

## **Enter The Hero**

BY THERESA HELBURN

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ENTER THE HERO was first produced in San Francisco by the St. Francis Little Theater Players, on January 16th, 1918, with the following cast:

RUTH CAREY *Ruth Hammond*. ANNE CAREY *Helene Sullivan*.  
HAROLD LAWSON *Arthur Maitland*. MRS. CAREY *Julia Deane*.

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ENTER THE HERO

A COMEDY BY THERESA HELBURN

*[The scene presents an upstairs sitting room in a comfortable house in a small city. The wall on the spectator's left is broken by a fireplace, and beyond that a door leading into the hall. At the back of the stage is a deep bay window from which one may have a view up and down the street. A door in the right wall leads to Anne Carey's bedroom. The sitting room, being Anne's particular property, is femininely furnished in chintz. A table desk with several drawers occupies an important place in the room, which is conspicuously rich in flowers.]*

*The curtain rises on an empty stage. Ruth Carey, a pretty girl of eighteen years, enters hurriedly, carrying a large box; she wears a hat and coat.]*

RUTH. Oh, Anne, here's *another* box of flowers! Anne, where are you?

VOICE FROM ANNE'S BEDROOM. In here. I thought you had gone out.

RUTH [*opening door left*]. I was just going when the expressman left these--and I wanted to see them. [*Looking into the bedroom.*] Oh, how pretty your dress is. Turn round. Just adorable! May I open these?

THE VOICE. Yes, but hurry. It's late.

RUTH [*throwing her sister a kiss*]. You dear! It's almost like having a fiancé of my own. Three boxes in two days! He's adorably extravagant. Oh, Anne, exquisite white roses! Come, look!

[*Anne Carey appears in the bedroom door. She is a girl of twenty-two. Her manner in this scene shows nervousness and suppressed excitement.*]

ANNE. Yes, lovely. Get a bowl, Ruth. Quickly.

RUTH. I will. Here's a card. [*She hands Anne an envelope, goes to the door, then stops.*] What does he say, Anne? May I see?

[*Anne, who has read the card quickly with a curious little smile, hands it back to her without turning.*]

RUTH [*reading*]:

"The red rose whispers of passion  
And the white rose breathes of love;  
Oh, the red rose is a falcon,  
And the white rose is a dove.

"But I send you a cream-white rosebud  
With a flush on its petal tips,  
For the love that is purest and sweetest  
Has a kiss of desire on the lips.

Oh, how beautiful! Did he make that up, do you suppose? I didn't know he was a real poet.

ANNE [*who has been pinning some of the roses on her dress*]. Any one in love is a poet.

RUTH. It's perfectly beautiful! [*She takes a pencil and little notebook out of her pocket.*] May I copy it in my "Harold Notebook"?

ANNE. Your *what*?

RUTH. I call it my "Harold Notebook." I've put down bits of his letters that you read me, the lovely bits that are too beautiful to forget. Do you mind?

ANNE. You silly child!

RUTH. Here, you may see it.... That's from the second letter he wrote you from Rio Janeiro. I just couldn't get over that letter. You know I made you read it to me three times. It was so--so delicate. I remembered this passage--see. "A young girl seems to me as exquisite and frail as a flower, and I feel myself a vandal in desiring to pluck and possess one. Yet, Anne, your face is always before me, and I know now what I was too stupid to realize before, that it was you and you only, who made life bearable for me last winter when I was a stranger and alone." Oh, Anne--[*Sighing rapturously.*] that's the sort of love letters I've dreamed of getting. I don't suppose I ever shall.

ANNE. [*still looking over the notebook with her odd smile*]. Have you shown this to any one?

RUTH. Only to Caroline--in confidence. [*Pauses to see how Anne will take it.*] But really, Anne, every one knows about Harold. You've told Madge and Eleanor, and I'm sure they've told the others. They don't say anything to us, but they do to Caroline and she tells me. [*Watching Anne's face.*] You're not angry, are you, Anne?

ANNE. Yes, rather. [*Then eagerly.*] What do they say?

RUTH. Oh, all sorts of things. Some of them horrid, of course! You can't blame them for being jealous. Here you are having just the sort of experience that any one of them would give their eye teeth to have. *I'd* be jealous if you weren't my sister. As it is, I seem to get some of the glory myself.

