

Bernice

BY SUSAN GLASPELL

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

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

ORIGINAL CAST

MR. ALLEN, *Bernice's Father* O. K. LIVERIGHT
ABBIE SUSAN GLASPELL
CRAIG NORRIS, *Bernice's Husband* JAMES K. LIGHT
LAURA (MRS. KIRBY), *Craig's Sister* BLANCHE HAYS
MARGARET PIERCE, *Bernice's Friend* IDA RAUH

BERNICE

ACT ONE

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

against the wall, and papers on which he has been writing. ABBIE, a middle-aged servant, is attending to the open fire.

FATHER

[Holding up a card he is about to place.] Ten minutes since the train whistled. They'll be here in five minutes now.

ABBIE

Yes, sir.

FATHER

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

ABBIE

Oh, yes.

FATHER

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

ABBIE

That's all I know of.

FATHER

But Margaret Pierce will be here soon. As soon as she can get here, Margaret will come. Within an hour, probably.

ABBIE

[*Apprehensive.*] You think so, sir?

FATHER

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

ABBIE

She doesn't need anyone now.

FATHER

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

ABBIE

[*Frightened now.*] You think so, sir?

FATHER

Oh, yes, she does. Bernice knew that. "Margaret sees things," I've heard Bernice say. [*ABBIE turns from him.*] Now Mrs. Kirby, Craig's

sister Laura, she's a sensible woman, she'll be a help to you, Abbie, in--arranging things. But see things? No. How different people are. They're all different, Abbie. I don't think Bernice cared much for Laura--though she didn't mind her. She'd just laugh about Laura--about her being so sure of everything. It was nice, Abbie, the way Bernice would just laugh about things. She had no malice.

ABBIE

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

FATHER

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

ABBIE

I think I do--knowing her.

FATHER

To you--did she seem detached?

ABBIE

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

FATHER

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

ABBIE

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

FATHER

I suppose that's true, Abbie. [*Buries his face.*] I wish my little girl hadn't died. What am I going to do, Abbie? How can I stay here? And how can I go away? We should die in our proper order; I should have gone before my daughter. Anything else makes confusion. There's not going to be anybody to laugh at me now, Abbie. I'll miss the way Bernice laughed at me, a laugh that took me in and--yes, took me in. She laughed at my spending the whole time of the war studying Sanscrit. Well, why shouldn't I? What can the old do about war? I had my vision of life. If that had been followed there'd have been no war. But in a world that won't have visions--why not study Sanscrit while such a world is being made over--into another such world. [*Listening.*] You hear some one, Abbie?

ABBIE

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

FATHER

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

ABBIE

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

FATHER

That was--how long ago, Abbie?

ABBIE

Thirty-five years ago.

FATHER

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

ABBIE

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

FATHER

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

ABBIE

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

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

LAURA

[*To the FATHER, taking his hand.*] This is so hard for you, Mr. Allen. I cannot tell you--[*Turning to ABBIE*] Abbie.

FATHER

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

LAURA

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

ABBIE

I have the rooms ready upstairs.

CRAIG

[*As if he cannot do this.*] Upstairs?

ABBIE

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

[*She indicates the closed door. Then takes LAURA'S bag and they start upstairs. CRAIG does not move.*]

LAURA

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

CRAIG

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

FATHER

No, it was very sudden. You know she had had trouble occasionally in the past year; Dr. Willis had said she might have to go to the hospital. At first this seemed like that--so Abbie and I weren't really alarmed.

Of course we sent for Willis, but he was in Boston. Young Stuart had the grip. So there was no doctor here--till afterwards.

CRAIG

And--how long was Bernice sick?

[*He speaks with difficulty.*]

FATHER

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

CRAIG

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

FATHER

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

CRAIG

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

FATHER

Of course.

CRAIG

But Bernice wrote me she was fine.

FATHER

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

CRAIG

Are you expecting Margaret now?

FATHER

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

CRAIG

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

FATHER

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

[*CRAIG half looks at him.*]

CRAIG

And Margaret answered that she was coming?

FATHER

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

CRAIG

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

FATHER

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

CRAIG

I can't--think of things that way now.

FATHER

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

CRAIG

That's good.

FATHER

And now the war is over, and some of the people who fussed around about it influenced it as little as I, and I--have my Sanscrit. You know, Bernice used to laugh at me, Craig. She--the way she used to laugh at us--lovingly. Seems to me I'll miss that most of all.

[*He goes into his room--through the door to the rear of the stairway.*]

[Alone in the room, CRAIG tries to look around. He cannot. He has taken a step toward the closed door when he hears ABBIE'S step on the stairs.]

CRAIG

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

ABBIE

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

CRAIG

A--message she left?

ABBIE

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

[They are arrested by the sound of a stopping car; neither moves; in a moment MARGARET PIERCE hurries in.]

MARGARET

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

[Starts towards the stairs.]

ABBIE

No--there.

[*Pointing.*

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

I know. I know what you mean, Margaret.

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

It's true, Margaret.

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

I know--what you mean.

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

No. Nor I.

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

I didn't know she was sick.

MARGARET

Your boat got in a week ago.

CRAIG

Yes. I was detained in New York.

MARGARET

Detained by May Fredericks?

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

No.

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

She understood me.

MARGARET

And was indulgent.

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

Yes. I know, Margaret.

MARGARET

I want to see Bernice!

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

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

CRAIG

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

ABBIE

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

CRAIG

[*Falling back.*] What--are--you--saying?

ABBIE

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

CRAIG

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

ABBIE

It's true. I'm telling you. It's true. She--didn't want to live any longer--so she took something--ended her life. That's all. That's all I can tell you. Nobody knows. Not her father--nobody. I thought I ought to tell you. Now I've told you! Let me go. I've told you--I--

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

CRAIG

[*Scarcely able to call to her.*] Margaret.

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

What--are--you--saying?

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

It is *not* true.

CRAIG

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

MARGARET

And you killed her!

CRAIG

No--Oh, don't say that! I didn't *know*.

MARGARET

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

CRAIG

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

LAURA

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

MARGARET

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

[She goes out.]

LAURA

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

CRAIG

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

LAURA

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

CRAIG

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

[She stands there beside him; the FATHER, coming in, at first sees only LAURA.]

FATHER

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

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

(CURTAIN)

ACT TWO

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

LAURA

But he took the tray, did he, Abbie?

ABBIE

He let me leave it.

LAURA

And how did he seem?

ABBIE

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

LAURA

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

MARGARET

I--I didn't see them.

[*She looks at ABBIE, who is looking at her. ABBIE turns away from MARGARET'S look.*]

LAURA

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

ABBIE

Two days.

LAURA

And just what did the doctor say was the matter?

ABBIE

The doctor wasn't here.

[*She steals a glance at MARGARET, who is all the while looking at her.*]

LAURA

I know. But afterwards--what was his opinion?

