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MRS. MINGOTT. Then I shall have to see myself. Do you remember the days when I was the Pink of Maiden Lane? (Abruptly, almost accusingly, to DR. LANSKELL, pausing near the door) You used to play for me.

DR. LANSKELL. Of course I did.

MRS. MINGOTT. Then come; I shall see whether or not you've let yourself get rusty.

(She precedes them into the next room. Presently, after a waterfall of airy melody from the sweet, tinted SPINET, MRS. MINGOTT bursts into song. Somewhere a BELL is heard. Mrs. MINGOTT takes a high note as abruptly as she does many other things, and though it is not the success the things she usually does are, the enterprise is going with a sentimental brilliance when CHARLOTTE opens the door from the hall Center, and enters. She wears an ermine tippet over her cloak, a fur bonnet, and her face is spotted with the bright color of some inner excitement. She halts, hearing the music. Flinging off her cloak, she tiptoes to the door up Right, looks through, signals. An instant later DELIA

DELIA. (In amazement) Chatty!
CHARLOTTE. (Abruptly) I had to see you alone. Can we talk here? (Crosses Right Center.)

~~DELIA. (With the blandness so characteristic of her and which never seems to desert her) Of course, darling. How handsome you look! I always said you needed rich materials. This must be the coat Cousin Edith ordered for your trousseau.~~

CHARLOTTE. (Indifferently) Yes, it is. Can't you close that door?

DELIA. Yes, we might disturb Aunt Carrie. (Crosses up Right, closes door Center. The room is suddenly still. She turns to CHARLOTTE, who stands nervously ~~and uncertainly back of door Right Center, clutching~~

~~(its edge) Now. But do take off your bonnet. It's very handsome and becoming, but it's heavy, you know. I've only like it. I'll show it to you later. I hope you like it—I'm saving it for your wedding.~~

(CHARLOTTE is taking off her bonnet mechanically as DELIA prattles on. DELIA crosses to table Right Center with bonnet.)

CHARLOTTE. (Suddenly realizing what DELIA is saying) My wedding! I may not be married.

DELIA. (Center) May not be married? Are you perfectly crazy?

CHARLOTTE. If it's crazy to try to do what I think right—

DELIA. How could it be right to change your mind, now? You look as if you'd seen an army of ghosts. You can't be well—What's the matter, Chatty?

CHARLOTTE. (Somberly) I've seen Joe.

DELIA. Joe? Of course you've seen Joe. Have you quarrelled? Or is it something he's done—

CHARLOTTE. (Interrupting blankly) Done? What are you talking about?

DELIA. (A little foolishly) I thought you must have heard something against him—to be so upset.

CHARLOTTE. (Crossing down Right, with a ironical smile) No, if I'd heard anything against Joe, I shouldn't be upset. (Sharply) No! that's not it. It's nothing Joe's done.

DELIA. (Center, uneasily) What can be wrong? Tell me.

CHARLOTTE. (Slumps down into the sofa) I want you to help me.

DELIA. (Crosses to front of sofa—sits beside her) Help you? How?

CHARLOTTE. With Joe. By saving us both from his Ralston ideas!

DELIA. (Perturbed; a little offended) The Ralston ideas? I've not found the Ralston ideas unbearable.

CHARLOTTE. No, you wouldn't. But it was different with you. You weren't expected to give up things.

WHA↑ DELIA. What things? What is there for you to give up—?

CHARLOTTE. Those poor children—~~he~~ ^{IN MY NURSERY} wants me to give them up!

DELIA. Of course he does, darling. Any man would.

CHARLOTTE. But I can't! I've told him I can't—!

~~Oh! (She remembers Joseph's gloom) So that's what Joe came to talk over with Jim! But Jim will think you ought to give them up, too.~~

~~Naturally. They're two of a kind.~~

DELIA. But if you should have children of your own, how could you risk exposing them to the dangers of disease?

CHARLOTTE. Danger? Do you suppose there's really any danger? It's this everlasting Ralston cautiousness—this making mountains out of molehills where their precious safety is concerned, that I can't bear! Of course Joe's not like the rest of them—pompous and crushing and solemn. If he were—I'd have known what to expect. But I thought him different.

DELIA. *(In a voice she seldom uses, which she keeps for the few facts which have to be faced in emergencies)* You must try to be sensible, Chatty. Whether you agree with the Ralston ideas or not, you must realize that you'll never have another chance like this. *(Then, after letting this sink into CHARLOTTE'S mind, in a different tone, lending herself, without real conviction, to the Ralston attitude)* After all, one's own babies have first claim.

