

CHAINS OF DEW
BY SUSAN GLASPELL
1922

ADAPTED BY CHERYL BLACK FROM THE MS. COPY HELD BY THE
LIBRARY OF CONGRESS; PROLOGUE BY CHERYL BLACK

WITH PERMISSION OF, AND THANKS TO, VALENTINA COOK.

SETTING:

ACT 1 - NYC, THE OFFICES OF THE BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE
ACTS 2 AND 3 - THE STANDISH HOME IN BLUFF CITY

TIME: CIRCA 1920.

CHARACTERS, IN ORDER OF APPEARANCE:

NORA POWERS, SECRETARY OF THE BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE
LEON WHITTAKER, ASSOC. EDITOR OF THE *NEW NATION*
JAMES O'BRIEN, A YOUNG IRISH WRITER VISITING AMERICA
SEYMORE STANDISH, POET & BANK DIRECTOR
DIANTHA ("DOTTY"), SEYMORE'S WIFE
MRS. STANDISH, SENIOR, SEYMORE'S MOTHER
MRS. MACINTYRE, MAVEN OF BLUFF CITY SOCIETY
EDITH, BLUFF CITY MATRON

STAGE DIRECTIONS THAT ARE TO BE READ ARE IN ***BOLD AND ITALICS***

STAGE DIRECTIONS IN ITALICS ONLY SHOULD NOT BE READ.

PROLOGUE: THE COMPANY (lines distributed as they were for SSAWW reading in November 2006)

MARTHA

In the 1919-1920 season, Provincetown Players co-founders George Cram ("Jig") Cook and Susan Glaspell took a leave of absence from their theatrical responsibilities to write.

MONICA

Glaspell began work on a comic play dealing with serious contemporary issues dear to the hearts of her hair-bobbing, corset-burning feminist colleagues in the Greenwich Village community: the birth control movement, freedom of speech, sexual and social relations between men and women, stereotyped sex roles, and the role of the artist in society.

BASIA

Margaret Sanger's American Birth Control League, founded in 1921, sought to expand the movement beyond bohemia into middle America; organizing "local affiliates through upper class women's clubs, even high society charity groups."

DREW

By mid-January 1920, Glaspell had completed a draft, and Glaspell's friend and colleague Gene O'Neill urged her to send the play to Broadway producer George Tyler.

DOUG

"Tell Susan I spoke to Tyler about her play and that he is genuinely eager to have a look at it. He said he had seen three of her plays at different times at the PP . . . He said, 'that *girl* has a real touch of genius'. . . "

CHERYL

Susan Glaspell was forty four years old at the time.

MICHAEL

Gene's wife Agnes read the play and reported to Gene:

ELLEN

"It's a corking idea and has all her fine characterization and delightful ironic fun making some delicious comedy."

MARTHA

Adding, however,

ELLEN

"it needs work and should be cut."

MONICA

When Gene read it himself, he wrote to Agnes

DOUG

"I like her play tremendously and think it has fine chances either with Tyler or another producer."

BASIA

The Theatre Guild asked to see it.

DREW

When nearly two years of negotiations had still not produced an offer, Glaspell agreed to a production by the Provincetown Players.

CHERYL

On March 1 1922, Glaspell and Cook sailed for Greece for a sojourn of indefinite length, delegating supervision of the production to Provincetown literary manager Edna Kenton.

MICHAEL

As soon as Glaspell and Cook, left, however, other company members began to suggest other options.

MARTHA

Designer Cleon Throckmorton suggested a revival of Emperor Jones.

MONICA

"Throckmorton was mad to do the sets"

BASIA

"Interiors don't interest Throck much."

DREW

Edna Kenton settled the issue.

CHERYL

"I announced to the press that *Chains of Dew* was going on. We were committed."

DOUG

Kenton's first choice for a director, veteran actress and feminist Margaret Wycherly, was unavailable. The director finally chosen, Ralph Stewart, made radical cuts:

CHERYL

"Sue, my dear—it was what I was most afraid of with Stewart.. . you must believe that I did everything in the world that I could. . . It had to be cut, and it had to be up to him.....If you had been here subtleties and ironies would have stayed in that went. "

ELLEN

For The Players, who had just moved O'Neill's *The Hairy Ape* to Broadway, finding a cast was also a challenge.

CHERYL

"We were manless. Everybody went uptown with the Ape. "

MICHAEL

One male role was cast two days before opening. Casting women was also a problem. The actress cast as the mother—

CHERYL

"A part that could make an actress"

MARTHA

"Was adequate, but no smash."

MONICA

When Kenton informed Glaspell that Stewart had cast a very young ingénue in the leading role of Nora Powers, feminist activist for birth control, Glaspell replied:

BASIA

"I saw there was nothing for me to do but get drunk, and so deaden the pangs in the thought of Reese as Standish, Blanche as Dotty, and little Marion Berry as the on-to-herself Nora."

DREW

One reviewer referred to Nora as a "featherhead."

ELLEN

Reviews of the production were – mixed.

DOUG

"*Chains of Dew* is more spirited and radiant of actual life than anything she has done hitherto" - The New York Herald

MARTHAI

"It is plainly inferior to *Inheritors* and *The Verge*." - Ludwig Lewisohn

MONICA

"Susan Glaspell's plays give one something to think about, and *Chains of Dew* is no exception." - Stephen Rathbun

MICHAEL

Heywood Broun complained that the leading male character was "an absolute prig and an idiot."

DREW

A circumstance Maida Castellun saw as deliberate:

BASIA

"Showing up the male as your only true conservative in matters social and spiritual. . . as a social iconoclast the female of the species again proves more daring than the male." ,

ELLEN

Alexander Woolcott missed this theme:

DOUG

"It has a good deal to do with bobbed hair."

DREW

Some critics objected to the play's generic classification of comedy:

CHERYL

Burns Mantle considered it political propaganda, and Stephen Rathbun found the ending tragic.

MICHAEL

Many critics found the production weak.

MARTHA

" Several of the author's best effects are missed because the players were uncertain of their lines and indeterminate in their business.." – The Evening Telegram

MONICA

"It promises so well in its first act, even when it is as sluggishly played as it is at the Provincetown Playhouse..." Burns Mantle

BASIA

"Short and light *Chains of Dew* may be, but length and heaviness are added by the extraordinarily long waits and the unindividualized acting." Maida Castellun

DREW

From far-away Greece, Glaspell viewed the reaction philosophically:

ELLEN

"I thought our friends the reviewers treated us very well. I know a Seymore equal to an impression of reserve and complexity would have helped the part a lot, but how fortunate we were to have had any Seymore at all! "

DOUG

Perhaps influenced by her own struggles with the play's production, Kenton thereafter dismissed the play she had once so steadfastly championed:

CHERYL

"We had no other long play than hers to put on, and hers was not good –none knew it better than she."

MICHAEL

In July 1922 Edna Kenton instructed Glaspell's publisher Small Maynard to exclude *Chains of Dew* from an upcoming volume of her published works:

CHERYL

"I knew you would want *The Verge* alone."

BASIA

And therefore *Chains of Dew* became the only one of the 11 plays Glaspell wrote for the Provincetown Players that was never published, and the only extant copy of the script is held by the library of congress.

MARTHA

Glaspell did, however, rework the plot, characters, and themes of *Chains of Dew* in the creation of her novel *Ambrose Holt and Family*, published in 1931.

MONICA

Although the play remains unpublished, In the past decade feminist critics have taken a closer look at this neglected work.

ELLEN

Chains of Dew expands beyond docudrama to provide an image of women's struggles among their commitments to their families, other women, and themselves." .. J. Ellen Gainor, 1995

BASIA

"[*Chains of Dew*] represents an important link in the development of [Glaspell's] life and thought, and should be examined in detail." - Barbara Ozieblo, 2000

MARTHA

"*Chains of Dew* might well be read as a significant transitory piece between the hopeful debates performed in Glaspell's earlier plays (such as *Trifles* or *The*

People) and the much more pessimistic view of the relationship between the individual and society which she presents in her later play *The Verge*. " –Kristina Hinz Bode, 2006

DOUG

"The surprise is how well much of the play works. . . " – Linda Ben Zvi, 2005.

BASIA

"[Along with *The Verge*] *Chains of Dew* exemplif[ies] the complex and plural nature of theatrical modernism and early twentieth-century feminism. " – Barbara Ozieblo, 2006

ELLEN

It is tantalizing to consider what a perceptive director and cast could do with this script were it to be produced today – J. Ellen Gainor, 2001

CHERYL

And now, in an attempt to SUGGEST to a perceptive audience how this play might work in production today, we proudly present Susan Glaspell's *Chains of Dew*.

MARTHA

Abridged.

ACT 1, SC. 1.

AT LIGHTS UP, NORA, SECRETARY OF THE BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE, AND LEON WHITTAKER, AN EDITOR OF THE NEW NATION, ARE DISCOVERED IN THE GREENWICH VILLAGE OFFICE OF THE BIRTH CONTROL LEAGUE. ON THE REAR WALL ARE COMPANION POSTERS, ONE OF A MOTHER WITH TWO CHILDREN, ONE OF A MOTHER WITH NINE. THESE POSTERS SAY, IN NO UNCERTAIN TERMS, THAT IT IS MORE DESIRABLE TO HAVE TWO CHILDREN THAN NINE.

