SIX ONE - ACT PLAYS

RACHEL CROTHERS

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Six One-Act Plays

By

RACHEL CROTHERS

Author of "Expressing Willie," "39 East," "Mary the Third," etc.

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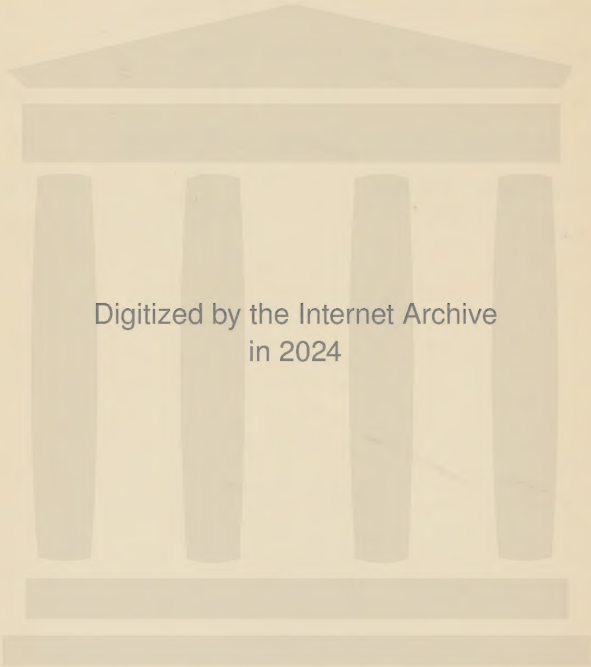

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CLOTHED

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CLOTHED

CHARACTERS

THE MAKER, *Madam Christoph.*
THE WEARER, *Nancy Marshall.*
THE IDLER, *Constancia Biddle.*
THE WORKER.
THE MODEL.

THE PLACE. A fitting room in the Maker's establishment.

THE TIME. Late afternoon to-day, and possibly to-morrow.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING CLOTHED

SCENE.—*A fitting room. Late afternoon.*

THE IDLER (*otherwise* CONSTANCIA BIDDLE, *small, round and blondely, twinklingly pretty. In effect thirty—in fact forty*). Heavens, I wish she'd come! When she particularly tells me to be on time she's always especially late herself—and I'm always fool enough to do it.

(*Applying her lip stick with serious and delicate care.*)

THE MAKER (*or* MADAM CHRISTOPH, *who bravely shifts from one large, tired foot to the other, in her Spartan rule of always standing in the presence of her august customers*). But Miss Marshall is the busiest woman in New York—isn't she?

THE IDLER. That's what she goes in for. It's a wonderful system. That's the way she gets out of everything except what she really wants to do—she's so desperately busy. That's why I'm wasting my time waiting for her now—she's so desperately busy.

THE MAKER. There's one more gown I want you to see while you're waiting.

THE IDLER. No—I'm going. This is the limit—really. I'll never do it again—never.

(*She draws up her furs threateningly as the* WEARER *suddenly pervades the room.* NANCY MARSHALL, *tall, strong, vibrating with health which pushes everything out of its way.*)

THE WEARER. How adorable of you to wait, Constancia! I tried so hard to get here on the dot —but actually this is *the* most desperately busy day I ever ——

THE IDLER. I know—I know, dear. Get your clothes off.

THE WEARER (*as hat, furs, coat and most of her other garments are swiftly taken away from her*). Don't keep me waiting a minute, will you, Madam Christoph? I'll be horribly late for this dinner if you do. Connie, I made the best speech this afternoon I ever made in my life. Oh, I wish I had my slippers on. It's so hard to get the effect with these shoes. Everybody said so. The applause was wonder —— Is that hat new, dearest? I love you in it!

THE IDLER. Painfully new. I made it last night.

THE WEARER. Oh, you're so clever!

THE IDLER. Oh, no, I'm not—just poor. It's the woman who can have everything she wants who needs to be clever. Good taste is only self-control. What a gorgeous color! But I think I'd like it better for *you* if it were black.

(*As the small and astoundingly thin body of the* WORKER *comes into the room under a cloud of rose tulle, which she puts the* WEARER *into.*)

THE WEARER. No—put it over my head. My hair's a fright anyway. I thought of black first and then I decided rose was so much more ——

THE MAKER. Oh, yes, this is marvelous for Miss Marshall! It brings out her coloring so.

THE IDLER. She'll have to bring out all that's in the box to keep up with that. I think it would be much more effective to be awfully pale with your lips terribly red—when you wear this.

THE WEARER. Do you? Lord, I hope it's becoming! That awfully nice Englishman's going to be there.

THE IDLER. The one who's so mad about Gertrude?

THE WEARER. Who told you that?

THE IDLER. Don't remember.

THE WEARER. She said it herself. No one else could. He was there this afternoon. Came to hear me and he said —— That's too tight. I can't step at all.

THE MAKER. Oh, we can give you plenty of room—plenty, Miss Marshall. Just let that little plait out, mademoiselle.

THE WORKER. But, madam, I did. A whole inch.

THE WEARER. I must walk—*some*—you know.

THE IDLER. But this isn't a sport suit. You don't have to sprint in it. Try it. Go over there.

THE WEARER. I can't. I simply can't budge.

THE MAKER. Oh, yes, you can, Miss Marshall. Just try it. That's really much wider than we're making them. Now try, dear Miss Marshall. There—that's right. See—you're moving.

THE WEARER. Yes—wriggling like an eel to get across the floor.

THE IDLER. Well—that's all that's necessary.

THE WORKER (*crawling after* NANCY). Madam —will get used to it. If madam will bend the knees more and not try to go forward so much, but just up and down, madam would get on better.

THE WEARER (*adapting herself to the inevitable and mincing back to the mirror*). It *is* good looking—isn't it?

THE MAKER. You're marvelous in it, Miss Marshall. Isn't she, Miss Biddle?

THE WORKER. Madam—wears it very well. Will madam excuse me? Madam is stepping on it. Thank you, madam.

THE WEARER (*growing more contented as she watches in the mirror as the* MAKER *and the* WORKER *take out a pin here and put one in there*). He said he knew American women were freer than any others but he had no idea we'd made such long strides in politics. He said I reminded him *very* much of Lady Astor. Said I was really brilliant and witty with a strong forceful undercurrent under my—my —— That's too short, isn't it?

THE IDLER. No! Your ankles are the best part of you. Pull it up in front, Madam Christoph.

THE MAKER. Certainly. I quite agree with you, Miss Biddle.

THE WEARER. Oh! As much as that? Would you?

THE MAKER. Certainly, that's not short. In Paris they're up to their knees.

THE WEARER. Do you really believe that?

THE MAKER. Oh, certainly, certainly!

THE WORKER. Oh, yes, madam. And madam has such beautiful legs—limbs.

THE MAKER. Everything—on the street—every place—they think nothing of it.

THE IDLER. Why should they think of it? What difference does it make? It's only a mood. It's so provincial to make a fuss about it. So stupid.

THE WEARER. Not at all. I think it's horrible in the French women. I don't know how they *can* after all they've gone through—the men they've seen die and everything. No—over this way—that makes me flatter. After the heights they reached it's so strange that they've fallen into this debauche of clothes—without restraint—without anything. There *is* something degenerate in the race. For a while we took it back—but you see it's coming out again and it *is* true.

THE IDLER. Slush! You're a prig, Nancy. Degenerate your granny! All women are alike. America's coming right along. It's only human nature busting out after too long a squeezing. People are getting comfortable again, and it's just as natural that they should wallow in it a little as for a cat to purr in the sun.

THE WEARER. But they needn't be pigs.

THE IDLER. We *are* pigs—all of us.

THE WEARER. You're rotten, Constancia. You get from under all your moral responsibilities by posing a believing in all the laxness that's going on.

THE IDLER. *Dis*believing won't stop it. Why buck against it?

THE WEARER. It *can* be stopped. And women

are going to do it. That is—American women. Mr. Chichester says he thinks the future of America is absolutely in the hands of the women.

THE IDLER. He'll be safe. He lives in England.

THE WEARER. And we *are* going to do things. Don't you feel it, Madam Christoph?

THE MAKER. Oh, certainly. Women are marvelous! In my business we have to fight the men all the time. You have no idea how hard it is. The labor conditions are something fierce. God knows I wish the women *would* do something. The men are only making it worse. I go to a meeting of the Fifth Avenue Dressmakers' Association and what do the men do—they cave in and do nothing. Cutters have gone up to fifty dollars a week now. Fifty dollars! What do you think of that, Miss Marshall?

THE WEARER. Dreadful! Do you think this *is* becoming, Connie?

THE IDLER. U-m—y-e-s—but why don't you snatch that satin lining out? It's too thick—positively jay. You might as well have a real petticoat on as that.

THE WEARER. Would you? I'll be perfectly transparent then. Won't I, Madam Christoph?

THE MAKER. Not—too much so.

THE WEARER. I have got a little shred of modesty left, Connie—if you haven't.

THE IDLER. There's nothing so immodest as being entirely covered up. It's so suggestive. Makes one imagine all sorts of things. A gown ought to be worn because it's beautiful—not to hide things

one's ashamed of. You won't look half as fat anyway if you let yourself out all over.

THE WEARER. *Fat?*

THE IDLER. Large—then.

THE WEARER. I'm not large either. I'm big, of course. That's my type; but I'm very well proportioned. Everybody says so.

THE MAKER. You are wonderful, Miss Marshall.

THE IDLER. Well, all right, Venus—but *I* think your gown's a failure.

THE MAKER. Oh, Miss Biddle!

THE WEARER. Don't be ridiculous! I've got to wear it to-night. I simply have to. I think it's an enormous success. Don't you, Madam Christoph? What's the matter with it? You're a pleasant person, Connie! I like it immensely—but you've ruined it now.

THE IDLER. You asked me to come and tell you what I thought, didn't you?

THE WEARER. I didn't ask you to come and spoil my evening. I'll feel a dub and be a dub if I don't look well. I *must* be unconscious of my clothes. It wasn't that I spoke well this afternoon because I looked well but because subconsciously I *knew* I did—you know. It supports one—gives one something to stand on. There's power in it, you know. That's all I care about—the subconscious part of it.

THE IDLER. If you want to be so darned subconscious wear one of your black things. You're always safe in them.

THE WEARER. I love wearing a gown because it's safe. You *are* a cat, Constancia.

THE IDLER. Thanks! Catch me ever telling the truth again to you or any other woman. I'm going. Awfully sorry. If *you* like it, it's all right, darling. What difference does it make! Bye-bye, dearest.

THE WEARER. Don't be a beast. You can't go. What *shall* I do? Sit *down.*

THE MAKER. It's a beautiful gown, Miss Marshall, and you're wonderful in it.

THE WEARER. No, I'm not. I hate myself in it. Take out that lining, quickly. What else can we do, Constancia?

THE IDLER (*sitting again cautiously and critically on the edge of her chair*). W-e-ll, it's neither one thing nor the other. Neither so severe that it's distinguished—nor so—um—frank—that one knows you're a perfect lady to dare it. Now which do you want to go in for?

THE WEARER. W-e-ll—I don't think *severe* is exactly my—I *have* got a good back but there *is* a limit.

THE IDLER. No, there isn't—not with any style. Cut it down to the waist line in the back and two inches down in front and you'll ——

THE WEARER. Lower? Heavens, look at me *now!*

THE IDLER. You *want* us to look at you, don't you? It takes nerve to be chic. Oh, look—that's what the whole business means.

(*As the* MODEL *undulates into the room with a wiggle any woman would detest in any human being in any other capacity than that of displaying clothes. She is slender and svelte with*

youth. The amazing glint of her hair is natural—the tints of her skin as fresh as a baby's and her smiling, wistful interest in the importance of what she is doing as keen as when she began her long nerve-racking day. The four other women turn their anxious attention and their intellects fully upon her.)

THE WEARER. Isn't she ravishing! But then I couldn't look like that.

THE MAKER. Certainly you can—in your own way. (*The* MODEL *turns and smiles seraphically at the* WEARER—*doing something with her arms which only a model can do and thereby giving an infinite and indescribable seductiveness to the whisp of lace and satin which is called a frock.*) This is the gown I wanted you to see, Miss Biddle. Isn't it good?

THE IDLER. It's a love! Simply adorable! Turn around. Don't you see what I mean, Nancy? What you must do is to *dominate* your clothes—so they melt and float 'round you and your personality rises *out of them.* Turn 'round.

THE WEARER. Go on. Do *something.* Cut it down. Cut it down—let's get *somewhere.*

THE MAKER (*as the* WORKER *starts with her scissors*). Yes—go on. Go on. No—more—go on.

THE WORKER. Madam must have nothing at all then, in the back, in order to balance the front.

THE WEARER. What? Horrors!

THE MAKER. Don't worry, Miss Marshall. It will be all right. Now, not *too* much, mademoiselle. Miss Marshall is very conservative, you know.

THE WORKER. But the proportion—the line—it is everything, madam. Madam must not get afraid in the back when she has so much courage in the front.

THE IDLER (*twinkling with appreciation*). You're beginning to look as if you had worn an evening gown before in your life, Nancy.

THE WEARER. I'm letting you do this, purely because I don't want to seem too conservative and narrow. I want to look absolutely normal—unconscious, you know. I want to stand for the normal inconspicuous thing always. That's the only reason I pay any attention to my clothes. When a woman goes into public life and expects to influence people—the broad-minded thing is what counts. Actually Mrs. Howard looked so—so domestic and home-made this afternoon when she spoke that it positively made me afraid that she never could be broad enough to represent *any*thing. Oh, dear, my feet are killing me! Will this be finished so I can wear it to-night?

THE MAKER. Certainly it will. Certainly! There's such a very little bit to do.

THE WEARER. Won't it keep you awfully late, miss? I'm *so* sorry.

THE WORKER. Oh, that's all right, madam.

THE WEARER. You're sure you don't mind?

THE WORKER. No, madam—not at all.

THE WEARER. If it wasn't so *very* important I wouldn't think of letting you do it. I'm awfully particular about that sort of thing. We women must be considerate of each other. If I am nominated I'm going in awfully strong for that. The

selfishness and inconsideration of women is simply appalling. That's what makes a lot of the bitterness in the laboring classes. That's one of the first things I shall go in for. Oh, dear, there's so much to do to get things right! The housing business, for instance. I don't believe it. I simply do not believe that conditions need be as bad as they say they are. Men have made a mess of it—that's all. The idea that there aren't enough houses in New York to go 'round. What nonsense! People are simply too fussy about what they live in. That's the trouble. All these awful people with money who never had any before in their lives ought not to be allowed to crowd other people out. It's Bolshevism —just Bolshevism. That's what it is. And not enough school teachers to go 'round. That is the most scandalous thing of all. People ought simply to be made to teach school, whether they want to or not. They've been doing it. Why shouldn't they go on? I can't teach school. God knows I'd be glad to—and just show them if my hands weren't so full now of —— I'm going to have awful circles under my eyes from standing so long. Couldn't you just hurry a little, miss? If there's anything men hate it's a tired-looking woman. We must be fresh and look as though we loved it when we try to put things over, you know. It *does* really and truly look as though I were going to get the nomination, Connie. There's an awful lot of opposition to Miss Cleveland, you know. I don't see how she stands it. I honestly don't. She is so unpopular I should think she'd withdraw from sheer embarrassment.

THE IDLER. That would be a strong political move.

THE WEARER. And she's so fat I don't see how she *can* stand on the platform with everybody looking at her. Some people think she speaks awfully well—but I wouldn't say this to any living being but you, Connie—but ——

THE IDLER. I know—but confidentially you think she's punk.

THE WEARER. I'm really sort of sorry for her because she is so unattractive. That's why the men have put her up. She's so unattractive they're not afraid of her because they *know* she'll never get anywhere. Now honestly, Connie, between her and me would you hesitate a moment whom to vote for?

THE IDLER. Not a second. Between you and her I'd vote for the worst man going.

THE WEARER. Connie! That's just it! The apathy of women towards women is the most dangerous thing we have to combat. Here am I devoting my life to it and you're just —— What do you *do* to make yourself as slender as that? (*Turning her troubled attention to the* MODEL.) Do you deny yourself a lot?—a lot of food I mean—sweets and things?

THE MODEL (*sweetly*). I eat all I can *get*, madam.

THE WEARER. Do you really? You're not extravagant, I hope. We're going in for an extravagance campaign. That's what's the matter with the world—absolutely. My dear, all these tales we hear about women buying pearls and taking the money right out of their stockings are true. They're *true.*

People are reeking with money who have made it in the wrong way—over night, you know—on munitions and things, and high rents. It's got to be stopped. Why, I was buying hats yesterday and two women came in who looked like—well—Texas or something—and the way they bought the eighty-five-dollar ones and turned down the fifty-dollar ones was simply appalling. The sheer vulgarity of it was sickening. Why, I never pay more than fifty dollars for my hats—never. You'll simply have to take this off now. I *absolutely* can't stay another second.

THE WORKER (*still putting in overpaid stitches with her skilled labor fingers*). One moment, madam. I must catch this. There!

THE WEARER (*sliding out of the gown*). Now I'll count on this absolutely. It would be too appalling if you disappointed me.

THE MAKER. You know you will have it, Miss Marshall, you know you will.

THE IDLER. Come along now—do for goodness sake. Scramble into your clothes.

THE WEARER. And this one is three hundred and fifty, isn't it, Madam Christoph?

THE MAKER. Oh, no, Miss Marshall! Not *this* one. You've forgotten. Four hundred and fifty and ——

THE WEARER. What!

THE MAKER. And you've had the satin cut out so we'll have to put lace in to cloud it. That will make it five hundred and ——

THE IDLER. The clouds are getting heavy, Nancy—you'd better hurry.

THE MAKER. And these ends here will have to have some of those dear little French flowers you like so much. That will ——

THE WEARER. But you're not going to charge me for *those!*

THE MAKER. Oh, my *dear* Miss Marshall! I wish I didn't have to—but if you only knew! Why, the duty is something terrible. They're imports, you know.

THE WEARER. Yes, but good heavens, I can't stand it.

THE MAKER. But they *make* the gown—these little touches.

THE IDLER. Yes, these "little touches" make a million dollars before you know it.

THE MAKER. So that will be—well, I'll make it five-eighty-five for *you*, Miss Marshall. That's really the best I can do.

THE WEARER. But that's awful—simply ruinous!

THE MAKER. But you don't know what things cost, my dear woman. I'm nearly crazy.

THE WEARER. I know. It's ghastly! Absolutely ghastly! Something's *got to be done!* We're fools—simply fools to pay such prices. We've *got* to stop it and go without things—until things are brought down. That's what I shall stand for. Come on, Connie dear. It was *awfully* good of you to do this. Thank you so much, Madam Christoph, and you won't disappoint me—will you? And thank you, mademoiselle, for staying so late. I wish I could do something for you. You *do* think I'll look well in it, don't you, Connie?

THE IDLER. I think you'll influence a *great* many people to do a *great* many things in it.

THE WEARER. That's it. That's all I care about. Good-night. Good-night. Thank you *so* much.

(MADAM CHRISTOPH *personally conducts them to the outer door. The* MODEL *wriggles out of her frock and stands a moment in her delicate pantalettes as the* WORKER *gathers up the radiant tulle.*)

THE MODEL. Don't they make you sick? They act like nobody had a date but themselves. I'm goin' to be awful late. How long will it take you to finish that?

