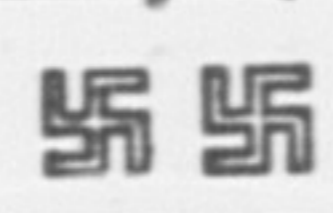


HOLIDAY—A PLAY*



OTTIE B. GRAHAM



Characters

Margot Cotell.....A noted actress
 Claire Mead.....A school girl, colored
 Bertie.....A colored maid
 Friends {Mr. Barter—her manager
 of {Two other men
 Margot {Two fashionable women
 Time: The present.

Place: A popular white summer resort and beach.

Scene 1.

LIVING ROOM in the summer cottage of Margot Cottell. A long Dutch window opens from the back of the room upon a stoop. A shorter, ordinary window also is in the back of the room. Entrances are at left and right sides, one leading to anteroom and front door, and the other to another room in the house. It is late morning and breakfast time for the lady. She is breakfasting from a serving table on a chaise-longue. The morning is very dark and cloudy. There is heard continuously the distant roar of the ocean.

Margot—This is good coffee, Bertie. Do fix some for yourself and come eat with me. This dreary morning gets on my nerves. It grows darker. Just look! I suppose we'll need the lights on.

Bertie—Yes, Madame, I'll come. The morning is dark. It certainly ain't no day to make you feel happy.

Margot—Something makes me feel frightened inside, Bertie. Did you ever have a scared kind of feeling way in here—for no reason whatever?

Bertie—(Placing a chair and plate for herself)—Yes, Madame, I know. I've had it, I certainly have.

Margot—Did anything happen after you had it?

Bertie—Well, not *always*, but most times it did. Maybe nothing partic'lar, but just little troubles in general, you know. Yes, ma'am, I know that feeling.

Margot—It just feels as though my heart would jump out, and for no reason.

Bertie—Sometimes the reason is *there*, but you just can't think of it, ma'am.

Margot—(Looking quickly at the maid)—Why do you say that?

Bertie—Oh, nothing, ma'am; just because it is sometimes.

Margot—(Laughing)—Not always though, eh, Bertie?

Bertie—Well, no'm, not always.—Er—is something wrong with the toast, madame?

Margot—(Not attending)—When it is dreary, the ocean makes more noise than ever.

Bertie—Madame, you have not tasted your toast.

Margot—Just want coffee. (They sit for a few moments sipping coffee.) Somehow I believe I won't act to-night.

Bertie—Oh, Madame!

Margot—(Absently)—I don't—feel up to it, Bertie. (The girl sits awkwardly staring at her mistress.)

Margot—(Still absent-mindedly)—Chilly—dark—a fine summer morning! Just because I had planned the visit for to-day. And still my holiday is postponed.

Bertie—Is there to be a holiday, ma'am?

Margot—Yes, Bertie, there is to be. It has been postponed now for, oh, a number of years. I'm going to take it this time—soon as this contract ends.

Bertie—Oh yes, ma'am. I s'pose you do need some vacation like other folks. Everyone else is enjoying the summer, and you just keep on acting to please them. Sure, you must get worn out, still tain't every actress as is good enough to be called on for special performances.

Margot—Oh no, I don't mean just that—perhaps I *do* need rest, but it isn't rest I want—I'm too in love with my part. Yes, it is rest I want too. Rest from an awful longing. Now, here it is summer again—summer, and I am suffering the same thing.—It's all tom-foolery—sacrilege. But society demands it. No, it isn't rest, it's

—(shrugs her shoulders)—Every year, every year, I look forward to the summer. I know that I must let the winter go for work, but there is summer which is coming—and then summer comes and the same thing happens. Here comes another offer: "Take it—take it—ah Madame! The people want you! Just a short contract! Madame! Madame!" Bah! What do I care about the people? Anything pleases them—the people! But I am worried half

to death, and so I say yes. Then the summer goes. Still I have not done it. I—I am criminal! I swear I will have my holiday! Not a vacation, but a holiday.

