

Fairy

FAIRY. Oh! That reminds me. May we ask you a personal question, Mrs. Savage?

MRS. SAVAGE. They're the only ones worth asking, my dear.

FLORENCE. A little bird told us that you used to be an actress. We're bursting with curiosity. Is it true?

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh—that. Well, if being on the stage makes you an actress—then I guess it's true.

FAIRY. Miss Willie—she's the bird Florence mentioned—told us that you'd been on the New York stage.

HANNIBAL. I wonder if we've ever seen you, Mrs. Savage?

MRS. SAVAGE. Not unless you were quick. Actually I was only in two plays. The first was "Macbeth."

FAIRY. Oh, I adore "Macbeth." All that blood. I sent a pint of my blood to the Red Cross once. They sent it back.

JEFF. I should think you would have been a novel departure as Lady Macbeth.

MRS. SAVAGE. I can't tell you how much I agree with you—but they cast me as a witch.

FAIRY. But you're a perfect witch!

MRS. SAVAGE. Thank you, dear.

FAIRY. Please speak some witch talk for us.

MRS. SAVAGE. I didn't have any lines. If I had it probably would have cost me twice as much.

JEFF. Why did it cost you *anything*?

MRS. SAVAGE. I backed the show. If I hadn't put up the money—I couldn't have played even the mute witch. But we made history. It's the first play that ever closed *before* the reviews were out.

FAIRY. Was it expensive?

MRS. SAVAGE. Extremely—but worth it.

FLORENCE. What a pity. Weren't you discouraged?

MRS. SAVAGE. Bitterly. But man is by nature optimistic. If he weren't he'd eat his young. So I decided I'd write a play and star myself.

FAIRY. (*Stops—aghast.*) You wrote a play!

MRS. SAVAGE. I did indeed. With a courage born of ignorance and a plot out of wedlock.

FLORENCE. What part did you play then?

MRS. SAVAGE. Naturally—the lead. (*With a sweep of her hand.*) "Not Guilty"—starring Ethel P. Savage.

JEFF. What does the "P" stand for?

MRS. SAVAGE. I haven't the faintest idea. My numerologist said I needed it in my name for luck. He was right. We ran a year.

FAIRY. What was the play about?

MRS. SAVAGE. A mother who'd murdered a man and was defended by a young woman lawyer who turns out to be her own daughter. I had red hair and died in my daughter's arms every night and two matinees a week just as the curtain came down and the jury whispered—"Not Guilty." (*Rises to her own applause.*) Oh, I've never had a better time in my life.

HANNIBAL. I gather the notices were good that time?

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, they were sincere. But it didn't make any difference.

FLORENCE. What did they say?

MRS. SAVAGE. The *Times* said my play set the theatre back fifty years. It couldn't possibly—because I stole the plot from "Madame X," and that's only forty years old.

FAIRY. Wouldn't you think they'd know?

MRS. SAVAGE. But the *Wall Street Journal* was wonderful. It said I brought something new to the theatre.

FAIRY. Money?

FLORENCE. Oh, Fairy—really! Money isn't new.

JEFF. What did *Wall Street* say?

MRS. SAVAGE. It said I had a "tenacious mediocrity unhampered by taste."

JEFF. But that wasn't good.

MRS. SAVAGE. It was perfect. In our ads we simply said "Tenacious" and "Unhampered."

JEFF. And you ran a year?

MRS. SAVAGE. We'd have been running yet if my daughter hadn't come home and stopped me. Oh, I know I was bad and audiences only came to laugh at me. But we both had a good time. What more can you ask? I do miss it. (*Sighs.*) Oh, well. (*Crosses to reading table L.*) My turn is coming.

FAIRY. I don't think it was very nice of your daughter. (*Then, seeing MRS. SAVAGE pick up a newspaper, she leaps to her feet and points.*) Don't! Don't do it. Please don't!

FLORENCE. Fairy—what is wrong?