THE WORKER. My God—I don't know! My eyes have gone back on me.

THE MODEL. Gee, it's a shame. Were you goin' any place?

THE WORKER. I was going to the movies—but she's got to have this. She's going to a dinner party.

THE MODEL. She can go to the devil for all I care.

CURTAIN

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NICE

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NICE

CHARACTERS

Miss Constancia Biddle, *a lady of leisure.*
Miss Nancy Marshall, *Constancia's friend.*
Mrs. Jimmy Sullivan, *society woman.*
Mrs. Miriam Leslie, *ditto.*
Miss Pattie Pitt, *a "Variety Star."*
Mr. Beach, *an American gentleman.*
Mr. Arthur Chichester, *an English gentleman.*

Scene. The "Ritz" at lunch-time.
Time. The present.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING NICE

SCENE.—*Luncheon at the "Ritz."*

(*As the curtain rises,* CONSTANCIA BIDDLE *is lunching at the "Ritz" because she likes it—seeing and being seen.* NANCY MARSHALL, *who is with her, of course, is doing it in the attitude of having to eat somewhere, it might as well be here. However,* NANCY *seems to be enjoying her food in her beautifully healthy way; her glowing vitality and large magnificence never more effective than in her perfect clothes of the moment.* CONSTANCIA *is looking even more dimplingly, twinklingly disreputable than ever—the crinkle of her hair and the general audacity of her clothes giving her a delicious effectiveness which is impossible to resist—to say nothing of a youthfulness far below her years.*)

CONSTANCIA (*finishing the last crisp bite of her fish*). She's the rottenest nice woman I know.

NANCY. Who?

CONSTANCIA. Miriam Leslie—over there.

NANCY. I don't see her.

CONSTANCIA. Yes, you do. You're looking right at her—with the long jade earrings.

NANCY. Oh, heavens! she looks terribly degenerate!

CONSTANCIA. Terribly distinguished, you mean. Look away from her a minute at everybody else and then look back at her and you'll see what I mean. For instance, anybody could tell with half an eye that Mrs. Jimmy Sullivan at the next table is a perfectly good little woman trying to look fast—but Miriam suggests layers of " past "—covered up with exquisitely groomed conventionality. Mrs. Jimmy is gazing at you. Bow to her—*do*—so her afternoon will be a success. Oh, *smile* at her. Lord, you *are* a prig, Nancy!—the damndest prig for a somebody of anybody I know. What harm can it do you to make that little nobody happy?

NANCY. Nonsense! I can't grin like an ape.

CONSTANCIA. Uh—I thought a man would show up —— Ye gods! it's Charlie Beach. Can't Miriam Leslie do better than that? Look—see. My word! he's kissing her hand. We *are* getting continental, aren't we?

NANCY. We're getting disgusting. Look at this room. There's lots of nice people here and it's as bold as Paris.

CONSTANCIA. And as amusing. I love it.

NANCY. I loathe it. I loathe New York now anyway. It's too loose for words. There isn't a woman or a girl here—with any style at all—who isn't made up and —— Look at them—the way they sit—the expressions on their faces. Look at their legs—their necks—their whole bodies—*displayed*—that's what they are—displayed for allure—and all pretending to be totally unconscious.

CONSTANCIA. Most of them are.

NANCY. Don't talk rubbish. How can they be?

CONSTANCIA. Well, aren't you unconscious? *I* am—and we're about as exposed as the rest of 'em.

NANCY. *You* are. I'm not.

CONSTANCIA. Oh, yes, you are—more so. That is, you're more exposed for *you* than they are for *them.* I mean—compare yourself and your figure and all the rest of it with five years ago.

NANCY. Well, of course, one can't look as if one came out of the ark. But, good heavens! there *is* a limit. Now your gown is too thin, Connie—to be sitting here in the middle of the day in this public place.

CONSTANCIA. You mean it's thinner than it was five years ago at this time of day. That's fashion, dearest. It has nothing to do with my virtue.

NANCY. I don't know how men *can* think women are decent, when they *look* so loose.

CONSTANCIA. Slush! I'll bet you anything on earth there isn't one of us—not one—who is any looser morally because we're wearing fewer clothes and more make-up.

NANCY. You're talking hot air and you know it. There *is* a subtle insidious something now about women that's deep and dangerous and having a horrible effect everywhere. And if really *nice* women stood together —— No, no, I don't *want* any potatoes. You *know* I don't eat them.—Stood together they could *do* something about it.

CONSTANCIA. But they don't *want* to do anything about it.

NANCY. But they could be *made* to want to.

CONSTANCIA. Who's going to make them?

NANCY. I would do something if I weren't nearly

mad now. You're a lazy, good-for-nothing thing, Connie. You might come down to my workshop one day a week at *least*.

CONSTANCIA. But that would always be *the* day I wanted to do something else.

NANCY. Oh, but my *dear*—you'd get so interested you'd forget everything else. It's inspiring. Really, it has the greatest spiritual effect. There's nothing like it. If you'd come Mondays I could get rid of Mrs. Travers.

CONSTANCIA. What's the matter with Mrs. Travers?

NANCY. Oh, I can't abide her. She's so sure of herself—with her ideas.

CONSTANCIA. Get Mrs. Jimmy Sullivan over there. She'd be tickled to pieces and wouldn't trouble you with any ideas. I'll ask her to come over here now.

NANCY. No—no—don't. I don't want her.

CONSTANCIA. Why not?

NANCY. Oh, she's so insignificant.

CONSTANCIA. But she'd work like a dog—and be so flattered. She thinks I motioned to her. She's coming.

NANCY. Heavens—what a bore! Now, Connie, don't you say ——

CONSTANCIA. How do you do, Mrs. Sullivan? Come and have your coffee over here.

MRS. JIMMY SULLIVAN. How sweet of you! I'd love to.

CONSTANCIA. You know Miss Marshall, don't you?

NANCY. How do you do?

MRS. SULLIVAN (*with a suggestion of a lisp*). How do you do? I know Miss Marshall, of course, but she doesn't know me. I'm one of your greatest admirers, Miss Marshall.

NANCY. Really?

MRS. SULLIVAN (*frankly and breathlessly excited and flattered*). You do do such wonderful things! I think it's perfectly marvelous! I simply don't see how you do it all! You must be absolutely superhuman! How any woman can just simply have something to do with everything that's going on in the world and always look as smart as you do, is too marvelous for words. I think that gown you wore the other night when you were asking for money for starving Ireland—or China, wasn't it—was the most ravishing thing I ever saw. Some nasty cat of a woman right behind me said, "If she hadn't bought that gown she might send enough food to feed the whole country," but I don't feel that way about it at all. I always feel more like giving money if a woman looks fascinating—and I know men feel that way about it. Don't you think so? Yes, thanks. No, two lumps.

CONSTANCIA. Why don't you get Miss Marshall to give you a job in some of her noble work if you're so crazy about it?

MRS. SULLIVAN. Oh, dear, I haven't done anything since I rolled bandages. I was awfully popular in the Red Cross because I always did *any*thing *any*body wanted me to. Jimmy says I'm an awful goose. Of course, I can't organize and lead and that sort of thing, you know. The only thing I was really awfully good about was sitting next to

somebody that nobody else *would* sit by. I suppose it's awfully silly but it *did* seem to me that just being kind to somebody, whether you were very keen about them or not, was sort of useful, too—don't you know. I mean it sort of makes it possible to get things done sometimes, when nothing else on *earth* will, you know. But of course I can't do really big things as you do, Miss Marshall. What are you laughing at, Miss Biddle?

CONSTANCIA. Nothing—nothing at all.

MRS. SULLIVAN. But, of course, I'll be only too delighted to do anything in the world you want me to do, Miss Marshall.

NANCY. That's very good of you, I'm sure. There doesn't happen to be anything just now, I believe. Sometime, I hope.

CONSTANCIA. How amazingly beautiful Miriam Leslie is! And how *can* she stand that man?

MRS. SULLIVAN. Oh, they say she is mad about him—perfectly infatuated. And dozens of titles have been insane about her in Europe. Jimmy says that Beach man is a perfect rotter—practically lives on what he makes playing bridge. And then somebody's always feeding him. That helps a lot. Aren't her pearls the most luscious things you ever saw? They make my mouth water. They say a Russian prince gave them to her—but she's awfully nice, isn't she?

CONSTANCIA. She looks delightfully nice.

NANCY. It depends upon what you call nice.

CONSTANCIA. Yes, that's the question. Who *are* nice people, anyway?

NANCY. They're the ones with too much innate

dignity and decency to be carried away by anything that *other* people are doing.

CONSTANCIA. What do *you* call nice people, Mrs. Sullivan?

MRS. SULLIVAN. Oh, dear me! The ones I want to know, I s'pose. What do *you* think they are?

CONSTANCIA. They're the ones I *like*.

NANCY. Never! You like a mess of people.

CONSTANCIA. Thank God I do. Oh, Mrs. Leslie and Beach are going.

MRS. SULLIVAN. I heard them say they were going to look at a house. Do you suppose she's going to marry him?

CONSTANCIA. Probably not. I imagine she's through marrying people. Hello. How are you, Miriam? I haven't seen you for ages. Hello, Charlie.

MR. BEACH. Hello—hello, Connie. How are you? You're looking awfully fit.

MRS. LESLIE. Oh, it's Constancia Biddle. I've been wondering in my near-sighted way who the awfully chic little woman was. How are you?

CONSTANCIA. You know Miss Marshall and Mrs. Sullivan, don't you?

MRS. LESLIE (*nodding to* MRS. SULLIVAN *and giving her hand to* NANCY MARSHALL). I think I used to see you at the dear Duchess of Kent's, didn't I?

NANCY. Yes.

MRS. LESLIE. When I was Mrs. Rollo.

NANCY. Oh, yes, surely.

MRS. LESLIE. Congratulations on the splendid things you've done in the war. It's magnificent.

CONSTANCIA. Be careful—she'll ask you to do something.

MRS. LESLIE. I'm sure she wouldn't trust *me* with any of the important things she's doing.

NANCY. On the contrary, if you're looking for something to do I can put you to work any time.

MRS. LESLIE. How charming of you! But I'm sailing next week. I'm going back to help the Duchess with our homes for disabled men. She and I started so many, you know—and then I must hurry on to Russia. Bye-bye. It's so very charming to see you both. My dog's waiting for me. Au revoir.

MRS. SULLIVAN. Mercy, isn't she fascinating! She smiles way in under her skin and you can't quite tell what she means. Oh, dear, I hate to go but I'm going to a matinée. Good-bye, good-bye, Miss Marshall. I'm so delighted to have met you and remember if you ever *do* want me to do anything I'd love to. Bye-bye.

CONSTANCIA. Good-bye—good-bye. Oh, what a farce it is!

NANCY. What?

CONSTANCIA. You—me—all of us.

NANCY. I don't know what you mean.

CONSTANCIA. Oh, yes, you do. Want another cigarette? Why did you step on Mrs. Jimmy?

NANCY. Connie, you haven't any more discrimination than a monkey. All my committees are such awfully *nice* women. You entirely misunderstood what I did. I have to judge people on a very big scale and be generous and open-minded.

CONSTANCIA. Yes, dear—yes, dear.

NANCY. You're always looking out for *ordinary* people—so afraid their feelings will be hurt or something. You know—it's because I inspire women who have money and power that I get such big results.

CONSTANCIA. I know—they fall over themselves to work with you because you are *who* you are. But for Lord's sake, leave out the word "*inspire*" and a few of those.

NANCY. Oh!

CONSTANCIA. I don't mean for a minute that what you and the rest of them are doing isn't tremendous, but I'm so tired of the *ego* of it all; it makes me sick. Nobody can be with one of you two minutes till it sticks out—*my* hospital—*my* soup kitchen—*my* organization. Really, the blank Mrs. Jimmy's knowing they're blank are so refreshing I love 'em.

NANCY. I have no use for them—whatsoever. And the way these blank ones are spending and wasting and living in general is too disgusting for words. It's having a horrible effect *every* way.

CONSTANCIA. But it isn't half as obnoxious nor half as much what's the matter with the world as our confounded selfishness. *Me—me—me!* That's why the world's in a mess—and it won't be out of it till ——

NANCY. Till one great leader rises—*one* great statesman—who is really big enough for the job.

CONSTANCIA. Great statesman nothing. A great Christ you mean. Nothing else can do it.

NANCY. What?

CONSTANCIA. We need something that's going to make us good—and then it won't matter whether we wear any clothes at all—if we only care enough about making the other fellow happy.

NANCY. You're absurd, Connie. You don't see things in a big way.

CONSTANCIA. But I saw the tears in Mrs. Jimmy's eyes—and I think what you did to her was much rottener and much more harmful to civilization than all the Mrs. Jimmys in town showing their bosoms and legs.

NANCY. Connie, it's just you and nice women like you who are responsible. You really set the pace and other women imitate you and *vulgarize* everything you do.

CONSTANCIA. Oh, your granny! I'm getting sick of this song. Everybody's singing it. Why, I think it's marvelous how moral we are, considering how the highest ladies in the land were behaving only about a hundred and thirty years ago. I've just been reading some French history and I'd forgotten how funny it was. It's too delicious for words to think some of the court ladies received gentlemen callers while they were in the bath tub with a little milk in the water to make it less transparent. Some of their fancy dress ball costumes were no costumes at all. Isn't it a scream! And four of Marie Antoinette's men friends nursed her through the measles. Don't you love it! Only a hundred and thirty years ago! I think we're coming along pretty well myself.

NANCY. Don't laugh so. Everybody's looking at you. And we'll be right back where they were—

if we keep on like this. And it finally got their heads chopped off, you know.

CONSTANCIA. They didn't get their heads chopped off because of their bad morals, but because they were stepping on the necks of the rest of mankind. Oh, oh—oh—weren't they silly fools! It's unbelievable that they weren't clever—enough to save their own necks by being kind. To be fair and kind! Nothing else matters very much really. Come on if you want me to help you get some hats.

NANCY. I'll have to rush terribly. I'm speaking at three o'clock. Oh ——

CONSTANCIA. What's the matter? Why are you blushing so furiously?

NANCY. There's Chichester. Whom is he with?

CONSTANCIA. Oh, you know—that girl in musical comedy.

NANCY. It can't be. She looks like an awfully nice girl.

CONSTANCIA. She probably is.

NANCY. She isn't made up a bit and her gown is exquisite—just as simple and modest as it can be.

CONSTANCIA. My God, why shouldn't it be? He sees you. He's coming over.

NANCY. He needn't trouble. I'm going.

CONSTANCIA. Wait—wait. Let's see what he says.

NANCY. It's perfectly immaterial to me who she is.

CONSTANCIA. Yes, of course. Chichester certainly would be flattered if he could see how excited you are. Sit down—do —— You're giving

yourself away, horribly. You haven't even paid the bill and *I* can't.

NANCY. What a bore! Check, please. Why, here's Mr. Chichester. I thought you never lunched out. It must be something *very* important to get you.

CHICHESTER (*putting out his big hand in his shy British way*). Yes, it is—rather. How are you? How awfully jolly! Fancy finding you here.

CONSTANCIA. *I'm* here, too, you know.

CHICHESTER. How do you do, Miss Biddle?

CONSTANCIA. Who's the awfully pretty girl with you?

CHICHESTER. That's a young friend of mine. May I introduce her? She might come and sing for you in some of your hospitals, you know.

NANCY. I'm afraid I can't stop. I'm just waiting for my ——

CONSTANCIA. Hurry up. Bring her over.

CHICHESTER (*striding off*). That's awfully nice of you.

CONSTANCIA. Perfectly harmless if he wants you to meet her.

NANCY. But how stupid! Why should I meet her?

CONSTANCIA. No reason in the world why you should. That's why I want to. She's famous. Everybody's crazy about her.

NANCY. I never heard of her.

CONSTANCIA. I wouldn't mention that. Buck up and use all the tact in your system or even the guileless Chichester will think you're jealous of her or the most colossal snob going. A—how do you

do, Miss Pattie Pitt? I don't need to be introduced. I've seen you seven times and I adore you more each time.

PATTIE PITT. How awfully nice of you!

(*She takes* CONSTANCIA's *hand and* CONSTANCIA's *homage with frank pleasure, quite unconscious that she is in the presence of royalty, and looking peculiarly patrician in her clean slenderness and freshness.*)

CHICHESTER. Miss Marshall, this is Miss Pattie Pitt.

PATTIE PITT. Oh—how do you do? Are you Tottie Marshall's sister?

NANCY. N-o. (*Trying to remain on the throne.*)

PATTIE PITT. She's the girl who's made such a hit as a boy, you know. She's a riot.

CHICHESTER (*a little flushed*). No—a—a—this is—Miss Marshall is—a —— *This* Miss Marshall is—a ——

PATTIE PITT. I meet such a lot of people I don't always remember everybody.

CONSTANCIA. But we all remember you.

PATTIE PITT. Mr. Chichester's such a dear—I'm always meeting nice people with him. He gave me a peach of a party the other night and I didn't know any of them. We had an awfully—by the way—I'm giving a party to-morrow night. Won't you all come? You bring them, Mr. Chichester, won't you?

NANCY (*after an eloquent pause*). I believe Mr. Chichester is dining with me—if I remember.

PATTIE PITT. That won't matter. This isn't till after the show. Drop in any time and bring anybody. There'll be lots of room and the music is going to be divine. Too bad you can't dance, Ches—but you like seeing other people have a good time. That's the nicest thing about you.

CHICHESTER. Perhaps Miss Marshall would —— Perhaps you would like —— Perhaps you both might ——

CONSTANCIA. I'm sure they might.

NANCY (*oh, so sweetly from very splendid heights*). Yes, perhaps you'd like to come and sing in some of my entertainments for the ex-service men in hospitals. It's very wonderful and inspiring. If you'd try it you might like it.

PATTIE PITT. Like it? I like it better than anything I do. But I don't know whether I could squeeze in any more or not. I sing for the boys all I possibly can, of course. I was overseas a year, you know—giving shows for them.

CHICHESTER. Miss Pitt is taking care of twenty war orphans and all sorts of things.

CONSTANCIA. How wonderful of you!

PATTIE PITT. Not a bit. Why shouldn't I do it? I'm in a success now. If you want any clothes or anything like that for them let me know. I'd love to help out. I know so many men who've got clothes enough packed away in moth balls to dress up the whole army. I make them dig 'em out. Sorry I have to run along but I must eat and I have three appointments this afternoon and have to have my picture taken besides. Good-bye. Come along, Ches. Bye-bye.

(*With her charming chin well up, she goes back to the table, pleasantly conscious that everyone in the room is saying "There she is"—followed by* CHICHESTER'S *long stride, after he has with an honest though helpless glance tried to get it to the ladies that "this is a nice young friend of mine, whom I am very nicely fond of."*)

CONSTANCIA (*after a pause of much understanding and still more enjoyment*). She doesn't know and she doesn't give a damn. You were a little ponderous, my dear. Come on. You'll have time to get one hat.

(NANCY *leads out, looking sure of the kingdom of the earth but considerably shaken in the depths of her soul. They are in the luxurious seat of her motor some moments before she speaks.*)

NANCY. But how on earth do you suppose he knew her? I mean in that perfectly—*frank*—way. I mean, Chichester's so awfully conservative.

