

GATHER AT THE RIVER
AN ORIGINAL PLAY IN THREE ACTS

A THESIS

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S P E E C H

BY

KATHERINE HONORE DUFFY, B. S.

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We hereby recommend that the thesis prepared under our supervision by Katherine Honore Duffy entitled Gather at the River, an original play in three acts,

be accepted as fulfilling this part of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts.

Committee in Charge of Thesis

John W. Young
Chairman, and Director of Thesis

Earle C. Bryan

Mamie W. Walker

Accepted:

A. H. Smith
Director, Graduate Division

2-00587

CHARACTERS

EDITH, the middle daughter.

JUANA, an old Mexican servant.

DANIEL HASTINGS, Sarah's husband, the father of Claire, Edith,
and Peggy.

CLAIRE, the eldest daughter.

ELIZABETH ANNE, Claire's daughter.

PEGGY, the youngest daughter.

DR. BRUCE, the family doctor.

REVEREND J. SPENCER ALLEN, the minister.

MISS GRACE GIBBINGS, the nurse.

MOTHER SORIANAS, an old Mexican woman.

MARGUERITA, her granddaughter.

SEVERAL MEXICAN PEOPLE, a man, a woman, and a young man.

ACT I

The china clock on the mantelpiece chimes four as the last of a spring day's sun drifts through the two heavily curtained, narrow windows of a large Victorian home. The two windows on the upstage wall are hung with heavy blue draperies turning grey with age, and around the windows many pictures are hung in crazy patterns on the wall. A small table stands in front of one window, and a fern has been placed on the table. There is a walnut what-not with shelves against the upstage wall between the windows and the hall. Upleft is a hallway, the archway hung with similar blue curtains. From here can be seen the front door, which has two glass panels surrounded by stained glass in diamond shapes, and a staircase leading to the second floor. At the foot of the staircase is a copper umbrella stand and, above that, a square mirror with hooks on each side for hanging coats. On a similar angle as the archway is a fireplace of marble with a large gold-framed mirror above it. On the mantle is a china clock, two white and blue rosejars, and several small pictures in frames of gold filigree. A settee with green upholstery is in front of the fireplace, and a small table with a lamp is between it and the fireplace. Across from the settee is a Victorian armchair and a small footstool covered in needle-

point. The door to Sarah's room is downright, and opposite on stageleft is a door opening to a hallway which leads to the kitchen. A small upright piano, with two brass candlesticks fastened to each end, stands between the hallway and the door leading to the kitchen. Downleft is a round table covered to the floor with a velvet cloth which is mulberry color and has a deep fringe. There is an old lamp on the table, and on each side of the table are two Victorian chairs. The walls of the room are papered in a floral paper of lavender, mulberry, and blue colors. All the colors in the room are dull with age.

Edith is alone in the room. She is middle-aged, plump, and deficient in iodine. A maladjusted person, Edith has always hidden beneath the front of Victorian respectability. She is standing by the fireplace and, apparently, is worried. Edith is impatient as if waiting for someone to appear from Sarah's room. Presently, an old Mexican woman, Juana, comes from the room and, without glancing at Edith, crosses downleft to the door. Edith comes downstage as if anxious to ask Juana a question, but she says nothing. Edith does not like Juana, nor does Juana like Edith. Juana knows that Edith wants to ask a question, but she leaves the room. Edith turns back to the fireplace, and Daniel, Edith's father comes into the room. Daniel, because of his wife's strength of character, has seemed to himself inadequate. He is small

and wears glasses. His hair is thin.

DANIEL

Where is Juana?

EDITH

Father, would you please take the time to tell me what is wrong? You scared me practically out of my wits calling over the 'phone the way you did and saying to hurry right over.

DANIEL

Edith, your mother isn't feeling well.

EDITH

I know that. But, what is wrong? I wondered what was going on in the downstairs bedroom, but Juana wouldn't let me in nor would she tell me anything.

DANIEL

This is what happened. I was upstairs resting as I always do after lunch before going back to the office when it all took place. What a scare Sarah gave me!

EDITH (Impatiently)

Father, would you please tell me why you called me to come over? Really, I don't think you realize that you disturb me sometimes. This will disrupt my whole day. And George will come home tonight grumpy and worried about the river flooding.

DANIEL

Edith, I wouldn't have called if I hadn't thought it important.

EDITH

Father, get to the point. What is important?

DANIEL

Well, I was upstairs resting after lunch when---

EDITH (Impatiently)

You have already said that. What happened?

DANIEL

Edith, I'm getting to it. I was resting when I heard a little cry from downstairs, then a thud as if someone had fallen, and I wondered what happened. Juana came running to the stairway and called me. I came down to find Sarah on the floor. She fainted here by the fireplace while Elizabeth Anne was talking to her. Juana and I managed to get Sarah into the bedroom and onto the bed. It was such a scare with Elizabeth Anne crying and Sarah lying there motionless. She looked horrible with her mouth pulled at one corner. I didn't know what to do; so I called you. Sarah usually tells me what to do if an unpleasant situation arises.

EDITH

Good heavens! We should call a doctor. Mother isn't in the habit of fainting. Besides, it might be something else.

JUANA

(Entering from the kitchen)

She does not need a doctor. The Lord will take care of Senora Hastings.

EDITH

(Ignoring Juana)

Father, she may be very ill. Perhaps she had a stroke.

DANIEL

Nonsense, nonsense. Sarah has never been ill a day in her life. Never has been, not even when she had you three girls.

EDITH (Determined)

Father, I'm going to call my doctor. You are so impractical!

(Sighing) If it isn't one thing, it's something else.

JUANA

Senora Hastings does not need a doctor.

DANIEL

Really, Edith, I don't know why you're making such a fuss over this. Sarah will be all right. She's probably just tired and is sleeping.

EDITH (Exasperated)

Father, you are so exasperating! Where is Elizabeth Anne? She might be able to tell a more intelligent story.

JUANA

(Going into Sarah's room)

She's upstairs, crying.

EDITH

What went on here that you didn't mention?

DANIEL

Oh, now, Edith. You know how girls are. When they get a certain age, they cry over the least little thing. I suppose it frightened the child when Sarah fainted. It scared me, too.

EDITH

(Moving toward the hall)

I'm going to call Dr. Felding right now. I don't like the looks of this.

DANIEL

No, Edith, not Dr. Felding. Sarah wouldn't like that at all. Dr. Bruce has always been our doctor. He always has been and always will be, so if you're determined to call a doctor, call him. But, I really don't think it's necessary. Sarah isn't even pale. In fact, she has a good color.

(Edith leaves the room, going to the hall where she calls the office of Dr. Bruce, telling him to come immediately. Juana enters and whispers to Daniel.)

DANIEL

I'll hurry right in. Goodness!

(He leaves for Sarah's room.)

EDITH (Coming back)

Where did Father go?

JUANA

He went to your mother.

EDITH

I am perfectly capable of taking care of her.

(She starts for the door to Sarah's room.)

JUANA

I think it best that your father look after Senora Hastings.

EDITH

Well!

(Edith is a little afraid of the old Mexican woman. Juana is standing by the door looking like a sentinel. Edith turns toward the table and then walks to the window.)

I wish Dr. Bruce would get here. There's no telling what is wrong with Mother.

JUANA

You called the doctor?

EDITH (Righteously)

Yes, I called Dr. Bruce, and he said he was leaving the office at that moment; so he should be here soon.

(Juana leaves without a word, going into Sarah's room.

Edith turns back to the window and sees Claire coming up the front path. Standing by the window, she is partly hidden from the hallway; so Claire does not see her when she enters. Claire is several years older than Edith,

thinner, and more drawn looking. Her hair is coiled at the nape of her neck. She is still a pretty woman even though she has a very sad look in her eyes.)

EDITH

Well, Claire.

CLAIRE

You startled me. I didn't see you standing there. The sun was rather bright outside, and it's so dark in here---like a tomb.

EDITH

That's a morbid thought, but characteristic. Why did you come over?

CLAIRE

Well, I---is there some reason why I shouldn't?

EDITH

I don't know. Is there? You never do come unless it is absolutely necessary.

CLAIRE

I---I came to borrow some money from Mother.

EDITH

Borrowing money? But, Claire, why would you need to borrow money? Surely, William left you with enough security to last a lifetime.

CLAIRE

It's true I have a monthly check, but I'm not a very good manager; it seems to disappear awfully fast. And then, too, the amount is dependent somewhat on stock interests which vary from month to month.

EDITH

Well, I never would have guessed that you, of all people, needed money.

CLAIRE

I wanted to cash some of the bonds Grandmother Howard left me, but Mother didn't think it wise. That was last month. Where is Mother?

EDITH

She's in bed. Father says she fainted. He 'phoned me just a short while ago and wanted to know what to do. I rushed over, leaving my work at the house, and found that he hadn't even called the doctor. I suppose Juana told him not to. Juana has the superstitious idea that doctors and hospitals are fatal. She doesn't want me in the room with Mother, and it's easier to stay out than to cause a fight with her. I still don't know what's wrong with Mother, but Dr. Bruce should be here soon, providing he doesn't stop a dozen places on the way. I hope he realizes it is important. He talked to me over the 'phone as if I were a child calling for a joke. He never did take my illnesses seriously. If it weren't for Juana's stubbornness I could be there now seeing what could be done. She as much as said she didn't want me with Mother. My own mother, too! Well, don't just stand there, Claire. Sit down. You make me nervous.

CLAIRE

I hope she isn't ill. What will we do if she is?

EDITH

I'm the one who will have to do the worrying; you won't.

CLAIRE

It's just that I don't like to worry, Edith. You know that.

EDITH

After all these years I'm quite aware of it. You always could escape anything. When we were children, if anything went wrong here at home, you and Peggy were far away. But, at least, I've tried to please Mother, which is more than you or Peggy ever cared about.

CLAIRE

I know I have never pleased her. But, did you actually please her, Edith?

EDITH

Of course, I pleased her. Haven't I always---? (The doorbell rings.) That must be Dr. Bruce. I didn't hear him come up on the porch.

(Edith jumps up from the downstage chair in which she has been sitting and goes to the hall. Claire who has been standing facing the fireplace turns around as the doctor enters. Dr. Bruce is a large man with a small grey mustache and with thinning grey hair. He takes no foolishness from his patients. He is not a sugar-pill kind of doctor. Edith opens the door for him.)

Come in, Dr. Bruce. It didn't take you long to get here.

DR. BRUCE

I told you I would be right over. Hello, Claire. Edith, you didn't say what happened to Sarah when you called.

