

care— Now I can't! Now he's gone—and I'll never forgive her—never—!

DELIA. Tina!

TINA. I won't! (To CHARLOTTE) You'd no business to meddle! And if you ever do it again I'll never speak to you as long as I live!

DELIA. (Sharply) Go to your room, Tina!

TINA. (Crying) I'm going, Mamma, but before I do, she's got to know that I'm sick of her fault-finding and her spying and her meddling! You can say what you please to me, because you understand me, and I love you; but she's only a poor old maid who hates me because I'm young—and alive, while she's old and hideous and dried up—and has never known anything about love! I won't have her interfering with my life, I tell you! I won't have it!

DELIA. Tina—Tina! Tina!

(Sits in chair Right Center, covers her face with her hands, unable to say more. Instantly TINA is frightened and sobered.)

TINA. (Kneels at DELIA's feet) Mamma! I'm sorry, Mamma! Don't cry— (DELIA points toward the stairs.

TINA understands) I'm going— (Frightened by what she has said, she slips past CHARLOTTE, who stands Left as rigid and still as a statue, towards the door Center; then she turns, speaking humbly) You'll come in and say goodnight to me, won't you, Mamma? Please—

(But DELIA only waves her hand again in another gesture of dismissal, and TINA goes, closing the door after her. CHARLOTTE sits sofa Left.)

CHARLOTTE. (Somberly) This has gone on long enough. I see my mistake now, and I mean to remedy it.

DELIA. Your mistake?

CHARLOTTE. I understand my duty now. We must go.

DELIA. What?

CHARLOTTE. Don't think me ungrateful. You've done all you could for us both. If I am to save my child, I must take her away.

DELIA. Charlotte, in God's name, what are you saying?

CHARLOTTE. I must take Tina away. We must go somewhere where we're not known—where we shall live among plain people, leading plain lives—where she can find herself a husband and make herself a home.

DELIA. You'd take Tina away from me now!

CHARLOTTE. (*Repeating*) I'm not ungrateful—

DELIA. (*Rises, crosses Right to mantel; desperately*) Oh, don't let's speak of gratitude! What does it matter whether you're grateful or not? It's Tina I'm thinking of—

CHARLOTTE. Of course it's Tina you're thinking of— (*Rises, crossing Left Center, exits*) Tina and Clem Spender!

DELIA. (*Turns, facing Center*) You're insane, Charlotte! I've not thought of him for years!

CHARLOTTE. Oh, but you have! You have! You've always thought of him in thinking of Tina! Of him, and nobody else. Everthing you've done—for me was for him!

DELIA. Upon my honor, I have not thought of him!

CHARLOTTE. (*Crossing Right*) You've thought of him whether you knew it or not. A woman never stops thinking of the man she loves. She thinks of him years afterwards in all sorts of unconscious ways, in thinking of all sorts of things—a sunset, an old song, a cameo on a chain—! (*DELIA sits Right of table, CHARLOTTE crosses in turning above DELIA. She breaks off with a short laugh*) I know. I've thought of him too. Only tonight it wasn't Tina and Lanning Halsey here—it wasn't those two I saw from the window—sauntering through the icy weather—like lovers in a midsummer glade. I saw us—long ago—walking home to, a

darkened house—on just such a night—when I didn't know whether there was snow beneath my feet—or daisies . . . I suppose you found them in each other's arms. I was afraid to come in—afraid I'd see us!

DELIA. Hush, hush—you mustn't say these things!

CHARLOTTE. Ah—you can't forgive me because Clem Spender didn't quite break his heart over you! That's why you like keeping me at your mercy—and taking his child from me! That's why you took us in—to give his child a home.

DELIA. (*Also at white heat*) And suppose that is all true! Suppose I couldn't leave Clem's child to the mercy of chance? She's yours too. And to take her away now—from the life you made such a sacrifice to give her—would be too cruel. Too cruel—to her! Even more cruel to her than to me.

CHARLOTTE. (*Faltering a little; thinking of TINA now, not herself*) My mind's made up.

DELIA. Have the years, then, given me no share in her?

CHARLOTTE. (*Again determined*) I know what is best for my own child.

DELIA. Is destroying her happiness best?—

CHARLOTTE. What's ahead of her, here? For a girl without a name or a penny,—among cautious people like the Halseys and their kind? You've done all you could for her. But you see what's come of it, so far.

DELIA. No. (*Rises*) I've not done all I could— But I'm going to, now, if (*CHARLOTTE sits Left of table*) you'll let me. (*At a questioning look from CHARLOTTE, she continues*) I want to adopt Tina, legally.

~~DELIA. (*Standing*) Oh, I've thought of it before. From time to time—ever since you and she came to live with me after Jim's death. When she first began calling me Mamma—because Dee did.~~

~~CHARLOTTE. You've never mentioned it before.~~

~~DELIA. No. Because I wasn't sure how you'd feel about it.~~

~~CHARLOTTE. (*Drily*) Perhaps you weren't sure how.~~

~~she would feel about it—your own child, for instance.~~

DELIA. That's not true. I lacked the courage which I've never had till now, now that I realize, as you should, that Tina's position must be made unassailable. I don't care what the gossips say; this is the only way I know of doing it.

CHARLOTTE. It isn't clear to me that your adopting Tina would help her, now.

DELIA. But it would. I'll give her my name—the Ralston name, and my money—the money my mother left me—my own child has all she'll ever need from her father. Tina's position would be secure both financially and legally. Don't you see what a difference it will make?

CHARLOTTE. (*Rising, cutting her short, after recovering from her surprise*) No! I refuse!

DELIA. You refuse? How dare you sacrifice Tina's happiness to your pride?

CHARLOTTE. (*Center, brokenly*) — What pride have I, except in my child? And that I'll never sacrifice.

~~DELIA. You're not reasonable. You're cruel—just because Tina behaved like a spoiled baby a moment ago; you speak as if I were trying to interfere with your rights, as her mother—~~

CHARLOTTE. (*Interrupting*) I have no rights—either before the law or in the heart of my own child. I've given them all to you.

DELIA. (*Awkwardly*) You know that Tina really loves you—

CHARLOTTE. (*Ironically*) Perhaps, if you say so—as I used to love my old-maid relatives. No! It's gone on long enough—this—this mistake. (*Crosses to sofa*) I mean to take her away.

DELIA. (*Crosses up Center, with quiet desperation*) You are going to sacrifice her then? Sacrifice her to your desire for mastery! (*CHARLOTTE sits on sofa.*) When she might have everything—even Lanning Halsey.

for a husband, if she wants him and the home of her own you say you want for her? (DELIA crosses Left to CHARLOTTE) He will love her if she wants him to. It's as she said; she can make him love her, if there's ~~any money about~~, if the girl has money of her own, and my name, the Halseys won't find her such a bad match for their son after all. Give her this chance. (DELIA places hand on CHARLOTTE'S) It won't be like (Sits on sofa) giving her up, this time— Can't we just go on loving her together?

~~opens door~~  
 opens and TINA stands there, in a dressing gown.  
 She speaks uneasily.)

TINA. Mamma, aren't you coming up? I've been waiting for you.

CHARLOTTE. (Drawing away from DELIA'S touch; in a flat voice) Go on up with her—I'll come presently— Goodnight.

(DELIA rises—crosses Right, picks up candle—crosses

**CURTAIN**