ABBIE

Attacks like she had had before--only worse. Ulcers in the stomach, he thought it was.

LAURA

It's a great pity you couldn't get a doctor. That's the worst of living way up here by one's self. Mrs. Norris had seemed well, hadn't she?

ABBIE

Yes, except once in a while; the doctor had said that she ought to go to the hospital to find out.

MARGARET

[*To LAURA.*] Too bad Craig wasn't here.

LAURA

Yes. He was detained in New York.

MARGARET

Yes. I know.

LAURA

Abbie, I wish you would go up and ask Mr. Norris if he would like some more coffee and--see how he seems. [*To MARGARET, resentfully.*] I don't understand why Craig should be quite like this. [*ABBIE does not move until LAURA looks at her in surprise, then she turns to go.*] No; I'll go myself, Abbie. I want to see how he is.

[*She goes up, and ABBIE comes back. Without looking at MARGARET she is turning toward the kitchen.*]

MARGARET

Abbie! [*Reluctantly ABBIE comes back, at first not looking up. Then she raises her eyes.*] Yes, he told me. [*ABBIE does not speak or move.*] Had she seemed unhappy, Abbie?

ABBIE

No. No, I hadn't noticed anything.

MARGARET

Abbie! Don't shut me out like this! *She* wouldn't shut me out. Bernice loved me.

ABBIE

I know. I know she did. But there's nothing for me to tell you, Miss Margaret, and it's hard for me to talk about. I loved her too. I lived with her her whole life long. First the baby I took care of and played with--then all the changing with the different years--then *this*--

[*A move of her hands towards the closed door.*]

MARGARET

Yes--then this. [*Gently.*] That's it, Abbie. "This"--takes away from all that. Abbie, do *you* understand it? If you do, won't you help me?

ABBIE

I don't understand it.

MARGARET

It's something so--outside all the rest. That's why I can't accept it. Something in me just won't take it in--because it isn't *right*. I knew her. I *know* I knew her! And this--Why then I didn't know her. Can't you help me?

ABBIE

I don't see how, Miss Margaret.

MARGARET

But if you would tell me things you know--little things--even though they meant nothing to you they might mean something to me. Abbie! Because you loved her don't you want what she was to go on living in our hearts?

ABBIE

Oh, I do! I do! But she'll go on living in my heart without my understanding what she did.

MARGARET

But differently. I'll tell you what I mean. Everything about her has always been--herself. That was one of the rare things about her. And herself--oh, it's something you don't want to lose! It's been the beauty in my life. In my busy practical life, Bernice--what she was--like a breath that blew over my life and--made it something.

ABBIE

I know--just what you mean, Miss Margaret.

MARGARET

It's inconceivable that she should--cut off her own life. In her lived all the life that was behind her. You felt that in her--so wonderfully. She felt it in herself--or her eyes couldn't have been like that. *Could* they? Could they, Abbie?

ABBIE

It--wouldn't seem so.

MARGARET

She wouldn't destroy so *much*. Why she never destroyed anything--a flower--a caterpillar. Don't you see what I mean, Abbie? This denies so *much*. And then is it true that all this time she wasn't happy? Why she seemed happy--as trees grow. Did Mr. Norris make her unhappy? Oh, don't think you shouldn't talk about it. Don't act as if I shouldn't ask. It's too big for those little scruples. Abbie! I can't let Bernice's life go out in darkness. So tell me--just what happened--each little thing. [*MARGARET has taken hold of ABBIE; ABBIE has turned away.*] When did you first know she had--taken something? Just what did she say to you about it? I want to know each little thing! I have a *right* to know.

[*A step is heard above.*]

ABBIE

[*As if saved.*] Mrs. Kirby's coming down now.

MARGARET

I want to talk to you, Abbie, after the others have gone to bed.

[*LAURA comes down, ABBIE passes her at the foot of the stairs, and goes through to the kitchen.*]

LAURA

Margaret, what is to be gained in making people feel worse than they need? Craig upstairs--he's so broken--strange. And even Abbie as she passed me now. You seem to do this to them. And why?

MARGARET

I don't do it to them. I'm not very happy myself.

LAURA

Of course not. None of us can be that. But I believe we should try to bear things with courage.

MARGARET

That comes easily from the person who's bearing little!

LAURA

You think it means nothing to me that my brother has lost his wife?

MARGARET

Your brother has lost his wife! That's all *you* see in it!

LAURA

I don't see why you seem so wild--so resentful, Margaret. Death should soften us.

[She takes her old place before the fire.]

MARGARET

Well I can tell you this doesn't soften me!

LAURA

I see that you feel hard toward Craig. But Bernice didn't. You think he should have come right home. But you must be just enough to admit he didn't have any idea Bernice was going to be taken suddenly sick. He had been out of the country for three months, naturally there were things connected with his writing to see about.

MARGARET

Connected with his writing! Laura! Don't *lie* about life with death in the next room. If you want to talk at a time like this, have the decency to be honest! Try to see the *truth* about living. Craig stayed in New York with May Fredericks--and he doesn't pretend anything else. Stayed there with May Fredericks, continuing an affair that has been going on for the past year. And before it was May Fredericks it was

this one and that one. Well, all right. That may be all right. I'm not condemning Craig for his affairs. I'm condemning you for the front you're trying to put up!

LAURA

I certainly am not trying to put up any front. It's merely that there seems nothing to be gained in speaking of certain things. If Craig was--really unfaithful, I do condemn him for that. I haven't your liberal ideas. [*Slight pause, she takes up her knitting.*] It's unfortunate Bernice hadn't the power to hold Craig.

MARGARET

Hadn't the power to hold Craig!

LAURA

She didn't want to--I suppose your scoffing means. Well, she should have wanted to. It's what a wife should want to do.

MARGARET

Oh, Laura, Bernice will never say one more word for herself! In there. Alone. Still. She will not do one new thing to--to throw a light back on other things. That's death. *A leaving* of one's life. Leaving it--with us. I cannot talk to you about what Bernice "should have been." What she was came true and deep from--[*Throwing out her hands as if giving up saying it. Taking it up again.*] It's true there was something in her Craig did not control. Something he couldn't *mess up*. There was something in her he might have drawn from and become bigger than he was. But he's vain. He has to be bowling some one over all the time--to show that he has *power*.

LAURA

I don't agree with you that Craig is especially vain. He's a man. He does want to affect--yes, dominate the woman he loves. And if Bernice didn't give him that feeling of--

MARGARET

Supremacy.

LAURA

There's no use trying to talk with you of personal things. Certainly I don't want to quarrel tonight. That would not be the thing. [*In a new tone.*] How is your work going? I don't quite know what you are doing now, but trying to get some one out of prison, I suppose?

MARGARET

Yes; I am trying to get out of prison all those people who are imprisoned for ideas.

LAURA

I see.

MARGARET

I doubt if you see, Laura.

LAURA

Well I don't say I sympathize. But I see.