CONSTANCIA. Oh, wake up, Nancy! You're lost on the heights. Wasn't she sweet and wasn't she happy! Gloriously oblivious of us! Nothing exists above or below her—only what is beside her.

NANCY. You don't think for a minute she thinks Chichester is beside her?

CONSTANCIA. I most emphatically do—and he *is*. But don't worry—that doesn't keep him from being at your feet.

NANCY. He can't be both.

CONSTANCIA. Oh, yes, he can. That's what you've missed, Nancy. You're too far away from the promiscuous and unexpected to get the tang of it.

NANCY. And you're too lax in your ideas. You're throwing away what nice people ought to hold on to the tightest.

CONSTANCIA. And you're perfectly blind to what nice people ought to see the clearest.

NANCY. Sometimes I think you're a little hazy about what *is* nice.

CONSTANCIA. I am—and I'm getting more so every day.

(*And the motor rolls on—picking its way skilfully and condescendingly, thoroughly confident that nothing in the great tangled mass is quite so nice as it.*)

CURTAIN

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED

CHARACTERS

Miss Pattie Pitt, *a "Variety Star."*
Mrs. Pitt, *Pattie's mother.*
Miss Constancia Biddle, *a lady of fashion.*
Mrs. Beauregard, *friend of Constancia.*
Mattie, *Pattie's maid.*
Rosenbaum, *Pattie's manager.*
Kipps, *a stage manager.*
Harry Ashley, *an actor.*
Call-Boy.

Scene. Miss Pattie Pitt's dressing-room at the theatre.
Time. The present.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING MARRIED

SCENE.—*The dressing-room of* Miss Pattie Pitt *at the theatre is as well ordered as that of the most fastidious lady in the land. The fifteen different costumes, which she wears in the course of her hectic evening, hang in their respective places covered by the most immaculate of curtains. The fifteen pairs of unbelievably small shoes stand in an exact and glittering row on the shelf. The long narrow dressing table is spread with a virgin white cover and on it are placed in neat array small boxes and bottles and brushes and "pencils" and "sticks" and tubes of this and that—each with its own effect—lying ready for her deft hand. The telegrams and cards which make a jagged border to her mirror represent a very wide range—socially and otherwise—from—"I'm rooting for a knockout for you—The Big Guy"—to "Wishing you the most distinguished success—Arthur Chichester."* Mattie, *the guardian of this inner shrine, is neither very black nor very white—but as skilful as the most exacting nerves demand. She now stands ready to open the door when she hears the alert footstep outside.*

(*The curtain rises, the latch clicks, and in she comes*—Miss Pattie Pitt, *the tiny, slender*

thing who is the most powerful wheel in the great machine which has just produced the most successful musical comedy of the year.)

PATTIE (*pulling off her small hat*). Has the half hour been called, Mattie?

MATTIE. Yas'am. Just now.

(PATTIE *steps out of her frock—delicate, young, exquisite. She fills the room with the fragrance of health and wholesomeness, and as she sits for the business of "making up" it seems especially ridiculous to put paint and powder on that glowing skin with its sprinkle of honest freckles across the nose.*)

PATTIE (*wiping off the first deluge of cold cream*). I could hardly get in for the crowd outside. Way up to the alley! Gee, it's great!

MATTIE. Didn't I tell you? I can always tell at the dress rehearsal.

PATTIE. Pity you don't sell your hunches, Mattie. You ought to be worth millions. Turn that steam off and go and tell Kipps to have *plenty* of confetti for me to throw in the last act. Tell him I didn't have *half* enough last night. (*Left alone* PATTIE *goes busily on—applying the dripping black to her lashes from the "stick" which she has melted over the candle, while she chirps the silly words of her most successful song. Complete happiness bubbles in the notes of her warm little undertrained voice.*) Come!

(*A loud knock introduces* MR. ROSENBAUM, *who is large and warm and a trifle out of breath.*

His shrewd eyes have a mixture of managerial pride and paternal kindness in them as they twinkle at PATTIE.)

ROSENBAUM. Hello.

PATTIE. Hello yourself. Biggest manager in town to-day, un? How about it?

ROSENBAUM. You want to begin getting your roof ready to live on. We'll be here in August, all right.

PATTIE. Do you mean it?

ROSENBAUM. Show me the first Wednesday matinée and I'll give you the answer. We're standin' 'em up out there now. Look at this. (*Holding out the theatrical advertising sheet of a newspaper.*) "Seats selling eight weeks in advance."

PATTIE. Isn't it beautiful! Oh, I think that's *the* most wonderful thing that ever happened. I'm going to get Mother that fur coat *to-morrow.* Gosh, isn't it great!

ROSENBAUM. You sure did put it over. You've got 'em all skinned. There's no doubt about that. I want you to have another song in the first act. They want more of you.

PATTIE. Oh, no.

ROSENBAUM. Sure thing. Gota have it.

PATTIE. I don't think they want more of *me* but I'd like to have another song with Harry. That would be fine. He's made a big hit.

ROSENBAUM. Never you mind about other people's hits. Freeze on to your own.

PATTIE. Yes, but they're crazy about him.

ROSENBAUM. Oh, I don't know.

PATTIE. But they *are*. Can't you tell it? Why, last night they were mad about him. We had seven encores on our last-act song.

ROSENBAUM. That's *you*, dearie. That's you. The trouble with you is you don't know when you *have* landed a hit.

PATTIE. I wouldn't worry about that. I think if you took out the bit he does with that girl Mazie and gave him another song with me, it would be a lot better. They don't like *her*.

ROSENBAUM. Oh, that girl's all right. She helps *him*.

PATTIE. He doesn't need any help. He's a *hit*, I tell you.

ROSENBAUM. See here. You aren't going to be fool enough to be silly about *him*—are you?

PATTIE (*turning away to put more unnecessary powder on her nose*). Don't get paternal, Rosie.

ROSENBAUM. Now you listen to me, girlie. You let the men alone. You've got ten good years ahead of you to make a fortune in if you'll cut out everything but work.

PATTIE. You haven't got any kick coming about what I cut out—have you?

ROSENBAUM. That's why I'm talkin'. It's because you *are* such a wise little guy about men that you're apt to fall for some nut that can't pay his own board bill—let alone yours.

PATTIE (*still exaggeratedly absorbed in the tip of her nose*). I could pay 'em both.

ROSENBAUM. That's just about what you would do, too. Takin' care of somebody else is about all

you get out of your money and your success. Now you listen to me, kid. You can ——

MATTIE (*who has been waiting outside the open door*). Your cue's comin', Miss Pitt.

PATTIE. All right. I mean it about that song, governor. Bye-bye, see you later. Oh, and thanks for the flowers; they were about *the* most —— (*Speaking to someone outside as she goes.*) Hello, Harry. What? Yes, isn't it great?

ROSENBAUM (*left alone with* MATTIE). Well, Mattie. We've got a hit.

MATTIE. Yes, sir.

ROSENBAUM. You take good care of her. There's a million dollars in that little girl.

MATTIE. Yes, sir.

(*Half an hour later* MATTIE *is taking down the second pair of shoes—lifting an elaborate headdress out of its box and making ready for the second act change.*)

MRS. PITT (*coming through the open door*). Here I am. Oh, hasn't she come off yet? I hurried so I'm out of breath. Will you give me a drink of water, Mattie, please? (*Sitting heavily in the armchair.* MRS. PITT *is alarmingly plump for* PATTIE'S *future, considering how much* PATTIE *looks like her now. However, as her mother is as inert and helpless as* PATTIE *is active and dynamic perhaps the danger is not so great as it looks.*) Isn't it time for her to come off?

MATTIE. She's just finished a song now. Hear 'em? They're crazy about her.

MRS. PITT. Of course they are. Why wouldn't they be?

(*As she empties the glass of water* MATTIE *has given her.*)

ROSENBAUM (*coming in again*). How are you, Mrs. Pitt?

MRS. PITT. Oh, how are you, Mr. Rosenbaum? I just came in. She hasn't come off yet.

ROSENBAUM. Hear that? (*Nodding towards the sound of the applause.*) She's got 'em going.

MRS. PITT. Of course she has. I'm not surprised. I knew it.

ROSENBAUM. So did I. But there's a lot of difference in when you think you know and when you know you know.

MRS. PITT. Yes, but I *did* know.

ROSENBAUM. Uh huh. Mattie—just step out a minute. (MATTIE *is used to "stepping out" just as something interesting is about to be said and she goes with dignity, closing the door after her. It is not then possible to know just how close to the door she may be.*) I want to speak to you about something. Your little girl's got a great future, Mrs. Pitt.

MRS. PITT. Of course she has. You don't need to tell *me* that.

ROSENBAUM. *If* she just won't fall in love and lose her head about some man.

MRS. PITT. I wish to goodness she would.

ROSENBAUM. What?

MRS. PITT. Some rich man, I mean. Then the

money would be sure without her working for it. I can't bear to have her work so hard. It's terrible.

ROSENBAUM. She likes it better than anything on earth. That's why she *don't* fall in love.

MRS. PITT. That's just the trouble. She likes to play around with 'em a little and then when it comes to the point she drops 'em like a hot poker.

ROSENBAUM. That's what I want to talk to you about. Watch her. Don't let anything get serious. You let me know if it does and we'll give her a new automobile or somethin'—to distract 'er.

MRS. PITT. You're talking to the wrong person. I *want* her to marry—that is—somebody with money—*real* money. But she *won't*. Didn't she refuse that elegant Englishman, Sir Arthur Chichester that almost belongs to the royalty? She ran around with him a year and had him at her beck and call just like any ordinary man and then *wouldn't* marry him. It's awful! Just awful!

ROSENBAUM. The English thing really is off for good, is it?

MRS. PITT. It certainly is and he laid everything he had at her feet. The family jewels and all the different kind of places he's got in England—and everything—and the little ninny told him she'd rather make the money and buy things herself.

ROSENBAUM. That's the stuff! She's a great baby. If she just keeps this up a few years she can buy most anything she ——

PATTIE (*throwing open the door*). Oh, hello, Mother! Skip, Rosie; this is a quick change. How about that song?

ROSENBAUM (*as he makes a hasty exit*). We'll see.

PATTIE (*calling after him*). No, we won't see. We'll *do* it. Unhook me quick, Mattie. I want you to take this note to Harry. Mother can hook up the next one. Wait a minute. (*Bending over her dressing-table to scribble a note.*) There, take that to Mr. Ashley—and wait for an answer. Hustle. And bring that answer back here quick, and don't stop to read it on the way, either. You're getting so you read entirely too well, Mattie. (MATTIE *grins and departs with the note.*) I won't be home for dinner to-night, Mother. No—can't. I've got a date for tea after the matinée and I'm coming back here to rest a little, and have my dinner sent in. Tell Buddie, if he's home for dinner —— You've dropped something on the front of your dress, Ma. Here, take this and wipe it off.

(*Tossing a handkerchief at her mother.*)

MRS. PITT. It's nothing but water.

PATTIE. Tell Buddie he can have that little roadster by spring. No—keep it. Haven't you got a handkerchief? Buy yourself some this afternoon. You can wipe your nose on the best things in town, now, old dear. Here's the sample of the stuff I want you to get for Violette's dress. Get the slippers to match, you know, and make that dressmaker hustle. And come to hook me now.

MRS. PITT (*as she rises to hook the costume* PATTIE *has just taken from the wall*). You certainly are spending a lot of money on other people. You better change your mind and come home for dinner.

PATTIE. Can't—I tell you. Give it to me quick.

(*Snatching the note from* MATTIE *as* MATTIE *opens the door.* PATTIE *reads—and stands rigid—staring at the note.*)

MRS. PITT. Well, I'll go 'long now. Pattie, you'd better change your mind and —— What's the matter with you? I'm going now, I say. Pattie! (PATTIE, *still staring at the note, doesn't answer.* MRS. PITT, *looking at* MATTIE.) Is that note from that leading man? (MATTIE *grins.*) Well, before I'd let *him* upset me I'd ——

PATTIE. Go along, Mother—do, please. Get my headdress, Mattie.

(MRS. PITT *disappears and* PATTIE *puts the gewgaw on without caring whether the blue beads are exactly over her eyes or not.*)

MATTIE. Here's your fan, Miss Pattie.

(PATTIE *takes the huge feather fan and strides out like a young lioness. The sensible, dignified little* PATTIE *who has held herself aloof from the love making of her profession—the level-headed* PATTIE *so amazingly shrewd in business—too ambitious and proud of the place she has made for herself to give it up for merely a great marriage—this brave little* PATTIE *is bitten, deeply and cruelly, by a mad passion for the mild and amiable young tenor whom chance has accidentally engaged to be her leading man this season. Half an hour later when the curtain has at last fallen on the*

thirteenth encore, PATTIE *strides back into her dressing-room again, followed by a blond young man who is tall and astonishingly good looking.* MATTIE *doesn't need to be told to "step out" this time. She goes—closing the door after her.*)

HARRY. But I'm so sorry. How was I to know? You never asked me before and I've had this date for two days.

PATTIE (*smashing some beads as she throws the headdress down*). If it's only two days you can break it.

HARRY. Oh, I say. That's pretty raw. She'd know.

PATTIE. Know? *Know?* What if she does know? You don't mean to say you'd *mind?*

HARRY. No, of course not, only I can't treat Mazie like any old thing.

PATTIE. Why not? Who is she, anyway? *What* is she? Not much more than a chorus girl. *I* picked her. *I* gave her that bit—and she's lost her head. How on earth did you happen to get thick enough with her to *ask* her to dinner anyway?

HARRY. I didn't. She asked me.

PATTIE. That's even worse. You can't do that sort of thing. Good Heavens, you're my leading man. Tell her you have to talk business with *me.* That's why I was going to have dinner sent in here, quietly, so we could *talk.* I'm going to have another song put in the first act for us.

HARRY. Oh, wonderful!

PATTIE. And I'm going to try like the devil to

get Rosie to let me use that one of *yours*—your own song.

HARRY. Marvelous!

PATTIE. Don't you see? We have to talk it over. We have to get up in it before he hears it—so he'll fall for it. And we must do it *right away.* Just simply tell her you can't go. (*Stepping out of her costume with complete modesty.*) Go on, old man. (*Putting a hand on his arm.*) I'm thinking about your *future.* You've *got* one, you know, if you just don't let fussing 'round mess things up for you.

HARRY. Do you think he *will* let us do it?

PATTIE. He will if you—*work*—and don't make a fool of yourself. Tell Mattie to come here—and don't forget that new business in this next scene.

HARRY. When I cross you—you mean?

PATTIE. Yes—after I give you my slipper.

HARRY. Right-o. Mattie ——

(*He calls as he goes. The curtain goes down for the last time this afternoon and* PATTIE *has told the newspaper man how happy she is to be playing this great part, and what a great manager* MR. ROSENBAUM *is, and has got through with that and plunged into the cold cream again with one side of her face already wiped off, when another knock comes.*)

PATTIE. Oh, that's those women! Let them in. Oh, how do you do? Come in. You don't mind, do you? It must be done. What? Yes. Oh, no—I don't mind. I'll keep right on. Take that off that chair, Mattie. No—no, it's all right. Sit

down, do. Of course I remember you. You're Miss Constancia Biddle.

CONSTANCIA. And this is Mrs. Brauregard.

PATTIE. How do you do? I can't give you my hand. It's all cold cream.

(CONSTANCIA *sits on the edge of a chair—beaming at* PATTIE *with open curiosity and admiration—her long earrings bobbing—her crinkly hair getting in her eyes and her general smartness and clever bizarre clothes making her plainness really striking and enormously effective.*)

CONSTANCIA (*sitting on the edge of a chair*). Isn't it amusing! I do so love coming behind. I think it's too fascinating. Grace never has before. Have you, Grace? Mrs. Brauregard never has, and I knew you wouldn't mind my bringing her. (*The air in the small room grows heavy with exotic perfume and as the other half of* PATTIE'S *face emerges fresh and glowing the make-up on the other two faces seems more glaring than before. The ladies both light cigarettes.* CONSTANCIA, *having offered one to* PATTIE.) Oh, no, I remember you don't smoke. Isn't it sweet, Grace? She doesn't smoke.

(GRACE *is long and dark and has nothing to say but her heavy eyes are taking in the details of* PATTIE *and her surroundings—not quite able to grasp the honest, clean healthiness of it all.*)

PATTIE. Open the window, Mattie. Do you mind?

CONSTANCIA. You're too perfectly marvelous and adorable. Isn't she, Grace? We were mad about it. I'm coming again. It's a great success. Isn't it?

PATTIE. Oh, ra-*ther!*

CONSTANCIA. How long will it run?

PATTIE. I don't think God knows that.

CONSTANCIA. Isn't her hair priceless? Look at it, Grace—the way it grows on her neck.

(CONSTANCIA *makes faces at* GRACE, *meaning for her to look closely and see that the red is real —way down to the roots.*)

PATTIE (*rising*). You don't mind if I keep right on dressing, do you?

CONSTANCIA. Oh, no, do. (*Staring frankly.*) Have you heard the exciting news?

PATTIE. What?

CONSTANCIA. Nancy Marshall is going to marry Chichester after all.

PATTIE. Oh, yes, of course.

CONSTANCIA. The great Nancy who never was going to marry anybody. You know, my dear, she was horribly jealous of you.

PATTIE. Oh, no!

CONSTANCIA. Oh, *yes!* I used to tease her awfully. Do you remember that day last spring he brought you to her house to tea? That did it. I think she saw then that if she ever was going to get him she must get him *then.* I think she did it that very day, after we left.

PATTIE (*reaching for her hat*). Really?

CONSTANCIA. You *did* refuse him, didn't you?

PATTIE. We're friends.

CONSTANCIA. Isn't it extraordinary, Grace? She wouldn't marry Arthur Chichester. I think myself you would have been frightfully bored—but then—think what you could have done. It's too frightfully amusing.

PATTIE. I love him very much and I admire him more than any man I've ever known, *but* I have my work—nothing can interfere with that.

CONSTANCIA. Imagine! Isn't it sweet! I do think it would be too marvelous to have something one really wanted to do.

(MATTIE *opens the door.*)

THE DOOR MAN. Mr. Chichester.

PATTIE. Ask him to wait just a minute.

CONSTANCIA. What?

PATTIE. I'm going to tea with him. I'm so sorry to hurry. You don't mind, do you? I have to come back and sleep fifteen minutes.

CONSTANCIA. It's priceless!

PATTIE. Come and speak to him—won't you? And can't we drop you some place?

CONSTANCIA (*as they go*). Oh, that would be sweet of you. Look up there, Grace—that's what they call the flies or wings or something. Don't you love it? I think it's too amusing. Perfectly fascinating!

(*They pick their way out as an army of men are pulling the castle, the sea and the forest up into the air. Two hours later* PATTIE *is*

curled up on the couch in her dressing-room—eating a very large red apple for her dessert. HARRY, *in the one armchair, is having his coffee and cigarette with comfort and even elegance while* MATTIE *clears away the remains of the little dinner with an eye to what is left.*)

PATTIE. He'll do it. Of course he will when he sees what a good song it is. He almost *always* lets me have what I want anyway.

HARRY. I should think he would. He'd better give you anything on earth you want now. You're the biggest hit on Broadway.

PATTIE. Do you re —— Come back in half an hour, Mattie. Do you really think I am, Harry?

