

## THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

KAREN enters the dining area—CARDIN has left.

MARTHA: It gets dark so early now. Cooking always makes me feel better. I found some purple Scylla for the table. Remember! They were the first things we planted here. And I made a small cake. Know what? I found a bottle of wine. We'll have a good dinner. Where's Joe?

KAREN: Gone.

MARTHA: A patient? We'll wait dinner for him, then. Karen! What's the matter?

KAREN: He won't be back.

MARTHA: You mean he won't be back any more tonight?

KAREN: He won't be back at all.

MARTHA: What happened? What happened Karen?

KAREN: He thought we had been lovers.

MARTHA: I don't believe you. I don't believe it. What kind of awful talk is that? I don't believe you. I don't believe it.

KAREN: All right, all right.

MARTHA: Didn't you tell him? For God's sake, didn't you tell him it wasn't true?

KAREN: Yes.

MARTHA: He didn't believe you?

KAREN: I guess he believed me.

MARTHA: Then what have you done? It's all wrong. It's crazy. I don't understand what you've done. You "guess" that he believed you. There's no guessing about it. Why didn't you---

KAREN: I don't want to ever talk about it Martha.

MARTHA: Oh God I wanted that for you so much!

KAREN: Don't carry on. I don't feel well.

MARTHA: What's happened to us? What's really happened to us?

KAREN: I don't know. I think I'll make a cup of tea and go to bed now.

MARTHA: Whatever happened, go back to Joe. It's too much for you this way.

KAREN: Stop talking about it. Let's pack and get out of here. Let's take the train in the morning.

MARTHA: The train to where?

KAREN: I don't know. Some place, any place.

MARTHA: A job? Money!

KAREN: In a big place we could get something to do.

MARTHA: They'd know about us. We've been in the headlines. We're very famous.

KAREN: A small town then.

MARTHA: They'd know more about us I guess.

KAREN: We'll find a place to go.

MARTHA: I don't think we will. Not really. I feel as if I couldn't move, and what would be the use? It seems to me I'll be sitting the rest of my life wondering what happened. It's a bad night tonight but we might as well get used to it. They'll all be like this.

KAREN: But it isn't a new sin they tell us we've done. Other people aren't destroyed by it.

MARTHA: They are the people who believe in it, who want it, who've chosen it for themselves. That must be very different. We aren't like that. We don't love each other. We don't love each other. We've been close to each other, of course. I've loved you like a friend, the way thousands of women feel about other women.

KAREN: I'm cold.

MARTHA: You were a dear friend who was loved, that's all. Certainly there's nothing wrong with that. It's perfectly natural that I should be fond of you. Why, we've known each other since we were seventeen and I always thought--

KAREN: Why are you saying all this?

MARTHA: Because I love you.

KAREN: Yes of course. I love you too.

MARTHA: But maybe I love you that way. The way they said I loved you. I don't know—listen to me.

KAREN: What?

MARTHA: I have loved you the way they said.

KAREN: Martha we're both so tired. Please don't--

MARTHA: There's always been something wrong. Always—as long as I can remember. But I never knew until all this happened.

KAREN: Stop that crazy talk--

MARTHA: You're afraid of hearing it, I'm more afraid than you.

KAREN: I won't listen to you.

MARTHA: You've got to know it. I can't keep it to myself any longer. I've got to tell you that I'm guilty.

KAREN: You are guilty of nothing.

MARTHA: I've been telling myself that since the night we heard the child say it. I lie in bed night after night praying that it isn't true. But I know about it now. It's there. I don't know how. I don't know why. But I did love you. I do love you. I resented your marriage; maybe because I wanted you; maybe I wanted you all these years; I couldn't call it by a name but maybe it's been there ever since I first knew you--

KAREN: It's not the truth. Not a word of it. We never thought of each other that way.

MARTHA: No, of course you didn't. But who says I didn't? I never felt that way about anybody but you. I've never loved a man—.... I never knew why before. Maybe it's that.

KAREN: You are tired and sick.

MARTHA: It's funny. It's all mixed up. There's something in you and you don't do anything about it because you don't know it's there. Suddenly a little girl gets bored and tells a lie, and there, that night, you see it for the first time, and you say it yourself "Did she see it? Did she sense it?"---

KAREN: What are you saying? You know it could have been any lie. She was looking for anything--

MARTHA: Yes, but why this one? She found the lie with the ounce of truth. I guess they always do. I've ruined your life and I've ruined my own. I swear I didn't know it, I swear I didn't mean it.... Oh I feel so goddamned sick and dirty—I can't stand it any more.

KAREN: All this isn't true. We don't have to remember it was ever said. Tomorrow we'll pick ourselves up and---

MARTHA: I don't want tomorrow. It's a bad word.

KAREN: Go and lie down, Martha. And in a few minutes I'll make some tea and bring it to you. You'll feel better.

MARTHA: Don't bring me any tea. Thank you. Good night darling.

MARTHA exits.