

For All Time

BY RITA WELLMAN

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CHARACTERS

MONSIEUR ROBERT. NANETTE. DIANE BERTRAL. MADAME
LE BARGY.

TIME: *France, 1915.*

Dedicated to MAURICE MAETERLINCK,

Whose essay in "The Wrack of the Storm" inspired this play.

Application for the right of performing FOR ALL TIME must be
made to Rita Wellman, 142 East 18th Street, New York.

FOR ALL TIME

A PLAY BY RITA WELLMAN

[SCENE: Sitting room in the house of Madame le Bargy. Furnished in excellent taste. Main entrance center, this leads into a hall. Another entrance left, back. French window right near back, near this stands a large wing chair. Couch left, well forward. Chairs near this. Nanette comes from the entrance left as Monsieur Robert comes into the room from entrance center. Nanette is a European old maid. Her dark eyes are full of fire and her lips are bitter. She speaks quickly and sharply and is always on the defensive. Monsieur Robert is well groomed, gentle, weak and likable. Nanette is in deep mourning. Monsieur Robert carries a small bunch of flowers which he holds awkwardly and fussily as if they embarrassed him.]

NANETTE. Monsieur Robert....

ROBERT [*coming forward*]. Nanette.... How are you, Nanette! You look thinner.

NANETTE. Yes, it's the mourning. It's unbecoming.

ROBERT. I shouldn't say that, Nanette. How is Madame? Tell me. [*Nanette gives an eloquent shrug.*] I haven't dared to come before. You know how I hate anything--anything like a scene.

NANETTE [*sitting left*]. Sit down, Monsieur Robert. [*He sits in a chair forward right.*] It was cowardly of you not to come to see Madame.

ROBERT. Yes, I know. I am such a coward. I cannot imagine how I came to be such a coward, Nanette. I am afraid to do anything any more. Yet my mind keeps so active. How do you account for that? It's my imagination. It seems to run ahead and do things in my place. In these times I am all over the world at once. Nanette, will you believe it, that I suffer actually with every man in the trenches?

NANETTE [*contemptuously*]. Oh, I daresay.

ROBERT. You don't understand my case. I am fifty-five. I have lived for my work always. Why should I give it up now that the world has gone mad? Some one must stay behind and keep things together. Some one must conduct the dull march of everyday life. We can't all be heroes.

NANETTE. Your work!

ROBERT. Well, to be at the head of a big charity. That is something. Countless lives, numberless families are in my care. I am sort of a father to them all, Nanette.

NANETTE. They could have a mother as well.

ROBERT [*with pained eagerness*]. Do you really think that?

NANETTE. I know it. There are many women as well fitted for your post as you--better fitted, in fact.

ROBERT. Oh, surely not. I have had the experience of years. I love my work so. I love my little people.

NANETTE. You have made a pleasure out of what should be only your duty. It isn't the poor who couldn't get along without you, Monsieur Robert. It's you who couldn't get along without the poor.

ROBERT. Well, are we all to live merely to do our duty? Is that what the Germans are going to teach us--to be machines like themselves?

NANETTE. I suppose after all, you are better off where you are.

ROBERT. How do you mean, Nanette?

NANETTE. You are more of a woman than a man after all.

ROBERT. You were always bitter against me, Nanette.

NANETTE. You were always superior with me, because I was not beautiful like Madame nor young like Maurice.

ROBERT. How did you say she was, Nanette?

NANETTE. You will find her greatly changed.

ROBERT. I wanted to come to her as soon as she came, from Aix les Bains. When she went to recover the body.

NANETTE [*in a tone of deep feeling*]. Yes, when we went hoping to find Maurice.

ROBERT [*softly*]. Tell me about his death.

NANETTE. There were terrible days in which we could learn nothing certain. Several times they gave up hope. What hope! It only made certainty more unbearable.

ROBERT. They found him at last.

NANETTE. Yes, they found Maurice.

ROBERT. The French. That was good.

NANETTE. No, the Germans.

ROBERT. But Madame wrote me....