EDITH

(Standing at Sarah's door)

I really don't know, Dr. Bruce. Juana won't let me in Mother's room, and Father can't seem to be coherent about it.

DR. BRUCE

Well, I'll see.

(Dr. Bruce goes into Sarah's room, and Edith, after shutting the door, walks to the downstage table. She turns, looking back at the door.)

EDITH

He can be the most provoking man.

CLAIRE

Why, Edith, I can remember when you thought he was the most wonderful man in the world.

EDITH

We were children then, and I changed my mind long ago. He's an old fool, set in his ways, who won't even try any new methods or medicines.

(The doorbell rings.)

Suppose you get it this time.

(Claire crosses to the hall. She opens the door and several Mexican people appear.)

MEXICAN MAN

We would like to see Senora Hastings, please, Senora.

CLAIRE

Just a moment, I'll see---; (Claire steps into the room.)

Edith, there are some people here to see Mother. What will I say?

EDITH

Tell them she can't see them.

CLAIRE

But they sound so---all right. (She goes back to the door.)

I'm sorry, but she can't see you now.

MEXICAN MAN

May we wait for her then?

CLAIRE

Well, I suppose so. Would you like to come in?

(Three Mexican persons enter.)

MEXICAN MAN

It is all right, Senora. We have been here before. Will Senora Hastings be back soon?

CLAIRE

Edith, explain it to them.

EDITH (Impatiently)

Mrs. Hastings is ill; so you will not be able to see her.

MEXICAN MAN

Who can we talk to if the Senora is sick?

(The Mexicans look at one another.)

EDITH

I would say that it depended on what you wanted to talk to Mrs. Hastings about.

MEXICAN BOY

The river is coming up rapidly and perhaps will flood tonight.

Mrs. Hastings has always helped us.

MEXICAN WOMAN

How long will the Senora be sick?

EDITH

I don't know the answer to that.

MEXICAN BOY

Is Juana here? Perhaps she could help us.

MEXICAN MAN

And now Senora Hastings will not come? Where will we find a place to stay?

CLAIRE

I wouldn't know. Edith, where---?

EDITH

How would I know? (Impatiently) Good heavens! Surely there is someone in this town besides Mother who will help you.

MEXICAN BOY

Perhaps you would call Juana.

CLAIRE

Yes, I'll get her. (She leaves.)

(The Mexicans whisper among themselves. Edith says nothing, but looks on them with dislike. They feel her disdain.)

JUANA (Entering)

What is it you want?

(Claire enters.)

MEXICAN MAN

Juana, the river is flooding. Tonight it will be high. Who will help us if the Senora is sick?

JUANA

It may be that Senora is sleeping as Senor Hastings says, but she can do nothing to help you now. There is nothing I can do.

MEXICAN WOMAN

Where are we to go?

(Claire looks at Edith for an answer.)

EDITH

Why don't you move your belongings out of the houses?

MEXICAN MAN

What would we use to move them in? We have no cars.

EDITH

It floods every year! What have you used before?

MEXICAN BOY

Mrs. Hastings always brought cars and some horses.

EDITH

Where did she get them?

MEXICAN BOY

I do not know.

EDITH

Juana, don't you know?

JUANA

No, I have never asked Senora Hastings.

EDITH

You have been here thirty-five years, Juana, ever since Mother first started waiting on the Mexicans hand and foot, and it seems to me you would know how and what she did for them.

MEXICAN WOMAN

(Breaking the awkward silence)

Senora built a mission church for us.

EDITH

I am aware of that. But the mission isn't helping you to get out of the flood. Why don't you see what you can do by yourselves without Mrs. Hastings' help?

MEXICAN WOMAN

The Lord will help us.

DR. BRUCE (Entering)

Juana, perhaps you should go back to Sarah and wait by her bed. She may need you. Do you understand that you must call immediately if she shows a change?

(Juana nods and leaves the room.)

EDITH

Don't you think I should be the one to stay with her if she needs someone, Dr. Bruce?

DR. BRUCE

In this case Juana will do quite well. It is a matter of watching for a change. You have visitors, I see.

MEXICAN MAN

Dr. Bruce, we have come for Senora Hastings to help us.

DR. BRUCE

Mrs. Hastings cannot help you. I suggest you see what you can do among yourselves. Or, you could talk to Reverend Allen. Perhaps, he could help you.

MEXICAN WOMAN

Is Senora Hastings very sick?

DR. BRUCE

Yes, she is. Now, perhaps you should leave so she will have quietness.

MEXICAN MAN

We are sorry the Senora is sick. Goodbye.

DR. BRUCE

Good night.

MEXICAN BOY

Good night.

(Claire opens the door for them to leave.)

EDITH

Dr. Bruce, is it true that Mother fainted?

DR. BRUCE

Come back into the room, Claire. I want to talk to you. Your father was wrong when he said Sarah had fainted. Your mother had a stroke of a serious nature and may pass on any minute.

EDITH (Sinking into a chair)
Oh, no. That isn't possible. Not Mother.

(She begins to cry.)

CLAIRE
I can't believe that Mother---

DR. BRUCE
Nevertheless, it's true. Edith, I suggest you stop being emotional, and call Peggy immediately.

CLAIRE
But, Father was so sure Mother only fainted.

DR. BRUCE
My dear girls, your mother has had a stroke. She may regain consciousness, and she may not. I have not told your father. That will be your job. However, it might be better if you had Peggy tell him. Now, what I want to know is this. What happened here when Sarah fell? Your father said she was here in the sitting room. Who was with her?

EDITH
Father told me Elizabeth Anne was here, and that she was crying when he came in. Juana called Father.

DR. BRUCE
Where is Elizabeth Anne now?

EDITH
Juana said she was upstairs, and I haven't seen her come down.

CLAIRE
You didn't tell me she was here.

EDITH
I didn't suppose you would be interested. After all, she is only your daughter.

DR. BRUCE

At least, she has a daughter, Edith. But that's another story. For as long as I've known Sarah she has never had any illnesses and has always been perfectly sound in every way. I was surprised to find her as she is now. Well, before I leave I'd better see Elizabeth Anne. She was in to see me several days ago.

CLAIRE

Is something the matter with Elizabeth Anne? She didn't mention it to me.

DR. BRUCE

She didn't? Well, I'll have to hurry. I haven't made my hospital calls yet. (He starts toward the stairway.)

EDITH

Do you expect us to just sit here while Mother is in there dying? Isn't there something you can do?

DR. BRUCE

I've done what I can do, Edith. In this case there isn't much anyone can do. She may die tonight or she may linger for days or even weeks. Possibly she will get up again, but that's a slim chance. Juana could take care of her, but since you don't seem to approve, Edith, I'll send a nurse. Would you approve of that, Claire?

CLAIRE

Anything you say is all right with me, Dr. Bruce. You know that.

DR. BRUCE

Thank you, Claire. I'll send her over tonight. Now, Claire, I suggest you call Peggy immediately.

EDITH

I see no reason to call Peggy. She could do nothing.

DR. BRUCE

Edith---. (He changes his mind about saying anything and gives a shrug.) I believe your mother is dying and Peggy should be here. She would want to be here, and she has a right to be.

EDITH

She doesn't have a right to be. Peggy hasn't been home in two years and then only for a short time. Mother still hasn't forgiven her for leaving the way she did.

CLAIRE

Do you think she would come?

DR. BRUCE

I'm sure she will come. And I'm sure Sarah forgave her long ago for leaving home. It has been a good many years since that happened. Now, I must see Elizabeth Anne. (Crossing to the hall.)

CLAIRE

Should I come too, Dr. Bruce?

DR. BRUCE

No need. You stay down here and call Peg. I'll take care of Elizabeth Anne. (He leaves the room.)

EDITH

First of all, Juana is going to leave. I will not have her telling me what to do or keeping me away from Mother's room.

CLAIRE

Edith, Mother wouldn't like it if you sent Juana away. She would have a fit. I'm surprised at you!

EDITH

Mother won't know the difference. I'll not stay in this house with Juana. She hates me.

CLAIRE

Well, you don't like her. Do you?

EDITH

I detest her and the rest of them, too!

CLAIRE

Why, Edith! You're jealous! Jealous of the Mexicans!

EDITH

Stop, Claire. (Turning away) It has always been their welfare, their mission, their salvation. Look at Juana---she has more influence over Mother than we ever had or ever will have.

(Dr. Bruce comes down the stairs and pauses to say something, but decides not to. He nods to Claire as if to say that Elizabeth Anne is all right. Claire smiles at him, and he leaves.)

What good has Mother's work done? They're still dirty. They still live by the river and have to be evacuated every time it floods. They don't go to church, the church she built for them. What did she ever get out of it?

CLAIRE

What did she want?

(The doorbell rings.)

EDITH

Claire, you're up. See who it is.

CLAIRE

(She has been standing at the window.)
It is Spencer Allen. I saw him come up the path. I'll just leave out the back door, Edith, and you can talk to him.

EDITH

You'll do nothing of the kind. Why can't you stay? You don't like him, do you, Claire?

(The doorbell rings again.)

CLAIRE

You'd better let him in.

EDITH

Don't you dare leave. He probably saw you looking out the window, and he'll ask me where you went. He always wants to know where or how you are, and I'm tired of lying to him.

(Edith goes to the door.)

REVEREND ALLEN

(Entering)

Well, Edith, I hurried right over. I passed Dr. Bruce out in the street, and he said Sarah was quite ill.

EDITH

Come in and sit down, Mr. Allen. (They enter.) Here's Claire.

REVEREND ALLEN

This is a pleasant surprise. I haven't seen you in a long time, Claire.

CLAIRE

Yes, I know.

EDITH

I didn't hear Dr. Bruce leave. Did you, Claire?

CLAIRE

Yes, I saw him, but he didn't say anything since you were talking. He came downstairs while you were raving about the Mexicans.

EDITH

It seems to me he could have said something. Not even a goodbye.

CLAIRE

I should go upstairs to see if Elizabeth Anne is all right.

(She starts toward the hall.)

EDITH

Claire, have you forgotten we have a guest! If Elizabeth Anne weren't all right, Dr. Bruce would have said so. She is probably sleeping now, and you would only waken her. You see Reverend Allen so seldom it seems to me you could sit and talk for a little while.

REVEREND ALLEN

Tell me, Edith. I'm quite anxious to know about Sarah. Dr. Bruce was in his car so he didn't have time to say much, only that Sarah had a stroke and was pretty low. I couldn't believe it!