HARRY. You know you are.

PATTIE. No, I don't. I don't want to lose my head. I do want to do big things. Why don't you write the book and lyrics for me for next year?

HARRY. Ho—ho—wish I could.

PATTIE. You could—if you'd try. If you'd work. Your stuff's awfully good. I like it because it has style. You ought to be ambitious, Harry. Why aren't you?

HARRY. Oh, I don't know. I am—ambitious enough. What's the use? I'm your leading man. What more could anybody want?

PATTIE. Pooh! You ought to be your own leading man. A star, I mean. Write your own stuff and have your own shows.

HARRY (*throwing back his head to laugh in his most lovable way*). Oh, I say! You *are* a scream!

PATTIE. Why shouldn't you? You're heaps

cleverer than most people. I love those violets. It was sweet of you to bring them in. Oh—by the way—I'm going to take out that bit you have with that girl and put in our song instead.

HARRY. What?

PATTIE. Um. Don't you think it's a good idea?

HARRY. A bit rough on her.

PATTIE. Nonsense! It's for the good of the show. Never mind about her. She's in luck to be in it at all.

HARRY. I've never known you to be nasty to anybody before. You're always so terrifically kind to everybody.

PATTIE. Don't be absurd. What did she say when you told her you couldn't go to dinner with her?

HARRY. Why—nothing. It was all right. She's a good sport.

PATTIE. Turn your head that way. Your nose *is* wonderful. I'm crazy about you in your second-act clothes.

HARRY. Not bad un?

PATTIE. I heard a girl in a box this afternoon say "Isn't he the best looking thing you ever saw?" You see you've got everything, Harry—looks and education and a voice and everything. You know I think musical comedy can be as big as anything. I mean—not as big as Shakespeare of course, and things like that, but I mean as big as most things. After all, what are most things? If you've got something in yourself, to put *into* a thing, you can make *anything* something. Don't you think? I'm not going jazzing 'round and spending money just

because I've got this big success. I'm going to save money and—and *do* something.

HARRY. You'll never save money. You're always spending it on somebody else.

PATTIE. Oh, yes, I will too. Johnnie will be through college next year and go to work and I won't have to help him any more and I'm going to save and buy a little place in the country, you know—and you know—have something. I should think you'd love to work in the country. I mean get away from Broadway and do something. I'll tell you what we'll do. We'll have Rosenbaum come up to the house to-night after the show and we'll go over a lot of your stuff for him—he doesn't know how good it is—and talk to him seriously about you doing my next thing for me. See?

HARRY (*rising and putting his cup down*). Wonderful. A ——

(*As he carefully crushes his cigarette.*)

PATTIE. What?

HARRY. But I—I've got a date to-night.

PATTIE. Oh!

(*A pause which grows chilly as it grows longer.*)

HARRY. I'm sorry.

PATTIE. Oh, it doesn't matter. Of course if you never can get *at* it—if you have so many dates you can't tend to your business—there's not much use trying to do anything. Is there? I thought you were different, of course. I thought you were something more than a musical comedy man.

HARRY. Oh—well—Pattie, you needn't be quite so nasty. I didn't know.

PATTIE. It's quite all right, of course. If you have something more important to do.

HARRY. It isn't that. But I couldn't help it. It's Mazie. I can't throw her down again.

PATTIE. Oh! Can't you? I see.

HARRY. When I got out of the dinner I had to do *something*, so I asked her to have supper with me.

PATTIE (*getting up*). Don't apologize. Run along. If Mattie's out there tell her to come in, and tell Kipps I want to see him.

HARRY. I'm terribly sorry, Pattie. I do appreciate it tremendously but ——

PATTIE. But—yes, I know. Skip—*please*.

(*She begins brushing her hair.*)

HARRY. Do you want me to break it again?

PATTIE. Want you to? Don't be absurd. It doesn't make the slightest difference to me. If you'd rather eat than look out for your future why, of course, that's your own business.

HARRY. But I don't see how I ——

PATTIE. Let's not say anything more about it —*please*. (*He goes—mystified and miserable.* PATTIE *sings off key in the first act. The curtain gets stuck. The steam pipes pound.* MAZIE *gets an encore on her dance with* HARRY. *The whole world is a hideous place to live in.* ROSENBAUM *comes back in response to a hurry call.*) She spoils my whole first act. She jumps on my cues all the time. I won't have it. I won't have her *in* it. Mattie, tell Kipps to come here.

ROSENBAUM. I was watching the first act. I didn't see anything wrong.

PATTIE. Oh—you didn't? Well, I won't go on to-morrow night if you don't change her.

ROSENBAUM. Change who? Which one?

PATTIE. Oh, that dark thing that thinks she looks Spanish with her hair over her ears. Harry got an encore for the first time in that dance and she thinks it's hers. Kipps, what on earth have you done to the lights in the first act?

KIPPS (*appearing with the harrowed look which only a stage manager can wear*). Nothing but what you ——

PATTIE. I didn't tell you to play the whole act in total darkness.

KIPPS. I only ——

PATTIE. Get it right. Get it *right*. Can't I ask for one little thing without you changing everything?

KIPPS. I'm very sorry but I only ——

ROSENBAUM. Go along and don't you nor anybody else monkey with those lights. I've got 'em set the way I want 'em and if anybody —— (KIPPS *vanishes*.) What's the matter, dearie? What's upset you? You tell me and I'll bounce the whole layout.

PATTIE. Call a rehearsal to-morrow and *I'll* tell you what's the matter with your show. *I'll* show you where to cut it. There's too much of that girl that nobody gives a damn about. She bores 'em stiff.

ROSENBAUM. Think so?

PATTIE. Do I think so? Can't you see it?

Can't you *feel* it? Can't you tell she lets the whole thing down whenever she comes on? Stop that, Mattie. Let the pins alone. Are you going to call a rehearsal or not?

ROSENBAUM. Of course, dearie. Anything you say.

PATTIE. Go tell Mr. Ashley to come here, Mattie. They'll have to hold the curtain till we get this settled. Now he's got a song I want to do in the first act.

ROSENBAUM. How can I tell till I hear it? I must hear it, of course.

PATTIE. Can you hear it to-night—after the show?

ROSENBAUM. Sure thing. The sooner the better.

PATTIE. You tell him that. Tell him you've got to hear it to-night or not at all.

ROSENBAUM. Now see here, Pattie. You've got the world at your feet. Don't you be a fool and kick it away. Maybe his song's good and maybe it ain't. If it's good for *you* it goes in. If it ain't—it *don't*. Get me? I'm for *you*—that's *my* business—to make you the biggest little star on Broadway, and I'm not going to let you give anything to anybody just because you feel kind of soft. Get me?

PATTIE. You'd like a *good* song in your show, wouldn't you? Better than anything you've got?

ROSENBAUM. If he's so good why didn't I know it before?

PATTIE. *I* knew it. He's clever. He's got class. I know what I'm talking about.

ROSENBAUM. Sure he is. That's why I've got him for you.

PATTIE. He's ever so much cleverer than I am. He is. He *is*. Don't smile like that. He's something way out of the ordinary and you ought to make a long contract with him right now. I guess *I* know.

(*She turns away with quick tears in her eyes.*)

ROSENBAUM. Why, see here, little girl, he's not fit to tie your shoe.

PATTIE. He's the most wonderful man I've ever known. He helps me! I sing better! I act better! He inspires me! He—he's *wonderful!* I'm going to *marry* him!

ROSENBAUM. My God! He hasn't got the guts to come in out of the rain.

HARRY (*hurrying in*). It's all right. I've called it off.

(PATTIE *turns with a radiant face, although there are still tears on her cheek.*)

ROSENBAUM. Miss Pitt tells me you've got a song she'd like me to hear. The only time I can hear it is to-night after the show.

HARRY. Delighted.

PATTIE. That's all right. We'll go up to my house. Mattie, go telephone Mother to have supper for us. We'll see you later then, Rosie.

(HARRY *steps aside and* ROSENBAUM *goes.*)

HARRY. Have you been crying?

PATTIE. No, of course not. Now this is a great

chance for you. You must make a wonderful impression on him to-night. Everything depends on it. Everything.

HARRY. You certainly are good to me.

PATTIE (*putting both her hands on his arm*). I believe in you. I think you have a great future, you know.

(*There is something in her eyes which quickens his pulses sufficiently to make him want to take her in his arms but he doesn't do it. However,* PATTIE *is content. She knows he will next time.*)

CALL BOY. Last act, Miss Pitt.

PATTIE. Heavens! Hold the curtain! Fly, Harry. Mattie! Quick—light the candle. My left eyebrow's all smeared. No, I can't change my stockings.

(*She gets on just in time and sings better than she knows how—throwing out something to her audience so irresistibly and radiantly happy that they keep her singing her nonsense over and over and over again.*)

CURTAIN

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WOMAN

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WOMAN

CHARACTERS

Miss Constancia Biddle, *a woman of leisure.*
Miss Nancy Marshall, *Constancia's friend.*
Miss Pattie Pitt, *a "Variety Star."*
Mr. Arthur Chichester, *an English gentleman.*

Time. Afternoon; the present.
Place. Miss Nancy Marshall's drawing-room.

THE IMPORTANCE OF BEING A WOMAN

SCENE.—Miss Marshall's *drawing-room.*

(*As the curtain rises,* Constancia Biddle *has had the rare luck of finding* Nancy Marshall *at home and in her own drawing-room. They have discussed in detail everything that has happened in the intervening twenty-four hours since they saw each other and have then come as usual to* Chichester. *It is spring and the slight idleness and relaxation is in the air which comes to women before they leave town—after their winter of intensive living.* Nancy *looks especially well in this room. The tapestries are a good background for her and she sits as quietly, as regal and aloof as one of the great portraits on the wall. The blazing daringness of* Connie's *brazen modernness stands out as a strong bizarre blotch of color in this atmosphere.*)

Connie (*as she peers into her small mirror at her alert face—appreciating how much more telling it is than the beauty of most women*). Well—marry him for a while anyway and see how you like it.

Nancy. But *why?*

CONNIE. You need experience in that direction terribly.

NANCY. Don't be an idiot!

CONNIE. You *are* the blankest page, so far as sex is concerned, of anything called a woman I ever knew.

NANCY. Just because I've wiped men off the slate entirely since the war, doesn't mean that I don't know as much about them as any decent unmarried woman ever knows.

CONNIE. But why not know still more?

NANCY. Because other things are so much more important. Men don't interest me as individuals.

CONNIE. No—just in large masses—as movements and bodies and so much power to be influenced.

NANCY. Um—more or less—yes.

CONNIE (*applying her lipstick with the touch of an artist*). Not for me, thank you. I think men *en masse* are a joke. They're nature's greatest failure. But give me one man at a time and he's the most diverting thing in the world—absolutely the only thing more important to a woman than herself.

NANCY. No man on earth could possibly be as important to me as I am to myself.

CONNIE (*lighting another cigarette from the one she has just finished*). Yes, dear—you're a superwoman—we all know that—president of more organizations, with your fingers in more uplifts and a larger income flowing into your check-book than most *men* have who have worked like dogs all their lives. Still, my darling—you *are* an old maid—and that's an awfully stupid thing to be.

NANCY. I'm not an old maid. I'm a woman who hasn't married and I'm not sure that it isn't the most distinguished thing a woman *can* be.

CONNIE. It takes an awfully big woman to be unmarried and not be an old maid. Since we're going in for frankness—I don't think you're quite up to that.

NANCY. Who *is* in that class if I'm not? I haven't slipped back one inch since the war. Most women who sort of rose to something then have slumped into themselves again, but I've gone *on*. My life gets much fuller and wider all the time. There's no room for men. Why—*why* should I give up my own personal life—or let it be changed in the slightest degree for a man?

CONNIE. Because no woman is complete without giving up everything on earth for at least one man in her life.

NANCY. That's rank old-fashioned outlived nonsense. A woman can be completely happy without men.

CONNIE. You mean she makes a much better bluff at it now than she used to.

NANCY. Not at all. She can be so deeply absorbed and fascinated and stimulated with other things that merely marrying a man is a step down and back.

(*Rising majestically and going to lean against the mantelpiece.*)

CONNIE (*uncrossing and recrossing her legs slowly and comfortably*). Eloquent, but not convincing.

NANCY. A man *is* a handicap to a woman. If she loves him, either he dominates her or she has to drag him along to keep up with her.

CONNIE. Oh, yes, love is hell—there's no doubt about that—but it's worth it. Harry was a rotter, but I wouldn't have missed him for anything. My mad, ridiculous infatuation for him was the best thing I ever did. It has sort of *illuminated* everything else. Go on, be a sport, Nancy, and marry Chichester. He's perfect for you. You'll never find anything else so good. As much money as you have—so you can never kick him around—even better born—sand enough to stick up for himself—but not enough to ever interfere with you. He's good-looking in the nicest, cleanest, healthiest British way, and all women adore him. What more do you want?

NANCY. Oh, you don't understand, Connie. Of course he's all that. A man *very* much worth marrying—if a woman wants to marry. But it's —— Oh, it's something too deep—too subtle to explain. It isn't that I couldn't be generous and give up lots of things and even like doing it. It isn't that one side of my nature wouldn't like being dominated and that it wouldn't be an interesting experience to let oneself go—to let passion sweep one away for a while. It isn't all that ——

(*Throwing out her arms widely and vaguely.*)

CONNIE. Well, what *is* it then?

NANCY. It's that I wouldn't be *myself*, alone—absolute—free—an entire and complete entity. All

the other—the intoxication of being loved by a man who's worth loving—all of it isn't worth giving up the glorious sensation of being exactly what I myself—my inmost self wants. (*Putting her hands on her splendid chest with dramatic intensity.*) Don't you see? When a woman *is* as free as I am and has as much power as I have, there is a responsibility with it—the obligation of living up to it—not throwing it away or lessening it. Any woman can marry *some* kind of a man—but it's a very great privilege to be a woman who *has* more important things to do than being married—and I think *I* have.

CONNIE (*rising and going to stand before* NANCY, *and flicking her cigarette ashes into the fireplace*). That's very godlike of you, and you're rich enough, and good looking enough, and even young enough to get away with it for at least the next ten years, but after that you'll be more or less like the rest of 'em—a lonely old woman rattling around the world, talking about the men she *might* have married.

NANCY. You can't love a man without compromise. You can't love and keep even your soul entirely your own—let alone your body.

CONNIE. I'm not keen about doing either one—but to get down to brass tacks, if you don't take Chichester pretty quickly the little actress is going to get him. She's the only really serious rival you've got.

NANCY. She can't be. No man who is as interested as Chichester is in *me* could possibly be anything but amused by *her*.

CONNIE. The amusement is getting pretty deep,

they say, but you're big game. I imagine he'd drop her cold if you'd give him enough reason to.

NANCY. He's bringing her in to tea this afternoon. You'd better stay. It may be amusing.

CONNIE. *What?* You don't mean to say he asked if he could?

NANCY (*moving away and trying to seem casual*). N-o—I asked him to do it. I confess to being curious. They say she's perfectly decent and I really thought it would be interesting to see a man of Chichester's quality trying to make himself believe that a common little thing like that—*isn't* common.

CONNIE. She *isn't!*

NANCY (*sitting on a sofa and making herself comfortable with the pillows to show how calm she is*). Oh, not very obviously so—*herself*—perhaps, but her view-point—her conspicuousness—her freedom—so *intimately* advertised—running about—sort of public property—a young girl as free as that—it's horrible.

CONNIE. She's an individual—you can't apply a measuring stick to *her*.

NANCY. That's all right—as an actress, of course—but to take her seriously as a person, it's too absurd.

CONNIE. Nancy, you're jealous of her. It's priceless.

NANCY. You're disgustingly stupid!

CONNIE. You bet I'll stay. I wouldn't miss it for anything. I wondered why you were wearing that gown. You're better looking this minute than you ever were in your life. You *look* as if you were

thinking about a man and not reorganizing something. You're positively magnetic now and not just impressive. But there's one thing—either take all the rouge off or put heaps more on—you look timid this way.

NANCY. Why, I only ——

CONNIE. Yes, I know—and your hair is too tame —too. Come on—let's go up and put on the high lights, and you'll be overpowering.

NANCY. It doesn't matter in the least how I look. I'm merely doing this to amuse myself.

CONNIE (*going into the hall*). I know—but come on.

NANCY (*trying to be reluctant, but following*). I hope you aren't asinine enough to think I care what *he* thinks.

(*A motor turns into the park and* CHICHESTER *leans nearer and more earnestly to* MISS PATTIE PITT *as she sits by his side, startlingly pretty in a delicate, vivid way, emphasized by the extravagant simplicity of her cleverly chosen clothes.*)

CHICHESTER (*saying in his rather heavy hesitating way*). But you are so very—very young, Pattie, dear—and so little and so sweet—how can you be so—so—very stubborn?

PATTIE. I'm not stubborn. I'm just *sure;* why shouldn't I know what I want? I've taken care of myself since I was fifteen. That's seven years. If I don't know now I never will. And I've got too many people and too many things depending on me to go and tie myself up getting married.

CHICHESTER. But that's just it. You ought not to have people depending on you. It's beastly, you know—a little thing like you taking care of brothers and sisters and things.

PATTIE. Oh, pickles! I'm prouder of that than anything I do. I got a much bigger thrill sending Johnnie to college than I did the first time I saw my name in electric lights. Honest.

CHICHESTER. But the strain—the burden. It's dreadful.

PATTIE. No strain at all. Signing checks is the easiest thing in life. The money's coming—why not spend it while the coming's good?

CHICHESTER. But yourself—your own life. It might be something very—I can give you things that —that ——

PATTIE. That money can't buy. Of course you can—but I want the things I can get myself.

CHICHESTER. How long are you going to stick it?

PATTIE. I don't know—forever, I suppose. See here, Ches, I'm a success.

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid you are.

PATTIE. And I'm crazy about what I'm doing. If I weren't, if I were just dubbing along looking for one job after another, I expect you wouldn't have a chance to ask me twice. I s'pose I'd grab you. They always do—men like you—but . . .

CHICHESTER. But what has that to do with it? You're made for wonderful things.

PATTIE. I'm getting wonderful things.

CHICHESTER. But for something totally different.

PATTIE. I don't want anything totally different.

CHICHESTER. A life that would satisfy you—where your real self—your real personality, don't you know—would count.

PATTIE. My real personality counts in the box-office.

CHICHESTER. But that's only what you're giving out to the public. They don't know how really charming and sweet and simple you are.

PATTIE. Whatever it is *they* like in me is the best thing I've got. Don't you fool yourself thinking I've got anything better than that to give to *anybody*. I haven't. Whatever it is that gets over —is *me*. Not what I am to separate people—because we're a little bit different to everybody. We give a little bit of ourselves to this one and another little bit to that—but in the theatre there's *everybody*—the whole world. You give it all at once—all you've got—in a way you couldn't do any place else. I know they love me and something that is *me* vibrates between me and them. It's power, Ches. I've got it and I mustn't throw it away. There's a responsibility about it, you know. Any girl can get married, but I have something more important to do, you know.

CHICHESTER. What? What is more important for a charming girl to do than to marry—a—a ——

PATTIE. A charming man. And you *are* a charming man, Ches. You're a perfect darling. (*Touching his cheek with the tip of one of her charming fingers and smiling close to his eyes with the honest sweetness that had first made him say*

what he is saying.) The very biggest darling of any man I know—or ever knew—or probably ever will know.