NORA HAS SHORT HAIR. THIS DOES NOT MEAN SHE'S ECCENTRIC—IT IS NOT THAT KIND OF SHORT HAIR. IT CURLS AND IS YOUNG AND VITAL AND CHARMING SHORT HAIR. NORA ALSO IS YOUNG AND VITAL AND CHARMING. DEVOTION TO A CAUSE REALLY DOESN'T HURT HER LOOKS." NORA IS WORKING A SQUEAKING MIMEOGRAPH MACHINE. SHE IS NOT AN ADEPT. LEON IS HOLDING SEVERAL SHEETS OF PAPER – POETRY SCHEDULED FOR PUBLICATION IN THE NEW NATION..

LEON
Seymore not here yet?

NORA
Not yet.

LEON (*sighs*)
It's a great pity he's –as he is.

NORA
Yes. Of course that can be said of most everyone.

LEON
You hate to see a man –not *there* in some ways, when he's so there in others.

NORA
Um. I've hated it more than once.

LEON
We're using one of his poems in this number. I have it here. Listen, Nora.
(*reading*) "To Shelley."
We need you, Shelley.
You whose vision had the power of light,
seeing that gave sight.

THE MIMEOGRAPH MACHINE EMITS A LOUD SQUAWK.

NORA (*Apologetically*)

Oh.

LEON LOOKS AT HER IN ANNOYANCE; SHE WAITS FOR HIM TO BEGIN AGAIN.

We need the swiftness that was Shelley,
Swifter than harm, wider than falling darkness, more sure than--

ANOTHER SQUEAK FROM THE MACHINE.

More sure than hate
who now has thoughts to life the night?
We need new reaches of the path of light that was your seeing
Courage so sure that --

SQUEAK

LEON (*folding it up*)
Since you care more about birth control than poetry---

NORA
I thought I could do both. Please begin again, Leon.

LEON
You're a fanatic.

NORA
You're another.

LEON
If I'm a fanatic, what am I a fanatic about?

NORA
Oh, about having the world run right.

LEON
I've long since given up on having the world run right. How can the world be run right when no one who runs it is right? The world run right—and John Maxwell is in prison because he writes what he sees as the truth about things. Don't let me forget to get Seymore's signature on this protest. His signature will be worth having---especially having it in the same number with his poem. This poem, Nora, is the most passionate cry for freedom that has come out of this night we're stuck in. Unfortunately you were too busy to listen to it. I must read it to O'Brien. What did you think of him, Nora?

NORA (*fluffing her hair*)

O'Brien? He liked my bob.

LEON
Your what?

NORA
My hair. Unfortunately, I couldn't speak so highly of his – I wonder why he wears it that way . . . a man's hair should lie down. (*fluffs her own out*) It is one of the fundamental differences between the sexes.

LEON
I could see O'Brien was quite got by Seymore. When I said Seymore Standish would be here this afternoon he said he'd drop in too. Of course he might be dropping by for another look at your hair—

NORA
Help, Leon, it's stuck!

LEON (*overlapping*)
I don't know anything about the darned thing—

NORA (*overlapping*)
It's not feeding right—

As they are bent over the machine, JAMES O'BRIEN, a young writer from Ireland, enters.

O'BRIEN
May I come in?

LEON
O'Brien! How are you?

NORA (*overlapping*)
Leon! You're *blurring* it!

LEON
Can't I *spea*k to him?

NORA
It's crumpled! Mr. O'Brien, perhaps you could help us -?

O'Brien
Uh – unfortunately I don't know the slightest thing about it—

LEON

Unfortunately that doesn't make the slightest difference.

NORA

Oh, it's a mess. No use sending people letters they can't read.

O'BRIEN

It might be a relief to them. If I can read them I always feel I should.

LEON

But every word about birth control is sacred.

NORA

How did you escape from the author's committee?

O'BRIEN

I told them I had to buy a present for my mother.

LEON

If only America had a little of that kind of courage! O'Brien came here, Nora, to give me an interview for the next issue of the *New Nation*, and to meet Seymore.

O'BRIEN

Yes that's true. I was awfully glad to meet Seymore Standish last night. It was the nicest thing about the evening. But his poetry puzzles me. When given so much—why am I left unsatisfied? I—miss something.

LEON (*immensely interested*) What is it you miss?

O'BRIEN

But that's the exasperating part of it—I don't know what I miss.

NORA

Sincerity?

O'BRIEN

No—He seems to me sincere—and shrewd. I like shrewdness in a poet. I like it more than what's called beauty. Sometimes Standish might seem sentimental—if you didn't feel him smiling at himself for being sentimental. If he had that thing--- that one misses in him—he'd be a great poet. You see? I'm telling you—if he had—what he hasn't got—he'd be a *great* poet.

SEYMORE STANDISH enters. He does not look like a poet. He looks like a prosperous American of the sophisticated sort—and a very good-looking one at that.

NORA

Oh, Seymore! I have news for you. If you had what you haven't got you'd be a great poet.

SEYMORE
Who says so?

NORA
This shrinking Irishman. The same might be said of me.

O'BRIEN
No, it might not. At least, not that I know of. (*To Seymore, intently*) And I care about what you haven't got because I care about what you have got. Tell us – do you know what it is that's missing in your poetry? Do you know what it is is the matter with you?

SEYMORE
I could give a guess. (*He doesn't give it at once*) Perhaps America is the matter with me.

O'BRIEN
Of course something is the matter with every country. But that is what has made poets—

LEON
What is the matter with Ireland can make poets, but what is the matter with America is that it makes Americans. Seymore, that's what's the matter with you. You're an American.

SEYMORE (*With mock pain*)
Oh, nooooo...

NORA
Yes, Seymore, you are. Is it or is it not true that you have just visited your wife's aunt?

SEYMORE
Nora, my wife's aunt has neuritis.

NORA
Now, Mr. O'Brien, are you beginning to understand America?

She returns to her mimeograph.

SEYMORE
What's the matter, Nora?

NORA
I wish I knew.

(As NORA tugs at letters stuck in the mimeograph machine, O'BRIEN looks around at the posters and exhibits.)

O'BRIEN
Why all this –demonstration—about so personal a matter?

NORA
I'll tell you why the demonstration. Because our laws are so benighted that they do not permit a personal matter to be carried out in a personal way. Do you wish to give birth to children you cannot feed? A child has a right to be wanted. But here. I will give you our literature.
(Nora gets circulars, leaflets, and presents them to O'Brien).

Here. Read THESE, and then you will know one thing that is the matter with America.

O'BRIEN *(Holds them gingerly)*
Oh, yes, I shall be very glad—

SEYMORE
You have not overlooked, I hope, the great moral lesson in these pictures. *(points out 2 posters in the rear)*. Have a large family, and you will look like this. Have a small family—and you will look so. Could anything be simpler?

O'BRIEN
Really, a good deal of truth in it. In Ireland, families are much too large.

SEYMORE
Nora, he'll make a speech for you.

NORA
Will you make a speech for me? Yes! You will go with me before the legislative committee. You will say, Birth Control would have saved Ireland! Read Ireland's history and then *dare* say to America –

(O'Brien is rescued by the ringing telephone)

LEON
We were speaking of Seymore—

NORA
Oh, yes, Mrs. Arnold. *(listens)* And you think she will give a thousand dollars? Now isn't that immense?! Let me know the instant you hear. I'll be here until

five. **(as she hangs up)**. It's too bad I'm so busy. I could tell you what is the matter with Seymore.

SEYMORE

I don't pretend to be as essential as birth control, but since you know, it seems rather a pity you can't take three minutes off to tell me.

NORA

I doubt if it would take three. In the first place, Mr. O'Brien, he's rich. He's a director of a bank. In the second place, he's a vestryman of the church. How can he be a poet for the whole wide world when he is a very important man in his home town?

SEYMORE

He's a very lonely man in his home town. I'm going away from here now, away from this life I care about back to that world I don't belong in. Back to bondage.

LEON

You are a vestryman of a church?

SEYMORE

Yes, you have to be if you are a director of a bank. They go together. That's the trouble with the whole thing. It all goes together.

(a bell on the mimeograph machine begins ringing suddenly and without thought of stopping)

NORA

They told me it would do that! Isn't it wonderful?

LEON

Stop that bell.

NORA *(tries to; doesn't succeed)*

It's speaking to me! A poem. Magic. Machine. Magic.

(O'Brien does something to the machine. There is silence.)

LEON

Nora, please do not set in motion things you are not able to control. Now, Seymore, you were saying—

SEYMORE

Were you never where there was no one? Not one person in the town knows what I'm talking about when I do make a slip and speak of things that interest me.

O'BRIEN

But is there *no* one? Usually God has put some one person to —appraise one's earnestness.

SEYMORE

Perhaps he did in the British Isles. He'd run out before he got to the Middle West. Yes, if there were that one person. One woman like Nora—one dynamic person—life would be there. As it is, what is there for it but be as they are? Slip along in their bridge, and golf and dancing and flirting, and try to be amused when they say 'Now do tell me how you write poetry!'

LEON

My God!

