

# OVERTONES

a play in one-act  
by Alice Gerstenberg

HARRIET, a cultured woman  
HETTY, her primitive self  
MARGARET, a cultured woman  
MAGGIE, her primitive self

((A two character drama, this play shows two women as they appear to each other, and their inner selves as they really are. Harriet and Margaret are two refined ladies, but Hettie and Maggie are their thoughts and emotions come to life. As cool and serene as Harriet and Margaret may appear, Hettie and Maggie are just as volatile, troubled and passionate. The bigger we can make the contrast between the inner and outer selves, the funnier and more poignant the play))

Setting: HARRIET'S fashionable living-room. HARRIET is seated right of tea table, busying herself with the tea things.]

HETTY: Harriet. [There is no answer.] Harriet, my other self. [There is no answer.] My trained self.

HARRIET: [listens intently] Yes?

[From behind HARRIET'S chair HETTY rises slowly.]

HETTY: I want to talk to you.

HARRIET: Well?

HETTY: [looking at HARRIET admiringly] Oh, Harriet, you are beautiful to-day.

HARRIET: Am I presentable, Hetty?

HETTY: Suits me.

HARRIET: I've tried to make the best of the good points.

HETTY: My passions are deeper than yours. I can't keep on the mask as you do. I'm crude and real, you are my appearance in the world.

HARRIET: I am what you wish the world to believe you are.

HETTY: You are the part of me that has been trained.

HARRIET: I am your educated self.

HETTY: I am the rushing river; you are the ice over the current.

HARRIET: I am your subtle overtones.

HETTY: But together we are one woman, the wife of Charles Goodrich.

HARRIET: There I disagree with you, Hetty, I alone am his wife.

HETTY: [indignantly] Harriet, how can you say such a thing!

HARRIET: Certainly. I am the one who flatters him. I have to be the one who talks to him. If I gave you a chance you would tell him at once that you dislike him.

HETTY: [moving away] I don't love him, that's certain.

HARRIET: You leave all the fibbing to me. He doesn't suspect that my calm, suave manner hides your hatred. Considering the amount of scheming it causes me it can safely be said that he is my husband.

HETTY: Oh, if you love him--

HARRIET: I? I haven't any feelings. It isn't my business to love anybody.

HETTY: Then why need you object to calling him my husband?

HARRIET: I resent your appropriation of a man who is managed only through the cleverness of my artifice.

HETTY: You may be clever enough to deceive him, Harriet, but I am still the one who suffers. I can't forget he is my husband. I can't forget that I might have married John Caldwell.

HARRIET: How foolish of you to remember John, just because we met his wife by chance.

HETTY: That's what I want to talk to you about. She may be here at any moment. I want to advise you about what to say to her this afternoon.

HARRIET: By all means tell me now and don't interrupt while she is here. You have a most annoying habit of talking to me when people are present. Sometimes it is all I can do to keep my poise and appear not to be listening to you.

HETTY: Impress her.

HARRIET: Hetty, dear, is it not my custom to impress people?

HETTY: I hate her.

HARRIET: I can't let her see that.

HETTY: I hate her because she married John.

HARRIET: Only after you had refused him.

HETTY: [turning on HARRIET] Was it my fault that I refused him?

HARRIET: That's right, blame me.

HETTY: It was your fault. You told me he was too poor and never would be able to do anything in painting. Look at him now, known in Europe, just returned from eight years in Paris, famous.

HARRIET: It was too poor a gamble at the time. It was much safer to accept Charles's money and position.

HETTY: And then John married Margaret within the year.

HARRIET: Out of spite.

HETTY: Freckled, gawky-looking thing she was, too.

HARRIET: [a little sadly] Europe improved her. She was stunning the other morning.

HETTY: Make her jealous today.

HARRIET: Shall I be haughty or cordial or caustic or--

HETTY: Above all else you must let her know that we are rich.

HARRIET: Oh, yes, I do that quite easily now.

HETTY: You must put it on a bit.

HARRIET: Never fear.

HETTY: Tell her I love my husband.

HARRIET: My husband--

HETTY: Are you going to quarrel with me?

