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THE STORY OF RACHEL.

Drawn from:

FOUR SHORT PLAYS

BY

LADY BELL

LONDON
ARTHUR L. HUMPHREYS
187 PICCADILLY, W.
1922



THE STORY OF RACHEL.

A Play in One Act.

Characters:

CAPTAIN WILLIAM CARTERET, R.N. (about 48).

RACHEL (his wife, 28).

*A maid—not a speaking part—who only
brings in a letter.*

RACHEL and CARTERET sitting in their comfortable drawing room, RACHEL in armchair R.C. near a table, cutting a book with a paper-knife. CARTERET on small sofa, L.C., with a little table near him on which is an ash-tray. He is smoking, and reading the "Pall Mall Gazette."

RACHEL [*continuing conversation as the curtain goes up*].
Don't you agree with what I'm saying? I'm sure men are like that.
Will, do you mean to say you don't agree?

CARTERET [*absently, looking up and down columns of paper*].
Yes, I daresay.

RACHEL. I know quite well what it means when a man says in that way [*imitating his tone*]—'Yes, I daresay,' and goes on reading. It means you're not thinking of what I'm saying—you're thinking of nothing but the paper.

CARTERET [*still looking up and down the columns*]. Well, there are very interesting things in the paper.

RACHEL. Of course there are. And it's still more interesting trying to guess which of them are true. But still it is rather boring that you should be reading the newspaper while I'm talking.

CARTERET. Oh? I thought you were talking while I was reading the newspaper.

RACHEL. That *is* a one-sided view, I must say.

[CARTERET *smiles, shakes the ash off his cigarette, and goes on reading without speaking*].

RACHEL. It is a pity you don't enjoy my society, isn't it?

CARTERET [*smiling*]. A great pity.

RACHEL. Will, I suppose that you like me as I am?

CARTERET. Absolutely and entirely. Even when you talk unceasingly when I'm having a quiet read and smoke before dressing for dinner.

RACHEL. Anyhow, you'd have to be interrupted soon, because you must go up when the clock strikes, and see Mary in bed.

CARTERET [*laughing happily*]. Yes, the little monkey. I should never hear the end of it if I didn't. She's a tremendous tyrant, isn't she.

RACHEL. Yes. I wonder what she'll be like when she grows up.

CARTERET [*smiling*]. Like her mother, I daresay. Apt to talk when her husband's reading.

RACHEL. To-night I want to talk. Do listen, Will—just this once!

[CARTERET *smiles and puts his paper down on his knee*].

CARTERET. Just this once, if you're sure it won't happen again.

RACHEL. I was thinking about what men are like, and what women are like.

CARTERET. You see, men don't want to be taking their souls to pieces perpetually as women do, to see what they're made of.

RACHEL. But it is *so* interesting to do it, even if one's afraid of what one finds there.

CARTERET. Afraid!

RACHEL. Oh, yes. There are times when I'm thinking of things, when I'm all over the place. I can't help it.

CARTERET. All over the place! Yes, that's quite true. You are.

RACHEL. Well, as I said, I've been thinking—and I see that in heaps of ways men and women are so different.

CARTERET. That's a very profound remark. Don't get beyond my depth, Rachel, pray.

RACHEL. Will, you horrid old thing! But I don't care for your laughing at me. I'll go on. Men are so simple——

CARTERET. And women so complicated?...

RACHEL. Sometimes. Men take things and people for granted so

much more than women do—sailors I do believe especially, are made like that. You take things for granted; you like everybody; you believe in everybody.

CARTERET. Well, my experience has shewn me that you come fewer croppers in life if you believe in people, than if you're suspicious of them. It may be an illusion, but that's my experience.

RACHEL. I wonder?... And there is another great difference. Women—so many women—are cowards; afraid, always afraid.

CARTERET. Afraid of what, you foolish creature?

RACHEL. Of all sorts of things. I was full of terrors when I was a child. Not only of robbers and ghosts, of absurd things that never happened, but of people, who were cross or unkind ... of everything. And then I was left by myself, and I was poor, and had to earn my own living. It was dreadful.

CARTERET. Well, that's all over. You needn't think of it any more. I'll take care of you, never fear. Nothing and nobody shall frighten you now.