MARGARET

No; for if you did see, you would have to sympathize. If you did see, you would be ashamed; you would have to--hang your head for this thing of locking any man up because of what his mind sees. If thinking is not to become--whatever thinking may become!--then why are we here at all? [*She stops and thinks of it.*] Why does Bernice--her death--make that so simple tonight? Because she was herself. She had the gift for being herself. And she wanted each one to have the chance to be himself. Anything else hurt her--as it hurt her to see a dog tied, or a child at a narrow window.

LAURA

I don't think Bernice was a very good wife for a writer.

MARGARET

She would have been a wonderful wife for a real writer.

LAURA

Oh, I know she didn't value Craig's work. And that's another thing. And I suppose you don't value it either. [*She looks at MARGARET, who does not speak.*] Fortunately there are many thousands of people in this country who do value it. And I suppose you think what I do of little value too. I suppose you scoff at those things we do to put cripples back in life.

MARGARET

No, Laura, I don't scoff at anything that can be done for cripples. Since men have been crippled, cripples must be helped. I only say-- Don't cripple minds--strong free minds that might go--we know not where! Might go into places where the light of a mind has never been. [*Rising.*] Think of it! Think of that chance of making life even greater than death. [*With passion.*] If you have any respect for life--any reverence--you have to leave the mind free. I do not scoff at you, but you are not a serious person. You have no faith--no hope--no self-respect!

LAURA

[*Rising.*] You tell me I have no self-respect! You who have not cared what people thought of you--who have not had the sense of fitness--the taste--to hold the place you were born to--you tell me, against whom no word was ever spoken, that I have no self-respect?

MARGARET

You have a blameless reputation, Laura. You have no self-respect. If you had any respect for your own mind you could not be willing to

limit the mind of any other. If you had any respect for your own spiritual life you could not be willing to push *your* self into the spiritual life of another. [*Roughly.*] No! You could not. [*As one seeing far.*] I see it as I never saw it. Oh I wish I could talk to Bernice! Something is *down*. I could see things as I never saw them.

LAURA

[*Gathering up the things she had been working with.*] I will go before I am insulted further.

MARGARET

There's nothing insulting in trying to find the truth. [*Impulsively reaching out her hands to LAURA, as she is indignantly going.*] Oh, Laura, we die so soon! We live so in the dark. We never become what we might be. I should think we could help each other more.

LAURA

[*After being a moment held.*] It would have to be done more sympathetically.

MARGARET

I didn't mean to be unsympathetic. [*Watching LAURA go up the stairs.*] I suppose that's the trouble with me. [*She stands a moment thinking of this. Then there is something she wants to say. She knows then that she is alone--and in this room. Slowly she turns and faces the closed door. Stands so, quite still, realizing. Suddenly turns to the stairway, goes up a few steps.*] Craig! [*Listens, then goes up another step and calls a little louder.*] Craig!

LAURA

[*From above.*] Please don't disturb Craig, Margaret.

[*MARGARET hesitates, turns to go down. A door opens above.*

CRAIG

Did some one call me?

MARGARET

I did, Craig. I'm down here alone--lonely.

CRAIG

[As if glad to do so.] I'll come down. *[After coming.]* I wanted to come down. I thought Laura was down here. I can't pretend--not tonight.

MARGARET

No. I can't. I wanted so to talk to Bernice, and when I couldn't I--called to you.

CRAIG

I was glad to hear my name. It's too much alone. *[He and MARGARET stand there hesitatingly, as if they are not able to do it--settle down in this room and talk. CRAIG takes out his cigarette case. In the subdued voice of one whose feeling is somewhere else.]* You want a cigarette, Margaret?

MARGARET

No. I don't believe so.

CRAIG

Oh, I remember, you don't like these. Bernice must have some of the-

[He opens a chest on the mantel, takes from it a beautiful little box.]

MARGARET

[As she sees the box.] Oh--*[Turning away.]* Thank you, Craig, but--

CRAIG

Of course. [*Holds the box for a moment, then slowly replaces it. He looks around the room. Then, helplessly.*] I don't know what I'm going to do.

[*He sits down before the fire. MARGARET also sits. The door at the other side of the room opens and the FATHER comes in from his room.*

FATHER

I was going to bed now. I thought I'd go in here first.

[*Slowly goes in where Bernice is. A little while CRAIG and MARGARET sit there silent.*

CRAIG

And I don't know what he's going to do. Poor old man. Bernice was certainly good to him--keeping him happy in that life he made for himself away from life. It's queer about him, Margaret. Somehow he just didn't go on, did he? Made a fight in his youth, and stopped there. He's one of the wrecks of the Darwinian theory. Spent himself fighting for it, and--let it go at that. [*Running his hand through his hair.*] Oh, well, I suppose we're all wrecks of something. [*With a nervous laugh.*] What are you a wreck of, Margaret? You're a wreck of free speech. [*Impatiently.*] I'm talking like a fool. I'm nervous. I'll be glad when he goes to bed. [*Looking upstairs.*] I guess Laura's gone to bed. [*After looking into the fire.*] Well, Bernice isn't leaving any children to--be without her. I suppose now it's just as well we lost our boy before we ever had him. But she would have made a wonderful mother, wouldn't she, Margaret?

MARGARET

Oh, yes!

CRAIG

You ever wish you had children, Margaret?

MARGARET

Yes.

CRAIG

[*Roughly.*] Well, why don't you have?

MARGARET

[*Slowly.*] Why, I don't just know, Craig. Life--seems to get filled up so quickly.

CRAIG

Yes. And before we know it, it's all over--or as good as over. Funny--how your mind jumps around. Just then I thought of my mother. How she used to say: "Now eat your bread, Craig."

[*His voice breaks, he buries his face in his hands. MARGARET reaches over and puts a hand on his shoulder. The door opens and the FATHER comes out. He stands looking at them.*

FATHER

[*Gently.*] Yes. Of course. I'm glad you're here Margaret. But my little girl looks very peaceful, Craig. [*Pause.*] She had a happy life.

[*CRAIG moves, turning a little away. MARGARET makes a move as if to shield him, but does not do this.*

FATHER

Yes; she had a happy life. Didn't she, Margaret?

MARGARET

I always thought so.

FATHER

Oh, yes. She did. In her own way. A calm way, but very full of her own kind of happiness. [*After reflection.*] Bernice was good to me. I suppose she might have liked me to have done more things, but--she wanted me to do what--came naturally to me. I suppose that's why we always felt so--comfortable with her. She was never trying to make us some--outside thing. Well--you know, Margaret, I can see her now as a baby. She was such a nice baby. She used to--reach out her hands. [*Doing this himself.*] Well, I suppose they all do. I'm going to bed. [*After starting.*] I'm glad you're here with Craig, Margaret. Bernice would like this. You two who know all about her--well, no, nobody knew *all* about Bernice--but you two who were closest to her, here now as--close as you can be. I'm going to bed. Good-night.

