

OVERTONES
a play in one-act

by Alice Gerstenberg

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Washington Square Plays*. Ed. Edward Goodman. New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1916. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

HARRIET, a cultured woman
HETTY, her primitive self
MARGARET, a cultured woman
MAGGIE, her primitive self

[HARRIET'S fashionable living-room. The door at the back leads to the hall. In the centre a tea table with a chair either side. At the back a cabinet. HARRIET'S gown is a light, "jealous" green. Her counterpart, HETTY, wears a gown of the same design but in a darker shade. MARGARET wears a gown of lavender chiffon while her counterpart, MAGGIE, wears a gown of the same design in purple, a purple scarf veiling her face. Chiffon is used to give a sheer effect, suggesting a possibility of primitive and cultured selves merging into one woman. The primitive and cultured selves never come into actual physical contact but try to sustain the impression of mental conflict. HARRIET never sees HETTY, never talks to her but rather thinks aloud looking into space. HETTY, however, looks at HARRIET, talks intently and shadows her continually. The same is true of MARGARET and MAGGIE. The voices of the cultured women are affected and lingering, the voices of the primitive impulsive and more or less staccato. When the curtain rises HARRIET is seated right of tea table, busying herself with the tea things.]

HETTY: Harriet. *[There is no answer.]* Harriet, my other self. *[There is no answer.]* My trained self.

HARRIET: *[listens intently]* Yes?

[From behind HARRIET'S chair HETTY rises slowly.]

HETTY: I want to talk to you.

HARRIET: Well?

HETTY: *[looking at HARRIET admiringly]* Oh, Harriet, you are beautiful to-day.

HARRIET: Am I presentable, Hetty?

HETTY: Suits me.

HARRIET: I've tried to make the best of the good points.

HETTY: My passions are deeper than yours. I can't keep on the mask as you do. I'm crude and real, you are my appearance in the world.

HARRIET: I am what you wish the world to believe you are.

HETTY: You are the part of me that has been trained.

HARRIET: I am your educated self.

HETTY: I am the rushing river; you are the ice over the current.

HARRIET: I am your subtle overtones.

HETTY: But together we are one woman, the wife of Charles Goodrich.

HARRIET: There I disagree with you, Hetty, I alone am his wife.

HETTY: *[indignantly]* Harriet, how can you say such a thing!

HARRIET: Certainly. I am the one who flatters him. I have to be the one who talks to him. If I gave you a chance you would tell him at once that you dislike him.

HETTY: *[moving away]* I don't love him, that's certain.

HARRIET: You leave all the fibbing to me. He doesn't suspect that my calm, suave manner hides your hatred. Considering the amount of scheming it causes me it can safely be said that he is my husband.

HETTY: Oh, if you love him--

HARRIET: I? I haven't any feelings. It isn't my business to love anybody.

HETTY: Then why need you object to calling him my husband?

HARRIET: I resent your appropriation of a man who is managed only through the cleverness of my artifice.

HETTY: You may be clever enough to deceive him, Harriet, but I am still the one who suffers. I can't forget he is my husband. I can't forget that I might have married John Caldwell.

HARRIET: How foolish of you to remember John, just because we met his wife by chance.

HETTY: That's what I want to talk to you about. She may be here at any moment. I want to advise you about what to say to her this afternoon.

HARRIET: By all means tell me now and don't interrupt while she is here. You have a most annoying habit of talking to me when people are present. Sometimes it is all I can do to keep my poise and appear not to be listening to you.

HETTY: Impress her.

HARRIET: Hetty, dear, is it not my custom to impress people?

HETTY: I hate her.

HARRIET: I can't let her see that.

HETTY: I hate her because she married John.

HARRIET: Only after you had refused him.

HETTY: *[turning on HARRIET]* Was it my fault that I refused him?

HARRIET: That's right, blame me.

HETTY: It was your fault. You told me he was too poor and never would be able to do anything in painting. Look at him now, known in Europe, just returned from eight years in Paris, famous.

HARRIET: It was too poor a gamble at the time. It was much safer to accept Charles's money and position.

HETTY: And then John married Margaret within the year.

HARRIET: Out of spite.

HETTY: Freckled, gawky-looking thing she was, too.

HARRIET: [*a little sadly*] Europe improved her. She was stunning the other morning.

HETTY: Make her jealous today.

HARRIET: Shall I be haughty or cordial or caustic or--

HETTY: Above all else you must let her know that we are rich.

HARRIET: Oh, yes, I do that quite easily now.

HETTY: You must put it on a bit.

HARRIET: Never fear.

HETTY: Tell her I love my husband.

HARRIET: My husband--

HETTY: Are you going to quarrel with me?

HARRIET: [*moves away*] No, I have no desire to quarrel with you. It is quite too uncomfortable. I couldn't get away from you if I tried.

HETTY: [*stamping her foot and following HARRIET*] You were a stupid fool to make me refuse John, I'll never forgive you -- never--

HARRIET: *[stopping and holding up her hand]* Don't get me all excited. I'll be in no condition to meet her properly this afternoon.

HETTY: *[passionately]* I could choke you for robbing me of John.

HARRIET: *[retreating]* Don't muss me!

HETTY: You don't know how you have made me suffer.

HARRIET: *[beginning to feel the strength of HETTY'S emotion surge through her and trying to conquer it]* It is not my business to have heartaches.

HETTY: You're bloodless. Nothing but sham -- sham -- while I --

HARRIET: *[emotionally]* Be quiet! I can't let her see that I have been fighting with my inner self.

HETTY: And now after all my suffering you say it has cost you more than it has cost me to be married to Charles. But it's the pain here in my heart -- I've paid the price -- I've paid ---- Charles is not your husband!

HARRIET: *[trying to conquer emotion]* He is.

HETTY: *[follows HARRIET]* He isn't.

HARRIET: *[weakly]* He is.

HETTY: *[towering over HARRIET]* He isn't! I'll kill you!

HARRIET: *[overpowered, sinks into a chair]* Don't -- don't -- you're stronger than I -- you're --

HETTY: Say he's mine.

HARRIET: He's ours.

HETTY: *[the telephone rings]* There she is now.

[HETTY hurries to 'phone but HARRIET regains her supremacy.]

HARRIET: *[authoritatively]* Wait! I can't let the telephone girl down there hear my real self. It isn't proper. *[Into the phone.]* Show Mrs. Caldwell up.

HETTY: I'm so excited, my heart's in my mouth.

HARRIET: *[at the mirror]*. A nice state you've put my nerves into.

HETTY: Don't let her see you're nervous.

HARRIET: Quick, put the veil on, or she'll see you shining through me.

[HARRIET takes a scarf of chiffon that has been lying over the back of a chair and drapes it on HETTY, covering her face. The chiffon is the same color of their gowns but paler in shade so that it pales HETTY'S darker gown to match HARRIET'S lighter one. As HETTY moves in the following scene the chiffon falls away revealing now and then the gown of deeper dye underneath.]

HETTY: Tell her Charles is rich and fascinating -- boast of our friends, make her feel she needs us.