EDITH

I'm afraid it's true. It happened this afternoon. I was home working on the plans for our luncheon for Thursday when Father called. He sounded so frantic that I dropped everything and hurried right over. He always calls me when something goes wrong, and, of course, I'm only too glad to help. I got here and found that Juana and Father had taken Mother into the downstairs bedroom. Elizabeth Anne had been here when she fell and was upstairs crying, or so Juana said. Then, Dr. Bruce came and said that she might live days or even weeks or might pass on tonight. It's so pathetic!

REVEREND ALLEN

Sarah and I had many disagreements during my years here, but the Lord knows she has been unselfish in giving her life for

others, more unselfish than I.

EDITH

Now, Mr. Allen, I wouldn't say---.

REVEREND ALLEN

(Interrupting)

Yes, it's true. As I was walking this afternoon this thought was the furthest thing from my mind. And then I ran into the Doctor. It suddenly occurred to me that there were many things I should say to Sarah Hastings that I had never said. And now I'm afraid it's too late. I realized then that I've stood against Sarah many times through the years. But, I thought I had good reasons. She used means to accomplish her purpose in helping those Mexicans that I thought were undignified. But, I suppose the real reason I objected was that people gave her money for the mission and the Mexicans, and I thought such contributions should be spread over several of our church projects.

EDITH

Surely, Mr. Allen---.

REVEREND ALLEN

(Interrupting)

Now, let me finish. This is a sort of confession for me. I've been a proud man, and if I'd had time to think this over before I came here, I'd never have said such a thing. Sarah wasn't proud; so she outdid me there. Maybe I was jealous. Well, all along I was thinking of the reputation of the church when Sarah asked people for things for the Mexicans and for the mission church. But, she was right, and I was wrong. Sarah put her

work for the Lord first and foremost. Nothing interfered, not even myself, and I confess I tried. Sarah gave up her pride for the work of the Lord. She was a good woman.

EDITH

That is kind of you to say, Reverend Allen. I'm sure she would like to hear you say it.

REVEREND ALLEN

No, it wouldn't matter to Sarah. She never did care what I thought nor what I said as long as she was doing her work converting those Mexicans who had long ago lost their old religion. After knowing Sarah, I've come to the conclusion that one has to forget and forsake everything if one is to live for a purpose, or an ideal. So many things call us away from our true purpose in life. But that was not so with Sarah. Nothing---and with opposition of all kinds---nothing kept her from her purpose. It's really almost miraculous! She let nothing interfere with her work.

CLAIRE

Not even her children.

REVEREND ALLEN

What's that? Oh, well, I have been wrong to think only of my dignity and reputation. False pride, that's what it is. You were right, Claire, very right. Remember?

EDITH

Claire? What has she to do with it?

CLAIRE

(Crossing quickly to the downleft door)

Edith, I'm going to call Peggy and tell her to come at once.

I'll use the phone in the back hall.

EDITH

Claire, you are as silly as Dr. Bruce. Why should Peggy come?

CLAIRE

I've been thinking about it since Dr. Bruce left. Peggy should come. She'll keep things straightened out. We can't. Father isn't capable of taking any responsibility. You will assume all authority, make Juana leave, and a few things like that. Then, we will really be in a predicament. I can't seem to get hold of anything anymore. So, I'm calling Peggy. She could be here within three or four hours if she came by plane.

(She leaves the room.)

EDITH

I don't know when I've seen Claire so determined about anything.

REVEREND ALLEN

Is Claire well?

EDITH

Claire? You never know about Claire. But I wish she would forget about calling Peggy.

REVEREND ALLEN

We must not harbor old grudges. What has happened in the past has long gone by. The ways of the Lord are strange. Look at Sarah---struck down like lightning. And she has long been one of His greatest champions. Well---(A moment of silence) I was out at our little college this morning, and several people asked me where Sarah had been lately. She was absent from the directors meeting last week for the first time. I inquired about that Alvarez boy to see that he isn't wasting her money. He is the one Sarah is sending through college, and she is evidently right about him.

EDITH

It's getting dark outside. I hope it isn't going to rain.

This was the first day in weeks that the sun came out for any length of time.

REVEREND ALLEN

(Going to the window)

It is grey, and it was sunny only a short time ago.

EDITH

I wanted it to be nice tomorrow since George said he would send the painters out to start on the roof. These old houses on Oak Street are falling apart. I've been thinking of taking the money Grandmother Howard left me and starting a new home, a small modern place. But, I suppose George would object.

REVEREND ALLEN

These are grand old houses, all five of them. This one of the Hastings's, your husband's, Grandmother Howard's that Claire lives in, Dr. Bruce's and the Hadley's. When I first came to Franklin, I wondered which had been here on Oak Street first, the oak trees or these five old homes. And I wondered about the people who lived in them. That was a good many years ago. Claire's husband had just passed away, and she was expecting a child. How well I remember.....

EDITH

I hope it doesn't rain. With the river flooding it makes such a mess.

REVEREND ALLEN

I can never think of a flood without thinking of your mother and her favorite hymn.

EDITH

I didn't know she had a favorite.

REVEREND ALLEN

Oh, yes, she had a favorite. I remember asking her once the name of her favorite hymn, and she told me it was "Gather at the River."

EDITH

That's strange.

REVEREND ALLEN

No, it isn't strange at all. I thought so too at the time; so I asked her why she chose that one. Can you guess why?

EDITH

I suppose it has something to do with the floods.

REVEREND ALLEN

It started many years ago when Sarah decided someone had to convert those Mexicans who lived along the river, and to help them during flood time. With an average of one or two floods a year, that adds up to quite a few gatherings at the river. It was the river that really started her on her crusade for the Mexicans.

(Elizabeth Anne comes down the stairs and stands listening in the hall.)

EDITH

I hope they appreciate all she's done for them, but I wonder sometimes. They still live in filth. They don't go to school, not to speak of church. They're ignorant and all that goes with it. What has Mother accomplished?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Aunt Edith, how can you be so stupid and selfish? When you say

things like that, I hate you. I hate you! I hate you!

(She runs out slamming the front door.)

REVEREND ALLEN

(Breaking the silence)

She's running down the path toward the street. Now, Edith, don't be upset over what the child said. I imagine she was still suffering from the shock of seeing Sarah fall. It would be an awful shock, you know.

CLAIRE (Entering)

Who was that? I thought I heard the door slam.

EDITH

It was your daughter, your darling daughter.

CLAIRE

How odd---

DANIEL (Entering)

What is going on in here? Oh, Spencer Allen, I didn't know you were here. Was it you who came in just now?

EDITH

No, it was Elizabeth Anne going out.

DANIEL

Well, I wondered. Reverend Allen, it's nice to see you. But, I must get back to Sarah.

REVEREND ALLEN

Daniel, I was telling the girls what a wonderful woman their mother is. That mission she built is a true monument of a woman's life spent in working toward an ideal. I'll never be able to understand where she got the money to build it. I have a hard enough time. Not that people aren't generous, but---. Well, Sarah and the Lord built that mission stone on

stone. It is like the story of Solomon in the Old Testament. "And, behold, I purpose to build an house unto the name of the Lord my God, as the Lord spake unto David my father, saying, Thy son, whom I will set upon thy throne in thy room, he shall build an house unto my name. My servants shall bring timber of fir down from Lebanon unto the sea; and I will convey them by sea in floats unto the place that thou shalt appoint me, and will cause them to be discharged there, and thou shalt receive them: and thou shalt accomplish my desire, in giving food for my household." When Sarah told me she was going to build a mission, (she didn't ask me; she told me) I didn't think she would get very far. And when I heard that old man Oliver up the river was cutting trees on his place for lumber for the mission, it was a real jolt. I couldn't imagine that old miser giving anything to anybody, not even the Lord. How Sarah talked him into it I'll never know.

DANIEL (Chuckling)

He was sweet on Sarah when we were young.

REVEREND ALLEN

You don't say. Old man Oliver? Well, well. I shall never forget that day I was out walking and passed over the bridge in town and here came a mass of logs down the river---floating down the river. They got them out at the lumber mill and before I knew what was happening, Sarah had the framework for her building. After that, I passed by the building every day when out for my daily walk just to see how it was progressing.

She couldn't afford skilled labor, and those Mexicans did make some amusing mistakes. I'll never forget the time I passed by and saw Sarah giving one of the workers the very devil for something he had done wrong. She made him do it all over again.
(Laughing)

EDITH

You'll have to admit it's an attractive little church, Reverend Allen. The stone has turned such a nice color.

REVEREND ALLEN

"And the king commanded, and they brought great stones, costly stones, and hewed stones, to lay the foundation of the house. And Solomon's builders and Hiram's builders did hew them, and the stone quarters so they prepared timber and stones to build the house." Yes, Sarah's church is something to be proud of.

DANIEL

Well, you girls were the main contributors. Mother couldn't have done it without your help.

CLAIRE

You're wrong, Father. I didn't give her a cent.

EDITH

I didn't give very much.

DANIEL

Yes, I know that. And since you didn't give it to her, she took it.

EDITH

She what?

DANIEL

Yes, that's right. She took the money Grandmother Howard left to you three girls. She took the bonds out of the bank and used

the money for the mission.

EDITH

She couldn't. She wouldn't do a thing like that. Part of that money was mine.

CLAIRE (Laughing)

Sarah and the Lord cashed in our bonds, robbed us, and hewed stone for the Mexican mission.

(CURTAIN)

ACT II

It is 9:30 the same evening as the clock on the mantle chimes the half hour. Inside the house, it is very quiet, but outside, the old oaks whistle in the spring rain. The lamp on the downleft table is lighted and casts an eery light about the room.

In the chair by the fireplace a very tired old man, Daniel, dozes with his feet on the footstool. His sleep is a restless one. The front door opens, and Elizabeth Anne, wearing a raincoat, enters. She is a slim girl with a lovely soft face. She has light brown hair pulled back from her forehead and falling to her shoulders. It is rather straight hair.

Elizabeth Anne shuts the door quietly, hanging her raincoat on the rack at the side of the mirror. She turns, coming hesitantly into the room. Elizabeth Anne sees her grandfather by the fireplace and sits down on the settee across from him. As she watches him intently, he wakes with a start.

DANIEL

Peggy, when did you get here?

ELIZABETH ANNE

(Putting her hand on his shoulder)

It's me, Elizabeth Anne. I'm sorry I startled you. You were sleeping.

DANIEL

Yes, yes. I didn't intend to go to sleep, just to sit here and

rest for a few minutes. I dreamed Peggy was here---right here with me now. Yes, yes. (Getting up from the chair) I must go to Sarah now. Is Edith still with her?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Sit back down, Grandfather. You've been with Grandmother all afternoon and all evening. Aunt Edith will look after her. Please, dear. There. (Pause) Grandfather, could I see Grandmother? I came over especially for that purpose.