MARGARET

[*Crying.*] Good-night.

CRAIG

[*After the father has closed his door. With violence.*] "Reached out her hands!" And what did she *get*? [*Roughly grasping MARGARET'S wrists.*] I *killed* Bernice. There's no use in your saying I didn't. I did. Only--[*Letting go of her*] don't flay me tonight, Margaret. I couldn't stand it tonight. [*With another abrupt change.*] Am I a fool? Why did I never know Bernice loved me like this? [*In anguish.*] Why wouldn't I *know* it? [*Pause.*] We don't know *anything* about each other. Do we, Margaret? Nothing. We never--get anywhere. [*Shivering.*] I'm cold. I wonder if there's anything to drink in the house. There must be something. [*He goes out into the kitchen; after a moment there is the sound of running water; he comes in with a bottle of whiskey, a pitcher of water.*] I don't see the glasses. Things seem to have been moved. [*Looks at MARGARET as if expecting she will go and get them; she does not; he goes out again. From the kitchen.*] Margaret, have you any idea where the glasses are?

MARGARET

No, Craig. I don't know. [*After hearing him moving things around.*]
Isn't Abbie somewhere there?

CRAIG

No; she isn't here. She seems to have gone outdoors. She's left the door open too. No wonder it was cold. [*Calling at an outer door.*]
Abbie! [*Sound of the door closing. Again the sound of dishes being moved.*] Well, I don't know where they can have put--

MARGARET

[*Covering her face.*] Don't look for things. [*More quietly.*] Bring anything, Craig, there must be something there.

CRAIG

[*Coming in with cups.*] Things have been moved around. I stumbled over things that didn't used to be there. You'll have a little, Margaret? It--we need something.

MARGARET

I don't--oh, I don't care.

[*He pours the drinks and drinks his.*]

CRAIG

[*Abruptly shoving his cup away.*] Margaret, I loved Bernice. I suppose you don't believe that! And I thought Bernice knew I loved her, in spite of--other things. What do you think it is is the matter with me, Margaret, that I--[*Saying it as if raw*] miss things. You can tell me. I'd be glad to feel some one knew. Only--don't leave me alone while you're telling me!

MARGARET

I'm afraid I have nothing to tell you, Craig. I thought I knew Bernice. And now--I *did* know Bernice! [*Gropingly.*] I feel something we don't get to.

CRAIG

And Bernice can't help us.

MARGARET

I think she would expect us to--find our way. She could always find her way. She had not meant to leave us *here*. Bernice was so kind.

CRAIG

She was kind.

MARGARET

Such a sensitive kindness. The kindness that divined feeling and was there ahead--to meet it. This is the very thing she would *not* do.

CRAIG

[*Slowly, as if feeling his way.*] Margaret, I wish I could tell you about me and Bernice. I loved her. She loved me. But there was something in her that had almost nothing to do with our love.

MARGARET

Yes.

CRAIG

Well, that isn't right, Margaret. You want to feel that you *have* the woman you love. Yes--completely. Yes, every bit of her!

MARGARET

So you turned to women whom you could have.

CRAIG

Yes.

MARGARET

But you “had” all of them simply because there was less to have. You want no baffling sense of something beyond you. [*He looks at her reproachfully.*] You wanted me to help you find the truth. I don’t believe you can stand truth, Craig.

CRAIG

It’s hard tonight.

MARGARET

[*Intensely.*] But perhaps it is tonight or not at all. It’s a strange thing this has done. A light trying to find its way through a fog. [*In her mind the light tries to do this.*] Craig, why do you write the things you do?

CRAIG

Oh, Margaret, is this any time to talk of work?

MARGARET

It seems to be. Tonight it’s all part of the same thing. Laura and I were talking of work--quarreling about it: you were talking of Bernice’s father. The light--just goes there. That poor sad old man--why didn’t he go on? You said he was a wreck of the Darwinian theory. Then me--a wreck of free speech.

CRAIG

Oh I didn’t mean you were, Margaret.

MARGARET

But I might be. I can see that. We give ourselves in fighting for a thing that seems important and in that fight we get out of the flow of life. We had meant it to deepen the flow--but we get caught. I know people like that. People who get at home in their fight--and stay there--and are left there when the fight's over--like this old man. How many nights Bernice and I have sat in this room and talked of things! And I had thought--[*With sudden angry passion.*] If you had been good to her, she would be in this room now. [*After a look at him.*] I'm sorry. But can I help feeling it?

CRAIG

I didn't know.

MARGARET

No; you didn't know. We don't know. When you think what a writer might do for life--for we *don't* know. You write so well, Craig, but--what of it? What is it is the matter with you--with all you American writers--'most all of you. A well-put-up light--but it doesn't penetrate anything. It never makes the fog part. Just shows itself off--a well-put-up light. [*Growing angry.*] It would be better if we didn't have you at all! Can't you see that it would? Lights which--only light themselves keep us from having light--from knowing what the darkness is. [*After thinking.*] Craig, as you write these things are there never times when you sit there *dumb* and know that you are glib and empty?

CRAIG

Did you ever try to write, Margaret?

MARGARET

No.

CRAIG

I suppose you think it's very simple to be real. I suppose you think we could do it--if we just wanted to do it. Try it. You try.

MARGARET

So you do this just to cover the fact that you *can't* do anything? Your skill--a mask for your lack of power?

CRAIG

I should think you'd want to be good to me tonight, Margaret.

MARGARET

Be good to you! Keep you from seeing. That's the way we're good to each other. There's only one thing I could do for you tonight, Craig. You don't want that. So--

[Moves as if to rise.

CRAIG

No, don't go away. My brain won't keep still either. What I think is just as bad as what you say. Well, why do you think it is I--miss things--never get anywhere?

MARGARET

I don't know. And it's true of all of us. Of me too. I do things that to me seem important, and yet I just do *them*--I don't get to the thing I'm doing them for--to life itself. I don't simply and profoundly get to *life*. Bernice did.

CRAIG

Yes. Bernice did.

MARGARET

And yet you had to--shy away from Bernice. Into a smaller world that could be all your world. No, Craig, you haven't power. It's true. And for one hour in our lives let's try to--Those love affairs of yours--

they're like your false writing--to keep yourself from knowing you haven't power. Did you ever see a child try to do a thing--fail--then turn to something he could do and make a great show of doing that? That's what most of our lives are like.

CRAIG

[*Rudely.*] Well, why *haven't* I power? If you are going to be any good to me--tell me that.

MARGARET

[*Shaking her head.*] I can't tell you that. I haven't any light that--goes there. But isn't it true? Isn't your life this long attempt to appear effective--to persuade yourself that you *are* something? What a way to spend the little time there is for living.

CRAIG

I fancy it's the way most lives are spent.

MARGARET

That only makes it infinitely sadder.

CRAIG

[*As if he can stay in this no longer.*] As to writing, Margaret, the things that interest you wouldn't interest most people.