CHARLOTTE. That's just it. How can I give up my own baby?

DELIA. *(Frightened, then taking account of CHARLOTTE'S hysteria and finding refuge in a pleasantry)* Your own? Which of the poor waifs do you call your own baby?

CHARLOTTE. *(Mercilessly, catching DELIA'S wrist)* I call my own baby—my own baby!

~~DELIA. Your own—your own? You're hating my
baby, Chatty!~~

CHARLOTTE. My own little girl—the one who lives with those negroes.

DELIA. Oh!

CHARLOTTE. ~~The hundred-dollar baby!~~ She's my own! (Then she releases DELIA's hand and buries head in hands.)

DELIA. Oh—poor Chatty! My poor Chatty! (CHARLOTTE is crying suddenly. DELIA, after an instant, tries to take CHARLOTTE's hands. CHARLOTTE rises.) Chatty, tell me everything; don't look like that, darling—!

CHARLOTTE. (Crosses Right to mantel, in a dry voice) What do you want me to tell you? That's all you have to know.

DELIA. I mean about yourself. Was it when you were in the South, after you were ill—? (Then in a flash, understanding) Or was that why you went South? Of course! That's why Dr. Lonskell sent you—he knew—oh— (Both curious and pitying) You loved someone—?

CHARLOTTE. (Harshly) Yes, but that's over.

DELIA. (Almost afraid of her own thought; uncertainly) But—not Joe—?

CHARLOTTE. (At mantel) Not then.

DELIA. But now—?

CHARLOTTE. (Warily) Oh yes—now—that's why I was going to marry him. Because I loved him. ~~Not (Bitterly) because he was a Ralston. Not even because I could have got money from him for her. Even that's not all. I could love his children too. As you once said, life doesn't stop. One gets lonely. One wants her own home.~~

~~Doesn't I understand?~~
CHARLOTTE. (Crosses to sofa) But I can't give up my baby, can I?

DELIA. No, no—of course not. Of course not. (CHARLOTTE breaks into a sob on sofa in DELIA's lap.) We must think of some way—

CHARLOTTE. If you could speak to Jim— You can make Jim do what you like—and if he could talk to Joe—and persuade him that no harm can come of my going on with my nursery—

DELIA. (*Stroking CHARLOTTE's hair*) I'll do my best to help you—one way or the other.

CHARLOTTE. (*Gratefully*) Oh, Delia—if you only can!

DELIA. If only you could tell Joe—

CHARLOTTE. I couldn't. He'd never forgive me. (*Sits erect*) He must never know.

DELIA. No; you're right. Joe must never know. But— (*Recovering her poise sufficiently to examine the situations, but hesitating to remind CHARLOTTE of memories which must be painful*) —we're talking as if—as if—you didn't have to—to consider the—the person—who—who took advantage of you. After all, he's your child's father.

CHARLOTTE. (*Drily, but with sudden reserve*) No one took advantage of me. I was lonely. He was lonely and unhappy. Besides, he never thought of marrying me. But before he went away—

DELIA. (*As she stops*) He went away?

CHARLOTTE. Yes.

DELIA. *Knowing?*

CHARLOTTE. What was going to happen? No— I didn't know myself, then.

DELIA. But afterwards.

CHARLOTTE. No, never. He never came back.

DELIA. After all—but shouldn't he have known—?

CHARLOTTE. (*Impatiently*) Why? He couldn't have helped. He was in no position to marry anyone. Besides, he didn't love me. He loved someone else.

DELIA. (*Sharply*) Where did he go?

CHARLOTTE. (*Evading her*) Oh, what does it matter? You wouldn't understand—

DELIA. You won't tell me who he was?

CHARLOTTE. Why should I? I've never told anybody.

DELIA. How can I help you if you don't trust me?

CHARLOTTE. (*Stubbornly silent; after an instant*) Haven't I told you all you need to know?

DELIA. (*Hard, with a growing suspicion*) Where did he go—out of the country—? To—to Italy?

