

DEEP ARE THE ROOTS

turns and continues toward phone.) Please, Alice. For Brett! He's already had so much trouble! (Alice continues to phone.) Whoever the person is, there's nothing he can do! He has no proof! And nobody would believe him! (Alice stops d. r. She turns slowly and looks at Genevra, a monstrous question forming in her mind. Crosses u. c. to back of sofa.)

ALICE. Genevra—where were you last night? (Genevra doesn't answer.) Answer me!

GENEVRA. I was out.

ALICE. Where?!

GENEVRA. (Weakly.) The movies. To the movies.

ALICE. Yes? . . . What was showing at the movies?

GENEVRA. Oh, you know. Fredric March—in that picture —

ALICE. Fredric March was last week.

GENEVRA. (Pause.) Was it?

ALICE. You were out with Brett!

GENEVRA. Yes. I was.

ALICE. You've been out with him before.

GENEVRA. No.

ALICE. But last night somebody saw you.

GENEVRA. Yes. It was unfortunate.

ALICE. (With deep bitterness.) Unfortunate! . . . How did it happen? He forced you to go with him, isn't that right?

GENEVRA. No, he didn't force me. I asked him to go. We went walking down by the river.

ALICE. At night. All alone. Walking!

GENEVRA. (Calmly.) Yes.

ALICE. You don't think anybody will believe that? You don't think I can believe it?

GENEVRA. Why not?

ALICE. You're trying to protect him.

GENEVRA. Of course I am.

ALICE. Why? Why should you defend him?

GENEVRA. Because I like him.

ALICE. (In a whisper.) Nevvy! Nevvy! You couldn't have wanted him to touch you.

GENEVRA. That's what you're bound to believe, isn't it?

ALICE. My God, you must have tried to stop him!

GENEVRA. Pretty soon you'll be saying something even worse. Rape . . .

ALICE. Nevvy! Tell me you tried to stop him!

GENEVRA. I didn't try to stop him, because he didn't try to touch me.

ALICE. You're lying.

GENEVRA. No, I'm telling the truth.

ALICE. Then why didn't you tell me before? Why did you try to hide it?

GENEVRA. Yes, that was stupid. Because there was nothing to hide.

ALICE. Then why are you frightened? Are you ashamed?

GENEVRA. I'm not ashamed! And I am telling the truth! And I may as well tell the whole truth. (Slowly, painfully.) I realize now, if he had—if he had put his arms around me—I wouldn't have—well, I don't think I would have minded at all. I think maybe I would have been glad.

ALICE. (Backing away.) My sister! My own sister!

GENEVRA. (Very simply.) Yes, maybe I do love him.

ALICE. Stop it! Don't use that word! (Crosses down c.)

GENEVRA. I can't help it. Maybe I do love him. And it's no use covering your face or closing your ears. If it's the truth, you've got to hear it. Why shouldn't I say it? I love him.

ALICE. (Sitting L. of table R.) I wish you were dead.

GENEVRA. Yes, that would solve everything, wouldn't it? Except that I don't want to be dead. . . . I'm going away.

ALICE. How could I have been so unaware!

GENEVRA. You're not listening to me. I'm telling you that I'm going away. I know it's completely impossible, and so does Brett.

ALICE. The very first day he came home—you went to the station —

GENEVRA. All right, don't listen to me—don't believe me. But I don't think you'll call Cousin Roy or anyone else. You can't do anything to Brett without making it pretty awful for me, too. And you'd never do that. You'll have to face the fact that it happened and then you'll have to forget about it. (She crosses to Alice, looks down at her.) I'm sorry, Alice. (Puts a hand on Alice's shoulder.)

ALICE. (Pulling away.) Don't!

GENEVRA. (After a moment.) All right, Alice, I won't touch you. (She stares at Alice, then turns and goes c., and upstairs.)

HOWARD. It's too bad. I'm sorry for them; both of them.

ALICE. (*Looking up at him slowly.*) You say that so calmly. Don't you know what this means?