ANNE [*pleads, but disparaging*]. But every girl has this experience sooner or later.

RUTH. Oh, not in this way. Everything that Harold does is beautiful, ideal. Jane Fenwick showed me some of Bob's letters. They were so dull, so prosaic! All about his salary and the corn crop. I was disgusted with them. So was she, I think, when she saw Harold's letters.

ANNE. Oh, you showed them to Jane, too?

RUTH [*a bit frightened*]. No, really I didn't. Caroline did. I lent her my notebook once overnight, and she gave Jane a peek--in the *strictest* confidence. Jane really needed it. She was getting so cocky about Bob. Girls are funny things, aren't they?

ANNE [*who has been keenly interested in all of Ruth's gossip*]. What do you mean?

RUTH. It isn't so much the man, as the idea of a man--some one to dream about, and to talk about. When I think of getting engaged--I suppose I shall get engaged some day--I never think of being really, really kissed by a man--

ANNE. What do you think of?

RUTH. I always think of telling Caroline about it, showing my ring to her and to Madge. Oh, Madge is green with envy. I believe she thought Harold sort of liked her. [*Anne turns away.*] She was so excited when she saw him in New York. She said she would have got off the bus and chased him, but he went into a house.... Anne, why didn't you tell us--me, at least--that Harold was back from South America, before we heard it from Madge?

ANNE. Just because.... I wanted to avoid all this.... It was hard enough to have him within a few hours' distance and know he could not get to me. But it was easier when no one else knew. Don't you understand?

RUTH. Yes, dear, of course I do--but still--

ANNE [*impatiently*]. Now, Ruth, it's quarter past four. You promised-

-

RUTH. I'm going ... right straight off ... unless--Oh, Anne, mayn't I stay and have just one peek. I won't let him see me, and then I'll run straight away?

ANNE. Oh, for heaven's sake, don't be naughty and silly! Clear out now, quickly, or--[*Changing her tone suddenly.*] Ruth, dear, put yourself in my place. Think how you would feel if you were going to see the man you loved for the first time. That's what it really is. Think of it! Two years ago when he went away we were just the merest friends--and now--

RUTH. And now you're engaged to be married! Oh, isn't it the most romantic thing! Of course you want to be alone. Forgive me. Oh, Anne, how excited you must be!

ANNE [*with rather histrionic intensity*]. No, I'm strangely calm. And yet, Ruth, I'm afraid, terribly afraid.

RUTH. Why, what of?

ANNE [*acting*]. I don't know ... of everything ... of the unknown. All this has been so wonderful, if anything should happen I don't think I could bear it. I think I should die.

RUTH. Nonsense, dear, what can happen? You're just on edge. Well, I'll be off. I'll join Mother at Aunt Nellie's. Give my love to Harold. You know I've never called him anything but Mr. Lawson to his face. Isn't that funny? Good-bye, dear. [*Throwing Anne a kiss.*] You look so sweet.

ANNE [*her hands on Ruth's shoulders for an impressive moment*].  
Good-by, Ruth. Good-by.

[*They kiss. Ruth goes. Left alone, a complete change comes over Anne. She drops the romantic attitude. She is nervously determined. She quickly arranges the flowers, takes out the box, etc., straightens the room, and surveys herself rapidly in the mirror. There is a sound of wheels outside. Anne goes to the bay window and looks out. Then she stands erect in the grip of an emotion that is more like terror than anticipation. Hearing the sound of footsteps on the stair she is panic-stricken and about to bolt, but at the sound of voices she pulls herself together and stands motionless.*]

MAN'S VOICE [*outside*]. In here? All right!

[*Harold Lawson enters, a well set up, bronzed, rather commonplace young man of about twenty-eight. He sees no one on his entry, but as he advances into the room, Anne comes down from the bay window.*]

HAROLD. Hello, Miss Carey, how are you? Splendid to see you again, after all this time. [*Anne looks at him without speaking, which slightly embarrasses him.*] You're looking fine. How's your mother--and little Ruth?

ANNE [*slowly*]. Welcome home.

HAROLD. Oh, thanks. It's rather nice to be back in God's country. But it's not for long this time.

ANNE. Are you going away again?

HAROLD. Yes. I've another appointment. This one in India, some big salt mines. Not bad, eh? I made pretty good in Brazil, they tell me.

