

THE TRIANGLE OF INJUSTICE

One-Act Play

By MARY PHILBECK

Characters:

Edward Markston: A business man of about 55
 Patrick: His secretary, a man of about 60
 The girl

Setting:

Place: Markston's fabulous New York Apartment
 Time: Present.

PLAY

As the curtain opens, Edward Markston sits at his desk in his fabulous study. The room is richly furnished with valuable and magnificent antique furniture. Heavy, maroon drapes hang in deep folds on the windows. In the center of the room is a large, round table, and upon it sits an exquisitely-made blue bowl filled with deep red roses. Edward Markston wears a dark, immaculately-tailored suit. He is a man of average height and build, with the greved temples that label today's successful business man. He speaks immediately.

EDWARD: Patrick! (there is no answer to his summons and he calls again, his voice raised with added impatience.) Patrick! (This time there appears in the doorway a slight, unassuming man of about 60. He wears a dark, modest business suit.)

PATRICK: Yes sir?

EDWARD: (sighs.) Can't you hear, Patrick?

PATRICK: Yes sir?

EDWARD: Then, for heaven's sake, act like it!

PAT: Yes, sir.

ED: What time is Miss Carlson supposed to arrive?

PAT: At 3 o'clock.

ED: (Consulting his watch.) That's half an hour yet.

PAT: That's correct, sir.

ED: That will be all now. By the way, Patrick, did you get those letters in the mail this morning?

PAT: All of them were in the morning's mail, Mr. Markston.

ED: Fine, Patrick. You may go now. (Patrick continues to stand still, making no move to go.) Did you want something, Patrick?

PAT: (turning slowly to go.) Well, I—no, sir. (starts to exit, but turns back into the room hesitantly.) Yes, sir, there is something. Miss Carlson is your late partner's daughter, is she not?

ED: Yes, but I don't see that that concerns you, Patrick.

PAT: (slowly) No, sir, I can't say that it does, but honesty and decency do concern me in this case.

ED: (Shrewdly) I think you're forgetting your place, Patrick.

PAT: Perhaps, sir, but I feel that I must speak my mind, Mr. Markston. I have worked for you for 15 years—years in which you have treated me fairly.

ED: (Omnibusly) Well, have you a complaint now, my man?

PAT: It's Miss Carlson, sir.

ED: What about Miss Carlson, Patrick?

PAT: She's just a young girl, sir, only 17, I understand.

ED: You aren't making yourself clear.

PAT: All right, I shall be blunt. I have worked for you long enough to know how you get where you are today. Your methods have not always been enhancing to your integrity, sir.

ED: (deliberately) You must be mistaken, Patrick. I haven't been in the habit of indulging in crime.

PAT: Oh, no, sir. Your system of gaining wealth has remained inside legality, assuredly, but in the silent code of honor among men, I'm afraid you aren't exactly faultless.

ED: (his eyes narrowed) Since we appear to be in the process of accusations, may I ask—as a matter of curiosity—just why you have remained in my employment, if you were so well-aware of my perfidious business relations? (sarcastically) I'm quite sure you had no ulterior motive, Patrick.

PAT: (slowly) I am not a perfect man by any means, Mr. Markston, nor am I insusceptible to the wiles of money. I do not deny that the generous salary I received as your secretary has not been attractive to me. . . . and I don't know that I felt that you committed to great a sin by—shall we say—maneuvering situations to suit your purpose.

ED: (sardonically) Your subtlety is quite touching, Patrick. Just what are you driving at?

PAT: Mr. Markston, the business men you have created would have for the most part—done the same to you had they been as clever as you were. That is why I say that I cannot particularly blame you. But there are people who are honest,

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Mr. Markston. Perhaps it never occurred to you that integrity to such people is more than a word, sir.

ED: (cynically) And I always thought you were a secretary, a Patrick. I had no idea you were a philosopher, too.

PAT: (ignoring Mr. Markston's sarcasm) Mr. Markston, Miss Carlson is only a child. Her father was your first and last partner. The least you can do is to be fair to his memory.

ED: My late partner was a fool, Patrick.

PAT: Why? Because he refused to join in your dishonesty? What would have been Frank Carlson's reaction had he known why this business prospered when other men could not make ends meet?

ED: Could I help it because Frank became an invalid? Because he was stupid?

PAT: No, Mr. Markston, you can't reciprocate for the injustices you did Frank Carlson, but the least you can do is to treat his daughter fairly.

ED: (shrewdly) Just what you are driving at, Patrick?

PAT: If I understand the situation on Mr. Markston, you plan to reimburse Miss Carlson for her own good, of course—that she should sign the share of the business left her by her father, over to you. Am I not correct, sir?

ED: I see you have more intelligence than I gave you credit for, Patrick, but I'm afraid you aren't using it wisely. You appear to have grasped the situation correctly. Now, just what is your idea on the subject?

PAT: It's dishonest, sir.

ED: (doubtfully) You use your terms loosely, my dear Patrick. Since when did the power of suggestion—and as you so aptly put it, "for the young lady's own good"—since when, Patrick, did the power of suggestion become illegal?

PAT: (slowly) Mr. Markston, you are not a young man. Don't you think it about time you were honest with yourself, at least? You have gained your wealth. Is dishonesty such an obsession with you that you must resort to the indecency of robbing an innocent child of all she has left in the world?

ED: (quite pale) Have you finished, Patrick?

PAT: (delightfully) If you've sunk that low, Mr. Markston, you've a dismal failure for all your filthy money. (exits left).

Edward Markston sits on theavenport, his head in his hands. After a moment he walks to the window and looks out. There is a knock on the door of the study.

ED: (sharply) Come in.

(The door is opened by a young girl of 17 with dark hair and eyes. She is dressed in a simply-styled light suit. She hesitates just inside the door.)

EDITH: Mr. Markston? Your—you secretary said that I should come in.

ED: (looking at her intently) You are Edith Carlson?

EDITH: Yes, sir.

ED: Please sit down won't you. (Edith sits on theavenport.) You're rather young, aren't you?

EDITH: I'm seventeen, sir—last month.

ED: I see. You're in school aren't you?

EDITH: Yes, sir.

ED: How do you like school, Miss Carlson?

EDITH: Very well, sir.

ED: Your father was anxious that you finish school and go into training for a nurse, wasn't he?

EDITH: (looking down) Yes, he was.

ED: (sitting in chair at left of aavenport) Do—do you know the stipulations of your father's will, Miss Carlson?

EDITH: (Apparently shocked) Why, no, sir. How could I know? Why do you ask?

ED: Oh, no reason. (suddenly) Miss Carlson, do you consider honesty a prevalent character trait?

EDITH: I—I don't think I understand, Mr. Markston.

ED: Do you think that a man has failed if he has been dishonest with himself, Miss Carlson?

EDITH: (nervously) Why do you ask me, Mr. Markston?

ED: (apparently forgetting Edith's presence, he walks over to the window and speaks, as though to himself) Could Patrick be right in concluding me a failure? Funny, I never stopped to consider the way in which I was gaining my wealth—just so long as I got it, I was satisfied. (puts his hand to his forehead, suddenly feeling old and weary) It's too late now, too late to begin again.

(Edith walks about nervously ringing her hands, apparently unobserved by Mr. Markston's gaze from the window.)

EDITH: Mr. Markston, I don't understand; I came down to settle my father's will, not to discuss the auspices of integrity.