RACHEL. Oh, I know. I've always felt what a rock of defence you were ever since that first evening, when we had broken down in the motor and you stopped yours beside us in the dark.

CARTERET. And found you, the pretty little governess, by the side of the road with the son of the house! having broken your employer's motor. By George, you looked frightened then. I don't think I ever saw a more woebegone little object than you were,

standing there huddled together, looking as if you were trying to escape from the lights of the motor.

RACHEL [*shuddering*]. Yes, those horrible lights that would keep blazing away all round us, and oh, I did so want to hide, to sink under the earth, never to be found again!

CARTERET. Come, come, it wasn't as bad as that: though I must admit it was pretty awful when we had to go back and face your infuriated employer.

[RACHEL *shudders at the thought*].

CARTERET. I think she had a case, mind you! Going out for a joy ride with her son at that time of night in her car!

RACHEL. Oh, the rapture of that moment when you stood up for me, and then, when you found out you had known my dad!

CARTERET. Rather a good moment, that—a trump card, wasn't it?

RACHEL. I can hear you saying it now, 'Tom Farrar, my old shipmate.' Oh, the relief of it! the relief!

CARTERET [*smiling*]. Poor little girl!

RACHEL [*recovering herself*]. But we needn't think about it; and you were there, and you brought me back with you, and then, as they say in the fairy tales, we married and lived happily ever after.

CARTERET. Except that I had to go off to the Cape directly

afterwards. Good Lord! How I used to laugh at the other men on board, when they were wanting to go ashore to see their wives and babies, or to come back home when they were aboard. I used to think what fools they were; but they weren't. I was the fool all right. And now I know better—I have done just the same. And after getting that splendid ship I was so proud of, and after always saying that I would not take a shore-going job for the world, I jumped at this job at the Admiralty just to be near you and Mary, and, oh, I am so glad I did.

RACHEL [*caressingly*]. We are awfully happy, aren't we?

CARTERET. Awfully.

RACHEL [*musingly*]. Mary—Mary—[*she says the name twice*]. How I love that child! I love her absurdly, fiercely. If I tried to love her more I couldn't. I have sometimes a wild sense of the joy of having her that makes me afraid of fate. . . . [*She speaks on in a more ordinary tone*]. Men aren't like that, I daresay.

CARTERET [*smiling*]. No, I don't believe they are. They just love and love their child, that's all.

RACHEL. Yes, that's all. And that's everything.

CARTERET [*smiling*]. And that's everything.

[RACHEL *sitting looking before her*—CARTERET *leaning back in his chair looking up at ceiling; not at her*].

CARTERET. That night, at Simonstown, that I got your telegram saying the child was born, that you had a daughter—it was so

wonderful, so impossible to understand. That night I remember, after I knew, I went for a blow on the quarter deck quite late, before turning in—in the sort of dark it is out there when the sky is deep purple and the huge stars are blazing in it like holes opening into glory—and I kept saying to myself, A child! I have a child—my child! I really believe for a while I was almost mad. It seemed to me that the splash of the sea, the choppy little waves beating against the gangway ladder were answering me, were saying the same thing, too—my child! Life had changed in that hour. And I wondered if I could go on waiting, waiting for the moment when I should be with you both. I didn't tell any of them about it out there. I didn't trust myself. I didn't know what I should say if I began to speak of it.

RACHEL [*smiling*]. *You'd* have been all over the place.

CARTERET [*trying to hide his emotion*]. I believe I should, for once. Good old Tom! I was with him when he died in the East. He would have been glad to know I had got his little girl out of a scrape.

RACHEL. And that you had married her.

CARTERET. Well ... he would have thought me a bit old for you, perhaps.

RACHEL. You're not to say that! You're just the right age.

CARTERET. You really think so?

RACHEL. Of course I do.

CARTERET [*still smiling*]. Now, Rachel, were you in love with that young Thornton?

RACHEL. No, I don't think I was. It was a boy and girl sort of thing.

CARTERET [*smiling, but sighing too*]. Yes, boy and girl. I suppose when there are young people together that sort of thing happens.

RACHEL. Oh, don't say it in that tone. You don't mean to say you're jealous of him—because he was young?

CARTERET [*more seriously*]. Jealous? Of you? Of my wife? No.