MARGARET

“Wouldn't interest most people!” Oh, Craig, don't slide away from that one honest moment. Say you haven't got it. Don't say they wouldn't want it. Why, if now--in this our day--our troubled day of many shadows--came a light--a light to reach those never lighted places--wouldn't *want* it? I wish some one could try them! No, Craig, they all have their times of suspecting their lives are going by in a fog. They're *pitifully* anxious for a little light. Why--they continue to look to *writers*. You know, Craig, what living makes of us--it's a rim--a

bounded circle--and yet we know--have our times of suspecting--that if we could break through *that*. [*Seeing.*] O-h. It's like living in the mountains--those high vast places of Colorado--in a little house with shaded windows. You'd *suspect* what was there! A little sunshine through the cracks--mountain smells--and at times the house would shake--and you'd wonder--and be fretted in your little room. And if some day you could put up the shade and--*see where you were*. Life would never be so small a thing again. Bernice could do that. Her own life did not bound her.

CRAIG

No. That was what--

MARGARET

Hurt your vanity?

CRAIG

I don't know. I'm trying to be honest. I honestly don't know.

MARGARET

No. We don't know. That's why--oh, Craig, it would be so wonderful to be a writer--something that gets a little farther than others can get--gets at least the edge of the shadow. [*After her own moment on the edge of the shadow.*] If you ever felt the shock of reality, and got that back in you--you wouldn't be thinking of whom it would "interest"! But, Craig--*this*. [*A movement toward the closed room.*] Doesn't *this* give you that shock of reality?

CRAIG

What of *you*? Doesn't it give it to you? You're speaking as if this hadn't happened! You leave it out--what Bernice did because of me. You're talking of my having no power. What of *this*? *Had* I no power? [*After her look at him.*] Oh, yes--I know I used it terribly--plenty of years for my heart to break over that. But can you say I didn't *have* it?

MARGARET

I do leave it out. It isn't right there should be anything in Bernice not Bernice. And she had a great rightness--rightness without effort--that rare, rare thing.

CRAIG

You say it isn't right--and so you leave it out? And then *you* talk about the shock of reality.

MARGARET

I don't say it isn't fact. I say it isn't--*in the rightness*.

CRAIG

"In the rightness!" Is that for you to say? Is rightness what you think? What you can see? No. You didn't know Bernice. You didn't know she loved me--*that way*. And I didn't know. But she did! How *could* I have had that--and not *known*? But I *did* have it! I did *have* it! You say life broke through her--the whole of life. But Bernice didn't want--the whole of life. She wanted *me*. [*He goes to the door, bows against it, all sorrow and need.*] I want to talk to *her*--not you. I want her *now--knowing*.

[*He opens that door and goes in to Bernice. MARGARET stands motionless, searching, and as if something is coming to her from the rightness. When she speaks it is a denial from that inner affirmation.*

MARGARET

No! I say--No! [*Feeling some one behind her, swiftly turning she sees ABBIE outside, looking through the not quite drawn curtains of the door. She goes to the door and draws ABBIE in.*] Yes, I *am* here--and I say *no*. [*She has hold of her, drawing her in as she says it.*] You understand--I say *no*. I *don't believe it*. What you told me--*I don't believe it*.

ABBIE

[*At first it is horror--then strange relief, as if nothing could be so bad as this has been.*] Well, I'm glad you know.

MARGARET

[*Very slowly, knowing now it is fact she has come to.*] Glad I know what?

ABBIE

That it isn't true. That she didn't do it.

MARGARET

Didn't do it? Did *not* take her own life?

ABBIE

No. Of course she didn't.

MARGARET

[*Still very slowly, as if much more is coming than she can take in.*] Then *why*--did you say she did?

ABBIE

Because she said I must. Oh--look at me! Look at me! But you knew her. You know the strength of her. If she'd told you the way she told me--*you'd have done it too*. You would!

MARGARET

[*Saying each word by itself.*] I can not understand one word you're saying. Something is wrong with you. [*Changing, and roughly taking hold of ABBIE.*] Tell me. Quick, the truth.

ABBIE

Wednesday night, about eight o'clock, about an hour after she told me to telegraph you, she said, "Why, Abbie, I believe I'm going to die." I said no, but she said, "I think so." I said we'd send for Mr. Norris. She said no, and not to frighten her father. I--I didn't think she was going to die. All the time I was trying to get the doctor. There were two hours when she was--quiet. Quiet--not like any quiet I ever knew. Thinking. You could see thinking in her eyes--stronger than sickness. Then, after ten, she called me to her. She took my hands. She said, "Abbie, you've lived with me all my life." "Yes," I said. "You love me." "Oh, yes," I said. "Will you do something for me?" "You know I will," I told her. "Abbie," she said, looking right at me, *all* of her looking right at me, "if I die, I want you to tell my husband I killed myself." [*MARGARET falls back.*] Yes, I did that too. Then I thought it was her mind. But I looked at her, and oh, her mind was there! It was terrible--how it was all *there*. She said--and then she [*The sobs she has been holding back almost keep ABBIE from saying this*]--held out her hands to me--"Oh, Abbie, do this last thing for me! After all there has been, I have a *right* to do it. If my life is going--let me have *this* much from it!" And as still I couldn't--*couldn't*--the tears ran down her face and she said, "I want to rest before pain comes again. Promise me so I can rest." And I promised. And you would have too!

MARGARET

You don't know what you're *telling* me! You don't know *what* you're doing. You do this *now*--after she can do nothing? [*Holding out her hands.*] Abbie! Tell me it isn't true!

ABBIE

It's true.

MARGARET

You are telling me her life was *hate*? [*Stops, half turns to the room where CRAIG is with Bernice.*] You are telling me she covered hate with--with the beauty that was like nothing else? Abbie! *You* are telling me that as Bernice left life she *held out her hands* and asked you to take *this* back for her?

ABBIE

There are things we can't understand. There's no use trying.

[She turns to go.]

MARGARET

You can't leave me like this!

ABBIE

[More gently.] You shouldn't have tried to know. But--if you have *got* to know things--you have got to take them.

[CRAIG comes out; ABBIE goes.]

CRAIG

Go in there, Margaret. There's something wonderful there.

MARGARET

[Turned from him, her face buried in her hands.] Oh no--no--no. I can never go in there. I--I never *was*--in there.

[Her other words are lost in wild sobbing. He stands regarding her in wonder, but not losing what he himself has found.]

(CURTAIN)

ACT THREE

SCENE: The same as in Acts One and Two; it is early afternoon of the next day; the door leading outdoors is a little open; when the curtain is drawn CRAIG is seen outside, just passing the window, as one who is walking back and forth in thinking. In the room are LAURA and the FATHER--the FATHER sitting at the table by the stairs--LAURA, standing, watches CRAIG pass the door; she has in her hand a paper

on which are some memoranda. After watching CRAIG she sighs, looks at her notes, sits down.