ANNE [*nervously*]. Sit down.

HAROLD. Thanks. Hot for September, isn't it? Though I ought to be used to heat by this time. Sometimes the thermometer would run a hundred and eight for a week on end. Not much fun, that.

ANNE. No, indeed.

HAROLD [*settling back comfortably to talk about himself*]. You know I loathed it down there at first. What with all the foreigners and the rotten weather and the bugs--thought I'd never get into the swing. Wanted to chuck engineering for any old job that was cool, but after a while--

ANNE. How long have you been home?

HAROLD. About three weeks. I'd really been meaning to come out here and have a look round my old haunts, but there was business in New York, and I had to go South and see my family--you know how time flies. Then your note came. It was mighty jolly of you to ask me out here. By the way, how did you know I was back?

ANNE [*after a pause*]. Madge Kennedy caught sight of you in New York.

HAROLD. Did she really? How is little Madge? And that odd brother of hers. Is he just as much of a fool as ever? I remember once he said to me--

ANNE. Oh, I didn't ask you here to talk about Madge Kennedy's family.

HAROLD [*taken aback*]. No ... no, of course, not. I--I've been wondering just why you did ask me. You said you wanted to talk to me about something.

ANNE [*gently*]. Weren't you glad to come?

HAROLD. Why, of course I was. Of course. And then your note fired my curiosity--your asking me to come straight to you before seeing any one else.

ANNE. Aren't you glad to be here with me?

HAROLD. Why surely, of course, but--[*Pause.*]

ANNE. You see, people seemed to expect you would come to see me first of all. I rather expected it myself. Don't you understand?

HAROLD [*very uncomfortably*]. No.... I'm afraid I don't....

ANNE. From the way you acted before you went away I thought you, yourself, would want to see me first of all.

HAROLD. Before I went away? What do you mean?

ANNE. You know well enough what I mean. The parties those last weeks--the theater we went to--the beautiful flowers you sent Mother--the letter--

HAROLD. But--but--why, I was going away. You and your people had been awfully nice to me, a perfect stranger in town. I was simply trying to do the decent thing. Good Lord! You don't mean to say you thought--

ANNE [*watching him very closely*]. Yes, it's true, I thought--and every one else thought--I've been waiting these two years for you to come back.

[*She drops her face into her hands. Her shoulders shake.*]

HAROLD [*jumping up*]. Great Heavens! I never imagined--Why, Miss Carey, I--oh, I'm terribly sorry! [*She continues to sob.*] Please don't do that--please! I'd better go away--I'll clear out--I'll go straight off to India--I'll never bother you again.

[*He seized his hat, and is making, in a bewildered way, for the door, when she intercepts him.*]

ANNE. No. You mustn't go away!

HAROLD. But what can I do?

ANNE [*striking a tragic attitude*]. You mean to say you don't care at all--that you have never cared?



HAROLD. Really, Miss Carey, I--

ANNE. For heaven's sake, don't call me Miss Carey. Call me Anne.

HAROLD. Miss Carey.... Anne.... I.... Oh, you'd better let me go--let me get away before any one knows I'm here--before they think--

ANNE. It's too late. They think already.

HAROLD. Think what? What do you mean?

ANNE. Oh, this is terrible! Sit down, Harold, and listen to me. [*She pushes him into a chair and begins to talk very rapidly, watching intently the effect of her words upon him.*] You see, when you went away, people began to say things about us--you and me--about your caring. I let them go on. In fact I believed them. I suppose it was because I wanted so much to believe them. Oh, what a fool I've been! What a fool!

[*She covers her face with her hands. He gets up intending vaguely to comfort her, but she thinks he is making another move to go, and jumps to her feet.*]

ANNE. And now you want to clear out like a thief in the night, and leave me to be laughed at! No, no, you can't do that! You must help me. You've hurt me to the very soul. You mustn't humiliate me before the world.

HAROLD. I'll do anything I can, Miss Carey.

ANNE. Anne!

HAROLD. Anne, I mean. But how?

ANNE [*after a moment's thought, as if the idea had just come to her*]. You must stay here. You must pretend for a few days--for a week at most, that we're engaged.

HAROLD. I can't do that, you know. Really, I can't.