DANIEL

Didn't your mother tell you that Sarah was still in bed?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Yes, but I thought she might feel like talking now. (She goes to Daniel's side.) Grandfather, there's something I should like to talk to Grandmother about---something awfully important.

DANIEL

Well, now, dear, Sarah is still asleep, but I'm sure you could talk with her tomorrow morning.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Do you think she will be all right tomorrow?

DANIEL

I'm positive, Elizabeth Anne. It wouldn't surprise me at all. In fact, I'm expecting it. You aren't worried, are you? You must not worry. Don't you think your old grandfather would know if his wife of forty-five years was very sick?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Of course, you know, Grandfather. I shouldn't have been afraid. It's just that I had something to tell her, and I guess I thought maybe---. Oh, I don't know. It will be all right.

DANIEL

Edith and Claire had no right to upset you with all that--- calling Peggy and the doctor. It isn't that I'm not glad Peggy is coming, but you would think something horrible had happened, and, the truth is, nothing is really wrong. Sarah is sleeping.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Yes, Grandfather. I'm sure you are right. Are you cold? Would you like me to light a fire?

DANIEL

That would be nice. It is chilly in here. Do you feel a draft?

ELIZABETH ANNE

(Stirring the fire)

It won't be long before we have a cozy fire---just the two of us. It will be nice and warm when Aunt Peggy gets here. Mother said she would be here about ten o'clock. Won't it be nice to have her here again? How long has it been since we last saw her?

DANIEL

Let me think---Peggy was here for my birthday two years ago, but she stayed only three days. Remember? The children were here, too. It's a long distance to come for a short visit.

ELIZABETH ANNE (Laughing)

I guess I'm jealous. When Aunt Peggy's here, I'm not your favorite, not by a long shot. But, I don't really mind. She's rather nice.

DANIEL

Yes, yes. You're a great deal like your Aunt Peggy---a great

deal. When she was your age, she had an inquisitive look in her grey eyes, too.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Do you ever get used to a person being gone, Grandfather?

DANIEL

I don't like being used to it. Not one bit. But Peggy is happy where she is---really happy, which is a lot more than her sisters are. I wonder sometimes, Elizabeth Anne, if you're happy.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Grandfather! Why wouldn't I be happy?

DANIEL

You look so peaked at times, and you're very quiet---just as Peggy used to be. You don't talk very much, Elizabeth Anne.

ELIZABETH ANNE (Laughing)

I guess I'm naturally not very talkative. Besides, at home Mother generally has little to say. She doesn't say much about anything.

DANIEL

It's been lonely for you in that house, hasn't it?

ELIZABETH ANNE

It used to be awfully lonely and quiet, but now that I'm older, I'm not home very much, so it doesn't matter.

DANIEL (Thoughtfully)

Yes, yes.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Here we sit waiting---. It is difficult to wait, isn't it, Grandfather?

DANIEL (Absentmindedly)

Wait? Oh, yes, yes. It's hard to wait.

ELIZABETH ANNE

(Picking up a picture from the table)

I've never seen this picture before. Where did it come from?

DANIEL

That picture was in my desk drawer. I came across it yesterday and brought it home from the office. (Going to sit beside Elizabeth Anne on the settee) Here is your grandmother. Would you recognize her?

ELIZABETH ANNE

She's by far the prettiest. Who are these other girls? Do you remember?

DANIEL

Of course, I remember. I can tell you the name of every one of them. This is Alice O'Neill. She was crippled, but had lovely blonde hair. Here is Agnes Crane, Julia Keith, Mable Wallace, and Sarah. This picture was taken the day we graduated from high school. Sarah and her girl friends had it made in their white graduation dresses. They called in a photographer from out of town to make the picture, and they ordered just five, one apiece. I had to marry Sarah to get this one. Yes, yes.

(He chuckles. Edith enters.)

Oh, Edith, is Mother still asleep?

EDITH

She is still unconscious if that's what you mean. Your hair is wet, Elizabeth Anne.

ELIZABETH ANNE

It's raining out.

EDITH

Where is your mother?

ELIZABETH ANNE

(Going to the window)

She went home for a minute.

EDITH

This is one time we need her, but of course she isn't here. There's always some reason for her to run home. What is it this time?

(Edith moves to the downstage area sitting in a chair by the table.)

ELIZABETH ANNE

Mother has a headache.

EDITH

Well, if it wasn't that, it would be something else.

DANIEL

(Getting up from the chair)

I hate to leave the fire, but I must be going.

EDITH

Going? Where are you going?

DANIEL

I'm going to get the car out of the garage and go to the air-field after Peggy.

(He starts for the kitchen door.)

EDITH

You'll do nothing of the kind. It's raining out, and with the slippery streets, you'd have an accident before you got there.

DANIEL

Edith, I've been driving for a good many years, and I've never had an accident.

EDITH

But, you aren't getting any younger, Father.

DANIEL

That has nothing to do with it---not a thing. I'm as steady at the wheel as I was twenty years ago.

EDITH

If Mother were in here, she wouldn't let you go out on a night like this.

DANIEL

But, Sarah isn't here and she doesn't know what I'm doing, so I'll do as I please.

(The doorbell rings.)

ELIZABETH ANNE

Let me see who is here before you leave, Grandfather. It might be Aunt Peggy.

(Elizabeth Anne goes to the hall from her place at the window. Edith is standing at the fireplace, and Daniel is near the door to the kitchen. Elizabeth Anne opens the door, and a woman in her latter thirties enters. Peggy has "found herself" and, as Daniel so aptly said, "Peggy is happy.")

It is! It's Aunt Peggy. (Elizabeth Anne throws her arms around Peggy.)

DANIEL

(Hurrying to the hall)

Gracious, Peggy, I was on my way to get you. (Kissing her warmly) Where's your luggage? Here, put it down.

(Elizabeth Anne has gone into the living room while Daniel and Peggy stand in the hall.)

PEGGY (Laughing)

Oh, it's good to see you, Papa. You're looking hale and hearty. And Elizabeth Anne is growing like a weed.

(They go into the sitting room with their arms around each other.)

Edith, I didn't see you. (Going to Edith) Well---. Aren't you glad to see me?

EDITH (Kissing Peggy)

Of course, I am, Peggy. It's just that since Mother is ill, I---.

PEGGY

I understand, Edith. Tell me, what's wrong with Mother?

EDITH

We'll talk about that later, but first take off your coat and hat. Here, Elizabeth Anne, take Peggy's things to the hall.

DANIEL

Peggy, I was going to drive down for you. Didn't your plane come in early?

PEGGY

No, I don't think so. We were due here at 9:30.

DANIEL

But, Claire said 10:00.

EDITH

Father, you should have called to find out. Claire never gets anything straight. You know that.

PEGGY

It doesn't matter. I'm here, and that's what's important.

DANIEL

I didn't want you to take a taxi out here by yourself. It isn't a very pleasant way to arrive home---no one to meet you at the airport.

PEGGY

I didn't mind, really, Papa. I just came eight hundred miles by myself, so, you see, I'm a big girl now. Where is Claire?

ELIZABETH ANNE

She's at home. Mother has a headache, but she said she would be over at ten to see you.

EDITH (Laughing)

That's Claire for you. Come, Peggy, sit here beside me.

Doesn't she look healthy? But, then, you always do. I only wish I had your health and your luck, too. Some of Mike's luck of the Irish must have rubbed off on you.

DANIEL

How are Mike and the children?

PEGGY

They're well, and they send their love. The children wanted to come so badly, but I thought, under the circumstances, it would be best if they stayed home this time. I'm anxious to know about Mother. Claire was so indefinite over the telephone. She said Dr. Bruce wanted me to come home this evening as Mother was quite ill. I told her I would catch the plane at 6:30, and that seemed to satisfy her.

EDITH

There's very little to tell, but I'll tell you what I know. Father, why don't you see if Juana has Mother ready for the night. She was making the bed when I left. Peggy will want to see Mother as soon as she can.

DANIEL

Yes, yes. I shouldn't have been away so long. Peggy, you rest here by the fireplace. I'll put another log on, there,

and I'll come back for you in a few minutes. (He leaves.)

EDITH

I'm glad you came, Peggy. Now, Claire and Father will realize that Mother is really ill. Peggy, Dr. Bruce said right here that Mother may die any minute, and Claire doesn't realize it yet. Father persists in thinking that Mother is merely sleeping. Yes, he thinks she is asleep and will wake any minute. Mother is dying, our own mother, and nobody can grasp the idea except myself.

PEGGY

It's a little hard for me to get used to the idea, too. I thought about it all the way home. It seems almost impossible that Mother could ever leave this world. But, Edith, don't be too hard on Papa. He can't accept the idea that she is dying because she is his whole world. She has run his life as completely as she has run Claire's. He would be lost without her.

EDITH

It's horrible. I can hardly bear to think about it, and, yet, I know I must.

PEGGY

I still don't know what actually happened.

EDITH

Dr. Bruce said that Mother had a stroke this afternoon, and he went on to say that she might live a few hours, days, or perhaps weeks. He didn't know. He scared me to death when he insisted we call you. Of course, he didn't prepare me for the news---just blurted it out.

ELIZABETH ANNE

I think I'll go after Mother. She said she wanted to be here when Peggy came, and she'll be disappointed. It's just across the street.

(Elizabeth Anne leaves the table in the downstage left area where she has been looking at a picture album and goes into the hall.)

PEGGY

Be sure to put your raincoat on, dear. It is still raining.

ELIZABETH ANNE

I will. (She leaves.)

EDITH

It's such a shame about Elizabeth Anne.

PEGGY

Shame? What is a shame? (She lights a cigarette.)

EDITH

It's just that Elizabeth Anne hasn't had any upbringing--- none whatsoever. Claire has shut herself up in that old house and rarely comes out. People talk about her, you know, and I can't say I blame them. She does act rather peculiarly. She never knows where Elizabeth Anne is, nor what time she gets home. And she doesn't seem to worry about the child at all. You would think Elizabeth Anne didn't even belong to her the way she acts.

PEGGY

I'm sure Claire loves Elizabeth Anne a great deal.

EDITH

She may love her, but to my way of thinking, that isn't enough. She lets Elizabeth Anne run wild, and she is eighteen, not a child any more.

PEGGY

Remember, Edith, one reason Claire lets Elizabeth Anne do as she wishes is because as a child Claire didn't have a thought of her own and didn't get to do a thing she wanted to.