RACHEL. Well, some people are. They always are in books.

CARTERET. I'm not in a book, and that sort of thing isn't good enough for me. [*Goes on in an ordinary tone*]. I wonder what became of Thornton. Have you ever heard anything of him?

RACHEL [*with an impulse*]. Will, how different you are from other people!

CARTERET [*surprised*]. Why?

RACHEL. You find me on the road in the dark with a young man. How do you know I was not running away with him?

CARTERET [*smiling*]. Well, if you were, you weren't doing it very successfully. To tell the truth, there were so many things to think of that night after fettling up the motor and taking you back,

that I hadn't time to wonder what you were after. [*A pause*].

RACHEL. AS a matter of fact, I have heard something about Jack Thornton—he's dead.

CARTERET [*interested but not suspicious*]. Dead! How do you know?

RACHEL. I saw it in an evening paper six weeks ago. It was a night you were away inspecting at Portsmouth or something. I meant to tell you. It was a horrible story. He was in East Africa—he went there to farm—he was one of a party who had a skirmish with some natives—they had quarrelled about something and he and another Englishman were killed.

CARTERET [*sympathetically*]. Oh, a bad business. Yes. I am sorry.

RACHEL [*impulsively*]. I was not, very—I couldn't bear to think of all that time he had been mixed up in. No, when I heard that he was dead, it was a relief. I don't want to be reminded of him—to be reminded of all that time. Oh, Will, if you knew what the sense of security and happiness is of being married to you. I do love you.

CARTERET. I'm very glad to hear it. Look here; confess you weren't in love with me when we married.

RACHEL. We married so very soon, you see. I hadn't time.

CARTERET. You didn't fall in love at first sight as I did.

RACHEL. But I was as quick as I could. Before we had been married a month I adored you.

CARTERET. Did you really, Rachel?

RACHEL. You know I did.

CARTERET. Yes, I know it too, but I like hearing you say it.

RACHEL. You ought to believe it by this time without having to be told.

CARTERET. Of course I do. Oh, Rachel—I wonder if you know the absolute trust I have in you. How I love and reverence you more than I can put into words, and how I wonder every day at the great gifts that have come to me from you and the child. My life is overflowing with happiness—and when I think of those lonely days when I was going ahead thinking I had got all I wanted, and I had nothing!—darling, I must try to be worthy of it all.

[He stands up by her. She holds out her hand to him. He takes it in both his, then they part as the maid comes in with a letter. CARTERET takes it, looks at it, and throws it down on the table].

RACHEL *[speaking very lightly as the maid goes out]*. Nothing for me; how dull the evening post always is.

CARTERET. You shall have half of mine; it looks fearfully dull, too.

RACHEL. Yes, a letter of that shape always is. It's about

business, I suppose.

[She leans back in her chair and goes on cutting the book with a paper-knife].

CARTERET *[trying to open the letter]*. And then the brutes stick it down so that you can't get it open.

RACHEL *[laughing]*. No great loss, I daresay. Here!

[She throws him the paper-knife and leans back idly, comfortable in her chair. CARTERET takes the knife and cuts it open].

CARTERET *[excited]*. Oh! Rachel!

RACHEL *[interested but not anxious]*. What is it? Who's it from?

CARTERET *[reading the name at the top of the paper]*. It's from Threlfold and Bixley, solicitors. They're—*[then he looks at RACHEL as though hesitating to speak the name suddenly]*—Jack Thornton's solicitors.

[RACHEL aghast stands up transfixed—CARTERET is so full of the letter that he doesn't look at her].

CARTERET. Listen! 'Dear Sir—We have to inform you that we have received from East Africa the will of our late client, Mr John Thornton, deceased, in which he instructs us that a third of the fortune he acquired there, is to be assigned, on her twenty-first birthday, to Mary Carteret, his *[he is going to turn over the*

page when RACHEL rushes forward with a shriek.

RACHEL [*beside herself*]. Wait, wait! don't turn over! wait—stop—I want to tell you something—first—say you won't look—

CARTERET [*amazed*]. Rachel! [*Getting up*]. What is it? You are not well! Is it hearing about this so suddenly? [*He makes a movement. She thinks he is going to turn the page*].