HARRIET: I'll make her ask John to paint us.

HETTY: That's just my thought -- if John paints our portrait --

HARRIET: We can wear an exquisite gown --

HETTY: And make him fall in love again and --

HARRIET: *[schemingly]* Yes.

[MARGARET parts the portieres back centre and extends her hand. MARGARET is followed by her counterpart MAGGIE.]

HARRIET: Oh, Margaret, I'm so glad to see you!

HETTY: *[to MAGGIE]* That's a lie.

MARGARET: *[in superficial voice throughout]* It's enchanting to see you, Harriet.

MAGGIE: *[in emotional voice throughout]* I'd bite you, if I dared.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Wasn't our meeting a stroke of luck?

MARGARET: *[coming down left of table]* I've thought of you so often, Harriet; and to come back and find you living in New York.

HARRIET: *[coming down right of table]* Mr. Goodrich has many interests here.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Flatter her.

MARGARET: I know, Mr. Goodrich is so successful.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Tell her we're rich.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Won't you sit down?

MARGARET: *[takes a chair]* What a beautiful lamp!

HARRIET: Do you like it? I'm afraid Charles paid an extravagant price.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]* I don't believe it.

MARGARET: *[sitting down. To HARRIET]* I am sure he must have.

HARRIET: *[sitting down]* How well you are looking, Margaret.

HETTY: Yes, you are not. There are circles under your eyes.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]* I haven't eaten since breakfast and I'm hungry.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* How well you are looking, too.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]*. You have hard lines about your lips, are you happy?

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Don't let her know that I'm unhappy.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Why shouldn't I look well? My life is full, happy, complete --

MAGGIE: I wonder.

HETTY: *[in HARRIET'S ear]* Tell her we have an automobile.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]*. My life is complete, too.

MAGGIE: My heart is torn with sorrow; my husband cannot make a living. He will kill himself if he does not get an order for a painting.

MARGARET: *[laughs]* You must come and see us in our studio. John has been doing some excellent portraits. He cannot begin to fill his orders.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Tell her we have an automobile.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Do you take lemon in your tea?

MAGGIE: Take cream. It's more filling.

MARGARET: *[looking nonchalantly at tea things]* No, cream, if you please. How cozy!

MAGGIE: *[glaring at tea things]* Only cakes! I could eat them all!

HARRIET *[to MARGARET]* How many lumps?

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Sugar is nourishing.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* Three, please. I used to drink very sweet coffee in Turkey and ever since I've --

HETTY: I don't believe you were ever in Turkey.

MAGGIE: I wasn't, but it is none of your business.

HARRIET: *[pouring tea]* Have you been in Turkey, do tell me about it.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Change the subject.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* You must go there. You have so much taste in dress you would enjoy seeing their costumes.

MAGGIE: Isn't she going to pass the cake?

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* John painted several portraits there.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Why don't you stop her bragging and tell her we have an automobile?

HARRIET: *[offers cake across the table to MARGARET]* Cake?

MAGGIE: *[stands back of MARGARET, shadowing her as HETTY shadows HARRIET. MAGGIE reaches claws out for the cake and groans with joy]* At last! *[But her claws do not touch the cake.]*

MARGARET: *[with a graceful, nonchalant hand places cake upon her plate and bites at it slowly and delicately]* Thank you.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Automobile!

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Follow up the costumes with the suggestion that she would make a good model for John. It isn't too early to begin getting what you came for.

MARGARET: *[ignoring MAGGIE]* What delicious cake.

HETTY: *[excitedly to HARRIET]* There's your chance for the auto.

HARRIET: *[nonchalantly to MARGARET]* Yes, it is good cake, isn't it? There are always a great many people buying it at Harper's. I sat in my automobile fifteen minutes this morning waiting for my chauffeur to get it.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Make her order a portrait.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* If you stopped at Harper's you must have noticed the new gowns at Henderson's. Aren't the shop windows alluring these days?

HARRIET: Even my chauffeur notices them.

MAGGIE: I know you have an automobile, I heard you the first time.

MARGARET: I notice gowns now with an artist's eye as John does. The one you have on, my dear, is very paintable.

HETTY: Don't let her see you're anxious to be painted.

HARRIET: *[nonchalantly]* Oh, it's just a little model.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Don't seem anxious to get the order.

MARGARET: *[nonchalantly]* Perhaps it isn't the gown itself but the way you wear it that pleases the eye. Some people can wear anything with grace.

HETTY: Yes, I'm very graceful.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]*. You flatter me, my dear.

MARGARET: On the contrary, Harriet, I have an intense admiration for you. I remember how beautiful you were -- as a girl. In fact, I was quite jealous when John was paying you so much attention.

HETTY: She is gloating because I lost him.

HARRIET: Those were childhood days in a country town.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* She's trying to make you feel that John was only a country boy.

MARGARET: Most great men have come from the country. There is a fair chance that John will be added to the list.

HETTY: I know it and I am bitterly jealous of you.

HARRIET: Undoubtedly he owes much of his success to you, Margaret, your experience in economy and your ability to endure hardship. Those first few years in Paris must have been a struggle.

MAGGIE: She is sneering at your poverty.

MARGARET: Yes, we did find life difficult at first, not the luxurious start a girl has who marries wealth.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Deny that you married Charles for his money.

[HARRIET deems it wise to ignore HETTY'S advice.]

MARGARET: But John and I are so congenial in our tastes, that we were impervious to hardship or unhappiness.

HETTY: [*in anguish*] Do you love each other? Is it really true?

HARRIET: [*sweetly*] Did you have all the romance of starving for his art?

MAGGIE: [*to MARGARET*] She's taunting you. Get even with her.

MARGARET: Not for long. Prince Rier soon discovered John's genius, and introduced him royally to wealthy Parisians who gave him many orders.

HETTY: [*to MAGGIE*] Are you telling the truth or are you lying?

HARRIET: If he had so many opportunities there, you must have had great inducements to come back to the States.

MAGGIE: [*to HETTY*] We did, but not the kind you think.

MARGARET: John became the rage among Americans travelling in France, too, and they simply insisted upon his coming here.

HARRIET: Whom is he going to paint here?

MAGGIE: [*frightened*] What names dare I make up?

MARGARET: [*calmly*] Just at present Miss Dorothy Ainsworth of Oregon is posing. You may not know the name, but she is the daughter of a wealthy miner who found gold in Alaska.

HARRIET: I dare say there are many Western people we have never heard of.

MARGARET: You must have found social life in New York very interesting, Harriet, after the simplicity of our home town.

HETTY: [*to MAGGIE*] There's no need to remind us that our beginnings were the same.

HARRIET: Of course Charles's family made everything delightful for me. They are so well connected.

MAGGIE: [*to MARGARET*] Flatter her.

MARGARET: I heard it mentioned yesterday that you had made yourself very popular. Some one said you were very clever!

HARRIET: *[pleased]* Who told you that?

MAGGIE: Nobody!

MARGARET: *[pleasantly]* Oh, confidences should be suspected -- respected, I mean. They said, too, that you are gaining some reputation as a critic of art.