EDITH

Oh, Peggy, it wasn't that bad. And, besides, that's all over and done with.

PEGGY

Childhood feelings aren't over and done with that easily, Edith. I remember how I felt when I had to leave a party in order to be home at 9:00. That was when I was in high school, and the other girls didn't have to go home until just before the curfew. And I didn't get to dance while the others did, nor did I have a feather or a plume on my straw hat like the other girls. I'm not rearing my children that way, Edith.

EDITH

Well, it seems to me as if Claire's method or lack of method in rearing Elizabeth Anne is doing more harm than good. I worry more about the child than her own mother does.

PEGGY

I think you're worrying needlessly, Edith. Let's get back to what Dr. Bruce said about Mother.

EDITH

There isn't any more to tell. Mother had a stroke and may die any minute. I'm almost crazy with worry since I'm the one who always bears the brunt of anything that happens. You are too far away to know what goes on, and Claire has escaped completely by being in a daze all the time. Elizabeth Anne is too young

to understand the situation, and Father is too old. Mother and Father have been a constant worry and care for the past few years.

PEGGY

I don't understand why they should be. They have Juana here with them.

EDITH

Juana isn't much help any more. After all, she's been here in the house for almost forty years. No, I've always been the one to take all the blows. Even as children Mother took it all out on me. Claire was off in some corner with her nose in a book and you were in the back of the garden up in the cherry tree. Claire had her books, you had a cherry tree, and Papa had his headaches. But for me, there was no place to go and there still isn't. I have been the one to do as Mother wanted.

PEGGY

Edith, you enjoy it or you wouldn't do it. Getting Mother's attention was always your chief ambition. Even as a child you told on Claire and me if you could get attention that way.

EDITH

Well, I've always tried to please Mother, if that's what you mean. And that is a lot more than you or Claire did. You eloped, and Claire left home.

PEGGY

That happened long ago, and is water under the bridge now.

EDITH

Things like that can't be forgotten easily. What do you think

people said when you ran off the way you did?

PEGGY

I know only too well what people said. But, what else could I do? I was in love with Mike, and Mother would never, never have approved, so I did the only thing I knew to do. We left and got married. I should like to have been married as you were in a white gown with bridesmaids and all that, but in my case it was impossible.

EDITH

Well, it just about broke Mother's heart.

PEGGY (Impatiently)

Oh, Edith, it might have hurt her pride, but it didn't break her heart. Nothing could really hurt her.

EDITH

Peggy, I don't think that was a very nice thing to say.

PEGGY

Well, it's true, and you know it. What did you ever get out of all the years trying to please her? You certainly didn't get very much affection. The Mexicans got a hell of a lot more than we ever did, but, then, she was saving their souls. Now that she is sick and flat on her back you can wait on her hand and foot and feel as if you are doing the daughterly thing.

ELIZABETH ANNE

I---(out of breath) I couldn't find Mother. I guess she left to go after you, Aunt Peggy. Oh, I'm out of breath. I ran.

EDITH

Well, there is no telling where she is now.

PEGGY

Do you feel all right, Elizabeth Anne?

ELIZABETH ANNE

No, I feel funny. I think I'll go upstairs and lie down for a little while.

PEGGY

Do you want me to go with you?

ELIZABETH ANNE

No. I'll be all right. (She leaves.)

PEGGY

The child looked as pale as a ghost.

DANIEL (Entering)

Peggy, I thought you might like to see Mother. Juana has her ready for the night, and said you could come in.

EDITH

Good, we'll both come.

DANIEL

Oh, I don't know, Edith, Juana didn't say anything about you.

EDITH

Good heavens, she is my mother, and I'll see her if I wish. Juana thinks she owns this house and everyone in it, but she isn't going to tell me what I can do.

(She passes in front of Daniel and Peggy.)

DANIEL

Edith gets upset so easily.

(They leave.)

(Claire comes in the front door. She puts her umbrella in the stand by the door, takes off her coat, hanging it on the rack and comes down into the sitting room. Claire has been drinking more than usual. When Claire drinks, she

becomes sentimental about the past. Claire looks about and then sits down at the piano and plays softly. There is a ring at the door, and although she hears it, she continues to play. The bell rings again and she stops the music, going to the door. The Reverend J. Spencer Allen enters.)

CLAIRE

Oh, Mr. Allen!

REVEREND ALLEN

If I may come in, please.

CLAIRE

Yes, do come in.

REVEREND ALLEN

Thank you. (He realizes she has been drinking.) I'll just put my umbrella in the stand.

CLAIRE

And your coat on the rack?

REVEREND ALLEN

Thank you. (Claire stands looking at him as he takes off his coat.) There.

CLAIRE

Would you like to sit down?

REVEREND ALLEN

It was good seeing you again this afternoon. It had been a long time, Claire, a long time. But, I came over here for a reason.

CLAIRE

Why don't you sit by the fire? It's chilly in the room.

REVEREND ALLEN

Thank you. Aren't you going to sit down, too?

CLAIRE

No. I'll just stand here by the window. I like to watch the rain. It's so peaceful---rather like death. Don't you think so?

REVEREND ALLEN

I wish it would stop raining. The more it rains, the higher the river gets. And that's what I came to talk about. Is Edith here?

CLAIRE

I suppose she and Peggy are with Mother. I took the car to the airport, but I missed her. Mr. Henry said she left in a taxi.

REVEREND ALLEN

Well, then, I'll tell you why I came. The river is flooding.

CLAIRE

Yes, I know. It was announced over the radio.

REVEREND ALLEN

And you know what it means when the river starts flooding.

CLAIRE

No, what does it mean?

REVEREND ALLEN (Laughing)

Surely, after all these years you know that the Mexicans have to move out from their homes.

CLAIRE

Oh, yes, the Mexicans. Mother's Mexicans.

REVEREND ALLEN

Precisely! Your mother has always been the one to help out there, and now your mother isn't able to do it. That's why I'm here. I don't know what to do. How did she get them out, and where did she put them after she got them out? The Mexicans can't seem to understand that she won't be there to help

them. They are sitting in their houses waiting for her to come. I'm getting the church deacons together and we're going down to the river to see what we can do. It's going to be bad this time and the river will be high. If those stubborn Mexicans don't get out, they will go down the river like chickens. How did Sarah manage them? And too, the mission might get it this time. I wonder about putting everything upstairs. Is there much on the first floor that might get ruined?

CLAIRE

You're a minister; haven't you been in the church? It is of your denomination.

REVEREND ALLEN

No. No, I haven't. I'm sorry to say it, but I have never been in Sarah's mission.

CLAIRE

Why, shame on you, Mr. Allen. You don't go to their church, and I don't go to yours. You condemned me for it, remember?

REVEREND ALLEN

Claire, as I've grown older, I know now I was wrong, but I could never admit it to you. Things might have been different between us if I hadn't been such a pompous---

CLAIRE (Interrupting)

I shouldn't have called you that.

REVEREND ALLEN

You were right. I was just that, a pompous---

CLAIRE (Interrupting)

Please, let's not discuss it. That was many years ago. Perhaps we both made a mistake. (Changing the subject) You said you came over with a purpose in mind.

REVEREND ALLEN

Yes. What I want to know is this. I am trying to find places for the Mexicans to go until the flood is over and I was wondering if I could send old Mr. and Mrs. Pacheko here. I know it is an imposition since Sarah is ill, but in trying to place these people I can't find enough homes. In fact, I don't know who will take them in.

CLAIRE

Don't you have a church full of good Christians?

REVEREND ALLEN

They're good people, Claire, but---

CLAIRE

What do you have to worry about then?

REVEREND ALLEN

You know very well without my saying.

CLAIRE

Well, if you wouldn't mind sending a few to a heathen's home, you may send some to my place. I have three empty bedrooms. You can fill them with as many people as you wish.

REVEREND ALLEN

Now, Claire, this is good of you.

CLAIRE

I'm not doing it for the good of my soul, so it may not be so good of me as you think.

REVEREND ALLEN

What about the Pacheko's?

CLAIRE

I'm sure Mother would want them to come here. There's room for them.

REVEREND ALLEN

Good. That was my first worry. God will reward you for this, Claire.

CLAIRE

Don't worry about that. I won't.

REVEREND ALLEN

(Starting for the door)

Now to begin work!

CLAIRE

Haven't you forgotten something?

REVEREND ALLEN

Forgotten something? No, I don't think so. I thought perhaps Sarah would take in several Mexican people, and then you were charitable enough to take a few more.

CLAIRE

No, I wasn't charitable. I just feel sorry for them. But you did forget something, rather someone. Edith.

REVEREND ALLEN

Edith?

CLAIRE

Yes. Being a good Christian, attending Sunday school and church every Sunday ought to make Edith a rather good Christian. I'm wondering if you are going to ask her to take some guests.

REVEREND ALLEN

Well, I---.

CLAIRE

Edith has four empty bedrooms. And if you could persuade her to be Christian enough to sleep with George, she would have five. You could put quite a few Mexicans into five bedrooms--- or four.

REVEREND ALLEN (Hesitantly)

Well, if you think she wouldn't mind. However, since she isn't here I---.

CLAIRE (Interrupting)

I'll tell her you are sending some people over for her to take care of. Since it is you who are sending them, she'll think nothing of it.

REVEREND ALLEN

Are you sure it will be all right, Claire?

CLAIRE

Of course, it will be all right. Edith's a good Christian woman. I'll tell her about it.

REVEREND ALLEN

Well, this is fine. These big old houses are good for something after all, aren't they?

CLAIRE

You mean, you have been wondering?

REVEREND ALLEN (Laughing)

Yes, I have, for many years. Well, I must get my coat on.

How is Sarah, by the way?

CLAIRE

I don't know.

REVEREND ALLEN

Oh? Well, I'll send Mr. and Mrs. Pacheko tonight, and in the meantime I'll find someplace else for them to go tomorrow. Since Sarah is ill I know it would be a hardship to keep them here.

CLAIRE

All right.

REVEREND ALLEN

(Opening the door)

You're sure Edith won't mind?

CLAIRE

How could you doubt it?

REVEREND ALLEN

Here is someone coming up the steps. Why, Miss Gibbings---

(Turning to Claire) Were you expecting Miss Gibbings, Claire?

CLAIRE

Miss Gibbings? Oh, yes, the nurse. Have her come in.

GRACE GIBBINGS (Entering)

Hello, Mr. Allen---and Claire. It has been a long time since I last saw you.

CLAIRE

It has been. Dr. Bruce didn't say whom he was sending, but this is a nice surprise. I thought you had left Franklin, Grace.

GRACE GIBBINGS

I did leave, but I came back two months ago.

