

while we're on the subject of Mr. Jefferson, you might ask him if he wouldn't like to pay your salary, since he takes up all your time.

MAGGIE. *(She is on her knees, gathering up debris L. of wheelchair.)*
Oh, come now, Sherry. It isn't as bad as that.

WHITESIDE. I have not even been able to reach you, not knowing what haylofts you frequent.

MAGGIE. *(Crossing to back of sofa with box of debris.)* Oh, stop behaving like a spoiled child, Sherry.

WHITESIDE. Don't take that patronizing tone with me, you flea-bitten Cleopatra. I am sick and tired of your sneaking out like some lovesick high-school girl every time my back is turned.

MAGGIE. Well, Sherry—I'm afraid you've hit the nail on the head.
(Taking off hat and putting it on table back of couch.)

WHITESIDE. ~~Stop acting like Zasu Pitts and~~ explain yourself.

MAGGIE. *(To c.)* I'll make it quick, Sherry. I'm in love.

WHITESIDE. Nonsense. This is merely delayed puberty.

MAGGIE. No, Sherry, I'm afraid this is it. You're going to lose a very excellent secretary.

WHITESIDE. You are out of your mind.

MAGGIE. Yes, I think I am, a little. But I'm a girl who's waited a long time for this to happen, and now it has. Mr. Jefferson doesn't know it yet, but I'm going to try my darnedest to marry him. *(Ease L.)*

WHITESIDE. *(As she pauses.)* Is that all?

MAGGIE. Yes, except that—well—I suppose this is what might be called my resignation, as soon as you've got someone else.

WHITESIDE. *(A slight pause.)* Now listen to me, Maggie. ~~We have been together for a long time.~~ You are indispensable to me, but I think I am unselfish enough not to let that stand in the way where your happiness is concerned. Because whether you know it or not, I have a deep affection for you.

MAGGIE. *(Ease R.)* I know that, Sherry.

WHITESIDE. That being the case, I will not stand by and allow you to make a fool of yourself.

MAGGIE. I'm not, Sherry.

MAGGIE:
#1

START

2/6

WHITESIDE. You are, my dear. You are behaving like a Booth Tarkington heroine. It's— it's incredible. I cannot believe that a girl who for the past ten years has had the great of the world served up on a platter before her, I cannot believe that it is anything but a kind of temporary insanity when you are swept off your feet in seven days by a second-rate, small-town newspaper man.

MAGGIE. (To him.) Sherry, I can't explain what's happened. I can only tell you that it's so. It's hard for me to believe, too, Sherry. Here I am, a hard-bitten old cynic, behaving like *True Story* magazine, and liking it. Discovering the moon, and ice-skating—I keep laughing to myself all the time, but there it is. What can I do about it, Sherry? I'm in love.

~~WHITESIDE. (With sudden decision.) We're leaving tomorrow. Hip or no hip, we're leaving here tomorrow. I don't care if I fracture the other one. Get me a train schedule and start packing. I'll pull you out of this, Miss Stardust. I'll get the ants out of those moonlit pants.~~

~~MAGGIE. (Crosses L.) It's no good, Sherry. It's no good. I'd be back on the next streamlined train.~~

~~WHITESIDE. It's completely unbelievable. Can you see yourself, the wife of the editor of the *Mesalia Journal*, having an evening at home for Mr. and Mrs. Stanley, Mr. and Mrs. Poop-Face, and the members of the Book-of-the-Month Club?~~

MAGGIE. (Crosses R.) ~~Sherry~~, I've had ten years of the great figures of our time, and don't think I'm not grateful to you for it. I've loved every minute of it. They've been wonderful years, Sherry. Gay, and stimulating—I don't think anyone has ever had the fun we've had. But a girl can't laugh all the time, Sherry. There comes a time when she wants—Bert Jefferson. You don't know Bert, Sherry. He's gentle and he's unassuming, and—well, I love him, that's all. (Ease L.)

WHITESIDE. ~~I see. Well, I remain completely unconvinced.~~ You are drugging yourself into this Joan Crawford fantasy, and before you become completely anesthetized I shall do everything in my power to bring your to your senses.