HARRIET: I make no pretenses.

MARGARET: Are you and Mr. Goodrich interested in the same things, too?

HETTY: No!

HARRIET: Yes, indeed, Charles and I are inseparable.

MAGGIE: I wonder.

HARRIET: Do have another cake.

MAGGIE: *[in relief]* Oh, yes. *[Again her claws extend but do not touch the cake.]*

MARGARET: *[takes cake delicately]* I really shouldn't -- after my big luncheon. John took me to the Ritz and we are invited to the Bedfords' for dinner -- they have such a magnificent house near the drive -- I really shouldn't, but the cakes are so good.

MAGGIE: Starving!

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* More tea?

MAGGIE: Yes!

MARGARET: No, thank you. How wonderfully life has arranged itself for you. Wealth, position, a happy marriage, every opportunity to enjoy all pleasures; beauty, art -- how happy you must be.

HETTY: *[in anguish]*. Don't call me happy. I've never been happy since I gave up John. All these years without him -- a future without him -- no -- no -- I shall win him back -- away from you -- away from you --

HARRIET: *[does not see MAGGIE pointing to cream and MARGARET stealing some]* I sometimes think it is unfair for any one to be as happy as I am. Charles and I are just as much in love now as when we married. To me he is just the dearest man in the world.

MAGGIE: *[passionately]* My John is. I love him so much I could die for him. I'm going through hunger and want to make him great and he loves me. He worships me!

MARGARET: *[leisurely to HARRIET]* I should like to meet Mr. Goodrich. Bring him to our studio. John has some sketches to show. Not many, because all the portraits have been purchased by the subjects. He gets as much as four thousand dollars now.

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Don't pay that much.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* As much as that?

MARGARET: It is not really too much when one considers that John is in the foremost rank of artists to-day. A picture painted by him now will double and treble in value.

MAGGIE: It's all a lie. He is growing weak with despair.

HARRIET: Does he paint all day long?

MAGGIE: No, he draws advertisements for our bread.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* When you and your husband come to see us, telephone first --

MAGGIE: Yes, so he can get the advertisements out of the way.

MARGARET: Otherwise you might arrive while he has a sitter, and John refuses to let me disturb him then.

HETTY: Make her ask for an order.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Le Grange offered to paint me for a thousand.

MARGARET: Louis Le Grange's reputation isn't worth more than that.

HARRIET: Well, I've heard his work well mentioned.

MAGGIE: Yes, he is doing splendid work.

MARGARET: Oh, dear me, no. He is only praised by the masses. He is accepted not at all by artists themselves.

HETTY: *[anxiously]* Must I really pay the full price?

HARRIET: Le Grange thought I would make a good subject.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]*. Let her fish for it.

MARGARET: Of course you would. Why don't you let Le Grange paint you, if you trust him?

HETTY: She doesn't seem anxious to have John do it.

HARRIET: But if Le Grange isn't accepted by artists, it would be a waste of time to pose for him, wouldn't it?

MARGARET: Yes, I think it would.

MAGGIE: *[passionately to HETTY across back of table]* Give us the order. John is so despondent he can't endure much longer. Help us! Help me! Save us!

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* Don't seem too eager.

HARRIET: And yet if he charges only a thousand one might consider it.

MARGARET. If you really wish to be painted, why don't you give a little more and have a portrait really worth while? John might be induced to do you for a little below his usual price considering that you used to be such good friends.

HETTY: *[in glee]* Hurrah!

HARRIET: [*quietly to MARGARET*] That's very nice of you to suggest -- of course I don't know --

MAGGIE: [*in fear*]. For God's sake, say yes.

MARGARET: [*quietly to HARRIET*] Of course, I don't know whether John would. He is very peculiar in these matters. He sets his value on his work and thinks it beneath him to discuss price.

HETTY: [*to MAGGIE*] You needn't try to make us feel small.

MARGARET: Still, I might quite delicately mention to him that inasmuch as you have many influential friends you would be very glad to -- to --

MAGGIE: [*to HETTY*] Finish what I don't want to say.

HETTY: [*to HARRIET*] Help her out.

HARRIET: Oh, yes, introductions will follow the exhibition of my portrait. No doubt I --

HETTY: [*to HARRIET*] Be patronizing.

HARRIET: No doubt I shall be able to introduce your husband to his advantage.

MAGGIE: [*relieved*] Saved.

MARGARET: If I find John in a propitious mood I shall take pleasure, for your sake, in telling him about your beauty. Just as you are sitting now would be a lovely pose.

MAGGIE: [*to MARGARET*] We can go now.

HETTY: [*to HARRIET*] Don't let her think she is doing us a favor.

HARRIET: It will give me pleasure to add my name to your husband's list of patronesses.

MAGGIE: [*excitedly to MARGARET*] Run home and tell John the good news.

MARGARET: [*leisurely to HARRIET*] I little guessed when I came for a pleasant chat about old times that it would develop into business arrangements. I had no

idea, Harriet, that you had any intention of being painted. By Le Grange, too. Well, I came just in time to rescue you.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* Run home and tell John. Hurry, hurry!

HETTY: *[to HARRIET]* You managed the order very neatly. She doesn't suspect that you wanted it.

HARRIET: Now if I am not satisfied with my portrait I shall blame you, Margaret, dear. I am relying upon your opinion of John's talent.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* She doesn't suspect what you came for. Run home and tell John!

HARRIET: You always had a brilliant mind, Margaret.

MARGARET: Ah, it is you who flatter, now.

MAGGIE: *[to MARGARET]* You don't have to stay so long. Hurry home!

HARRIET: Ah, one does not flatter when one tells the truth.

MARGARET: *[smiles]* I must be going or you will have me completely under your spell.

HETTY: *[looks at clock]* Yes, do go. I have to dress for dinner.

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* Oh, don't hurry.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]* I hate you!

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* No, really I must, but I hope we shall see each other often at the studio. I find you so stimulating.

HETTY: *[to MAGGIE]* I hate you!

HARRIET: *[to MARGARET]* It is indeed gratifying to find a kindred spirit.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]* I came for your gold.

MARGARET: *[to HARRIET]* How delightful it is to know you again.

HETTY: *[to MAGGIE]* I am going to make you and your husband suffer.

HARRIET: My kind regards to John.

MAGGIE: *[to HETTY]* He has forgotten all about you.

MARGARET: *[rises]* He will be so happy to receive them.

HETTY: *[to MAGGIE]* I can hardly wait to talk to him again.

HARRIET: I shall wait, then, until you send me word?

MARGARET: *[offering her hand]* I'll speak to John about it as soon as I can and tell you when to come.

[HARRIET takes MARGARET'S hand affectionately. HETTY and MAGGIE rush at each other, throw back their veils, and fling their speeches fiercely at each other.]

HETTY: I love him -- I love him --

MAGGIE: He's starving -- I'm starving --

HETTY: I'm going to take him away from you --

MAGGIE: I want your money -- and your influence.

HETTY and MAGGIE: I'm going to rob you -- rob you.