REVEREND ALLEN

I must be going. Goodnight. Goodnight, Claire.

CLAIRE

Goodnight, Spencer. (Claire turns to Miss Gibbings) Come, Grace, let's sit down. Oh, your coat. Here, let me help you.

GRACE GIBBINGS

Thank you, Claire. (Claire hangs the coat on the rack.) I always liked this room. I was here, you remember, when your father was ill and then again with Edith.

CLAIRE

With Edith? When?

GRACE GIBBINGS

Don't you remember? It was during the winter of 1930. I recall

the year quite well because of the influenza epidemic. Poor Edith. She was so sick, but it was her own fault. She should never have had such a thing done and especially not by that quack doctor. Of course, she didn't tell Dr. Bruce until she was very, very sick. She was here at your mother's because she didn't want George to know. Do you remember now?

CLAIRE

No, I guess it happened the year before Elizabeth Anne was born. William and I spent that winter in Florida. He had been ill with influenza.

GRACE GIBBINGS

Perhaps I shouldn't have mentioned it. I certainly wouldn't say anything to anybody about it, but I supposed you, being her sister, knew.

CLAIRE

That is all right, Grace. It is just that I'm a little surprised.

GRACE GIBBINGS

It's nice seeing you again, Claire. I haven't seen your little girl since she was in grade school.

CLAIRE

It has been a long time. She's eighteen now.

GRACE GIBBINGS

Gracious, they do grow up, don't they? She was one of the prettiest babies I've ever taken care of. If you recall, we didn't have a hospital here when she was born. Well, I should go upstairs and unpack my bag. I'll want to be with your mother as soon as possible.

CLAIRE

Yes, of course. Go on upstairs. The front bedroom is always empty.

GRACE GIBBINGS

Yes, I remember my way around, so don't get up. It shouldn't take me very long.

(She leaves. Claire walks to the window as Peggy and Edith enter.)

PEGGY

Claire! Darling Dolly. Remember?

CLAIRE

You sweet thing, Peggy. It's been so long since anyone called me Dolly. I thought everyone had forgotten. I'll confess, I always liked being called that. It sounds nice, don't you think? It never did fit me, though.

PEGGY

But, it did fit you. At least, I think it did. Now, I never did have a nickname like that, and Edith was always just Edith. But you were Dolly. (Picking up one of Claire's hands) Claire, your hands are like ice. Come, let's go to the fireplace. Edith, move over so Claire can sit by the fire. I'll sit over here. (Sitting in the chair across from the settee) When was the last time we three sat here together?

EDITH

I remember very well. It was one September, and it was raining like tonight. Don't you remember, Peggy?

PEGGY

No, I---

EDITH (Interrupting)

Claire remembers. Don't you, Claire? The only difference was that Mother was sitting over in that chair by the table where she always sat. Do you remember now, Peggy?

PEGGY

Let's talk about something else.

EDITH

Why? You know, we've never really talked about this. Claire's hair was wet that evening. Wasn't it, Claire? And her cheeks were rosy. She had been running. I remember, quite well. After dinner that evening, Claire went upstairs to our room. We shared a room in those days. Mother was in the kitchen helping Juana, so she didn't know what was going on, but I did. Claire was packing a bag to leave. Not only that, she was leaving with a man. (Claire gets up with her back to Edith and faces the fire.) Mother went after you in the car. It must have been embarrassing when she caught you, Claire.

CLAIRE

(Turning to face Edith)

I never did know how she found out. I didn't know you knew. You told her.

EDITH

Of course, Claire. You can be slow in discovering things. At least, you didn't ruin your life. You should be glad I told her.

CLAIRE

Glad? It was the one time in my life I had guts enough to leave, and you ruined it.

EDITH

Well, you ended up in a respectable marriage with William.

CLAIRE

A respectable life with William! William wasn't the one I was leaving with. Remember? Respectability means a lot to you, doesn't it, Edith?

EDITH

You know it does.

CLAIRE

I'm going to get even with you, Edith. It is mean and low, but I'm going to do it.

EDITH

Really, Claire, don't act like a child.

PEGGY

Claire, perhaps you shouldn't---.

CLAIRE (Interrupting)

Even Peggy knows what I'm going to say, but you don't, Edith. I may be slow in finding out what is going on, but you are, too, my dear sister. What do you think I do all day in that crumbling old house? You have often wondered because you have asked me. I drink. Yes, I drink---liquor, not grapejuice.

EDITH

You're lying!

CLAIRE

I'm surprised you didn't know, Edith, since everyone else in town does. Don't look so shocked! They know all right. All of your holy church-going friends know that your sister, Claire, drinks. Spencer Allen knows it---they all do. So, I have had a respectable life with William.

EDITH

I don't believe it.

CLAIRE

Come close to me, darling, and you will. I've been drinking since I left here this afternoon.

EDITH

Peggy, it isn't true, is it?

PEGGY

Oh, Edith, what difference does it make? Where are my cigarettes?

EDITH

What difference does it make? My whole life---Mother's life---Mother's work---

PEGGY

Mother's work. Hell!

EDITH

Claire, how could you do a thing like this?

CLAIRE

William was very kind and understanding, and I was happy. When he died, there was nothing left. I was surrounded by unpleasant things and responsibilities which I couldn't seem to take care of adequately. I couldn't get out. I was sick to death of everything! My books weren't enough any longer.

PEGGY

Claire, don't talk about it any more.

CLAIRE

Do you understand, Peggy?

PEGGY

Yes, I understand, Claire. Would you like for me to take you home?

CLAIRE

No, I'll stay here and wait for Mother to die.

EDITH

Claire! (Crying, she starts toward the hall.)

CLAIRE

What's wrong, Edith? Are you trying to run away? Who can you confide the horrible news to? J. Spencer Allen whom you have always thought was so God Almighty good? Would it shock you to know that after William died, the holy Reverend Allen wanted to marry me? Me, your drunkard sister.

PEGGY

Now, Claire, please don't say anything more.

CLAIRE

That's all. There isn't more. Edith, now that I have displayed the ghosts in my closet, and since Peggy has never tried to hide hers, why don't you confess?

(The doorbell rings, but Edith, standing in the hall, makes no move to answer it. Peggy opens the door, and two Mexicans enter.)

SEÑOR PACHEKO

We have just seen Mr. Allen, and he said we were to come to Senora Hastings's home. (They enter, and come down into the living room.)

EDITH

What are they talking about?

CLAIRE

That's right. I told Reverend Allen that Mother wouldn't mind if they stayed here. Put your bags down. You're welcome.

PEGGY

Oh, here let me shut the door. You'll stay upstairs, so if you would like to go---

EDITH (Interrupting)

What is this? They can't stay here. Mother is sick---

CLAIRE

I don't see why they can't stay.

PEGGY

Of course, they can. Come, I'll show you the way.

DANIEL (Entering)

What is the noise? Don't you realize that Sarah---. Oh, I didn't know we had company.

PEGGY

Papa, these friends of Mother's have come to spend the night since the river is flooding.

DANIEL

Oh, yes. Well, we must find beds for them. I will call Juana. (He leaves.)

(There is an awkward silence as Peg tries to show some hospitality.)

PEGGY

The flood must be bad this time.

SEÑOR PACHEKO

Si, Senora, it is very bad.

DANIEL (Entering)

We will go upstairs and get you settled for the night. I'll go first, come. (They leave.)

PEGGY

I'm glad we have room for them. What on earth is Mr. Allen going to do with them?

EDITH

Mother is dying, and you want to fill the house with strangers, with dirty Mexicans.

PEGGY

This is Mother's house, and they certainly are not strangers to her.

EDITH

I am going home. I will not stay here with all this turmoil. At least, there will be some peace there.

CLAIRE (Laughing)

Wait till you get there. There is a surprise waiting for you.

EDITH

What have you done, Claire? Stop laughing! Tell me.

CLAIRE

You have visitors at your house, too.

EDITH

You're mad, Claire. You wouldn't dare.

CLAIRE

Spencer Allen is sending them over. Since you are one of his best Christians, he knew you wouldn't mind, and of course I agreed with him.

EDITH

Claire!

(Daniel hurries down the stairs and starts out the door.)

PEGGY

Papa, where are you going in the rain? It is late.

DANIEL

I'm in a hurry. Ask Miss Gibbings. (He leaves.)

PEGGY

Good Lord! What has happened now? Who is Miss Gibbings?

CLAIRE

Don't you know Miss Gibbings? Edith does. Don't you, dear?

EDITH

What is she doing here?

CLAIRE

She is the nurse Dr. Bruce sent. Wasn't it nice of him to send an old friend? She came while you and Peggy were in Mother's room. (She goes to the stairway.) Grace?

GRACE GIBBINGS

(From the top of the stairs)

Yes.

CLAIRE

What's wrong?

GRACE GIBBINGS

Just a minute. (Coming down the stairs) Claire, when I went upstairs I found Elizabeth Anne at the top of the stairs. She had fainted and hit her head when she fell. When your Father came up I sent him next door for Dr. Bruce.

PEGGY

What is wrong with Elizabeth Anne? I should have known something was the matter when she came in looking so pale.

GRACE

Claire, I don't know whether I should tell you or not. I---

CLAIRE

If something is the matter, tell us, Grace.

(FAST CURTAIN)

ACT III

It is later the same evening. Edith, alone in the sitting room, is resting in a chair by the fireplace. The fire is burning low. Peggy comes down the stairway.

PEGGY

Did Dr. Bruce go in to see Mother before he left?

EDITH

Yes, but he didn't stay long. Oh, goodness, I can see it already, the shame of it all. First, Claire and now Elizabeth Anne. It is almost too much to bear.

PEGGY

Dr. Bruce was as kind to Elizabeth Anne as her own father would have been. I think he knew what was wrong before he saw her.

EDITH (Standing up)

He knew? Good heavens, if he knew, I wonder how many other people know? How did he find out?

PEGGY

I imagine Elizabeth Anne went to see him. Poor dear, she must have told someone.

EDITH

Poor dear---. It's the family I feel sorry for. What will people say? This is the worst thing that ever happened to us.

PEGGY

It is a shame. And it's bad for the family, but think of Elizabeth Anne. We're probably to blame about the whole thing, or it never would have happened. Elizabeth Anne isn't that

kind of girl.

EDITH

How do we know what kind of girl Elizabeth Anne is? She certainly hasn't had guidance at home as she was growing up. Claire never knows what is going on. In fact, this thing doesn't surprise me at all. I've been thinking for a long time that something should be done about Elizabeth Anne's running around all the time. A situation like this was bound to come up sooner or later. You can talk about feeling sorry for poor Elizabeth Anne, but you don't have to live here in Franklin and hear the malicious gossip. Why did this have to happen?