NANETTE. That was a lie she told you. The Germans found him. It was they who had the privilege of putting him away to his final rest. He had just won his cross.

ROBERT. He won the cross!

NANETTE. Yes, didn't you hear? That very week. [*Almost overcome with emotion she rises.*] We have it now. [*She goes out back a moment and returns with a small black box which she opens reverently.*] Here is all that we have left of Maurice. [*She hands him a picture post card.*] This was taken only the day before.... [*She hands him a letter.*] This was the last letter ... you can see the date.... He was never so confident or full of life.... There is even a joke about me. He was always making fun of me. I don't know why. [*She hands him a revolver.*] Here is his revolver. [*She takes out the small box with the cross of war and hesitates to give it to him.*] This--this is what we have left in place of Maurice. [*With a violent look she opens the box and then suddenly hands it to him.*]

ROBERT. You mustn't look on it in that way, Nanette.

NANETTE. I can't help it.

ROBERT [*reading*]. Maurice Paul le Bargy. Little Maurice! He was never meant for action either. Do you remember how we used to tease him? He hated to make any decision. He loved life's dreams and nuances.

NANETTE. He was nothing but a dreamer. Madame and I were talking only yesterday of his garden--did we ever tell you of the garden he had when he was a boy?

ROBERT [*handing her the box very carefully*]. No. Tell me about the garden.

NANETTE. He made himself a garden, everything in it was arranged as if for people only an inch high.

ROBERT. But there are no such people.

NANETTE. Of course not. That is why every one made fun of him. But he went on building it just the same. It was scaled so that he was a giant in it. There were little houses and little walks and little boats sailing on lakes two feet across. The geraniums were great trees, his pet turtle was like a prehistoric monster, and the hollyhocks pierced heaven itself. When people told him that no one could really enjoy such a garden he said that the ants could, and they ought to appreciate a little beauty because they were always so busy.

ROBERT. That was like Maurice. How vast the sky must have seemed to him who loved minute shadowy things!

NANETTE. He was always timid. Everything violent frightened him. They made him positively ill. And how he dreaded the sea! Do you remember how Madame tried to get him to swim?

ROBERT. But he did learn to swim finally.

NANETTE. Yes. But he told me one day--"Nanette, when I hear the surf my whole body shakes with fear. I feel as if some terrible giant were calling me. I hate the great sea."

ROBERT. And he fell into the sea, didn't he?

NANETTE. Two thousand feet.

ROBERT. What he must have endured all alone!

NANETTE. No one can know.

[*After a pause.*]

ROBERT. You say Madame has changed?

NANETTE [*looking toward left before speaking*]. Yes.

ROBERT. Why do you look around like that? Is there anything wrong?

NANETTE. Yes, there is.

ROBERT. What do you mean? Is Madame very ill?

NANETTE. There has been a change.

ROBERT. What kind of a change?

NANETTE. Madame has changed. You wouldn't know her, Monsieur Robert.

ROBERT. You mean she has grown old? Madame was always so beautiful. Has her hair turned white?

NANETTE. No, it isn't that.

ROBERT. You mean she is so stricken she can't talk with me? She won't see me?

NANETTE. She will see you. But for your own peace of mind I advise you to go away. I will tell her that you came. That will be the best way.

ROBERT. A change, you say? You mean she has altered so....

NANETTE. Yes. The truth is, it is Madame's mind.

ROBERT. Her mind! No, no, don't tell me that. That is the worst of all. Do you mean that she is not clear in her mind? She wouldn't know me? She wouldn't be able to remember? Nanette, I can't believe it. I can't believe that this great and beautiful woman could give in like that. Everywhere you see the small ones breaking down. But the great

spirits like hers--oh they must keep up. What else is there left for us if they give up, too?

NANETTE. If you could hear her talk, Monsieur Robert. The things she says.... Sometimes I have to run away and lock my door. I am afraid of her.

