

all of it. You think I shirked the issues—returned home with nothing but regrets and faded memories. (Very abruptly): Have you ever thought why I named my son Peter?

Mrs. B.: What do you mean?

Mrs. C. (walks over to sideboard, takes cigarette, toys with it in hand and walks slowly back towards Mrs. B.): Have you ever stopped to think why Peter's youth and his eagerness—sensitiveness, all the traits which draw you to him—appeal to you so very strongly? You say your love for him is largely material. That, perhaps, is quite natural seeing that he is, in a sense, your step-son.

Mrs. B. (laughing hysterically): Really, Mary, you must be losing your reason!

Mrs. C. (slowly and with emphasis): The only sentiment I allowed myself, once that episode in my life was closed, was in calling my son Peter—"Simon called Peter."

Mrs. B.: Simon! Peter! You mean Simon, my husband. It's a lie—a dirty lie to kick me into giving him up! (Rises.)

Mrs. C.: I have told you that which I vowed to myself should be dead and forgotten for ever. Now do you understand how impossible it all is?

Mrs. B.: Does Simon know?—or Peter?

Mrs. C.: No. That was the price I had to pay, and I did not choose to share my suffering even with him.

Mrs. B.: And do you mean to say you have the impertinence to stand there and criticise my morals, hold yourself up as an example of what I should do, when you yourself had not the courage to do one thing or the other. You hadn't the guts to stick by either of them, and now you try to preach your gospel of selfishness to me. Oh, I know I'm speaking like a Billingsgate fish-wife: I don't care. You needn't look so horrified just because I'm telling you the truth. We're not

discussing any drawing-room topic. I'm telling you as plainly as I can that I despise you, and your smug hypocrisy, and I'm ashamed to have ever had you for my friend!

Mrs. C.: You need not bother to explain any more. I'm sorry if that is how you see it. I thought you would have a little more tolerance. You see, Zetta, you and I judge things from a very different standpoint. You condemn me for not daring to break the shackles of convention, but you, after all, are far more conventional (if we must judge conventionality a sin!). You are just doing what every cheap publicity-sodden film star and loose-brained seeker after fresh sensations has done for the past century, and you think it's something fine, and noble, and courageous . . . (wearily)—Well, I've done all I can—you must do as you wish, but for God's sake try to get a sense of true values. Fidelity for the mere sake of fidelity is of no more value than being honest because you are afraid of the policeman round the corner. It is only of value if it is prompted by a desire springing up deep within you to be faithful or to be honest. I never once sinned against those inner feelings, and I can conceive no higher law than that set by our conscience. I gave Simon up, not because I felt it a sin to break my marriage vows, but because I felt I was committing a crime of extreme selfishness in sacrificing those who loved and depended upon me, for the sake of our happiness. You say I betrayed my husband. How could I betray him by giving away that which he had never had? We cannot parcel out our love and hate as suits us, and all I could do was to give freely when love came to me, and yet respect the claims of those who needed me. I caused none but myself any suffering through what I gave, and once my mind was made up I devoted my life to my children and my husband, and he never knew, and no one ever guessed that Simon had ever meant anything to me.—(Sighs.)—God knows I suffered. Through force of circumstances we had to meet frequently as friends, and when you brought him to me as your fiancée I thought surely this must be the last cruel twist of fate, and I prayed I might be guided to do the best for us all and never let you suffer for what had passed. But it seems forces over which we have no control tear asunder our plans and play havoc with our dreams. There is no end to the misery we weave for ourselves. You must take the only thing that held some meaning for that past for me—you, of all women, must rob me of Peter!

Mrs. B.: Of all the hypocritical statements! I suppose you're hinting I robbed you of Simon? Well, it's thanks to you I ever met him, and as for your grief at my marrying him, why you were the one to shower blessings on us and get us married as soon as you could! Pretty scene! My wedding taking place at the home of my husband's former mistress! I suppose you thought it would be more convenient to have him married to your best friend. Gave you an excellent excuse to see plenty of him!—(raising her voice hysterically)—I've listened to enough of your abuse—I'm going! (Starts walking determinedly to exit.) By the way—(mockingly)—when our divorce is through, you're welcome to Simon, but see you don't let him go this time!

(Mrs. C. shrugs her shoulders hopelessly. As she turns telephone bell rings sharply. Mrs. C. moves to answer it, but Mrs. B. swings round from archway and snatches the phone before Mrs. C. gets there.)

Mrs. B. (breathlessly): That will be for me! I told Peter I should be here between four and five if he wanted to send a message.

(She listens. Mrs. C. moves to mantlepiece and remains standing.)

Mrs. B.: Yes, yes, this is Kurali 31. Yes, Mrs. Brodie speaking. All right, I'll hang on! (Waits a few seconds. Voice

changes.) Hello! Is that, you darling? What? I can't hear—. You think what? Booked for where? America? But we're going home. Booked a passage for one! I don't understand—what? You've thought it over and realise what? Yes, yes. I know all that—(slowly, with amazement)—too big a sacrifice for me! Can't hurt Mary and Simon! (Puts on receiver, laughing hysterically.) Oh, my God, that's funny! (Turning, stunned, to Mrs. C.) D'you hear that, Mary? Can't hurt you and Simon! Too big a sacrifice for me! You and your Peter! Oh, how funny. (Grope her way out blindly, laughing hysterically and muttering "Peter, too!" "Not fair to Mary and Simon!")

Mrs. C., tired and dazed, walks from centre stage across to sofa. As she passes she picks up goliwog. She sits on sofa and gazes at photo as in a trance. She clasps the goliwog to her breast and rocks it as a mother does her child—slowly sobs come. A little time passes. Off-stage a motor-horn and sounds of activity are heard. Slowly with a sigh of relief she puts the goliwog down. As she rises the effort of getting hold of herself is apparent.

Mrs. C. (sternly, loudly): Boy! Pull that damned punkah!

(The punkah swings to life once more, and Mrs. C. is seen to walk toward doorway as the curtain falls.)

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