CHICHESTER. Then, my dear child, if that's the way you feel about it, why on earth don't you ——

PATTIE. You don't grow on bushes—I know that.

CHICHESTER. Then why don't you marry me and let me give you the things you ought to have?

PATTIE. I'd rather give things to other people. Really, I would.

CHICHESTER. But you could go on doing that. All your brothers and sisters could ——

PATTIE. Oh, no. You're sweet—just sweet—but I *couldn't.* I couldn't let you or anyone else give me anything for them.

CHICHESTER. But it would be yours—just as absolutely yours to do with as you please, as what you have now is.

PATTIE. You *are* a dear! (*She looks deeply into his eyes with a wise tenderness and appreciation.*) You are—but you don't understand. Don't you see—I—I'm proud of being able to do it? They aren't clever and they need to be *made* and have ideas and education and things *poked* into them. They're just—you know—ordinary. And to see Mother wearing pretty things and staying at home, like a lady, is just too wonderful. It's the thing I'm conceited about—not about my success. I know I'm clever. I can't help that. I didn't do *it*, but I *am* doing the other things and that's what I'm proud of. That's where the fun is. It's just exactly the way you feel when you say you want to

take care of me—you know you could—you can put out your hand and have things and get things *done*. So can I. I've got something that people buy and I mustn't throw it away. I must live up to it.

(*He leans back, looking out across the spring grass with a sigh which is lonely and puzzled. She puts a kind hand on his sleeve.*)

CHICHESTER. That isn't it at all—or it wouldn't be—if you loved me.

PATTIE. But I wonder if I'm ever going to love anybody enough to give it up ——

CHICHESTER. Oh, yes, there will be someone you'll chuck it for—quickly enough.

PATTIE. But such a lot of men have asked me to marry them—and I've always liked—like being alone best.

CHICHESTER (*slowly turning to her again*). I believe you mean it. You're a funny little girl.

PATTIE. I'm not so funny. Only when men don't understand. They think it can't be. I wish —oh, I wish you *did* understand, Ches, because you *are* so perfectly adorable.

CHICHESTER. Oh, no, I'm not—but other things are and—you—you'd like it. We'd go back to England. Things are simpler and—and quieter, you know. They would go on forever—not jump about and change the way they do over here. There wouldn't be anything uncertain about your future. It would be *yours* and there'd be a—a something solid under your feet. And people would be awfully sweet to you, and—and—things would be—right, you know.

PATTIE (*putting her hand on his*). I do appreciate you—oh, I *do*—and all you are and all you mean. It's old and mellow and marvelous and terribly grand and wonderful, but I just *have* to do things myself. I wish you loved me the way I love you. We'll be friends forever, won't we? Say yes.

CHICHESTER. I hope so.

PATTIE. You've got the kindest eyes, Ches. Oh, is this where she lives? She's awfully spiffy and wonderful, isn't she?

CHICHESTER. Very.

PATTIE. Sweet of you to bring me to see her.

CHICHESTER. Awfully sweet of you to come.

PATTIE (*stepping out*). You don't think she'll mind if I don't stay very long, do you? I've got a million things to do.

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid she won't understand that.

PATTIE. Why not?

CHICHESTER. Most people give up everything else when they're asked to come to her.

PATTIE. How funny!

CHICHESTER (*closing the door, having gathered up* PATTIE'S *fur and gold purse*). I confess I don't know just why she asked me to bring you—for she hasn't at all other people's curiosity about knowing you.

PATTIE (*patting her perfect foot on the first step*). Perhaps we'll find out. I run into all kinds of things. Nothing ever surprises me much.

(*The door is opened; they cross the hall and enter the drawing-room which seems large and dark*

to PATTIE, *but not much else. She prefers her own gay apartment with the sun on upper Riverside Drive. But she is for a moment impressed with the personality which greets her. Something large and beautiful and calm and sure and very hard under the softness checks* PATTIE'S *glowing good faith—but it comes back quickly with the warmth which leaps to her from* CONNIE.)

NANCY (*holding out a long, slow hand*). How very nice of you to come and see me!

CONNIE. I've been boasting that I knew you for a long time—and now I *shall* be puffed up.

NANCY (*with a radiantly careful smile, as she also gives her hand to* CHICHESTER). And how very nice of you to bring her.

CHICHESTER. We're both immensely flattered to be asked.

CONNIE. Hello, Chichester. Do you happen to have a smokable cigarette? I've been trying to get through Nancy's, but they're expensive and bad. Ah—that's more like it. Thanks. Sit here, Miss Pattie Pitt, close to me—so I can tell people about your hair. It's so real, nobody believes it, of course. Have one?

PATTIE. No, thank you. I don't smoke.

NANCY. Oh, don't you? How remarkable!

PATTIE. Is it? Why?

NANCY. Well—I don't know. I should rather imagine you would.

PATTIE. I hate it. It's so messy.

CONNIE. Don't tell me you have no vices.

NANCY (*being very gracious*). It depends upon what she calls vices, doesn't it?

CHICHESTER. What *do* you consider a vice, Mrs. Biddle?

PATTIE. Oh—I thought you were *Miss* Biddle.

CONNIE. Did you? How dreadful of you!

PATTIE. Oh, why? Don't you like being Miss?

CONNIE. I've just been holding forth on that subject. It's the one I'm most eloquent on.

CHICHESTER. What do you say when you are at your best?

CONNIE. Ask Nancy.

NANCY. Pray don't. I couldn't do you justice.

PATTIE. Don't *you* think it's nice—not to be married, Miss Marshall?

NANCY. Nice?

(NANCY'S *smile means that she is lending herself with generosity and tact to something quite below her level.*)

PATTIE. Fun, I mean—and awfully interesting.

NANCY. W-ell—if one's life *is* interesting, I suppose it doesn't matter much whether one is married or not.

CONNIE. Don't let them get off any of that stuff while *we're* here, Mr. Chichester. We believe in marriage, don't we? I think it comes *first*—for a woman—either as a means of livelihood or any other necessity—everything else is on the side.

PATTIE. For people like you, yes. You could stop all the wonderful things you're doing, Miss Marshall, any minute, and it wouldn't make any difference at all.

NANCY. I'm afraid I don't understand.

PATTIE. I mean it would be your own business entirely.

NANCY. It would concern a great many thousands of people.

PATTIE. Oh, yes, I know—but somebody else could go on with it. I mean—oh, I know you're perfectly marvelous and all that. I don't mean that somebody else could do it just as well, but I mean you're not under contract.

NANCY. Contract?

PATTIE. Like I am, I mean. I've just signed for another five years.

NANCY. But don't you think the things one *elects* to do, one is much more obliged to keep faith with than merely business contracts—which might be—a—adjusted, I should think—somehow.

PATTIE. But how? A manager signs a contract for *me*—my personality. Nothing else will do. How can it be adjusted?

NANCY. Oh, really? Isn't that rather limiting?

PATTIE. Limiting? It's the greatest thing that can happen. If somebody wants to tie you up for five years, you know exactly where you are and what you can ask for.

CONNIE. How delightful! What *do* you ask for? Wonderful gowns and motors and jewels and things?

PATTIE. Heavens, no—that has nothing to do with the case. I mean, you're—you get to be part of the big machinery and have your say about the plays and the cast—and—oh, you're really in it

and pulling for it and deciding and helping and *responsible*, you know. It's great!

NANCY (*beginning with the tea much as the gods must have served their nectar*). Of course, I really know nothing about it.

PATTIE. Of course, you don't. Outsiders never do. Ches is wonderful now. He understands really awfully well.

NANCY. Does he? (*Turns to* CHICHESTER.) What do you understand?

CHICHESTER (*rising to take a cup*). Oh—I understand that Miss Pitt is a very big person and that everything else must stand by and wait when her profession needs her.

CONNIE (*taking the cup*). I always thought one was so completely one's own boss when one got to the top like you that everything and everybody had to wait for one.

PATTIE. Yes, I think that's what most people think—just fluff—just rehearsing a little and coming on for a little while in the evening. People even say to me, "Come for the week-end. Couldn't you get off *Saturday?* Oh, *do!* It's *so* hot in town. Can't *you* get off when you want to?"

NANCY. And can't you?

PATTIE. Not unless you're so rotten they don't want you.

NANCY. Hard, isn't it?

PATTIE. No, it's gorgeous. Of course, *you* don't have to do anything in the world you don't want to do, so you don't know how thrilling it is to have a whole ship—all the officers and the crew and everybody else depending on *you*—so you just *have*

to come through and make good and live up to something.

NANCY. I fancy I rather know something about that.

PATTIE. Oh, but not like this—because you have money, and when you're tired you don't need to care whether school keeps or not. But when I'm so tired it seems to me I can't dance another step or sing another note—at about the eleventh encore—I get a thrill down my spine—not at the applause—but thinking what *would* they do if I couldn't get through the summer and of how proud and happy Mr. Isaacs and Mr. Rosenstein and Mr. Applebaum are that we're going to have our three hundredth performance next week and of the limousine I'm going to give Mother as a souvenir. It's the being tied up tight and having to go on—or else break up a tremendous thing—that makes it worth while. I adore carrying a load.

CONNIE. You dear, delightful little thing! Somebody ought to pick you up in his big hand and carry you off and keep you in a glass case forever. Don't you think so, Chichester?

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid she'd soon crack the glass. You won't have any tea—will you?

PATTIE. No, thank you.

NANCY. No?—Oh! What can I offer you?

PATTIE. Oh, I never take anything. I have rather an early dinner, you know, and it doesn't fit in. I must run along now. I have to see —— (*Looking at the very small watch almost lost in the diamonds.*) Goodness, I must fly. I have to see an author at five-thirty and listen to some new music

at six and then have my dinner and rest a minute—and I have to be at the theatre a little early tonight because a reporter will be waiting for me. It was awfully nice seeing you, Miss Marshall. Thank you so much. I'd love to send you a box if you'll let me know when you can come. You don't mind my leaving you here, do you, Ches?

CONNIE. Are you in a car or anything? I wonder if you'd mind dropping me at the Colony Club—if you're going up.

PATTIE. I'd love it. Good-bye, Miss Marshall. Bye-bye, Ches—I'll ring you up about Sunday. Good-bye—good-bye.

CONNIE (*looking back at* NANCY *and* CHICHESTER *as she goes out*). I feel like the tail to a *very* large comet. You ordinary mortals don't interest me in the least. Good-bye—I'm following.

(*She goes out after* PATTIE. *A long moment during which* NANCY *looks into the bottom of her teacup and* CHICHESTER *looks at his shoes.*)

NANCY. Oh—sorry. More tea?

CHICHESTER. A—no—yes. Thanks awfully, if I may.

(*Going to her with his cup and standing silently till it is filled.*)

NANCY. Extraordinary, isn't it?

CHICHESTER. What?

NANCY. The—her—I've never seen anything just like it before. Of course, *you know.* I can't judge. You admire her immensely, I suppose—so perhaps it doesn't seem so amazing to you.

CHICHESTER. The—what?

NANCY. The—ego—the complete absorption in herself—her *importance* to herself.

CHICHESTER. That's only the outside. In reality she's the most modest person I know. (NANCY *laughs.*) It's quite true—really. Her own estimate of herself—just as a girl—is *very* humble! It's only this something she has which—which has made her famous—which she values so much and of course it *is* valuable.

NANCY. I suppose so. But it seems to me she thinks it very important just to be—herself.

CHICHESTER. Well—it is—rather—isn't it? That is, since she has an especial self to be.

NANCY. But hasn't she got that importance a little out of proportion?

CHICHESTER. You think so? I wonder. After all—it seems to be awfully important to a woman—nowadays—to be a woman. She seems so awfully busy about it somehow. I'm not criticizing. I'm sure I would be, too—if I were a woman. Men *are* totally unnecessary, I s'pose, except for breeding purposes. And we go on taking ourselves for granted in the same old relationships with women. Stupid of us, isn't it?

NANCY. Nonsense! Why are you so humble all of a sudden? Have you been humbled?

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid I have.

NANCY. Nothing is so important to women as their relations to men.

CHICHESTER. Eh?

NANCY. Every woman in the world knows that.

CHICHESTER. This from the seats of the mighty?

NANCY. That is, she knows it when she isn't too completely carried away with herself to see it. But women of real importance aren't carried away with themselves or what they're doing. They know that the big elemental things are what everything else depends upon. Of course, the bigger the woman —the greater appreciation she has of men and the —the greater devotion she's capable of giving to a— *big* man. She knows that *whatever* she is and however far she may have gone, in her own way—she's only complete with a great love.

(*Something slowly relaxes in* CHICHESTER. *He stretches out his long legs more comfortably and settles deeper into the chair.*)

CHICHESTER. I—never seem to have got that from you somehow. I rather thought you were one of the ones who don't need us.

NANCY. No! How queer! How *could* you have thought that of *me?*

CHICHESTER. Well, you *are* one of the Olympians, you know. You must admit a man has to look up—to get near you at all.

NANCY. *Some* men, naturally. But *you*—why should *you* say anything so stupid?

CHICHESTER. Because I am so stupid—I suppose—where women are concerned. I usually miss my bet.

NANCY. Do you? I shouldn't have thought that. You seem to me to have a very subtle understanding, something keener than most men. But I think perhaps I do know how—why you have misunderstood me so entirely. It's because you are so

self-depreciating. It's quite true—I am totally indifferent to most men, but big men are much more interesting and companionable than women.

CHICHESTER. But, alas, I don't classify.

NANCY. If you didn't you wouldn't be saying that.

CHICHESTER. I'm only one of the bystanders—looking on.

NANCY. Ah—but you're looking on with large understanding, and understanding is the greatest thing in the world. Isn't it?

CHICHESTER. Is it?

NANCY. Give me your cup. I can't reach it.

CHICHESTER. Oh—sorry. A—I ——

NANCY. Of course, you will.

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid I will. If you don't mind. Thanks so much. No, quite right. Very nice. I'm afraid I ought to be running along.

NANCY. Why do you say ought?

CHICHESTER. I'm afraid I'm boring you.

NANCY. I'm afraid I've been horribly clumsy not to let you see that you—don't bore me.

CHICHESTER. Thanks. That's awfully nice of you. I don't know. I—a ——

NANCY. Yes?

CHICHESTER. Nothing.

NANCY. By the way, I want to ask your advice about something. I have to undertake a thing that I'm afraid is too big for me.

CHICHESTER. Oh—there *isn't* anything like that, is there?

NANCY (*leaning across the table with her fine elbows on it*). Don't laugh at me. I wonder if

you'd mind very much letting me talk it out to you —and telling me quite honestly what you think and how *you* see it.

CHICHESTER. You frighten me.

NANCY. It would be such an enormous help to have your mind on it. I sometimes need *disinterested* advice so desperately and don't know where to find it. Sometimes I tremble at the things I have to put through without a man's advice.

CHICHESTER. I'm rather overwhelmed.

NANCY. Don't—don't laugh at me, please. *May* I—tell you?

CHICHESTER. Listening is my one talent, Miss Marshall.

NANCY. A diplomat's talent. A dangerous, subtle talent. It makes one say too much. I think I won't let myself go after all.

CHICHESTER. Oh, come now. That isn't fair— to take me up on the heights and throw me down like that. Please ——

NANCY. It's a great temptation—but it will take a long time.

CHICHESTER. I have more time than anything in the world.

NANCY. Turn out that one light near you then, will you—and sit over here. (*She pokes the pillows at her back cozily and luxuriously and the light falls warmly over her.* CHICHESTER *sits in the nearer chair and a comforting and pleasant appeal and deference are in her voice and hands as she begins. He sits modestly listening and slowly wondering.*) You see, it's this way. Oh!

CHICHESTER. What is it?

NANCY. Now *you* are frightening *me*. Your head is so strong in that light. It brings out new lines somehow, or at least lines I never seem to have seen before. But that doesn't mean they haven't always been there. It's merely my own blindness. Isn't it?

CHICHESTER. If you see anything new and strong in me, Miss Marshall, it's only because you are putting it there.

NANCY. Which would you rather it were—something which is really in you—or something which *I* put into you?

CHICHESTER. Oh! Eh? Well—really, you know! Now you *have* got me going, as you say over here. Either one would be too—what shall I say—too much to expect.

NANCY. I can't imagine where or how you get that self-depreciation. You must have come in contact lately with something or someone who belittled you. It's all wrong, you know. You must get rid of it.

CHICHESTER (*blushing with pleasure*). But about this—this new something.

NANCY. Yes—this terrifyingly *strong* something in *you*. It's because of that I'm afraid, I can't go on—can't talk to you so intimately, I mean, as I had *wanted* to.

CHICHESTER. Oh, now, Miss Marshall, I *say!* Aren't you pulling my leg a bit? Now *really!* Just a *little* bit?

NANCY. You don't mean that for a minute. You know I'm absolutely sincere and horribly embarrassed. I don't mind confessing it's a new sen-

sation for me—being suddenly overwhelmed by a personality so much stronger than my own.

CHICHESTER. My word!

NANCY. It upsets my values, so to speak. I can't put myself and my problem to you in just exactly the right proportion, so you will see the subtlety of the whole thing.

CHICHESTER. But come now—*try*. I give you my word I shall try to understand.

NANCY. But don't look at me so—so *deeply*—or I can't begin.

CHICHESTER (*lowering his shy eyes*). I beg your pardon. It's only because I'm so interested and so immensely flattered.

NANCY. You *are* good. It's this. I find that all the huge affairs I'm involved in, which are depending on me and pulling me this way and that—I find they're getting to be a burden instead of a joy. I find that my own inner self as a woman is demanding something else—something personal. Now would you despise me if I refused to do a very important piece of work which they are depending on me to do—work which would take me to France for a while? *Would* you despise me if I just flatly gave it up because—well, because I don't *want* to do it? Because something which I can't even define or explain is calling to me? They tell me no one else *can* do it as well as I could. But, do you know—the colossal conceit of that little thing who was just here made it suddenly seem rather absurd for any of us to believe that someone else won't do just as well. And even if it were true—even if I could do it better than anyone else—I want to stop. I want

to live. I want my *soul—myself*—to live. Oh, I—— (*Suddenly covering her face with her hands.*) It's so strange to be saying this to *any*one—above all to you. You seem to have *made* me say it. I've never let anyone see how weak I am.

CHICHESTER. My dear Miss Marshall!

(*He rises timidly and unbelievingly and stands before her in an awkward silence.*)

NANCY (*lifting her head*). You don't think I'm foolish—do you?

CHICHESTER. Oh, dear, no! Dear me, no!

NANCY. I know you understand. I don't have to put it into words. It's this great confusion that I'm fighting. I'm trying to decide which side of my nature is the one to give up to. I don't know —I don't know whether my *work* or *myself* is the more important. Tell me honestly what *you* think.

CHICHESTER. Well—they're both so *very* important, it's difficult to say.

NANCY. Oh, be honest, *please.*

CHICHESTER. What is it you want to do—if you *are* yourself, my dear Miss Marshall, to marry someone?

NANCY. Oh—do you think—that is—I mean I—— What do *you* mean?

CHICHESTER. Why, only that love is probably the only thing that could make you give up all the wonderful things you're doing. But where's the man big enough to make you love him?