ROBERT. I cannot stay now, Nanette. I couldn't bear it. It was hard enough for me before. What can I say to her, Nanette, when my own grief finds no comfort? Maurice was like my own son. He was the fruit of my own soul. Into him went all the spiritual love I had for Madame, the love which for fourteen years....

NANETTE. Monsieur Robert!

ROBERT. Oh, Nanette, forget your piety for once and let me speak my heart out.

NANETTE [*with her strange, bitter coldness*]. No, Monsieur Robert, I can never forget what you call my--piety.

ROBERT. No, you never can. That is why I have never been able to talk to you. Your heart is closed to all but Maurice.

NANETTE. Yes, that is true. My heart has been like one of those vases of domestic use which the ancients buried with the dead in their tombs. All that was warm and beautiful in me is closed away forever with Maurice. Although I was never more to him than a familiar object which was a part of his everyday life. Only his old nurse.

ROBERT. How did he come to inspire such love in every one who came near him?

NANETTE. Because he was young and beautiful.

ROBERT. But that is simply a temporary state.

NANETTE. Maurice would always have been young and beautiful.

ROBERT. Yes, he made you believe that. When he talked with you you felt glad and young as if you'd heard music.

NANETTE. He loved life.

ROBERT. Yet he was a coward.

NANETTE. But he always dared to do what he was afraid to do.

ROBERT. Yes, that is where he was different from me. That is what I have never been able to do--to dare as far as I could imagine.

[He goes slowly toward the back.]

NANETTE *[rising]*. You are going?

ROBERT. Yes. I can't see her. You see the state I am in. What could I say to her? I had better go.

NANETTE. Yes, it is the best way for you both.

[Robert hesitates at the chair right. He tentatively puts a hand out to touch the arm of it, and regards it curiously.]

NANETTE *[unsteadily]*. What are you doing?

ROBERT. It is strange.... *[Suddenly he falls into the chair and buries his head in the cushions, sobbing and calling.]* Maurice! Maurice!

NANETTE *[hoarsely]*. Monsieur Robert. *[As he does not answer--sharply and frightened.]* Monsieur Robert!

ROBERT *[rises slowly, a little dazed, but calm]*. Yes, yes, I know. I am trying your nerves. Forgive me. I am going now, Nanette. Here--I was forgetting--The flowers I brought for Madame. You will give them to her, Nanette.

NANETTE. Monsieur Robert, why did you act in that way just now? Why did you go to that chair?

ROBERT. I don't know.

NANETTE. When we came home from Aix les Bains I thought Madame would go wild. She tore her clothes. She went striding about the house from room to room calling at the top of her voice--Maurice, Maurice. She went into all the rooms, into his room, looking into the closets--everywhere--Then she came running down here. She went back into the back sitting room where she is now--then back into this room. At last she came to that chair.

ROBERT. To that chair, Nanette? Are you sure?

NANETTE. To that very chair. Then she flung herself down into it and cried. That was the first time she had cried. I went away. When I came back she was still there. And then this strange and terrible change came over her.

ROBERT. How do you mean?

NANETTE. A peculiar quiet, an awful calm like death--only more terrible.

ROBERT. Yes, that is how I felt.

NANETTE. Just now in that chair?

ROBERT. Yes, just now.

NANETTE. A calm, you say?

ROBERT. Yes, like a hand pressed over my heart.

NANETTE. But you seemed happier, Monsieur Robert.

ROBERT. I am happier, Nanette. [*He goes toward back.*] I am going.

[*He goes out at center. Nanette watches him dumbfounded. She then gets the black box, carefully puts away her keepsakes, and takes the box out center, returning almost at the same time that Diane Bertral*

enters. Diane Bertral is a beautiful woman of about twenty-eight. She is nervous and ill at ease, almost hysterical.]

DIANE. Does Madame le Bargy live here?

NANETTE. Yes, she does. Where can Julie be? Did the maid let you in?

DIANE. No, the gentleman who just went out ... he left the door open for me. He evidently thought I was a friend.

NANETTE. Did you want to see Madame le Bargy?

DIANE. Yes, very much. Could I see her, do you think?