MAGGIE. (Wheeling on him.) Now listen to me, Whiteside. I know you. Lay off. I know what a devil you can be. I've seen you do it to other people, but don't you dare do it to me. Don't drug

yourself into the idea that all you're thinking of is my happiness. You're thinking of yourself a little bit, too, and all those months of breaking in somebody new. I've seen you in a passion before when your life has been disrupted, and you couldn't dine in Calcutta on July twelfth with Boo-Boo. Well, that's too bad, but there it is. (*Crosses to stairs.*) I'm going to marry Bert if he'll have me, and don't you dare try any of your tricks. I'm on to every one of them. So lay off. That's my message to you, Big Lord Fauntleroy. (*And she is up the stairs.*)

END

(*Left stewing in his own juice, Whiteside is in a perfect fury. He bangs arm of his chair, then slaps at manuscript in his lap. As he does so, the dawn of an idea comes into his mind. He sits perfectly still for a moment, thinking it over. Then, with a slow smile, he takes manuscript out of its envelope. He looks at title page, riffles through the script, then stops and thinks again. His face breaks out into one great smile. He reaches for phone receiver.*)

WHITESIDE. (*In a lowered voice, meanwhile discarding cables from basket until he finds right one.*) Long distance, please. I want to put in a Transatlantic call. (*He looks at cablegram again for confirmation.*) Hello. Transatlantic operator? ...This is Mesalia 1-4-2. I want to talk to Miss Lorraine Sheldon—S-h-e-l-d-o-n. She's on the *Normandie*. It sailed from Southampton day before yesterday. (*Doorbell.*) Will it take long? ...All right. My name is Whiteside...thank you.

(*He hangs up. He goes back to manuscript again and looks through it. John then ushers in Dr. Bradley.*)

BRADLEY. (*Offstage.*) Good evening, John.

JOHN. Good evening, Doctor. (*Exits swinging-door U. L.*)

BRADLEY. (*Crosses to R.; heartily as usual.*) Well, well! Good evening, Mr. Whiteside!

WHITESIDE. Come back tomorrow—I'm busy.

BRADLEY. (*Turning cute.*) Now what would be the best news that I could possibly bring you?

WHITESIDE. You have hydrophobia.

BRADLEY. (*Laughing it off.*) No, no... Mr. Whiteside, you are a well man. You can get up and walk now. You can leave here tomorrow.

MAGGIE

4/6

ACT THREE

Scene is the same.

Christmas morning. The bright December sunlight streams in through the window. From library comes the roaring voice of Whiteside again: "Miss Preen! Miss Preen!"

Miss Preen, who is just coming through dining room, rushes to open library doors.

MISS PREEN. Yes, sir. Yes, sir.

WHITESIDE. *(As he, plainly in a mood, rolls himself into the room to D. R.)* Where do you disappear to all the time, My Lady Nausea?

MISS PREEN. Mr. Whiteside, I can only be in one place at a time.

WHITESIDE. That's very fortunate for this community.

(Miss Preen goes indignantly into library and slams doors after her. John enters from upstairs, carrying a tray of used dishes.)

JOHN. Good morning, Mr. Whiteside. Merry Christmas.

WHITESIDE. Merry Christmas, John. Merry Christmas.

JOHN. Are you ready for your breakfast, Mr. Whiteside?

WHITESIDE. No, I don't think I want any breakfast... Has Miss Cutler come down yet?

JOHN. No, sir, not yet.

WHITESIDE. Is she in her room, do you know?

JOHN. Yes, sir, she is. Shall I call her?

WHITESIDE. No, no. That's all, John.

JOHN. *(Going through dining room U. R.)* Yes, sir.

(Whiteside, left alone, heaves a huge sigh. Then Maggie comes downstairs. She wears a traveling suit and carries a bag. Whiteside waits for her to speak.)

MAGGIE

#2

START

MAGGIE. *(Putting bag down R. of staircase.)* I'm taking the one o'clock train, Sherry. I'm leaving.

WHITESIDE. You're doing nothing of the kind!