NANCY (*after a slight pause*). I didn't realize you were so *very* tall. Don't stand up or I shall *never* be able to talk. Sit over here.

(*Making a place beside her on the couch and knocking a pillow on the floor.*)

CHICHESTER. Let me get it.

NANCY (*reaching down with a beautiful hand which is trembling*). See that. *Now* you know how you frighten me.

CHICHESTER (*taking the hand in a very kind and surprised grasp*). Why, *dear* Miss Marshall. We all tremble before you, you know.

NANCY. Oh, don't! I'm so tired of that. I—forgive me. (*Looking at her watch.*) Heavens! I never dreamed! It *is* late—and I haven't even begun. What a bore! I suppose you're tied up for dinner. I suppose you *must* go. You aren't free, by any chance?

CHICHESTER. Well—I ——

NANCY. I'm all alone. I won't dress. How nice of you to just stay. We can sit here and go on with this wonderful talk which may never come again.

CHICHESTER. How good you are! You're sure you're not just being kind to me because you think I'm a bit down?

NANCY. Nonsense! Down? It's because you're so *up* I'm clinging to you so desperately for help.

(*They laugh with a note of something almost like comfortable companionship.*)

CHICHESTER. You'll find me awfully clumsy, you know, because I can't grasp yet that—well, that you are just a woman. You're such a gigantically important *person*, you know.

NANCY. But isn't the most important thing in the world just *being* a woman—if one *is* a woman?

CHICHESTER. If I might dare to say so—yes, but then I'm only a man, of course.

NANCY. A very big man. Tell me, why is it I'm so frightened of you all of a sudden? Tell me all about yourself.

(*She smiles at him very elementally and puts three long fingers across his sleeve in a very elemental touch and* CHICHESTER'S *self-respect grows stronger.*)

CURTAIN

WHAT THEY THINK

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

WHAT THEY THINK

CHARACTERS

Bobbie (*the* Boy).
Josie (*the* Girl).
The Mother.
The Father.

Time. Always; a morning in August at 3 A. M.
Place. A corner section of the living-room of a good house in a small American city.

WHAT THEY THINK

SCENE.—*Always. About three o'clock, a morning in August.*

(*The curtain rises on a corner section of the living-room of a good house in a small American city. The room shows that the passion for interior decoration has not entirely passed it by and that a comfortable amount of money has been spent in doing what other people are doing. It is the average prosperous living-room of its average occupants, where their average lives have left no impression. Moonlight comes through the two long windows and lights the room with a white glow, still and expectant.* THE BOY, *who lies asleep on the couch, is in shadow. After a moment a* GIRL, *wearing a long cape and carrying a soft basket on her arm, comes cautiously up to one of the windows on the terrace outside and quietly manipulating the lock opens the window.* THE BOY *lifts his head a little, then puts it down, watching.* THE GIRL *comes in, closes and locks the window and goes to the hall door. She is slender and strong. The bobbed hair and indefinite little nose give her rather a pert and piquant style. She puts her hand on the knob to open the door.*)

THE BOY. Hist!

THE GIRL (*jumping violently*). Mercy! What are you doing there?

THE BOY. Waiting to give you a tip.

THE GIRL. What about?

THE BOY (*with a slow, dry speech which at times resembles a growl*). They're on the warpath. You've done it once too often. Much telephoning by Mother from eleven o'clock on—and much snorting by Father. Why the dickens didn't you come home at a decent time? It's after two now.

THE GIRL. It's three. Where did Mother telephone?

THE BOY. Every place she could think of—to the country club and most of your friends.

THE GIRL. Makes me sick.

THE BOY. What you got there?

THE GIRL. My bathing suit.

THE BOY. Oh, yes. Every time Father ran out of copy he went back to that. You're in for a hot one.

THE GIRL. Makes me tired!

THE BOY. What have you cooked up to tell 'em?

THE GIRL (*coming a little away from the door*). I've been thinking all the way home—why should I fix up *anything* just to please their ideas? The way Mother and Father *make* you lie is the limit. We only went for a perfectly marvelous motor ride in this perfectly divine moonlight after the party—and then we thought it would be heavenly to go in the pool once more—just because it *was* this priceless moonlight—and so we did.

THE BOY (*pushing himself up to a half-sitting position*). Who?

THE GIRL (*frankly*). Jimmie and Marth and Louis and me, of course, and then we were starting home and Marth got into the pantry and brought out food, and we had it there by the pool, after we got dressed—and it was great.

THE BOY. Well, *this* time is going to be a blow-out. They're foaming at the mouth, both of 'em. I've never seen 'em as bad as this. What you goin' to do?

THE GIRL (*with a shrug*). D'know.

THE BOY. Seems to me you might have had sense enough in your bean to keep out of another one.

THE GIRL. You're a nice one to talk!

THE BOY (*from the superior standpoint of a man of eighteen*). A girl can't get away with stuff like that—chasin' round all night. Why do you try it?

THE GIRL (*with rising indignation*). Oh, a girl—a girl—a girl! I'm a human being and just as free as Father and Mother are. I'm not always ragging *them* about what they ought and ought not to do.

THE BOY. Wouldn't you like to though?

THE GIRL (*giving the* BOY *a poke to move over and sitting on the sofa*). Gosh, wouldn't I! Just once—just *once* to let loose and get it all out of my system.

THE BOY. I'd like to shoot a few at Dad—square in the eye—just exactly what I like about him and what I *don't*.

THE GIRL. I know! I'm so sick of hearing my faults and pretending that *they* haven't got any I can hardly stand it.

THE BOY. If I could just once let him know that

I'm *on* to him, I could listen to his favorite remarks about my character with a little more equanimity. (Josie *giggles.*) Shut up. They're not quiet for the night yet. I think they're laying for you at the top of the stairs. You'd better beat it up the back way, and I'll make a noise down here to bring 'em down. Get into bed and say you were there all the time. Persuade 'em they've had a temporary delusion of the optic nerve.

The Girl. I *won't!* Why should I?

The Boy. You'll know when they hop on to you. There's talk about sending you away.

The Girl. What!

The Boy. That was Dad's brilliant suggestion. Away—anywhere—out of this rotten town with its rotten association.

(*Waving his arms, in a vivid imitation of* Father.)

The Girl. He didn't!

The Boy. Sure, he did!

The Girl. What did Mother say?

The Boy. Mother blubbered, and then they got on their favorite topic—whose fault it is they *have* such rotten children; and a pleasant evening was had by all.

The Girl. Where did he say he was going to send me?

The Boy. Oh, just *away.* This is not the every-day thing. It's come to a boil. Honest, Josie, you'd better dope out something to get yourself out of this. You're in deep.

The Girl. In? In what? What have I done? They've never had any fun in their whole lives them-

selves, and they don't expect anybody else to have any.

THE BOY. Oh, I don't know. They must have been pretty devilish, buggy riding Sunday afternoons.

THE GIRL. Looking for wild flowers. Just because it's moonlight instead of daylight, Mother thinks it's wicked to be out in it.

THE BOY. *Loose!*

THE GIRL. Yes—everything that's *fun* is *loose.* It was too cool and sweet and heavenly for words, and the hot, smelly old town had gone to bed, and nothing was out but us and we simply *tore.* It was marvelous! Isn't it ridiculous and disgusting to have to come back and *explain?* And the worst of it is you *can't.* No language in the human dictionary will make them see it the right way.

THE BOY. Right you are! What's the use trying? They're parents.

THE GIRL. I know. But they ought to have *some* idea of what's going on in the world. They're all wrong about—just about every bloomin' thing they fuss about.

THE BOY. And the worst of it is you can't tell 'em. If a feller could only talk it over, get it to 'em that there *is* something else in the world besides what *they* think! Dad's not so bad, you know. Men like him. He must be all right. If he just wasn't so confounded sure that *I'm* always wrong. That's what gets my goat.

THE GIRL. Mother's all right, too. If she just could get the fact that *I'm* a woman too.

THE BOY. A what?

THE GIRL. I am. I'm twenty. I know a great deal more about life as it actually *is*—*now*—*this minute*—than Mother does; but she spends her time handing me out stuff to believe and laws to live by that have *nothing to do with the case*. She doesn't know *at all* what *I* really believe and think and want; and there she is, sitting on a throne, waving a little stick to the old tune: I'm right because I'm your mother. If just once—just *once*—she'd say "Oh, I'm wrong and *you're* right."

THE BOY. You bet! If Dad didn't take it as a matter of religion that I *ought* to give him his chair. If once in a while he'd say "Here, Bob, you take it" —I'd be crazy about giving it to him.

THE GIRL. Of course if they only could see, but they can't. They haven't *lived*. That's what's the matter with 'em.

THE BOY. If he could only get it through his brain that I didn't *mean* to smash the motor! Wouldn't you think he'd *know?* I'm a great deal more sorry than he is. If he didn't say so darned much about it himself I could tell him so.

THE GIRL. Of course. I just can't talk things over with Mother. She doesn't *know*. She hasn't lived. I s'pose she never had any beau but Father; just married him and settled down, and there you are. Her ideas about love and divorce and things are too killing for words. I'm not going to have my life suppressed and ruined just because she doesn't understand, and I'm just going to stand up and tell her so.

THE BOY. Yes, you are. You haven't got the nerve. Sst! They're coming!

(*With one roll* BOBBY *goes off the couch and under it.*)

THE GIRL (*standing up*). Bobby, don't be a dub. Get up!

(JOSIE *hesitates and then makes a quick dash behind one of the window curtains, concealing herself successfully. After a moment* MOTHER *opens the hall door, pauses, switches on the light and comes into the room, hesitating and listening intensely. She is moderate and medium in her size, her coloring and her very being shaped and pigeonholed by her surroundings. The mild blue dressing gown is pleasantly becoming to her agreeable face; and her indefinite hair, which is trying to curl, suggests a general distress.*)

FATHER (*from the hall, in sharp, determined tones*). Is she there?

MOTHER. No.

FATHER (*coming into the doorway*). I told you so. He's gone out after her then. They're in cahoots. He knew all the time where she was.

MOTHER. I hope so.

FATHER. You do? You hope he lied to me steadily for hours?

MOTHER. Yes—if he knew where she is.

FATHER. There you are! No wonder they lie.

MOTHER. They don't lie.

(*Rather a good-looking man at his best,* FATHER'S *dignity suffers a little from his bathrobe and flopping slippers and the lock of hair which stands erect instead of covering the bald spot.*)

FATHER. They don't lie, don't they?

MOTHER. No, they don't.

FATHER. No, they don't! They just go on deceiving you and getting away with it, because you shut your eyes to it. You're weak as water. *I tell you I'm through.* I'm not going to be made a fool of by my own children.

MOTHER (*not listening*). You wouldn't telephone any place again, would you?

FATHER. Why in heaven's name you can't manage your own children, I don't see. I manage *my* business.

MOTHER. Do you think Bobby *has* gone after her?

FATHER. Nobody's putting anything over on *me*, and if I can't have the same law and order and decency in my own home it's a —— Don't you *tell her?* Don't you *tell* her?

MOTHER. Tell her what?

FATHER. Tell her *what I say*—that I won't *have* this kind of thing, that if she can't live according to decent ideas, the way a decent, well-brought-up girl ought to live, I—she can't live in this house?

MOTHER. Do you expect her to listen to that?

(*Sitting on the edge of a chair, thinking and listening.*)

FATHER. Why wouldn't I expect her to?

MOTHER. Did you listen to it when you were her age?

FATHER. Certainly I did. Children had some respect for their parents when I was young.

MOTHER. Oh, no, they didn't. Listen! (*She motions for silence.*) I thought the 'phone was going to ring.

FATHER. What's the matter with you? I sometimes think—it's something in *you* that they get their looseness from.

MOTHER. I expect it is.

FATHER. What! I don't believe you try. You're not firm enough. If you'd kept at it, day in and day out since they were born, impressing the principles of right and wrong, how *could* they be the way they are?

MOTHER. They're just like everybody else's children. Don't forget that.

FATHER. Well, I won't have it. I want them like *my* children. I want them to show that they're brought up in a—in a—a good, Christian—I don't believe you get at them. I don't believe it sinks in. If I had the *time* they'd be different, let me tell you. What *do* you say to them? What *do* you teach them?

MOTHER (*with a sudden outcry*). What difference does that make? I want to know where she is. Here we are talking, talking, talking, and where is she? (*She breaks into sobbing.*)

FATHER. That's just it. Where is she? This is the end. It's gone too far. When she comes home *I'll* tell her that unless she makes an absolute change, that unless she lives according to my ideas of—of what is fitting and right, there's going to be a—a *change*.

MOTHER. She hears that from you once a week. Where *is* she?

(*Blowing her nose and going to the window to look out.*)

FATHER. And what does she hear from *you?* Why in the name of all that's holy can't you make her behave?

MOTHER (*turning on him with a weak fierceness*). Because I don't know how.

FATHER. What! Why don't you know how? You're a woman. It's your business. Why don't you? She's only a young girl. Why can't you manage her?

MOTHER. Why can't you manage Bobby?

FATHER. I do.

MOTHER. No, you don't.

FATHER. That's different; he's a boy. It wouldn't hurt him to stay out all night.

MOTHER. Yes, it would; yes, it would. I couldn't stand it.

FATHER. You undo all I teach him, anyway—with your slackness. You haven't any spine. *I* don't know what's the matter. It's not *my* fault. What in thunder *is* the matter? Why have we got such rotten children?

(*He sinks into one of the chairs, putting his head in his hands.*)

MOTHER. We don't know what kind of children we have.

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. They're not near us. They're way off there. We might as well be trying to shout across the ocean.

FATHER. Don't try to excuse yourself with that kind of nonsense. What's the reason you don't know them? They're your children. It's your own fault if you don't. *I* know them, let me tell you!

MOTHER (*coming away from the window, with desperation in her unhappy hands*). It's those awful years in between.

FATHER. What!

MOTHER. That horrible gap we can't fill up. I've tried. I've remembered all the things I did. I used to sneak and hide. She doesn't. She just *does* them. I've reminded myself how many boys I was engaged to.

FATHER. What? You never were engaged to any but me.

MOTHER. And how many I kissed.

FATHER. *You* weren't that sort of a girl.

MOTHER. I shiver in my bed at night when I think of her and pray for something to help her with. I wonder how I ever pulled through myself. I wonder how I ever landed you with respectability.

FATHER (*after a pause with his mouth open*). You're making that stuff up to try to excuse her.

MOTHER (*going into the window where* JOSIE *is*). Can't you remember yourself? Were you any better than Bobby is? Were you as good?

FATHER. He ought to be better than I was. He has greater advantages. I've given him every ——

MOTHER. Oh!—*oh!*—OH! What has that got to do with it? Are you any closer to him than your father was to you? Do you never want to put your hand in his and say: Oh, help me to help you; let me be near you—close? (*Putting her hand on the*

curtain which hides JOSIE.) Do you never wish you could, but don't know how? We're getting farther away from them all the time, and we're never going to catch up.

(*She goes to sit helplessly in the chair opposite* FATHER. *There is a long pause. She wipes her tears, dabbing at her face. He stares at her.*)

FATHER. You let them step on you. You let them see your weak side.

MOTHER. I'd like to be myself with them just once—open out—bare—and let them take me in if they will.

FATHER (*trying to keep a firm footing*). Bosh! Bosh! We have to keep up the best side for them. You can't go letting them see the other.

MOTHER. I believe they'd like us better. We couldn't have failed worse than we have anyway.

FATHER (*rising with a slap on his knee*). Speak for yourself. You can't blame me if you've failed in your job.

MOTHER. You're so cocksure you're right.

FATHER. Well, what am I wrong about? Just tell me. Didn't I tell you this would happen?

MOTHER. Yes—yes—yes; you did.

FATHER. If you had *controlled* her ——

MOTHER. Ho-o ——

FATHER. And the worst of it is it undermines everything I do. I tell you once and for all, I'm not going to have children that are like something that don't belong to me, doing things I don't do, thinking things I don't think, saying things I never

—it outrages me. What's the use being the best people in the town? What's the use of good society, of—of everything we've built up and everything we stand for, and—and everything—only to see your own flesh and blood throwing it all away? It's rank. It's degenerate. It's tearing down civilization. I won't stand for it. It's not *me*. *I* won't have it.

MOTHER. But you've got it. The whole world's got it. What are you going to do about it?

FATHER. What are *you* going to do? It's simply because you haven't done what I wanted ——

MOTHER. Oh, yes, I have! I've spouted all your golden wisdom and all mine. Everything any woman ever said, any way she ever said it—I've said. I've tried to make them see that I *do* see.

FATHER. You see what? Make *them* see. That's the point.

MOTHER. No, it isn't. You're so pig-headed.

FATHER. What's the matter with you? You've got hysterics.

MOTHER. You're only thinking what you want. You're not thinking of what's right for them at all.

FATHER. If I had what I want things would be right.

MOTHER (*their voices rising*). Well, what *is* right?

FATHER. Do you think this is—letting a girl do as she pleases?

MOTHER. Maybe. I don't know.

FATHER. What! Haven't you any sense at all? Is rolling in and out of a swimming pool—all mixed up together like eels—wrong or right?

MOTHER. I don't know; I don't know. At least it's all out in the open, with the whole town looking at them. Perhaps it makes them freer and safer.

FATHER. Freer and *looser*, you mean. There isn't such a thing as modesty left. Exposing their legs and—and all—means nothing to them.

MOTHER. I hate to think what it used to mean to us.

FATHER. They talk about things—right out, as if it were the weather—till it makes your head swim—things they're not even supposed to know about.

MOTHER. But they do know; they *do* know. We used to pretend we didn't—and the things they would *not* tell us about were the most important things in the world.

FATHER. Well, is it good for a nice girl to do the same things that disreputable hussies do—dance like them, drink like them, look like them?

MOTHER. No—no—no! It's horrible; but they don't mean it to be horrible! They don't know what they're doing. They don't know anything—and they know everything. They've got something we didn't have, something wise and wonderful and unafraid in one hand—and something dangerous and terrible in the other. Oh, their foolishness! Their silly, silly youngness! Why can't *somebody* show them the right thing?

(*She speaks with the groping helplessness of an inarticulate person, not given to expressing herself or to having her opinions seriously considered, but shaken now by a new and strong emotion which overwhelms her.*)

FATHER (*growing louder and more sure of his righteousness*). *I've* got the right thing. Why don't you help me make them what they ought to be?

MOTHER. Do you never think it's a joke that we have children at all—and set ourselves up as examples for them?

FATHER. Why not? Don't we know more than they do?

MOTHER. And what have we done with what we know? Do you want them to be like you?

FATHER. I certainly do.

MOTHER. Look at yourself—under the skin—down to the bone. What is there in you or about you that you want Bobby to have?

FATHER. My—my—my standards; my character.

MOTHER. Oh, your character! You're honest, as people go, and moral enough—a law-abiding, upright citizen. But what are *you* yourself? What do you mean to them? We're something they think they ought to love, but do they love us? Don't you know they hate almost everything we tell them, just because *we* tell it?

FATHER (*frowning*). What do you mean?

MOTHER. It's the way we do it, something in *us*. If you could have seen what we'd be like in twenty-five years, would you have married me?

FATHER. If you feel that way about it, whose fault is it?

MOTHER. Or ten years? Did we have ten years that were worth anything?

FATHER. I hope you're not blaming *me*.