NANETTE. She is back in her own sitting room. She isn't to be disturbed.

DIANE. No, I suppose not. I shouldn't have come.

NANETTE. If you wished to speak with her about anything important I can take the message.

DIANE [*absently*]. No--no....

NANETTE [*regarding her suspiciously*]. You know Madame le Bargy personally?

DIANE. No, no, I don't.

NANETTE. I thought not.

[*Sitting.*]

DIANE. May I sit down here for a moment? I am so tired. I have walked all the way, or rather I have run most of it. I am all out of breath.

NANETTE. If you will let me know your message at once.... Otherwise there is a seat down at the concierge. I am very busy.

[She goes toward back, with her lips set.]

DIANE *[rising]*. The truth is.... I can't tell you. It is something personal.

NANETTE. Something personal? Perhaps you are mistaken in the Madame le Bargy ... this is Madame Jeanne le Bargy--the writer....

DIANE. Yes, yes, I know. Mightn't I speak with her for a moment?

NANETTE. That is impossible. Since the death of her son Madame le Bargy has seen no one. No one at all.

DIANE. I might have known. Let me think. My mind has been so confused lately. I have been in such a state of mind--I don't know what to do. I came running here without any idea in my head. I felt that I would be all right if I could only see Madame le Bargy.

NANETTE *[tersely]*. Perhaps Mademoiselle had better see the doctor. At the end of the street--number 27--you will find an excellent physician.

DIANE. No physician on earth can cure me.

NANETTE *[after giving her an uneasy, distrustful look]*. Well, since you cannot see Madame le Bargy, and since you have no message for her, I must ask you please to excuse me. I am busy.

[She stands waiting for Diane to go, regarding her with undisguised hostility.]

DIANE. Yes, I will go. Why did I ever come? It was a mad idea. I see now that the things which seem so simple and easy in the heat of your own mind are the hardest of all to accomplish when you meet the coldness of other minds. Don't trouble about me. I am going. I didn't come to harm you or Madame in any way.

[As she goes toward the door she passes the chair at right and stops. She goes toward it curiously, then hopefully. Finally she flings herself into it as Robert has done, and sobs the name--"Maurice! Maurice!"]

NANETTE [*horrified*]. Mademoiselle!

[Diane rises slowly, looking about her in a dazed way. Then she suddenly leaves the chair.]

DIANE [*quietly*]. Forgive me. I will go quietly now.

NANETTE [*trembling*]. Mademoiselle. Just now--you spoke a name....

DIANE. Yes.

NANETTE. Was it--Maurice?

DIANE. Yes.

NANETTE [*drawing away, her face going black*]. I see.

DIANE [*going up to her curiously*]. Who are you?

NANETTE [*drawing herself up, showing the utmost contempt, hatred and fear of Diane*]. Who are you?

DIANE. My name is Diane Bertral.

NANETTE. Who *are* you?

DIANE. Just that.

NANETTE [*as before*]. I see.

DIANE [*passionately*]. Madame, listen to me....

NANETTE. Mademoiselle....

DIANE. Mademoiselle--are you--Nanette?

NANETTE [*who seems to grow small with dread*]. Those who know me well call me that.

DIANE. He often spoke of you. He told me of you. You were his old nurse. You were very dear to him. He always said he was the only person to reach your heart. [*Seizing Nanette's hand.*] Nanette! Let me call you Nanette! Let me touch you. Let me know that heart which he could waken. I am so in need of help. I am so in need of love.

NANETTE [*drawing away*]. Mademoiselle!

DIANE. You have lost Maurice. You know what I feel. Only you can know. Help me. Let us help each other! We can never be strangers for our hearts bear the same sorrow.

NANETTE. I don't understand. [*Growing stern with the realization.*] Maurice! Can it be that Maurice.... No, that is impossible. He was not like that.

DIANE. Nanette. I loved Maurice. He loved me.

NANETTE [*recoiling as if at a great obscenity*]. Oh!

DIANE. Why do you speak like that? What could there be in our love for each other that was wrong? If you only knew what we were to each other. If you only knew, Nanette....