ANNE [*going to him*]. Why not? Only a little while. Then you'll go away to India. We'll find it's been a mistake. I'll break it off,--it will only be a pretense, of course, but at least no one will know what a fool I've been.

HAROLD [*after a moment's hesitation*]. Miss Carey--Anne, I mean, I'll do anything I can, but not that! A man can't do that. You see, there's a girl, an English girl, down in Brazil, I--

ANNE. Oh, a girl! Another! Well, after all, what does that matter? Brazil is a long way off. She need never know.

HAROLD. She might hear. You can't keep things like this hid. No. I wouldn't risk that. You'd better let me clear out before your family gets home. No one need ever know I've been here.

[*Again he makes a move toward the door. Anne stands motionless.*]

ANNE. You can't go. You can't. It's more serious than you imagine.

HAROLD. Serious? What do you mean?

ANNE. Come here. [*He obeys. She sits in a big chair, but avoids looking at him. There is a delicate imitation of a tragic actress in the way she tells her story.*] I wonder if I can make you understand? It means so much to me that you should--so much! Harold, you know how dull life is here in this little town. You were glad enough to get away after a year of it, weren't you? Well, it's worse for a girl, with nothing to do but sit at home--and dream--of you. Yes, that's what I did, until, at last, when I couldn't stand it any longer, I wrote you.

HAROLD [*quickly*]. I never got the letter, Miss Carey. Honor bright, I didn't.

ANNE. Perhaps not, but you answered it.

HAROLD. Answered it? What are you talking about?

ANNE. Would you like to see your answer? [*She goes to the desk, takes a packet of letters out of a drawer, selects one, and hands it to him.*] Here it is--your answer. You see it's post-marked Rio Janeiro.

HAROLD [*taking it wonderingly*]. This does look like my writing. [*Reads.*] "Anne, my darling--" I say, what does this mean?

ANNE. Go on.

HAROLD [*reading*]. "I have your wonderful letter. It came to me like rain in the desert. Can it be true, Anne, that you do care? I ask myself a hundred times what I have done to deserve this. A young girl seems to me as exquisite and frail as a flower--" Great Scott! You don't think I could have written such stuff! What in the world!

ANNE [*handing over another letter*]. Here's the next letter you wrote me, from the mine. It's a beautiful one. Read it.

HAROLD [*tears it open angrily, and reads*]. "I have been out in the night under the stars. Oh, that you were here, my beloved! It is easy to stand the dust and the turmoil of the mine without you, but beauty that I cannot share with you hurts me like a pain--"

[*He throws the letter on the table and turns toward her, speechless.*]

ANNE [*inexorably*]. Yes, that's an exceptionally beautiful one. But there are more--lots more. Would you like to see them?

HAROLD. But I tell you, I never wrote them. These aren't my letters.

ANNE. Whose are they, then?

HAROLD [*walking up and down furiously*]. God knows! This is some outrageous trick. You've been duped, you poor child. But we'll get to the bottom of this. Just leave it to me. I'll get detectives. I'll find out who's back of it! I'll--

[*He comes face to face with her and finds her looking quietly at him with something akin to critical interest.*]

HAROLD. Good Lord. What's the matter with me! You don't believe those letters. You couldn't think I wrote them, or you wouldn't have met me as you did, quite naturally, as an old friend. *You understand!* For heaven's sake, make it clear to me!

ANNE. I am trying to.... I told you there had to be ... answers.... I was afraid to send my letters to you, but there had to be answers. [*Harold stares at her.*] So I wrote them myself.

HAROLD. You wrote them yourself?!?

ANNE. Yes.

HAROLD. These? These very letters?

ANNE. Yes. I had to.

HAROLD. Good God! [*He gazes at the litter of letters on the desk in stupefied silence.*] But the handwriting.

ANNE. Oh, that was easy. I had the letter you wrote to Mother.

HAROLD. And you learned to imitate my handwriting?

ANNE [*politely*]. It was very good writing.

HAROLD [*in sudden apprehension*]. No one has seen these things,-- have they?

ANNE. They arrived by mail.

HAROLD. You mean people saw the envelopes. Yes, that's bad enough.... But you haven't shown them to any one? [*At her silence he turns furiously upon her.*] Have you?... Have you?

ANNE [*who enjoys her answer and its effect upon him*]. Only parts-- never a whole letter. But it was such a pleasure to be able to talk about you to some one. My only pleasure.

