

Jeff & Ethel

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh! You startled me.

JEFF. (Quickly rises and covers R. side of his face with his hand.) I didn't know anyone was in here.

MRS. SAVAGE. And I didn't know you could play the piano. (Comes down to him.)

JEFF. I only play when I'm alone.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh, you shouldn't be so shy. No one is going to compare you with a professional.

JEFF. But I *am* a professional.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh.

JEFF. I made my debut in Town Hall a week before the war. Jeffrey Meredith. You see? (Takes clipping from his wallet.)

MRS. SAVAGE. Why, it says you were brilliant! Forgive me, Jeff. I should have known.

JEFF. (Smiles.) I was going to appear with the Philharmonic. I didn't—but I have the contract to prove I might have.

MRS. SAVAGE. But you never play, Jeff. Oh, please go on—I'd like to hear you.

JEFF. (Puts hand to face again.) No. I don't like to be stared at.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Pats him affectionately on shoulder.) I'll look the other way and listen, Jeff.

JEFF. I'd rather not. I'm not ready to face people yet. Please don't insist.

MRS. SAVAGE. I wouldn't dream of it. (Sits on sofa.)

JEFF. Thank you. (Crosses to sit beside her.) Can you keep a secret?

MRS. SAVAGE. About ten minutes.

JEFF. Doctor Emmett isn't a doctor at all.

MRS. SAVAGE. What is he?

JEFF. A patient—just like Mrs. Paddy.

MRS. SAVAGE. Oh—do you think so?

JEFF. For five years now he's promised to give me a new face.

MRS. SAVAGE. No, he's a doctor, Jeff. It says so on his office door. He wouldn't lie.

JEFF. Do you believe a man is what he claims to be?

MRS. SAVAGE. I'm a trusting soul. I try to believe the best of people.

JEFF. It's best to believe the worst. If you believe the worst, then the worst is only half bad at best. And the best is no worse than expected. So it's best to believe the worst.

MRS. SAVAGE. (Ponders this for a moment.) You know, Jeffrey—that's just obscure enough to be profound. What does it mean?

JEFF. It's simple. When a man says he is wise, you say he's a fool. But if he says he's a fool—you believe him.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, only a fool claims to be wise.

JEFF. (Triumphantly.) Exactly! Which proves I'm right. Doctor Emmett is a fool. He claims he's a doctor. The war was over five years ago—and where's his miracle?

MRS. SAVAGE. Some things take a long time to heal, Jeffrey.

JEFF. I can't wait much longer. I'm getting old. I'll be twenty-six soon.

MRS. SAVAGE. And that's ancient. Why don't you forget your appearance and play, anyhow? Don't condemn your audience before you give them a chance to be kind.

JEFF. Look at me and then tell me an audience won't shudder at the sight of me. (Rises and stands in front of her with hand covering his face toward audience.) Look! (Slowly takes his hand away.) Do you see?

MRS. SAVAGE. (Looks at JEFFREY's handsome and unblemished face.) I see nothing—to hide, Jeffrey.

JEFF. Doctor Emmett told you what to say.

MRS. SAVAGE. No, he didn't, I promise. But I'd trust him if I were you. Give him a little more time.

JEFF. All right. I'll give him five years more.

MRS. SAVAGE. Fair enough.

JEFF. Do you know something?

MRS. SAVAGE. Not a thing. I'm awed only by the magnitude of what I don't know.

JEFF. I wouldn't tell this to anyone else. (Glances around cautiously.) Hannibal really can't play the violin.

MRS. SAVAGE. No!

JEFF. Yes!

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, of course, I'm tone deaf.

JEFF. I'll tell you something else. I sometimes wish I were.

MRS. SAVAGE. Well, you're a sweet boy to pretend.

JEFF. Poor Hannibal can't play—yet he does. I really can—but I won't. Don't you think that's funny?

~~MRS. SAVAGE. Not very.~~

~~FAIRY. (Rushes in from hallway and screams.) There's a rat in the hall—a rat as big as a mouse! Climb up on a chair quickly.~~