NANETTE [*hoarsely*]. Maurice.... I can scarcely believe it.

DIANE. Let me talk to you about him. Let me tell you about us. [*She sits on the couch left, and feverishly begins to talk.*] I am an actress. We met at a supper party after the theater. You know how shy Maurice was. He was afraid of most people. I saw that. I drew him to one side and got him to talk. He was like a child when any one took a real interest in him. He told me all about himself at once, about you, and about Madame le Bargy....

NANETTE [*passionately*]. Oh, keep still!

DIANE [*not noticing Nanette's hostility*]. And about your house in the country, and his garden and books and his piano and all the things he loved. Then he went on and told me about his work, and how he wanted to be a great writer, how he wanted to carry on what was best in the French theater. He promised to show me his play.

NANETTE. His play!

DIANE. I told him to come to my house and read it to me. He came the next day. It was the twenty-first of March. I remember the date perfectly.

NANETTE. We always left town on that day, but we could not get Maurice to go, so we had to leave him behind. Now I understand.

DIANE. Yes. He stayed to lunch with me, and that afternoon I had him read his play to me. Do you remember how beautiful his voice was? It started in a sort of sing song, like a child singing itself to sleep, but as he went on his voice grew deeper and stronger, all your senses melted into his voice and he carried you along as if on a great wave of emotion, of ecstasy. Monsieur Laugier came later. He was my manager then. I had Maurice read the play to him. And later some other people came, and every one urged Monsieur Laugier to take the play. I begged him to read it. I will never forget it. It seemed to me the most important thing in the world. Well, as you know, Monsieur Laugier did produce Maurice's play. And, although they wouldn't let me be in it, I always considered it my play, too.

NANETTE. Then the story he told us of his meeting with Monsieur Laugier--that wasn't true?

DIANE. No. I invented that for him to tell you.

NANETTE. He lied to us!

DIANE. You would never have understood.

NANETTE. Let me think--Maurice's play was produced in September, 1913. That is two years ago. Two years.... Maurice lived

here with us--day after day--saying nothing--telling us nothing--We never suspected. We never dreamed that he would deceive us.

DIANE. He did not deceive you. Not even the closest hearts can reveal everything.

NANETTE. But to continue to see you ... all that time! It is unthinkable.

DIANE. How could he explain what he didn't understand himself? How could he tell you of what was a mystery to him? From the first moment we met we lived and thought and felt as one being.

NANETTE [*vehemently*]. No! With us he was like that! He was like that with us.

DIANE. With me!

NANETTE. To think of it! A common actress!

DIANE [*jumping up*]. How could you?

NANETTE. If I had known of this affair I would have gone straight to you.

DIANE. And what could you have done?

NANETTE [*significantly*]. I could have found a way.

DIANE. You are a terrible old woman.

NANETTE. Am I terrible? I had to fight my way when I was your age--because I was not pretty. I had the choice of being a free drudge or some man's slave. So I chose to toil alone. In order to get along alone I had to stifle every drop of humanity in my being. I had to bind up my human instincts as they bind up the breasts of mothers who flow too bounteously with life-blood long after their babes have need of it. I had to become sharp and bitter because sweetness and softness get crushed under in the battle to live. I learned to fight and I forgot to feel. Then, when I was used up and hard I met Madame le Bary and

she took me into her house because I had one valuable thing left. I had learned that it is wiser to be honest. I was there when Maurice was born.

DIANE. You were with him from the very beginning then.

NANETTE. I was an old maid of thirty-five. I had always lived alone. I hadn't ever had a dog to care for. Then all at once I had this baby, this little baby. I had his baby cries to call me. I had his tiny hands to kiss. I used to press my lips against his throbbing head, against the soft fissure where life and death meet, and I would say to myself, "Here, with one pressure I can crush away life. Here, with one pressure is where immortal life must have entered."

DIANE. Then later--when he grew up....

NANETTE. Day by day I watched over him. Madame was busy. Even after her husband died she was in the world. She had her writing. She had her friends. Her heart was fed in a hundred different ways. While I--I had only Maurice.