MOTHER. Or even five—at the end of five years

we were the average lot, jogging along, enduring each other and letting all the worst side of ourselves come out for the other to live with. And we expect to have children that are the ideals we've never come any place near ourselves.

FATHER. You're saying a lot of wild things. I didn't know you did have so little sense. You haven't had one of these spells for years.

MOTHER. Of course not. I've just about stopped trying to tell the truth to you—about anything.

FATHER. I've never had any help from you; I know that. You're a silly, empty-headed simpleton, Maud—not worth shucks when it comes to control.

MOTHER. At least I've got sense enough to know what I don't know.

FATHER (*with injured dignity*). I'm flabbergasted at you. You knock everything out of me.

MOTHER. We've missed it. Something's out there—somewhere—that we haven't got hold of. Something goes on in spite of us, bigger than we are. People are so little. It's life that's big, too big for any of us. We don't know how to live it.

FATHER. I don't know you. There's something new let loose and floating around, like a—a germ. I never thought you'd be bitten by it. You seem to have lost the little sense you did have. You *are* a failure, Maud, a complete failure. It's hard on me. You disappoint me—terribly.

MOTHER. Of course I do. You disappoint *me*. Your faults are getting bigger to me every day. You get on my nerves so when you grind out that old stuff I could shriek.

(*Shrieking as she sees the basket with the bathing suit.*)

FATHER. Good heaven! What's the matter?

MOTHER. The bathing suit. She *is* here; she's in the house. Josie, my darling, where are you? Josie!

(*She rushes through the hall door,* FATHER *after her. There is a pause.* JOSIE *cautiously peers out from the curtain.* BOBBY *slowly pokes his head out from under the couch.*)

THE GIRL (*gradually coming out, her cape falling off her shoulders and showing her charming evening gown*). It's awful!

THE BOY. What?

THE GIRL. I believe they hate each other.

THE BOY. Some scrap.

THE GIRL. How can they stand each other?

THE BOY (*getting on his feet*). How can they keep from swatting each other in the nose?

THE GIRL. It's so low.

THE BOY. Talk about being loose! Their tongues are loose enough, believe *me!*

THE GIRL. Makes me sort of all gone inside, somehow.

THE BOY. Nothing to hang on to.

THE GIRL. I know. I always thought—well, they're old-fashioned and can't help it; but they're *good.* If you ask me, I think it's rotten, fighting like that.

THE BOY. I'll say it is.

THE GIRL. Mother's all right. She's a corker.

I never dreamed she knew so much. She *had* to say the things she said to Dad. He's impossible.

THE BOY. Yes, but he said some pretty good things too—about my being out all night, for instance.

THE GIRL. Piffle! It's a sweet mess to come home to.

MOTHER (*rushing back into the room*). Where were you? Where have you been? What were you doing? When did you come in?

FATHER (*following, and speaking positively*). Now, young lady, this is the last time. Where have you been? What have you been doing?

THE GIRL. I've had a perfectly nice evening in a perfectly nice way.

MOTHER. Where were you? How could you? Do you know what time it is?

FATHER. This is the last time, I tell you. You've got a decent home, and if you can't stay in it—and do decent things ——

THE GIRL. Mother, I'm awfully sorry for you. I had no idea you were having such a hard time; but it's all your own fault. Why do you stand it?

FATHER. What?

MOTHER. What do you ——

THE GIRL. We heard you, Bobby and I; we were here in this room. I'm awfully sorry for you, Mother; but still I don't see how Father can ever speak to you again.

THE BOY. I know how you feel as a man, Dad —that is, about some things; but I must say I think it's pretty raw to talk to Mother like that.

MOTHER. *Bobby!*

FATHER. You young whippersnapper! Is there nothing left? No respect? No reverence? Has nothing we've taught you, or nothing we are, meant anything to you?

THE GIRL. Nothing—if you and Mother don't mean any more than you do to each other.

MOTHER. Josie ——

THE BOY. That's the idea.

MOTHER. Your father's a good man. I honor and respect him above everything on earth.

FATHER. Your mother and I have had a lifetime of devotion, with the highest ideals of married life. We didn't think we'd live to see our own children desecrate all that we—we've lived for.

THE GIRL. Oh, rot, Father!

MOTHER. Josie! *Stop!* You sha'n't do it. You're out of your senses.

THE GIRL. Then make Father stop talking that hot air. I *know*. I was here. I heard. You told each other the *truth*. What's the good of trying to plaster it over for *us?*

FATHER. There's nothing left to appeal to. This is the result of the wild life you've been leading. What else is there to expect?

THE GIRL. I'm not wild. I'm straight. I'm honest. Every boy I know knows I won't stand for anything that isn't. But I've lived a little. I know a thing or two. Why do you and Mother go on about what *we* do? We'll get along—Bobby and me. It's you that are the point. You don't like what Mother thinks, Father. It riles you till you nearly burst. You can't go what Father believes, Mother. You know it's archaic nonsense. Why do

you stand it? Just why do you try to pretend to stand it—either one of you?

FATHER. What do you mean?

THE GIRL. We think you ought to get a divorce or something.

THE BOY. That's right, Dad. I'm with you—anything I can do for you. I don't mind.

THE GIRL. A divorce is the only thing.

MOTHER. Oh, my children!

FATHER. Yes, your children. They're certainly not mine.

THE BOY. I'm not *all* on Mother's side, Dad.

THE GIRL. We're not on anybody's side. There *isn't* any side. You people simply ought not to live together. It makes us sick. We can't stand it.

FATHER. *Be quiet!* It's even worse than I realized. It's deeper. It's gone further. You're a generation not only without morals and ideals; you're without heart, without soul.

MOTHER (*beginning to sob*). Oh, don't—don't!

THE GIRL. Everybody's jumping on our generation. Everybody's hipped on the subject. I don't see that *your* generation is so much, if it doesn't get you any further than you and Mother are.

FATHER. *That will do*, I say! This is the kind of talk you get from the set you run with. The sacredness of marriage means nothing to them. Divorce is no disgrace. Two or three husbands are a matter of course.

THE GIRL. Well, I'd rather have ten husbands than to live with one all my life that riled me the way you rile Mother.

FATHER. Stop!

THE GIRL. There's nothing the matter with a divorce if you have to have one. The awful thing is to *need* one.

MOTHER. My child—my child! You *mustn't* say such things.

THE GIRL. Why mustn't I? We all know now just where we're at. Bobby and I know exactly what you and Father are like and what you actually think of each other, and it's going to be much more sensible and comfortable.

FATHER. I won't *have* such talk!

THE GIRL. Why not? And why don't you talk to *me—myself*—not to something you think is a daughter?

THE BOY. That's the idea. If we could just talk things over we might be able to help you and Mother out. You seem to be pretty much balled up about a lot of things.

FATHER. How dare you speak to me like that?

THE BOY. No offense, Dad. I used to have your old ideas about these things too; but when you come right down to it, when you're up against a thing yourself it looks different. *I* don't mind a divorce. I'm game. I'll do all I can for you. Jumping Jehoshaphat, nothing could be worse than to live with a woman and feel the way you do about Mother. Gosh, it's awful!

FATHER (*to* MOTHER). This is the answer. This is where it gets them—the way they live, the things they do.

THE GIRL. *You* don't know what we do. I could tell you things that would make your hair curl. Some of us know where to draw the line and

some of us don't; but I don't think it matters half so much what *we* do, as what *you* do. How do you s'pose Bobby and I feel when we're horribly disappointed in you? *You're parents.* If *you're* all messed up, what's the use of anything?

FATHER. How dare you criticize your mother and me! Is *nothing* sacred to you?

THE GIRL. Yes, a lot of things *used* to be. We always thought there was something between Mother and you that was sort of holy and different, something that most people didn't have at all. How do you s'pose we feel when we know that's a joke? It smashes up a lot of things.

FATHER. I'm speechless. I'm shocked beyond words.

THE GIRL. *We're* shocked. We think it's disgusting and immoral and low for you and Mother to live together. Seems to me my bathing suit is an awfully silly thing to row about. Seems to me there's not much left of *anything* if you and Mother are like this.

(*Her voice breaks and she marches out of the room proudly, trying to stifle her rising sobs. They stare after her.*)

THE BOY (*after a moment*). That's—that's about the way I feel about it.

(*He follows* JOSIE *with as much dignity as possible.*)

FATHER (*after a moment*). Did you hear the language? Did you take it in?

MOTHER. I did.

FATHER. What do you think of your children *now?*

MOTHER. I'm thinking of what they're thinking of us. (*They stare blankly.*)

CURTAIN

PEGGY

A Play in One Act

by

RACHEL CROTHERS

PEGGY

CHARACTERS

ANGELINE, *Little Dan's aunt.*
HARRIETTE, *ditto.*
AMY, *aunt "in law" to Little Dan.*
PEGGY (MRS. DAN RAYMOND), *stepmother and guardian to Little Dan.*
WORTHINGTON, *Little Dan's uncle.*
LAURENCE, *ditto.*
DAN RAYMOND (LITTLE DAN), *Peggy's stepson.*

PLACE. A room in an old house just outside Philadelphia.
TIME. The present.

PEGGY

SCENE.—*An old house, a short way out of Philadelphia. The room is mellow with age and fine taste, and there is a subdued glowing under the sheen of the old woods and brasses that is felt rather than seen. The same restrained beauty is in the woman who sits in one of the charming chairs, waiting tensely, with long delicate hands clasped in unresigned resignation. The room has never quite let go—never flowed into the abandon of luxury and sensuous comfort, and the woman who has lived in it has the same subdued gleam that might have been radiant had she let the inner spark burn. Her brother, much like her outwardly, but hardened into middle age with a fine hard polish which has no regrets and no doubts of its own fineness.*

(*As the curtain rises he is pacing the room with long strides which indicate an aggrieved and superior irritation that anything should keep him waiting.*)

WORTHINGTON. I've been foolish enough to think that just once—just once—for a thing as important as this, some of them might have done what I asked.

ANGELINE (*in a voice whose sweetness and steadiness control its unfulfilled longings*). Busy people don't realize what waiting means to people like us.

WORTHINGTON. Busy people? They're only busy with their own self-importance.

ANGELINE. There's a train from New York every hour, isn't there?

WORTHINGTON. Certainly.

ANGELINE. They're sure to be here on the next one.

WORTHINGTON. And there's no excuse under heaven for Harriette. There's a train out from Philadelphia every thirty minutes. I tried to impress them with the necessity of getting here before the woman herself does—but I might as well try to impress the wind as Harriette, and Laurence would make a point of being late to show me how much better he can handle the thing than I can.

ANGELINE. Oh, no, something has detained him.

WORTHINGTON. He shouldn't have allowed anything to detain him. If we let her slip through our fingers this time, we'll never get her again—never. It's only the diplomacy of my letters that has got her now. She's curious and ready to listen. She wants to hear what I have to say.

ANGELINE. I hope so. (*Looking at the tall clock.*) But it *is* late. Oh, there's a motor.

(*She braces herself without rising.* WORTHINGTON *stops walking, but does not go to the door. A motor is heard on the gravel beyond the low veranda, after a moment a quick assertive step, and* HARRIETTE *appears in full sail, a tall, long-lined woman who has made so much of her good points that she seems handsome.*)

WORTHINGTON (*going on with his walk*). Oh, it's only Harriette.

HARRIETTE (*as she comes through the open door*). I'm not late, am I? Where are the others? Don't tell me I'm the only one here. That's maddening. I could have stayed longer. I ran away from the nicest luncheon party.

WORTHINGTON. Didn't a motor just drive up?

HARRIETTE. Of course. I motored out. Mrs. Rittenhouse gave me her car. She *is* so sweet about it. I almost feel as though it were mine now. What's the matter, Angeline, you look as if you had a cramp. You're nervous, of course—so am I—horribly—but don't be. She'll give up. If you'll just let me do the talking, Worthington—I know better than any of you what to say—and I have a better *right* than any of you to ask what we're going to ask.

(*She has seated herself on a long sofa and more or less filled that side of the room with her personality and her effects—her gloves one place, her purse and trinkets another. She makes a critical and satisfied inspection of her complexion in a small mirror, and the extremely long earrings bob and vibrate, adding to her all-pervading, all-embracing restlessness.*)

WORTHINGTON. The best thing you can possibly do is to keep still, Harriette, you'll irritate ——

HARRIETTE. Yes, of course you think *you're* the one to talk. What can you say that has any weight

at all? Here you are—you and Angeline—an old maid and an old bachelor—with just barely so much money. How can you ask for the child? What do you want with him, anyway? What would you do with him if you ——

ANGELINE. But it doesn't matter who has him —just so we *get* him. That can be settled afterward.

HARRIETTE. Oh, but it does matter—and it's *my* case and *my* argument that will get him. I'm married and have no children. Obviously, I'm the one to have my brother's child. Who else? Laurence has more children now than he knows what to do with. If all of you will only *see* that, and throw your weight on my side, we'll ——

ANGELINE (*rising and going towards the outer door*). There's the motor.

HARRIETTE. Heavens, I'm terribly excited. Now, do keep cool and don't lose your heads. Sit down, Angeline. Don't let her think you're —— Oh, Lord, it's Laurence and Amy! Why on earth did he bring Amy? She'll ruin it if she sticks in. Actually she gets a bigger fool every year, and I positively believe she's going to have another baby. It's disgraceful.

ANGELINE. Careful! They'll hear you. Come in, Amy dear. Come in, Laurence.

LAURENCE (*who is short and thick and therefore obliged to add to his height by a tall manner*). Is she here?

HARRIETTE. She isn't, but I am. Hello, Laurence. Hello, Amy.

LAURENCE. How are you, Harriette?

(*Nodding to* HARRIETTE *and shaking hands with* ANGELINE *and* WORTHINGTON.)

AMY (*trailing in limply after* LAURENCE). Oh, hello, Harriette dear. Hello, Angeline dear.

(AMY *kisses the two women with fussy sweetness and subsides in a chair, pushing back a lock of her dull hair where it will not stay.*)

ANGELINE. Wasn't there any —— Wasn't she on that train?

LAURENCE. I didn't see anybody get off.

ANGELINE. Send the car right back to the station, Worthington. She'll surely be on the next one.

(WORTHINGTON *goes out on the veranda to give the direction.*)

HARRIETTE (*still on the sofa*). Your hat's crooked, Amy, and why did you get another drab one? And a hairpin's coming out. Laurence, I say if you'll only let me do the talking, I know just how to approach ——

LAURENCE. And if you'll only keep still, Harriette, that's the best thing you can do. It's got to be handled in a businesslike ——

HARRIETTE. Of course that's what you *would* say. Business has nothing to do with the case. It's going to take tact and a great deal of finesse and cleverness. Now wait, *wait*—do let me say *something* just *once*.

LAURENCE. We didn't come over here to hear you talk, Harriette. Worthington, listen to me. (*As* WORTHINGTON *comes back from the veranda.*)

I tell you this thing has got to be tackled from a legal standpoint.

(*Sitting rigidly and legally by a table.*)

HARRIETTE. Slush!

WORTHINGTON. I don't see that there's anything *legal* about it.

(ANGELINE *stands anxiously by the open door, looking out.* WORTHINGTON *moves about a little—restlessly.*)

HARRIETTE. Of course there isn't. It's going to take tact—tact—and a great deal of insight and intuition, which neither of you has a drop of in your ——

WORTHINGTON. Oh, bosh, Harriette! It's the justice and fitness of things that have to be ——

HARRIETTE. Much she cares about justice and fitness! She's a—a something you people don't know anything about. Harry saw her dance in New York last week and she's perfectly ——

LAURENCE. Now let me tell you at the go-off Harry has nothing to do with this. No voice in it at ——

HARRIETTE. He doesn't want to have, and he had the good taste to stay away. He knows the in-laws have nothing to say whatever.

(*Raising her chin at* AMY.)

AMY (*whimpering*). I only came for the trip—for a little outing. I'm so tired, I ——

LAURENCE. That will do, Amy. I tell you, I've got to get at it from a legal ——

(*Bringing his fist down on the table.*)

HARRIETTE. Now wait till I finish—just *once*, Laurence, *please*, if you can let somebody else say something.

ANGELINE. Go on, Harriette, do.

HARRIETTE. Harry saw her, as I say, and she's perfectly marvellous. And he says we're fools not to take her up—recognize her while she's a success. People are mad about her, you know.

ANGELINE. Take her up? What do you mean?

(*Turning back into the room.*)

HARRIETTE. Know her—invite her here —— (*There is a quick protest from them all.*) Now *wait*—make it *smart* to know her—so people can't say we're ashamed of her. That's the only thing in the world that will flatter her. She won't care anything about any money we could put up. She can get money easily enough, you know. She's had several fortunes spent on her already.

AMY. Oh, my! What are we going to call her?

HARRIETTE. Peggy, of course. Why not? That's what everybody else calls her.

WORTHINGTON. Just avoid calling her anything. I refuse absolutely to know her at all—except for the necessity of this interview.

LAURENCE. Certainly. If you begin muddling it with personal stuff, Harriette, there'll be no end to it. She has no *legal* ——

WORTHINGTON. I'm not so sure about that. If she's got anything in writing to show that Dan gave the child to her ——

AMY. Oh, he couldn't do that. He couldn't give away his own flesh and blood to a woman like *that!*

HARRIETTE. A woman like that! Don't be a ninny, Amy. Of course he gave her everything he had. She's just the kind men *do* give everything to. And, after all, he did marry her. Don't forget that.

ANGELINE. Of course he married her. I don't believe there was ever anything else.

(*Sitting again.*)

HARRIETTE. Oh, piffle, Angeline! Wake up. Wake up.

ANGELINE. After all, she *is* his stepmother, and we wouldn't have dreamed of taking him away from his own mother.

AMY. Of course not—his own mother was a lady.

HARRIETTE. Yes, she certainly was—a lady and a *fish*. You know, I never did blame Dan in my heart of hearts for swinging to the other extreme after his years with Laura. Now, see here, *I* won't mind knowing this woman, Peggy—you know. I won't mind it at all, and if you'll let me *alone*, I'll get him away from her in my own way. Now, *wait —please*. (*As they all protest again.*) Harry's father has always been perfectly rabid on the children business. He hasn't given us a cent for years, and if I took this child—a real Raymond—it would be the next thing to having one of my own, and the old gent would thaw. I know it.

AMY. Oh, my!

WORTHINGTON. Looking out for your *own* interests, of course, Harriette. What about us—Angeline and me?

LAURENCE. Well, if I may be allowed to say something—after all, I'm the head of the family. That's what you all seem to have forgotten entirely.

HARRIETTE. Oh, no, you never *let* us forget that, Laurence dear.

LAURENCE. Are you going to begin again?

HARRIETTE. Oh, no—no—go on—go on.

LAURENCE. I want a boy. I ought to have one. Amy doesn't seem to be able to produce anything but girls, and ——

AMY. Oh, Laurie, you know you wouldn't exchange our five dear little girls for all the boys in the world.

LAURENCE. I didn't say anything about exchanging them. Now, see here, I'm prepared to put up more than the rest of you.

HARRIETTE. Then that's taking a mean advantage of me. Money isn't everything, and I have social position to give him. That means more than all the ——

WORTHINGTON. Poppycock! *This* is the place for him. This is the old home where Dan would have wanted him to be.

