[Turns away her face] need for nobility. I'd rather die than go back to it! Help me to lead another life!

Scornful One

[Fervently.] We must lift her up.

Motherly One

We will find a place for her in the great good world outside the shielded life.

Shielded One

Then you others go, and I will stay.

[Motherly One and Scornful One rise and move to the door.

Silly One

I will give my life for yours, my sister!

Scornful One

No you won't. I'll have nothing to do with saving you. You deserve nothing better than woman's honor. Come with us.

[But at the door these three stand looking back at the Cheated One.

Scornful One

[Moving down to her.] Aren't you coming with us?

Cheated One

[Without raising her eyes.] No.

Scornful One

Why not?

Cheated One

I shall stay.

Motherly One

Perhaps she is here. And if "she" is here—then we have not the right to leave her.

[Indicating the Shielded One.

Scornful One

[To Cheated One.] Tell us: are you the woman Gordon Wallace was with on the night of October 25?

Cheated One

Yes.

Motherly One

Of course we've all said that.

Scornful One

But she says it in a different way.

Motherly One

[To Shielded One.] I am afraid that you will have to leave with us. It seems she has the right.

[These four move to the door.

Shielded One

[Thinking of it just in time.] But do you think she has the right just because she is the one?

[To consider this, they go back and sit down.

Silly One

Leave me!

Scornful One

[Wickedly inspired.] Suppose we do! You know, I like the idea. Why—the more I think about it—the better I like it. [To the other women.] Yes, come! [To the young man.] This is the lady you were going to die for!

Shielded One

[Distressed.] But, no! What can it do for her? And how, through her, can we reach my poor sisters smothered under woman's honor? I insist upon it! I am the one!

Cheated One

[Suddenly turning upon her.] You are not the one!

Motherly One

Now I think, to avoid feeling between you two, I had better stay. I'm a nurse, and a

mother, and I keep coming back to the idea these things are needed.

Scornful One

No, you have too many other things to do. I am the one to remain. I am—peculiarly fitted for it.

Shielded One

You are not fitted for it at all. There is no one less fitted for it than you.

Scornful One

How do you make that out?

Shielded One

You don’t need it. Woman’s honor never hurt you.

Scornful One

[Reluctantly accepting this. To Prisoner.] Are you acquainted with this woman?

[Indicates Cheated One.

Prisoner

No.

Scornful One

Then why are you so afraid of her?

Prisoner

I’m not—

[But he is forced to meet the smoldering eye of the Cheated One; he cannot look away.

Shielded One

[Almost in tears.] But you were going to help me lead a better life. And now you stand here quibbling over a petty question of fact, when the whole great question of escape from woman’s honor is at stake! Oh, is it true that women will not help one

another? That they are hard and self-seeking?

[She breaks down; Motherly One goes to comfort her.

Silly One

My heart is full—

Scornful One

Your heart is full of a simpering parrot!

[The Lawyer returns.

Lawyer

Ladies—ladies—quarreling? I'm sorry to find you in this mood. I had hoped while you were here together you might—arrive at some understanding.

Scornful One

[To Silly One.] I wish you'd go home. We might arrive at something if we didn't have you on our backs.

Lawyer

Now why must women always dislike each other?

Motherly One

[In her motherly way.] If I were you I'd try not to talk much.

Lawyer

Why not?

Scornful One

She has a kind heart. Now I—I'd let you talk.

Lawyer

Sometimes it seems quite as well not to try to follow women.

Scornful One

Sometimes even better.

Lawyer

Well now, Ladies, let us drop personal dissentions for the moment. This unfortunate young man, Mr. Wallace, is much moved by your generosity. He had made up his mind to die for woman's honor. Now it seems he is not to do so—a change of plan to which he has not yet adjusted himself. His perturbation makes him unequal to selecting the lady who was with him on the night of October 25. [Door swings, Prisoner looks around nervously.] So—I would like to get your feeling. Since it seems unnecessary for all of you to have been with the young man on the night of October 25—

[Again door swings.

Prisoner

[In a rasped voice.] Could that door be closed? It makes me—nervous.

[Motherly Woman closes the door.

Lawyer

Now, doubtless you will agree with me that we should always eliminate waste. If a woman's honor is to be sacrificed, may I without indelicacy inquire who would sacrifice least?

Shielded One

[Firmly.] I would.

Lawyer

[Weakly.] You would?

Cheated One

[In a voice dull as destiny.] The rest of you can talk as long as you like. I shall stay.

[She rises and takes firm hold of the unfortunate young man's chair.

Lawyer

Well, there seems something final about that.

Motherly One

Tell us, are you the one?

Cheated One

I am the one to stay.

Scornful One

Now, don't cheat. Tell us, are you—

Cheated One

[Passion flaming through sullenness.] Cheat? Cheat? You say to me, don't cheat? I don't cheat. I've been cheated. Cheated out of my chance to have a man I wanted by a man who would have what he wanted. Then he saved my woman's honor. Married me and cheated me out of my life. I'm just something to be cheated. That's the way I think of myself. Until this morning. Until I read about Gordon Wallace. Then I saw a way to get away from myself. It's the first thing I ever wanted to do that I've done. You'll not cheat me out of this. Don't you try!

Shielded One

But she is thinking of it in just a personal way.

Cheated One

That's why I stay.

Shielded One

But think of my poor sisters! All those unfortunate women—

Cheated One

The only unfortunate woman I'll think about is myself.

Shielded One

[Wildly.] You hear her? The only unfortunate woman she'll think about—

Motherly One

[Approaching Cheated One.] Now we really must ask you—

Silly One

Love is so beautiful!

Scornful One

You can't cheat just because you've been cheated.

Cheated One

[Inflamed—incoherent.] You say cheat to me again? You say cheat to—

Lawyer

[Stepping in to pacify.] Ladies—ladies. Surely there must be a way out of the difficulty. Perhaps we can work out some way to—

Scornful One

To save both of them through Gordon Wallace!

[All women except Cheated One draw together excitedly. The Prisoner, who has rapidly been approaching the breaking point makes a move as if he must try to escape. The Cheated One is watching the other women.

Scornful One

Here! Yes! On the night of October 25—

[Their heads together in low-voiced conference with Lawyer. Suddenly the Prisoner slips around the Cheated One—trying now not to be cheated of what is being said—and makes for the door. It opens in his face, and the doorway is blocked by a large and determined woman. Prisoner staggers back to Lawyer's arms.

Prisoner

Oh, hell. I'll plead guilty.

(Curtain)

BERNICE A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

First Performed by the Provincetown Players, New York, March 21, 1919.

ORIGINAL CAST

Mr. Allen, Bernice's FatherO. K. Liveright AbbieSusan Glaspell Craig Norris, Bernice's HusbandJames K. Light Laura (Mrs. Kirby), Craig's SisterBlanche Hays Margaret Pierce, Bernice's FriendIda Rauh

BERNICE

ACT ONE

Scene: The living-room of Bernice's house in the country. You feel yourself in the house of a woman you would like to know, a woman of sure and beautiful instincts, who lives simply. At the spectator's right, stairs go up from the living room; back of this—right, rear, a door; to the front of the stairs is a narrowed passage as of a hall leading to the kitchen. On the other side of the room, is a tea-table before the fireplace, and before it is a low rounded chair, as if awaiting the one who will come to serve tea. Toward the rear of this left wall is a door. This door is closed. From the back of the room French windows lead directly out of doors. On each side of this door is a window thus opening almost the entire wall to the October woods. There are comfortable seats under the windows, books about. It is late afternoon and the sun glows through the flaming leaves. As the curtain is drawn the Father is seen sitting at a long table at the side of the stairway, playing solitaire. At the back of the cards, open books are propped against the wall, and papers on which he has been writing. Abbie, a middle-aged servant, is attending to the open fire.

Father

[Holding up a card he is about to place.] Ten minutes since the train whistled.

They'll be here in five minutes now.

Abbie

Yes, sir.

Father

It will be hard for Craig to come in this house, Abbie.

Abbie

Oh, yes.

Father

Bernice made this house. [Looking around.] Everything is Bernice. [A pause.] Change something, Abbie! [With growing excitement.] Put something in a different place. [He takes a pillow from the seat under the window, holds it irresolutely a moment, puts it on the floor at the side of the fireplace. On the other side he moves a high vase from the window. Then helplessly.] Well, I don't know. You can't get Bernice out of this room. The tea-table! Come, Abbie, quick! We will take this out of the room. [Together, Abbie reluctant, they move it to the passage-way leading out from the living-room. The Father comes back and sees the chair, now without its table. He goes as if to move it, but cannot do this; looks old and broken as he faces the closed door.] I wish they'd left Bernice upstairs, Abbie, in her own room. Now there—so near the living-room—right off the living-room. [Hastily goes back to his cards, but in an instant he brushes them together and pulls the open book toward him, and papers; but he only rests his hand on the book.] There'll be only Craig and his sister on this train, Abbie.

Abbie

That's all I know of.

Father

But Margaret Pierce will be here soon. As soon as she can get here, Margaret will

come. Within an hour, probably.

Abbie

[Apprehensive.] You think so, sir?

Father

I think so. That train from the West got to the Junction at three. I have a feeling Margaret won't wait for the five o'clock train to get here. She'll get a car. [Abbie goes to the door and looks out.] It would save a little time, and—she doesn't know that Bernice—Yes, Margaret will get here the quickest way. She always came to Bernice when Bernice needed her.

Abbie

She doesn't need anyone now.

Father

No. But yes—in a way, she does. She needs some one to be here to do what she can't go on doing. Margaret will see that—when she knows. Margaret sees everything.

Abbie

[Frightened now.] You think so, sir?

Father

Oh, yes, she does. Bernice knew that. "Margaret sees things," I've heard Bernice say. [Abbie turns from him.] Now Mrs. Kirby, Craig's sister Laura, she's a sensible woman, she'll be a help to you, Abbie, in—arranging things. But see things? No. How different people are. They're all different, Abbie. I don't think Bernice cared much for Laura—though she didn't mind her. She'd just laugh about Laura—about her being so sure of everything. It was nice, Abbie, the way Bernice would just laugh about things. She had no malice.

Abbie

[Strangely intense.] No. She didn't have, did she?

Father

Oh, no, Abbie. Malice wasn't in her. It was just that a good many things—well, the things that are important to most people weren't so important to Bernice. It was another set of things were important. People called her detached. But—I don't know. Maybe they're detached, Abbie. Maybe it's Laura Kirby, the sensible woman, who's detached,—Bernice would have laughed at that—the practical person who's detached, and Bernice.... You know what I mean, Abbie?

Abbie

I think I do—knowing her.

Father

To you—did she seem detached?

Abbie

[Tenderly thinking it out.] She was loving, and thoughtful, and gay. But always a little of what she is now—[Faces the closed door] off by herself. [With that intensity the present moment does not account for.] You can't expect to understand a person who is "off by herself." Now can you?

Father

I understood Bernice. Except, there were things—outside what I understood.

Abbie

[Eagerly.] That's it. And we should take what we had, shouldn't we, and not try to reach into—to where we didn't go.

Father

I suppose that's true, Abbie. [Buries his face.] I wish my little girl hadn't died. What am I going to do, Abbie? How can I stay here? And how can I go away? We should die in our proper order; I should have gone before my daughter. Anything else

makes confusion. There's not going to be anybody to laugh at me now, Abbie. I'll miss the way Bernice laughed at me, a laugh that took me in and—yes, took me in. She laughed at my spending the whole time of the war studying Sanscrit. Well, why shouldn't I? What can the old do about war? I had my vision of life. If that had been followed there'd have been no war. But in a world that won't have visions—why not study Sanscrit while such a world is being made over—into another such world. [Listening.] You hear some one, Abbie?

Abbie

[After listening.] It didn't turn in.

Father

And you, Abbie. [With wonder.] Why you were with us when Bernice was born.

Abbie

Yes, I was—in the room the night she was born. The night she died I thought of the night she was born.

Father

That was—how long ago, Abbie?

Abbie

Thirty-five years ago.

Father

Was Bernice thirty-five years old? She was, Abbie—my little girl? Well, life moves by—and we hardly know it's moving. Why, Abbie, your whole life has been lived around Bernice. [Abbie nods.] It will be now as if things had—fallen apart. And it was the main thing in your life—doing things for her.

Abbie

[With excitement.] Yes, it was the main thing in my life—doing what she wanted. I couldn't do anything else now, could I?

Father

[A little surprised at her agitation, but not thinking about it.] Why, no. Now some one is coming, Abbie. You hear them coming?

Abbie

I think so. [She goes to the door.] Yes.

[Abbie opens the door and Laura and Craig come in. Craig holds back as if to enter this house is something he can scarcely make himself do; he does not look around the room.

Laura

[To the Father, taking his hand.] This is so hard for you, Mr. Allen. I cannot tell you—[Turning to Abbie] Abbie.

Father

[Going to Craig, who is still at the door.] Well, Craig. [The Father holds out his hand, Craig takes it.] Well, I don't know what we're going to do without her.

Laura

[Coming to the rescue with the practical.] And where are you going to put us, Abbie?

Abbie

I have the rooms ready upstairs.

Craig

[As if he cannot do this.] Upstairs?

Abbie

[In a low voice.] She is down here, sir.

[She indicates the closed door. Then takes Laura's bag and they start upstairs. Craig does not move.

Laura

[On the stairway.] Aren't you coming up, Craig, to get clean and rest a little?

Craig

In a minute or two. [He sits down—on the edge of a chair near the door. The Father and husband sit there silent.] Bernice—hadn't been sick long, had she?

Father

No, it was very sudden. You know she had had trouble occasionally in the past year; Dr. Willis had said she might have to go to the hospital. At first this seemed like that—so Abbie and I weren't really alarmed. Of course we sent for Willis, but he was in Boston. Young Stuart had the grip. So there was no doctor here—till afterwards.

Craig

And—how long was Bernice sick?

[He speaks with difficulty.

Father

She spoke of feeling badly on Tuesday. She was lying down most of that day. Wednesday—she didn't get up at all Wednesday. And she died late Wednesday night. [Emotion breaking through.] Abbie and I were here all alone!

Craig

Did she say—Did she leave—Well, we can talk of that later.

Father

[Changing to something not so hard to speak of.] You landed last week?

Craig

Yes, I was held in New York by things to do. [A glance at the Father.] Of course, if I had had any idea—

Father

Of course.

Craig

But Bernice wrote me she was fine.

Father

She seemed so. She was well and—seemed very happy here this fall. You know how she loves to tramp the woods in the fall. She was counting on your coming home. She had done over your room upstairs. And hers too. They both look so nice and fresh. And she was just starting to do some things to Margaret's room. Margaret was coming next month for a rest. She's been working very hard.

Craig

Are you expecting Margaret now?

Father

Yes. Wednesday evening Bernice seemed to want Margaret to come. She thought maybe Margaret could get away now, and that it would do her good too. She had been worrying about her—thinking she was working too hard. Margaret's been in Chicago, you know, working on some labor things—I never know just what it is she is doing. Bernice seemed to want to see her. I wonder if Bernice herself felt it was more than we knew. Anyway, she wanted us to send for Margaret.

Craig

But you didn't send for me until—until it was over.

Father

No. You see we didn't know—Abbie and I didn't have any idea—I spoke of sending for you when we sent the telegram for Margaret, but Bernice said you'd be here soon anyway, and she didn't want to hurry you away from New York. [As if not understanding it himself, and trying to find an explanation.] I suppose you were

doing something that she knew about, and didn't want to interrupt.

[Craig half looks at him.

Craig

And Margaret answered that she was coming?

Father

Yes, we heard from her Thursday morning that she had started. She could get here today. We didn't know where to reach her telling her it was too late now for—for the visit with Bernice. [Breaking.] I just can't believe it! Think of what you and I are talking about! Bernice, out of life. She was so—of it. Didn't you feel that, Craig—about Bernice?

Craig

Yes. She seemed so—secured. It never seemed anything could—destroy Bernice.

Father

When I think she won't come down those stairs again!

Craig

I can't—think of things that way now.

Father

No. No, of course not. [He does not know what to say, so gathers together his cards, then books.] I'll just—I was just going in my room. [Pause.] I've been getting on fine with my Sanscrit, Craig.

Craig

That's good.

Father

And now the war is over, and some of the people who fussed around about it influenced it as little as I, and I—have my Sanscrit. You know, Bernice used to

laugh at me, Craig. She—the way she used to laugh at us—lovingly. Seems to me I'll miss that most of all.

[He goes into his room—through the door to the rear of the stairway.

[Alone in the room, Craig tries to look around. He cannot. He has taken a step toward the closed door when he hears Abbie's step on the stairs.

Craig

[Impetuously going to her, his hands out.] Abbie, you were good to her. [Takes her hands, holds them tight. Then changing.] Why didn't you telegraph me when she was taken sick? [Violently.] Do you think there was anything in New York I wouldn't have left? Bernice knew that if she needed me—She never seemed to need me. I never felt she—couldn't get along without me. [Taking a few stumbling steps toward the room where Bernice is.] Oh, I wish I could have a talk with her.