Bertie—Oh, oh, Madame, when you talk like that you ain't talking to me, I—I know! You said some o' those same things once before. Madame, you are tired. Maybe you ought to rest before your guests come to lunch. Breakfast is a little late this morning, you know, ma'am, and they're due at noon, so you said. If Madame wants, maybe when they arrive—

Margot—Hush, hush! Don't talk to me of guests. Not of *these* guests. What do I care for them, or they for me? In two blinks of my eye they would not speak to me if—under certain conditions. Ah it's just the world, Bertie. Go make the coffee hot; it's about the only thing worth partaking of on such bleak summer days. (Maid goes out. Margot goes over to window.) Good Lord, it's dark out there! And yesterday was so beautiful and—why yesterday was scorching. Well, I'll go to-morrow, if it's the last—thing I do. The day should be a pleasant one. Oh dear!

Bertie—(Entering)—Here's hot coffee, ma'am. (She seems still a bit wary of the lady.) If it's too strong, maybe you can't sleep.

Margot—Why do I want to sleep, girl? What's the matter? This smells good—Oh, listen to that ocean! Every time I hear it I imagine it is washing away something dear to me,—dashing its poor life out.—Bertie! (She grasps the frightened girl by the wrist.) Kneel here by me, child. (She looks hard at the girl's face.) Don't be alarmed, young idiot. I just wanted to look at your skin. It's beautiful, Bertie.—I—I just wondered whether I might brown well.—My next rôle will require it.

Bertie—(Busying around at nothing)—If—Madame—I—er—

Margot—Take this stuff away—oh, bring it back—no, that's right—go on. I believe it grows a bit lighter, thank heaven.

Bertie—(Stopping nervously on her way out with the tea wagon)—If—if—Madame wants to use my brown powder—

(Margot has a little fit of laughter, hearty and indulgent. In the midst of it there is a sudden agitated knocking from without. Before the maid can open the long window it bursts open and a tall, slender girl, wrapped in a cape, comes in. She is col-

ored and very comely. She hesitates within the entrance, panting and convulsive. The maid, Bertie, starts to her, but waits to see what Madame will do. Margot is dazed as she rises and stands staring at the visitor. For a moment the three stand gazing, none seeming to know what to do. The girl is Claire Meade.)

Claire—(Trying to be calm and to announce herself)—I—I am—(She is overcome with tears. Standing with outstretched arms in the doorway, she makes a silent appeal.)

Claire—Please! Please! (She drops to the floor in a little heap. Margot nods dismissal to the maid, who leaves reluctantly, not hiding her curiosity.)

(The sobbing girl jumps up from the floor upon the approach of Madame, and forcing back her tears, stands erect. Margot starts as though she would caress her, but holds back. Claire sees this and speaks.)

Claire—Ah, Madame, you will come and do so when I have told you; when you know how lonely I am you will take me in your arms as though I were your child. My life is so queer, everything for me is so dull; this day is so dark.—Whoever saw a morning in summer so black—so chilly! It frightened me because I was so lonely! (Margot unable to withstand the sobbing voice of the pathetic little figure, takes her almost madly into her arms and leads her to the chaise-longue, soothing her tears.)

Margot—Poor, poor little girl! There, there, don't be sad. I know, you were lonely—lonely—I know, I know. (After a moment of comforting)—Tell me child, what under heaven's sun made you come to me? People seldom are real in my presence because—because I am—Madame Cotell.—Oh, I hate it now. Child, why did you come?

Claire—Because I knew you were—I—I used to know you when you lived across from my uncle and me in Mersville. (Margot starts slightly, but listens intently.) You lived in that pretty yellow stone house. I used to watch you come and go from my play-room window, and when you had gone down the street I would try so hard to walk like you. You were the wife of every fine prince in my fairy-tale books; when you came over to see uncle I tried to talk like you. Oh, I remember so well—when you took me for walks and held me on your knee—I—I thought I was in paradise.—Then you went away. You came over to

* For right to reproduce address THE CRISIS.