HARRIET: [moves away] No, I have no desire to quarrel with you. It is quite too uncomfortable. I couldn't get away from you if I tried.

HETTY: [stamping her foot and following HARRIET] You were a stupid fool to make me refuse John, I'll never forgive you -- never--

HARRIET: [stopping and holding up her hand] Don't get me all excited. I'll be in no condition to meet her properly this afternoon.

HETTY: [passionately] I could choke you for robbing me of John.

HARRIET: [retreating] Don't muss me!

HETTY: You don't know how you have made me suffer.

HARRIET: [beginning to feel the strength of HETTY'S emotion surge through her and trying to conquer it] It is not my business to have heartaches.

HETTY: You're bloodless. Nothing but sham -- sham -- while I --

HARRIET: [emotionally] Be quiet! I can't let her see that I have been fighting with my inner self.

HETTY: And now after all my suffering you say it has cost you more than it has cost me to be married to Charles. But it's the pain here in my heart -- I've paid the price -- I've paid ---- Charles is not your husband!

HARRIET: [trying to conquer emotion] He is.

HETTY: [follows HARRIET] He isn't.

HARRIET: [weakly] He is.

HETTY: [towering over HARRIET] He isn't! I'll kill you!

HARRIET: [overpowered, sinks into a chair] Don't -- don't -- you're stronger than I -- you're --

HETTY: Say he's mine.

HARRIET: He's ours.

HETTY: [the telephone rings] There she is now.

[HETTY hurries to 'phone but HARRIET regains her supremacy.]

HARRIET: [authoritatively] Wait! I can't let the telephone girl down there hear my real self. It isn't proper. [Into the phone.] Show Mrs. Caldwell up.

HETTY: I'm so excited, my heart's in my mouth.

HARRIET: [at the mirror]. A nice state you've put my nerves into.

HETTY: Don't let her see you're nervous.

HARRIET: Quick, put the veil on, or she'll see you shining through me.

[HARRIET takes a scarf of chiffon that has been lying over the back of a chair and drapes it on HETTY, covering her face. The chiffon is the same color of their gowns but paler in shade so that it pales HETTY'S darker gown to match HARRIET'S lighter one. As HETTY moves in the following scene the chiffon falls away revealing now and then the gown of deeper dye underneath.]

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HETTY: Tell her Charles is rich and fascinating -- boast of our friends, make her feel she needs us.

HARRIET: I'll make her ask John to paint us.

HETTY: That's just my thought -- if John paints our portrait --

HARRIET: We can wear an exquisite gown --

HETTY: And make him fall in love again and --

HARRIET: [schemingly] Yes.

[MARGARET parts the portieres back centre and extends her hand. MARGARET is followed by her counterpart MAGGIE.]

HARRIET: Oh, Margaret, I'm so glad to see you!

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] That's a lie.

MARGARET: [in superficial voice throughout] It's enchanting to see you, Harriet.

MAGGIE: [in emotional voice throughout] I'd bite you, if I dared.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Wasn't our meeting a stroke of luck?

MARGARET: [coming down left of table] I've thought of you so often, Harriet; and to come back and find you living in New York.

HARRIET: [coming down right of table] Mr. Goodrich has many interests here.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Flatter her.

MARGARET: I know, Mr. Goodrich is so successful.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Tell her we're rich.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Won't you sit down?

MARGARET: [takes a chair] What a beautiful lamp!

HARRIET: Do you like it? I'm afraid Charles paid an extravagant price.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] I don't believe it.

MARGARET: [sitting down. To HARRIET] I am sure he must have.

HARRIET: [sitting down] How well you are looking, Margaret.

HETTY: Yes, you are not. There are circles under your eyes.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] I haven't eaten since breakfast and I'm hungry.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] How well you are looking, too.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY]. You have hard lines about your lips, are you happy?

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Don't let her know that I'm unhappy.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Why shouldn't I look well? My life is full, happy, complete --

MAGGIE: I wonder.

HETTY: [in HARRIET'S ear] Tell her we have an automobile.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET]. My life is complete, too.