MAGGIE. Here are your keys—your driving license. *(Hands them to him.)* The key to the safe-deposit vault is in the apartment in New York. I'll go in here now and clear things up. *(She opens library door.)*

WHITESIDE. *(Puts keys etc. in pocket.)* Just a moment, Mrs. Siddons. Where were you until three o'clock this morning? ~~I sat up half the night in this station-wagon, worrying about you.~~ You heard me calling to you when you came in. Why didn't you answer me?

MAGGIE. *(Crosses to R. of him.)* Look, Sherry, it's over, and you've won. I don't want to talk about it.

WHITESIDE. ~~Oh, come, come, come, come, come.~~ What are you trying to do—make me feel like a naughty, naughty boy? Honestly, Maggie, sometimes you can be very annoying.

MAGGIE. *(Looking at him in wonder, crossing to L. of him.)* You know, you're quite wonderful, Sherry, in a way. You're annoyed! I wish there was a laugh left in me. Shall I tell you something, Sherry? I think you are a selfish, petty egomaniac who would see his mother burned...at the stake...if that was the only way he could light his cigarette. I think you'd sacrifice your best friend without a moment's hesitation if he disturbed the sacred routine of your self-centered, paltry little life. I think you are incapable of any human emotion that goes higher up than your stomach, and I was the fool of the world for ever thinking I could trust you.

~~WHITESIDE. Well, as long as I live, I will never do anyone a good turn again. I won't ask you to apologize, Maggie, because in six months from now you will be thanking me instead of berating me.
MAGGIE. In six months, Sherry, I expect to be so far away from you—
(She is halted by a loud voice from hallway, as door bangs. "Hello—hello—hello!" It is Bert Jefferson who enters L., a little high. Maggie crosses U. to R.)
JEFFERSON. *(c.)* Merry Christmas, everybody! Merry Christmas! I'm a little high, but I can explain everything. Hi, Maggie. Hi, Mr. Whiteside. Shake hands with a successful playwright. Maggie, why'd you run away last night? Where were you? Miss Sheldon thinks the play is wonderful. I read her the play and she thinks it's wonderful. Isn't that wonderful?~~

* PAGE 76 cut for audition ⁷⁵

WHITESIDE. Now listen to me, Maggie. I am willing to forgive your tawdry outburst and talk about this calmly.

MAGGIE. I love him so terribly. Oh, Sherry, Sherry, why did you do it? Why did you do it? *(She goes stumbling into library—closes doors after her.)*

END

(Whiteside, left alone, looks at his watch; heaves a long sigh. Then Harriet comes down steps, dressed for the street.)

HARRIET. *(To c.)* Merry Christmas, Mr. Whiteside.

WHITESIDE. Oh! ...Merry Christmas, Miss Stanley.

HARRIET. *(Nervously.)* I'm afraid I shouldn't be seen talking to you, Mr. Whiteside—my brother is terribly angry. I just couldn't resist asking—did you like my Christmas present?

WHITESIDE. I'm very sorry, Miss Stanley—I haven't opened it. I haven't opened any of my presents yet.

HARRIET. Oh, dear, I was so anxious to—it's right here, Mr. Whiteside. *(She goes to tree.)* Won't you open it now?

WHITESIDE. *(As he undoes string.)* I appreciate your thinking of me, Miss Stanley. This is very thoughtful of you. *(He takes out gift—an old photograph.)* Why it's lovely. I'm very fond of these old photographs. Thank you very much.

HARRIET. I was twenty-two when that was taken. That was my favorite dress... Do you really like it?

WHITESIDE. I do indeed. When I get back to town I shall send you a little gift.

HARRIET. Will you? Oh, thank you, Mr. Whiteside. I shall treasure it— *(She starts to go.)* Well, I shall be late for church. Goodbye. Goodbye.

WHITESIDE. Goodbye, Miss Stanley.

(As she goes out front door Whiteside's eyes return to gift. He puzzles over it for a second, shakes his head. Mumbles to himself—"What is there about that woman?" Shakes his head again in perplexity.)

(John comes from dining room, carrying a breakfast tray.)

JOHN. Sarah's got a little surprise for you, Mr. Whiteside. She's just taking it out of the oven. *(Crossing from U. R. to upstairs.)*