HOWARD. It's a mess.

ALICE. Then you don't know what it means. . . . My own sister!

HOWARD. You said that before.

ALICE. She can't be in her right mind. She can't be. How could it have happened? Of course, she's terribly young—but other girls never act that way—Nevvy's always been quite normal—but she's sensitive—you know what I mean—she's terribly sensitive. I've known that—I've always tried to shield her. Mother died when she was a baby—she's never had a mother. Maybe I've left her alone too much.—No, it can't be my fault—it can't—you heard the things she said—they weren't natural—it's completely abnormal. He's used some horrible persuasion, don't you think so? But he *did*. It couldn't have happened otherwise. He must have bewitched her.

HOWARD. (*On his knees beside her.*) Alice! Snap out of it!

ALICE. Yes, he did. He bewitched her.

HOWARD. You don't even realize what you're saying!

ALICE. (*Rises, beginning to pace.*) Of course! I should have seen it—that first day—I shouldn't have trusted him. My God, how could he do this? She was such a beautiful little girl—! How could she let him touch her? . . . Yes, and he did it deliberately. He's done everything deliberately. The library, the conference at Atlanta, everything. And now we know he's stopped at nothing. He'd do anything— (*She stops pacing u. l., goes abruptly across to phone, picks it up.*) Get me Sheriff Serkin's office, please.

HOWARD. (*Taking a step toward her.*) Alice, I beg of you—

ALICE. Let me alone, Howard.

HOWARD. (*Moving closer to her.*) You must not do this. You can't let them know about Nevvy.

ALICE. (*With great intensity.*) It's Nevvy I'm protecting—

HOWARD. You'll destroy her!

ALICE. It's her I'm saving! (*Into phone.*) Sheriff Serkin?

HOWARD. Alice, listen to me—

ALICE. This is Miss Alice Langdon. I want you to make an arrest. (*Howard turns away from her hopelessly.*) That's right, an arrest. Brett Charles. He's still here in the house. . . . Very well. I'll expect you just as soon as you can get here. . . . For theft! (*She puts down the phone, turns to find Howard watching her accus-*

ingly. *Avoiding his gaze, she wanders to the table down L., very precisely arranges a chair, it's obvious she is trying to calm herself.*)

HOWARD. (*Very quietly.*) How easy it all is. Just call the Sheriff. Of course, we ignore the fact that he didn't steal the watch.

ALICE. (*Walking up L., still avoiding his gaze.*) But he *did* steal it.

HOWARD. A little while ago you were defending Brett very ably, and I thought very logically. Now suddenly you say he's a thief.

ALICE. (*Down L.*) You don't understand these things.

HOWARD. No, I don't.

ALICE. He's gone bad.

HOWARD. What?

ALICE. He'd do anything. To steal a watch is nothing. He's gone bad.

HOWARD. Ah, I know. Something like a thoroughbred horse who breaks a leg. You feel quite unhappy about it, but you have to shoot him. But Brett's not a horse. He's an intelligent man. You've got an investment there. Twenty years of patience and kindness—to say nothing of your liberal convictions. Shouldn't you hesitate a moment before you—shoot him?

ALICE. Don't talk nonsense.

HOWARD. And in a moment you're going to say that I'm from the North.

ALICE. Well, you *are* from the North.

HOWARD. (*Goes to her.*) Good Lord! (*Urgently.*) Alice! Alice, darling. You're an intelligent woman. You've always used your head. You've got to use it *now*. Let's not lose our powers of reason. Let's not luxuriate our emotions by riding off on a witch hunt.

ALICE. Father was right. He saw what had happened to Brett.

HOWARD. And now, I suppose, you'll agree with every wild declaration of your father's?

ALICE. (*Turns to him, coldly.*) My father may be old, but in his time he was considered by many to be a great man. And nobody ever questioned his sincerity.