Abbie

Mr. Norris! [Her tone halts him.] There's something I must tell you.

Craig

A—message she left?

Abbie

Message? No. Yes—perhaps. Before you go in there I must tell you—

[They are arrested by the sound of a stopping car; neither moves; in a moment Margaret Pierce hurries in.

Margaret

[After looking at them.] She's worse? [Growing more and more alarmed by them.] Where is she?

[Starts towards the stairs.

Abbie

No—there.

[Pointing.

Craig

[Stepping between Margaret and the closed door.] She's dead, Margaret.

Margaret

Dead? Oh—no. Not Bernice. [Waits imploringly.] But that couldn't be.

Craig

I know. I know what you mean, Margaret.

[It seems Margaret is about to fall; Craig brings a chair; without taking a step she sinks to it, facing the closed door. Abbie turns and goes out, toward the kitchen.

Margaret

[A slight quick turn of her head to him.] I don't believe it!

Craig

It's true, Margaret.

Margaret

[Like blood from her heart.] But Bernice—she was life.

Craig

I know—what you mean.

Margaret

[After much has gone on in her.] And I wasn't here!

Craig

No. Nor I.

Margaret

[A moment later, just having taken this in.] Why weren't you here?

Craig

I didn't know she was sick.

Margaret

Your boat got in a week ago.

Craig

Yes. I was detained in New York.

Margaret

Detained by May Fredericks?

Craig

Margaret! Bernice wouldn't want you to talk that way to me—now.

Margaret

No.

Craig

Why, she knew it. Bernice knew I was staying out on Long Island with them while I was attending to some things about my work. I had a beautiful letter from Bernice. She was perfectly all right—about everything. And I was anxious now to get home to her. I was getting ready to start the very day I got the telegram that—that it was like this. You mean—you think I didn't make Bernice happy, Margaret?

Margaret

Oh, I don't think you had the power to make her very unhappy.

Craig

That's a cruel thing to say, Margaret. Bernice wouldn't say that to me.

Margaret

[Who is all the while looking straight ahead at the closed door.] No.

Craig

She understood me.

Margaret

And was indulgent.

Craig

[After a pause.] Margaret, did you ever feel you didn't really get to Bernice?

Margaret

Get to her? So far as I had power. She never held me back. Life broke through her—a life deeper than anything that could happen to her.

Craig

Yes, that's it. Something you couldn't destroy. A life in her deeper than anything that could be done to her. That—that makes a difference, Margaret. I never had Bernice.

Margaret

Oh, wasn't it wonderful to you that beneath what you "had" was a life too full, too rich to be had? I should think that would flow over your life and give it beauty.

Craig

I suppose a man's feeling is different. He has to feel that he moves—completely moves—yes, could destroy—not that he would, but has the power to reshape the—

Margaret

Craig! "Reshape" Bernice! [In anguish.] Oh, I came to see her. Not to sit here talking to you.

Craig

I loved her, Margaret. I valued her—even though her life wasn't made by my life. And she loved me. You think she didn't?

Margaret

No, Craig, I don't think she didn't. I know she did. I was thinking of those things in her—even greater than loving. Those things in her even loving never—caught.

Craig

Yes. I know, Margaret.

Margaret

I want to see Bernice!

[Crying she goes blindly toward the closed door, and to Bernice.

[A second time left alone in the room, Craig now looks at those various things with which he and Bernice have lived. When he can no longer do this he goes to the passage way at the front of the staircase.

Craig

Abbie! [After a moment's wait Abbie comes slowly in.] When Miss Margaret came, you were about to tell me something. My wife—left a message for me?

Abbie

Yes. No—I don't know. [Wildly.] She killed herself!

Craig

[Falling back.] What—are—you—saying?

Abbie

She—did it herself. Took her life. Now I've told you! You know now!

Craig

[Roughly taking hold of her.] What's this you're saying? What's this lie you're trying to—[Letting go of her—in horror, imploringly.] Abbie! Tell me it isn't true.

Abbie

It's true. I'm telling you. It's true. She—didn't want to live any longer—so she took something—ended her life. That's all. That's all I can tell you. Nobody knows. Not

her father—nobody. I thought I ought to tell you. Now I've told you! Let me go. I've told you—I—

[She breaks from him and rushes out. Craig does not move. Margaret comes from Bernice, without looking at Craig, opens the door to go outside.

Craig

[Scarcely able to call to her.] Margaret.

Margaret

[Not turning.] I'll be back soon.

Craig

[Wildly.] You can't go away leaving me alone with this! I tell you I can't stand it. You're going to the woods to think of Bernice! Well I'll tell you one thing. You never knew Bernice. You thought she didn't love me. You think I didn't matter. But Bernice killed herself because she loved me so!

Margaret

What—are—you—saying?

Craig

Abbie just told me. No one knows. Not her father—only Abbie.

Margaret

It is not true.

Craig

Yes. Abbie was with her. Oh, Margaret, she loved me like that.

Margaret

And you killed her!

Craig

No—Oh, don't say that! I didn't know.

Margaret

[After trying to take it in.] I knew Bernice. She was life. She came from the whole of life. You are asking me to believe that because of—some little thing in her own life—

Craig

But it wasn't a little thing. That's what we didn't know. I was everything to Bernice. More than all that life we felt—[Some one is heard above.] I think Laura's coming down. Laura mustn't know. I had to have you know. Nobody else. Not Laura.

Laura

[On the stairs.] Oh, Margaret, you have come?

Margaret

I was just going out. [As Laura comes nearer.] I'm going to take a walk!

[She goes out.

Laura

[Looking after her.] Take a walk. She always does some strange thing. [Craig has sunk to a chair, his back to Laura.] Why should she rush away like this, as if it were so much harder for her to stay in this house than for anyone else? [Craig, bowed, covers his face with his hands.] Has she been trying to make you feel badly, Craig? [She goes up to him and puts a hand on his bent shoulder.] Don't let her do that. It isn't true. It isn't as if Bernice were—like most women. There was something—aloof in Bernice. You saw it in her eyes; even in her smile. Oh, I thought she was wonderful, too. Only, it isn't as if Bernice—

Craig

If you think she didn't love me, you're wrong!

Laura

Oh—Craig! Love you, of course. Only—things that might have hurt another

woman—

Craig

How do we know who's hurt? Who isn't? Who loves—who doesn't love? Don't talk, Laura.

[She stands there beside him; the Father, coming in, at first sees only Laura.

Father

I must have dropped the ten of diamonds. [Seeing Craig.] Of course. Of course. I try not to think of it. My little girl. She loved life so. Always. From the time she was a baby she did rejoice so in the world.

[He stands looking at the closed door. Abbie comes in; looks at Craig, hesitates, then slowly crosses the room and takes the traveling-bag he brought in when he came; another look at his bowed head, then, herself bowed, starts up the stairs.

(Curtain)

ACT TWO

Scene: As in Act One, save that it is evening now; the reading lamp is lighted, and candles. Laura is sitting before the fire knitting. Abbie is standing at the foot of the stairs, as if Laura had called to her as she came down.

Laura

But he took the tray, did he, Abbie?

Abbie

He let me leave it.

Laura

And how did he seem?

Abbie

I didn't see his face. And he didn't say anything.

Laura

He wasn't like that until Margaret Pierce came. How long was Mrs. Norris sick, Abbie? [As she asks this the outer door opens and Margaret comes in.] Been out looking at the stars, Margaret? Aren't they bright up here in the hills?

Margaret

I—I didn't see them.

[She looks at Abbie, who is looking at her. Abbie turns away from Margaret's look.

Laura

I was asking you—how long was Mrs. Norris sick, Abbie?

Abbie

Two days.

Laura

And just what did the doctor say was the matter?

Abbie

The doctor wasn't here.

[She steals a glance at Margaret, who is all the while looking at her.

Laura

I know. But afterwards—what was his opinion?

Abbie

Attacks like she had had before—only worse. Ulcers in the stomach, he thought it was.

Laura

It's a great pity you couldn't get a doctor. That's the worst of living way up here by one's self. Mrs. Norris had seemed well, hadn't she?

Abbie

Yes, except once in a while; the doctor had said that she ought to go to the hospital to find out.

Margaret

[To Laura.] Too bad Craig wasn't here.

Laura

Yes. He was detained in New York.

Margaret

Yes. I know.

Laura

Abbie, I wish you would go up and ask Mr. Norris if he would like some more coffee and—see how he seems. [To Margaret, resentfully.] I don't understand why Craig should be quite like this. [Abbie does not move until Laura looks at her in surprise, then she turns to go.] No; I'll go myself, Abbie. I want to see how he is.

[She goes up, and Abbie comes back. Without looking at Margaret she is turning toward the kitchen.

Margaret

Abbie! [Reluctantly Abbie comes back, at first not looking up. Then she raises her eyes.] Yes, he told me. [Abbie does not speak or move.] Had she seemed unhappy, Abbie?

Abbie

No. No, I hadn't noticed anything.

Margaret

Abbie! Don't shut me out like this! She wouldn't shut me out. Bernice loved me.

Abbie

I know. I know she did. But there's nothing for me to tell you, Miss Margaret, and

it's hard for me to talk about. I loved her too. I lived with her her whole life long. First the baby I took care of and played with—then all the changing with the different years—then this—

[A move of her hands towards the closed door.

Margaret

Yes—then this. [Gently.] That's it, Abbie. "This"—takes away from all that. Abbie, do you understand it? If you do, won't you help me?

Abbie

I don't understand it.

Margaret

It's something so—outside all the rest. That's why I can't accept it. Something in me just won't take it in—because it isn't right. I knew her. I know I knew her! And this—Why then I didn't know her. Can't you help me?

Abbie

I don't see how, Miss Margaret.

Margaret

But if you would tell me things you know—little things—even though they meant nothing to you they might mean something to me. Abbie! Because you loved her don't you want what she was to go on living in our hearts?

Abbie

Oh, I do! I do! But she'll go on living in my heart without my understanding what she did.

Margaret

But differently. I'll tell you what I mean. Everything about her has always been—herself. That was one of the rare things about her. And herself—oh, it's

something you don't want to lose! It's been the beauty in my life. In my busy practical life, Bernice—what she was—like a breath that blew over my life and—made it something.

Abbie

I know—just what you mean, Miss Margaret.

Margaret

It's inconceivable that she should—cut off her own life. In her lived all the life that was behind her. You felt that in her—so wonderfully. She felt it in herself—or her eyes couldn't have been like that. Could they? Could they, Abbie?

Abbie

It—wouldn't seem so.

Margaret

She wouldn't destroy so much. Why she never destroyed anything—a flower—a caterpillar. Don't you see what I mean, Abbie? This denies so much. And then is it true that all this time she wasn't happy? Why she seemed happy—as trees grow. Did Mr. Norris make her unhappy? Oh, don't think you shouldn't talk about it. Don't act as if I shouldn't ask. It's too big for those little scruples. Abbie! I can't let Bernice's life go out in darkness. So tell me—just what happened—each little thing. [Margaret has taken hold of Abbie; Abbie has turned away.] When did you first know she had—taken something? Just what did she say to you about it? I want to know each little thing! I have a right to know.

[A step is heard above.

Abbie

[As if saved.] Mrs. Kirby's coming down now.

Margaret

I want to talk to you, Abbie, after the others have gone to bed.

[Laura comes down, Abbie passes her at the foot of the stairs, and goes through to the kitchen.

Laura

Margaret, what is to be gained in making people feel worse than they need? Craig upstairs—he's so broken—strange. And even Abbie as she passed me now. You seem to do this to them. And why?

Margaret

I don't do it to them. I'm not very happy myself.

Laura

Of course not. None of us can be that. But I believe we should try to bear things with courage.

Margaret

That comes easily from the person who's bearing little!

Laura

You think it means nothing to me that my brother has lost his wife?

Margaret

Your brother has lost his wife! That's all you see in it!

Laura

I don't see why you seem so wild—so resentful, Margaret. Death should soften us.

[She takes her old place before the fire.

Margaret

Well I can tell you this doesn't soften me!

Laura

I see that you feel hard toward Craig. But Bernice didn't. You think he should have come right home. But you must be just enough to admit he didn't have any idea

Bernice was going to be taken suddenly sick. He had been out of the country for three months, naturally there were things connected with his writing to see about.

Margaret

Connected with his writing! Laura! Don't lie about life with death in the next room. If you want to talk at a time like this, have the decency to be honest! Try to see the truth about living. Craig stayed in New York with May Fredericks—and he doesn't pretend anything else. Stayed there with May Fredericks, continuing an affair that has been going on for the past year. And before it was May Fredericks it was this one and that one. Well, all right. That may be all right. I'm not condemning Craig for his affairs. I'm condemning you for the front you're trying to put up!

Laura

I certainly am not trying to put up any front. It's merely that there seems nothing to be gained in speaking of certain things. If Craig was—really unfaithful, I do condemn him for that. I haven't your liberal ideas. [Slight pause, she takes up her knitting.] It's unfortunate Bernice hadn't the power to hold Craig.

Margaret

Hadn't the power to hold Craig!

Laura

She didn't want to—I suppose your scoffing means. Well, she should have wanted to. It's what a wife should want to do.

Margaret

Oh, Laura, Bernice will never say one more word for herself! In there. Alone. Still. She will not do one new thing to—to throw a light back on other things. That's death. A leaving of one's life. Leaving it—with us. I cannot talk to you about what Bernice "should have been." What she was came true and deep from—[Throwing out her hands as if giving up saying it. Taking it up again.] It's true there was

something in her Craig did not control. Something he couldn't mess up. There was something in her he might have drawn from and become bigger than he was. But he's vain. He has to be bowling some one over all the time—to show that he has power.

Laura

I don't agree with you that Craig is especially vain. He's a man. He does want to affect—yes, dominate the woman he loves. And if Bernice didn't give him that feeling of—

Margaret

Supremacy.

Laura

There's no use trying to talk with you of personal things. Certainly I don't want to quarrel tonight. That would not be the thing. [In a new tone.] How is your work going? I don't quite know what you are doing now, but trying to get some one out of prison, I suppose?

Margaret

Yes; I am trying to get out of prison all those people who are imprisoned for ideas.

Laura

I see.

Margaret

I doubt if you see, Laura.

Laura

Well I don't say I sympathize. But I see.

Margaret

No; for if you did see, you would have to sympathize. If you did see, you would be

ashamed; you would have to—hang your head for this thing of locking any man up because of what his mind sees. If thinking is not to become—whatever thinking may become!—then why are we here at all? [She stops and thinks of it.] Why does Bernice—her death—make that so simple tonight? Because she was herself. She had the gift for being herself. And she wanted each one to have the chance to be himself. Anything else hurt her—as it hurt her to see a dog tied, or a child at a narrow window.

Laura

I don't think Bernice was a very good wife for a writer.

Margaret

She would have been a wonderful wife for a real writer.

Laura

Oh, I know she didn't value Craig's work. And that's another thing. And I suppose you don't value it either. [She looks at Margaret, who does not speak.] Fortunately there are many thousands of people in this country who do value it. And I suppose you think what I do of little value too. I suppose you scoff at those things we do to put cripples back in life.

Margaret

No, Laura, I don't scoff at anything that can be done for cripples. Since men have been crippled, cripples must be helped. I only say—Don't cripple minds—strong free minds that might go—we know not where! Might go into places where the light of a mind has never been. [Rising.] Think of it! Think of that chance of making life even greater than death. [With passion.] If you have any respect for life—any reverence—you have to leave the mind free. I do not scoff at you, but you are not a serious person. You have no faith—no hope—no self-respect!

Laura

[Rising.] You tell me I have no self-respect! You who have not cared what people thought of you—who have not had the sense of fitness—the taste—to hold the place you were born to—you tell me, against whom no word was ever spoken, that I have no self-respect?

Margaret

You have a blameless reputation, Laura. You have no self-respect. If you had any respect for your own mind you could not be willing to limit the mind of any other. If you had any respect for your own spiritual life you could not be willing to push your self into the spiritual life of another. [Roughly.] No! You could not. [As one seeing far.] I see it as I never saw it. Oh I wish I could talk to Bernice! Something is down. I could see things as I never saw them.

Laura

[Gathering up the things she had been working with.] I will go before I am insulted further.

Margaret

There's nothing insulting in trying to find the truth. [Impulsively reaching out her hands to Laura, as she is indignantly going.] Oh, Laura, we die so soon! We live so in the dark. We never become what we might be. I should think we could help each other more.

Laura

[After being a moment held.] It would have to be done more sympathetically.

Margaret

I didn't mean to be unsympathetic. [Watching Laura go up the stairs.] I suppose that's the trouble with me. [She stands a moment thinking of this. Then there is something she wants to say. She knows then that she is alone—and in this room. Slowly she turns and faces the closed door. Stands so, quite still, realizing. Suddenly

turns to the stairway, goes up a few steps.] Craig! [Listens, then goes up another step and calls a little louder.] Craig!