PEGGY (Impatiently)

Edith, what has happened has happened, and how or why is beside the point. What are we going to do?

EDITH

It's beyond me. If only Mother could---. No, it's a good thing she doesn't know what's going on. I'm at my wits end. I don't know what to do. After all, it's Claire's responsibility, not mine.

PEGGY (Indifferently)

Well, if you want to leave it up to Claire, it's all right with me.

EDITH

You know as well as I that we can't do that. Peggy, you will have to take her home with you. That's the only solution.

PEGGY

I couldn't, Edith. With the children? They ask questions!

And Kitty is as old as Elizabeth Anne. I wish I could take her with me, but I can't. You should be able to understand that.

EDITH
All right, then. What will we do? I don't see why she has to go ahead and have the baby.

PEGGY (Astonished)
Edith, you wouldn't suggest that---.

EDITH
Don't get so excited. No, I'm not suggesting anything. But she can't have the baby here in Franklin. Peggy, you don't seem to realize what people will say. I wouldn't be able to speak to any of my friends. I couldn't even go to church if people knew about Elizabeth Anne. It makes me sick to think about it.

PEGGY
She could go to the hospital in the city.

EDITH
She couldn't go there till she was ready to have the baby. Besides, that isn't far enough away. She'll have to go someplace farther away than that. She can leave as soon as she feels like traveling.

PEGGY
Elizabeth Anne is just a child. She couldn't go far away by herself.

EDITH
She is old enough to have a baby. She has taken care of herself all these years without Claire's help. This is the only thing

for her to do. I don't have an ounce of sympathy for her, not an ounce.

PEGGY (Sarcastically)

So I noticed. Well, now that you have solved the problem I guess that is that. Poor kid! (She lights a cigarette) Oh, damn, Edith! She can't have a child all by herself away from home. That just isn't right, and you know it.

EDITH

I know nothing of the kind. But if that is all you're worrying about, Claire can go with her. There isn't another solution unless you can think of a better one.

PEGGY

I have a better solution. She can marry the boy.

EDITH

Marry the boy? It's too late for that. You know how people talk. If she got married and had a baby in six months, they really would gossip. And, too, we haven't the slightest idea who the boy is. It wouldn't surprise me at all if he were some trash from across town. She can't marry him now. (Definitely) She should have thought of that a long time ago.

PEGGY

I think she should marry the boy. There is no reason why things couldn't work out all right. They could leave Franklin, if necessary.

EDITH

But, we don't know who he is. We wouldn't want her to marry just anyone.

PEGGY

You forget, Edith, that I married a boy from the wrong side of

town. He didn't turn out too badly.

EDITH

That's beside the point. Mike had what it takes to get somewhere.

PEGGY

What makes you think this boy doesn't? I can't help feeling that Eligabeth Anne would be in love with someone rather nice.

EDITH

You're as bad as Claire with your romantic illusions. If he were as nice as you think, this would never have happened. On the contrary, I know he must be perfectly terrible and I certainly wouldn't want someone like that in the family.

PEGGY

In other words, you think it would be better for her to have a child and not be married.

EDITH

If she went away, no one would know, and, then, she could put the child in a home.

PEGGY

Edith, I don't believe you have ever felt a human emotion or you could never suggest such a thing. But, what I can't understand is why she didn't marry the boy. There must be a definite reason.

EDITH

I suggest we go upstairs and find out.

(Claire enters and goes to the chair down left.)

Well, Claire?

CLAIRE

Is Dr. Bruce still here?

PEGGY

No, he didn't stay---just glanced at Mother.

EDITH

Claire, you might be kind enough to tell us what Elizabeth Anne had to say for herself.

CLAIRE

She didn't say anything.

EDITH

Didn't you ask her?

CLAIRE

No, I didn't ask her. I couldn't.

EDITH (Disgustedly)

I might have known. Claire, you're the cause of all this, and you can't even help a little. After all, she is your daughter, not mine. For once in your life you could take a little responsibility. Oh, I wish Mother were here.

PEGGY

But, she isn't, Edith. Besides, can't we decide something for ourselves? We aren't children any more.

CLAIRE

You have been away a long time, Peggy.

EDITH

Well, what are we going to do? Claire, for once, be practical and suggest what we should do.

CLAIRE

What do you mean?

EDITH (Impatiently)

Claire, your daughter is going to have a baby, and she isn't married. Surely you can grasp that.

PEGGY

Claire, darling, it is a rather unpleasant situation. Perhaps,

if Elizabeth Anne could marry the boy, everything would work out all right.

CLAIRE

Yes, I suppose that would be best. However, I thought she could stay here. I mean---

EDITH

I don't think you know what you mean. Of all the absurd ideas! She must go away. No one need ever know anything about it.

PEGGY

Claire, did you ask Elizabeth Anne who the boy is?

CLAIRE

Yes, I did.

EDITH

You just said you didn't ask her anything. Make up your mind.

CLAIRE

I did ask her that. I thought it might make her feel better if she told me.

EDITH

What did she say? Who is it?

CLAIRE

She didn't say.

EDITH

She wouldn't tell you? Is that what you mean?

CLAIRE

She said she would rather not tell me.

EDITH

Well, this is the last straw. She has caused all this unpleasantness, and now she won't even be considerate enough to tell us who the father is. I'm going to find out all about this. You two don't seem to be making any progress. I'm going up right now. (Starting toward the stairway)

PEGGY

Edith, wait. You stay here, and I'll go ask Elizabeth Anne to let us help her.

EDITH

No. I'm going myself. You probably wouldn't find out a bit more than Claire did. I can't understand why you are so--- soft about this.

CLAIRE

You couldn't understand why a person would want to have a baby.

PEGGY

Edith, stop acting like a fool and come away from the hall. Elizabeth Anne will tell me before she would think of telling you, and you know it. (Going to the hallway) I'll be down in a few minutes.

EDITH

You might bring Elizabeth Anne with you when you come down. There is no reason why we can't settle the matter with her present. After all, it concerns her, too.

PEGGY

From the plans you have already made I'm surprised you would admit that. If I bring her, will you be tactful in what you say?

EDITH

I shall say what I have to say.

PEGGY

In that case I won't bring her.

(Peggy leaves and Edith moves toward the fireplace.)

CLAIRE

I think I'll run across the street for a few minutes.

EDITH

Why? Oh,---well. Go home and drown your sorrows. You have a good excuse now. Aren't you going?

(Claire starts to leave, but turns back almost defiantly as if to say something to Edith. Instead, she walks down-left to the table and turns the leaves of a magazine on the table.)

You agree don't you, Claire, that Elizabeth Anne should go away for a while? (No answer) Claire. Did you hear me? (No answer) Claire, stop fiddling with that magazine and listen to me. Why can't you see what is happening to your daughter and to the family?

CLAIRE

Perhaps I don't want to.

EDITH (Exasperated)

Claire, put that magazine down and listen to me.

(Daniel enters from the door to Sarah's room)

DANIEL

Girls, I could hear you in Mother's room. Now, I think you should be a little more quiet.

CLAIRE

I'm sorry. I didn't realize we would bother her.

DANIEL

Yes. Yes, I understand. But, I think she will be waking any time, so please let's have peace.

EDITH

Why can't you realize, Father, that she is not sleeping. She is unconscious.

DANIEL

Edith, your mother has never been sick or---unconscious.
Besides, I don't like the word.

EDITH

Father, you know as well as I that Mother will never---

CLAIRE (Interrupting)

No, Edith, Father is right. Why should Mother be ill?

EDITH (Disgustedly)

Oh, you're impossible. You act like idiots.

DANIEL

I must go back to your mother now. Remember to be quiet.

EDITH

Wait, Father. We want to talk to you about something before
you leave. It is important. Isn't it, Claire?

CLAIRE

We have nothing to discuss with Father. You can go back to
Mother.

EDITH

No, I want you to stay here.

DANIEL

Girls, please. I should get back to your mother. Claire, tell
me what is going on.

CLAIRE

It is nothing.

EDITH

Claire, tell him or I will.

CLAIRE

Father, did Dr. Bruce say anything about Elizabeth Anne when
you went after him?

DANIEL

No. I told him she had fainted and apparently had struck her
head when she fell.

CLAIRE

He didn't say anything when he went in to see Mother before he left?

DANIEL

No. Dr. Bruce didn't say anything about Elizabeth Anne except that she was all right. After all, Dr. Bruce has been our doctor for many years, and I'm sure he would tell me if anything were wrong. That's what you were worried about, isn't it? You think something is wrong with Elizabeth Anne.

PEGGY

(Coming down the stairs)

What was that, Father?

DANIEL

The girls think something is wrong with Elizabeth Anne. But, like I said, Dr. Bruce would have told me if that were true. Now, you need not worry about it.

(He turns to leave.)

EDITH

Father, that isn't it.

PEGGY

Be quiet, Edith. Of course, that is all it is, Papa.

DANIEL

Girls, you are confusing me.

EDITH

Father, I will tell you. The truth is this. Elizabeth Anne is going to have a child.

DANIEL

Oh.

EDITH

She isn't married.

DANIEL

Yes, I know. We were hoping you wouldn't hear about it.

PEGGY

We? You and Dr. Bruce?

DANIEL

No. Although he knows, I didn't mean him. Your mother and I---

EDITH

Mother knows?

DANIEL

I told Sarah I wouldn't tell you, but, since you know about Elizabeth Anne, I might as well tell you Sarah woke several hours ago for a little while and told me all about it.

EDITH

Why didn't you call me?

DANIEL

She told me not to call you. That's why. No, she wanted to tell me what to do.

PEGGY

What did she say?

DANIEL

She went back to sleep before she said, and it has been worrying me. That is why I have been watching by her bed. I wanted to know what to do before you girls found out about Elizabeth Anne. Sarah said you wouldn't like it.

PEGGY

Did she say who the boy is? His name?

DANIEL

Don't you know who he is?

EDITH

If you know, Father, tell us immediately.

DANIEL
I don't like to be rushed, Edith. Sarah said not to tell you,
so I---

EDITH
She didn't want us to know, but since we do, you might as well
tell us his name.

DANIEL
Should I tell you, Peggy?

PEGGY
It might be best if you did, Papa. As it is, we don't know
what to do, and it would help if we knew who the boy is.

DANIEL
Yes. Yes, I suppose so. But I really don't know who he is.
Sarah went back to sleep before she told me.

EDITH
Father, you can be so exasperating. You said you knew.