MAGGIE: My heart is torn with sorrow; my husband cannot make a living. He will kill himself if he does not get an order for a painting.

MARGARET: [laughs] You must come and see us in our studio. John has been doing some excellent portraits. He cannot begin to fill his orders.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Tell her we have an automobile.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Do you take lemon in your tea?

MAGGIE: Take cream. It's more filling.

MARGARET: [looking nonchalantly at tea things] No, cream, if you please. How cozy!

MAGGIE: [glaring at tea things] Only cakes! I could eat them all!

HARRIET [to MARGARET] How many lumps?

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Sugar is nourishing.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] Three, please. I used to drink very sweet coffee in Turkey and ever since I've --

HETTY: I don't believe you were ever in Turkey.

MAGGIE: I wasn't, but it is none of your business.

HARRIET: [pouring tea] Have you been in Turkey, do tell me about it.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Change the subject.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] You must go there. You have so much taste in dress you would enjoy seeing their costumes.

MAGGIE: Isn't she going to pass the cake?

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] John painted several portraits there.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Why don't you stop her bragging and tell her we have an automobile?

HARRIET: [offers cake across the table to MARGARET] Cake?

MAGGIE: [stands back of MARGARET, shadowing her as HETTY shadows HARRIET. MAGGIE reaches claws out for the cake and groans with joy] At last! [But her claws do not touch the cake.]

MARGARET: [with a graceful, nonchalant hand places cake upon her plate and bites at it slowly and delicately] Thank you.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Automobile!

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Follow up the costumes with the suggestion that she would make a good model for John. It isn't too early to begin getting what you came for.

MARGARET: [ignoring MAGGIE] What delicious cake.

HETTY: [excitedly to HARRIET] There's your chance for the auto.

HARRIET: [nonchalantly to MARGARET] Yes, it is good cake, isn't it? There are always a great many people buying it at Harper's. I sat in my automobile fifteen minutes this morning waiting for my chauffeur to get it.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Make her order a portrait.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] If you stopped at Harper's you must have noticed the new gowns at Henderson's. Aren't the shop windows alluring these days?

HARRIET: Even my chauffeur notices them.

MAGGIE: I know you have an automobile, I heard you the first time.

MARGARET: I notice gowns now with an artist's eye as John does. The one you have on, my dear, is very paintable.

HETTY: Don't let her see you're anxious to be painted.

HARRIET: [nonchalantly] Oh, it's just a little model.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Don't seem anxious to get the order.

MARGARET: [nonchalantly] Perhaps it isn't the gown itself but the way you wear it that pleases the eye. Some people can wear anything with grace.

HETTY: Yes, I'm very graceful.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET]. You flatter me, my dear.

MARGARET: On the contrary, Harriet, I have an intense admiration for you. I remember how beautiful you were -- as a girl. In fact, I was quite jealous when John was paying you so much attention.

HETTY: She is gloating because I lost him.

HARRIET: Those were childhood days in a country town.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] She's trying to make you feel that John was only a country boy.

MARGARET: Most great men have come from the country. There is a fair chance that John will be added to the list.

HETTY: I know it and I am bitterly jealous of you.

HARRIET: Undoubtedly he owes much of his success to you, Margaret, your experience in economy and your ability to endure hardship. Those first few years in Paris must have been a struggle.

MAGGIE: She is sneering at your poverty.

MARGARET: Yes, we did find life difficult at first, not the luxurious start a girl has who marries wealth.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Deny that you married Charles for his money.

[HARRIET deems it wise to ignore HETTY'S advice.]

MARGARET: But John and I are so congenial in our tastes, that we were impervious to hardship or unhappiness.

HETTY: [in anguish] Do you love each other? Is it really true?

HARRIET: [sweetly] Did you have all the romance of starving for his art?

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] She's taunting you. Get even with her.

MARGARET: Not for long. Prince Rier soon discovered John's genius, and introduced him royally to wealthy Parisians who gave him many orders.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] Are you telling the truth or are you lying?

HARRIET: If he had so many opportunities there, you must have had great inducements to come back to the States.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] We did, but not the kind you think.