[There is a cymbal crash, the lights go out and come up again slowly, leaving only MARGARET and HARRIET visible.]

MARGARET: *[quietly to HARRIET]* I've had such a delightful afternoon.

HARRIET: *[offering her hand]* It has been a joy to see you.

MARGARET: *[sweetly to HARRIET]* Good-bye.

HARRIET: *[sweetly to MARGARET as she kisses her]* Good-bye, my dear.

CURTAIN

HE SAID AND SHE SAID
a play in one-act

by Alice Gerstenberg

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Ten One-Act Plays*. Alice Gerstenberg. New York: Brentano's, 1922. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

DIANA CHESBROUGH, a society girl
ENID HALDEMAN, her friend
FELIX Haldeman, her husband
MRS. CYRUS PACKARD, their friend

SETTING

Living-room at the Haldemans, before dinner.

[Living-room at the Haldemans. Discovered Enid setting the room to rights. Enter in hat and coat and jingling a bunch of house keys Felix Haldeman. He kisses Enid affectionately as if it were a daily habit, and then tosses down the evening paper.]

FELIX: Hello, dear.

ENID: Felix, I asked Diana and Mrs. Packard over for dinner. You'd better hurry and wash up a bit.

FELIX: What? Am I to be the only man *again*?

ENID: Can't help it, darling. Mr. Packard's in Washington and all of Diana's suitors are in the trenches.

FELIX: There must be some old greybeard left somewhere to invite for Diana.

ENID: Oh, there are a few left-overs floating around but Diana doesn't like them. If she can't get the best *male* company she prefers *female*.

FELIX: Diana's a peach! She should have married one of the boys before they all went over. Poor Aubrey Laurence was madly in love with her.

ENID: Hurry up, there's soot on your cheek. *[She taps it affectionately.]*

FELIX: All right, if I have to dine with three women I'd better look my best.

ENID: *(Admiringly)* Yes, my dear Cock of the Walk.

FELIX: There're the evening papers. We gained three miles again. *[Exit down left.]*

[Enid is about to glance at the paper but is interrupted by the breezy entrance of Mrs. Packard.]

MRS. PACKARD: My dear, your maid told me to come right in.

ENID: Oh, Mrs. Packard, I'm so glad you could come on such short notice.

MRS. PACKARD: I jumped at the invitation. It's so lonesome with John away. How lucky *you* are to have your husband at home.

ENID: Thanks to his business, the Government prefers him here. Take off your things.

MRS. PACKARD: I'm a little early but I took advantage of the chance to ride this way in Mrs. Morgan's car. Do you like Mrs. Morgan?

ENID: Why, yes, don't you?

MRS. PACKARD: I don't think *you* ought to like her.

ENID: Why not?

MRS. PACKARD: She has a long, bad tongue.

ENID: Talks about people--

MRS. PACKARD: *(Raises her eyebrows)* Does she? You ought to hear her--but then *you* ought *not* to hear her.

ENID: About me?

MRS. PACKARD: Now, there, my dear, I have come for a jolly little dinner-party and I'm *not* going to gossip.

ENID: Still, if she said anything against *me*, I ought to protect myself--

MRS. PACKARD: That's just it, that's what I thought--and when she said--Oh, no, why should I tell you--

ENID: Why *shouldn't* you tell me?

MRS. PACKARD: Yes, why shouldn't I? After all, I'm one of your *best* friends and you ought to know--

ENID: Certainly, I ought to know--

MRS. PACKARD: But you may never forgive me--

ENID: Not forgive you for protecting me?

MRS. PACKARD: That's true, you must protect yourself. It is my duty to tell you.

ENID: What *is* it? You have me quite scared.

MRS. PACKARD: If she tells me a thing like that, of course, she will tell everyone else. By this time, no doubt, it's all over town.

ENID: How dreadful--what have I done--

MRS. PACKARD: It isn't what you've done--it's about Diana Chesbrough.

ENID: She's coming tonight.

MRS. PACKARD: *Is* she? *Your* invitation?

ENID: Why, yes--

MRS. PACKARD: Are you sure?

ENID: (*A bit impatiently*) Of course, I'm sure.

MRS. PACKARD: Well-- (*She raises her shoulders and eyebrows.*)

ENID: But in what way can gossip couple my name with Diana's? She is one of my *best* friends.

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, *is* she?

ENID: (*Stoutly*) I am quite sure she is.

MRS. PACKARD: Maybe she is--still, they wonder why Diana didn't marry one of the boys before they went off to war.

ENID: Why should she have--

MRS. PACKARD: Yes, why should she have really--still--anyone as attractive as Diana--she had plenty of chances, didn't she?

ENID: Oh, yes.

MRS. PACKARD: That's what they say. All nice men, too, and one or two real catches--don't you think it's strange Diana didn't marry one of them?

ENID: Yes, I do think it's strange.

MRS. PACKARD: (*Pouncingly*) There! Of course you do! I *said* it. But why do you think she didn't?

ENID: I don't know.

MRS. PACKARD: What does *she* say?

ENID: I think she--

MRS. PACKARD: Exactly! It's just what everyone is saying. And everybody feels so sorry for *you*.

ENID: Sorry for *me*?

MRS. PACKARD: My dear, *you* get all the sympathy.

ENID: What for?

MRS. PACKARD: Is it possible you have been so blind?

ENID: Blind, I?

MRS. PACKARD: You're with each other a great deal aren't you?

ENID: Yes--

MRS. PACKARD: And your husband--

ENID: Ah, *that's* what you mean--

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, my poor dear, *that's* what they say--

ENID: Just *what* do they say?

MRS. PACKARD: That she and--oh, no, my dear, of course I don't believe it, but--

-

ENID: (*Worried*) But just in exact words what *do* they say--

MRS. PACKARD: Hasn't he ever admired her in your presence--

ENID: Yes--

MRS. PACKARD: What does *he* say--

ENID: Oh, that she's a peach and popular and all the men like her and many of them want to marry her and--

MRS. PACKARD: There you are! That's *just* it! They said so and Mrs. Morgan told me that Diana refused the other men because--well she said because-- (*Sees Diana entering, changes the subject quickly.*) Oh, Diana, you dear, sweet thing, good evening.

DIANA: (*Enters back center, gay, happy, pretty, unconsciously friendly*) Hello, Mrs. Packard. Hello, Enid, old top. (*Kisses Enid.*) I'm early, because I came straight up from town after dressing at the club. Canteen work all day. How's everybody?

ENID: I've been nursing at the hospital all afternoon.

DIANA: Isn't Enid a tramp, doing the home nursing and releasing someone else to get the glory over there? I'd have gone over there myself--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Pouncingly*) Why didn't you?

DIANA: Against the law. I have relatives in the trenches. Oh, I'd *love* the romance of being there. Enid, get the letter from your brother, won't you, and read it to Mrs. Packard? He gives such unusually interesting descriptions--

ENID: Yes, it's most interesting. Excuse me a moment, it's in my desk upstairs.

[*Exit Enid back center.*]

MRS. PACKARD: (*With a backward glance to see if Enid is out of hearing*) My dear Miss Chesbrough, pardon me for seeming to presume, but I am only trying to save you. Are you aware of what people are saying about you?