RACHEL. Don't, don't! you promised, you promised you wouldn't. I want to tell you what is on the next page before you read it—I know how it goes on—'Mary Carteret his—child!'

CARTERET [*alarmed*]. Rachel! what has happened to you?

RACHEL [*compelling herself to speak less wildly; with concentrated utterance*]. Mary Carteret is his child—Jack Thornton's child. Yes! Mary—is—Jack Thornton's child.

[*A silence—CARTERET stands looking at her.*]

CARTERET [*seizing her wrists*]. It isn't true! [*She stands silent*]. Is it true?—is it?

RACHEL. Oh! you hurt me.

CARTERET. Is it true?

RACHEL [*looking straight at him*]. Yes. Read it. Turn over the page now.

[CARTERET *has the letter in his hand still. He looks at the bottom of the page he has read and turns it over with shaking hands, and reads what is on the next*].

RACHEL [*almost beside herself*]. Now you know it's true. You see yourself what it says.

[CARTERET *waits a moment, gazing at the page, then looks up at her*].

CARTERET. It doesn't say so.

RACHEL [*petrified, looks at him, her lips forming the words, almost in a whisper*]. Doesn't say so!

CARTERET. No! [*reading*]—'to Mary Carteret—his [*pause*] god-child!"

RACHEL [*gives a smothered cry*]. Oh! It's not in the letter—and I told you—I myself....

CARTERET [*with a sudden impulse of hope*]. Rachel, I still don't believe it. You don't know what you are saying.

RACHEL. Yes, yes, I tell you, it's true—and I've told you—I did—if I hadn't, you wouldn't have known.

CARTERET. What—it *is* true then! and *that* is all you can think of—that you needn't have told me—that if you had not, you could have gone on pretending....

RACHEL. We should have gone on being happy—and—now it's

gone.

CARTERET. Happy—you could have lived with that lie in your heart and have been happy?

RACHEL. The lie was buried—he was dead—I was safe [*wringing her hands*]. We were happy, we should always have been happy now he is dead.

CARTERET. But the truth! Do you care so little about the truth?

RACHEL. The truth can be so terrible.

CARTERET. Is *that* what women are like?

RACHEL. Oh, women are afraid. All these years I have been so terrified—so haunted by terror—till I knew he was dead. Then—then—I thought I was safe. I used to think—suppose—suppose, you ever came to know it! I tried to tell you, at first, I did, indeed, but my heart died at the thought.... And then when I fell in love with you and saw how desperately you cared for Mary—

CARTERET [*he shrinks*]. Don't—

RACHEL. I couldn't—and then, I thought it was in the letter—and you'd see it, and so I told you—I told you.

CARTERET [*looking at the letter and reading*]. 'His god-child'—is that true?

[RACHEL *shakes her head*.]

CARTERET. A lie, too, like all the rest? Oh, my God! [*He sits down and buries his face in his hands*]. And if the letter hadn't come I should have gone on being fooled to the end. You had better have told me, Rachel, before we married. I should have done exactly what I did—I should have married you all the same.

[RACHEL *moves with an irresistible impulse of love and gratitude towards him*].

CARTERET [*stopping her*]. No, you needn't go on with that now. I shouldn't have had those illusions—I shouldn't have had that dream of love and pride in—in the child, but I should not have had this ghastly awakening. Good God! that night that I told you about just now—the night I first heard—I've never told another human being about that night of revelation, of knowing what it meant to have a child—and it was all a lie. It was none of it true. She's not mine—I have no child—she's a child without a name.

RACHEL [*fiercely, in an agony of apprehension*]. No, no! I won't have you say that! She has your name, your splendid name—Will, you're not going to take it from her? You're not going to make her suffer for something she had no part in?

CARTERET. Am I likely to make a child suffer? Do you understand me as little as that—it is not the child who will have to endure—

[*The clock strikes the hour—they look at each other*].

RACHEL. Are you going up to her?

CARTERET [*without looking at her*]. No.

RACHEL [*hesitatingly*]. I'll go instead. She'll be wondering.

CARTERET. No. You shall not go from here. I must have the truth—all you've kept back—the whole of this damnable story.

RACHEL. I can't, I can't—you terrify me when you look like that....

CARTERET [*regardless*]. I must have it. I must know.

[RACHEL *is silent*.]