DANIEL
No, Edith, I did not say I knew. The only thing Sarah told
me was that he was a young Mexican boy.

EDITH
Oh, no! A Mexican boy!

(The doorbell rings.)

CLAIRE (Hurrying to the door)
I'll see who it is.

EDITH
Well, Peggy, what happened to your big idea?

CLAIRE
Look who is here, Mother Sorianas and Marguerita.

(An old Mexican woman and a young Mexican girl enter.)

MOTHER SORIANAS
Buenas noches, Senoras y Senor Hastings. Senora Hastings es
sick. No? Muy sorry.

PEGGY

Yes, she is.

MOTHER SORIANAS

No speak Ingles. You know. (She pats her heart, showing her sympathy.)

PEGGY

That is kind of you, Mother Sorianas.

MARGUERITA

Mr. Hastings, Grandmother would like to know if there is anything we can do for Mrs. Hastings.

DANIEL

I don't know---. (He looks to Peggy for an answer.)

MARGUERITA

Please, sir, we would like to help. Is there linen we could wash?

DANIEL

Peggy, is there something?

PEGGY

I am sure there will be linen to wash. But, Marguerita, you have enough work since the river is flooding.

MARGUERITA

Oh, no. We live in town now with my married sister, Gloria. We would like to wash the linen.

CLAIRE

I'll ask Juana. (Claire leaves the room.)

PEGGY

This is thoughtful of you, Marguerita. Since Juana is kept busy taking care of Mother it will help her a great deal.

MARGUERITA

We are happy to do something. Grandmother wanted to bring some food, but I thought you might not need that. She is old,

but she loves Mrs. Hastings dearly. She has been praying for her.

CLAIRE (Entering with a bundle)
Juana said these things were ready for the laundry. I believe it is bed linen.

MARGUERITA
Good, I will take it. We will bring it back tomorrow evening. Thank you.

PEGGY
Thank you for coming.

MOTHER SORIANAS
Adios.

CLAIRE
I'll go to the door with you.

MARGUERITA
Good night.

DANIEL
Yes, yes.

PEGGY
Good night.

(The visitors leave and Claire comes back into the sitting room.)

DANIEL
I must get back to Sarah. (He leaves.)

PEGGY
Edith, you might have said hello to Mother Sorianas and Marguerita. It was rude of you.

EDITH
I couldn't keep from thinking what sort of in-laws they would make. How you can accept it the way you have, Claire, I'll never know.

CLAIRE

I suppose worse things could happen.

EDITH

I wish Mother could do something. Now is an inconvenient time for her to take sick and leave us alone with this problem.

PEGGY

If she were here, she would agree with me that Elizabeth Anne should marry him.

EDITH

She would not.

PEGGY

Mother has spent her life working for the Mexicans. Why would she object to her granddaughter marrying one? She has said often enough that they are as good as we are, if not better.

EDITH

You are wrong, Peggy. Mother would have been very much against it. Remember when one of Mother Sorianas's granddaughters married the Sadler boy? She didn't like that at all.

CLAIRE

I think I'll go into Mother's room. She might wake.

EDITH

So, you think she is going to wake, too? You and Father! Oh, well, if you're going in, I'll go, too. We'll discuss this matter later.

PEGGY

Would you tell Juana to come here? I want to ask her something.

(They leave, and Peggy nervously lights a cigarette as Juana enters.)

JUANA

Did you want something, Peggy?

PEGGY

Yes, Juana. I wanted to ask you something, but---. Mother Sorianas and Marguerita were here. I suppose Claire told you.

JUANA

Yes.

PEGGY

It was nice of them to want to help.

JUANA

Mrs. Hastings has done a lot for them.

PEGGY

Juana, who was here to see Mother this afternoon, or all day for that matter? Did Mother have any visitors?

JUANA

There is someone here every day.

PEGGY

Yes, I know that, but tell me who in particular was here.

JUANA

Edith came during the morning to ask Senora Hastings to drive her to town. She could have walked, but Senora Hastings took her in the car.

PEGGY

Did anyone come after lunch?

JUANA

Yes, Mr. Garcia came.

PEGGY

Who is Mr. Garcia?

JUANA

He is the minister for the mission. He didn't want anything important.

PEGGY

Who else came?

Peter Alvarez.

JUANA

PEGGY
Is he the one she is sending through school? I believe she mentioned him.

Yes.

JUANA

What did he want?

PEGGY

I don't know.

JUANA

PEGGY
Yes, you do know, Juana. When Mother gets better we can't have problems for her to worry about.

JUANA
Peter Alvarez wanted to quit school. He said he wanted to leave town.

Why?

PEGGY

JUANA
He said he didn't want to be a doctor any more.

PEGGY
And it happened right after that.

JUANA
No, it was a little while later---when Elizabeth Anne was here.

PEGGY
No one told me she was here when it happened.

JUANA
She came in just a few minutes after Peter left and was here with Senora Hastings when she fell.

PEGGY
Perhaps you'd better go back to Mother, Juana. She may need

you. Thank you. Do you think Mother is going to get well, Juana?

JUANA
Only God knows, Peggy. (She leaves.)

PEGGY
I wonder if He does know. She has pulled the wool over His eyes more than once. I sometimes think she has taken advantage of Him.

(As she walks to the fireplace, Elizabeth Anne comes down the stairs.)

ELIZABETH ANNE
Aunt Peggy?

PEGGY (Startled)
You startled me. I didn't hear you come in.

ELIZABETH ANNE
You must have been thinking terribly hard.

PEGGY
Yes, as a matter of fact, I was.

ELIZABETH ANNE
I would like to talk to you, Aunt Peggy. Where are Mother and Aunt Edith?

PEGGY
They are with Grandmother, so we can talk. They won't be back in very soon.

ELIZABETH ANNE
How is Grandmother?

PEGGY
I guess she is about the same. Dr. Bruce didn't say.

ELIZABETH ANNE
(Breaking into tears)
She'll die! And I killed her! I killed her!

PEGGY

(Going to Elizabeth Anne)

Now, what is this?

ELIZABETH ANNE (Crying)

It is true. If it weren't for me, she wouldn't be dying. I killed her! And now, I don't know what to do.

(Edith and Claire enter.)

EDITH

Well, we must be feeling repentant.

PEGGY

Hush, Edith, don't you dare say a word. Go on, dear. What do you mean?

ELIZABETH ANNE (Crying)

I can't tell you.

PEGGY

There, dear. Take your time. You came down because you wanted to tell me something.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Ask them to leave.

PEGGY

They won't say a thing, Elizabeth Anne. Isn't that right?

CLAIRE

We won't interrupt.

PEGGY

There, now, dry your eyes so we can talk about this thing. Edith won't say a word. (She looks warningly at Edith.) You came to see Grandmother this afternoon and when you got here, she was angry.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Yes, she was very angry.

PEGGY

She was angry because Peter Alvarez had been here to tell her

that he was leaving town and would discontinue studying medicine at the college.

ELIZABETH ANNE

She said he was ungrateful after all she had done to help him, and that it was stupid of him to leave since he had such potentialities. She said some unkind things---that he would end up no better than the other Mexicans along the river. I couldn't understand why she said those things, not Grandmother.

PEGGY

You didn't say why you went to see her.

ELIZABETH ANNE

I wanted some money so I could go away by myself.

PEGGY

Did she give it to you?

ELIZABETH ANNE

I didn't have a chance to ask her for it because she started right in criticizing Peter as soon as I got in the door. It made me angry, and I told her he was going away because of me.

EDITH

I thought so.

PEGGY

Be quiet, Edith. You told her you were going to have a child and that Peter was the father.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Yes. And that he was leaving because he wanted to marry me. I've been in love with him for so long, but I wouldn't marry him. I wouldn't because I knew we would have to leave this horrible town, and I didn't want him to quit college. Then, I

told him about the baby. I had to tell him as I didn't know what to do. The next day was when he told Grandmother he was leaving.

PEGGY

You told Grandmother all this?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Yes. She was sitting over by the fireplace, and after I said what I said her face turned a sort of purple color. When she started to get out of the chair, she fell. (She starts to cry again.) It is all my fault. I don't know what to do.

CLAIRE

(Going to Elizabeth Anne)

What does Peter think you should do?

ELIZABETH ANNE

He has always wanted us to be married. But, he knows you would hate me if I did marry him, and you would hate him, too.

CLAIRE

That is not true. I couldn't hate you nor him, ever. If you love him, you should marry him.

EDITH

Claire, you are being sentimental. She can't marry him.

PEGGY

Mother messed up our lives in helping these Mexicans, and it seems to me that some good should come from it. Elizabeth Anne should gain where we lost.

EDITH

Mother helped the Mexicans, but she didn't change people's idea of them. Even she had a stroke when Elizabeth Anne told her she was going to marry one.

CLAIRE

You don't know that was the reason, at all, Edith. You don't need a reason to have a stroke.

EDITH

Do you mean that you think Mother would approve of Elizabeth Anne's marrying the boy?

PEGGY

Why wouldn't she? I am glad Claire thinks they should be married.

EDITH

Claire is just being sentimental. She has never been able to forget her old past romance. But you, Peggy, should be more sensible. You know this will ruin the family's name.

PEGGY

You said the same thing about me when I ran away with Mike. He not only lived on the wrong side of town, but he belonged to the wrong religion. Besides, who gives a damn about the family's name as long as Elizabeth Anne is happy. She is the one it will be hard on, but if she loves him, she should marry him.

ELIZABETH ANNE

Aunt Peggy, I can't marry him---not if he has to give up his ambition to be a doctor and quit school.

PEGGY

There is no reason why he should quit, is there? I'm sure Mother will continue sending him. Would his classmates resent him?

ELIZABETH ANNE

Oh, no, it isn't that. The kids at school would understand.

It is people like Aunt Edith---.

(Daniel enters.)

CLAIRE

Father, what is wrong?

(Daniel hurries toward the hall.)

DANIEL

Wrong? Nothing is wrong. I'm in a hurry that is all. Mother is sitting up and wants her shawl.

EDITH

Sitting up!

DANIEL

She must have a warm shawl. It is a cool evening. I told you, Edith, that she would wake, but you wouldn't believe me. So, I'm a stupid old man!

PEGGY

Are you sure she is sitting up, Papa?

DANIEL

Of course, I'm sure, Peggy. She said to send you girls in. She wants to talk to you about some plans---about Elizabeth Anne, I suppose. Well, aren't you going?

ELIZABETH ANNE (Joyously)

She is going to be all right then!

DANIEL

Of course, Sarah is never ill.

(CURTAIN)