DIANA: Saying about me?

MRS. PACKARD: Of course they wouldn't say it *to* you--

DIANA: *What* wouldn't they say?

MRS. PACKARD: It is so much easier to flatter than to say disagreeable things--

DIANA: People are saying disagreeable things about me?

MRS. PACKARD: You haven't heard?

DIANA: No, but I should certainly like to know--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course you would; any young girl like you--but my dear, do you really think you should come to this house--

DIANA: Come to this house? Why, Enid and I went to school together, she is one of my oldest and best friends--

MRS. PACKARD: *Best*--did you say?

DIANA: You doubt it?

MRS. PACKARD: After what *she* said?

DIANA: *She* said something to make you doubt her friendship to *me*--surely you are mistaken--

MRS. PACKARD: My dear girl, I have eyes and ears--I can see and hear--

DIANA: What did Enid say?

MRS. PACKARD: She said she wished you had married one of the boys before they went to war--

DIANA: *Oh, that*--

MRS. PACKARD: You admit it! And still you come here--*that* is what people say--

DIANA: What do I admit? I don't follow your reasoning--I don't see--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course you don't see--love is always blind.

DIANA: Love! We haven't said a word about love--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course not, it is a delicate word to use and in this matter it is--well, the world does not think it becoming--

DIANA: (*Indignantly*) Mrs. Packard I do not understand your innuendos--tell me the plain facts--what are people saying--and what has love got to do with it?

MRS. PACKARD: Mr. Haldeman.

DIANA: (*Laughs*) Felix?

MRS. PACKARD: And *you!*

DIANA: I?

MRS. PACKARD: They couple your names together.

DIANA: (*Furiously*) They say that Felix and I--it is a lie--

MRS. PACKARD: It doesn't make any difference if it *is* a lie--the point is what people say--

DIANA: The people who say such things have rotten little minds that haven't enough brains to entertain themselves--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Shocked*) My dear Miss Chesbrough--

DIANA: And you're just the same repeating such slander--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Angrily*) You insinuate that I am one of the--

DIANA: I do.

MRS. PACKARD: You have insulted me!

DIANA: Not more than you have insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD: (*Furiously*) Miss Chesbrough, you will suffer for this! I tell you something in all friendliness of spirit to protect you from the slanders of the world and then you reward me by--

DIANA: You listen to idle tongues and then you come and rob me of my happiness--by putting poison into my mind--

MRS. PACKARD: I was telling you the *truth*, but people do not thank you for telling them the truth--

DIANA: *I* am the one who knows what the truth is! I know that Enid and I are friends and that Enid and Felix and I are friends and that is all. Felix adores Enid, he would never care for any other woman--

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, wouldn't he? Does the world know more than Mrs. Haldeman herself? It does *not!* Just a few moments ago in this very room she told me herself that she wished you had married because she knows that Felix is in love with you--she pretends to be your friend but in her heart she hates you--

DIANA: It's not true!

MRS. PACKARD: It is not pleasant to argue with you, Miss Chesbrough. I shall find my hostess and make my excuses and not stay to dinner-- (*Exit up center.*)

DIANA: (*Goes as if to follow her*) If I have been too utterly rude, I humbly apologize but I cannot allow you to circulate such outrageous--

FELIX: (*Enters from down left*) Hello, Diana, when did *you* get here? Want to help me mix the cocktails? (*Goes to side table and begins to mix drinks.*)

DIANA: Felix, a terrible thing has happened--they talk about us!

FELIX: Who is *they* and who is *us*?

DIANA: People are talking about you and me--

FELIX: (*Mixing cocktail*) Why, what have we done? Do you like a drop of orange bitters?

DIANA: You're not taking it seriously.

FELIX: But what is there--

DIANA: That's just it--what *is* there--if there really *were* something-- (*She watches him anxiously.*) It's most embarrassing for *me*--I don't know how to say it to *you*--

FELIX: My dear Diana, you can say anything to me--haven't I proved myself a real friend--

DIANA: But if what they say is really--true--

FELIX: Don't *you* know whether it's true or not--

DIANA: I thought I did--but after she said it I began to wonder--

FELIX: Wonder *what*?

DIANA: (*Hesitates*) Oh--

FELIX: Out with it!

DIANA: You know I love Enid--

FELIX: Why, you've grown up together--

DIANA: I wouldn't hurt her for worlds--

FELIX: No, you trump!

DIANA: So do *you* love her more than any one else--don't you?

FELIX: Of course--but--

DIANA: (*Horried*) Don't say *but*--

FELIX: But *why*--

DIANA: Why did you say "but"--

FELIX: Did I say "but"? I don't know, what was I saying--

DIANA: You said *of course*--*BUT*--

FELIX: I don't remember--you have me all confused--

DIANA: You don't think I'm in love with you, do you?

FELIX: Great Scott, do they say you are in love with me?

DIANA: You never have thought have you--

FELIX: I'm not so conceited to think I could--

DIANA: Ah, then--*but*--

FELIX: Well, *now, what, but*--

DIANA: *Are* you in love with me?

FELIX: (*Shouts*) No!

DIANA: Thank goodness! But--

FELIX: What--

DIANA: *That's* what they say--

FELIX: That I am in love with you--

DIANA: And that I am in love with *you*--

FELIX: And--

DIANA: Exactly!

FELIX: Holy smokes!

DIANA: But it's *not* true!

FELIX: (*Shouts*) No!

DIANA: But they *say* it's true!

FELIX: And what they *say*--

DIANA: Amounts to the same thing--

FELIX: What can we do?

DIANA: That's what I'm asking *you*--

FELIX: Go straight to Enid--

DIANA: But Enid believes it!

FELIX: Nonsense!

DIANA: *She* said so--

FELIX: What "she" said so?

DIANA: Mrs. Packard said they *all* say it.

FELIX: How do *they* know?

DIANA: They *don't*, but they *think* they do so it amounts to the same thing.

FELIX: But Enid can't believe it--

DIANA: But there's proof that she *does* believe it--

FELIX: It's too absurd--

DIANA: Mrs. Packard said that *Enid* said that *you* said you were in love with *me* or something like that--and that Enid hates me--

FELIX: That's not true, I know she likes you--

DIANA: But Mrs. Packard wouldn't dare say anything--

FELIX: She said Enid hates you--

DIANA: Perhaps Enid does--perhaps she is jealous over nothing at all--perhaps she has been imagining things--perhaps she *does* hate me--perhaps she *too* has been saying things--making it seem as if--

[She stops as Enid enters followed by Mrs. Packard center.]

