

hen, running after them with mufflers and sweaters to keep them warm, and eggnogs to make them strong; and then at four o'clock in the morning, you who always complained you never could sleep a wink, snoring in your bed and letting them slip out into the bushes." That's what she'd say, your mother. And I'd stand there, dying of shame if I wasn't dead already. And all I could do would be not to dare look her in the face; and "That's true," I'd say. "That's all true what you say, Your Majesty."

ANTIGONE: Nanny, dear. Dear Nanny. Don't cry. You'll be able to look Mamma in the face when it's your time to see her. And she'll say, "Good morning, Nanny. Thank you for my little Antigone. You did look after her so well." She knows why I went out this morning.

NURSE: Not to meet a lover?

ANTIGONE: No. Not to meet a lover.

NURSE: Well, you've a queer way of teasing me, I must say! Not to know when she's teasing me! *Rises to stand behind Antigone.* I must be getting awfully old, that's what it is. But if you loved me, you'd tell me the truth. You'd tell me why your bed was empty when I went along to tuck you in. Wouldn't you?

ANTIGONE: Please, Nanny, don't cry anymore. *Antigone turns partly toward Nurse, puts an arm up to Nurse's shoulder. With her other hand, Antigone caresses Nurse's face.* There now, my sweet red apple. Do you remember how I used to rub your cheeks to make them shine? My dear, wrinkled red apple! I didn't do anything tonight that was worth sending tears down the little gullies of your dear face. I am pure, and I swear that I have no other lover than Haemon. If you like, I'll swear that I shall never have any other lover than Haemon. Save your tears, Nanny, save them, Nanny dear; you may still need them. When you cry like that, I become a little girl again; and I mustn't be a little girl today.

THE CHILDREN'S HOUR

by Lillian Hellman

ACT III

Martha Dobie and Karen Wright run a girls' boarding school. One of their pupils spreads an unfounded rumor that they are lesbians. Although it is later discovered that the gossip was the invention of a malicious youngster, it is too late to spare them tragedy. They are forced to close their school, and Karen's engagement to Joe Cardin ends because he believed the rumor.

The following scene is from the end of the play. Karen reveals the circumstances of her broken engagement. Martha, in despair over the incident, confesses her secret belief that she has, indeed, always loved Karen "that way." Martha's guilt over having possibly caused Karen's unhappiness leads her to eventually take her own life.

The scene begins with Karen onstage. Martha, who has been preparing dinner, comes in with a small tray and dust cloth.

MARTHA, *goes to lamp on downstage left table, lights it:* It gets dark so early now. *Crosses to desk, puts down tray, empties ash-tray into it:* 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. *Crosses to below right end of sofa, picks newspaper up from the floor. No answer. She crosses back to above desk.* Where's Joe?

KAREN: Gone.

MARTHA, *puts newspaper on desk:* A patient? Will he be back in time for dinner?

KAREN: No.

MARTHA, *watching her:* We'll wait dinner for him, then. Karen! What's the matter?

KAREN, *in a dull tone:* He won't be back.

MARTHA, *speaking slowly, carefully*: You mean he won't be back anymore tonight? *Slowly crossing left, above desk.*

KAREN: He won't be back at all.

MARTHA, *quickly, walks to right of Karen*: What happened? *Karen shakes head.* What happened, Karen?

KAREN: He thought we had been lovers.

MARTHA, *tensely*: 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, *moves upstage angrily*: 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. *Comes back to right of Karen.* There's no guessing about it. Why didn't you—?

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

MARTHA, *sits in chair left of desk*: 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, *irritably*: 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 head lines. 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, *gets up, goes to stove. Hands in front of it, warming herself*: 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, *turns her back to stove*: 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, *as if she were tired*: Why are you saying all this?

MARTHA: Because I love you.

KAREN, *sits on downstage left chair*: 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, *(kneels down next to Karen)* I have loved you the way they said.

KAREN, *idly*: 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 it until all this happened.

KAREN, *for first time looks up, horrified, turns to Martha*: Stop that crazy talk—

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

KAREN, *turns away, hands over her ears*: 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, *deliberately*: 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, *tensely, grips arms of chair*: It's not the truth. Not a word of it. We never thought of each other that way.

MARTHA, *bitterly*: 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— (*Stops. Softly*) I never knew why before. Maybe it's that.

KAREN, *carefully*: You are tired and sick.

MARTHA, *as though talking to herself*: 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, *turns to Martha. Desperately*: 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— (*Rises, crosses upstage left. In a wail*) Oh, I feel so Goddamned sick and dirty—I can't stand it anymore.

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, *who is crying*: 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, *looks around room, slowly, carefully. She is now very quiet. Moves, turns, looks at Karen*: Don't bring me any tea. Thank you. Good night, darling.

CURSE OF THE STARVING CLASS

by Sam Shepard

ACT I

The action of this odd but actually quite naturalistic play takes place in the kitchen of Ella and Weston and their son and daughter, Wesley and Emma. The family owns a run-down farm in the western United States. Ella, who mostly eats, has plans to sell the farm behind her husband's back, and dreams of using the money to go off to Europe. Weston, who mostly drinks, tried to kill her the night before when she locked him out of the house. He smashed in the front door, but left when she started screaming for the police. Emma, dressed in a white and green 4-H Club uniform, is having her first period. She decided (just minutes before the excerpt below begins) to leave home on a horse, intending to ride down the freeway to California. She made this decision when she learned that her mother ate the chicken that she had been saving for today's 4-H Club demonstration, and that her brother urinated on the charts she had prepared for her talk ("How to Cut Up a Frying Chicken").

As the scene begins, Ella has eaten everything in the house and is staring into the empty refrigerator. Emma enters, covered with mud. She is holding a horse's rope halter.

EMMA: That bastard almost killed me.

Ella shuts refrigerator and turns toward Emma.

ELLA: What happened to you?

EMMA: He dragged me clear across the corral.

ELLA: I told you not to play around with that fool horse. He's insane, that horse.

EMMA: How am I ever going to get out of here?

ELLA: You're not going to get out of here. You're too young. Now go and change your clothes.