LAURA

I'm sorry to be troubling you, Mr. Allen. Certainly you should not be asked to discuss these matters about--arrangements. But really, you and I seem the only people who are capable of going on with things. I must say, I don't know what to make of everyone else. They all seem to be trying to--keep away from one. I think that's a little unnecessary. Of course I know what grief does, and I'm sure I have every consideration for that, but really--I'm sorry Craig keeps his own sister out. When I'm here to help him. And Abbie--why she seems to have lost her head. Just when it's so important that she look after things. And as to Margaret Pierce--she certainly is worse than useless. I don't see what she came for if she didn't want to be helpful.

FATHER

Margaret and Bernice were very dear friends, Laura.

LAURA

Is that any reason for not being helpful in Bernice's household at a time like this? Really I do like control. [*After looking at her notes.*] Then the minister will come here at three, Mr. Allen. Why that will be little more than an hour! Think of things having been neglected like this! [*As CRAIG, having turned in his walk, is again passing the door.*] Craig! [*He steps to the door.*] The minister, Mr. Howe, will come here, Craig, at three.

CRAIG

What for?

LAURA

Craig! What *for*?

CRAIG

I don't see why he comes here. Why Bernice scarcely knew him. [*To her father.*] Did Bernice know him?

FATHER

Well, I don't know whether she knew him, but--

LAURA

It is not a personal matter, Craig.

CRAIG

I think it is. Very personal.

LAURA

You mean to say you are not going to have any *service*?

CRAIG

I haven't thought anything about it. Oh, Laura! How can I think of such things now?

LAURA

Well, I will think of them for you, dear.

CRAIG

Don't bring him here. He can go--[*Stops*] there, if he wants to. Where--we have to go. Not here. In her own house. The very last thing.

FATHER

I'm afraid it will seem strange, Craig.

CRAIG

Strange? Do I care if it seems strange? Bernice seemed strange too. But she wasn't strange. She was wonderful. [*Putting out his hand impatiently.*] Oh, *no*, Laura. There's so much else to think of--now.

[*He steps out of the door and stands there, his back to the room.*]

FATHER

[*In a low voice.*] I wonder--could we go somewhere else? Into my room, perhaps. I'm afraid we are keeping Craig out of here. And I think he wants to be here--near Bernice. We will be undisturbed in my room.

[*He gets up and goes to the door of his room, LAURA turns to follow. Outside CRAIG passes from sight.*]

LAURA

I think it's too bad things have to be made so--complicated.

FATHER

[*After opening the door.*] Oh, Margaret is in here.

MARGARET

[*From the other room.*] I was just going out. I just came in here to--
[*Enters.*] I just went in there--I didn't think about it being your room.

FATHER

Why that was quite all right, Margaret. I'm only sorry to disturb you.

MARGARET

No. That doesn't matter. I--wasn't doing anything.

LAURA

There is a great deal to do.

[She follows the FATHER into his room. MARGARET walks across the room, walks back, stands still, head bent, hands pressing her temples. ABBIE comes part way down the stairs, sees MARGARET, stands still as if not to be heard, turns to go back upstairs.]

MARGARET

[Hearing her, looking up.] Abbie! *[ABBIE comes slowly down.]*
Where is he, Mr. Norris? Where is he?

ABBIE

I don't know. He was here a little while ago. Perhaps he went out.

[Indicating the open door.]

MARGARET

I have to tell him!

ABBIE

[After an incredulous moment.] Tell *him* what you made me tell you?

MARGARET

Of course I have to tell him! You think I can leave that on him? And the things I said to him--they were not just.

ABBIE

And you'd rather be "just" than leave it as she wanted it?

MARGARET

Oh, but Abbie--what she *wanted*--*[Holds up her hand as if to shut something from her eyes.]* No. You can't put that on anyone. I couldn't *live*--feeling I had left on him what shouldn't be there.

ABBIE

But you wouldn't tell him *now*?

MARGARET

I must tell him now. Or I won't tell him. And I must go away. I can't stay. I can't stay here.

ABBIE

But what will they think--your leaving? You mean--before we've taken *her* away?

MARGARET

Oh, I don't know. How can I--plan it out? I'm going as soon as I can tell him. All night--all day--I've been trying to tell him--and when I get near him--I run away. *Why did you tell me?*

ABBIE

[*Harshly.*] Why did you *know*--what you weren't to know? But if you have some way of knowing what you aren't told--you think you have the right to do *your* thing with that? Undo what she did? What *I* did? Do you know what it took *out* of me to do this? There's nothing left of me.

MARGARET

[*With a laugh. Right on the verge of being not herself.*] No. You're a wreck. Another wreck. It's your Darwinian theory. Your free speech.

ABBIE

Oh, I was afraid of you. I didn't want you to come. I knew you'd--get *to* things.

[*ABBIE goes to the door and looks out.*

MARGARET

He is out there?

ABBIE

Yes.

[*MARGARET tries to go; moves just a little.*] And you'd go to him and--what *for*?

MARGARET

Because I can't *live*--leaving that on him--having him think--when I know he didn't. I can't leave that on him one more hour.

ABBIE

[*Standing in the door to block her going.*] And when you take that from him--*what do you give to him?*

[*They stare at one another; MARGARET falls back.*

MARGARET

Don't ask me to see so many things, Abbie. I can only see this thing. I've grown afraid of seeing.

ABBIE

[*After looking at her, seeing something of her suffering.*] Miss Margaret, why did you do what you did last night? How did you know?

MARGARET

I don't know.

ABBIE

But you knew.

MARGARET

No. I didn't *know*. I didn't know. It didn't come from me. It came-- from the rightness.

[*A laugh.*]

ABBIE

If you could get that without being told--why don't you get more without being told? [*MARGARET gives her a startled look.*] For you will never be told.

MARGARET

You know *more*?

ABBIE

No. My knowing stops with what you got from me last night. But I knew her. I thought maybe, as you have some way of knowing what you aren't told, you could--see into this. *See.*

MARGARET

I've lost my seeing. It was through her I saw. It was through Bernice I could see. And now it's dark. [*Slowly turning toward the closed room.*] Oh, how still death is.

[*The two women are as if caught into this stillness.*]

ABBIE

[*Looking from the door.*] He turned this way. [*Swiftly turning back to MARGARET.*] But you *couldn't* tell him.

MARGARET

No, I can't. Yes, I must! I tell you there's something in me can't *stand* it to see any one go down under a thing he shouldn't have to bear. Why that feeling has made my life! Do you think I've *wanted* to do the kind of work I do? Don't you think I'd like to be doing--happier things? But there's something in my blood *drives* me to--what's right.

ABBIE

And something in *my* blood drives me to what's right! And I went against it--went against my whole life--so she could rest. I did it because I loved her. But you didn't love her.

MARGARET

Oh--Abbie!