HAROLD. Good heavens! You told people I wrote these letters? That we were engaged?

ANNE. I didn't mean to, Harold. Really, I didn't. But I couldn't keep it dark. There were your telegrams.

HAROLD. My telegrams?!?

*[She goes to desk and produces a bundle of dispatches.]*

ANNE *[brazen in her sincerity]*. You used to wire me every time you changed your address. You were very thoughtful, Harold. But, of course, I couldn't keep those secret like your letters.

HAROLD *[standing helplessly, with the telegrams loose in his fingers]*. My telegrams! Good Lord! *[He opens one and reads.]* "Leaving Rio for fortnight of inspection in interior. Address care Señor Miguel--" *My telegrams!*

*[He flings the packet violently on the table, thereby almost upsetting a bowl of roses which he hastens to preserve.]*

ANNE. And then there were your flowers. I see you are admiring them.

*[Harold withdraws as if the flowers were charged with electricity.]*

HAROLD. What flowers?

ANNE. These--these--all of them. You sent me flowers every week while you were gone.

HAROLD *[overcome]*. Good God!

*[He has now reached the apex of his amazement and becomes sardonic.]*

ANNE. Yes. You were extravagant with flowers, Harold. Of course I love them, but I had to scold you about spending so much money.

HAROLD. Spending so much money? And what did I say when you scolded me?

ANNE [*taken aback only for a moment by his changed attitude*]. You sent me a bigger bunch than ever before--and--wait a minute--here's the card you put in it.

[*She goes to the same fatal desk and produces a package of florists' cards.*]

HAROLD. Are all those my cards too?

ANNE. Yes.

HAROLD [*laughing a bit wildly*]. I'm afraid I was a bit extravagant!

ANNE. Here's the one! You wrote: "If all that I have, and all that I am, is too little to lay before you, how can these poor flowers be much?"

HAROLD. I wrote that? Very pretty--very. I'd forgotten I had any such knack at sentiments.

ANNE. And then, right away, you sent me the ring.

HAROLD [*jumps, startled out of his sardonic pose*]. Ring! What ring?

ANNE. My engagement ring. You really were very extravagant that time, Harold.

HAROLD [*looking fearfully at her hands*]. But I don't see.... You're not wearing...?

ANNE. Not there--here, next to my heart. [*She takes out a ring which hangs on a chain inside her frock and presses it to her lips. Looking at him deeply.*] I adore sapphires, Harold.

[*A new fear comes into Harold's eyes. He begins to humor her.*]

HAROLD. Yes. Yes. Of course. Everyone likes sapphires, Anne. It is a beauty. Yes. [*He comes very close to her, and speaks very gently, as if to a child.*] You haven't shown your ring to any one, have you, Anne?

ANNE. Only to a few people--One or two.

HAROLD. A few people! Good heavens! [*Then he controls himself, takes her hands gently in his, and continues speaking, as if to a child.*] Sit down, Anne; we must talk this over a little,--very quietly, you understand, very quietly. Now to begin with, when did you first--

ANNE [*breaks away from him with a little laugh*]. No, I'm not crazy. Don't be worried. I'm perfectly sane. I had to tell you all this to show how serious it was. Now you know. What are you going to do?

HAROLD. Do? [*He slowly straightens up as if the knowledge of her sanity had relieved him of a heavy load.*] I'm going to take the next train back to New York.

ANNE. And leave me to get out of this before people all alone?

HAROLD. You got into it without my assistance, didn't you? Great Scott, you forged those letters in cold blood--

ANNE. Not in cold blood, Harold. Remember, I cared.

HAROLD. I don't believe it. [*Accusingly.*] You enjoyed writing those letters!

ANNE. Of course I enjoyed it. It meant thinking of you, talking of--

HAROLD. Rot! Not of me, really. You didn't think I am really the sort of person who could write that--that drivel!

ANNE [*hurt*]. Oh, I don't know. After a while I suppose you and my dream got confused.

HAROLD. But it was the rankest--

ANNE. Oh, I'm not so different from other girls. We're all like that. [*Repeating Ruth's phrase reminiscently.*] We must have some one to dream about--to talk about. I suppose it's because we haven't enough to do. And then we don't have any--any real adventures like--shop girls.

HAROLD [*surprised at this bit of reality*]. That's a funny thing to say!