LAURENCE. Dan would have wanted him to be in New York and be brought up like a *man*. I know well enough what Dan wanted!

ANGELINE. Dan evidently wanted her to have him. That's what we haven't taken into consideration at all.

(*They all speak at once in voluble protest at this, their voices rising.* ANGELINE *suddenly hushes them; they stop and turn to look at the woman who stands in the doorway with a boy of ten, whom she holds tightly by one hand. They are not able to speak to her at once, but stare at her, because of the warm magnetism of her lithe body, her white throat and the red hair—a strong irresistible force by which they are checked, and which they instinctively resent.*)

ANGELINE (*rising and going a little towards the woman*). Are you ——

PEGGY (*in a warm throaty voice*). I'm Mrs. Dan Raymond.

AMY. Why, how little Dannie's grown!

(*She pounces upon the boy and draws him into the room. The others surround him, all talking at once.*)

HARRIETTE. I'm your Aunt Harriette. You remember me, don't you, dearest?

AMY. And I'm your Aunt Amy, Dannie dear.

HARRIETTE. Oh, don't call him *Dannie!*

AMY. Wouldn't you like to come and live with me and be a big brother to my five little girls?

LAURENCE (*pushing* AMY *aside and taking the boy's hand*). Keep still, Amy. How are you, boy? I'm your Uncle Laurence. I live in New York. You remember me, of course, don't you?

WORTHINGTON. And I'm your Uncle Worthington. This is where you used to come and stay when you were a baby. Remember?

DAN. Peggy!

(*He calls to her sharply, and, pushing away from the others, goes back to her side, standing a little back of her and holding her arm. A flash of pride and satisfaction softens her face, and she throws a protecting arm about him.*)

ANGELINE. Did you—did the chauffeur find you? We sent the car.

PEGGY. We walked. Nobody seemed to be looking for us.

ANGELINE. Oh, I'm so sorry. Sit over here, won't you?

PEGGY (*moving to the chair with rather insolent grace*). I can't stay long. I have to get back, you know. (DAN *goes to stand beside her.*)

HARRIETTE. Oh, we hoped you might stay over. At least, I did. So we'd get to know you and see how you—how you feel about things, you know. You will stay, won't you? (*Sitting near* PEGGY.)

PEGGY (*with a very keen look at* HARRIETTE). I'm working, you know.

HARRIETTE. Dancing, you mean. My husband saw you last week in New York, and he says you're *perfectly marvellous.* I say he says you're *marvel-lous!*

(PEGGY *doesn't seem to hear this but she watches them all with probing eyes. These eyes are smuggy and blue, and under their suspicion and hardness is a very great wistfulness and fear.*)

ANGELINE. Shan't we have some tea? You must be tired.

PEGGY. No, thanks.

LAURENCE. No, no, I'm sure she wants us to be as businesslike as possible and get at things.

WORTHINGTON. As I wrote you, I have something of very great value to offer you.

HARRIETTE. *I* have—of *very* great.

LAURENCE. What I have to present is a very definite proposition. It's this way ——

PEGGY. It's about Dan—little Dan, isn't it?

(*There is a pause.* LAURENCE *clears his throat and lifting a chair places it before* PEGGY *and sits with an air of being about to settle all unsettled things.*)

LAURENCE. He must be a great burden to you. We want to relieve you of that.

AMY (*sitting on the edge of a chair and peering curiously at* PEGGY). Yes, that's it, Laurie.

PEGGY. What?

WORTHINGTON. Now, let me explain. We don't expect you to be entirely disinterested.

(*Moving closer to* PEGGY.)

HARRIETTE. Oh, but there's so much more than money to be considered. When I think of what I can give him, money seems horribly ——

WORTHINGTON. The child has inherited something vastly more important than money. I wondered if you wouldn't see that, if you came here. I wondered if you didn't want him to have it—the—the fineness of his inheritance.

PEGGY (*some of the hardness and suspicion relaxing and the wistfulness increasing*). Yes, I do want him to have it. That's why I came. I want

him to have what belongs to him, and what you people can give him. Oh, I can take care of him. That isn't it. It's the other things—that are his—that I don't want him to lose because of—of me.

LAURENCE (*relieved and jerking his chair closer to* PEGGY). Oh, well, then that's very good. We didn't know just what your attitude would be.

PEGGY (*speaking slowly and nervously but with great simplicity and honesty—rolling her handkerchief into a tight little ball in one hand*). No, I s'pose not. While Dan was alive I never thought anything about you. He had enough of all this you're talking about—to give little Dan. But after he was gone it was different. I began to think about what the boy wouldn't have now—without his father—and—and when I got your letter I decided to let —— Well, I said, if they've held out a friendly hand, I must take it—for the boy's sake—not for mine—mind you. *I* don't want any of this—but I'm perfectly willing to let you see Dan some—to even let him come and visit you just so often. I mean, regularly, you know—and for you to pick out his school and that kind of thing—and I'm doing it—not just for the boy—but for Dan. That's what I owe to him—and I'll go through with it.

(*The thing that breaks her voice and comes into her face is so startling that* ANGELINE *lowers her head and even the others turn their eyes away.* DAN *leans more closely against* PEGGY.)

LAURENCE (*after a pause*). Well, then, as I say, that's very good. We thought he might be a burden

to you; but if you're willing to give him up for his own sake, why that's so much the better.

PEGGY. Give him up?

HARRIETTE. Oh, now, if he came to me, I wouldn't insist upon that—*absolutely*.

LAURENCE. There couldn't be any going back and forth. That's impossible. It's —— The two things wouldn't go together at all.

PEGGY (*something ugly coming into a corner of her mouth*). Oh, you don't want any of him then?

LAURENCE. Don't misunderstand me. We mean for his sake he would have to be under our care entirely—come to us entirely.

HARRIETTE. Now, Laurence, I tell you ——

WORTHINGTON. Don't, Harriette. (*To* PEGGY.) Of course, you know as well as we do the two a—atmospheres couldn't be mixed. It—a—a child has to have one thing or the other, and in this case there is no doubt as to which it must be. This house is—as I say, his inheritance—his birthright—his place where he belongs.

PEGGY (*holding* DAN *a little tighter*). What do you mean?

HARRIETTE. You want him to have it. You've said that yourself. You've been splendid.

PEGGY. Are you trying to tell me you want me to give him up? Entirely? To *you?*

(*Looking at all of them.*)

LAURENCE. Of course we don't expect you to be entirely disinterested. I'm prepared to be fair. I'm prepared to—name a sum that will make you willing to set aside all claims to him whatsoever.

PEGGY. I don't seem to understand.

LAURENCE. I'm prepared to say twenty-five thousand dollars—outright—if he comes to me—with all claims relinquished.

PEGGY. God! (*She rises with a quick movement.*) God, I was a fool to come! Dan always said I was soft.

LAURENCE. Now, now—don't get excited. You have no legal claim to him, you know.

WORTHINGTON. None whatsoever. He's *ours*.

PEGGY. Listen! You cut Dan out entirely when he married me—and now I'm going to cut you out. You can't see little Dan again. You can't write to him—you can't get at him—*any* way. Dan gave him to me—not because he had to—but because he wanted *me* to have him—not *you*.

LAURENCE. We want to settle this without the law if we can, but we'll ——

PEGGY. He gave him to me, I tell you. He saw me with him for three years—and he wanted him to be with me. He *wanted* it! Don't be afraid, Dan, they're not going to get you. They're trying to buy you for twenty-five thousand dollars. It's a joke. Come on. We'll go. (*Going to the door.*)

AMY (*beginning to cry*). Oh, I think it's awful! Poor child!

PEGGY (*turning back to them at the door*). Poor child? Do you think I'd leave him here? Not for all the money the whole Raymond tribe could raise. Come on.

(*Their anger and their egos and their wills are now united in their common cause against her.*

They move towards her—all speaking at once —except ANGELINE, *who stands aside watching.*)

PEGGY (*raising her voice above the excitement of theirs*). There's one of you—Angeline—is that you? Dan always wanted me to see you—and I'd like to speak to you a minute. We'll go just in a minute, Dan. Don't be afraid.

(*Clutching* DAN *who has stayed close to her.*)

ANGELINE. Will you come into the library?

WORTHINGTON. No—no—stay here. We'll go. I hope you know what to say, Angeline. Don't let her browbeat you.

(WORTHINGTON, LAURENCE, AMY *and* HARRIETTE *go into another room, wrangling and arguing as they move.* WORTHINGTON *closes the door heavily.*)

DAN (*who has been watching* ANGELINE *most of the time*). Are you my Aunt Angeline?

ANGELINE (*flushing with surprise*). Yes.

DAN. Dad said if I ever saw you to give you a kiss for him.

ANGELINE. Oh! (DAN *kisses her cheek. She throws her arms about him and hides her face on his breast.* PEGGY *turns to the window, brushing away the tears that suddenly swim in her eyes.*) Did he? Did he do that?

DAN. Yes, and he said to tell you he loved you.

PEGGY (*standing at the window with her back to the others*). And didn't blame you for anything.

ANGELINE. I'm glad you told me that.

(*Putting a timid, hungry hand on his head.*)

DAN. Is this the house where my father lived when he was a little boy?

ANGELINE. Yes.

DAN. Like me?

ANGELINE. Yes. So like you —— Oh, he was so like you—I can't tell you.

DAN (*slowly looking around the room*). Did he play in this room?

ANGELINE. Yes, dear—in this very room. Some of his books are over there, and I have lots and lots of his toys put away.

DAN. Couldn't I see 'em?

ANGELINE. I'll send them to you.

DAN. Why couldn't I see 'em now?

PEGGY (*turning quickly*). Oh, no, Dan—not now.

DAN. Was that his?

(*Pointing to a sword on the wall.*)

ANGELINE. That was his great-grandfather's.

DAN. Can I have it?

PEGGY. *No*, Dan!

ANGELINE. I'd like you to have it.

PEGGY (*coming away from the window*). Dan, you skip outside and pick some of those flowers for us to take back with us. I want to speak to this lady for a minute.

DAN. She's my Aunt Angeline.

PEGGY. Yes, I know, dear. That's why I want

to talk to her. Run along. I'll call you in a minute.

ANGELINE. Pick all you want, dear. All you can carry.

(ANGELINE *puts out a hand to him. He takes it firmly and walks with her to the outer door.* PEGGY *is not at all unaware of the pride and beauty of the two figures as they walk together, and of the poignant things which reach out to* DAN *from the room.* ANGELINE *lets him go and stands watching him as he crosses the grass.*)

PEGGY. The thing I wanted to tell you was this.

ANGELINE (*turning back to her*). Yes?

PEGGY. He talked a lot about you. He always said he didn't give a damn about the others, not a tinker's dam, but he wanted me to know you. And then towards the last—when he—knew he was going—he wanted to see you. He never said so—but I knew it. I could have sent for you and I didn't. It's the only rotten thing I ever did to Dan. You've heard plenty of things about me—some of them are true and some of them aren't, but Dan *knew*—and he was happy. I made him happy, I tell you, and we *lived*—and I'm not going to give his boy back to these cold-blooded snobs. Why should I? Little Dan loves me. I'm working for him—I'm living for him. He's big Dan now. I—there isn't anything else on earth that cuts any ice at all with me now but him. They haven't got anything like that to give him—now, have they? All the aristocracy in the world can't do what love can. Now, can it?

Their claims don't mean anything beside mine—do they? I love him, you know—that's what I want to get *to* you—and nothing else matters, does it? *You* haven't put in any claim for him. *You* don't think you have any right to him, do you? (ANGELINE *lowers her eyes.*) Oh—you do? (*Slipping into a chair mechanically.*) You're in it, too—are you? You are all alike, then—after all. And what have *you* got to offer? What do you put up for him?

ANGELINE (*moving a chair and sitting close to* PEGGY). I have love, too.

PEGGY. You make me laugh. You've got a kind of family pride, I s'pose, that would like to have him—but nothing that would keep him close—like me—like me. You don't know what my kind of love is. Can't you understand that?

ANGELINE. And what is your kind of love?

PEGGY. What *is* it?

ANGELINE. Is it great enough to do the best thing for him—no matter how much it hurts you?

PEGGY. You needn't try to talk that to me—sacrifice. I don't believe in it. It's love that counts—human love that *keeps* the thing it loves—and makes it happy. Love doesn't give up.

ANGELINE. I think it sometimes does.

PEGGY. What?

ANGELINE. I could give him up to you if I were sure it were right for *him.*

PEGGY. Oh—you *are* what Dan said. That's big.

ANGELINE. Oh, no, it isn't. I love him and I want him to have what *he* loves.

PEGGY. And I'll *keep* him loving me. Don't be afraid. You can trust me. You see, you couldn't love him the way I do, because you've never had him. You haven't so much to give him as I have.

ANGELINE. Don't you think I have?

PEGGY. I know you haven't; you couldn't have, you've been here so long—alone—proud and quiet, with nothing to hurt you. You're still—and beautiful and—and perfect—but you haven't *lived*. It's when you're out in it—taking it as it comes, and *down* and *hurt*—and then find something to love—that you know what love means. Don't you see, I'll put into Dan all the *best* of everything that the worst has taught me. I know—I know what life is, and what's worth hanging on to. Don't you see? I have so much more to give him than you have.

ANGELINE. But I have all I *haven't* given. And all I've wanted to give all my life.

PEGGY. Oh, but—he needs—he's like big Dan—he needs the sun. He'd die without it. I'm not all I'd—I'd like him to have. I'm not kidding myself—not a little bit—but don't you see—how lonely he'd be here? Don't you see how empty—how cold you'd seem to him?

(*The two women bend towards each other, speaking in low tones, each unbaring her heart hunger to the other with the intimate abandon of a crisis.*)

ANGELINE. But you don't know how warm the coldness would become for *him*. You don't know how the emptiness would overflow—for *him*. Perhaps my love is stronger than yours because it never

has had him. All that has never been given to *anyone* I'd give to him.

PEGGY (*rising*). Never! You can't have him. I'll never—never—*never* give him up.

ANGELINE. And are you keeping him for his sake or for your own?

PEGGY. He's mine. Why shouldn't I keep him? Come in, Dan. Come in and say good-bye. We're going now. (*Going to the door to call him.*)

ANGELINE (*rising quickly*). But you can't take him away from us like this—and never let us see him again. They *have* a right—all of them.

PEGGY. They haven't. They don't love him. They just want him because they think he's theirs.

ANGELINE. We must compromise. We must all give up something.

PEGGY. I was ready to, but they ——

ANGELINE. I know—I know—but they must. Wait—just a minute. I'll speak to them. They must give up something.

PEGGY. All right, ask them. They won't. The way to test their love is through their pocket-books. They said twenty-five thousand. Ask them what they say to a hundred thousand. Go on—ask them that and see how much they love him. Go on—I'll wait.

ANGELINE. You will wait—won't you?

PEGGY. I will. [ANGELINE *hurries out.*

DAN (*coming back into the room*). What's the matter, Peggy?

PEGGY. Nothing, honey. Don't you be afraid. Nothing's going to hurt you.

DAN. Why don't we have flowers like these?

(*Showing her the stiff bunch of flowers he holds tightly in his little hot hand.*)

PEGGY. I'll buy you all the flowers you want.
DAN. I like to pick 'em.
PEGGY. Do you?
DAN. Why don't we live in this house, Peggy?
PEGGY. Un?

(PEGGY *is watching the door through which* ANGELINE *went.*)

DAN. She said we could. Aunt Angeline says this is my father's house.

PEGGY (*looking at him sharply*). Un? Oh, no, she didn't. She didn't say that, dear.

DAN. She said he lived here when he was a little boy. Why don't we live here?

PEGGY. We couldn't.

DAN. I'd like to.

PEGGY. But you wouldn't want to *stay* here. You like to move—and travel—and see things. Just think, where you've been, old man, and what you've seen. Not many boys as little as you have seen the things you have, I tell you, and lived in the grand hotels. (*His eyes slowly take in the room again.* PEGGY *turns him to her quickly.*) Do you like these people, Dan?

DAN. I like Aunt Angeline.

PEGGY. As much as me, Dan? As much as me?

DAN. Ho-o! I *love you!*

PEGGY. How much, Dan? How much?

DAN. Fifty bushels. (*She catches him to her;*

he gives her a bear-like hug and releases himself.) Couldn't I have that now?

(*Pointing to the sword.*)

PEGGY. *No.*

DAN. Who's going to have it if I don't, Peggy?

PEGGY. I don't know.

DAN. Have they got any little boys?

PEGGY. No.

DAN. Didn't they say I could have this house if I'd come and live here?

PEGGY. Why do you want it, Dan? Why do you *want* it?

DAN. Because it's mine. Why don't we live in it, Peggy?

PEGGY. They don't want *me.*

DAN. *I* do. *I'd* let you live in it, Peggy.

(*Her hot tears are falling unchecked; she puts her cheek against his hair.*)

PEGGY. Would you, dear?

DAN. Dad said he wanted me to live in this house.

PEGGY (*lifting her head quickly*). What? When? When did he say that?

DAN. Lots of times. He said *he* lived in it, and *his* father lived in it—and he wanted my little boy to live in it. Don't you want me to, Peggy?

PEGGY. No.

DAN. Why not, Peggy? I like it better than any place I ever saw.

PEGGY. Oh, God, Dan—don't say that. Would you like to stay here without me?

DAN. No.

PEGGY. We'll go, then, in a minute.

DAN. No, Peggy, I want to stay. I'm the only little boy there is to live here. *My* little boy wouldn't like it if he isn't here. I have to be here so's he can have it. I have to give it to my little boy so he can give it to *his* little boy. Please stay, Peggy. I want to.

PEGGY (*after a long pause*). Well, listen, honey. You see I can't stay just now—but you can.

DAN. Oh!

PEGGY. Listen, I have to get back because I go on at nine o'clock, and old Craps would give me hell if I wasn't there—wouldn't he? But you can stay, and—and make Aunt Angeline a little visit. Won't that be nice? Just a little one, you know, and see how you like it. Dan—if you—if you ever think I did a mean thing to you—you tell your little boy some day that—I wanted him to live in this ——

DAN. What's the matter, Peggy?

PEGGY. Nothing, darling.

DAN. Yes, there is. Don't cry, Peggy.

PEGGY. I won't. Here, you see, I have to beat it or I'll—I want to write a note to your Aunt Angeline, and tell her about it, you know. (*She tears a fly-leaf out of a book and writes rapidly.*) There, honey, you give that to her—not to anyone else. (*Folding it in a small bit and thrusting it into his hand.*) Now I've got to hurry. Good-bye, dear, you stay right there and wait for her.

DAN. I want you to stay, too, Peggy.

PEGGY. Oh, do you, sweetheart—do you? I—well—I—you—good-bye, honey. I have to hur—good-b ——

(*There are no tears now, but a deep pallor has come into her face. She gives him a long look, goes swiftly to the door, and with a limp wave of her hand, is gone.*)

DAN (*calling*). Good-bye, Peggy. You come back to-morrow.

(*He stands quite still looking after her. The voices of the others are heard as they come back into the room.*)

ANGELINE. Where is she?

DAN. Peggy told me to give this to *you.*

(*He gives the folded paper to* ANGELINE. *She reads it. The paper flutters to the floor. She kneels beside* DAN, *taking his hands with a reverent tenderness. The others are hushed—in the presence of something greater than themselves.*)

CURTAIN