ABBIE

Not as you love--what's right. If you loved her, don't you want to protect her--now that she lies dead in there? [*Her voice breaking.*] Oh, Miss Margaret, it was right at the very *end* of her life. Maybe when we're going to die things we've borne all our lives are things we can't bear any longer. Just--don't count that last hour.

MARGARET

[*After a moment of being swayed by this.*] Yet you counted it, Abbie. You did what she said--because of the strength of her. You told me last night--her mind was there. Terrible the way it was right *there*. She hadn't left her life.

ABBIE

Well, and if she hadn't left her life! If all those years with him there was something she hid, and if she seemed to feel--what she didn't feel. She did it well, didn't she?--and almost to the last. Shan't we hide it now? For her? You and me, who loved her--isn't she *safe*--with us? [*Going nearer MARGARET.*] Perhaps if you would go in there now--

MARGARET

Oh no--no.

ABBIE

[*In a last deeply emotional appeal.*] Miss Margaret, didn't she do a good deal for you?

MARGARET

Do a good deal for me? Yes. Yes!

ABBIE

Yes. She did for me. I--I'm something *more* on account of her. Aren't you?

MARGARET

Yes.

ABBIE

Yes, I think you are too. I can see myself as I'd have been if my life hadn't been lived round her. [*Thinks, shakes her head.*] It would be left you--what feels and knows it feels. And you said it was through Bernice you could see. Well, lets forget what we don't want to know! On account of what we are that we wouldn't have been--lets put it out of our minds! One ugly thing in a whole beautiful life! Let it go! And let all the rest live! [*They can see CRAIG outside.*] Oh--do this for *her*. *Make* yourself do it. Let *that* be what's dead--and let all the rest live! You were *her* friend not his.

[*CRAIG turns to the house, but when about to come in, turns away, covering his face.*]

MARGARET

[*Taking hold of ABBIE.*] You see? He thinks she loved him and he killed her. He might do what he thinks she did!

ABBIE

[*Falling back.*] O-h.

[*CRAIG comes in, stands by the door; MARGARET has drawn ABBIE over near the stairway. He sees them, but gives no heed to them, immersed in what he is living through. While he stands there MARGARET does not move. He turns toward the room where Bernice is; when he moves MARGARET goes a little toward him--his back is to her; ABBIE moves to step between CRAIG and MARGARET; MARGARET puts her aside. But when CRAIG comes to the closed door, and stands there an instant before it, not opening it, MARGARET too stops, as if she cannot come nearer him. It is only after he has opened the door and closed it behind him that she goes to it. She puts out her hands, but she does not even touch the door and when she cannot do this she covers her face and, head bent, stands there before the closed door. LAURA and the FATHER come out from the room where they have been. As they enter ABBIE slowly goes out, toward the kitchen.*

LAURA

[*After looking at MARGARET, who has not moved.*] We are going in an hour, Margaret.

MARGARET

Going?

LAURA

Taking Bernice to the cemetery.

MARGARET

Oh. Are we?

[After a look which shows her disapproval LAURA goes out, following ABBIE.]

FATHER

[Sitting.] I can't believe that, Margaret.

MARGARET

No. [MARGARET sits in the window seat, by which she has been standing. As if she is just realizing what they have said.] You say--we are taking Bernice away from here--in an hour?

FATHER

Yes. Think of it, Margaret. I just can't--take it in.

MARGARET

No.

FATHER

There is something I want to tell you, Margaret. [MARGARET gives him a quick look, then turns away, as if afraid.] I've been wanting to tell you--but it's hard to talk of such things. But before we--take Bernice away, before you--see her the last time--I want you to know. That night--the night Bernice died--at the very last, Abbie was afraid then--and had called to me. Abbie and I were in there and--Abbie went out, about the telephone call we had in for the doctor. I was all alone in there a few minutes--right at the last. Bernice said one last word, Margaret. Your name.

MARGARET

She called to me?

FATHER

No, I wouldn't say she called to you. Just said your name. The way we say things to ourselves--say them without knowing we were going to say them. She didn't really say it. She breathed it. It seemed to come from her whole life.

MARGARET

O-h. Then it wasn't as if she had left me? It wasn't as if anything was in between--

FATHER

Why no, Margaret. What an idea. Why I don't think you ever were as close to Bernice as when she said your name and died.

[MARGARET'S head goes down; she is crying. CRAIG comes out, carefully closing the door behind him. Partly crosses the room, looks uncertainly at the outer door as if to go outside again.]

FATHER

Sit down, Craig. *[CRAIG does this.]* Let's not try to keep away from each other now. We're all going through the same thing--in our--our different ways. *[A pause. MARGARET raises her head; she is turned a little away from the other two.]* I was so glad when you came, Margaret. I don't want Bernice to slip away from us. In an hour we--take her away from here--out of this house she loved. I don't want her to slip away from us. She loved you so, Margaret. Didn't she, Craig?

CRAIG

Yes. She did love Margaret.

FATHER

Oh, yes. "Margaret sees things," she'd say. *[Wistfully.]* She had great beauty--didn't she, Margaret?

MARGARET

I always thought so.

FATHER

Oh, yes. I was thinking last night--malice was not in Bernice. I never knew her to do a--really unfriendly thing to any one. [*Again in that wistful way.*] You know, Margaret, I had thought you would say things like this--and better than I can say them, to--to keep my little girl for us all. I suppose I'm a foolish old man but I seem to want them said. [*Pause. MARGARET seems to try to speak, but does not.*] I think it was gentle of Bernice to be amused by things she--perhaps couldn't admire in us she loved. Me. I suppose she might have liked a father who amounted to more--but she always seemed to take pleasure in me. Affectionate amusement. Didn't you feel that in Bernice, Craig?

CRAIG

Yes--that was one thing. A surface for other things. [*He speaks out of pain, but out of pain which wants, if it can, to speak.*] But only a surface. [*With passion.*] All of Bernice went into her love for me. Those big impersonal things--they were not apart. All of Bernice--loved me. [*His voice breaks, he goes to the door, starts out. Suddenly steps back--with a quick rough turn to her.*] Isn't that so, Margaret?

MARGARET

I can see--what you mean, Craig.

FATHER

Why of course Bernice loved you. I know that.

[*Craig goes outside.*

[*Looking after him.*] I hope I didn't send Craig away. You and he would rather not talk. Perhaps that is better. I seem to want to--gather up things that will keep Bernice. It's so easy for the dead to slip from us. But I mustn't bother you.

MARGARET

Oh, you aren't! I--I'm sorry I'm not--doing more. I'm pulled down.

FATHER

I know, Margaret. I can see that. Another time you and I will talk of Bernice. I didn't mean she didn't love Craig. Of course not. Only [*Hesitatingly*] I did feel that much as went into her loving--there was more than went into her loving.

MARGARET

Yes.