ANNE. Well, it's true. I know I went rather far. After I got started I couldn't stop. I didn't want to, either. It took hold of me. So I went on and on and let people think whatever they wanted. But if you go now and people find out what I've done, they'll think I'm really mad--or something worse. Life will be impossible for me here, don't you see--impossible. [*Harold is silent.*] But if you stay, it will be so easy. Just a day or two. Then you will have to go to India. Is that much to ask? [*Acting.*] And you save me from disgrace, from ruin!

[*Harold remains silent, troubled.*]

ANNE [*becoming impassioned*]. You must help me. You *must*. After I've been so frank with you, you can't go back on me now. I've never in my life talked to any one like this--so openly. You *can't* go back on me! If you leave me here to be laughed at, mocked at by every one, I don't know what I shall do. I shan't be responsible. If you have any kindness, any chivalry.... Oh, for God's sake, Harold, help me, help me!

[*Kneels at his feet.*]

HAROLD. I don't know.... I'm horribly muddled.... All right, I'll stay!

ANNE. Good! Good! Oh, you are fine! I knew you would be. Now everything will be so simple. [*The vista opens before her.*] We will be very quiet here for a couple of days. We won't see many people, for of course it isn't announced. And then you will go ... and I will write you a letter....

HAROLD [*disagreeably struck by the phrase*]. Write me a letter? What for?



ANNE [*ingenuously*]. Telling you that I have been mistaken. Releasing you from the engagement ... and you will write me an answer ... sad but manly ... reluctantly accepting my decision....

HAROLD. Oh, I am to write an answer, sad but manly--Good God! Suppose you don't release me after all.

ANNE. Don't be silly, Harold. I promise. Can't you trust me?

HAROLD. Trust you? [*His eyes travel quickly from the table littered with letters and dispatches to the flowers that ornament the room, back to the table and finally to the ring that now hangs conspicuously on her breast. She follows the look and instinctively puts her hand to the ring.*] Trust you? By Jove, no, I don't trust you! This is absurd, I don't stay another moment. Say what you will to people. I'm off. This is final.

ANNE [*who has stepped to the window*]. You can't go now. I hear Mother and Ruth coming.

HAROLD. All the more reason. [*He finds his hat.*] I bolt.

ANNE [*blocking the door*]. You can't go, Harold! Don't corner me. I'll fight like a wildcat if you do.

HAROLD. Fight?

ANNE. Yes. A pretty figure you'll cut if you bolt now. They'll think you a cad--an out and out cad! Haven't they seen your letters come week by week, and your presents? And you have written to Mother, too--I have your letter. There won't be anything bad enough to say about you. They'll say you jilted me for that English girl in Brazil. It will be true, too. And it will get about. She'll hear of it, I'll see to that--and then--

HAROLD. But it's a complete lie! I can explain--

ANNE. You'll have a hard time explaining your letters and your presents--and your ring. There's a deal of evidence against you--

HAROLD. See here, are you trying to blackmail me? Oh, this is too ridiculous!

ANNE. They're coming! I hear them on the stairs! What are you going to tell them?

HAROLD. The truth. I must get clear of all this. I tell you--

ANNE [*suddenly clinging to him*]. No, no, Harold! Forgive me, I was just testing you. I will get you out of this. Leave it to me.

HAROLD [*struggling with her*]. No, I won't leave anything to you, ever.

ANNE [*still clinging tightly*]. Harold, remember I am a woman--and I love you.

[*This brings him up short a moment to wonder, and in this moment there is a knock at the door.*]

ANNE [*abandoning Harold*]. Come in. [*There is a discreet pause.*]

MRS. CAREY'S VOICE [*off stage*]. May we come in?

ANNE [*angrily*]. Yes!

[*Harold, who has moved toward the door, meets Mrs. Carey as she enters. She throws her arms about his neck and kisses him warmly. She is followed by Ruth.*]

MRS. CAREY. Harold! My door boy!

RUTH [*clutching his arm*]. Hello, Harold. I am so glad.

[*Harold, temporarily overwhelmed by the onslaught of the two women, is about to speak, when Anne interrupts dramatically.*]

ANNE. Wait a moment, Mother. Before you say anything more I must tell you that Harold and I are no longer engaged!