DIANE. I understand.

NANETTE. I lived only for Maurice. When I saw that it was raining I thought of Maurice. When I saw that the sun shone I thought of Maurice. If I was awakened suddenly in the night his name was on my lips. It seemed to me I could not take a deep breath for fear of disturbing his image against my heart.

DIANE. Nanette! Can you believe that I have felt that way too?

NANETTE. You!

DIANE. Yes, yes, I have. Nanette, when he was little, when he was a boy growing up, did you never think of me?

NANETTE. Of you!

DIANE. Yes, of the woman who would eventually take your place. Didn't you think of what she would be like, didn't you plan her, didn't

you pray that she might be fine and great and beautiful? I know you did. You must have! Well, I tried to mold myself that way. I tried to be worthy of every dream you could have had for him, that his mother could have had. That is how I loved him.

NANETTE. Do you know what I thought of when the idea of a woman for Maurice came into my mind? I thought that when she came--if she ever did--

[She pauses, looking ahead of her.]

DIANE. Yes?

NANETTE *[turning and looking at Diane vindictively]*. I would kill her!

DIANE. Nanette, I would have killed myself rather than harm Maurice.

NANETTE. Then why did you allow him to throw himself away?

DIANE. Throw himself away! Nanette, I never knew what love was until Maurice came. I was older than he. I knew life better. I knew myself better. I had struggled. You say that you had to struggle because you weren't pretty. I had to struggle because I was. You can't know what it is to have every other man you meet want to possess you, not because he loves you, but because your face suggests love to him and he hasn't learned to know the difference. He finds that out later, and then he reproaches you for being beautiful.

NANETTE. To think that Maurice should fall so low!

DIANE. But I came to know things. I was determined to find love. From man to man, Nanette, I climbed up and up, picking my way, falling and getting up again. Only the truly educated can love. I loved Maurice with all the wisdom I had accumulated in years of suffering. I gave him a perfect gift I had molded in pain.

NANETTE. You! What had *you* to give?

DIANE. Then the war broke out.

NANETTE. Yes, the war. Maurice was one of the first. He made up his mind at once.

DIANE. No, he did *not* make up his mind at once.

NANETTE [*with a dreadful realization*]. Then it was....

DIANE. I made up his mind for him.

NANETTE [*vehemently*]. You did it! It was you then! You sent Maurice to war. After they excused him! After they gave him a post at home! You sent him to his death. Oh, I hated you before, but now....

DIANE. His mother and you clung to him. There was one excuse after the other. You made him believe that he was too delicate and sensitive. You used all of your influence. Madame le Bargy tried in every way to keep him. She even testified officially that Maurice was weak from birth and had dizzy spells and an unaccountable fear of the sea. And you testified under oath to a long and dangerous illness he had had in childhood.

NANETTE. I did that. And it was all a lie.

DIANE. But all the time I was urging him to go. We three women fought for mastery. But you see who won! I did! When he came to me at nights--in the country--to my little house where we had been so happy, there, there, in the very room where we were nearest, then I persuaded him. With my kisses, Nanette, with my arms, with all the power I had over him--then was when I thrust him away.

NANETTE [*triumphantly*]. You didn't love him then!

DIANE [*passionately*]. Could I love Maurice and see him stay behind? Could I really want him to save his body for me when thousands were giving theirs for France?

NANETTE. For France.... But what of us?

DIANE. Oh, the selfishness of those who have never really loved!

NANETTE. Never loved! How can you say that I have never loved?

DIANE. What can you know of my loss? Your love was a habit. It was the love you could have lavished on a dog, or a horse or anything. But with me--now that he is gone, I have lost everything. I have no place to turn. I haven't even memory, as you have. Your love always took on the color of memory, but mine was a living, flaming thing, necessary as food and drink--as life itself!