FAIRY. Look—Mrs. Savage is going to read the newspaper. (*Everyone in the room is alerted. Even MRS. PADDY rises from be-*

bind her easel. MRS. SAVAGE faces them a little apprehensively—takes a step backward.)

FLORENCE. Oh—oh!

MRS. SAVAGE. What's—the matter? (JEFF, followed by FAIRY, HANNIBAL and FLORENCE, all cross quickly to MRS. SAVAGE.)

HANNIBAL. I wouldn't do that if I were you, Mrs. Savage.

FLORENCE. Please give it to me. Please—Mrs. Savage.

JEFF. You mustn't read it.

FAIRY. It will only make you unhappy.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Backs away.) Now just a moment. I know what the paper is going to say so there is nothing you can hide from me. I've just been waiting for it to happen. (They look at each other, buzzed.)

HANNIBAL. Waiting for what to happen, Mrs. Savage?

MRS. SAVAGE. Why—why, what it says in the paper.

JEFF. But we don't know what it says in the paper.

MRS. SAVAGE. Then why were you trying to keep me from seeing it?

HANNIBAL. We have an agreement.

JEFF. We never read the newspapers until they're a month old.

FLORENCE. We find we're much happier when we wait.

MRS. SAVAGE. What are you waiting for?

FAIRY. Why, naturally we're waiting for — (Turns to HANNIBAL.) What do we wait for, Hannibal?

HANNIBAL. Ah—ah—perspective.

JEFF. Peace of mind.

FLORENCE. Security.

JEFF. We believe it's better to read about unpleasant things a month after they've happened.

HANNIBAL. It's reassuring when you know it's over and nothing can be done.

MRS. SAVAGE. My dear people—there is something important in the paper that I want to know about. And I'd like to know now—not next month.

FLORENCE. We're only trying to help you.

FAIRY. Yes!

JEFF. Disaster is easier to digest when it's aged a little.

MRS. SAVAGE. You're very kind but I've made my bed and I want to know who's in it.

FLORENCE. (To the others.) We can't prevent Mrs. Savage from

reading the paper if she insists. We don't know her well enough to be rude.

HANNIBAL. Florence is right.

FAIRY. Well—if you read anything unpleasant—don't tell us.

GUESTS. (Together.) No! (They move away from MRS. SAVAGE as if she were about to open Pandora's box and release a host of new apprehensions.)

FLORENCE. If there's trouble in the world—it won't help us to know about it. (They stand back and wait while MRS. SAVAGE searches the pages of the paper.)

MRS. SAVAGE. This is yesterday's paper. (Looks through other newspapers.) I want today's paper.

HANNIBAL. Oh, it isn't here yet.

MRS. SAVAGE. When does it come?

HANNIBAL. I don't know.

MRS. SAVAGE. Is there a radio here?

JEFF. Yes—right over there. (Points to window seat.)

MRS. SAVAGE. (Hurries over to it.) Maybe I can catch the news. (Switches on radio.) Why didn't someone mention there was a radio here?

JEFF. You didn't ask us.

MRS. SAVAGE. This doesn't light up. Is anything wrong with the set?

FAIRY. I don't think so. Of course, it hasn't any tubes.

MRS. SAVAGE. It hasn't any—what?

FLORENCE. Tubes. Mrs. Paddy steals them. She hates electricity, you know.

JEFF. No one knows where she hides them.

MRS. SAVAGE. Why didn't you say the set had no tubes?

JEFF. You didn't ask us.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh dear, dear, dear, dear! (Stands a moment, looking out window.) How high is that wall?

HANNIBAL. Much too high.

FAIRY. It's easily ten chairs high.

MRS. SAVAGE. And I suppose no one ever leaves that great gate open?

FLORENCE. Don't look beyond the garden, Mrs. Savage. There may be a better place somewhere—but if you give this up to search for it—you may not find it—and lose what you have.

HANNIBAL. You'll like it here after a while.