MARGARET: John became the rage among Americans travelling in France, too, and they simply insisted upon his coming here.

HARRIET: Whom is he going to paint here?

MAGGIE: [frightened] What names dare I make up?

MARGARET: [calmly] Just at present Miss Dorothy Ainsworth of Oregon is posing. You may not know the name, but she is the daughter of a wealthy miner who found gold in Alaska.

HARRIET: I dare say there are many Western people we have never heard of.

MARGARET: You must have found social life in New York very interesting, Harriet, after the simplicity of our home town.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] There's no need to remind us that our beginnings were the same.

HARRIET: Of course Charles's family made everything delightful for me. They are so well connected.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Flatter her.

MARGARET: I heard it mentioned yesterday that you had made yourself very popular. Some one said you were very clever!

HARRIET: [pleased] Who told you that?

MAGGIE: Nobody!

MARGARET: [pleasantly] Oh, confidences should be suspected -- respected, I mean. They said, too, that you are gaining some reputation as a critic of art.

HARRIET: I make no pretenses.

MARGARET: Are you and Mr. Goodrich interested in the same things, too?

HETTY: No!

HARRIET: Yes, indeed, Charles and I are inseparable.

MAGGIE: I wonder.

HARRIET: Do have another cake.

MAGGIE: [in relief] Oh, yes. [Again her claws extend but do not touch the cake.]

MARGARET: [takes cake delicately] I really shouldn't -- after my big luncheon. John took me to the Ritz and we are invited to the Bedfords' for dinner -- they have such a magnificent house near the drive -- I really shouldn't, but the cakes are so good.

MAGGIE: Starving!

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] More tea?

MAGGIE: Yes!

MARGARET: No, thank you. How wonderfully life has arranged itself for you. Wealth, position, a happy marriage, every opportunity to enjoy all pleasures; beauty, art -- how happy you must be.

HETTY: [in anguish]. Don't call me happy. I've never been happy since I gave up John. All these years without him -- a future without him -- no -- no -- I shall win him back -- away from you -- away from you --

HARRIET: [does not see MAGGIE pointing to cream and MARGARET stealing some] I sometimes think it is unfair for any one to be as happy as I am. Charles and I are just as much in love now as when we married. To me he is just the dearest man in the world.

MAGGIE: [passionately] My John is. I love him so much I could die for him. I'm going through hunger and want to make him great and he loves me. He worships me!

MARGARET: [leisurely to HARRIET] I should like to meet Mr. Goodrich. Bring him to our studio. John has some sketches to show. Not many, because all the portraits have been purchased by the subjects. He gets as much as four thousand dollars now.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Don't pay that much.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] As much as that?

MARGARET: It is not really too much when one considers that John is in the foremost rank of artists to-day. A picture painted by him now will double and treble in value.

MAGGIE: It's all a lie. He is growing weak with despair.

HARRIET: Does he paint all day long?

MAGGIE: No, he draws advertisements for our bread.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] When you and your husband come to see us, telephone first --

MAGGIE: Yes, so he can get the advertisements out of the way.

MARGARET: Otherwise you might arrive while he has a sitter, and John refuses to let me disturb him then.

HETTY: Make her ask for an order.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Le Grange offered to paint me for a thousand.

MARGARET: Louis Le Grange's reputation isn't worth more than that.

HARRIET: Well, I've heard his work well mentioned.

MAGGIE: Yes, he is doing splendid work.

MARGARET: Oh, dear me, no. He is only praised by the masses. He is accepted not at all by artists themselves.

HETTY: [anxiously] Must I really pay the full price?

HARRIET: Le Grange thought I would make a good subject.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET]. Let her fish for it.

MARGARET: Of course you would. Why don't you let Le Grange paint you, if you trust him?

HETTY: She doesn't seem anxious to have John do it.

HARRIET: But if Le Grange isn't accepted by artists, it would be a waste of time to pose for him, wouldn't it?

MARGARET: Yes, I think it would.