ENID: Diana, Mrs. Packard says you insulted her and that she feels she cannot stay for dinner--

DIANA: I apologized to Mrs. Packard but she would not accept my--

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, you *do* admit you insulted me--

DIANA: Only after you insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD: You hear, Mrs. Haldeman? It is just as I said, she accused me of insulting her when I was trying only to be kind and give her a little motherly advice--

DIANA: Mrs. Packard took it upon herself to repeat some things that people are saying--things that are manifestly untrue--

ENID: Whether they are true or not--it is highly unpleasant for me to have this altercation in my house--

DIANA: I can tell by your voice that you are willing to believe that woman--

MRS. PACKARD: Mrs. Haldeman, I resent being called *that* woman--

DIANA: I don't care what you resent--you've come in and spoilt a beautiful friendship I've had all my life and I don't care what I call you--

ENID: But in my house--my guests--

DIANA: Don't worry--I shall not be your guest another moment--I'm going--
(Starts.)

ENID: No, Diana, I can't let you leave in--anger.

DIANA: But I do--I leave with my heart black against you for listening to what she said--

MRS. PACKARD: What did I say?

DIANA: You said that Felix and I were in love with each other and you insinuated that--

MRS. PACKARD: I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA: Mrs. Packard! Why just a few moments ago in this very room you--

MRS. PACKARD: I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA: Can you look me straight in the eyes and tell me you never said it?

MRS. PACKARD: I *never* said it! never, never, *never!*

DIANA: Didn't you tell me that you have eyes and ears and that you can see and hear--and that everybody was saying--

MRS. PACKARD: But what *everybody* else says isn't what *I* say!

DIANA: Didn't you tell me that Felix was in love with me--

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't know that! *She* told me that! (Turns to Enid.)

ENID: I never told you that!

MRS. PACKARD: Why, my dear, you did! In this very room, a few moments ago--

ENID: I never said such a thing in all my life--and how can you imagine--

MRS. PACKARD: I imagine nothing! I know what I see and what I hear and you certainly told me that you ought to know all I had heard so you could *protect* yourself. So I told you in a friendly way, trying to be a help and there we are.

DIANA: (*Bitterly*) Yes, *where* are we?

MRS. PACKARD: You have no one to blame but yourself.

DIANA: We have no one to blame but *you*--

ENID: MRS. PACKARD, I didn't know I *had* to protect myself--until you insinuated--

MRS. PACKARD: Why, it was *you* yourself who said that he wanted to marry her--

ENID: I said nothing of the sort. I said that he said--

[All women turn simultaneously upon Felix who up to this time has refrained from meddling in the quarrel. He is confused by this sudden demand upon him and answers foolishly.]

FELIX: I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. PACKARD: Didn't you say to your wife that you wanted to marry Miss Chesbrough and didn't--

FELIX: I never said such a thing in all my life and whoever said it got it out of whole cloth!

MRS. PACKARD: He denies it of course.

DIANA: He *has* to deny it. To admit it would be false.

MRS. PACKARD: Whether it was true or false he would have to deny it.

DIANA: Why would he have to deny it?

MRS. PACKARD: Because the ethics of a gentleman would make him deny it in order to protect you--

DIANA: (*Raging*) So it doesn't matter whether it is true or not--nothing we can say or do can wipe out the miserable thoughts in your mind--

MRS. PACKARD: Not my mind! *Everybody's* mind! *I* have nothing to do with it!

DIANA: Enid, can't you stand up and defend us?

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, you admit you must be defended.

DIANA: The whole world has to be defended against women like you! If you were in my house *I'd* show you the door. Enid, show her the door and prove that you trust Felix and me, that you know there isn't and never has been anything between us but the most innocent friendship--you don't move, you don't trust me--

ENID: I have always trusted you--I never had the slightest suspicion--but perhaps I have been blind--perhaps the world has been able to see better from the distance and understand--

FELIX: Are you going to take the world's word against ours? Are you going to believe a silly gossip and let one minute of slander outweigh the love and loyalty you've had from Diana and me for a lifetime--

MRS. PACKARD: Why don't you tell your wife you love her?

FELIX: I love my wife but I do not see any reason to make a public statement of it. I stated that publicly when I married her. She knows I love her--don't you--

ENID: Do I?

DIANA: He adores you--

FELIX: Don't you know it--

ENID: But Diana is pretty and--

DIANA: Felix! I leave this house--forever! Thanks to you, Mrs. Packard, I have lost two friends who meant more to me than even the world's opinion. I shall never see either of you again!

FELIX: Diana, come back! It is too outrageous to allow such contemptible gossip to break your friendship with Enid.

MRS. PACKARD: You see he does not want her to go--

DIANA: It would never be the same between Enid and me again.

FELIX: I do not want her to go because I do not want to have an evil tongue like yours triumphant! If you had come into our home and stolen our silver you would be less a thief than you are now. New silver can be bought--but tarnished friendship can never be bright again. You caused this by your malicious remarks about my regard for Miss Chesbrough.

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't say it.

FELIX: Pardon me, you did!

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't say it, *she* did. (*Turning to Enid.*)

ENID: I didn't.

MRS. PACKARD: You did.

ENID: I didn't.

DIANA: What does it matter how it happened! It's done! Done! Our friendship is over but--I won't go without leaving my memory here white and clean--I don't care what the world believes but I want Enid to know I've never had a thought against her--and so I'm going to tell the truth even though I would rather have died than tell this before--

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, now we will hear something--

FELIX: Diana, be careful--you are under no obligations to--

ENID: (*To Felix*) So you know what she is going to say?

DIANA: No, he doesn't know. It is my secret. No one else has known. There is only one man I love or ever have loved and he's over there.

MRS. PACKARD: She's making it up, a likely story--

DIANA: I'm not making it up! If you don't believe me I'll have to tell you his name--

FELIX: No, no, Diana, it is not fair to demand that of you--

DIANA: They will not believe me--but I'll do anything for Enid--she'll have to know. It is Aubrey Laurence.

MRS. PACKARD: Aubrey Laurence! He wanted to marry you--

ENID: It's true he did--But Diana wouldn't--

MRS. PACKARD: Why wouldn't you?

DIANA: Because I *did*.

FELIX and ENID: You married him?

DIANA: (*Takes wedding-ring from chain about her neck*) Yes! I married him, the last day before he sailed--

MRS. PACKARD: But your family didn't like him--

DIANA: That's why I didn't tell them, but you can go now and tell them yourself, Mrs. Packard.

FELIX: Aubrey Laurence! Did you really, Diana?

MRS. PACKARD: He hasn't any money.

FELIX: But he's straight to the core! *I'm* awfully glad Diana!

ENID: So am I, Diana! Forgive me!

DIANA: There's the door, Mrs. Packard, and the world outside is waiting to hear the latest gossip!

MRS. PACKARD: I'll go, my dear, because I've offended you and I know you are not ready to forgive me, but I promise not to breathe it to a soul--not to a soul--

[Exit up center in such a way that one knows she is excited and eager to tell it to everyone she meets.]

ENID: Diana, I'll never *forgive you* for not telling *me* you *married* Aubrey. Why didn't you tell me that you married Aubrey?

DIANA: But I didn't.

FELIX: You didn't?

ENID: But you said--

DIANA: Oh, what I *said!* It doesn't matter what I *said*--

ENID: But she'll tell everyone.

DIANA: Of course she will--

ENID: But if it's not true--

DIANA: It might be true--

ENID: But it's not--is it?