~~CHARLOTTE. Oh! (*Flings her hand across her eyes.*)~~

DELIA. (*Rises and sits*) Then it was to Italy— It was Clem Spender! (*Her face hardens.*)

CHARLOTTE. I told you he loved somebody else— It was because you hadn't waited for him—

DELIA. (*Rises*) Stop! (*Moves away to Center.*)

CHARLOTTE. I knew it! I knew you'd not forgive that. But you've got to listen to me now. (*Then in an uneven voice*) I'd been in love with him ever since I was a girl. He seemed everything that was romantic, to me. But he never even looked at anybody but you, until that time—
6 at your wedding, when you asked me to look after him. Then he began coming to me for sympathy. And I was sorry for him; I loved him so much— (*She breaks off.*)

DELIA. (*Talks*) Oh, Chatty, how could you! How could you—when he didn't even pretend to love you?

~~CHARLOTTE. Oh, I shouldn't have told you! I knew you'd never understand—~~

DELIA. You are right. I can't understand you. Though I would have if it had been someone who really loved you, or who you thought loved you— But (*With*

~~great disgust~~) ~~had you no pride, at all?~~
CHARLOTTE. (*Her eyes narrowing*) You needn't be so contemptuous— I've never been sorry—not really sorry—

DELIA. (*After an instant, recovering her composure; coldly*) And he's never known about the child?

CHARLOTTE. No. Why should he? It's nobody's business but mine. Besides, that's over—all over— There's nothing left of anything I ever felt for him—except my baby.

DELIA. (*Center, still cold; in a dry voice*) But why did you come to me? What did you expect me to do for you?

~~CHARLOTTE. (Warily) Must we go over all that again? I came because I can't marry Joe if it means giving up my child. (Ironically) Delia, have you forgotten so soon you were going to help me?~~

DELIA. (Center, completely changed) —What can I do for you?

CHARLOTTE. What the man you loved would want you to do.

DELIA. (In a hard voice) What do you think he'd want me to do?

CHARLOTTE. (Somberly) If Joe were Clem, and I asked him if I might go on caring for my poor children—he'd laugh and call me a goose—and want to know why on earth I bothered to ask such a question.

DELIA. (Turns front; also somberly, more to herself than to CHARLOTTE) Yes, that would be Clem Spender's way. He'd always do the kind thing—even if it meant that others would have to pay the score. (Turns Left.)

~~CHARLOTTE. (As if she had hardly noticed DELIA's comment, in her own preoccupation with her own thoughts) Please persuade Joe that I ought to be permitted to go on caring for my poor children—so I can keep my own baby and watch over her—if you can't do that I must get out of this marriage as decently as possible—without hurting Joe.~~

DELIA. (Center, harshly) Do you think you're not hurting Joe by marrying him, with such a secret on your conscience?

CHARLOTTE. (Stubbornly) What he doesn't know—what no one knows—can't hurt him.

DELIA. (With a certain aversion she cannot conceal) But suppose you marry him, and he finds out?

CHARLOTTE. I've made up my mind to risk that—though it's the reason I held him off so long. But I love him so much I'll make it up to him in other ways. He'll not be sorry he married me if he'll only give me my own way about this.

~~DELIA. (Harshly) But you don't love him as much as you once loved Clem Spender.~~

CHARLOTTE. I love him—*differently*. As you love Jim, *differently*, perhaps. (DELIA crosses to Right, front of table, Left. CHARLOTTE rises and crosses Center) And I need Joe's love— (She breaks off as DELIA turns her eyes away as if in disgust; then continues passionately) Oh, I can imagine what you think of me for deceiving him! But if I choose to deceive him, it's not your business; it's mine!

DELIA. You've made it my business now. (After an instant, she looks at Charlotte.)

I can't think. You must give me time. (Sits at table Left, Center.)

CHARLOTTE. (Picking up her coat and crossing up Center doors) There is no time. I must decide now— tonight— and I can't think— either—

DELIA. Where are you going?

CHARLOTTE. (Crossing down to table Right Center) I don't know— I want to walk—to be out in the air. I think I want to be alone— (Picks up bonnet.)

DELIA. (Crosses back of her chair and faces CHARLOTTE. Sharply, as to a child) Go upstairs, to my room—and wait. Joe's here now with Jim. I'll try to do what I think best.

CHARLOTTE. (Brokenly) Do something. Whatever you do, you can't make things worse.

DELIA. (To Center, suddenly decisive; turns front) Whatever happens, that little girl shall stay with those blacks. I promise you that.

CHARLOTTE. (A light coming into her face) You promise that! You do promise—? (Takes hold of DELIA'S hand, she withdraws it.)

DELIA. Yes. But I must manage it in my own way. Will you wait? Or shall I send for the coach to take you home now, and see you tomorrow?

CHARLOTTE. (After an instant; drawing a sharp breath)