HOWARD. As you say, "in his time." But are you living in his time, or in your own time? . . . Whatever your father may once have been, today he's the dying South. He's decay; he's age; (*Alice turns away.*) he's everything that's corrupt and evil. At first I thought your father was harmless, but I can see now that he

wields a terrible power. The moment he thought he could frame Brett, he was off and away. He forgot he was ill, and that soon he would be dead. And now his greatest triumph: he's captured you—completely!

ALICE. Are you finished?

HOWARD. Hell, no; I could go on for hours! (*Alice suddenly begins to cry, she sits on sofa.*)

ALICE. Oh, Howard! I don't know why I'm crying. I love you so much.

HOWARD. (*Crossing up to back of sofa.*) You're still, notwithstanding, and despite everything, the loveliest woman I've ever known. Maybe just because you are so complicated and contradictory. Here, blow your nose. (*Hands her his handkerchief.*)

ALICE. Howard, I'll ask you a question.
HOWARD. Sure.

ALICE. If you were in my place, what would you do?

HOWARD. To answer honestly, I don't know.

ALICE. If you had a sister, and this had happened in your own house, what would you do?

HOWARD. (*Sits beside her.*) I'm sure of one thing. I would not call the Sheriff.

ALICE. (*Insistently.*) What would you do?

HOWARD. I'd try to behave rationally. I'd try to realize this is no case of crime and punishment. I'd try to act with compassion, rather than with vengeance. . . . And if I'd made the mistake of calling the Sheriff, then, when he came I'd send him away.

ALICE. Then you'd do nothing? You'd do nothing at all?

HOWARD. (*Impatiently.*) You keep talking about "doing something!" It's already done. Nevvy has made her decision. She knows it's impossible. You heard what she said!

ALICE. Surely you don't believe her!

HOWARD. Of course I believe her! My God, where are your eyes? Can't you see she's trying to be utterly honest?

ALICE. Yes, indeed. Because she was found out.

HOWARD. (*Looking at her coldly.*) That's a filthy thing to say!

ALICE. (*Rises, crossing L.*) But it's true!

HOWARD. (*Rises.*) Is it? I suspected several days ago that Nevvy and Brett were falling in love.

ALICE. (*Turning to him.*) And you wouldn't even say a word to me!

HOWARD. No.

ALICE. Why?

HOWARD. I didn't feel it was any of my business, and, now that we get right down to it, I'm not sure it's any of your business, either.

ALICE. Of course it's my business. It's every white person's business. How do you think we live down here? How do you think we keep our sanity? When a thing like this happens, we stamp it out. . . . And you babble on about compassion. You're a sentimental fool!

HOWARD. (*Angrily.*) Because I don't want to joint your private lynching!

ALICE. (*Bitterly.*) Lynching!

HOWARD. Yes. If you need support, go down and get those hooligans who sit on the curbstone outside the courthouse! They'll help you! They'll even *bang* Brett for you! Maybe you'd like *that*!

ALICE. (*She turns away trembling.*) I don't want to talk to you any more. Please go away. (*Howard stares at her, then crosses quickly to where she is standing, takes her urgently by the arms, with great force, turns her to him.*)

HOWARD. Alice—Alice, darling, there's just one chance for us; just one! When the Sheriff gets here, send him away! Don't let him have Brett! I can't stand up to be married tomorrow while that man's in jail! Send the Sheriff away! We'll try to help Nevvy. Maybe we can help Brett, too. For God's sake let's make a civilized effort!

ALICE. (*In a low voice.*) I have to do what I know is right. (*Howard releases her slowly, steps back.*)

HOWARD. Well, Miss Alice, it's been an interesting four weeks' visit in the romantic South. (*Howard turns, goes up the stairs. Langdon enters. He crosses down to his chair, L.*)

LANGDON. (*Noting the dark expression on Alice's face.*) Well?

ALICE. (*With an effort.*) The Sheriff's coming.

LANGDON. So.

ALICE. He's coming to arrest Brett.

LANGDON. Ah!

ALICE. I called him myself.

LANGDON. (*Carefully.*) What became of that sentimental lady who was acting as champion of her black friend?

ALICE. Please, Father, don't!