

**THE CHILDREN'S HOUR**

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by Lillian Hellman

From: *Contemporary Scenes for Student Actors*

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MARTHA: Where's Joe?

KAREN: Gone.

MARTHA: Karen. What's the matter?

KAREN: He won't be back.

MARTHA: You mean he won't be back anymore tonight.

KAREN: He won't be back at all.

MARTHA: What happened? What happened Karen?

KAREN: He thought we had been lovers.

MARTHA: I don't believe you. I don't believe it. What kind of awful talk is that? I don't believe you. I don't believe it.

KAREN: All right. All right.

MARTHA: Didn't you tell him? For gods sake didn't you tell him it wasn't true?

KAREN: Yes.

MARTHA: He didn't believe you?

KAREN: I guess he believed me.

MARTHA: Then what have you done. It's all wrong. It's crazy. Why didn't you ...

KAREN: I don't want to ever talk about it, Martha.

MARTHA: Oh god. I wanted that so much for you.

KAREN: Don't carry on. I don't feel well.

MARTHA: It's a bad night tonight. But we might as well get used to it. They will all be like this.

KAREN: But it isn't a new sin what they tell us we've done. Other people aren't destroyed by it.

MARTHA: They are the people who believe I it. Who want it. Who've chosen it for themselves. We aren't like that. We don't love each other. I've loved you like a friend. The way thousands of women feel about other women.

KAREN: I'm cold.

MARTHA: You were a dear friend. Who was loved. That's all. It's perfectly natural that I should be fond of you. Why we've known each other since we were seventeen. And I always thought ...

KAREN: Why are you saying all this?

MARTHA: Because I love you.

KAREN: Yes. Of course. I love you too.

MARTHA: But maybe I love you that way. The way they said. I don't know. Listen to me.

KAREN: What?

MARTHA: I have loved you the way they said.

KAREN: Martha we are both so tired. Please don't.

MARTHA: There's always been something wrong. Always. As long as I can remember. But I never knew until all this happened.

KAREN: Stop this crazy talk.

MARTHA: You are afraid of hearing it. I'm more afraid than you.

KAREN: I won't listen to you.

MARTHA: You have got to know it. I can't keep it to myself any longer. I've got to tell you that I am guilty.

KAREN: You are guilty of nothing.

MARTHA: It's there. I don't know how. I don't know why. But I did love you. I do love you.

KAREN: It's not the truth. Not a word of it. We never thought of each other that way.

MARTHA: No of course you didn't. But who says I didn't? I never felt that way about anybody but you. I've never loved a man before. I never knew why. Maybe it's that.

KAREN: You are tired and sick.

MARTHA: Its funny. It's all mixed up.

KAREN: What are you saying?

MARTHA: I've ruined your life. I've ruined my own. I feel so god damned sick and dirty. I can't stand it any more.

KAREN: All this isn't true. Tomorrow we will pick ourselves up and ...

MARTHA: I don't want tomorrow. It's a bad word.

KAREN: Go and lie down. Martha. And in a few minutes I'll make some tea and bring it to you. You'll feel better.

MARTHA: Don't bring me any tea. Thank you. Good night darling.