SEYMORE

Yes, that too. They need it—*and don't ask me what it means.*

O'BRIEN

Why do you go?

SEYMORE

It's --the whole works. My mother lives with me, and after her long faithful life I confess I do like to give her the kind of home she wants. And then, there is my wife.

NORA

Is your wife an invalid, Seymore?

SEYMORE

An invalid? What gave you that idea?

NORA

I don't know—just the way you speak of her—I'm glad she isn't.

SEYMORE

And then there is my son. And my daughter.

NORA

But I should think you would hate to have them grow up to be such ninnyes. You say all the other people in town are ninnyes, aren't you afraid they'll catch it? Seymore, why don't you move your family to New York? And why couldn't your wife--?

SEYMORE

I know it's terribly old fashioned of me, but I would rather not speak of my wife.

NORA

Of course one might speak of one's wife and still not say anything against her.

O'BRIEN

In a way it might be rather interesting. Such a town.

SEYMORE

It's not interesting. It's barren. It's alien. Why, Nora, they never even heard of birth control.

NORA

What? They all have large families?

SEYMORE

Oh, no, no, not at all. I mean the –demonstration. Seeing it from the standpoint of society, and the race – and all that.

NORA

But our literature has gone everywhere! I can't believe they never heard of us! Here, Seymore, you take these circulars home and give them to your wife to distribute—

SEYMORE

You think Dotty would touch them?

NORA

Dotty?

SEYMORE

Yes, Dotty, it's a pet name. Her real name is Diantha, but her father always called her Dotty Dimple. I've dropped the dimple.

NORA

Now that was nice of you.

O'BRIEN

Small towns in Ireland are the same...

SEYMORE

Ireland! Nothing is the matter with Ireland! Ireland is superb! I'd rather be an Irish Revolutionist than-

NORA

An American revolutionist?

SEYMORE

Were you never caught?

O'BRIEN

Caught? Yes, I know what you mean. I was to have been for the church. I had to tell my father I simply wouldn't think of such a thing.

LEON

And I shall not soon forget the day I told my father I was not going to stay in his law office.

NORA

And I used to edit the *Methodist Review*. They didn't want me to stop. "They" never do.

SEYMORE

And you think it's as simple as that! It is a bit amusing, though, to see you with this pleased sense of having emancipated yourselves. To me—you don't seem grown up.

NORA

It must be lonely to be the only grown up person in the world.

SEYMORE

It IS lonely. I- I don't know how to talk to you.

NORA

We aren't the aliens. It's those ninnies out home you can't talk to.

LEON

I find it very hard to recover from the vestry thing. I don't see how this poem we have—"To Shelley"—I don't see how this can be real if the vestry's real.

SEYMORE

But you've got to judge that by itself. Not by anything you may know about me.

LEON

No man has to be a vestryman if he doesn't want to be. You could can the vestry if you wanted to! Can it! Or do something to make them can you. Disgrace yourself. Stay here and start living with Nora.

NORA

I'm not sure that living with me is my idea of the ultimate disgrace.

SEYMORE

I don't know that Nora would live with me.

LEON

Now would you Nora ?

NORA

I'm perfectly safe in saying yes.

LEON

You could make him do it if you wanted to.

SEYMORE

I'm sorry we started in on the vestry. I know you don't understand. Say I'm weak—let it go at that. That's why I gave you a little something for birth control, Nora. There should be no more souls here until souls have a chance. (*looks at his watch*). I can't stay much longer. (*To O'Brien, rather wistfully*) Have you read that thing of mine Leon's using this week? Read it. Then – perhaps you can keep a grain of respect for me.

O'Brien. I have respect for you. I haven't it in me to despise a poet—not even a respectable poet.

LEON

Wait-Seymore-Here. We must have you sign this petition for John Maxwell. You know about him? The writer who is in prison for writing what he saw as the truth about life? We're featuring a protest next week.

SEYMORE (*After reading*). I'm sorry, Leon, I can't sign this.

LEON

The case is a flagrant violation of constitutional right. I should think you would be glad to – would *have to* - damn it. The man's in prison, you know.

SEYMORE

I don't expect you to understand.

LEON

He's a fellow writer! How can you ever write another line if you refuse to lift your hand for him?

SEYMORE

I'm sorry. I'm not a propagandist. I'm a poet.

NORA

What is it you admire about Shelley, Seymore?

SEYMORE

His poetry.

NORA
But what made him the kind of poet he was?

SEYMORE
God.

NORA
Rats.

SEYMORE
Perhaps I can do more from the inside...

LEON
Oh, not that. Just say you don't want to.

SEYMORE
Just say I can't. I'm bound.

LEON
Come, Mr. O'Brien, if I'm going to get that interview today, we have to get down to business. Nora, can I use your typewriter? **(opening a side door)**
Goodbye, Seymore.

SEYMORE
Don't despise me, Leon. I am the heart of the country. I am the backbone of this nation you run a paper about. Backbones haven't great freedom of movement.

LEON
No. It's a pity.

O'BRIEN
Good luck to you, Mr. Standish. **(they exit into inner office)**

SEYMORE
Poor Nora! I haven't a doubt you could disgrace me.

NORA
The question is, are you worth disgracing?

(Seymore suddenly takes her in his arms and kisses her)

NORA
Seymore! Remember the vestry!

SEYMORE

Let the vestry choke!

NORA
Remember you're married!

SEYMORE
Oh, Nora, I want you. I need you.

NORA
I thought it was Shelley you needed.

SEYMORE
Nora, I'm going away. Back to a place where I'm out of it. Let me be *at home* a moment before I go.

NORA
I want you to promise me something.

SEYMORE
I'll do it if I can.

NORA
Ever guarded! I hate caution. It's so middle western. I want you to promise you'll call your wife Diantha.

SEYMORE
Nora, I have to leave in five minutes. Why do you insist on filling them with my wife?

NORA
It is too dreadful to be called "Dotty" when your name is Diantha.

SEYMORE
It's not suited to her but I'll call her toadstool for a moment to remember! Nora, you move through all my dreams of what I want. Nora, darling, I won't go away—I can't go away—**(he kisses her; the telephone rings; she does not heed it at first; as it goes on ringing she raises her head)**

NORA
It might be Mrs. Arnold! **(she goes to phone)** Yes? Yes....she *has*? Oh, I'm so glad! I'm so glad you called me right up! **(she hangs up)**. Another thousand for birth control!

SEYMORE
It's awfully unselfish of you to care so much, Nora. It isn't as if it were a thing you have any —personal—use for. *(they look at each other for a moment.)* 'Bye Nora.

Isn't it nice that the good news came just before I left? It makes such a happy farewell for me.

NORA

Seymore! I'm sorry you have to go.

SEYMORE

I leave the race in your hands, Nora. **(He exits as LEON and O'BRIEN re-enter).**

LEON

What happened?

NORA *(viciously)*

I answered the telephone.

LEON

Nora, I thought perhaps you would –do something for life.

NORA

I know what you thought. You weren't so subtle that it need escape anyone. But when I bind a man to me with hooks or steel –or whatever it is—I can't do it with two other men waiting in the next room to see what's going to happen.

(telephone rings)

Or where there's a telephone.

LEON

Well, there doesn't seem to be any reason for not answering it now.

NORA

Hello? Oh, hello Mrs. Arnold. Yes- yes . . . you know I've thought all along that's what we should do. Yes, I think that might be the thing. Why, perhaps I could. . . all right, we'll talk it over. Tonight's fine for me. That's fine. Goodbye. **(she hangs up)** She wants me to go into the field.

LEON

We have so few poets. We cannot afford to give one over to respectability. I am amazed at you, Nora. I would certainly have expected 'the vestry' to rouse you to action. You have lost a great chance to serve America.

O'BRIEN

Where is "the field?"

NORA

The field is wherever I decide to go.

O'Brien and Leon exchange a look.

O'BRIEN
Why not?

NORA
Why not what?

O'BRIEN
Two birds with but a single stone!

NORA
I do not follow your nimble mind.

O'BRIEN
You can choose your field. Choose the field where Seymore Standish's soul is birth-controlled by respectability!

LEON
Nora!

O'BRIEN
Tell the vestry he is the Father of Birth Control!

LEON
Explain his poetry to the bank!

O'BRIEN
Explain *him* to Dotty!

LEON
Why, you could ruin him in a week! And think what you would mean to him.

O'BRIEN
Yes, one dynamic person!

LEON
Nora, declare yourself! Will you or will you not ruin Seymore?

O'BRIEN
For his soul's sake!

NORA
I will!

LEON

My brave girl!

NORA
Just one thing worries me.

LEON
What?

NORA
What will I do with him—after he's ruined?

CURTAIN.

ACT 2. SC. 1 *The Standish home in Bluff City. A richly furnished but comfortable room, a library used as living room. In the rear are two doors, one going into Seymore's study, the other to a hallway. A copy of the Sistine Madonna hangs between the two doors. Down Right is a sewing table on which sit two dolls – twins. Amelia and Angellica. They are not traditional dolls. They are dolls that say things about people. Another doll, only half-stuffed, sits in a chair. Down Left are SEYMORE, comfortably sprawled in a deep chair, smoking a cigarette, and DOTTY. DOTTY is dainty and amiable-looking, as one who was reared in what is quaintly called the polite world. Dotty slips Seymore an ash tray, slides a footstool in his way. Then she lights a cigarette for herself and takes a low seat by his chair.*

DOTTY
My, but it's nice to have you home, dearie.