*[Mrs. Carey and Ruth draw away from Harold in horror-struck surprise.]*

MRS. CAREY. No longer engaged? Why.... What...?

HAROLD. Really, Mrs. Carey, I--

ANNE *[interrupts, going to her mother]*. Mother, dear, be patient with me, trust me, I beg of you--and please, please don't ask me any questions. Harold and I have had a very hard--a very painful hour together. I don't think I can stand any more.

*[She is visibly very much exhausted, gasping for breath.]*

MRS. CAREY. Oh, my poor child, what is it? What has he done?

*[She supports Anne on one side while Ruth hurries to the other.]*

HAROLD. Really, Mrs. Carey, I think I can explain.

ANNE. No, Harold, there's no use trying to explain. There are some things a woman feels, about which she cannot reason. I know I am doing right.

HAROLD *[desperately]*. Mrs. Carey, I assure you--

ANNE *[as if on the verge of a nervous crisis]*. Oh, please, *please*, Harold, don't protest any more. I am not blaming you. Understand, Mother, I am not blaming him. But my decision is irrevocable. I thought you understood. I beg you to go away. You have just time to catch the afternoon express.

HAROLD. Nonsense, Anne, you must let me--

ANNE *[wildly]*. No, no, Harold, it is finished! Don't you understand? Finished! *[She abandons the support of her mother and Ruth and goes to the table.]* See, here are your letters. I am going to burn them. *[She throws the packet into the fire.]* All your letters--*[She throws the dispatches into the fire.]* Don't, please, continue this unendurable situation any longer. Go, I beg of you, go!

*[She is almost hysterical.]*

HAROLD. But I tell you I must--

ANNE *[falling back in her mother's arms]*. Make him go, Mother!  
Make him go!

MRS. CAREY. Yes, go! Go, sir! Don't you see you are torturing the child. I insist upon your going.

RUTH. Yes, she is in a dreadful state.

*[Here Mrs. Carey and Ruth fall into simultaneous urgings.]*

HAROLD *[who has tried in vain to make himself heard]*. All right, I'm going, I give up!

*[He seizes his hat and rushes out, banging the door behind him. Anne breaks away from her mother and sister, totters rapidly to the door and calls down gently.]*

ANNE. Not in anger, I beg of you, Harold! I am not blaming you.  
Good-by.

*[The street door is heard to bang. Anne collapses in approved tragedy style.]*

ANNE *[gasping]*. Get some water, Ruth. I shall be all right in a moment.

*[Ruth rushes into the bedroom.]*

MRS. CAREY. Oh, my dear child, calm yourself. Mother is here, dear. She will take care of you. Tell me, dear, tell me.

*[Ruth returns with the water. Anne sips a little.]*

ANNE. I will, Mother--I will ... everything ... later. [*She drinks.*] But now I must be alone. Please, dear, go away ... for a little while. I must be alone [*Rising and moving to the fire.*] with the ruin of my dreams.

[*She puts her arms on the chimney shelf and drops her head on them.*]

RUTH. Come, Mother! Come away!

MRS. CAREY. Yes, I am coming. We shall be in the next room, Annie, when you want us. Right here.

ANNE [*as they go out, raises her head and murmurs*]. Dust and ashes! Dust and ashes!

[*As soon as they have gone, Anne straightens up slowly. She pulls herself together after the physical strain of her acting. Then she looks at the watch on her wrist and sighs a long triumphant sigh. Her eye falls on the desk and she sees the package of florists' cards still there. She picks them up, returns with them to the fire and is about to throw them in, when her eye is caught by the writing on one. She takes it out and reads it. Then she takes another--and another. She stops and looks away dreamily. Then slowly, she moves back to the desk, drops the cards into a drawer and locks it. She sits brooding at the desk and the open paper before her seems to fascinate her. As if in a dream she picks up a pencil. A creative look comes into her eyes. Resting her chin on her left arm, she begins slowly to write, murmuring to herself.*]

ANNE [*reading as she writes*]. "Anne, my dearest.... I am on the train ... broken, shattered.... Why have you done this to me ... why have you darkened the sun ... and put out the stars ... put out the stars?... Give me another chance, Anne.... I will make good.... I promise you.... For God's sake, Anne, don't shut me out of your life utterly.... I cannot bear it.... I...."

[*The Curtain has fallen slowly as she writes.*]