FATHER

I think it wasn't that she--wanted it that way. You know, Margaret, I felt something--very wistful in Bernice. [*MARGARET looks at him, nods.*] In this calm now--I feel the wistfulness there was in her other calm.

MARGARET

Yes.

FATHER

As if she wanted to give us more. Oh--she gave more than any one else could have given. But not *all* she was. And she would like to have given us--all she was. She wanted to give--what couldn't be given. [*Pause.*] You know what I mean, Margaret?

MARGARET

Yes, I do know.

FATHER

And so--wistfulness. I see it now. [*After thinking.*] I think Bernice feared she was not a very good wife for Craig. [*MARGARET gives him a startled look.*] Little things she'd say. I don't know--perhaps I'm wrong. [*After a move of MARGARET'S.*] You were going to say something, Margaret.

MARGARET

No. I was just thinking of what you said.

FATHER

Craig didn't dominate Bernice. I don't know whose fault it was. I don't know that it was anyone's fault. Just the way things were. He--I say it in all kindness, he just didn't--have it in him. [*Slowly.*] As I haven't had certain things in me.

[*ABBIE comes in.*

ABBIE

People are coming. The Aldrichs--other neighbors.

FATHER

Oh--they are coming? [*With pain.*] Already? Oh. They are to wait in the south room--till a little later. I'll speak to them.

[*They go out; MARGARET has a moment alone. Then CRAIG comes in from outside.*

CRAIG

People are beginning to come. I suppose they'll come in here soon. I--I don't want them to.

[*LAURA enters with boxes of flowers.*

Oh--Laura, *please*. Bernice loved flowers.

LAURA

Well--*Craig*.

CRAIG

Would you take them around the other way? Or keep them till later-- or something. I don't *want* them here!

[*LAURA goes out.*]

CRAIG

I don't want things to be different. Not now--in the last hour. It's still Bernice's house. [*After watching her a moment.*] Margaret, I'm afraid I shouldn't have told you. It's doing too much to you. Surely--no matter what you feel about me--this--what I told you--isn't going to keep you away from Bernice?

MARGARET

No, Craig. What you told me--isn't going to do that.

CRAIG

I shouldn't have told you. But there are things--too much to be alone with. And yet--we are alone with them. [*He is seated, looking out toward the woods. Very slowly--with deep feeling.*] It is a different world. Life will never be--that old thing again.

MARGARET

[*Rising.*] Craig! [*He looks at her.*] Craig, I must tell you--

[*She does not go on.*]

CRAIG

[*After waiting an instant, looks away.*] I know. We can't say things. When we get right *to* life--we can't say things.

MARGARET

But I must say them. I have to tell you--life need not be a different thing.

CRAIG

Need not? You think I want that old thing back? Pretending. Fumbling. Always trying to seem something--to feel myself something. No. That's a strange thing for you to say, Margaret--that I can go back to my make-believe, now that I've got to life. This--[As if he cannot speak of it] this--even more than it makes me want to die it makes me want to--Oh, Margaret, if I could have Bernice now--knowing. And yet--I never had her until now. This--has given Bernice to me.

MARGARET

[As if his words are a light she is almost afraid to use.] This--has given Bernice to you?

CRAIG

I was thinking--walking out there I was thinking, if I knew only--what I knew when I came here--that Bernice was dead--I wonder if I could have got past that failure.

MARGARET

Failure, Craig?

CRAIG

Of never having had her. That she had lived, and loved me--loved me, you see--lived and loved me and died without my ever having had her. What would there have been to go on living for? Why should such a person go on living? Now--of course it is another world. This comes crashing through my make-believe--and Bernice's world get to me. Don't you *see*, Margaret?

MARGARET

Perhaps--I do. [*She looks at the closed door; looks back to him. Waits.*] O-h. [*Waits again, and it grows in her.*] Perhaps I do.

[*Turns and very slowly goes to the closed door, opens it, goes in. At the other side of the room ABBIE comes in with a floral piece.*

CRAIG

No, Abbie. I just told my sister--I don't want this room to be different. [*Looking around.*] It is different. What have you done to it?

[*He sees the pillow crowded in at the side of the fireplace. Restores it to its place in the window.*

ABBIE

And this was here.

[*She returns the vase to its place.*

CRAIG

Of course it was. But it isn't right yet. [*After considering.*] Why--the tea table! [*ABBIE turns toward the kitchen.*] What did you put it out there for? I remember now--I stumbled against it last night. [*They bring it in.*] Why, yes, Abbie, the tea-table was always here--before the fire.

ABBIE

And--

[*She hesitates, but CRAIG follows her eyes to the chair.*

CRAIG

Yes. [*He too hesitates; then gives the chair its old place before the table, as if awaiting the one who will come and pour tea. A moment they stand looking at it. Then CRAIG looks around the room.*] And what if it is still wrong, Abbie?

ABBIE

In the fall there were always branches in that vase. [*Indicating the one she has returned to its place.*] The red and yellow branches from outside.

CRAIG

Yes.

[*He goes out. With feeling which she cannot quite control ABBIE does a few little things at the tea-table, relating one thing to another until it is as it used to be. MARGARET comes out from the room where she has been with Bernice, leaving the door wide open behind her. With the quiet of profound wonder; in a feeling that creates the great stillness, she goes to ABBIE.*

MARGARET

Oh--Abbie. Yes--I know now. I want you to know. Only--there are things not for words. Feeling--not for words. As a throbbing thing that flies and sings--not for the hand. [*She starts to close her hand, uncloses it.*] But, Abbie--there is nothing to hide. There is no shameful thing. What you saw in her eyes as she brooded over life in leaving it--what made you afraid--was *her* seeing--her seeing into the shadowed places of the life she was leaving. And then--a gift to the spirit. A gift sent back through the dark. Preposterous. Profound. Oh--love her Abbie! She's worth more love than we have power to give! [*CRAIG has come back with some branches from the trees; he stands outside the door a moment, taking out a few he does not want. MARGARET hears him and turns. Then turns back.*] Power. Oh, how strange.

[*CRAIG comes in, and MARGARET and ABBIE watch him as he puts the bright leaves in the vase. The FATHER comes in.*

FATHER

The man who is in charge says we will have to be ready now to--
[*Seeing what has been done to the room.*] Oh, you have given the
room back to Bernice!

MARGARET

Given everything back to Bernice. Bernice. Insight. The tenderness of
insight. And the courage. [*To the FATHER, and suddenly with tears in
her voice.*] She was wistful. And held out her hands [*Doing this*] with
gifts she was not afraid to send back. [*Very simply.*] She loved you,
Craig.

CRAIG

I know that, Margaret. I know now how much.

MARGARET

[*Low.*] And more than that. [*Her voice electric.*] Oh, in all the world--
since first life *moved*--has there been any beauty like the beauty of
perceiving love?... No. Not for words.

[*She closes her hand, uncloses it in a slight gesture of freeing what
she would not harm.*]

(CURTAIN)