SEYMORE
You don't like it so well when I'm not here?

DOTTY
Well, hardly. Although this time I've been very busy.

SEYMORE
Oh, yes, without a doubt. Monday luncheon, Thursday bridge, dinner at Elmhurst, dinner at Edith's, the Verder's tea—poor Dot. It's a hard life.

DOTTY
I didn't go to the Verder's tea. —*(telephone rings)*

SEYMORE
You didn't?

DOTTY

I had something else to do. (*answers phone*) Hello? Oh, hello, Bill. (*Seymore rises with pleasure when he hears Bill's name*). Yes, he got home this morning. He's right here.

SEYMORE

Hello, Bill. Yep, back at last. I would have been home yesterday but I stopped over in Chicago to see a lunatic – yes, he wants me to write a poetic drama. A kind of a play. No, I don't think you ever did. What's more important, I got some of those new balls. Could try them this afternoon. Well, of course, but I could get it in. Hear you've all been pretty gay while I was gone? Hitting it up some. How's that new fellow, Dodd, playing? The devil he did. Well, I'll hear all about tit this afternoon. Suppose you stop and pick me up. Oh, half past two. All right then, Bill. See you later. (*hangs up and returns to his chair*). Bill's a happy sort. Think of having nothing on your mind but beet sugar and golf. You hear anything about the way this fellow Dodd is playing?

DOTTY

Yes, all the men are excited about him. He played the last three in – Heavens! (*The Sistine Madonna appears to be lowering herself. They rush to the rescue*) She's loose at one end. I was going to take her down the other day—I must have weakened her.

SEYMORE

Take her down? after all these years? Why?

DOTTY

You always make fun of our having the Madonna hanging here—

SEYMORE

My dear Dot, you know perfectly well I Want you to have the Madonna hanging here. Since you like Madonnas, by all means let her bless our home. (*He is all the while making the painting secure, Dotty steady*)

DOTTY

I'm not crazy about her. But I didn't know what else to put up.

SEYMORE

Well, don't worry your poor little head about that. She's quite all right. See? I return her to her time honored place. Tell me, what were you doing the afternoon of the Verder tea?

DOTTY

I had Miss Hines here for tea.

SEYMORE

Hines?

DOTTY

The high school teacher. English.

SEYMORE

That *frump*?

DOTTY

She's a very intellectual woman, Seymore. She hinted to me that the – the more intellectual people here feel you are not interested in them.

SEYMORE

I admire their discernment.

DOTTY

But Seymore why shouldn't we know them, since our other friends—leave so much to be desired?

SEYMORE

Haven't I always been nice to our friends?

DOTTY

Why yes, Seymore, so nice to them –that I don't think they have any idea you don't care for them.

SEYMORE

Well, then aren't you satisfied? Now, you haven't told me who was at Edith's dinner?

DOTTY

I don't know who was there. I wasn't.

SEYMORE

What? Why Dotty, were you ill?

DOTTY

No, I wasn't ill. I was studying.

SEYMORE

I see I mustn't go away and leave you alone like this. And what, pray, were you studying?

DOTTY

"How to understand poetry." I'm taking a course by correspondence.

SEYMORE

The devil you are! As if I couldn't tell you how to understand poetry.

DOTTY

Maybe you could, but you don't. You always laugh at me, Seymore.

SEYMORE

I have to laugh. It's the way I get along.

DOTTY

But I don't want you to 'get along.'

SEYMORE

Don't worry, Dot. I can swing things. I want you to be happy. I want you to be yourself.

DOTTY

But that's what I want you to be.

SEYMORE

You ask too much, Dotty Dimple. (*remembers, smiles*) Diantha.

(Dotty stares at him as His mother enters.)

DOTTY

Seymore's laughing at me.

MOTHER

Don't tease Dotty, Seymore.

SEYMORE

No, I'll not tease Dotty. Well, now perhaps I can have a moment for writing before Bill picks me up .It's just possible I could write for – fifteen minutes! Mother, do you know there are people who write all the time! Whenever they want to write – they write!

MOTHER

Well, why don't you do that? (***she goes to sewing table***)

SEYMORE

Why don't I - ? Joke! Yes, why don't I ? let business go to the devil, let the children starve, let Dotty sit home all alone—no one to take her out where she can put it over somebody else. And you, Mother, what would you brag about at the Guild if I wasn't on the vestry?

MOTHER

Why I don't know. I might brag about my dolls.

SEYMORE

Oh, I've forgotten to ask about them. And how are the dear dolls/

MOTHER

You can see for yourself (*displaying the twins*)

SEYMORE (*picks up a doll; her long hair is pulled into a tight knot at the back of its neck*) Mother, why don't you bob this doll's hair? I'll buy her myself.

MOTHER

All right, I'll take you up on that. I have felt that Angelica here rather lacked charm. (*She picks up a scissors and loosens the doll's hair*)

SEYMORE

Oh, no, no—it has to be done just right. (*Both women look at him. Mother hands him the doll and scissors*). I don't know all about it, but I do know what I like. Now, Angelica, if you want to be kissed a great deal—you must have your bob slanted up like this. (*he cuts the doll's hair to resemble Nora's jaunty bob.*) Now you must always fluff it up. (*he is silent for a moment; the doll has inspired him to poetry*) "Her hair grew long—though she was dead." Simple. Simple as Blake. "her hair grows long—though she is dead." I tell you ,there's an idea here. (*mutters to himself*). Dead. Head. Led—red—bed. (*DOTTY begins to unpin and play with her own hair, which was done in a simple knot at her neck*)

SEYMORE

"She always went where custom led.
her hair grew long—though she was dead. "

(*doorbell rings*)

DOTTY

Oh, Mrs. Macintyre and Edith and Helen are coming in for a little bridge-

SEYMORE

Just when I've got going on this! Never mind, I can get out. (*he goes into his study as Dotty exits to front door. Mother fluffs up Angelica's bob, turns her own hair up to get the bobbed effect. Dotty re-enters*).

DOTTY

It was Bill – I told him Seymore was writing.

MOTHER

But Seymore wanted to play golf with him.

DOTTY

That was before he knew he was going to be writing. ** I think we should protect Seymore a little more.

MOTHER

Why, yes, if he wants us to. He likes to play golf.

DOTTY

You don't understand Seymore, Mother.

MOTHER

Think not? I've known him for some time.

DOTTY

Do you think, Mother, that it's hard to be any other way than the way you are?

MOTHER

Well, I suppose that depends on just how you are.

DOTTY

Don't you think sometimes you are as you are—because you've *been* that way? And you've been that way—well, because you are supposed to be that way. When you do certain things—bridge and dancing—then you're the kind of person who plays bridge and dances. But what sort of person would you be—if you did something else?

MOTHER

I've sometimes wondered myself.

(Bell rings again. Mother exits to answer bell. Seymore emerges.)

SEYMORE

Bill.

DOTTY

No, Seymore, I told Bill you were writing.

SEYMORE

But I was supposed to golf with him!

DOTTY

He said he'd get Mr. Dodd.

SEYMORE

Dodd?

Mrs. Macintyre and Edith enter.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Well, Seymore, home again. Do tell us – how was New York? I want to get out there this fall to buy some new clothes. But I suppose that isn't the phase of New York that interests you.

SEYMORE

No, the people I know don't wear clothes. That is – not what you would call clothes.

MRS. MACINTYRE

I see. They wear ideas.

EDITH

You know, women in Bluff City can sometimes get ideas, too.

SEYMORE (flirting with her)

I'd hate to see you get one, Edith.

EDITH (***noticing Angelica—***)

Why isn't she cunning!

DOTTY

Isn't she dear? Seymore bobbed her hair. This is the way you slant it if you want to be kissed a great deal!

MRS. MACINTYRE

Oh really?

EDITH

Now think of knowing that!

SEYMORE

Dotty, that little joke was hardly worth repeating—

MRS. MACTINTYRE

I hear there's a new kind of poetry in New York. They say you write it about anything—bugs or hair pins or dish cloths—

EDITH

Seymore, I met a man the other night who said he understood your poetry. But people brag so.

DOTTY

Didn't you ever want to get away from things you could understand?

EDITH

Dot, you are trying to give me a jolt. I'll give you one back. I heard a man say the most outrageous thing about you the other day. He said you had the makings of a high brow! And if you could have heard how loyal I was - !

MRS MACINTYRE

Seymore, now that you are on the vestry, I wish you'd get us something to kneel on. Something soft. I cannot feel religious when my mind's on my knees.

EDITH

And another thing, if Spears is going to usher he should not wear that coat.

SEYMORE

I'll look into it.

MRS. MACTINTYRE

I suppose nothing can be said to Dean Davis about blowing his nose.

SEYMORE

I'd have to think about that.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Aren't you glad, my dear, that Seymore doesn't ACT like a poet? You'd never guess Seymore wrote anything.

SEYMORE

And on that tribute, I must depart.

Seymore bows and exits to his study as Dotty gets out cards for bridge.

EDITH

Where's Helen?