MAGGIE: [passionately to HETTY across back of table] Give us the order. John is so despondent he can't endure much longer. Help us! Help me! Save us!

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Don't seem too eager.

HARRIET: And yet if he charges only a thousand one might consider it.

MARGARET. If you really wish to be painted, why don't you give a little more and have a portrait really worth while? John might be induced to do you for a little below his usual price considering that you used to be such good friends.

HETTY: [in glee] Hurrah!

HARRIET: [quietly to MARGARET] That's very nice of you to suggest -- of course I don't know --

MAGGIE: [in fear]. For God's sake, say yes.

MARGARET: [quietly to HARRIET] Of course, I don't know whether John would. He is very peculiar in these matters. He sets his value on his work and thinks it beneath him to discuss price.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] You needn't try to make us feel small.

MARGARET: Still, I might quite delicately mention to him that inasmuch as you have many influential friends you would be very glad to -- to --

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] Finish what I don't want to say.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Help her out.

HARRIET: Oh, yes, introductions will follow the exhibition of my portrait. No doubt I --

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Be patronizing.

HARRIET: No doubt I shall be able to introduce your husband to his advantage.

MAGGIE: [relieved] Saved.

MARGARET: If I find John in a propitious mood I shall take pleasure, for your sake, in telling him about your beauty. Just as you are sitting now would be a lovely pose.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] We can go now.

HETTY: [to HARRIET] Don't let her think she is doing us a favor.

HARRIET: It will give me pleasure to add my name to your husband's list of patronesses.

MAGGIE: [excitedly to MARGARET] Run home and tell John the good news.

MARGARET: [leisurely to HARRIET] I little guessed when I came for a pleasant chat about old times that it would develop into business arrangements. I had no idea, Harriet, that you had any intention of being painted. By Le Grange, too. Well, I came just in time to rescue you.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] Run home and tell John. Hurry, hurry!

HETTY: [to HARRIET] You managed the order very neatly. She doesn't suspect that you wanted it.

HARRIET: Now if I am not satisfied with my portrait I shall blame you, Margaret, dear. I am relying upon your opinion of John's talent.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] She doesn't suspect what you came for. Run home and tell John!

HARRIET: You always had a brilliant mind, Margaret.

MARGARET: Ah, it is you who flatter, now.

MAGGIE: [to MARGARET] You don't have to stay so long. Hurry home!

HARRIET: Ah, one does not flatter when one tells the truth.

MARGARET: [smiles] I must be going or you will have me completely under your spell.

HETTY: [looks at clock] Yes, do go. I have to dress for dinner.

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] Oh, don't hurry.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] I hate you!

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] No, really I must, but I hope we shall see each other often at the studio. I find you so stimulating.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] I hate you!

HARRIET: [to MARGARET] It is indeed gratifying to find a kindred spirit.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] I came for your gold.

MARGARET: [to HARRIET] How delightful it is to know you again.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] I am going to make you and your husband suffer.

HARRIET: My kind regards to John.

MAGGIE: [to HETTY] He has forgotten all about you.

MARGARET: [rises] He will be so happy to receive them.

HETTY: [to MAGGIE] I can hardly wait to talk to him again.

HARRIET: I shall wait, then, until you send me word?

MARGARET: [offering her hand] I'll speak to John about it as soon as I can and tell you when to come.

[HARRIET takes MARGARET'S hand affectionately. HETTY and MAGGIE rush at each other, throw back their veils, and fling their speeches fiercely at each other.]

HETTY: I love him -- I love him --

MAGGIE: He's starving -- I'm starving --

HETTY: I'm going to take him away from you --

MAGGIE: I want your money -- and your influence.

HETTY and MAGGIE: I'm going to rob you -- rob you.

[There is a cymbal crash, the lights go out and come up again slowly, leaving only MARGARET and HARRIET visible.]

MARGARET: [quietly to HARRIET] I've had such a delightful afternoon.

HARRIET: [offering her hand] It has been a joy to see you.

MARGARET: [sweetly to HARRIET] Good-bye.

HARRIET: [sweetly to MARGARET as she kisses her] Good-bye, my dear.

CURTAIN