CARTERET [*quietly*]. Do you understand? I must have the truth.

[RACHEL *tries to make up her mind to speak*.]

CARTERET. Go on.

RACHEL. They were all so unkind to me there—when I was the governess. [*She stops*.]

CARTERET. Go on; that's not what I want to hear.

RACHEL. Jack—[*She stops*]. Oh, I can't!

CARTERET. Do you understand that you are not going from here till you have told me?

RACHEL [*looking wildly round her*]. Oh, when you look like

that I feel I have no one!

[*She buries her face in her hands.*]

CARTERET. Go on. Let me hear.

[*RACHEL waits. He takes down her hands. She looks up at him, then makes up her mind and begins again.*]

RACHEL. He was the only one who was kind—and—and—

CARTERET [*sternly*]. And—what?

RACHEL. He made love to me.

CARTERET. You let him ... make love to you?

RACHEL [*hardly audibly*]. Yes.

CARTERET. The scoundrel!

RACHEL. Now then, you know it all.

CARTERET. No, not all. Were you going away with him that night?

RACHEL. Yes—he said we must be married. I knew we must—

CARTERET [*bitterly*]. Yes, you had to marry someone.... [*RACHEL looks at him imploringly*]. Go on to the end.

RACHEL [*with an effort*]. He was going to East Africa. He was to sail next day, and I was going with him. We were going up by

the late train to be married in the morning, and we meant to leave the car at the station with a letter to his parents—and then the car broke down by the roadside—and you came, and the next day he sailed.... Now you know it all.

CARTERET. Yes, that sounds like the truth at last. I know that I have dragged the truth from you bit by bit. My God! I was far enough from it that night when I thought I was protecting an innocent little girl who was being bullied by her employer. You called me simple just now—I was simple indeed.

RACHEL. Yes, you were simple and trusting and wonderful—you say you would have married me all the same if I had dared to tell you. I know you would. It would have been like you—like your greatness and goodness. But, oh, how could I tell you—how could I! Oh, Will, you say you could have forgiven me then—can't you forgive me now?

CARTERET. Forgiveness! What does forgiveness matter, if there's no belief when trust has gone? Rachel, I believed in you as I believe in my Redeemer. You knew I did. What was in your thoughts, this very evening was it, or was it another lifetime? when I told you how I trusted and revered you? Did you feel nothing but mockery at the success of your deceit?

RACHEL. No, no. I thought when you were telling me, what a great pure heart you had, how I would try to be worthy of you.

CARTERET [*with a bitter laugh*]. Worthy of me! by letting me believe every day of our lives something that was false, false; something that had never been. Oh, I can't bear it.

RACHEL [*suddenly with a wild impulse*]. Oh, don't let Mary know!

CARTERET. Don't speak her name. I can't endure it yet.

RACHEL. Don't let her suffer! Oh, don't let suffering come to her, let me have it all.

CARTERET. *You* have it all? Is that what you think? Suffering is round us all everywhere like the darkness.

[*He sits on sofa, covering his face with his hands.*]

RACHEL [*looking round her as if terrified*]. The darkness! Will, I'm so frightened—you have been my shelter, my rock, my love. Help me now! Help me! I cannot do without you!

[*She stands looking at him, waiting for him to speak.*]

CARTERET [*without looking at her*]. You need not be so frightened. I will always shelter you—you—and your child....

[*RACHEL stands for a moment as if transfixed, then speaks*].

RACHEL. I am going up to say good-night to her—she will be lying awake.

CARTERET [*as she slowly turns away, puts out his hand, the other still covering his face*]. Poor little Rachel!

[*She takes his hand, timidly—they clasp hands, and loose them again. It is not a lovers' embrace: it is a compact*

between them.]

CURTAIN *comes down as* RACHEL *goes out.*

CARTERET *still sitting with his face hid in his hands, broken with emotion.*

SLOW CURTAIN.

THE END.



TRANSCRIBER'S NOTE

Occasional missing punctuation has been silently added. A missing final "s" was supplied on one occasion. In one instance, where the same word appeared at the end of one line and the beginning of the next, one of the two was removed. No substantive changes were made.

[The end of *The Story of Rachel* (from *Four Short Plays*) by Florence Eveleen Eleanore Bell]