

NETTIE JO: It would. I know Tommy wouldn't mind.

BEEBEE: You ought to try asking him.

NETTIE JO: I already have. And he thought it was a wonderful idea.

BEEBEE: Nettie Jo.

NETTIE JO: The thing of it is I think a change of scene might give you a fresh viewpoint.

BEEBEE: Well, thanks, Nettie Jo but . . .

NETTIE JO: My thought is a fresh scene and fresh faces might help you get settled on somethin'. And I'd certainly feel better about you. Will you think about it?

BEEBEE, distracted: What?

NETTIE JO: I say will you think about it.

BEEBEE: Yes, I'll think about it.

NETTIE JO: Well. I'll see you later. I'll come up when I get home if it's not too late.

BEEBEE: Goodbye, Nettie Jo. *Nettie Jo exits. Beebee crosses upstage center. With emotion:* Two years! That's three hundred and sixty-odd days times two! And how many hours and how many minutes and how many seconds? God, what have I been doing all this time? *The sound of the ticking begins under and increases in volume as the speech progresses.* You must have put me in a trance. I'm so dogged by time all I been doing is lettin' it go by. I been here two years! People ask me what are my interests, and I say I'm a writer/pianist or a pianist/writer or a pianist/painter or a writin piano-playin painter. When all I am is a nine-to-five worker at T. D. Hackameyer's with an unfinished novel, a grubby sketchbook, and an apartment that's drivin me stark starin crazy. I need somebody! Somebody for me! If I had somebody I'd know what to do and how to do it. Well, what do you want, Miss Beebee? *Fiercely:* I want a man in the image of God! Isn't that what you're supposed to be produc'in? Then do it goddamit! If I'm my own worst enemy make me not my own worst enemy. I've got strings attached and they're tying me in knots! *The ticking has become almost louder than her voice. It stops abruptly.*

THE BAD SEED

by Maxwell Anderson

ACT I, SCENE 4

Rhoda is as sweet, well behaved, and innocent-seeming as a young girl can be. Yet, as this play of intrigue and suspense unfolds, her mother, Christine, learns that Rhoda is a malevolent murderer, totally devoid of conscience. Christine also learns that she herself is an adopted child, and that her *own* mother was "the most amazing woman in all the annals of homicide." Rhoda has apparently inherited her grandmother's traits (thus the *bad seed*). Prior to the following scene Christine hears on the radio that one of Rhoda's classmates, a little boy, Claude Daigle, who had just won a penmanship medal that Rhoda wanted, was found drowned on a school picnic. (The medal was not found.) Rhoda's casual reaction toward the incident surprises her mother, but the event is soon forgotten. A few days later, Miss Fern, the school headmistress, arrives at the house seeking some information about the drowning. After Rhoda leaves the room the questions begin.

MISS FERN, she waits till Rhoda exits: It did occur to me that—that Rhoda might have told you a detail or two which she hadn't remembered when she talked with me. You see, she was the last to see the little Daigle boy alive—

CHRISTINE: Are you sure of that?

MISS FERN: Yes.

CHRISTINE: I hadn't realized— *(Christine rises, crosses, and sits left end of sofa.)*

MISS FERN: About an hour after we arrived at the estate one of our older pupils came on Rhoda and the Daigle boy at the far end of the grounds. The boy was upset and crying, and Rhoda was standing in front of him, blocking his path. The older girl was among the trees, and neither child saw her. She was just about to intervene when Rhoda shoved the boy and snatched at

his medal, but he broke away and ran down the beach in the direction of the old wharf where he was later found. Rhoda followed him, not running, just walking along, taking her time, the older girl said.

CHRISTINE: Has it occurred to you that the older girl might not have been telling the truth?

MISS FERN: That isn't at all likely. She was one of the monitors we'd appointed to keep an eye on the younger children. She's fifteen and has been with us since kindergarten days. Mrs. Penmark, she was telling precisely what she saw. We know her well.

CHRISTINE: And this was the last time Claude was seen?

MISS FERN: Yes. A little later—it might have been about noon—one of the guards saw Rhoda coming off the wharf. He shouted a warning, but by then she was on the beach again and he decided to forget the matter. The guard didn't identify the girl by name, but she was wearing a red dress, he said, (*Christine looks toward front door*) and Rhoda was the only girl who wore a dress that day. *Christine rises slowly, looking toward door.* At one o'clock the lunch bell rang and Claude was missing when the roll was called. You know the rest, I think.

CHRISTINE, *turns, crosses below coffee table to dining table looking out window:* Yes. But this is very serious—if Rhoda was on the wharf—

MISS FERN: Not serious, really, when you've seen as much of how children behave as I have. Children conceal things from adults. *Christine crosses slowly downstage center.* Suppose Rhoda did follow the Daigle child onto the wharf—so many things could have happened quite innocently. He may have concealed himself in the old boat house, and then, when discovered, may have backed away from Rhoda and fallen in the water.

CHRISTINE: Yes, that could have happened.

MISS FERN: Now, Claude, although he looked frail, was an excellent swimmer—and, of course, Rhoda knew that. Once he was in the water she would have expected him to swim ashore. How could she know that the treacherous pilings were at the exact spot where he fell?

CHRISTINE: No, she couldn't possibly . . .