MRS. MACINTYRE

Seems to me Helen has taken to being late.

EDITH

Yes, especially since Edna **Albright went to California.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Why, what do you mean?

EDITH

I could swear it was Helen's red hat I saw going round the corner in Captain Albright's car. If you ask me, she's making a great mistake—wearing a red hat.

MRS. MACINTYRE

What's this I hear about Marion Eaton having another baby?

DOTTY

Yes, she's terribly upset about it.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Poor Marion. I wish something could be done about laundresses having children. I had such a good laundress and now she's going to have another. But one doesn't like to talk to those people about—things.

EDITH

Wasn't it clever of Seymore to bob that doll's hair? I wonder how he knew how to do it?

DOTTY

I don't know how he knew how to do it.

EDITH

I suppose it's like being a poet—something ordinary people don't understand.

MRS. MACINTYRE

I think you're rather wonderful, Dotty, my dear.

DOTTY

Me?

MRS. MACINTYRE

Letting Seymore go off to New York by himself. Many wives wouldn't understand.

DOTTY

He has to go from time to time to escape stupidity.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Dotty, dear, you are hardly stupid.

DOTTY

I wasn't talking about myself.

EDITH

Then what were you talking about?

DOTTY

The town.

MRS. MACINTYRE

Oh, there are stupid people everywhere. *(bell rings)*. I'm glad Mr. Macintyre's not a poet.

DOTTY

(calls out) In here, Helen!

MRS. MACINTYRE

I wonder whether we should say anything - ?

EDITH

About changing her hat?

MRS. MACINTYRE

I could say – has anyone heard from **Edna Albright?

EDITH

And then I could say—

(The women stop talking as NORA appears in the doorway.)

NORA

May I come in? I'm not expected. But I hoped it wouldn't matter. I'm a friend of Seymore's - from New York.

DOTTY *(advancing doubtfully)*

Why, how do you do – Miss - ?

NORA

I'm Nora Powers. Perhaps Seymore has spoken of me? Or my work with the Birth Control League? I see he hasn't. I work for birth control.

DOTTY

Oh, yes, he has—spoken of that.

NORA

I'm here now on my job. *(in a light and charming manner)*. I'm going to line you all up for birth control.

MRS. MACTINTYRE

Indeed?

NORA

Yes.

EDITH

So good of you.

NORA

Yes, it is rather good of me, isn't it? Giving you the first shot at it like this. We're going to organize leagues all over the country. I could have gone anywhere I wanted. And I came here. (*Mother enters*)

DOTTY (*a little dazed*)

Mother, here's a little surprise – Seymore's friend, Miss Powers, from New York.

NORA

How do you do?

MOTHER

You have come for a visit?

NORA

Yes, in a way. I wanted to get acquainted with the middle west. Seymore tells me it is the heart of the country. Also the backbone. The only thing we have left to be in New York is the brain. But I'm here on business, too. I'm going to organize the heart and backbone into a league to legalize the giving out of information about birth control. So people won't have to have babies if they don't want to. Seymore is crazy about it. He gave me three hundred dollars for it. But I'm hoping to get more from him while I'm here.

(As she speaks, NORA removes her hat and fluffs up her hair; the resemblance to the doll's haircut is unmistakable; following EDITH's eyes, NORA spots the doll and picks it up)

NORA

What a very modern doll! She looks a little like me, doesn't she? I have a feeling she believes in birth control. It's the smart thing in New York this season. When suffrage grew so – sort of common – the really exclusive people turned to birth control. Now. Shall we talk a little about birth control? Here is a table all prepared for me. (*going to the bridge table*). But not in the presence of mine enemy, I hope. (*takes circulars from a bag*). You'll let me show you some of our literature, I know.

MRS. MACINTYRE

It may be true that people of one's own sort are doing this in New York—I should have to verify the facts. Meanwhile, I have been married for twenty-two years and--

NORA

And how many children have you? (*pause*) I wish you would take a walk with me down on the East Side. Maybe you will someday. Do you believe that women

have any rights over their own lives? Do you like babies? This is a question of babies' rights.

MRS. MACINTYRE

How many babies have you?

NORA

None yet. But I'm sure I will have, as soon as I can get around to it.

MRS. MACINTYRE

No children, but many—ideas. I suppose—what you are dealing with – must mean a great deal to you –personally?

NORA (laughs)

Ask Seymore.

MRS. MACINTYRE

This is outrageous! Dotty, my dear child, come home with me!

NORA

Don't let me detain you, if you were going out.

(Seymore enters as Mrs. Macintyre rises)

SEYMORE

Am I interrupting a little game?

MRS. MACINTYRE

I have been insulted in this house!

SEYMORE

Why, Dotty!

MRS. MACINTYRE

No, not Dotty. Dotty has been insulted more deeply than I. By this woman.

NORA

Hel-lo, Seymore.

SEYMORE

Nora?

NORA

So sorry your friend got so wrought up. She seems excitable. Have you had your blood pressure taken? Oh, well, never mind. **(NORA exchanges a long searching look with DOTTY)** Seymore! let me introduce you to Diantha

Standish, president of the first birth control league in the Mississippi Valley. (To Dotty) Diantha, am I right?

DOTTY (*after a pause*)
Quite right.

NORA
Seymore! Perhaps I won't *have* to ruin you!

Scene 2. The next afternoon. Scene unchanged except for a packing box from which NORA is removing birth control posters and the "excess family" exhibit seen in Act 1. SEYMORE enters.

NORA
Oh, Seymore. Now where do you think I should put these pictures?

SEYMORE
You're putting them up in here?

NORA
Why, yes. Diantha thought we'd better have our headquarters right here. Isn't it fine about Diantha?

SEYMORE
I don't know what you mean.

NORA
The way she takes to this idea of getting loose. Why, Seymore, your life may never be the same again. And I've only been here twenty-four hours! Those women I shoed off yesterday—they're probably off you for life.

SEYMORE
As pleasant as it is – to have a friend around – it's just a trifle awkward, in some ways. This room is where we see people – people who come to see us.

NORA
So Diantha said. They come here for one reason or another, then we nail them for birth control!

SEYMORE
Birth control is one thing in life, Nora. There are other things.

NORA
Sure there are. That's why there must be birth control.

SEYMORE

Much as we enjoy having you here—and much as I would like to help with your work – well, frankly, I'm worried about what it is going to mean to Dot when she finds just what she has let herself in for. Out from, I should say. It doesn't seem intelligent to cut yourself off from your life unless you 're doing it for a thing that means a great deal to you.

NORA

Oh, anything is good enough to cut you off from something you don't want.

SEYMORE

The point is, she does want it.

NORA

Well, a woman ought to know what she wants.

SEYMORE

And even though Dotty may be attracted by the novelty of this – have you thought of my mother?

NORA

Yes, I've thought of her. I think she's quite an up and coming old lady.

SEYMORE

It may be weak of me, but I confess I rather hate to see her disturbed when she has come to a peaceful resting place after her long life.

NORA

Why do you speak of your mother as if she were dead? She's still alive.

SEYMORE

It is not always to laugh, Nora. These middle western women of an earlier day had hard lives.

NORA

I should think then they would have a little fun coming to them.

SEYMORE

Have you noticed these dolls Mother makes?

NORA

Yes! Aren't they cunning?

SEYMORE

You think they're cunning; I think they're – significant. They – say it all. She makes them for the church, you know. They sell them in their bazaars. You see, Mother just has to go on doing things for people - her own kind of thing. Her

children are gone, so she makes dolls. It's all there – the loneliness for what can't be. I shall write a poem about it... the image for the reality...

(Mother enters)

MOTHER

Dotty will be down in a minute. Perhaps I can help you with this?

SEYMORE

Don't let all this disturb you, Mother.

MOTHER

It's not disturbing me, Seymore. Why should it? **(she looks at exhibit with interest)** What's this?

NORA

It's an excess family exhibit. I was just setting it up. Here is a mother of seven children.

MOTHER

And here's another.

NORA

Did *you* have seven children?

MOTHER

Seven.

NORA (staggered)

Perhaps you'd rather I didn't set this up?

MOTHER

Put it together. I want to see it.

NORA

Here is the little stove.

MOTHER

And here are the children. (Inspired) You know, I could make some dolls for birth control.

SEYMORE

Now don't feel you must do that.

MOTHER

Don't you think it's a good idea, Nora?

NORA

I think birth control dolls would be –some idea! I think Leon and Mr. O'Brien will be very impressed!

SEYMORE

What? Leon and - ? Where will they see them?

NORA

Oh, I haven't told you yet, have I, Seymore? (to Mother) I haven't had a real visit with Seymore since I came. He's always doing something else. Yes, Leon and Mr. O'Brien thought quite likely they'd get out here while I was here.

SEYMORE

They're coming too??

NORA

Won't it be nice?

SEYMORE

I do not understand this invasion.

NORA

Invasion? That's a curious way to speak of a visit from friends. Leon is coming west to write of race riots, so – if he's near here – And as to O'Brien, he's out for seeing the country, and you having told him this was its heart and backbone –

(Seymore gathers his papers and goes off)

NORA

It's hard to help one's friends.

MOTHER

I doubt it can be done.

NORA

I'm sorry if we interrupted Seymore's work.