DIANA: I told you it wasn't--

ENID: But now I don't know whether to believe you or not--

DIANA: Nor will other people know whether to believe her or not--

FELIX: But when *Aubrey* hears of it--Diana--what will *he* think--

DIANA: He will wish that it were true--

FELIX: But what will he say about *you*--

DIANA: He will say that *I* wish it were true--

FELIX: And *do* you?

DIANA: I do!

ENID: Have you found out since he left that you really love him--

DIANA: Madly--madly--madly--

FELIX: (*Teasingly*) Shall I cable him that?

DIANA: I have already.

ENID: You haven't!

DIANA: I *have*. I'm going to marry him by proxy.

FELIX: (*Offering glass*) Do have a cocktail on that.

ENID: But when we tell people you married him by proxy after Mrs. Packard has told them you are married already, what *will* people say?

DIANA: (*Takes cocktail with a smile*) What *will* people say? In *any* case, *exactly* what *they* choose!

CURTAIN

YESTERDAY
a play in one-act

by Colin Campbell Clements

The following one-act play is reprinted from *Ten Minute Plays*. Ed. Pierre Loving. New York: Brentano's, 1923. It is now in the public domain and may therefore be performed without royalties.

CHARACTERS

A Certain Lady of Quality
A British Officer, late of the Indian Army

[A secluded nook off the ballroom of a London house. Almost hidden by palm trees is a long comfortable divan piled with colored cushions. The nook in question is the sort of hide-and-seek place one has around one's house for young lovers. How Lady A--for she is something past sixty, ever came to be in the place, is more than we can understand. But there she is, just entering from the back and walking toward the divan when the curtain rises. Perhaps Cupid--oh no, the idea is preposterous, for, as I said before, Lady A--is past sixty (of course she doesn't look it--no woman ever does), and besides, she's dreadfully--er--Victorian.] A British Officer, late of the Indian Army

SHE: *[Sinking down into the cushions on the divan she leans back and closes her eyes.]* Oh, dear. Oh, dear me! How things have changed. *[She's thinking of the debutantes with their absurd coiffures, their ridiculous gowns, their outrageous manners and their preposterous way of dancing.]* How things have changed! I should never have believed it possible!

[An immaculately groomed old gentleman in uniform comes stumbling toward the divan.]

HE: Rot ... silly rot ... idiots! What is the world coming-- *[He sees the lady.]* Oh, I beg your pardon. I beg your pardon. I thought I was quite alone.

SHE: You were referring to the dancing?

HE: Quite right, quite right. My word, it's preposterous, isn't it?

SHE: *[Raising her eyebrows]* You mean so unconventional?

HE: That's a--hardly the word for it. *[He begins nervously to search for his eyeglass.]* Hardly the word for it.

SHE: These coming-out parties are not what they used to be when--

HE: Coming out--coming out; my word, nobody seems to be in these days!

SHE: *[Who is slow at seeing jokes]* The young ladies, I mean--the young ladies.

HE: *[Who has found his eyeglass, and by a series of fantastic muscular contractions succeeds in fixing it firmly in his right eye]* Exactly, exactly! Yes, the young ladies. 'Pon my word, there doesn't seem to be much left for them to come out of. Egad, they seem to be all arms and legs--ahem--limbs.

SHE: Won't you sit down, Colonel?

HE: *[Petulantly]* Genral, Madam. General.

SHE: *[Lifting her lorgnette]* General--pardon my mistake. Oh, yes, we were speaking of the dancing. You see the world moves so fast nowadays, and I suppose the dances must keep up with the world.

HE: The world--running away with itself!

SHE: *[Toying with her white feather fan; when she speaks there is just the slightest quiver in her voice]* It was different when we were young, but we must be tolerant. We are old people now.

HE: *[The eyeglass snaps from his eye]* Old? I beg your pardon! Not old, Madam, not really old. Middle-aged, perhaps, yes, middle-aged--but not *old*.

SHE: *[Looking up out of the corners of her eyes which twinkle kindly]* Yes, that's it, *middle-aged*.

HE: *[Moving over to the divan, and, with some difficulty, sitting down; he rubs his knee cautiously. From somewhere behind the palms comes the din of a modern, ultra-modern "Jazz" orchestra]* There goes that unspeakable music again, that infernal racket! It's like the tom-toms one hears in Africa! Much worse, in fact. Awful! *[He pauses]* Yes, I dare say you are right, quite right; times *do* change.

But we seem to be going backward rather than forward. But we must accept the facts.

SHE: *[With a sigh]* Unfortunately.

HE: I had hoped-- *[There is a crash in the music]* I had hoped, when I accepted the invitation for this ball tonight, that I would find something--something to remind me, even remotely, of my youth, but 'pon my word, they've even done over the house!

SHE: *[Leaning forward]* Oh! You have been here before? May I ask--

HE: Yes, yes; done over the house! And in this horrible modern way, too!

SHE: No--you see, I know this house quite well. I believe nothing has been changed, nothing.

HE: Nothing changed? Really? Well, it seems changed; yes, it seems changed. Perhaps it is I who have--er--changed. *[He is looking for his eyeglass again]* Perhaps it is I who have changed.

SHE: *[Turning suddenly]* Perhaps; you know when one grows old--

HE: *[Turning suddenly]* Old, Madam, old?

SHE: I should say, middle-aged; when one reaches--

HE: Middle-aged! Why, I'm just in the prime of my life ... just in the prime! Don't feel a day over twenty, not a day. *[He slaps his knee, and immediately wishes he hadn't. Confidentially.]* Why, at the War Office, they still call me "Richard."

SHE: *[In a whisper]* Richard?

HE: *[Good-naturedly]* Yes. And at the East Indian United Service they call me-- they call me "Dick"! Not to my face, mind you. But they do call me "Dick."

SHE: *[She has turned and is looking up into his face]* Richard? East Indian United Service Club? May I ask--

HE: Yes, yes, that's it. *[He chuckles.]* That's it! So you see I'm not so old, Madam. *[His chest expands perceptibly.]* Of course, I have accomplished a great deal

during the short time I have been in Her Maj-- [*He coughs nervously*] that is, *His Majesty's* service. It's forty-one years ago tomorrow that I went out, and I've seen service, my word, for a young chap, I have seen service!

SHE: Forty-one years ... forty-one years ago?

HE: Yes, yes, quite right. And, as I was saying, I had hoped to find something of my youth here, some of the old corners and nooks and faces. [*He pauses for a moment and looks up at the ceiling.*] Some of the old familiar faces. One in particular.

SHE: [*Stretching out her hand*] Then you--

HE: Oh, dear, yes, very much so. I suppose every youngster is--until he gets sense. Oh, I was very much in love at the time, foolishly so. Couldn't live without her, and all that sort of thing. She was a snappy little thing ... clever, pretty, very pretty, as I remember--blue eyes and golden hair--*that* sort of girl.

SHE: [*Nervously toying with her fan*] And you--you quite forgot her when you went away?

HE: [*Looking up quickly*] Yes, yes ... I quite forgot her, quite forgot her. Life in the service is strenuous, you know. Besides, there's hunting, polo, and that sort of thing.