MISS FERN: Perhaps the thought in Rhoda's mind when he fell in the water was that he'd ruin his new suit and she'd get a scolding for causing it. When he didn't swim ashore at once she

may have thought, with the logic of childhood, that he'd hidden under the wharf to frighten her—or to escape her. Later on, when it was too late to do anything, she was afraid to admit what had happened.

CHRISTINE: Then you think Rhoda knows something she isn't admitting?

MISS FERN: Yes. I think that, like many a frightened soldier, she deserted under fire. *Christine starts to reply.* This is not a serious charge. Few of us are courageous when tested.

CHRISTINE: She has lied, though.

MISS FERN: Is there any adult who hasn't lied? Smooth the lines from your brow, my dear. You're so much prettier when smiling.

CHRISTINE: I shall question Rhoda.

MISS FERN: I wish you would, though I doubt that you'll learn more than you know.

CHRISTINE, *crosses, sits on a stool:* Miss Fern, there's something I want to ask you. There was a floral tribute at Claude's funeral sent by the children of the Fern School. I suppose the children shared in the expense—but I haven't been asked to pay any part of it.

MISS FERN: The tribute wasn't nearly so expensive as the papers seemed to think. The money has been collected, and the flowers paid for.

CHRISTINE: Perhaps you telephoned me, and I was out.

MISS FERN: No, my dear. We thought perhaps you'd want to send flowers individually.

CHRISTINE: But why should we have sent flowers individually? Rhoda wasn't friendly with the boy, and my husband and I had never met the Daigles.

MISS FERN, *flustered:* I don't know, my dear. I really—There are three of us, you know, and in the hurry of making decisions—*(she pauses)*

CHRISTINE: You make excuses for Rhoda—and then you admit that you didn't ask me to help pay for the flowers—and the reasons you give for not asking are obviously specious. *Rises and stands below stool.* Does this mean in your mind, and the minds of your sisters, there is some connection between the Daigle boy's death and Rhoda's presence on the wharf?

MISS FERN: I refuse to believe there is any connection.

CHRISTINE: And yet you have acted as if there were.

MISS FERN: Yes, perhaps we have.

CHRISTINE: This is a terrible tragedy for Mrs. Daigle, as you say. She has lost her only child. But if there were any shadow over Rhoda—from what has happened—I shall have to live under it—and my husband, too. As for Rhoda—she would not be happy in your school next year. *Turns upstage toward window.*

MISS FERN: No, she would not. *Christine stops and turns toward Miss Fern.* And since she would not, it would be as well to make up our minds now that she will not be there.

CHRISTINE, *crosses downstage center*: Then there is a shadow over her—and you have already decided not to invite her back!

MISS FERN: Yes. *Rises and faces Christine*: We have made that decision.

CHRISTINE: But you can't tell me why?

MISS FERN, *crosses to Christine*: I think her behavior in the matter of the medal would be sufficient explanation. She has no sense of fair play. She's a poor loser. She doesn't play the game.

CHRISTINE: But you're not saying that Rhoda had anything to do with the Daigle boy's death.

MISS FERN: Of course not! Such a possibility never entered our minds! *At this moment the doorbell chimes.*

CHRISTINE: I'd better answer.

MISS FERN: Of course, my dear.

NO EXIT

by Jean-Paul Sartre,
translated by Stuart Gilbert

Sartre's one-act play takes place in Hell. Three people—two women and one man—are locked together in one bricked-up room, hideously decorated in Second Empire style, where the electric lights can never be turned off. Each character has a story that reveals the circumstances of his or her death on earth, and all three deny that they deserve to be punished for their deeds. Sartre's Hell is not the fire and brimstone of the Bible but the psychological cruelty that people can inflict on each other.

Toward the beginning of the play Inez, a lesbian, tries to befriend Estelle, a lovely but exceedingly vain young woman who has eyes only for Garcin, the male of the group. Estelle is very concerned with her appearance and falls into despair when she discovers there are no mirrors in Hell. Inez seizes this opportunity to coerce Estelle into a relationship. Garcin, the man, is present throughout this excerpt, but he does not speak.

Estelle has been plying her powder puff and lipstick. She looks round for a mirror, fumbles in her bag, then turns towards Garcin.

ESTELLE: Excuse me, have you a glass? *Garcin does not answer.* Any sort of glass, a pocket mirror will do. *Garcin remains silent.* Even if you won't speak to me, you might lend me a glass.

His head still buried in his hands, Garcin ignores her.

INEZ, *eagerly*: Don't worry. I've a glass in my bag. *She opens her bag.* *Angrily*: It's gone! They must have taken it from me at the entrance.

ESTELLE: How tiresome!

A short silence. Estelle shuts her eyes and sways, as if about to faint. Inez runs forward and holds her up.

INEZ: What's the matter?

ESTELLE, *opens her eyes and smiles*: I feel so queer. *She pats herself.* Don't you ever get taken that way? When I can't see myself I begin to wonder if I really and truly exist. I pat myself just to make sure, but it doesn't help much.

INEZ: You're lucky. I'm always conscious of myself—in my mind. Painfully conscious.

ESTELLE: Ah yes, in your mind. But everything that goes on in one's head is so vague, isn't it? It makes one want to sleep. *She is silent for a while.* I've six big mirrors in my bedroom. There they are. I can see them. But they don't see me. They're reflecting the carpet, the settee, the window—but how empty it is, a glass in which I'm absent! When I talked to people I always made sure there was one nearby in which I could see myself. I watched myself talking. And somehow it kept me alert, seeing