MOTHER

Oh, he likes to stay out here until he's driven in there. Funny, isn't it? But I've noticed I can make dolls better when I feel a little put upon.

NORA

Tell me – why do you make dolls? Seymore says it's because you like to do for others but they haven't a 'do for others' look.

MOTHER (*With the timid eagerness of the artist*)

What sort of a look have they?

NORA

They look to me – perhaps I'd better not say -- But there's something *devilish* about these dolls.

MOTHER

Oh. Does it show?

NORA

You were getting back at something.

MOTHER

Well, don't you have to one way or another? And this isn't a way that does much harm, do you think? (**taking up Amelia**) The women of Bluff City – if they had any idea how funny they are- then it wouldn't be the Kind of funniness you have to do something about. But after you've lived with respectability for seventy years it helps to make a stiff neck and a smile that doesn't know how silly the neck is.

These dolls have kept me out of lots of trouble (**taking up another doll, only partially stuffed**). Tell me, do you think this doll looks at all like Seymore?

NORA

I hadn't noticed it.

MOTHER

Oh, no, it wasn't meant to be noticed. You' d have to know him awfully well; Oh, dear, this is no way for a mother to talk. It's hard to be a mother. You're not supposed to notice things. (**studying the incompleted doll**) I don't suppose a child ever enjoyed unhappiness more. He began to write poems when I wouldn't let him go swimming in the river. Not that he would have gone swimming in the river. He was afraid of the river. But when I said –

(*Seymore enters*)

SEYMORE

Mother, what are you doing?

MOTHER

I'm improving these seven children.

SEYMORE

Now, Nora, this is a little too much!

MOTHER

I am enjoying it.

SEYMORE

Nora, I am not going to stand by and see my mother's happiness and my wife's happiness ruined! Mother, you know what Dotty's life has been.

MOTHER

Yes, I know what Dotty's life has been.

SEYMORE

The things she grew up in. I—at no little personal sacrifice--have kept her happy in those things. She's just playing with this idea—as a child plays with a doll—a bee—a bomb. She IS a child. And I have not asked her to be anything else.

MOTHER

No.

SEYMORE

No. Oh, I know I can't hope to make you understand, Nora. I know it will only result in your thinking meanly of ME. That's a thing I will simply have to bear. But Dotty grew up in a world where all the women are like the other women—the other women of their sort, I mean. She's playing with this because she feels me behind her. She would never in this world do an irrevocable thing. She hasn't in her to do the thing that would cut her off—***(Enter Dotty. Her hair is bobbed. It is extraordinarily becoming. She is young and gay and irresistible. The Dotty that never had a chance is gleaming there)***. Cut her off---

DOTTY

Well, here I am . How do you like me?

SEYMORE *(turning upon Nora)*

You come here, come into my house, breaking up my life, cutting my – cutting my - What do you mean by cutting my wife's hair?

NORA

I don't mean anything by it.

DOTTY

She didn't do it.

MOTHER

I cut Dotty's hair.

SEYMORE

YOU? YOU? So. Even my mother. EVEN MY MOTHER.

MOTHER

Even your mother. I think I cut it very well, considering it's the first hair I ever bobbed. Of course I had Nora's to pattern from. But I shouldn't have ventured upon it if I hadn't seen you cut the doll's hair.

Doorbell rings.

NORA

I'll see about that. *(she exits)*

DOTTY

I know now, Seymore, what you meant— isn't it amazing how much you cut when cut the hair? It makes me feel as if life were beginning all over again! I feel so— LIGHT. Cutting your hair —goes to your head! Of course, I never would have done it if I hadn't known you liked bobbed hair.

NORA RE-ENTERS, FOLLOWED BY LEON AND O'BRIEN.

LEON

Well, here we are.

NORA

Dotty, Mrs. Standish, this is Mr. Whittaker, from New York, and Mr. O'Brien, from Ireland.

DOTTY

More friends from New York! **(shaking hands)** How nice for Seymore. And — for me.

LEON *(frankly surprised)*

Are you Seymore's wife?

DOTTY

Yes, I'm Seymore's wife. Mother, here are Mr. O'Brien and Mr. Whittaker. How *good* of you all to come and see Seymore.

O'BRIEN *(Looking upon Dotty with enthusiasm)*

I didn't know the west was like this.

DOTTY

You are enjoying the west?

O'BRIEN

More and more!

LEON *(to Seymore)*

Well, and how is everything going? I hope you're writing?

SEYMORE
I am not writing.

LEON
Sorry to hear that. I hope our being here may help a bit. That's why we're here.
To - - help.

SEYMORE
Thank you.

LEON
You must have been awfully surprised to see Nora.

SEYMORE
Yes. Yes. I was surprised to see Nora.

Mrs. Macintyre appears in the doorway.

NORA
Mrs. Macintyre! *(aside to Mother)* I thought I finished with her yesterday.

MOTHER takes up Amelia, the stiff-necked doll whose smile doesn't know how silly her neck is. She compares Amelia with Mrs. MacIntyre.

MRS. MACINTYRE
I felt it my duty to come here. I knew Dotty's mother. I cannot abandon her—*(she stops short, seeing the radiant new DOTTY)*

DOTTY ***(fluffing her bob.)***
Ohhh, yes! And if you knew how it FELT! Oh – but we have friends with us – Mr. Whittaker – and Mr. O'Brien—more friends from New York. You met Miss Powers yesterday -

MRS. MACINTYRE
Yes, I saw Miss Powers yesterday. I came in thinking perhaps you needed me—

DOTTY
But I'm glad you did, Mrs. Macintyre. Won't you sit down? And yes—I do need you. I want to have a long talk with you. About birth control. ***(Dotty turns gaily upstage where, with NORA's help, she removes the Sistine Madonna to make room for the birth control posters)*** Now! Down with the Madonna! *(over her shoulder, to Mrs. Macintyre)* Aren't you awfully tired of Madonnas, Mrs. MacIntyre? I'm OFF Madonnas. ***(She takes up a birth control poster, hammer, and nails)***

NORA

That won't do the wall much good, Diantha.

DOTTY

Wall? Who cares about the WALL? (*Nailing down the words with the hammer*). If there's anything I'm sick of, it's WALLS.

MR. O'BRIEN (*delightedly*)

Why, Seymore, your wife could ruin any man!

CURTAIN.

ACT 3. Again the library. Seated in his big chair, SEYMORE is writing—trying to concentrate on an unhappy thought. At a slight noise in the hall he nervously looks that way—then turns and regards the pictures which have replaced the Madonna.

In flits DOTTY, light, busy, happy. Halts and looks at him.

DOTTY

Oh, you here, Seymore? You're thinking aren't you?

SEYMORE

Yes. Thinking.

DOTTY

Will it disturb you if I do some telephoning? (*He gestures as if to say 'pray don't think of me'*) We'll have to have another phone put in—now that there is so much going on in the house. But before I phone anyone else—Seymore dear, I want to have a little talk with you. Now. What is more important than birth control? When you think of the women—

SEYMORE

I've heard the arguments, Dotty. You know, you didn't invent birth control.

DOTTY

No, the greatest minds of our civilization—

SEYMORE

Yes, I've heard that too.

DOTTY

I know you have. And it is just because you know all about it—Seymore, YOU have been selected—by me—to introduce Bluff City to birth control! (*as he does not seem quite aware of the honor*) I have chosen you to make the opening speech!

SEYMORE

I'm sure that was very good of you.

DOTTY

Oh, not at all. With your long knowledge and deep sympathy—

SEYMORE

Did I ever say I had long knowledge and deep sympathy with birth control?

DOTTY

Yes—to Nora. In fact, you helped finance it.

SEYMORE

I wasn't financing birth control. I was financing being left in peace!

DOTTY

Dearie! I love your playful way of talking. I'm so glad for you too, Seymore, that you have this chance to let them know –what you really are! You know, it's your playful manner that has kept them—

SEYMORE

Please cease referring to me as if I were a kitten.

DOTTY

But now you can come straight out with your beliefs! Tell them what you think of our laws! Denounce their impure modesty! Tell them their virtues are hypocrisy and their—oh what a wonderful time you'll have !

SEYMORE

My joy can with difficulty contain itself.

DOTTY

You funny old dear!

SEYMORE

There's just one matter you overlook.

DOTTY

What do I overlook?

SEYMORE

I am a poet.

DOTTY

Why, Seymore I'm doing all this because you are a poet! I like what I'm doing. I just LOVE breaking loose like this—but I never could have taken the plunge if it hadn't been that I saw my way to get you free!

SEYMORE

I'm free now, am I ?

DOTTY

Would you like to hear the whole truth?

SEYMORE

Is there more of it?

DOTTY

That afternoon Nora came, when you came in and found us all here, and talking about – well, your personal relation to birth control—

SEYMORE

Dotty!

DOTTY

Well, with that – *in the air*—I realized that right here together were you and I and –what is called the other woman. When I realized that right here with us was a woman you've –how shall I put it - ?

SEYMORE

I think you've put it.

DOTTY

Of course I've known, in a way—But when I *felt* it as a complete affair, as they say in New York—

SEYMORE

It wasn't anything. It was only because there was nothing else to do.

DOTTY

Nothing else to do? THERE?