NANETTE [*white with passion*]. But my love was pure and yours was not. [*She crosses the room.*] Good God, to think that this thing should ever have happened to us in this house! [*She covers her face with her hands and runs out back.*]

[*After a moment Madame le Bargy enters, left. She is a handsome woman of fifty or more. She wears a long loose gown of white silk. Her voice is perfectly modulated and beautiful. There is about her a gentleness and nobility of perfect spiritual strength. She looks at Diane curiously for a moment, and then goes to her with hand outstretched. During the following the day is fast becoming dark, and the sun's setting is seen from the French window.*]

MADAME LE BARGY. I heard Nanette's voice. She has a habit of keeping people from me, although I am always glad to see any one. May I know your name?

DIANE. My name is Diane Bertral.

MADAME LE BARGY. Diane Bertral. I have never heard of you.

DIANE. No. I am an actress. But I am not so very well known. Are you Madame le Bargy?

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes. Won't you sit down on the couch there? Why did you come to see me, Mademoiselle?

[*She sits at right forward.*]

DIANE [*embarrassed*]. I came.... I don't know why I came, Madame le Bargy.

MADAME LE BARGY. You know some one I know, perhaps--some friend of us both.

DIANE. Yes, that is it. Some one we have both--lost.

MADAME LE BARGY [*with a quick look at Diane*]. A dear friend?

DIANE. Yes, a very dear friend.

MADAME LE BARGY. Do you mean--Maurice?

DIANE. Yes.

MADAME LE BARGY. You knew him well?

DIANE. I loved him.

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes, I know.

DIANE [*astonished*]. You know!

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes, Maurice has told me.

DIANE. No, no; that I am sure of. I am sure he never has. He has never told a soul. That was our agreement. We were to keep it secret and sacred. Not even you were to know, not as long as we lived.

MADAME LE BARGY [*gently*]. But after...?

DIANE [*puzzled*]. After?

MADAME LE BARGY. How long did you know Maurice?

DIANE. It would be two years this March.

MADAME LE BARGY. You loved each other all that time?

DIANE. From the very first. We never had any of those preliminaries in which people have a chance to deceive each other. We came together directly and frankly and we never regretted it.

MADAME LE BARGY. Maurice was very young.

DIANE. He was twenty-four. He was eager for life. But you two had kept him back. You had warmed his heart with your kind of love until he had begun to think it was the only love which is worthy.

MADAME LE BARGY. And you believe that that isn't so?

DIANE [*simply*]. I believe that there can be no flame like the love between two young people who are one.

MADAME LE BARGY [*going to Diane and putting a hand on her shoulder*]. Poor little woman.

DIANE [*astounded*]. Madame!

MADAME LE BARGY. You have been suffering a great deal, Diane.

DIANE [*bursting into wild weeping*]. Oh, Madame, how good you are, how kind you are! [*Grasping Madame's arms, she trembles and sobs.*] Oh, how can I ever tell you? Thank you, thank you! [*She jumps up and paces about the room.*] What am I going to do with myself? How can I go on? I simply can't stand it. If I had only died with Maurice! If I could only have died in his place! Oh, the cruelty of it! Why did they have to pick out *my* lover? Surely there are thousands of others. Why did it have to be just mine? Mine--when I needed him so! He might have been spared a little longer, to give me time to get used to it. That would have been better. But now! Just as he was beginning to be of service, too. Why he hadn't been there a year yet. Not even a year! [*Beating her hips violently.*] I could tear myself to pieces. I hate myself for going on living. I detest myself for being alive when he is dead.

MADAME LE BARGY [*who has watched Diane with infinite pity--softly*]. Diane, do you think that I loved my son?

DIANE [*in surprise*]. Why, yes, Madame, I believe that you loved Maurice.

MADAME LE BARGY. You think that my love was not as great as yours?

DIANE. No, I don't think so. You had had your life. Maurice and I were only beginning ours.

MADAME LE BARGY. Which do you think is the greater love, Diane, the love which endures for the moment, or the love which endures for all time?

DIANE [*puzzled*]. For all time...?

MADAME LE BARGY. For all time.

DIANE. We have the dear lips to kiss, the dear head to caress, but when these are gone there is only memory--and that is torture.

MADAME LE BARGY. What if I should tell you that Maurice still lives, Diane?

DIANE [*rushing to her*]. Madame! My God, is this true?

MADAME LE BARGY [*gently*]. Maurice still lives, Diane. He talks with me every day.

DIANE [*slowly*]. He talks with you....

MADAME LE BARGY [*holding her gaze*]. Yes, Diane, he talks with me.

DIANE [*the hope dies out of her face and she turns away*]. I understand.

MADAME LE BARGY. You see, you did not love Maurice.

DIANE. How can you tell me that--that I didn't love him?

MADAME LE BARGY. Because you don't continue to do so.

DIANE. But how can I love what no longer exists?

MADAME LE BARGY. Oh, the selfishness of those who have never really loved!

DIANE. That is what I said to Nanette--and now you say the same thing to me.

MADAME LE BARGY. Diane, when I knew for certain that Maurice had fallen into the sea, that they had recovered his body, that he was buried in German soil, then I felt that I should never live another moment. I felt as you have felt. I wanted to die. I could not bear it. I came here to this house. I was mad for the sight of him, for the things that he had touched and loved. I flew into his room and dragged his clothes from the pegs and crushed them to me, but even the odor and touch of his personal belongings was not enough to calm me. I came into this room. Then I drew near that chair. Something--I don't know what--drove me to sit in it. I flung myself into it as if it were into his arms, and I wept out all my grief. Then, all at once, a great calm came over me. I looked upon my solemn black dress in amazement and distaste. I looked into my solemn and black heart with surprise and shame. I felt that Maurice was *alive*, that he was not *dead*, Diane. Then I remembered, as I sat there, that it was in this chair that he had sat when he came to say good-by. There he had sat talking happily and confidently--he had seemed filled with radiance. And so he has talked to me again and again. Every day, at the same time, at twilight, I have sat there and felt myself with Maurice. We have talked together, just as we always did. There is nothing weird or supernatural about it, Diane. He is just as we knew him, as we knew him in those swift, strange moments when, in a flash, the body seems to slip aside and spirit rushes out to meet spirit. That is all. People see me cheerful and smiling and they say that I am mad. The few to whom I have told of these talks pity me and are sure that I have lost my reason. Perhaps, in a worldly sense, I am mad. But I know this, Diane, that Maurice lives as usual, more truly, than he did six weeks ago. I know that his youth has not been sacrificed in vain. As the dead plant enriches the soil from which it grew and into which it finally falls, so will this

young soul in all its bloom enrich the life out of which it sprang and from which it can never entirely disappear.

DIANE [*after a pause--rising*]. That is beautiful, but I cannot do it. [*Stretching out her arms.*] My arms are aching with emptiness.

MADAME LE BARGY. You see that you did not really love, Diane.

DIANE. Perhaps not. But it was the greatest I was capable of.

[*She gets a scarf she has dropped and goes toward the back.*]

MADAME LE BARGY [*softly*]. This is the time, Diane.

DIANE. When you talk with him?

MADAME LE BARGY. Yes.

[*Diane goes slowly and sinks into the chair wearily. Suddenly she flings her arms out, crying "Maurice, Maurice." Madame le Bargy rises and goes to her.*]

DIANE. Maurice, come back to me! Dear God, give him back to me!

[*Nanette enters at back with her black box. She sees Diane in the chair. Suddenly she takes out the revolver and shoots Diane.*]

NANETTE. Maurice! Forgive me!

MADAME LE BARGY. Nanette! Child! My child! [*She rushes to take Diane in her arms.*] Nanette, what have you done, what have you done?

NANETTE. I have rid Maurice of a stain.

DIANE [*calling softly*]. Maurice, Maurice.... Oh, I knew you couldn't stay away. I knew you would come back to me. Now we will never be separated. We will be together like this for always--for all time.

MADAME LE BARGY [*softly*]. For all time, Diane.

NANETTE [*kneeling beside Diane--crossing herself*]. For all time.

[*Curtain.*]