Laura

[From above.] Please don't disturb Craig, Margaret.

[Margaret hesitates, turns to go down. A door opens above.

Craig

Did some one call me?

Margaret

I did, Craig. I'm down here alone—lonely.

Craig

[As if glad to do so.] I'll come down. [After coming.] I wanted to come down. I thought Laura was down here. I can't pretend—not tonight.

Margaret

No. I can't. I wanted so to talk to Bernice, and when I couldn't I—called to you.

Craig

I was glad to hear my name. It's too much alone. [He and Margaret stand there hesitatingly, as if they are not able to do it—settle down in this room and talk. Craig takes out his cigarette case. In the subdued voice of one whose feeling is somewhere else.] You want a cigarette, Margaret?

Margaret

No. I don't believe so.

Craig

Oh, I remember, you don't like these. Bernice must have some of the—

[He opens a chest on the mantel, takes from it a beautiful little box.

Margaret

[As she sees the box.] Oh—[Turning away.] Thank you, Craig, but—

Craig

Of course. [Holds the box for a moment, then slowly replaces it. He looks around the room. Then, helplessly.] I don't know what I'm going to do.

[He sits down before the fire. Margaret also sits. The door at the other side of the room opens and the Father comes in from his room.

Father

I was going to bed now. I thought I'd go in here first.

[Slowly goes in where Bernice is. A little while Craig and Margaret sit there silent.

Craig

And I don't know what he's going to do. Poor old man. Bernice was certainly good to him—keeping him happy in that life he made for himself away from life. It's queer about him, Margaret. Somehow he just didn't go on, did he? Made a fight in his youth, and stopped there. He's one of the wrecks of the Darwinian theory. Spent himself fighting for it, and—let it go at that. [Running his hand through his hair.] Oh, well, I suppose we're all wrecks of something. [With a nervous laugh.] What are you a wreck of, Margaret? You're a wreck of free speech. [Impatiently.] I'm talking like a fool. I'm nervous. I'll be glad when he goes to bed. [Looking upstairs.] I guess Laura's gone to bed. [After looking into the fire.] Well, Bernice isn't leaving any children to—be without her. I suppose now it's just as well we lost our boy before we ever had him. But she would have made a wonderful mother, wouldn't she, Margaret?

Margaret

Oh, yes!

Craig

You ever wish you had children, Margaret?

Margaret

Yes.

Craig

[Roughly.] Well, why don't you have?

Margaret

[Slowly.] Why, I don't just know, Craig. Life—seems to get filled up so quickly.

Craig

Yes. And before we know it, it's all over—or as good as over. Funny—how your mind jumps around. Just then I thought of my mother. How she used to say: "Now eat your bread, Craig."

[His voice breaks, he buries his face in his hands. Margaret reaches over and puts a hand on his shoulder. The door opens and the Father comes out. He stands looking at them.

Father

[Gently.] Yes. Of course. I'm glad you're here Margaret. But my little girl looks very peaceful, Craig. [Pause.] She had a happy life.

[Craig moves, turning a little away. Margaret makes a move as if to shield him, but does not do this.

Father

Yes; she had a happy life. Didn't she, Margaret?

Margaret

I always thought so.

Father

Oh, yes. She did. In her own way. A calm way, but very full of her own kind of happiness. [After reflection.] Bernice was good to me. I suppose she might have

liked me to have done more things, but—she wanted me to do what—came naturally to me. I suppose that's why we always felt so—comfortable with her. She was never trying to make us some—outside thing. Well—you know, Margaret, I can see her now as a baby. She was such a nice baby. She used to—reach out her hands. [Doing this himself.] Well, I suppose they all do. I'm going to bed. [After starting.] I'm glad you're here with Craig, Margaret. Bernice would like this. You two who know all about her—well, no, nobody knew all about Bernice—but you two who were closest to her, here now as—close as you can be. I'm going to bed. Good-night.

Margaret

[Crying.] Good-night.

Craig

[After the father has closed his door. With violence.] "Reached out her hands!" And what did she get? [Roughly grasping Margaret's wrists.] I killed Bernice. There's no use in your saying I didn't. I did. Only—[Letting go of her] don't flay me tonight, Margaret. I couldn't stand it tonight. [With another abrupt change.] Am I a fool? Why did I never know Bernice loved me like this? [In anguish.] Why wouldn't I know it? [Pause.] We don't know anything about each other. Do we, Margaret? Nothing. We never—get anywhere. [Shivering.] I'm cold. I wonder if there's anything to drink in the house. There must be something. [He goes out into the kitchen; after a moment there is the sound of running water; he comes in with a bottle of whiskey, a pitcher of water.] I don't see the glasses. Things seem to have been moved. [Looks at Margaret as if expecting she will go and get them; she does not; he goes out again. From the kitchen.] Margaret, have you any idea where the glasses are?

Margaret

No, Craig. I don't know. [After hearing him moving things around.] Isn't Abbie somewhere there?

Craig

No; she isn't here. She seems to have gone outdoors. She's left the door open too. No wonder it was cold. [Calling at an outer door.] Abbie! [Sound of the door closing. Again the sound of dishes being moved.] Well, I don't know where they can have put—

Margaret

[Covering her face.] Don't look for things. [More quietly.] Bring anything, Craig, there must be something there.

Craig

[Coming in with cups.] Things have been moved around. I stumbled over things that didn't used to be there. You'll have a little, Margaret? It—we need something.

Margaret

I don't—oh, I don't care.

[He pours the drinks and drinks his.

Craig

[Abruptly shoving his cup away.] Margaret, I loved Bernice. I suppose you don't believe that! And I thought Bernice knew I loved her, in spite of—other things. What do you think it is is the matter with me, Margaret, that I—[Saying it as if raw] miss things. You can tell me. I'd be glad to feel some one knew. Only—don't leave me alone while you're telling me!

Margaret

I'm afraid I have nothing to tell you, Craig. I thought I knew Bernice. And now—I did know Bernice! [Gropingly.] I feel something we don't get to.

Craig

And Bernice can't help us.

Margaret

I think she would expect us to—find our way. She could always find her way. She had not meant to leave us here. Bernice was so kind.

Craig

She was kind.

Margaret

Such a sensitive kindness. The kindness that divined feeling and was there ahead—to meet it. This is the very thing she would not do.

Craig

[Slowly, as if feeling his way.] Margaret, I wish I could tell you about me and Bernice. I loved her. She loved me. But there was something in her that had almost nothing to do with our love.

Margaret

Yes.

Craig

Well, that isn't right, Margaret. You want to feel that you have the woman you love. Yes—completely. Yes, every bit of her!

Margaret

So you turned to women whom you could have.

Craig

Yes.

Margaret

But you "had" all of them simply because there was less to have. You want no baffling sense of something beyond you. [He looks at her reproachfully.] You wanted me to help you find the truth. I don't believe you can stand truth, Craig.

Craig

It's hard tonight.

Margaret

[Intensely.] But perhaps it is tonight or not at all. It's a strange thing this has done. A light trying to find its way through a fog. [In her mind the light tries to do this.] Craig, why do you write the things you do?

Craig

Oh, Margaret, is this any time to talk of work?

Margaret

It seems to be. Tonight it's all part of the same thing. Laura and I were talking of work—quarreling about it: you were talking of Bernice's father. The light—just goes there. That poor sad old man—why didn't he go on? You said he was a wreck of the Darwinian theory. Then me—a wreck of free speech.

Craig

Oh I didn't mean you were, Margaret.

Margaret

But I might be. I can see that. We give ourselves in fighting for a thing that seems important and in that fight we get out of the flow of life. We had meant it to deepen the flow—but we get caught. I know people like that. People who get at home in their fight—and stay there—and are left there when the fight's over—like this old man. How many nights Bernice and I have sat in this room and talked of things! And I had thought—[With sudden angry passion.] If you had been good to her, she would be in this room now. [After a look at him.] I'm sorry. But can I help feeling it?

Craig

I didn't know.

Margaret

No; you didn't know. We don't know. When you think what a writer might do for life—for we don't know. You write so well, Craig, but—what of it? What is it is the matter with you—with all you American writers—'most all of you. A well-put-up light—but it doesn't penetrate anything. It never makes the fog part. Just shows itself off—a well-put-up light. [Growing angry.] It would be better if we didn't have you at all! Can't you see that it would? Lights which—only light themselves keep us from having light—from knowing what the darkness is. [After thinking.] Craig, as you write these things are there never times when you sit there dumb and know that you are glib and empty?

Craig

Did you ever try to write, Margaret?

Margaret

No.

Craig

I suppose you think it's very simple to be real. I suppose you think we could do it—if we just wanted to do it. Try it. You try.

Margaret

So you do this just to cover the fact that you can't do anything? Your skill—a mask for your lack of power?

Craig

I should think you'd want to be good to me tonight, Margaret.

Margaret

Be good to you! Keep you from seeing. That's the way we're good to each other. There's only one thing I could do for you tonight, Craig. You don't want that. So—

[Moves as if to rise.

Craig

No, don't go away. My brain won't keep still either. What I think is just as bad as what you say. Well, why do you think it is I—miss things—never get anywhere?

Margaret

I don't know. And it's true of all of us. Of me too. I do things that to me seem important, and yet I just do them—I don't get to the thing I'm doing them for—to life itself. I don't simply and profoundly get to life. Bernice did.

Craig

Yes. Bernice did.

Margaret

And yet you had to—shy away from Bernice. Into a smaller world that could be all your world. No, Craig, you haven't power. It's true. And for one hour in our lives let's try to—Those love affairs of yours—they're like your false writing—to keep yourself from knowing you haven't power. Did you ever see a child try to do a thing—fail—then turn to something he could do and make a great show of doing that? That's what most of our lives are like.

Craig

[Rudely.] Well, why haven't I power? If you are going to be any good to me—tell me that.

Margaret

[Shaking her head.] I can't tell you that. I haven't any light that—goes there. But isn't it true? Isn't your life this long attempt to appear effective—to persuade yourself that you are something? What a way to spend the little time there is for living.

Craig

I fancy it's the way most lives are spent.

Margaret

That only makes it infinitely sadder.

Craig

[As if he can stay in this no longer.] As to writing, Margaret, the things that interest you wouldn't interest most people.

Margaret

"Wouldn't interest most people!" Oh, Craig, don't slide away from that one honest moment. Say you haven't got it. Don't say they wouldn't want it. Why, if now—in this our day—our troubled day of many shadows—came a light—a light to reach those never lighted places—wouldn't want it? I wish some one could try them! No, Craig, they all have their times of suspecting their lives are going by in a fog. They're pitifully anxious for a little light. Why—they continue to look to writers. You know, Craig, what living makes of us—it's a rim—a bounded circle—and yet we know—have our times of suspecting—that if we could break through that. [Seeing.] O-h. It's like living in the mountains—those high vast places of Colorado—in a little house with shaded windows. You'd suspect what was there! A little sunshine through the cracks—mountain smells—and at times the house would shake—and you'd wonder—and be fretted in your little room. And if some day you could put up the shade and—see where you were. Life would never be so small a thing again. Bernice could do that. Her own life did not bound her.

Craig

No. That was what—

Margaret

Hurt your vanity?

Craig

I don't know. I'm trying to be honest. I honestly don't know.

Margaret

No. We don't know. That's why—oh, Craig, it would be so wonderful to be a writer—something that gets a little farther than others can get—gets at least the edge of the shadow. [After her own moment on the edge of the shadow.] If you ever felt the shock of reality, and got that back in you—you wouldn't be thinking of whom it would "interest"! But, Craig—this. [A movement toward the closed room.] Doesn't this give you that shock of reality?

Craig

What of you? Doesn't it give it to you? You're speaking as if this hadn't happened! You leave it out—what Bernice did because of me. You're talking of my having no power. What of this? Had I no power? [After her look at him.] Oh, yes—I know I used it terribly—plenty of years for my heart to break over that. But can you say I didn't have it?

Margaret

I do leave it out. It isn't right there should be anything in Bernice not Bernice. And she had a great rightness—rightness without effort—that rare, rare thing.

Craig

You say it isn't right—and so you leave it out? And then you talk about the shock of reality.

Margaret

I don't say it isn't fact. I say it isn't—in the rightness.

Craig

"In the rightness!" Is that for you to say? Is rightness what you think? What you can see? No. You didn't know Bernice. You didn't know she loved me—that way. And I didn't know. But she did! How could I have had that—and not known? But I did have it! I did have it! You say life broke through her—the whole of life. But Bernice

didn't want—the whole of life. She wanted me. [He goes to the door, bows against it, all sorrow and need.] I want to talk to her—not you. I want her now—knowing.

[He opens that door and goes in to Bernice. Margaret stands motionless, searching, and as if something is coming to her from the rightness. When she speaks it is a denial from that inner affirmation.

Margaret

No! I say—No! [Feeling some one behind her, swiftly turning she sees Abbie outside, looking through the not quite drawn curtains of the door. She goes to the door and draws Abbie in.] Yes, I am here—and I say no. [She has hold of her, drawing her in as she says it.] You understand—I say no. I don't believe it. What you told me—I don't believe it.

Abbie

[At first it is horror—then strange relief, as if nothing could be so bad as this has been.] Well, I'm glad you know.

Margaret

[Very slowly, knowing now it is fact she has come to.] Glad I know what?

Abbie

That it isn't true. That she didn't do it.

Margaret

Didn't do it? Did not take her own life?

Abbie

No. Of course she didn't.

Margaret

[Still very slowly, as if much more is coming than she can take in.] Then why—did you say she did?

Abbie

Because she said I must. Oh—look at me! Look at me! But you knew her. You know the strength of her. If she'd told you the way she told me—you'd have done it too. You would!

Margaret

[Saying each word by itself.] I can not understand one word you're saying. Something is wrong with you. [Changing, and roughly taking hold of Abbie.] Tell me. Quick, the truth.

Abbie

Wednesday night, about eight o'clock, about an hour after she told me to telegraph you, she said, "Why, Abbie, I believe I'm going to die." I said no, but she said, "I think so." I said we'd send for Mr. Norris. She said no, and not to frighten her father. I—I didn't think she was going to die. All the time I was trying to get the doctor. There were two hours when she was—quiet. Quiet—not like any quiet I ever knew. Thinking. You could see thinking in her eyes—stronger than sickness. Then, after ten, she called me to her. She took my hands. She said, "Abbie, you've lived with me all my life." "Yes," I said. "You love me." "Oh, yes," I said. "Will you do something for me?" "You know I will," I told her. "Abbie," she said, looking right at me, all of her looking right at me, "if I die, I want you to tell my husband I killed myself." [Margaret falls back.] Yes, I did that too. Then I thought it was her mind. But I looked at her, and oh, her mind was there! It was terrible—how it was all there. She said—and then she [The sobs she has been holding back almost keep Abbie from saying this]—held out her hands to me—"Oh, Abbie, do this last thing for me! After all there has been, I have a right to do it. If my life is going—let me have this much from it!" And as still I couldn't—couldn't—the tears ran down her face and she said, "I want to rest before pain comes again. Promise me so I can rest." And I promised. And you would have too!

Margaret

You don’t know what you’re telling me! You don’t know what you’re doing. You do this now—after she can do nothing? [Holding out her hands.] Abbie! Tell me it isn’t true!

Abbie

It’s true.

Margaret

You are telling me her life was hate? [Stops, half turns to the room where Craig is with Bernice.] You are telling me she covered hate with—with the beauty that was like nothing else? Abbie! You are telling me that as Bernice left life she held out her hands and asked you to take this back for her?

Abbie

There are things we can’t understand. There’s no use trying.

[She turns to go.

Margaret

You can’t leave me like this!

Abbie

[More gently.] You shouldn’t have tried to know. But—if you have got to know things—you have got to take them.

[Craig comes out; Abbie goes.

Craig

Go in there, Margaret. There’s something wonderful there.

Margaret

[Turned from him, her face buried in her hands.] Oh no—no—no. I can never go in there. I—I never was—in there.

[Her other words are lost in wild sobbing. He stands regarding her in wonder, but not losing what he himself has found.

(Curtain)

ACT THREE

Scene: The same as in Acts One and Two; it is early afternoon of the next day; the door leading outdoors is a little open; when the curtain is drawn Craig is seen outside, just passing the window, as one who is walking back and forth in thinking. In the room are Laura and the Father—the Father sitting at the table by the stairs—Laura, standing, watches Craig pass the door; she has in her hand a paper on which are some memoranda. After watching Craig she sighs, looks at her notes, sits down.

Laura

I'm sorry to be troubling you, Mr. Allen. Certainly you should not be asked to discuss these matters about—arrangements. But really, you and I seem the only people who are capable of going on with things. I must say, I don't know what to make of everyone else. They all seem to be trying to—keep away from one. I think that's a little unnecessary. Of course I know what grief does, and I'm sure I have every consideration for that, but really—I'm sorry Craig keeps his own sister out. When I'm here to help him. And Abbie—why she seems to have lost her head. Just when it's so important that she look after things. And as to Margaret Pierce—she certainly is worse than useless. I don't see what she came for if she didn't want to be helpful.

Father

Margaret and Bernice were very dear friends, Laura.

Laura

Is that any reason for not being helpful in Bernice's household at a time like this?

Really I do like control. [After looking at her notes.] Then the minister will come here at three, Mr. Allen. Why that will be little more than an hour! Think of things having been neglected like this! [As Craig, having turned in his walk, is again passing the door.] Craig! [He steps to the door.] The minister, Mr. Howe, will come here, Craig, at three.

Craig

What for?

Laura

Craig! What for?

Craig

I don't see why he comes here. Why Bernice scarcely knew him. [To her father.] Did Bernice know him?

Father

Well, I don't know whether she knew him, but—

Laura

It is not a personal matter, Craig.

Craig

I think it is. Very personal.

Laura

You mean to say you are not going to have any service?

Craig

I haven't thought anything about it. Oh, Laura! How can I think of such things now?

Laura

Well, I will think of them for you, dear.

Craig

Don't bring him here. He can go—[Stops] there, if he wants to. Where—we have to go. Not here. In her own house. The very last thing.

Father

I'm afraid it will seem strange, Craig.

Craig

Strange? Do I care if it seems strange? Bernice seemed strange too. But she wasn't strange. She was wonderful. [Putting out his hand impatiently.] Oh, no, Laura. There's so much else to think of—now.

[He steps out of the door and stands there, his back to the room.

Father

[In a low voice.] I wonder—could we go somewhere else? Into my room, perhaps. I'm afraid we are keeping Craig out of here. And I think he wants to be here—near Bernice. We will be undisturbed in my room.

[He gets up and goes to the door of his room, Laura turns to follow. Outside Craig passes from sight.

Laura

I think it's too bad things have to be made so—complicated.

Father

[After opening the door.] Oh, Margaret is in here.

Margaret

[From the other room.] I was just going out. I just came in here to—[Enters.] I just went in there—I didn't think about it being your room.

Father

Why that was quite all right, Margaret. I'm only sorry to disturb you.

Margaret

No. That doesn't matter. I—wasn't doing anything.

Laura

There is a great deal to do.

[She follows the Father into his room. Margaret walks across the room, walks back, stands still, head bent, hands pressing her temples. Abbie comes part way down the stairs, sees Margaret, stands still as if not to be heard, turns to go back upstairs.

Margaret

[Hearing her, looking up.] Abbie! [Abbie comes slowly down.] Where is he, Mr. Norris? Where is he?

Abbie

I don't know. He was here a little while ago. Perhaps he went out.

[Indicating the open door.

Margaret

I have to tell him!

Abbie

[After an incredulous moment.] Tell him what you made me tell you?

Margaret

Of course I have to tell him! You think I can leave that on him? And the things I said to him—they were not just.

Abbie

And you'd rather be "just" than leave it as she wanted it?

Margaret

Oh, but Abbie—what she wanted—[Holds up her hand as if to shut something from her eyes.] No. You can't put that on anyone. I couldn't live—feeling I had left on him what shouldn't be there.

Abbie

But you wouldn't tell him now?

Margaret

I must tell him now. Or I won't tell him. And I must go away. I can't stay. I can't stay here.

Abbie

But what will they think—your leaving? You mean—before we've taken her away?

Margaret

Oh, I don't know. How can I—plan it out? I'm going as soon as I can tell him. All night—all day—I've been trying to tell him—and when I get near him—I run away. Why did you tell me?

Abbie

[Harshly.] Why did you know—what you weren't to know? But if you have some way of knowing what you aren't told—you think you have the right to do your thing with that? Undo what she did? What I did? Do you know what it took out of me to do this? There's nothing left of me.

Margaret

[With a laugh. Right on the verge of being not herself.] No. You're a wreck. Another wreck. It's your Darwinian theory. Your free speech.

Abbie

Oh, I was afraid of you. I didn't want you to come. I knew you'd—get to things.

[Abbie goes to the door and looks out.

Margaret

He is out there?

Abbie

Yes.

[Margaret tries to go; moves just a little.] And you'd go to him and—what for?

Margaret

Because I can't live—leaving that on him—having him think—when I know he didn't. I can't leave that on him one more hour.

Abbie

[Standing in the door to block her going.] And when you take that from him—what do you give to him?

[They stare at one another; Margaret falls back.

Margaret

Don't ask me to see so many things, Abbie. I can only see this thing. I've grown afraid of seeing.

Abbie

[After looking at her, seeing something of her suffering.] Miss Margaret, why did you do what you did last night? How did you know?

Margaret

I don't know.

Abbie

But you knew.

Margaret

No. I didn't know. I didn't know. It didn't come from me. It came—from the rightness.

[A laugh.

Abbie

If you could get that without being told—why don't you get more without being

told? [Margaret gives her a startled look.] For you will never be told.

Margaret

You know more?

Abbie

No. My knowing stops with what you got from me last night. But I knew her. I thought maybe, as you have some way of knowing what you aren't told, you could—see into this. See.

Margaret

I've lost my seeing. It was through her I saw. It was through Bernice I could see. And now it's dark. [Slowly turning toward the closed room.] Oh, how still death is.

[The two women are as if caught into this stillness.

Abbie

[Looking from the door.] He turned this way. [Swiftly turning back to Margaret.] But you couldn't tell him.

Margaret

No, I can't. Yes, I must! I tell you there's something in me can't stand it to see any one go down under a thing he shouldn't have to bear. Why that feeling has made my life! Do you think I've wanted to do the kind of work I do? Don't you think I'd like to be doing—happier things? But there's something in my blood drives me to—what's right.

Abbie

And something in my blood drives me to what's right! And I went against it—went against my whole life—so she could rest. I did it because I loved her. But you didn't love her.

Margaret

Oh—Abbie!

Abbie

Not as you love—what's right. If you loved her, don't you want to protect her—now that she lies dead in there? [Her voice breaking.] Oh, Miss Margaret, it was right at the very end of her life. Maybe when we're going to die things we've borne all our lives are things we can't bear any longer. Just—don't count that last hour.

Margaret

[After a moment of being swayed by this.] Yet you counted it, Abbie. You did what she said—because of the strength of her. You told me last night—her mind was there. Terrible the way it was right there. She hadn't left her life.

Abbie

Well, and if she hadn't left her life! If all those years with him there was something she hid, and if she seemed to feel—what she didn't feel. She did it well, didn't she?—and almost to the last. Shan't we hide it now? For her? You and me, who loved her—isn't she safe—with us? [Going nearer Margaret.] Perhaps if you would go in there now—

Margaret

Oh no—no.

Abbie

[In a last deeply emotional appeal.] Miss Margaret, didn't she do a good deal for you?

Margaret

Do a good deal for me? Yes. Yes!

Abbie

Yes. She did for me. I—I'm something more on account of her. Aren't you?

Margaret

Yes.

Abbie

Yes, I think you are too. I can see myself as I'd have been if my life hadn't been lived round her. [Thinks, shakes her head.] It would be left you—what feels and knows it feels. And you said it was through Bernice you could see. Well, lets forget what we don't want to know! On account of what we are that we wouldn't have been—lets put it out of our minds! One ugly thing in a whole beautiful life! Let it go! And let all the rest live! [They can see Craig outside.] Oh—do this for her. Make yourself do it. Let that be what's dead—and let all the rest live! You were her friend not his.

[Craig turns to the house, but when about to come in, turns away, covering his face.

Margaret

[Taking hold of Abbie.] You see? He thinks she loved him and he killed her. He might do what he thinks she did!

Abbie

[Falling back.] O-h.

[Craig comes in, stands by the door; Margaret has drawn Abbie over near the stairway. He sees them, but gives no heed to them, immersed in what he is living through. While he stands there Margaret does not move. He turns toward the room where Bernice is; when he moves Margaret goes a little toward him—his back is to her; Abbie moves to step between Craig and Margaret; Margaret puts her aside. But when Craig comes to the closed door, and stands there an instant before it, not opening it, Margaret too stops, as if she cannot come nearer him. It is only after he has opened the door and closed it behind him that she goes to it. She puts out her hands, but she does not even touch the door and when she cannot do this she covers

her face and, head bent, stands there before the closed door. Laura and the Father come out from the room where they have been. As they enter Abbie slowly goes out, toward the kitchen.

Laura

[After looking at Margaret, who has not moved.] We are going in an hour, Margaret.

Margaret

Going?

Laura

Taking Bernice to the cemetery.

Margaret

Oh. Are we?

[After a look which shows her disapproval Laura goes out, following Abbie.

Father

[Sitting.] I can’t believe that, Margaret.

Margaret

No. [Margaret sits in the window seat, by which she has been standing. As if she is just realizing what they have said.] You say—we are taking Bernice away from here—in an hour?

Father

Yes. Think of it, Margaret. I just can’t—take it in.

Margaret

No.

Father

There is something I want to tell you, Margaret. [Margaret gives him a quick look, then turns away, as if afraid.] I’ve been wanting to tell you—but it’s hard to talk of

such things. But before we—take Bernice away, before you—see her the last time—I want you to know. That night—the night Bernice died—at the very last, Abbie was afraid then—and had called to me. Abbie and I were in there and—Abbie went out, about the telephone call we had in for the doctor. I was all alone in there a few minutes—right at the last. Bernice said one last word, Margaret. Your name.

Margaret

She called to me?

Father

No, I wouldn't say she called to you. Just said your name. The way we say things to ourselves—say them without knowing we were going to say them. She didn't really say it. She breathed it. It seemed to come from her whole life.

Margaret

O-h. Then it wasn't as if she had left me? It wasn't as if anything was in between—

Father

Why no, Margaret. What an idea. Why I don't think you ever were as close to Bernice as when she said your name and died.

[Margaret's head goes down; she is crying. Craig comes out, carefully closing the door behind him. Partly crosses the room, looks uncertainly at the outer door as if to go outside again.

Father

Sit down, Craig. [Craig does this.] Let's not try to keep away from each other now. We're all going through the same thing—in our—our different ways. [A pause. Margaret raises her head; she is turned a little away from the other two.] I was so glad when you came, Margaret. I don't want Bernice to slip away from us. In an hour we—take her away from here—out of this house she loved. I don't want her to slip away from us. She loved you so, Margaret. Didn't she, Craig?

Craig

Yes. She did love Margaret.

Father

Oh, yes. “Margaret sees things,” she’d say. [Wistfully.] She had great beauty—didn’t she, Margaret?

Margaret

I always thought so.

Father

Oh, yes. I was thinking last night—malice was not in Bernice. I never knew her to do a—really unfriendly thing to any one. [Again in that wistful way.] You know, Margaret, I had thought you would say things like this—and better than I can say them, to—to keep my little girl for us all. I suppose I’m a foolish old man but I seem to want them said. [Pause. Margaret seems to try to speak, but does not.] I think it was gentle of Bernice to be amused by things she—perhaps couldn’t admire in us she loved. Me. I suppose she might have liked a father who amounted to more—but she always seemed to take pleasure in me. Affectionate amusement. Didn’t you feel that in Bernice, Craig?

Craig

Yes—that was one thing. A surface for other things. [He speaks out of pain, but out of pain which wants, if it can, to speak.] But only a surface. [With passion.] All of Bernice went into her love for me. Those big impersonal things—they were not apart. All of Bernice—loved me. [His voice breaks, he goes to the door, starts out. Suddenly steps back—with a quick rough turn to her.] Isn’t that so, Margaret?

Margaret

I can see—what you mean, Craig.

Father

Why of course Bernice loved you. I know that.

[Craig goes outside.

[Looking after him.] I hope I didn't send Craig away. You and he would rather not talk. Perhaps that is better. I seem to want to—gather up things that will keep Bernice. It's so easy for the dead to slip from us. But I mustn't bother you.

Margaret

Oh, you aren't! I—I'm sorry I'm not—doing more. I'm pulled down.

Father

I know, Margaret. I can see that. Another time you and I will talk of Bernice. I didn't mean she didn't love Craig. Of course not. Only [Hesitatingly] I did feel that much as went into her loving—there was more than went into her loving.

Margaret

Yes.

Father

I think it wasn't that she—wanted it that way. You know, Margaret, I felt something—very wistful in Bernice. [Margaret looks at him, nods.] In this calm now—I feel the wistfulness there was in her other calm.

Margaret

Yes.

Father

As if she wanted to give us more. Oh—she gave more than any one else could have given. But not all she was. And she would like to have given us—all she was. She wanted to give—what couldn't be given. [Pause.] You know what I mean, Margaret?

Margaret

Yes, I do know.

Father

And so—wistfulness. I see it now. [After thinking.] I think Bernice feared she was not a very good wife for Craig. [Margaret gives him a startled look.] Little things she'd say. I don't know—perhaps I'm wrong. [After a move of Margaret's.] You were going to say something, Margaret.

Margaret

No. I was just thinking of what you said.

Father

Craig didn't dominate Bernice. I don't know whose fault it was. I don't know that it was anyone's fault. Just the way things were. He—I say it in all kindness, he just didn't—have it in him. [Slowly.] As I haven't had certain things in me.

[Abbie comes in.

Abbie

People are coming. The Aldrichs—other neighbors.

Father

Oh—they are coming? [With pain.] Already? Oh. They are to wait in the south room—till a little later. I'll speak to them.

[They go out; Margaret has a moment alone. Then Craig comes in from outside.

Craig

People are beginning to come. I suppose they'll come in here soon. I—I don't want them to.

[Laura enters with boxes of flowers.

Oh—Laura, please. Bernice loved flowers.

Laura

Well—Craig.

Craig

Would you take them around the other way? Or keep them till later—or something. I don't want them here!

[Laura goes out.

Craig

I don't want things to be different. Not now—in the last hour. It's still Bernice's house. [After watching her a moment.] Margaret, I'm afraid I shouldn't have told you. It's doing too much to you. Surely—no matter what you feel about me—this—what I told you—isn't going to keep you away from Bernice?

Margaret

No, Craig. What you told me—isn't going to do that.

Craig

I shouldn't have told you. But there are things—too much to be alone with. And yet—we are alone with them. [He is seated, looking out toward the woods. Very slowly—with deep feeling.] It is a different world. Life will never be—that old thing again.

Margaret

[Rising.] Craig! [He looks at her.] Craig, I must tell you—

[She does not go on.

Craig

[After waiting an instant, looks away.] I know. We can't say things. When we get right to life—we can't say things.

Margaret

But I must say them. I have to tell you—life need not be a different thing.

Craig

Need not? You think I want that old thing back? Pretending. Fumbling. Always trying to seem something—to feel myself something. No. That's a strange thing for you to say, Margaret—that I can go back to my make-believe, now that I've got to life. This—[As if he cannot speak of it] this—even more than it makes me want to die it makes me want to—Oh, Margaret, if I could have Bernice now—knowing. And yet—I never had her until now. This—has given Bernice to me.

Margaret

[As if his words are a light she is almost afraid to use.] This—has given Bernice to you?

Craig

I was thinking—walking out there I was thinking, if I knew only—what I knew when I came here—that Bernice was dead—I wonder if I could have got past that failure.

Margaret

Failure, Craig?

Craig

Of never having had her. That she had lived, and loved me—loved me, you see—lived and loved me and died without my ever having had her. What would there have been to go on living for? Why should such a person go on living? Now—of course it is another world. This comes crashing through my make-believe—and Bernice's world get to me. Don't you see, Margaret?

Margaret

Perhaps—I do. [She looks at the closed door; looks back to him. Waits.] O-h. [Waits again, and it grows in her.] Perhaps I do.

[Turns and very slowly goes to the closed door, opens it, goes in. At the other side of

the room Abbie comes in with a floral piece.

Craig

No, Abbie. I just told my sister—I don't want this room to be different. [Looking around.] It is different. What have you done to it?

[He sees the pillow crowded in at the side of the fireplace. Restores it to its place in the window.

Abbie

And this was here.

[She returns the vase to its place.

Craig

Of course it was. But it isn't right yet. [After considering.] Why—the tea table! [Abbie turns toward the kitchen.] What did you put it out there for? I remember now—I stumbled against it last night. [They bring it in.] Why, yes, Abbie, the tea-table was always here—before the fire.

Abbie

And—

[She hesitates, but Craig follows her eyes to the chair.

Craig

Yes. [He too hesitates; then gives the chair its old place before the table, as if awaiting the one who will come and pour tea. A moment they stand looking at it. Then Craig looks around the room.] And what if it is still wrong, Abbie?

Abbie

In the fall there were always branches in that vase. [Indicating the one she has returned to its place.] The red and yellow branches from outside.

Craig

Yes.

[He goes out. With feeling which she cannot quite control Abbie does a few little things at the tea-table, relating one thing to another until it is as it used to be. Margaret comes out from the room where she has been with Bernice, leaving the door wide open behind her. With the quiet of profound wonder; in a feeling that creates the great stillness, she goes to Abbie.

Margaret

Oh—Abbie. Yes—I know now. I want you to know. Only—there are things not for words. Feeling—not for words. As a throbbing thing that flies and sings—not for the hand. [She starts to close her hand, uncloses it.] But, Abbie—there is nothing to hide. There is no shameful thing. What you saw in her eyes as she brooded over life in leaving it—what made you afraid—was her seeing—her seeing into the shadowed places of the life she was leaving. And then—a gift to the spirit. A gift sent back through the dark. Preposterous. Profound. Oh—love her Abbie! She's worth more love than we have power to give! [Craig has come back with some branches from the trees; he stands outside the door a moment, taking out a few he does not want. Margaret hears him and turns. Then turns back.] Power. Oh, how strange.

[Craig comes in, and Margaret and Abbie watch him as he puts the bright leaves in the vase. The Father comes in.

Father

The man who is in charge says we will have to be ready now to—[Seeing what has been done to the room.] Oh, you have given the room back to Bernice!

Margaret

Given everything back to Bernice. Bernice. Insight. The tenderness of insight. And the courage. [To the Father, and suddenly with tears in her voice.] She was wistful. And held out her hands [Doing this] with gifts she was not afraid to send back. [Very simply.] She loved you, Craig.

Craig

I know that, Margaret. I know now how much.

Margaret

[Low.] And more than that. [Her voice electric.] Oh, in all the world—since first life moved—has there been any beauty like the beauty of perceiving love?... No. Not for words.

[She closes her hand, uncloses it in a slight gesture of freeing what she would not harm.

(Curtain)

SUPPRESSED DESIRES A COMEDY IN TWO SCENES (In Collaboration with George Cram Cook) First Performed by the Provincetown Players, at the Wharf Theatre, Provincetown, Mass., August, 1914

ORIGINAL CAST

Henrietta BrewsterSusan Glaspell Stephen BrewsterGeorge Cram Cook MabelMary Pyne

SUPPRESSED DESIRES

Scene I: A studio apartment in an upper story, Washington Square South. Through an immense north window in the back wall appear tree tops and the upper part of the Washington Arch. Beyond it you look up Fifth Avenue. Near the window is a big table, loaded at one end with serious-looking books and austere scientific periodicals. At the other end are architect’s drawings, blue prints, dividing compasses, square, ruler, etc. At the left is a door leading to the rest of the apartment; at the right the outer door. A breakfast table is set for three, but only two are seated at it—Henrietta and Stephen Brewster. As the curtains withdraw Steve pushes back his coffee cup and sits dejected.

Henrietta

It isn't the coffee, Steve dear. There's nothing the matter with the coffee. There's something the matter with you.

Steve

[Doggedly.] There may be something the matter with my stomach.

Henrietta

[Scornfully.] Your stomach! The trouble is not with your stomach but in your subconscious mind.

Steve

Subconscious piffle!

[Takes morning paper and tries to read.

Henrietta

Steve, you never used to be so disagreeable. You certainly have got some sort of a complex. You're all inhibited. You're no longer open to new ideas. You won't listen to a word about psychoanalysis.

Steve

A word! I've listened to volumes!

Henrietta

You've ceased to be creative in architecture—your work isn't going well. You're not sleeping well—

Steve

How can I sleep, Henrietta, when you're always waking me up to find out what I'm dreaming?

Henrietta

But dreams are so important, Steve. If you'd tell yours to Dr. Russell he'd find out

exactly what's wrong with you.

Steve

There's nothing wrong with me.

Henrietta

You don't even talk as well as you used to.

Steve

Talk? I can't say a thing without you looking at me in that dark fashion you have when you're on the trail of a complex.

Henrietta

This very irritability indicates that you're suffering from some suppressed desire.

Steve

I'm suffering from a suppressed desire for a little peace.

Henrietta

Dr. Russell is doing simply wonderful things with nervous cases. Won't you go to him, Steve?

Steve

[Slamming down his newspaper.] No, Henrietta, I won't!

Henrietta

But, Stephen—!

Steve

Tst! I hear Mabel coming. Let's not be at each other's throats the first day of her visit.

[He takes out cigarettes. Mabel comes in from door left, the side opposite Steve, so that he is facing her. She is wearing a rather fussy negligee in contrast to Henrietta, who wears "radical" clothes. Mabel is what is called plump.

Mabel

Good morning.

Henrietta

Oh, here you are, little sister.

Steve

Good morning, Mabel.

[Mabel nods to him and turns, her face lighting up, to Henrietta.

Henrietta

[Giving Mabel a hug as she leans against her.] It's so good to have you here. I was going to let you sleep, thinking you'd be tired after the long trip. Sit down. There'll be fresh toast in a minute and [Rising] will you have—

Mabel

Oh, I ought to have told you, Henrietta. Don't get anything for me. I'm not eating breakfast.

Henrietta

[At first in mere surprise.] Not eating breakfast?

[She sits down, then leans toward Mabel who is seated now, and scrutinizes her.

Steve

[Half to himself.] The psychoanalytical look!

Henrietta

Mabel, why are you not eating breakfast?

Mabel

[A little startled.] Why, no particular reason. I just don't care much for breakfast, and they say it keeps down—[A hand on her hip—the gesture of one who is "reducing"] that is, it's a good thing to go without it.

Henrietta

Don’t you sleep well? Did you sleep well last night?

Mabel

Oh, yes, I slept all right. Yes, I slept fine last night, only [Laughing] I did have the funniest dream!

Steve

S-h! S-t!

Henrietta

[Moving closer.] And what did you dream, Mabel?

Steve

Look-a-here, Mabel, I feel it’s my duty to put you on. Don’t tell Henrietta your dreams. If you do she’ll find out that you have an underground desire to kill your father and marry your mother—

Henrietta

Don’t be absurd, Stephen Brewster. [Sweetly to Mabel.] What was your dream, dear?

Mabel

[Laughing.] Well, I dreamed I was a hen.

Henrietta

A hen?

Mabel

Yes; and I was pushing along through a crowd as fast as I could, but being a hen I couldn’t walk very fast—it was like having a tight skirt, you know; and there was some sort of creature in a blue cap—you know how mixed up dreams are—and it kept shouting after me, “Step, Hen! Step, Hen!” until I got all excited and just

couldn’t move at all.

Henrietta

[Resting chin in palm and peering.] You say you became much excited?

Mabel

[Laughing.] Oh, yes; I was in a terrible state.

Henrietta

[Leaning back, murmurs.] This is significant.

Steve

She dreams she’s a hen. She is told to step lively. She becomes violently agitated. What can it mean?

Henrietta

[Turning impatiently from him.] Mabel, do you know anything about psychoanalysis?

Mabel

[Feebly.] Oh—not much. No—I—[Brightening.] It’s something about the war, isn’t it?

Steve

Not that kind of war.

Mabel

[Abashed.] I thought it might be the name of a new explosive.

Steve

It is.

Mabel

[Apologetically to Henrietta, who is frowning.] You see, Henrietta, I—we do not live in touch with intellectual things, as you do. Bob being a dentist—somehow our

friends—

Steve

[Softly.] Oh, to be a dentist!

[Goes to window and stands looking out.

Henrietta

Don’t you see anything more of that editorial writer—what was his name?

Mabel

Lyman Eggleston?

Henrietta

Yes, Eggleston. He was in touch with things. Don’t you see him?

Mabel

Yes, I see him once in a while. Bob doesn’t like him very well.

Henrietta

Your husband does not like Lyman Eggleston? [Mysteriously.] Mabel, are you perfectly happy with your husband?

Steve

[Sharply.] Oh, come now, Henrietta—that’s going a little strong!

Henrietta

Are you perfectly happy with him, Mabel?

[Steve goes to work-table.

Mabel

Why—yes—I guess so. Why—of course I am!

Henrietta

Are you happy? Or do you only think you are? Or do you only think you ought to

be?

Mabel

Why, Henrietta, I don’t know what you mean!

Steve

[Seizes stack of books and magazines and dumps them on the breakfast table.] This is what she means, Mabel. Psychoanalysis. My work-table groans with it. Books by Freud, the new Messiah; books by Jung, the new St. Paul; the Psychoanalytical Review—back numbers two-fifty per.

Mabel

But what’s it all about?

Steve

All about your sub-un-non-conscious mind and desires you know not of. They may be doing you a great deal of harm. You may go crazy with them. Oh, yes! People are doing it right and left. Your dreaming you’re a hen—

[Shakes his head darkly.

Henrietta

Any fool can ridicule anything.

Mabel

[Hastily, to avert a quarrel.] But what do you say it is, Henrietta?

Steve

[Looking at his watch.] Oh, if Henrietta’s going to start that!

[During Henrietta’s next speech settles himself at work-table and sharpens a lead pencil.

Henrietta

It’s like this, Mabel. You want something. You think you can’t have it. You think

it's wrong. So you try to think you don't want it. Your mind protects you—avoids pain—by refusing to think the forbidden thing. But it's there just the same. It stays there shut up in your unconscious mind, and it festers.

Steve

Sort of an ingrowing mental toenail.

Henrietta

Precisely. The forbidden impulse is there full of energy which has simply got to do something. It breaks into your consciousness in disguise, masks itself in dreams, makes all sorts of trouble. In extreme cases it drives you insane.

Mabel

[With a gesture of horror.] Oh!

Henrietta

[Reassuring.] But psychoanalysis has found out how to save us from that. It brings into consciousness the suppressed desire that was making all the trouble. Psychoanalysis is simply the latest scientific method of preventing and curing insanity.

Steve

[From his table.] It is also the latest scientific method of separating families.

Henrietta

[Mildly.] Families that ought to be separated.

Steve

The Dwights, for instance. You must have met them, Mabel, when you were here before. Helen was living, apparently, in peace and happiness with good old Joe. Well—she went to this psychoanalyzer—she was "psyched," and biff!—bang!—home she comes with an unsuppressed desire to leave her husband.

[He starts work, drawing lines on a drawing board with a T-square.

Mabel

How terrible! Yes, I remember Helen Dwight. But—but did she have such a desire?

Steve

First she'd known of it.

Mabel

And she left him?

Henrietta

[Coolly.] Yes, she did.

Mabel

Wasn't he kind to her?

Henrietta

Why yes, good enough.

Mabel

Wasn't he kind to her.

Henrietta

Oh, yes—kind to her.

Mabel

And she left her good kind husband—!

Henrietta

Oh, Mabel! "Left her good, kind husband!" How naïve—forgive me, dear, but how bourgeoise you are! She came to know herself. And she had the courage!

Mabel

I may be very naïve and—bourgeoise—but I don't see the good of a new science

that breaks up homes.

[Steve applauds.

Steve

In enlightening Mabel, we mustn't neglect to mention the case of Art Holden's private secretary, Mary Snow, who has just been informed of her suppressed desire for her employer.

Mabel

Why, I think it is terrible, Henrietta! It would be better if we didn't know such things about ourselves.

Henrietta

No, Mabel, that is the old way.

Mabel

But—but her employer? Is he married?

Steve

[Grunts.] Wife and four children.

Mabel

Well, then, what good does it do the girl to be told she has a desire for him? There's nothing can be done about it.

Henrietta

Old institutions will have to be reshaped so that something can be done in such cases. It happens, Mabel, that this suppressed desire was on the point of landing Mary Snow in the insane asylum. Are you so tight-minded that you'd rather have her in the insane asylum than break the conventions?

Mabel

But—but have people always had these awful suppressed desires?

Henrietta

Always.

Steve

But they've just been discovered.

Henrietta

The harm they do has just been discovered. And free, sane people must face the fact that they have to be dealt with.

Mabel

[Stoutly.] I don't believe they have them in Chicago.

Henrietta

[Business of giving Mabel up.] People "have them" wherever the living Libido—the center of the soul's energy—is in conflict with petrified moral codes. That means everywhere in civilization. Psychoanalysis—

Steve

Good God! I've got the roof in the cellar!

Henrietta

The roof in the cellar!

Steve

[Holding plan at arm's length.] That's what psychoanalysis does!

Henrietta

That's what psychoanalysis could un-do. Is it any wonder I'm concerned about Steve? He dreamed the other night that the walls of his room melted away and he found himself alone in a forest. Don't you see how significant it is for an architect to have walls slip away from him? It symbolizes his loss of grip in his work. There's some suppressed desire—

Steve

[Hurling his ruined plan viciously to the floor.] Suppressed hell!

Henrietta

You speak more truly than you know. It is through suppressions that hells are formed in us.

Mabel

[Looking at Steve, who is tearing his hair.] Don't you think it would be a good thing, Henrietta, if we went somewhere else? [They rise and begin to pick up the dishes. Mabel drops a plate which breaks. Henrietta draws up short and looks at her—the psychoanalytic look.] I'm sorry, Henrietta. One of the Spode plates, too. [Surprised and resentful as Henrietta continues to peer at her.] Don't take it so to heart, Henrietta.

Henrietta

I can't help taking it to heart.

Mabel

I'll get you another. [Pause. More sharply as Henrietta does not answer.] I said I'll get you another plate, Henrietta.

Henrietta

It's not the plate.

Mabel

For heaven's sake, what is it then?

Henrietta

It's the significant little false movement that made you drop it.

Mabel

Well, I suppose everyone makes a false movement once in a while.

Henrietta

Yes, Mabel, but these false movements all mean something.

Mabel

[About to cry.] I don't think that's very nice! It was just because I happened to think of that Mabel Snow you were talking about—

Henrietta

Mabel Snow!

Mabel

Snow—Snow—well, what was her name, then?

Henrietta

Her name is Mary. You substituted your own name for hers.

Mabel

Well, Mary Snow, then; Mary Snow. I never heard her name but once. I don't see anything to make such a fuss about.

Henrietta

[Gently.] Mabel dear—mistakes like that in names—

Mabel

[Desperately.] They don't mean something, too, do they?

Henrietta

[Gently.] I am sorry, dear, but they do.

Mabel

But I'm always doing that!

Henrietta

[After a start of horror.] My poor little sister, tell me about it.

Mabel

About what?

Henrietta

About your not being happy. About your longing for another sort of life.

Mabel

But I don't.

Henrietta

Ah, I understand these things, dear. You feel Bob is limiting you to a life in which you do not feel free—

Mabel

Henrietta! When did I ever say such a thing?

Henrietta

You said you are not in touch with things intellectual. You showed your feeling that it is Bob's profession—that has engendered a resentment which has colored your whole life with him.

Mabel

Why—Henrietta!

Henrietta

Don't be afraid of me, little sister. There's nothing can shock me or turn me from you. I am not like that. I wanted you to come for this visit because I had a feeling that you needed more from life than you were getting. No one of these things I have seen would excite my suspicion. It's the combination. You don't eat breakfast [Enumerating on her fingers]; you make false moves; you substitute your own name for the name of another whose love is misdirected. You're nervous; you look queer; in your eyes there's a frightened look that is most unlike you. And this dream. A

hen. Come with me this afternoon to Dr. Russell! Your whole life may be at stake, Mabel.

Mabel

[Gasping.] Henrietta, I—you—you always were the smartest in the family, and all that, but—this is terrible! I don't think we ought to think such things. [Brightening.] Why, I'll tell you why I dreamed I was a hen. It was because last night, telling about that time in Chicago, you said I was as mad as a wet hen.

Henrietta

[Superior.] Did you dream you were a wet hen?

Mabel

[Forced to admit it.] No.

Henrietta

No. You dreamed you were a dry hen. And why, being a hen, were you urged to step?

Mabel

Maybe it's because when I am getting on a street car it always irritates me to have them call "Step lively."

Henrietta

No, Mabel, that is only a child's view of it—if you will forgive me. You see merely the elements used in the dream. You do not see into the dream; you do not see its meaning. This dream of the hen—

Steve

Hen—hen—wet hen—dry hen—mad hen! [Jumps up in a rage.] Let me out of this!

Henrietta

[Hastily picking up dishes, speaks soothingly.] Just a minute, dear, and we'll have

things so you can work in quiet. Mabel and I are going to sit in my room.

[She goes out left, carrying dishes.

Steve

[Seizing hat and coat from an alcove near the outside door.] I'm going to be psychoanalyzed. I'm going now! I'm going straight to that infallible doctor of hers—that priest of this new religion. If he's got honesty enough to tell Henrietta there's nothing the matter with my unconscious mind, perhaps I can be let alone about it, and then I will be all right. [From the door in a low voice.] Don't tell Henrietta I'm going. It might take weeks, and I couldn't stand all the talk.

[He hurries out.

Henrietta

[Returning.] Where's Steve? Gone? [With a hopeless gesture.] You see how impatient he is—how unlike himself! I tell you, Mabel, I'm nearly distracted about Steve.

Mabel

I think he's a little distracted, too.

Henrietta

Well, if he's gone—you might as well stay here. I have a committee meeting at the book-shop, and will have to leave you to yourself for an hour or two. [As she puts her hat on, taking it from the alcove where Steve found his, her eye, lighting up almost carnivorously, falls on an enormous volume on the floor beside the work table. The book has been half hidden by the wastebasket. She picks it up and carries it around the table toward Mabel.] Here, dear, is one of the simplest statements of psychoanalysis. You just read this and then we can talk more intelligently. [Mabel takes volume and staggers back under its weight to chair rear center, Henrietta goes to outer door, stops and asks abruptly.] How old is Lyman Eggleston?

Mabel

[Promptly.] He isn't forty yet. Why, what made you ask that, Henrietta?

[As she turns her head to look at Henrietta her hands move toward the upper corners of the book balanced on her knees.

Henrietta

Oh, nothing. Au revoir.

[She goes out. Mabel stares at the ceiling. The book slides to the floor. She starts; looks at the book, then at the broken plate on the table.]

The plate! The book! [She lifts her eyes, leans forward elbow on knee, chin on knuckles and plaintively queries] Am I unhappy?

(Curtain)

Scene II: Two weeks later. The stage is as in Scene I, except that the breakfast table has been removed. During the first few minutes the dusk of a winter afternoon deepens. Out of the darkness spring rows of double street-lights almost meeting in the distance. Henrietta is at the psychoanalytical end of Steve's work-table, surrounded by open books and periodicals, writing. Steve enters briskly.

Steve

What are you doing, my dear?

Henrietta

My paper for the Liberal Club.

Steve

Your paper on—?

Henrietta

On a subject which does not have your sympathy.

Steve

Oh, I'm not sure I'm wholly out of sympathy with psychoanalysis, Henrietta. You worked it so hard. I couldn't even take a bath without it's meaning something.

Henrietta

[Loftily.] I talked it because I knew you needed it.

Steve

You haven't said much about it these last two weeks. Uh—your faith in it hasn't weakened any?

Henrietta

Weakened? It's grown stronger with each new thing I've come to know. And Mabel. She is with Dr. Russell now. Dr. Russell is wonderful! From what Mabel tells me I believe his analysis is going to prove that I was right. Today I discovered a remarkable confirmation of my theory in the hen-dream.

Steve

What is your theory?

Henrietta

Well, you know about Lyman Eggleston. I've wondered about him. I've never seen him, but I know he's less bourgeois than Mabel's other friends—more intellectual—and [Significantly] she doesn't see much of him because Bob doesn't like him.

Steve

But what's the confirmation?

Henrietta

Today I noticed the first syllable of his name.

Steve

Ly?

Henrietta

No—egg.

Steve

Egg?

Henrietta

[Patiently.] Mabel dreamed she was a hen. [Steve laughs.] You wouldn't laugh if you knew how important names are in interpreting dreams. Freud is full of just such cases in which a whole hidden complex is revealed by a single significant syllable—like this egg.

Steve

Doesn't the traditional relation of hen and egg suggest rather a maternal feeling?

Henrietta

There is something maternal in Mabel's love, of course, but that's only one element.

Steve

Well, suppose Mabel hasn't a suppressed desire to be this gentleman's mother, but his beloved. What's to be done about it? What about Bob? Don't you think it's going to be a little rough on him?

Henrietta

That can't be helped. Bob, like everyone else, must face the facts of life. If Dr. Russell should arrive independently at this same interpretation I shall not hesitate to advise Mabel to leave her present husband.

Steve

Um—hum! [The lights go up on Fifth Avenue. Steve goes to the window and looks out.] How long is it we've lived here, Henrietta?

Henrietta

Why, this is the third year, Steve.

Steve

I—we—one would miss this view if one went away, wouldn't one?

Henrietta

How strangely you speak! Oh, Stephen, I wish you'd go to Dr. Russell. Don't think my fears have abated because I've been able to restrain myself. I had to on account of Mabel. But now, dear—won't you go?

Steve

I—[He breaks off, turns on the light, then comes and sits beside Henrietta.] How long have we been married, Henrietta?

Henrietta

Stephen, I don't understand you! You must go to Dr. Russell.

Steve

I have gone.

Henrietta

You—what?

Steve

[Jauntily.] Yes, Henrietta, I've been psyched.

Henrietta

You went to Dr. Russell?

Steve

The same.

Henrietta

And what did he say?

Steve

He said—I—I was a little surprised by what he said, Henrietta.

Henrietta

[Breathlessly.] Of course—one can so seldom anticipate. But tell me—your dream, Stephen? It means—?

Steve

It means—I was considerably surprised by what it means.

Henrietta

Don’t be so exasperating!

Steve

It means—you really want to know, Henrietta?

Henrietta

Stephen, you’ll drive me mad!

Steve

He said—of course he may be wrong in what he said.

Henrietta

He isn’t wrong. Tell me!

Steve

He said my dream of the walls receding and leaving me alone in a forest indicates a suppressed desire—

Henrietta

Yes—yes!

Steve

To be freed from—

Henrietta

Yes—freed from—?

Steve

Marriage.

Henrietta

[Crumples. Stares.] Marriage!

Steve

He—he may be mistaken, you know.

Henrietta

May be mistaken?

Steve

I—well, of course, I hadn't taken any stock in it myself. It was only your great confidence—

Henrietta

Stephen, are you telling me that Dr. Russell—Dr. A. E. Russell—told you this? [Steve nods.] Told you you have a suppressed desire to separate from me?

Steve

That's what he said.

Henrietta

Did he know who you were?

Steve

Yes.

Henrietta

That you were married to me?

Steve

Yes, he knew that.

Henrietta

And he told you to leave me?

Steve

It seems he must be wrong, Henrietta.

Henrietta

[Rising.] And I've sent him more patients—! [Catches herself and resumes coldly.] What reason did he give for this analysis?

Steve

He says the confining walls are a symbol of my feeling about marriage and that their fading away is a wish-fulfillment.

Henrietta

[Gulping.] Well, is it? Do you want our marriage to end?

Steve

It was a great surprise to me that I did. You see I hadn't known what was in my unconscious mind.

Henrietta

[Flaming.] What did you tell Dr. Russell about me to make him think you weren't happy?

Steve

I never told him a thing, Henrietta. He got it all from his confounded clever inferences. I—I tried to refute them, but he said that was only part of my self-protective lying.

Henrietta

And that's why you were so—happy—when you came in just now!

Steve

Why, Henrietta, how can you say such a thing? I was sad. Didn't I speak sadly of—of the view? Didn't I ask how long we had been married?

Henrietta

[Rising.] Stephen Brewster, have you no sense of the seriousness of this? Dr. Russell doesn't know what our marriage has been. You do. You should have laughed him down! Confined—in life with me? Did you tell him that I believe in freedom?

Steve

I very emphatically told him that his results were a great surprise to me.

Henrietta

But you accepted them.

Steve

Oh, not at all. I merely couldn't refute his arguments. I'm not a psychologist. I came home to talk it over with you. You being a disciple of psychoanalysis—

Henrietta

If you are going, I wish you would go tonight!

Steve

Oh, my dear! I—surely I couldn't do that! Think of my feelings. And my laundry hasn't come home.

Henrietta

I ask you to go tonight. Some women would falter at this, Steve, but I am not such a woman. I leave you free. I do not repudiate psychoanalysis; I say again that it has done great things. It has also made mistakes, of course. But since you accept this analysis—[She sits down and pretends to begin work.] I have to finish this paper. I

wish you would leave me.

Steve

[Scratches his head, goes to the inner door.] I'm sorry, Henrietta, about my unconscious mind.

[Alone, Henrietta's face betrays her outraged state of mind—disconcerted, resentful, trying to pull herself together. She attains an air of bravely bearing an outrageous thing.—The outer door opens and Mabel enters in great excitement.

Mabel

[Breathless.] Henrietta, I'm so glad you're here. And alone? [Looks toward the inner door.] Are you alone, Henrietta?

Henrietta

[With reproving dignity.] Very much so.

Mabel

[Rushing to her.] Henrietta, he's found it!

Henrietta

[Aloof.] Who has found what?

Mabel

Who has found what? Dr. Russell has found my suppressed desire!

Henrietta

That is interesting.

Mabel

He finished with me today—he got hold of my complex—in the most amazing way! But, oh, Henrietta—it is so terrible!

Henrietta

Do calm yourself, Mabel. Surely there's no occasion for all this agitation.

Mabel

But there is! And when you think of the lives that are affected—the readjustments that must be made in order to bring the suppressed hell out of me and save me from the insane asylum—!

Henrietta

The insane asylum!

Mabel

You said that's where these complexes brought people!

Henrietta

What did the doctor tell you, Mabel?

Mabel

Oh, I don't know how I can tell you—it is so awful—so unbelievable.

Henrietta

I rather have my hand in at hearing the unbelievable.

Mabel

Henrietta, who would ever have thought it? How can it be true? But the doctor is perfectly certain that I have a suppressed desire for—

[Looks at Henrietta, is unable to continue.

Henrietta

Oh, go on, Mabel. I'm not unprepared for what you have to say.

Mabel

Not unprepared? You mean you have suspected it?

Henrietta

From the first. It's been my theory all along.

Mabel

But, Henrietta, I didn’t know myself that I had this secret desire for Stephen.

Henrietta

[Jumps up.] Stephen!

Mabel

My brother-in-law! My own sister’s husband!

Henrietta

You have a suppressed desire for Stephen!

Mabel

Oh, Henrietta, aren’t these unconscious selves terrible? They seem so unlike us!

Henrietta

What insane thing are you driving at?

Mabel

[Blubbering.] Henrietta, don’t you use that word to me. I don’t want to go to the insane asylum.

Henrietta

What did Dr. Russell say?

Mabel

Well, you see—oh, it’s the strangest thing! But you know the voice in my dream that called “Step, Hen!” Dr. Russell found out today that when I was a little girl I had a story-book in words of one syllable and I read the name Stephen wrong. I used to read it S-t-e-p, step, h-e-n, hen. [Dramatically.] Step Hen is Stephen. [Enter Stephen, his head bent over a time-table.] Stephen is Step Hen!

Steve

I? Step Hen?

Mabel

[Triumphantly.] S-t-e-p, step, H-e-n, hen, Stephen!

Henrietta

[Exploding.] Well, what if Stephen is Step Hen? [Scornfully.] Step Hen! Step Hen! For that ridiculous coincidence—

Mabel

Coincidence! But it's childish to look at the mere elements of a dream. You have to look into it—you have to see what it means!

Henrietta

On account of that trivial, meaningless play on syllables—on that flimsy basis—you are ready—[Wails.] O-h!

Steve

What on earth's the matter? What has happened? Suppose I am Step Hen? What about it? What does it mean?

Mabel

[Crying.] It means—that I—have a suppressed desire for you!

Steve

For me! The deuce you have! [Feebly.] What—er—makes you think so?

Mabel

Dr. Russell has worked it out scientifically.

Henrietta

Yes. Through the amazing discovery that Step Hen equals Stephen!

Mabel

[Tearfully.] Oh, that isn't all—that isn't near all. Henrietta won't give me a chance to tell it. She'd rather I'd go to the insane asylum than be unconventional.

Henrietta

We'll all go there if you can't control yourself. We are still waiting for some rational report.

Mabel

[Drying her eyes.] Oh, there's such a lot about names. [With some pride.] I don't see how I ever did it. It all works in together. I dreamed I was a hen because that's the first syllable of Hen-rietta's name, and when I dreamed I was a hen, I was putting myself in Henrietta's place.

Henrietta

With Stephen?

Mabel

With Stephen.

Henrietta

[Outraged.] Oh! [Turns in rage upon Stephen, who is fanning himself with the time-table.] What are you doing with that time-table?

Steve

Why—I thought—you were so keen to have me go tonight—I thought I'd just take a run up to Canada, and join Billy—a little shooting—but—

Mabel

But there's more about the names.

Henrietta

Mabel, have you thought of Bob—dear old Bob—your good, kind husband?

Mabel

Oh, Henrietta, "my good, kind husband!"

Henrietta

Think of him, Mabel, out there alone in Chicago, working his head off, fixing people's teeth—for you!

Mabel

Yes, but think of the living Libido—in conflict with petrified moral codes! And think of the perfectly wonderful way the names all prove it. Dr. Russell said he's never seen anything more convincing. Just look at Stephen's last name—Brewster. I dream I'm a hen, and the name Brewster—you have to say its first letter by itself—and then the hen, that's me, she says to him: "Stephen, Be Rooster!"

[Henrietta and Stephen collapse into the nearest chairs.

Mabel

I think it's perfectly wonderful! Why, if it wasn't for psychoanalysis you'd never find out how wonderful your own mind is!

Steve

[Begins to chuckle.] Be Rooster! Stephen, Be Rooster!

Henrietta

You think it's funny, do you?

Steve

Well, what's to be done about it? Does Mabel have to go away with me?

Henrietta

Do you want Mabel to go away with you?

Steve

Well, but Mabel herself—her complex—her suppressed desire—!

Henrietta

[Going to her.] Mabel, are you going to insist on going away with Stephen?

Mabel

I'd rather go with Stephen than go to the insane asylum!

Henrietta

For heaven's sake, Mabel, drop that insane asylum! If you did have a suppressed desire for Stephen hidden away in you—God knows it isn't hidden now. Dr. Russell has brought it into your consciousness—with a vengeance. That's all that's necessary to break up a complex. Psychoanalysis doesn't say you have to gratify every suppressed desire.

Steve

[Softly.] Unless it's for Lyman Eggleston.

Henrietta

[Turning on him.] Well, if it comes to that, Stephen Brewster, I'd like to know why that interpretation of mine isn't as good as this one? Step, Hen!

Steve

But Be Rooster! [He pauses, chuckling to himself.] Step-Hen B-rooster. And Henrietta. Pshaw, my dear, Doc Russell's got you beat a mile! [He turns away and chuckles.] Be rooster!

Mabel

What has Lyman Eggleston got to do with it?

Steve

According to Henrietta, you, the hen, have a suppressed desire for Eggleston, the egg.

Mabel

Henrietta, I think that's indecent of you! He is bald as an egg and little and fat—the idea of you thinking such a thing of me!

Henrietta

Well, Bob isn't little and bald and fat! Why don't you stick to your own husband? [To Stephen.] What if Dr. Russell's interpretation has got mine "beat a mile"? [Resentful look at him.] It would only mean that Mabel doesn't want Eggleston and does want you. Does that mean she has to have you?

Mabel

But you said Mabel Snow—

Henrietta

Mary Snow! You're not as much like her as you think—substituting your name for hers! The cases are entirely different. Oh, I wouldn't have believed this of you, Mabel. [Beginning to cry.] I brought you here for a pleasant visit—thought you needed brightening up—wanted to be nice to you—and now you—my husband—you insist—

[In fumbling her way to her chair she brushes to the floor some sheets from the psychoanalytical table.

Steve

[With solicitude.] Careful, dear. Your paper on psychoanalysis!

[Gathers up sheets and offers them to her.

Henrietta

I don't want my paper on psychoanalysis! I'm sick of psychoanalysis!

Steve

[Eagerly.] Do you mean that, Henrietta?

Henrietta

Why shouldn't I mean it? Look at all I've done for psychoanalysis—and—[Raising a tear-stained face] what has psychoanalysis done for me?

Steve

Do you mean, Henrietta, that you're going to stop talking psychoanalysis?

Henrietta

Why shouldn't I stop talking it? Haven't I seen what it does to people? Mabel has gone crazy about psychoanalysis!

[At the word "crazy" with a moan Mabel sinks to chair and buries her face in her hands.

Steve

[Solemnly.] Do you swear never to wake me up in the night to find out what I'm dreaming?

Henrietta

Dream what you please—I don't care what you're dreaming.

Steve

Will you clear off my work-table so the Journal of Morbid Psychology doesn't stare me in the face when I'm trying to plan a house?

Henrietta

[Pushing a stack of periodicals off the table.] I'll burn the Journal of Morbid Psychology!

Steve

My dear Henrietta, if you're going to separate from psychoanalysis, there's no reason why I should separate from you.

[They embrace ardently. Mabel lifts her head and looks at them woefully.

Mabel

[Jumping up and going toward them.] But what about me? What am I to do with my suppressed desire?

Steve

[With one arm still around Henrietta, gives Mabel a brotherly hug.] Mabel, you just keep right on suppressing it!

(Curtain)

TICKLESS TIME A COMEDY IN ONE ACT (In Collaboration with George Cram Cook) First performed by the Provincetown Players, New York, December 20, 1918

ORIGINAL CAST

Ian Joyce, Who Has Made a Sun-dialJames Light Eloise Joyce, Wedded to the Sun-dialNorma Millay Mrs. Stubbs, a NativeJean Robb Eddy Knight, a Standardized MindHutchinson Collins Alice Knight, a Standardized WifeAlice MacDougal Annie, Who Cooks by the Joyces' ClockEdna St. Vincent Millay

TICKLESS TIME

Scene: A garden in Provincetown. On the spectator's right a two-story house runs back from the proscenium—a door towards the front, a second-story window towards the back. Across the back runs a thick-set row of sunflowers nearly concealing a fence or wall. Back of this are trees and sky. There is a gate at the left rear corner of the garden. People entering it come straight toward the front, down the left side and, to reach the house door, pass across the front of the stage. A fence with sunflowers like that at the back closes off the left wing of the stage—a tree behind this left fence.

The sun-dial stands on a broad step or pedestal which partly masks the digging which takes place behind it. The position of the sun-dial is to the left of the center of the stage midway between front and back.

From behind the tree on the left the late afternoon sun throws a well-defined beam of light upon the horizontal plate of the sun-dial and upon the shaft which supports it. On this shaft is the accompanying diagram: two feet high and clearly visible.

Sun dial correction graph.

On the plate of the sun-dial stands the alarm-clock. A huge shovel leans against the wall of the house-corner at the back.

Ian is at the sun-dial. He sights over the style to some distant stake left rear, marking the north. He then sights over the east and west line toward the six o'clock sun. Looks at shadow. Looks at alarm clock. Is intensely pleased.

Ian

[Turning toward house and calling excitedly.] Eloise! Oh, Eloise!

Eloise

[Inside house.] Hello!

Ian

Come quick! You'll miss it.

Eloise

[Poking her head out of the second-story window; she cranes her neck to look straight up in the air.] What is it?

Ian

Come down here quick or you'll miss it.

Eloise

[Disappears from window. A moment later comes running out, one braid of hair up and one braid down. Again looks wildly up in the air.] Where is it?

Ian

[Absorbed in the sun-dial.] Where's what?

Eloise

The airplane.

Ian

Airplane? It's the sun-dial. It's right. Just look at this six o'clock shadow. [She goes around to the other side of it.] It's absolutely, mathematically—you're in the way of the sun, Eloise. [She steps aside.] Look! the style is set square on the true north—this is the fifteenth of June—the clock is checked to the second by telegraph with the observatory at Washington and see! the clock is exactly nineteen minutes and twenty seconds behind the shadow—the precise difference between Provincetown local time and standard Eastern time.

Eloise

Then the sun-dial's really finished—and working right! After all these, weeks! Oh, Ian!

[Embraces him.

Ian

It's good to get it right after all those mistakes. [With vision.] Why, Eloise, getting this right has been a symbol of man's whole search for truth—the discovery and correction of error—the mind compelled to conform step by step to astronomical fact—to truth.

Eloise

[Going to it again.] And to think that it's the sun-dial which is true and the clock—all the clocks—are wrong! I'm glad it is true. Alice Knight has been here talking to me for an hour. I want to think that something's true.

Ian

That's just it, Eloise. The sun-dial is more than sun-dial. It's a first-hand relation with truth. A personal relation. When you take your time from a clock you are mechanically getting information from a machine. You're nothing but a clock yourself.

Eloise

Like Alice Knight.

Ian

But the sun-dial—this shadow is an original document—a scholar's source.

Eloise

To tell time by the shadow of the sun—so large and simple.

Ian

I wouldn't call it simple. Here on this diagram I have worked out—

Eloise

Dearest, you know I can't understand diagrams. But I get the feeling of it, Ian—the sun, the North star. I love to think that this [Placing her hands on the style] is set by the North star. [Her right hand remains on the style, her left prolongs its line heavenward.] Why, if I could go on long enough I'd get to the North star!

Ian

[Impressively.] The line that passes along the edge of this style joins the two poles of the heavens. [Eloise pulls away her hand as one who fears an electric shock.] Look at this slow shadow and what you see is the spin of the earth on its axis. It is not so much the measure of time as time itself made visible.

Eloise

[Knitting her brows to get this: escaping to an impetuous generality.] Ian, which do you think is the more wonderful—space or time?

Ian

[Again sighting over his east and west lines. Good-humoredly.] Both are a little large for our approbation.

Eloise

[Sitting on the steps and putting up the other braid.] Do you know, Ian, that's the

one thing about them I don't quite like. You can't get very intimate with them, can you? They make you so humble. That's one nice thing about a clock. A clock is sometimes wrong.

Ian

Don't you want to live in a first-hand relation to truth?

Eloise

Yes; yes, I do—generally.

Ian

I have a feeling as of having touched vast forces. To work directly with worlds—it lifts me out of that little routine of our lives which is itself a clock.

Eloise

[Catching his exultation.] Let us be like this! Let us have done with clocks!

Ian

Eloise, how wonderful! Can the clocks and live by the sun-dial? Live by the non-automatic sun-dial—as a pledge that we ourselves refuse to be automatons!

Eloise

Like Alice Knight. [She takes clock from dial and puts it face downward on the ground.] I shall never again have anything to do with a clock!

Ian

Eloise! How corking of you! I didn't think you had it in you. [Raising his right hand.] Do you solemnly swear to live by the truth, the whole truth and nothing but the truth?

Eloise

[Her hand upon the sun-dial.] I swear.

Ian

Bring them!

Eloise

Bring—?

Ian

The clocks! Bring them! [Seizes the spade over by the house; begins to dig a grave behind the sun-dial.] Bring every one! We will bury the clocks before the sun-dial—an offering, a living sacrifice. I tell you this is great, Eloise. What is a clock? Something agreed upon and arbitrarily imposed upon us. Standard time. Not true time. Symbolizing the whole standardization of our lives. Clocks! Why, it is clockiness that makes America mechanical and mean! Clock-minded! A clock is a little machine that shuts us out from the wonder of time. [A large gesture with the shovel.] Who thinks of spinning worlds when looking at a clock? How dare clocks do this to us? But the sun-dial—because there was creation, because there are worlds outside our world, because space is rhythm and time is flow that shadow falls precisely there and not elsewhere! Bring them, Eloise! I am digging the graves of the clocks!

[Eloise swept up by this ecstasy, yet frightened at what it is bringing her to, hesitates, then runs to house. Ian digs with rhythmic vigor. A moment later Eloise is seen peering down at him from window, in her arms a cuckoo clock. It begins to cuckoo, startling Eloise.

Ian

That damned cuckoo!

[A moment later Eloise comes out, bearing cuckoo clock and an old-fashioned clock. Ian’s back is to her; she has to pass the alarm clock, lying where she left it, prone on the ground. She hesitates, then carefully holding the other two clocks in one arm, she stealthily goes rear and puts the alarm clock behind the sunflowers. Then advances with the other two.

Ian

[While digging.] Into these graves go all that is clock-like in our own minds. All that a clock world has made of us lies buried here!

[Eloise stands rather appalled at the idea of so much of herself going into a grave. Puts the old-fashioned clock carefully on the ground. Gingerly fits the cuckoo clock into the completed grave. With an exclamation of horror lifts it out of the grave. Listens to its tick. Puts her ear to the sun-dial; listens vainly.

Eloise

The sun-dial doesn't tick, does it, Ian?

Ian

Why should it tick?

Eloise

Do you know, Ian, I [Timidly] I like to hear the ticking of a clock. [No reply. Eloise holds up the cuckoo clock.] This was a wedding present.

Ian

No wonder marriage fails.

[He moves to take it from her.

Eloise

I wonder if we hadn't better leave the cuckoo until tomorrow.

Ian

Flaming worlds! A cuckoo!

Eloise

Eddy and Alice gave us the cuckoo. You know they're coming back. I asked them for dinner. They might not understand our burying their clock.

Ian

Their failure to understand need not limit our lives.

[Puts the cuckoo clock in its grave and begins to cover it.

Eloise

[As the earth goes on.] I liked the cuckoo! I liked to see him popping out!

Ian

[Kindly.] You will grow, Eloise. You will go out to large things now that you have done with small ones.

Eloise

I hope so. It will be hard on me if I don't.

[Ian reaches for the other clock.

Eloise

[Snatching it.] Oh, Ian, I don't think I ought to bury this one. It's the clock my grandmother started housekeeping with!

Ian

[Firmly taking clock.] And see what it did to her. Meticulous old woman!

[Puts it in its grave.

Eloise

You were glad enough to get her pies and buckwheat cakes.

Ian

She had all the small virtues. But a standardized mind. [Trampling down the grave.] She lacked scope. And now—a little grave for little clocks. [Takes out his watch, puts it in the grave.] Your watch, Eloise.

Eloise

[Holding to her wrist watch.] I thought I'd keep my watch, Ian. [Hastily.] For an ornament, you know.

Ian

We are going to let truth be your ornament, Eloise.

Eloise

Nobody sees truth. [With a fresh outburst.] This watch was my graduation present!

Ian

Symbolizing all the standardized arbitrary things you were taught! Commemorating the clock-like way your mind was made to run. Free yourself of that watch, Eloise. [Eloise reluctantly frees herself. Ian briskly covers the watches. Moves to the unfilled grave.] Is there nothing for this grave? [Eloise shakes her head.] Sure—the alarm clock!

Eloise

[Running to the sunflowers and spreading out her skirts before them.] Oh, Ian, not the alarm clock! How would we ever go to Boston? The train doesn't run by the sun.

Ian

Then the train is wrong.

Eloise

But, Ian, if the train is wrong we have to be wrong to catch the train.

Ian

That's civilization. [Stands resolutely by the grave.] The alarm clock, Eloise. The grave awaits it.

Eloise

[Taking it up, her arms folded around it.] I wanted to go to Boston and buy a hat!

Ian

The sun will fall upon your dear head and give you life.

Eloise

[About to cry.] But no style! It ticks so loud and sure!

Ian

All false things are loud and sure.

Eloise

I need a tick! I am afraid of tickless time!

[Holding the clock in both hands she places it against her left ear.

Ian

[Spade still in his right hand, he places his left arm around her reassuringly.] You will grow, Eloise. You are growing.

[He takes the clock as he is saying this. She turns her head backward following the departing clock with surprised and helpless eyes. Disconsolately watches him bury it.

Eloise

[An inspiration.] Ian! Couldn't you fix the sun-dial to be set and go off?

Ian

[Pained.] "Set and go off?" [Pause; regards the sun.] Sine sole sileo.

Eloise

What did you say, Ian?

Ian

I said: Sine sole sileo.

Eloise

Well, I don't know what you say when you say that.

Ian

It's a Latin motto I've just thought of for the sun-dial. It means, "Without sun, I am silent." Silence is a great virtue. [Having finished the grave, he looks around,

making sure there are no more clocks. Joyously.] Now we are freed! Eloise, think what life is going to be! Done with approximations. Done with machine thinking. In a world content with false time, we are true.

Eloise

[Sitting on the steps.] Yes, it's beautiful. I want to be true. It's just that it's a little hard to be true in a false world. For instance, tomorrow I have an appointment with the dentist. If I come on sun-time I suppose I'll be twenty minutes—

Ian

[Eagerly. Going to the sun-dial and pointing.] If you will just let me explain this table—[Eloise shrinks back. Ian gives it up.] Oh, well, tell him you are living by the truth.

Eloise

I'm afraid he'll charge me for it. And when we ask people for dinner at seven, they'll get here at twenty minutes of seven. Or will it be twenty minutes after seven?

Ian

[Smoothing down graves.] It will be a part of eternal time.

Eloise

Yes,—that's true. Only the roast isn't so eternal. Why do they have clocks wrong?

Ian

Oh, Eloise, I've explained it so many times. You—living in Provincetown, three hundred miles to the eastward, are living by the mean solar time of Philadelphia. [Venomously.] Do you want to live by the mean solar time of Philadelphia?

Eloise

Certainly not. [An idea.] Then has Philadelphia got the right time?

Ian

It’s right six miles this side of Philadelphia.

Eloise

We might move to Philadelphia.

[Enter through gate, Mrs. Stubbs, a Provincetown “native.”

Mrs. Stubbs

Now, Mr. Joyce, this sun clock,—is it running?

Ian

It doesn’t “run,” Mrs. Stubbs. It is acted upon.

Mrs. Stubbs

Oh. Well, is it being acted upon?

Ian

As surely as the sun shines.

Mrs. Stubbs

[Looking at the sun.] And it is shining today, isn’t it? Well, will you tell me the time? My clock has stopped and I want to set it.

Ian

[Happily.] You hear, Eloise? Her clock has stopped.

Mrs. Stubbs

Yes, I forgot to wind it.

Eloise

[Grieved to think of any one living in such a world.] Wind it!

Ian

Do you not see, Mrs. Stubbs, where the shadow falls? [She comes up the steps.] From its millions of spinn—You’re in the way of the sun, Mrs. Stubbs. [She steps

aside.] Its millions of spinning miles the sun casts that shadow and here we know that it is eight minutes past six.

Mrs. Stubbs

Now, ain't that wonderful? Dear, dear, I wish Mr. Stubbs could make a sun clock. But he's not handy around the house. Past six. Well, I must hurry back. They work tonight at the cold storage but Mr. Stubbs gets home for his supper at half past six.

[Starts away, reaching the gate.

Eloise

[Running to her.] Oh, Mrs. Stubbs! Don't get his supper by sun time. It wouldn't be ready. It—[With a hesitant look at Ian] might get cold. [Mrs. Stubbs stares.] You see, Mr. Stubbs is coming home by the mean solar time of Philadelphia.

Mrs. Stubbs

[Loyal to Mr. Stubbs.] Who said he was?

Eloise

[In distress.] Oh, it's all so false! And arbitrary!

[To Ian.] But I think Mrs. Stubbs had better be false and arbitrary too. Mr. Stubbs might rather have his supper than the truth.

Mrs. Stubbs

[Advancing a little.] What is this about my being false? And—arbitrary?

Eloise

You see, you have to be, Mrs. Stubbs. We don't blame you. How can you live by the truth if Mr. Stubbs doesn't work by it?

Mrs. Stubbs

This is the first word I ever heard said against Johnnie Stubbs' way of freezin' fish.

Eloise

Oh, Mrs. Stubbs, if it were merely his way of freezing fish!

Ian

Since you are not trying to establish a direct relation with truth, set your clock at five minutes of six. The clocks, as would be clear to you if you would establish a first-hand relation with this diagram, Eloise, are slow.

Mrs. Stubbs

You mean your sun clock's wrong.

Ian

All other clocks are wrong.

Eloise

You live by the mean solar time of Philadelphia.

Mrs. Stubbs

I do no such thing!

Eloise

Yes, you do, Mrs. Stubbs. You see the sun can't be both here and in Philadelphia at the same time. Now could it? So we have to pretend to be where it is in Philadelphia.

Mrs. Stubbs

Who said we did?

Eloise

Well, [After a look at Ian] the Government.

Mrs. Stubbs

Them congressmen!

Eloise

But Mr. Joyce and I—You're standing on a grave, Mrs. Stubbs. [Mrs. Stubbs

jumps.] The grave of my grandmother's clock. [In reply to Mrs. Stubbs look of amazement.] Oh, yes! That clock has done harm enough. Mrs. Stubbs, think what time is—and then consider my grandmother's clock! Tick, tick! Tick, tick! Messing up eternity like that!

Mrs. Stubbs

[After failing to think of anything adequate.] I must get Mr. Stubbs his supper!

[Frightened exit.

Ian

[Standing near house door.] Eloise, how I love you when feeling lifts you out of routine! Do you know, dearest, you are very sensitive in the way you feel feeling? Sometimes I think that to feel feeling is greater than to feel. You're like the dial. Your sensitiveness is the style—the gnomon—to cast the shadow of the feeling all around you and mark what has been felt.

[They embrace. Eddy and Alice open the gate.

Eddy

Ahem! [He comes down.] Ahem! We seem to have come ahead of time.

Eloise

Oh, Eddy! Alice! [Moving toward Eddy but not passing the dial.] We are living by sun time now. You haven't arrived for twenty minutes.

Eddy

We haven't arrived for twenty minutes? [Feeling of himself.] Why do I seem to be here?

Alice

[Approaching dial.] So this is the famous sun-dial? How very interesting it is!

Eloise

It’s more than that.

Alice

Yes, it’s really beautiful, isn’t it?

Eloise

It’s more than that.

Eddy

Is it?

Eloise

It’s a symbol. It means that Ian and I are done with approximations arbitrarily and falsely imposed upon us.

Eddy

Well, I should think you would be. Who’s been doing that to you?

Eloise

Don’t step on the graves, please, Alice.

Alice

[Starting back in horror.] Graves?

Eloise

[Pointing down.] The lies we inherited lie buried there.

Eddy

Well, I should think that might make quite a graveyard. So the sun-dial is built on lies.

Eloise

Indeed it is not!

Alice

Does it keep time?

Ian

It doesn't "keep" time. It gives it.

Eddy

[Comparing with his watch.] Well, it gives it wrong. It's twenty minutes fast.

[Ian and Eloise smile at one another in a superior way.

Alice

You couldn't expect a home-made clock to be perfectly accurate. I think it's doing very well to come within twenty minutes of the true time.

Ian

It is true time.

Eloise

You think it's twenty minutes fast because your puny, meticulous little watch is twenty minutes slow.

Alice

Why is it, Eddy? [Comparing watches across the sun-dial.] No, Eddy's watch is right by mine.

Ian

And neither of you is right by the truth.

Eloise

[Pityingly.] Don't you know that you are running by the mean solar time of Philadelphia?

Eddy

Well, isn't everybody else running that way?

Eloise

Does that make it right?

Eddy

I get you. You are going to cast off standard time and live by solar time.

Eloise

Lies for truth.

Eddy

But how are you going to connect up with other people?

Ian

We can allow for their mistakes.

Eloise

We will connect with other people in so far as other people are capable of connecting with the truth!

Eddy

I’m afraid you’ll be awful lonesome sometimes.

Alice

But, Eloise, do you mean to say that you are going to insist on being right when other people are wrong?

Eloise

I insist upon it.

Alice

What a life!

Eddy

Come now, what difference does it make if we’re wrong if we’re all wrong together?

Ian

That idea has made a clock of the human mind.

[Enter Annie.

Annie

Mrs. Joyce, can’t I have my clock back now? I don’t know when to start dinner.

Ian

[Consulting dial.] By true time, Annie, it is twenty minutes past six.

Eloise

[Confidentially.] By false time, it is six.

Annie

I have to have my kitchen clock back.

[She looks around for it.

Ian

We are done with clocks, Annie.

Annie

You mean I’m not to have it back?

Eloise

It lies buried there.

Annie

Buried? My clock buried? It’s not dead!

Ian

It’s dead to us, Annie.

Annie

[After looking at the grave.] Do I get a new clock?

Eloise

We are going to establish a first-hand relation with truth.

Annie

You can’t cook without a clock.

Ian

A superstition. And anyway—have you not the sun?

Annie

[After regarding the sun.] I’d rather have a clock than the sun.

[Returns to her clockless kitchen.

Ian

That’s what clocks have made of the human mind.

Eddy

[Coming to Ian.] Of course, this is all a joke.

Ian

The attempt to reach truth has always been thought a joke.

Eddy

But this isn’t any new truth! Why re-reach it?

Ian

I’m reaching it myself. I’m getting the impact—as of a fresh truth.

Alice

But hasn’t it all been worked out for us?

Ian

And we take it never knowing—never feeling—what it is we take.

Eloise

And that has made us the mechanical things we are!

Annie

[Frantically rushes in, peeling an onion.] Starting the sauce for the spaghetti. Fry onions in butter three minutes.

[Wildly regards sun-dial—traces curved line of diagram with knife. Looks despairingly at the sun. Tears back into house.

Ian

You get no sense of wonder in looking at a clock.

Alice

Yes, do you know, I do. I've always thought that clocks were perfectly wonderful. I never could understand how they could run like that.

Eloise

I suppose you know they run wrong?

Eddy

What do you mean "run wrong?"

Eloise

Why, you are running by the mean solar time of Philadelphia! And yet here you are in Provincetown where the sun is a very different matter. You have no direct relation with the sun.

Eddy

That doesn't seem to worry me much.

Ian

No, it wouldn't worry you, Eddy. You're too perfect a product of a standardized world.

[Eddy bows acknowledgment.

Annie

[Rushing out to look at dial.] Add meat, brown seven minutes.

[Measures seven minutes between thumb and finger, holds up this fragment of time made visible and carries it carefully into the house.

Eddy

That girl'll get heart disease.

Ian

Let her establish a first-hand relation to heat. If she'd take a look at the food instead of the clock—!

Eddy

Trouble is we have to establish a first-hand relation with the spaghetti. [Eddy now comes down and regards the sun-dial. Moralizes.] If other people have got the wrong dope, you've got to have the wrong dope or be an off ox.

Ian

Perfect product of a standardized nation!

Eddy

[Pointing with his stick.] What's this standardized snake?

Ian

That's my diagram correcting the sun.

Eddy

Does one correct the sun?

Eloise

[From behind the dial.] Ian! Correcting the sun!

Ian

You see there are only four days in the year when the apparent time is the same as

the average time.

Eloise

[In growing alarm.] Do you mean to tell me the sun is not right with itself?

Ian

I've tried to explain it to you, Eloise, but you said you could get the feeling of it without understanding it. This curve [Pointing] marks the variation. Here today, you see, the shadow is "right" as you call it—that is, average. It will be right again here in September and again on December twenty-first.

Alice

My birthday!

Eloise

Ian, you mean to say the sun only tells the right sun-time four days in the year?

Ian

It always tells the "right" sun-time, but here the said right sun-time is fifteen minutes behind its own average, and here it is sixteen minutes ahead. This scale here across the bottom shows you the number of minutes to add or subtract.

Eloise

[With bitterness.] Add! Subtract! Then you and your sun are false!

Ian

No, Eloise, not false. Merely intricate. Merely not regular. Machines are regular.

Eloise

You got me to bury the clocks and live by the sun—and now you tell me you have to fix up the sun.

Ian

It was you who said bury the clocks.

Eloise

I suppose you have to do something to the North star too!

Ian

Yes, the North star is not true north.

[He starts to point out its error, sighting over the style of the dial.

Eloise

What is true? What is true?

Ian

[With vision.] The mind of man.

Eloise

I think I'd better have a clock. [A new gust.] You told me I was to live by the sun and now—after the clocks are in their graves—what I am to live by is that snake.

[She points at diagram.

Ian

You are a victim of misplaced confidence, Eloise. Sometimes when one feels things without understanding them, one feels the wrong thing. But there's nothing to worry about. The sun and I can take care of the sun's irregularities.

Eddy

Take heart, Eloise. It's a standardized sun.

Ian

It's not a blindly accepted sun!

Annie

[Who comes as one not to be put aside.] What'll I do when it rains?

Ian

You'll use your mind.

Annie

To tell time by? [Looking to Eloise.] I think I'd better find another place.

Alice

[Coming forward, regarding this as a really serious matter.] No, don't do that, Annie.

Eloise

[Tearfully.] You don't know the wonders of your own mind!

Annie

No, ma'm. [After a look at the sun, becomes terrified.] It's going down!

Eddy

Yes, it goes down.

Annie

How'll we tell time when it's dark?

Ian

Sine sole sileo.

Annie

Is that saying how we'll know when it's time to go to bed?

Ian

The doves know when to go to bed.

Annie

The doves don't go to the pictures.

Eloise

[Hysterically.] You'll grow, Annie!

Annie

I’d rather have a clock!

[Exit.

Ian

She’d rather have a clock than grow.

Alice

Now why can’t one do both?

Ian

One doesn’t—that’s the answer. One merely has the clock. I’d rather be a fool than a machine.

Eddy

I never definitely elected to be either.

Ian

One can be both without electing either.

Eloise

I want to hear the ticking of a clock!

Eddy

It’s a nice thing to hear. The ticking of a clock means the minds of many men. As long as the mind of man has to—fix up the facts of nature in order to create ideal time I feel it’s a little more substantial to have the minds of many men.

Alice

As I’ve told you before, Eloise, you can’t do better than accept the things that have been all worked out for you.

Ian

You hear them, Eloise? You see where this defense of clocks is leading?

Eloise

Ian, I’m terribly worried—and a little hurt—about the sun. [As one beginning a dirge.] The sun has failed me. The North star is false.

Ian

[Going to her.] I am here, dearest.

Eloise

Sometimes you seem so much like space. I am running by the sun—that wobbly sun [Looking at it] and everyone else is running by Philadelphia. I want a little clock to tick to me!

Ian

You will grow, dearest.

Eloise

There’s no use growing. The things you grow to are wrong. [Pressing her hands to her head.] I need a tick in time!

Ian

[Striding savagely from her.] Very well, then; dig up the clocks.

Eddy

Now you’re? talking!

[Eloise springs up.

Ian

Dig up the clocks! And we spend our lives nineteen minutes and twenty seconds apart!

[Eloise is arrested, appalled. Dreadful pause.

Eloise

You mean we’d never get together?

Ian

Time would lie between us. I refuse to be re-caught into a clock world. It was you, Eloise, who proposed we give up the clocks and live in this first-hand relation to truth.

Eloise

I didn't know I was proposing a first-hand relation with that snake!

Ian

It's not a snake! It's a little piece of the long winding road to truth. It's the discarding of error, the adjustment of fact. And I did it myself. And it puts me on that road. Oh, I know [To Eddy and Alice] how you can laugh if you yourself feel no need to feel truth. And you, Eloise, if you don't want to feel time—return to your mean little clock. What is a clock? A clock is the soulless—

[The alarm clock enters a protest. Smothered sound of the alarm going off underground. Eloise screams.

Eloise

The alarm clock! It's going off!

Alice

Buried alive!

Eloise

Oh, no—oh, no! How terrible! Ian, how terrible!

[She runs to him. Alarm clock, being intermittent, goes off again.

Ian

Eloise, if you listen to the voice of that clock—!

Eddy

How bravely it tries to function in its grave!

Alice

The death struggle—the last gasp!

[With another scream Eloise snatches spade, begins to dig; alarm clock gives another little gasp; spade is too slow for her: in her desperation goes to it with her hands. Gets it and, as she holds it aloft, the alarm clock rings its triumph.

Eloise

[Holding it to her ear.] It's ticking! It ticks! It ticks! Oh, it's good to hear the ticking of a clock!

[As he hears this, Ian, after a moment of terrible silence, goes and unscrews the plate of the sun-dial. All watch him, afraid to speak. He takes it off, holds it above the grave from which the alarm clock has been rescued.

Eloise

Ian! What are you doing? [He does not answer, but puts the sun-dial in the alarm clock's grave.] Ian! No! No! Not that! Not your beautiful sun-dial! Oh, no! Not that!

[Ian, having finished the burial of the sun-dial, sees the alarm clock and puts it on the pedestal from which the sun-dial has been taken.

Ian

We bow down, as of old, to the mechanical. We will have no other god but it.

[He then sits on the step, sunk in gloom. Annie appears, in her hand a panful of water.

Annie

This liver has to soak five minutes. I'll soak it here. [Sees the alarm clock; with a cry of joy.] My clock! My clock! [Overcome with emotion.] Oh! My clock! My clock! Can I take it in the house to finish dinner?

Eloise

[In a hopeless voice.] Yes, take it away.

[Beaming, Annie bears it to her kitchen. Eloise now kneels behind the grave of the sun-dial.

Eddy

Let us leave them alone with their dead.

[Leads Alice to the corner of the house; they look off down the road. Eloise and Ian sit there on either side of the grave, swaying a little back and forth, as those who mourn.

Eloise

[Looking at grave.] I had thought life was going to be so beautiful.

Ian

It might have been.

Eloise

[Looking at empty pedestal.] I suppose it will never be beautiful again.

Ian

It cannot be beautiful again.

[Suddenly, with a cry, Eloise gets up and darts to the house: comes racing back with the alarm clock, snatches spade, desperately begins to dig a grave.

Eloise

Ian! Ian! Don't you see what I'm doing? I'm willing to have a first-hand relation with the sun even though it's not regular.

[But Ian is as one who has lost hope. Eddy and Alice turn to watch the re-burial of the alarm clock. Annie strides in.

Annie

[In no mood for feeling.] Where's my alarm clock?

Eloise

I am burying it.

Annie

Again? [Looks at sun-dial.] And even the sun-clock's gone?

Eddy

All is buried. Truth. Error. We have returned to the nothing from which we came.

Annie

This settles it. Now I go. I leave.

[Firm with purpose re-enters the house.

Alice

[Excitedly.] Eloise! She means it!

Eloise

[Dully.] I suppose she does.

[Continues her grave digging.

Alice

But you can't get anybody else! You can't get anybody now. Oh, this is madness. What does any of the rest of it matter if you have lost your cook? [To Ian.] Eloise can't do the work! Peel potatoes—scrub. What's the difference what's true if you have to clean out your own sink? [Despairing of him she turns to Eloise.] Eloise, stop fussing about the moon and stars! You're losing your cook!

[Annie comes from the house with suit-case, shawl-strap and hand-bag on long strings. Marches straight to left of stage, makes a face at the sun, marches to gate left rear and off.

Alice

Eddy, go after her! Heavens! Has no one a mind? Go after her!

Eddy

What's the good of going after her without a clock?

Alice

Well, get a clock! For heaven's sake, get a clock! Eloise, get off the grave of the alarm clock! [Eloise stands like a monument. To Eddy.] Well, there are graves all around you. Dig something else up. No! You call her back. I'll—

[Snatches spade, which is resting against sun-dial pedestal, begins to dig. Eddy stands at back, calling.

Eddy

Annie! Oh, Annie! Wait, Annie!

Alice

[While frantically digging.] Say something to interest her, imbecile!

Eddy

[Stick in one hand, straw hat in the other, making wild signals with both.] Come home, Annie! Clock! Clock! [Giving up that job and throwing off his coat.] You interest her and I'll dig.

[They change places.

Alice

She's most to the bend! Eddy, don't you know how to dig?

[Eddy, who has been digging with speed and skill, produces the clock with which Eloise's grandmother started housekeeping. Starts to dash off with it.

Eloise

[Dully.] That clock doesn't keep time. Annie hates it.

Ian

[As if irritated by all this inefficiency.] What she wants is the alarm clock. Get off

the grave, Eloise.

[He disinters alarm clock and with it runs after Annie. Alice draws a long breath and rubs her back. Eddy brings the clock he dug up and sets it on the pedestal. Then he looks down at the disturbed graves.

Eddy

Here's a watch! [Lifts it from the grave; holds it out to Eloise; she does not take it. He puts it on the pedestal beside the clock.] Here's another watch. [Holds up Ian's watch.] Quite a valuable piece of ground.

[Now is heard the smothered voice of a cuckoo.

Alice

[Jumping.] What's that?

Eloise

The cuckoo. I suppose it's lonesome.

Alice

[Outraged.] Cuckoo! [Pointing.] In that grave? The cuckoo we gave you? [Eloise nods.] You buried our wedding present? [Eloise again nods. Eddy and Alice draw together in indignation.] Well, I must say, the people who try to lead the right kind of lives always do the wrong thing. [Stiffly.] I am not accustomed to having my wedding presents put in graves. Will you please dig it up, Eddy? It will do very well on the mantel in our library. And my back nearly broken digging for your cook!

[She holds her back. While Eddy is digging up the cuckoo, Annie and Ian appear and march across from gate to house, Annie triumphantly bearing her alarm clock, Ian—a captive at her chariot wheels—following with suit-case, shawl strap and long strings of bag around his wrist. A moment later Ian comes out of the house, looks at each dug-up thing, stands by the grave of the sun-dial. Enter Mrs. Stubbs.

Mrs. Stubbs

Oh, Mr. Joyce, I've come to see your sun-clock again. Mr. Stubbs says he'll not be run from Philadelphia. He says if you have got the time straight from the sun—[Sees that the sun-dial is gone.] Oh, do you take it in at night?

Ian

The sun-dial lies buried there.

Mrs. Stubbs

You've buried the sun-clock? And dug up all the wrong clocks? [With a withering glance at Eloise.] That's how a smart man's appreciated! What did you bury it for, Mr. Joyce?

[Eddy gives the cuckoo clock to Alice.

Ian

It cannot live in this world where no one wants truth or feeling about truth. This is a world for clocks.

Mrs. Stubbs

Well, I want truth! And so does Johnnie Stubbs! If you'll excuse my saying so, Mr. Joyce, after you've made a thing that's right you oughtn't to bury it, even if there is nobody to want it. And now that I want it—[Mrs. Stubbs takes the spade and begins to dig up the sun-dial. Ian cannot resist this and helps her. He lifts the sun-dial, she brushes it off and he fits it to its place on the pedestal.] Now there it is, Mr. Joyce, and as good as if it had never seen the grave. [She looks at the setting sun.] And there's time for it to make its shadow before this sun has gone.

Ian

The simple mind has beauty.

Eloise

[Coming to him.] I want to be simpler.

Mrs. Stubbs

Now what time would you say it was, Mr. Joyce?

Ian

I would say it was twenty minutes of seven, Mrs. Stubbs.

Mrs. Stubbs

[Looking at Eddy and Alice and the cuckoo clock.] And they would say it was twenty minutes past six! Well, I say: let them that want sun time have sun time and them that want tick time have tick time.

[Annie appears at the door.

Annie

[In a flat voice.] It’s dinner time!

(Curtain)

Transcriber’s Notes:

The one illustration has been moved to a paragraph break near where it is mentioned.

Punctuation has been made consistent.

Variations in spelling and hyphenation were retained as they appear in the original publication, except that obvious typographical errors have been corrected.

The following change was made:

p. 255: Steve changed to Henrietta (Henrietta? Henrietta Why,)

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