SEYMORE

No. Here.

DOTTY

Who are you talking about?

SEYMORE

Why, Edith of course. Who are you talking about?

DOTTY

Why, Nora, of course.

SEYMORE

You needn't worry about Nora. Nora's too busy for completeness.

DOTTY

But Edith has lots of time.

SEYMORE

Surely you surmised – about Edith.

DOTTY

I didn't surmise – the completeness.

SEYMORE

Just as well you didn't waste anything on it. It was as empty as it was complete. But look here! You thought that about me and Nora and then, notwithstanding, you take her in, follow in her footsteps—worship at her shrine!

DOTTY

I like her.

SEYMORE

Good Lord, have you no natural feelings?

DOTTY

Yes, that's what I'm telling you. For a moment I had –VERY natural feelings – and then I saw my way. I saw my way to free the poet! (*picks up telephone*). Mrs. Eaton, please. Mrs. Standish. Hello, Marion, this is Dot. We were going to have dinner with you Monday evening – and bridge. Now Marion, I'm going to be perfectly frank with you. Seymore and I have got to give up our social engagements to make room for some other things we've undertaken. Yes, I'm sorry too. I thought the best thing was to be quite frank about it. Well I'm glad if I *have* succeeded. Then you understand, Marion, that we can't go on with the social stuff? There are too many vital things in our lives to go on with the tiresome things. That's awfully good of you. Goodbye. (*hangs up*) She says she won't press it. Isn't it *amazing*?

SEYMORE

Yes, it is amazing.

DOTTY

You go through life thinking you have to do certain things, and all there is to it is—to say you don't want to do them. I don't suppose there's anything in the world easier to get out of than society.

SEYMORE

What are you going to do when you want it BACK? Society. Your friends.

DOTTY

I don't want it back.

SEYMORE

How do you know you won't?

DOTTY

You know what you'll want by what you're wanting.

SEYMORE

That's not true. And I must say, Dotty, after many years of sacrifice to give you what you want—

DOTTY

But if I don't WANT it?

SEYMORE

I have been willing to make a great personal sacrifice to keep you happy—

DOTTY

But Seymore, if I can be happy without sacrifice, isn't that all right? Don't worry, Dear. I can get it back if I want it back. Now, I'm calling Mrs. Macintyre to tell her I can't have a table at the guild bazaar. Unless they'd let me have a birth control table!

SEYMORE

Let this madness cease! You think you can mess up some things and not have it affect other things? You seem to forget that we make our money in this town.

DOTTY

Well, let's make less.

SEYMORE

A nice way for the mother of two children to talk! You don't know what you're talking about.

DOTTY

You know, Seymore, I do think there may be something to this idea of not tying the children up with all this stuff we've been stuck for.

SEYMORE

I wish I didn't have this cursed sense of responsibility. I wish I could stop caring what would happen to you, the children, mother—and be what / want to be. I *envy* the egoist who can do that. I was about to speak of mother. This – birth control – to a woman who has had seven children!

DOTTY

I think you've got the wrong dope, Seymore.

SEYMORE

I think I know my mother.

MOTHER comes in, waving a check.

MOTHER

I wondered if Nora was here.

DOTTY

She went downtown to see about getting some printing done.

MOTHER

What a whirlwind she is.

SEYMORE

Please don't let all this—(**hands her a doll**). Here. You can just go right on with your doll.

MOTHER

Thank you, Seymore. You like this doll?

SEYMORE

I think it's an eminently successful doll.

MOTHER

It doesn't quite satisfy me. (*steals a look at him*) Yet. Well, Dotty, how are arrangements coming for your meeting here tomorrow night?

SEYMORE

Tomorrow night? Here? The vestry meets here tomorrow night!

DOTTY

They come for hymn books and stay for birth control! Seymore! You know you were saying to Dean Davis that you could write some new hymns. Do it! A birth control hymn!

MOTHER (*to the tune of Onward Christian Soldiers*)
"Don't call them from Heaven
Til Earth has got a home."

DOTTY
Yes!

NORA comes in.

DOTTY
Nora! Seymore is writing a birth control hymn! (*singing*) "Don't call them from
Heaven . . . " (*Mother joins in*) til Earth has got a home...."-

SEYMORE (*interrupting*)
I did not say that I was writing a birth control hymn—I did not say that I was
going to talk for birth control. I am an artist, not a propagandist.

NORA
"We need you Shelley!"

SEYMORE
Times change.

NORA
And poets.

MOTHER (***handing NORA the check***)
Nora, here is seven hundred dollars for birth control. Seven is too many.
Children I mean.

SEYMORE
Mother! I was the seventh child!

MOTHER
So you were, Seymore.

SEYMORE
If you'd had less, you would not have had me!

MOTHER
True enough.

SEYMORE
You are giving seven hundred dollars to a movement which had it existed would
have meant my non-existence? (*silence*) You are giving seven hundred dollars
to gratify a wish for my non-existence?

MOTHER

Now why must men be so personal? I don't wish your non-existence. Now that I'm acquainted with you – used to you - I'm reconciled to your existence. But there's no use talking. You don't understand it. You never had seven children. ***(Holding up the doll that looks like Seymore)*** You think this doll's improving, Nora?

Leon and O'Brien come in.

SEYMORE

Dolls! Dolls!

O'BRIEN

But such nice dolls! ***(picking up Angelica)*** You know, don't you think it would be amusing for me to take this doll to my mother? For a little present?

MOTHER

I'm sorry. That doll belongs to Seymore. Although he hasn't paid for her yet.

SEYMORE

I shall never pay for her! I have – paid for her. Take her away!

NORA

You don't like this doll?

SEYMORE *(bitterly)*

I wish its nonexistence.

LEON

We have been out looking over your town.

O'BRIEN

We've been talking to a great many people.

LEON

I should think you would enjoy getting out and talking with all sorts of people.

SEYMORE

I see your idea of what my life should be. in the morning I run out to greet the newsboy. No, first the milkman. I tell him what is in my soul and ask him why he is a milkman? And at the garage -

LEON

The man at the cigar store was so excited by this contact with his own thoughts that he wouldn't wait on his customers.

O'BRIEN

I was thinking of birth control this morning.

DOTTY

I'm so glad!

O'BRIEN

I was thinking of the horrible inequality there is in this whole arrangement. Bearing children, I mean.

NORA

It's been spoken of before.

O'BRIEN

Why should women have everything?

DOTTY

Everything to bear!

O'BRIEN

Everything to know. What has man done that he should be excluded from this great experience? Now I should love to have a child.

MOTHER

I fear the ambition can never be realized.

O'BRIEN

Never. It's all very dispiriting—if you let yourself dwell upon it.

DOTTY

Why isn't *that* the opening speech for birth control?

NORA

It certainly is a new angle.

SEYMORE

Oh, all angles lead to birth control, if you just think long enough.

DOTTY

Why don't we go upstairs and work on this? Where we won't be disturbed. Or – won't disturb.

SEYMORE

Let no one worry about disturbing me. I am –absurdly enough—making the final revision of a group of poems.

(He exits into his study. Nora, Dotty and O'Brien exit in another direction. Leon takes a seat near Seymore's mother)

LEON

It must be rather tiresome-making dolls.

MOTHER.

It's not as tiresome as it looks.

LEON

You must be very proud of having a son who is a poet.

(The poet's mother reserves judgment on this.)

LEON

You realize that he is one of the important poets?

MOTHER

I suppose it's always a little hard for the family to realize the importance.

LEON

He feels that his family binds him to a trivial life. He comes to us - - and he is as a man let out of prison. But he knows he must return to bondage.

MOTHER

This is bondage, is it?

LEON

I'm sorry to be talking so—but I feel consideration for others has played too large a part in his life.

MOTHER

You do?

LEON

I do. I think the chains of affection should not hold him longer.

MOTHER

Chains of affection. It has a nice sound.

LEON

Seymore is not what he seems.

MOTHER

No.

LEON

He hates this gay easy life he lives.

MOTHER

He does?

LEON

He does. He thirsts for a hard life. An outlaw's life! All of that is in his poetry. Don't you feel the sadness there – the longing for things not had?

MOTHER (*As if he has expressed something for her*)

Yes. The longing for things not had . . . Is that what he says?

LEON

He has said it to me. Don't you see in his eyes that he knows he is – the alien?

MOTHER

The alien. I suppose that is it.

LEON

You see?

MOTHER

I believe I do see.

LEON

Seymore's strong sense of obligation leads him to exaggerate the impossibility of changing others. I had quite a different impression of his wife.

MOTHER

No doubt you did.

LEON

I think Seymore himself is rather stunned at finding her so ready for the things he felt she held him from.

MOTHER

He does seem a bit stunned.

LEON

You wouldn't hold him back would you? Have you ever thought – what poetry really is?

MOTHER

I never thought so much about it as I have since you've been talking. (*pause*) I think I have—done wrong.

LEON

Do not let it weigh too heavily upon you.

MOTHER

Oh, no, just heavily enough not to go on doing it. **(She rips the doll's head and begins to let the sawdust out; stops)**. It will be hard.

LEON

Then I may hope for your cooperation? You will not stand between him and what he wants from life?