SHE: [*In a low whisper*] And--and married someone else?

HE: [*Exploding*] *Never!* Oh, I beg your pardon. [*He relaxes again*] No -- no, I never married. Hadn't the time, matter of fact.

SHE: And--and the young lady?

HE: [*Shrugging his shoulders*] I dare say she is the mother of a large family now. Oh, dear me, how times do change. As I was saying, I was very much in love with her, at the time--at the time, you understand. But the family--*her* family, you understand, rather objected to me, so I--I broke off the whole affair, joined the Indian service [*He leans far back and takes a deep breath*] --and I've been quite content, quite.

SHE: Yes? And you--you haven't tried to see--the--young lady since you returned to England?

HE: See her? See her? Oh, dear, no. It might be--er--rather, rather embarrassing for both of us. *[He closes his eyes]* You see, we were practically engaged at the time. That is, I hadn't come right down to asking, but you know how some things are understood, so to speak.

SHE: *[Quickly]* But you went away and left--

HE: Not exactly left her; let me see, let me see, as I recall it, I believe I did ask her to marry me.

SHE: And she refused?

HE: Let me see, did she refuse? *[He taps his head absent-mindedly]* Did she refuse? Ah, now I remember! She said we would have to think it all over very carefully. Yes, that's it, her very words, "very carefully"! I remember how she wrinkled up her little snub nose and--

SHE: *[Throwing back her head and staring coldly at the man beside her]* Sir, that is--

HE: *[Good-naturedly]* Yes, yes, her little snub nose. *[He looks up suddenly.]* Oh, mind you, it was a nice little nose!

SHE: And did you think it over carefully, "very carefully"?

HE: Not at all! I was a bit of a wild dog in those days, you know ... like most young men. My pride was hurt. *[He chuckles softly]* I was a proud young fellow ... like most young men, you understand. Of course I expected her to fall in my arms--and live there happily ever after--that is, not in my arms, you know, but--

SHE: As your wife. I understand.

HE: As my wife? Oh, yes, yes.

SHE: You were a romantic youth.

HE: Very, very--exceedingly so. I believe I must have been reading Disraeli's novels at the time. Rubbish!

SHE: But you, you--quite lost all trace of the--young lady?

HE: Quite. *[He pauses a moment]* Oh, I was a conceited young ass.... Like most young men, you know. Wouldn't have written for worlds! Several years afterward I read in the *Times* that Ann--

SHE: *[Turning away quickly]* Ann?

HE: Yes, Ann, Ann. Pretty name, isn't it? I was always fond of the name. As I was saying, several years afterward, I read in the *Times* that she had gone with her father to Florence; since then--nothing.

SHE: And so your romance ended?

HE: It will never--yes, yes, quite so. It ended.

SHE: *[After a long pause]* You never married?

HE: No, hadn't the time, always busy. Oh, I did think of it now and then, not often, mind you, but now and then. Life in the service does get lonely at times, when the hunting season is off, especially.

SHE: Oh--

HE: But I don't mind saying that a man should get married. Yes, indeed ... yes, indeed. My word, I did need some one to take care of me, some one to--

SHE: You've outgrown that need?

HE: *[Looking up suspiciously]* Yes, quite, oh, quite--my man is vary capable. Quite. *[The stillness is broken by harsh laughter and the sound of crashing, ear-splitting music.]* There goes that infernal music again.

SHE: Why, it's a waltz. *[They both sit in silence listening to the music; she quickly brushes a tear from her cheek.]* Yes--a waltz. Ah, what happy days those were! Music brings back so many memories. And the young people are happy. Ah, forty-two years ago I, too, could dance and laugh as they, but--

HE: *[Fumbling for his eyeglasses]* You--really?

SHE: Yes--in this very house, forty-two years ago.

HE: *[Through his glass he gazes at the lady next to him.]* Forty-two years ago; 'pon my word, so long ago as that?

SHE: Is it so long ago?

HE: Forty-two years, forty-two years-- *[He jerks back his head suddenly.]* I say, we must have known each other--then.

SHE: Perhaps--perhaps.

HE: Do you know, I believe I didn't catch your name. Awfully stupid of me--awfully. I have the pleasure of--

SHE: Yes, perhaps we did know each other then, and again, perhaps we didn't.

HE: Quite right. And--you've lived in England ever since?

SHE: No, after you-- *[She coughs.]* That is, I've lived out of England a great deal. I have a small villa near Florence.

HE: Have you really? Delightful place, Florence.

SHE: Yes, though a bit lonely at times.

HE: Is it really? You know, I had always thought of it as quite gay. That only goes to show how mistaken one can be.

SHE: *[Her thoughts far away]* Yes ... yes.

HE: But--but I suppose you have your children about you, and all that sort of thing.

SHE: No, I never married.

HE: That's a bit unusual, isn't it?

SHE: *[Without looking up]* Is it?

HE: *[Sliding away to the farthest end of the divan]* And, I suppose you never will?

SHE: No ... no.

HE: *[Looking up at her through half-closed eyes]* You know-- *[There is a crash in the music.]* There goes that infernal music again!

SHE: Yes. Perhaps we had better join the company, Colonel--er--General Farrington.

HE: *[Puzzled]* General *Sir Richard* Farrington.

SHE: Oh, I beg your pardon!

HE: And may I have the pleasure of knowing to whom I am indebted for a very pleasant half-hour--may I have the pleasure of knowing to whom I have been speaking?

SHE: *[After a rather awkward pause]* Why--yes--I am Lady Ann Trevers.

HE: Lady Ann Trevers? *[Sir Richard stumbles in trying to get to his feet]* Not Lady Ann of--

SHE: Yes, Sir Richard.

HE: 'Pon my word! God bless my soul! Ann Trevers ... Ann Trevers! I might have known you the moment I saw you--but I must admit I don't see so well as I used, that is, not quite so well. Ann Trevers! And to think that after all these years and in this very house--

SHE: Yes, Richard.

HE: *[Now trembling with excitement]* Ann! You said you never married?

SHE: Never married. No.

HE: 'Pon my word, but I thought--

SHE: You were mistaken. It was you--I loved then.

HE: *[Somehow he has got hold of Lady Ann's hand and is, a bit awkwardly, but ardently, pressing it to his lips.]* And when you said, "We must think it all over very carefully," you really meant--

SHE: Yes, I really meant--

HE: Now isn't that just like a woman! *[He leans far back and scratches his head doubtfully.]* Isn't that just like a woman!

SHE: Is it?

[From somewhere a waltz is heard. A great golden moon has risen out of the East and is peeping in at the windows.]

HE: Ah me, what happy days those were.

SHE: What happy days.

HE: Yes ... yes. *[He looks up suddenly.]* My word, isn't that a waltz they're playing?

SHE: Yes--a waltz.

HE: Ann, will you finish this waltz with me?

SHE: Yes, Richard.

[Lady Ann holds out her hand, he takes it, and draws her to him.]

[It is best to lower the curtain here.]

END of PLAY