(Seymore pops his head in)

SEYMORE

Leon? You wanted to take a look at these things I'm doing?

LEON

Of course I want to. What do you think I'm here for? **(He exits as Nora re-enters)**.

NORA **(noting the doll's depleted head)**

Are you unmaking Seymore?

MOTHER **(begins to stuff back some of the sawdust she had let run out)**

I mustn't—unmake Seymore. It really couldn't be done. Oh my dear—it's hard to be a mother. Can you imagine Seymore without his – chains? You know—in your heart you know we must leave him his bondage. Here with us, longing for you, whom he cannot have. There with you, the pull of us, to whom he must return. He must always have the *other* thing. That lets him out from meeting either thing face to face. he never had the face-to-faceness. Oh my dear Nora, if you care anything about him – go away and be longed for!

NORA

But what about Diantha?

MOTHER

Yes, that's it. What about Diantha? She's loose. She's eating oats. I don't know whether we can catch her. And turn her back into a stumbling block, a hitching post – all those necessary things. It's hard to be a wife!

NORA

It shouldn't be asked of anyone.

MOTHER

But what is she to do?

NORA

Let her go on eating oats and find out what oats do to her.

Dotty enters.

DOTTY

Oats? Have you two gone mad?

NORA

Not both of us.

MOTHER

No, not both of us.

DOTTY

I thought you were coming back, Nora. We need you for fundamentals.

MOTHER

Speaking of fundamentals, Dotty, which do you love more—Seymore or birth control? If you had to choose between them, which would you choose?

NORA

I don't admit that she does have to choose between them.

MOTHER

Oh, yes you do, in your heart.

NORA

Is she to be merely something to be superior to?

MOTHER

You've never loved, Nora. At least you've never loved Seymore. Dotty, don't you see how lost Seymore is without his sacrifice for you? Do we want to go skylarking and leave poor Seymore to his freedom? Perhaps we do; it depends on which we value more—ourselves or him.

DOTTY

What am I supposed to do?

MOTHER

Perhaps you're to go right ahead as you are.

DOTTY

And be myself.

MOTHER

Only thing is, would "being yourself" spoil things for Seymore?

DOTTY

You mean I've got to sacrifice.

MOTHER

The greatest of all. You've got to let yourself be sacrificed for.

DOTTY

I won't do it!

NORA

Of course you won't!

DOTTY

If people ought to be free—why can't I be free?

MOTHER

Because you love another person. Of course if you love being free more than you love that person—

NORA

I don't agree with you. If Seymore is as you say he is, it's high time for him to change and become something more honest and downright.

MOTHER

Oh, I'm terribly to blame. I've seen him sacrificing for me all these years—and watched him bear me with such bright courage. Forgive me. Of course I don't know just how much Dotty does love Seymore. But I think perhaps she loves him enough to be his cross. It's so nice for Seymore to have a cross he loves.

NORA

A gay life - - being a cross!

MOTHER

When you love it isn't such a gay life. If you could only get us a love control, Nora, then there might be some hope –

DOTTY

Well, I don't know, Mother, you speak as if Seymore weren't intelligent.

MOTHER

I didn't mean to. He's very intelligent. Look at what he can make himself believe.

DOTTY

It's a strange way to speak of your own child.

MOTHER

Yes. Well, didn't I give seven hundred dollars to birth control?

NORA

What you're saying about Seymore makes me think Diantha had better pack a trunk and come with me. Let Seymore stay here and get up some new way of fooling himself.

DOTTY

I don't think you should talk that way about Seymore. You—a nice impression you've given Nora, Mother. You haven't said anything about the nice things—the delightful things. The *great* things. Everyone knows that Seymore is a poet. Well, certain peculiarities –go with gifts. It's part of being a poet – and –

NORA

Well, *Diantha*, I certainly am disappointed in *you*.

DOTTY (*beginning to cry*)

I know you're disappointed in me. (***Seymore and Leon come out***) I'm disappointed in myself. I can't help being – the way I am. Oh, I *wanted* to be different - !

SEYMORE

Why, what have you been doing to Dotty?

MOTHER

It's about birth control, of course. Nora has been telling her how she must go around and discuss it with men—go quite fully in detail—

DOTTY , *sobbing*

Oh, please don't – please don't –

SEYMORE

No. We'll not speak of it. Never mind, Dear. You don't have to do those things. You shall go right on being Dotty – dear Dotty Dimple (*fresh tears*) Are you satisfied, Nora? Perhaps you are beginning to see that certain things in life can't be changed?

NORA (*looking right at him*)

Perhaps that's true, Seymore.

SEYMORE

Leon, I'm sorry to have to ask you –not to prolong this visit. Oh, I know what you must think of me. I – I wish it were different.

LEON

But I just had everything arranged! Nora, this is your doing. You've bungled things as usual.

SEYMORE.

It isn't Nora who's bungled things—it's life.

O'BRIEN (*coming from upstairs, papers in his hand*).

I can't write this alone, you know – (*stops at the scene before him.*) Has something happened?

DOTTY (*with a violent new burst of sobs*)

I suppose we'll hang the Sistine Madonna again!

SEYMORE

Yes, dear. Yes, we'll hang the Madonna. (TO THE OTHERS) Well, come on. everybody, let's not be too tragic. If I am willing to accept that slice of the inevitable that falls to me, I don't see why you need get indigestion on it. Why, Mother, you've spoiled your doll.

MOTHER

Yes, and I'm rather sorry.

LEON

I protest! I cannot see life strangled without one word.

SEYMORE

I know just what you would say. I cannot let you say it now. Please stop crying Dotty. I will make things just what they were before.

NORA

I can stand this no longer.

SEYMORE

I know what you are feeling Nora. But there are things outside your world.

NORA

All I ask is that they stay outside! (*She goes*)

LEON

We'll get the afternoon train.

DOTTY, *crying afresh*

I have so enjoyed meeting you!

O'BRIEN

I wish I could know what is the matter.

SEYMORE

Leave us.

DOTTY

I don't want you to think – I don't want you to think that I - I wanted everybody to be free- and nobody is!

SEYMORE (*gently*)

I think when we are alone....

LEON (*wringing his hand*)

Goodbye, old man. Do the best you can for us, through your work. (to Mother) Mrs. Standish, I bid you goodbye. I have had a great disappointment.

MOTHER

So have I.

DOTTY

So have I.

SEYMORE

And so has O'Brien. Much as he longs to – he cannot bear a child. I'm the only one who hasn't had a disappointment. Perhaps because I don't expect the impossible. (**shaking hands with Leon and O'Brien**). Goodbye—happy people!

They go.

SEYMORE

Now, Dotty, dear, stop crying. She's gone. Can't you see? She's gone now; she won't be back. (**This does not cheer her**). I'll tell you. We'll hang the Madonna. Put her right back where she was before. Just as if nothing had ever happened. Don't you hear me, Dotty?

DOTTY

Yes, I hear you.

SEYMORE.

Well, then, come and help me. (**he starts to remove the birth control posters**). Well, you certainly drove them in—you've made holes in the wall.

DOTTY (**with malicious satisfaction**).

Yes, there will be holes in the wall.

SEYMORE

But the Madonna will cover it all up. There we are! Everything just as it was before. (**Dotty runs a hand thru her hair**). Oh, well, never mind. It will grow.

DOTTY

And be long again?

SEYMORE

Just as long as it was before.

DOTTY

"Her hair grows long, though she is dead.."

SEYMORE

Silly little lines, weren't they? I didn't use that line, remember? (**noticing his mother who has been working on the doll**) Mother, once and for all you had better make up your mind whether you are going to make or unmake that doll.

MOTHER

I'm going to make him. It's –safer.

DOTTY

Seymore?

SEYMORE

Yes?

DOTTY

When you go to New York, I want to go too. That is, sometimes.

SEYMORE

Why, dear, if you think you will enjoy it. You see what this has come to.

DOTTY

Sometimes I want to go too.

MOTHER

I think that would be a good idea, Seymore.

SEYMORE

Well, of course, Dotty shall go to New York, if Dotty Dimple wants to go to New York. I—it hurts just a little, Dotty – seeing Nora go. Going back to the things that – things not for me. It makes me realize the damnable HOLD life gets on one. (**MOTHER almost races out**) Through love. Through things one is not willing to violate. It's all right, Dear. I won't let it worry you. (**going toward his study**). I think I'll be by myself a little while. I feel I might write something. Oh – Dot, won't you get Bill on the phone for me. I fear Bill's hurt at the way things have been

lately – and Dotty, how about a little bridge tonight. If you were to call Edith up – and be nice to her – I think she'd come over, and Bill – I think it would cheer you up. (*in fine humor, and going to her*). I want you to be happy, dear. I – haven't I always been willing to arrange things so you can be happy? Well, then, isn't it a little ungrateful for you not to be?

DOTTY

After your years of sacrifice—

SEYMORE

We'll not speak of it. But just let it show you how much I love you.

DOTTY (*rather desperately*)

You love me more than that, don't you Seymore? You really love me?

SEYMORE

I really love you. I love you enough—

DOTTY

No-stop. Just really love me. That's enough.

SEYMORE (*with never a doubt of it*)

And you love me, Dotty. You really love me?

DOTTY

You'll never dream how much!

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY.