



Plays of the Month

Not Only the Guppy

A One-Act Play

by

P. N. JACOBSON



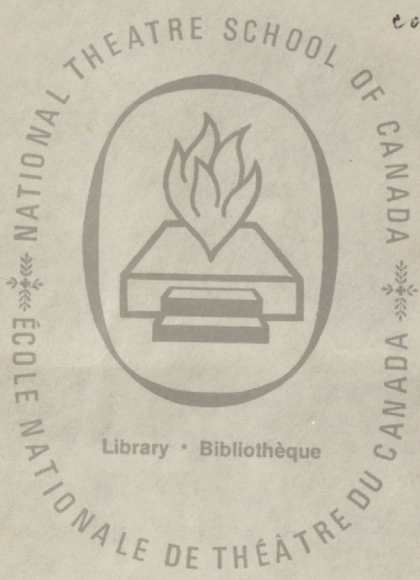
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Not Only the Guppy

(The Guppy or Rainbow Fish Devours Its Young)

A One-Act Play

by

P. N. JACOBSON

Author of ". . . And Sendeth Rain"



IMPORTANT

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NOT ONLY THE GUPPY
A Drama for Four Women, One Man, and One Child

CHARACTERS
(In Order of Appearance)

MRS. CARTER, a grandmother

LIZZIE, her maid

MRS. CHAMBERS, a friend

DR. ANDERSON

ANN CARTER, a mother

DAVID CARTER, a child

NOTES ON CHARACTERISTICS AND COSTUMES:

MRS. CARTER: A handsome, white-haired old lady with a self-centered, domineering nature. Wears a rather old-fashioned gown of dark material with a shawl over her shoulders.

LIZZIE: A typical family servant. She is accustomed to her mistress and loves her with a servant's sense of duty. She is thin and active and almost as old as her mistress.

MRS. CHAMBERS: A pleasant, agreeable woman of about Mrs. Carter's age. Is wearing an attractive street costume suited to early fall.

DR. ANDERSON: A grave, serious gentleman of about sixty. Wears neat business suit and topcoat and carries hat.

ANN: An attractive, strong-willed woman of between twenty-five and thirty. Wears a plain, but attractive, street costume and light fall coat.

DAVID: A young boy of about four or five years of age. Is dressed quite simply but in good taste.

SETTING

An old-fashioned living room. It is one of those high-ceilinged rooms still to be found in some old residences. The walls are hung with huge steel engravings and similar pictures. In the center of the left wall is a large fireplace with a marble mantel-piece above which hangs an enlarged portrait of the late Mr. Carter. Facing the fireplace is an old-fashioned sofa. Down left is a radio, the only modern piece of furniture in the room. At the center of the right wall is an old-fashioned sideboard. There is a door upstage right leading to Mrs. Carter's bedroom and another upstage left leading to the kitchen and front door. Downstage just right of center are a small table with a colored cloth and two chairs. Small whatnots and tables cluttered with bric-a-brac, family portraits, and the usual Victorian items, such as stuffed birds and waxed fruits covered by glass domes, may be scattered about the room as desired. The general effect should be quite drab.

STAGE DIRECTIONS

Upstage means away from the footlights, downstage, toward the footlights. When right and left are used, they refer to the actor's right and left as he faces the audience.

PROPERTY PLOT

FURNISHINGS:

Large fireplace with marble mantel
Old-fashioned sofa
Radio
Old-fashioned sideboard
Table and cloth
Two chairs
Whatnots and miscellaneous tables
Bric-a-brac, etc.
Photograph of young man on sideboard
Steel engravings, paintings, etc. on walls
Stuffed birds, etc.

HAND PROPERTIES:

LIZZIE:

Tray containing tea, buns, etc. (Off left)
Powder, perfume, mirror, etc. (Off right)
Smelling salts on sideboard

DOCTOR:

Instrument case
Watch

EFFECTS

Doorbell off left as indicated.

LIGHTS

Lights should be up but not too bright throughout.

Not Only the Guppy



(The scene is the living room of Mrs. Carter's old-fashioned home in Montreal. The time of the play, late October, 1931. It is late afternoon and Mrs. Carter is seen in profile seated in an invalid chair beside the window, back-stage center. When curtain rises, Lizzie, Mrs. Carter's companion-maid enters. She moves quietly in case her mistress is still asleep, and peers anxiously at her. She draws the curtain.)

LIZZIE: My, but it does get dark that early now. Did you manage a little doze, Ma'am?

MRS. CARTER: I couldn't sleep.

LIZZIE (*down right center with chair*): You'll be sleeping, all the better tonight. I'll be getting you a nice, strong cup of tea soon. That's what you be needing.

MRS. CARTER: Let me alone! I don't want any tea. I don't want anything. Just 'let me alone.

LIZZIE: There, there, Ma'am; it sure is a great affliction God has put on you. Poor, poor Master David. Aye, but it does feel terrible lonesome without him. The house seems that empty!

MRS. CARTER: I can't stand it! I can't stand it, Lizzie! I can't realize that I will never see my darling boy again.

LIZZIE: Don't you be sayin' that, Ma'am!

MRS. CARTER: How could God be so unmerciful! Was it not enough that He should take my husband away before my child was born! Did it not satisfy Him to

sentence me to a wheel chair for life! No, that wasn't enough. He must strike down my David in the very prime of his life. I tell you, Lizzie, He is a cruel, cruel God! I want no more of Him.

LIZZIE (*firmly*): Now then, Mrs. Carter, you mustn't go on talking that way! God's ways are not our ways. It is not given to the likes of us to question Him. Come now! Remember how Master David was always so proud of your courage. He'd feel real badly to hear you carry on this way. There, now, just try another doze while I'll be getting the tea. That'll make you feel better. (*Doorbell rings.*) Well, now, who can that be?

MRS. CARTER: I won't see anybody!

LIZZIE: No, of course not, Ma'am. (*Outside*) Mrs. Chambers back! She hasn't seen anybody yet, Ma'am.

MRS. CHAMBERS (*off stage*): Nonsense, Lizzie. Of course she'll see me. (*Enters and kisses Mrs. Carter compassionately and affectionately.*) Sophia, I didn't know a thing about it. I only landed yesterday. What a tragedy! I couldn't believe it. To think that David . . . Oh, it's terrible, terrible!

MRS. CARTER: He was all I had to live for, Grace. Now I'm all alone. A wretched, helpless, old creature and a burden to everybody.

LIZZIE: That's what she keeps on saying and saying. She knows it isn't true. She has me, hasn't she? Sure I won't be leaving her. Indeed, I'll be taking better care of her now that I have only her to look after.

MRS. CHAMBERS: You're a good soul, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: I'm so glad you're back, Mrs. Chambers. You're the real cheery sort, if I may say so, and it's your kind the Missus needs around her. May I take your things?

MRS. CHAMBERS: No, thank you, Lizzie. I'll just loosen my fur. I'll keep my hat on to hide my gray hairs. (*She goes back of chair to Mrs. Carter's right.*)

LIZZIE (*left*): It's many a year since I've seen you, Ma'am, but I will say you look as young, aye and as nice as ever, and that I can't help sayin'. You'll be havin' a cup of tea with the Missus.

MRS. CARTER: I won't take any.

MRS. CHAMBERS (*sitting right of table*): Oh, but I will! and I do hope you are still making those delicious buns.

LIZZIE (*beaming*): And to think of you remembering my buns all this long while. . . . Isn't that just too wonderful? (*She exits left.*)

MRS. CHAMBERS: You know, Sophia, I've been through it myself. Tell me about it. I'm sure it will do you good to talk about poor David. I know I'd have gone mad if I hadn't been able to talk to somebody when John was killed.

MRS. CARTER: How can you compare yourself with me, Grace? You have your husband, you have Doris and you can get around. I wasn't even to be with my boy when he died. If I could only have had my arms around him and his dear head on my breast. I might have been able to bear it. But I keep thinking and thinking of my darling dying in a hospital—amongst strangers—and I feel cheated, cheated again by a cruel God!

MRS. CHAMBERS: My dear! I felt just as bitter when John was taken. Think of it, Sophia! killed only two hours before the Armistice!

MRS. CARTER: That was the war. One could expect that. But there was my Davey in the midst of life.

MRS. CHAMBERS: At least you had your David eleven years longer than I had my boy. Suppose he had gone to the front with John at that time!

MRS. CARTER: That was impossible! What would have become of me? (*Mrs. Chambers rises and walks*

about the room.) I couldn't let Davey go. I would have been out of my mind in a month, sticking in this room alone, day after day. I tell you, Grace, I only lived when he was in the house. And now . . . (*She breaks off helplessly.*)

MRS. CHAMBERS: Yes, I know . . . (*Taking up picture from the sideboard.*) I never saw this picture before, Sophia. David must have had it taken while I was away.

MRS. CARTER: Yes, that was my boy's latest. I made him have it done for my last birthday. What a fuss he made! Said I was an old silly, and a next brooch would be nicer. But I insisted. (*Sighing*) I must have had a premonition. . . It wasn't very good. I was disappointed in it.

MRS. CHAMBERS: He looks thinner and oh, so very serious and careworn. Not a bit like the David I remember. (*Replaces the photograph.*)

MRS. CARTER: That was quite natural, wasn't it? The very young do not understand what suffering means. When he was older, he realized what a burden my life was to me.

MRS. CHAMBERS (*slowly*): Yes, he does seem to realize . . . the . . . burden. Poor lad! he certainly did sacrifice his youth to you, my dear.

MRS. CARTER (*indignantly*): I don't understand you, Grace, sacrifice, indeed! Davey loved to be with me just as much as I loved to have him.

MRS. CHAMBERS (*drily*): Well, I wonder . . . (*stops in front of birds*) Same old birds. Nothing is changed around here . . . only ourselves. You must have lived here all of forty years, Sophia.

(*Lizzie enters with tray containing tea, buns, etc.*)

MRS. CARTER: Thirty-eight years, next January. We moved in here when we were first married.

MRS. CHAMBERS: And you, Lizzie, you must have been with Mrs. Carter most of that time . . .

LIZZIE: About thirty years, Ma'am. Master David was only a bit of a thing and the Missus was still on her feet.

(Mrs. Chambers goes to radio.)

MRS. CHAMBERS: Well, I never, Sophia! if you are not going modern . . . a radio! I suppose you even listen in on Little Jimmie?

LIZZIE: Master David bought it for the Missus. He was always thinking up ways to make her happy.

MRS. CHAMBERS: That was David all over.

LIZZIE: I'll never forget that day. Do you remember, Ma'am, how cross you was because we kept you abed so that he could get it all fixed up and give you a big surprise?

MRS. CARTER: . . . and he made me close my eyes so that I wouldn't see it until he wheeled me in. Then he insisted that I keep them shut while he pressed my fingers on a button . . . Ah! he was so good to me, my Davey!

MRS. CHAMBERS: Such a good son; always giving, giving!

LIZZIE: Will you pour tea, Mrs. Chambers?

MRS. CHAMBERS (going down to tea-table, right): Do you still take sugar, Sophia? Yes, of course you do.

MRS. CARTER: I don't think I could swallow a drop.

LIZZIE: No, she doesn't take any sugar now. Come, you'll take something, just to please us.

MRS. CHAMBERS: Surely you are going to have one of Lizzie's buns.

LIZZIE: If you want anything, just ring, Ma'am.

MRS. CARTER: Yes, yes, Lizzie.

(Lizzie exits.)

MRS. CHAMBERS (*handing tea to Mrs. Carter*): Doris and the children came back with me, you know. I'd like you to see them when you feel better.

MRS. CARTER (*now enjoying her tea*): I'm no fit company for anyone.

MRS. CHAMBERS: Doris is quite upset about David. Do you remember how fond they were of each other, long ago? It looked serious for a while . . . and then . . . something happened . . . they drifted apart . . . I could never understand it. They would have made such a nice couple.

MRS. CARTER (*putting down cup decisively*): You're quite wrong, Grace. Davey never cared for anybody but me. He always said our love was all he wanted. Didn't he give me his promise not to marry while I was alive? My darling was all I had to live for, and he knew it.

MRS. CHAMBERS: So that was it! I've often wondered. You and I always did look at things differently, even when we were girls. Why, I don't know what I would have done if Doris hadn't married. Her children are such a joy to me.

MRS. CARTER: I'm not sorry. I had my Davey all to myself. I didn't have to share him with anyone, thank God!

MRS. CHAMBERS: I hope you acted right, Sophia. It's your life; but it seems to me, if you had a grandchild, it would be a great consolation now.

MRS. CARTER: No, no. I'm glad I had my Davey all to myself.

(*Lizzie enters.*)

LIZZIE: I seen the doctor's car outside Mrs. Barker's, opposite. Likely he'll be dropping in to see you, Mrs. Carter.

MRS. CARTER (*fussed*): I can't see him like this.

LIZZIE: I'll be fixin' you up. (*exits right.*)

MRS. CHAMBERS: I must be going, Sophia. Fix her up real pretty, Lizzie. You know your mistress always did have a soft spot for doctors, especially Doctor Anderson, eh, Sophia?

MRS. CARTER: You talk such nonsense, Grace.

MRS. CHAMBERS: Good-bye, Lizzie. I'll see myself out.

LIZZIE (*entering with toilet articles*): Good-bye to you, Ma'am. You'll be droppin' in soon again, I hope.

MRS. CHAMBERS: Oh, yes, Lizzie. (*Exits*)

(*Business of Lizzie and Mrs. Carter with make-up, powder, Florida water.*)

MRS. CARTER: Get my best shawl, Lizzie.

LIZZIE: Here it is, Ma'am. . . There, now, you're lookin' like your old self again.

(*Doorbell rings.*)

MRS. CARTER: Hurry, Lizzie. Don't keep the doctor waiting.

(*Lizzie puts down mirror. Mrs. Carter takes it up and examines herself critically, as Lizzie exits.*)

LIZZIE (*offstage*): I told her what you said, doctor. I've got her up. Yes, and I think she's looking stronger.

DOCTOR (*entering*): Well, well, and how's the patient today?

(*Lizzie follows doctor in.*)

MRS. CARTER: I didn't want to get up, but she wouldn't let me alone. I tell you, doctor, I don't want to live.

(*Lizzie exits.*)

DR. ANDERSON: Nonsense, Sophia. That's what you said when your husband died, but you found out that David could fill your life. (*Going round to chair back*)

of *Mrs. Carter*) Of course, you want to live. Why you can't tell what's around the corner even now.

MRS. CARTER: No, no. I'm finished.

DR. ANDERSON: When we're young life seems unbearable when we lose a loved one. After we pass sixty, we cling to life more than ever. Mark me, Sophia, in a few months you'll be getting your regular sleep; yes, and enjoying three good meals a day. (*Business with watch, taking pulse, etc.*)

MRS. CARTER: Doctor Anderson, even you must not talk to me like that with my darling boy dead only a week. How can I ever be the same again? Lizzie will tell you what a time she had getting me out of bed today. That was my Davey's duty.

DR. ANDERSON: Yes, yes.

MRS. CARTER: Every morning he wheeled me to the window, and he'd wave his dear hand to me before he turned the corner.

DR. ANDERSON: A devoted son.

MRS. CARTER: I never went back to my room until he came home and that was sometimes very late. David had to work very hard these last few years.

DR. ANDERSON: He did too much. I warned him about it.

MRS. CARTER: One night, he didn't come home at all and I dozed all night in my chair. He never did it again. When he went out of town on business, I stayed right in my bedroom until he came home. And you say I will soon forget.

DR. ANDERSON: You mustn't think me unsympathetic, Sophia. Of course, it is hard for you. You've lost a fine son. I've known a great many men in my time, but I have yet to meet his equal. It's a disaster, but you're going to bear it like a brave woman, eh?

MRS. CARTER: You're good to me, doctor.

DR. ANDERSON: It's too bad David didn't marry. A grand-child, a boy, perhaps, would be a great consolation to you. (*He lets this sink in.*) Don't you wish you had a grandson, Sophia?

MRS. CARTER: That's what Grace Chambers said. A grandchild, perhaps. But I could never have stood another woman.

DR. ANDERSON: Well, now, just for the sake of argument, suppose you found out that David did marry, and that he had left a boy, your grandson! . . . would it make you happy?

MRS. CARTER (*now thoroughly alarmed*): You speak mysteriously, doctor. Are you keeping something from me? Of course, David never married. Don't joke with me at a time like this!

DR. ANDERSON: I'm not joking, Sophia. Prepare yourself. I have been keeping something from you. David did marry, secretly . . .

MRS. CARTER (*gasping*): It's impossible . . . I . . . I don't understand!

(*Doctor rings bell on table for Lizzie, who enters quickly.*)

DR. ANDERSON: She knows. Get the smelling salts!
(*Lizzie gets smelling salts from sideboard.*)

LIZZIE: The poor old thing! I knew she'd take it hard.

MRS. CARTER: I'm all right now. Go on! Go on! I must know. Davey, Davey, how could you deceive your mother!

DR. ANDERSON: Some years ago, David fell in love and married a young girl, Ann Severs.

MRS. CARTER: Ann Severs? (*She shakes her head.*)

DR. ANDERSON: She was a stenographer in his office.

She seems a superior sort of young woman with plenty of character.

MRS. CARTER: But he promised me . . .

DR. ANDERSON: Yes, yes, I know. He promised you never to marry. But, my dear Sophia, you can't oppose natural forces that way. Such a promise was bound to be broken.

MRS. CARTER: I don't see why. I don't see why.

DR. ANDERSON: What was the result? He thought that if you knew it would break your heart; so he led, what you call, a double life. (*Pause*) There was a child—a boy.

MRS. CARTER: Where . . . where . . . is . . . the child . . . now?

DR. ANDERSON: Ah, I was hoping you would ask that. I have a surprise for you—that is, if you would really like to see him.

MRS. CARTER (*slowly*): Yes. But I won't see that woman.

DR. ANDERSON: Don't say that, Sophia! I had such a difficulty in inducing her to come. After all, she's his mother. Bring them in, Lizzie! (*To Mrs. Carter*) They're waiting in my car. (*Dr. Anderson moves round to left of Mrs. Carter.*)

MRS. CARTER: What shall I do? What shall I say? (*Murmuring*)

DR. ANDERSON: I want to tell you, Sophia, that the boy's name is David.

MRS. CARTER: David! David!

(*Dr. Anderson turns to greet Lizzie, Ann and child, as they enter.*)

DR. ANDERSON: My dear Mrs. Carter—this is your mother-in-law. I have just told her everything.

ANN (*ironically*): Everything, doctor? No, I don't think you have told her everything.

DR. ANDERSON: Sophia, this is your new daughter, Ann. Ann, this is your boy's grandmother.

(*The two women glare at each other.*)

MRS. CARTER: Where's the boy?

(*The boy has been clinging to his mother. Dr. Anderson takes him by the hand and brings him forward.*)

DR. ANDERSON: The boy—and this is Master David Carter, your grandson.

MRS. CARTER (*after a long and pregnant pause*): He's my Davey over again. Come here, my darling, and give your Granny a kiss!

(*The child shrinks away, scared. Lizzie, saving the situation, playfully catches hold of child.*)

LIZZIE: I think I know where there's a good big piece of chocolate cake. Come, dearie, we'll go and look for it!

(*Lizzie and child go out.*)

MRS. CARTER: There, my angel! Go and get your cake. But come back to your Granny soon!

DR. ANDERSON (*to Ann*): Please sit down, Mrs. Carter! You will understand that my old friend here has had quite a shock. Naturally it will take a little time before she realizes what has happened.

ANN: Well, what do you want me to do?

MRS. CARTER: Of course, he must stay here always.

DR. ANDERSON (*significantly*): With his mother?

MRS. CARTER: If she wants to.

ANN (*indignantly*): Does she think I will ever give up my boy to her?

DR. ANDERSON: This is quite a large house. There

is no reason why you should not be able to live here comfortably.

ANN: And if I do not choose . . . ?

MRS. CARTER (*realizing danger*): Of course, you must make your home with us, Ann!

DR. ANDERSON: I don't see that there's any choice. From what Wilson told me yesterday, David's estate will hardly support two households.

ANN (*sullenly*): Well, I can always earn my own living. I did it before.

DR. ANDERSON (*persuasively*): Things are different now. You have the child's future to consider. Why not give it a trial?

ANN (*relenting a little*): Well . . . I might.

DR. ANDERSON (*delighted*): Now, that's settled! I told Mrs. Carter you were a young woman of character. (*Turns to the old woman*) Sophia, I congratulate you. You have found a daughter. I'm sure she will make you happy. (*Lizzie enters with boy.*) Look, they are great friends already!

MRS. CARTER: Bring him over to me, Lizzie! Come, let me have a good look at you, my darling! (*To Dr. Anderson*) Yes, he's the very image of my Davey. I have my boy back again, thank God! Thank God!

LIZZIE: Aye, but you'll be happy, now, Mrs. Carter!

MRS. CARTER: Happy! Yes, Lizzie, I am happy now that I have my little Davey with me. (*She smooths the child's hair, lovingly.*) You see, my little precious, your poor old granny can't even walk. She must stay in this room all the time. She can't go out and run about like you. You will learn to love me, won't you, my darling? Then I'll forget all my troubles. You're all I have now. Granny won't be here long. She's very tired. You'll be her only comfort. We'll have such good times together. (*Hugs child passionately*)

Never, never leave me. Promise you'll never leave me!

ANN: David, come here!

MRS. CARTER: What's the matter? She's not going?

ANN (*fiercely*): Yes, for good!

DR. ANDERSON: Please wait, Mrs. Carter!

MRS. CARTER: What does the woman mean?

ANN: I'm going, I tell you.

DR. ANDERSON: I don't quite understand this rush to leave. Why this sudden change?

ANN: Oh, didn't you hear what she just said? Can't you see how she is already trying to work on the child's feelings? (*Minicking the old lady.*) Your poor old granny can't walk. God, I see it all so clearly now. How she must have flayed my poor husband's sensitive nature with her helplessness. How she must have harped and harped on her loneliness until his heart bled for her. No wonder he couldn't . . . (*She breaks off*) Oh, my dear, my dear, I didn't understand! (*fiercely*) And now the wretched old creature reaches out for another victim in the name of love. Well, she did that to the father and spoiled his life, but she won't have the chance to do it to the son—not if I can help it.

DR. ANDERSON (*sternly*): I realize that you're in a very nervous state, young woman, but I can not allow you to speak this way about my old friend. Come, now! be reasonable! Sit down and we'll talk it over.

MRS. CARTER (*bewildered*): What is she talking about, doctor? The woman must be crazy! (*hysterically*) Take her away, someone, I won't listen to her.

(*Ann takes a step toward her, menacingly.*)

ANN: I'm not crazy! I'm sane, sane! You can't fool me with the way you fool your doctor and your wom-

an here. I know you for what you are. A selfish, old woman who took advantage of her son's love! It's horrible, horrible, the way you messed up his dear life—preying on his generosity—eating his very life away with your unnatural demands. But that's passed. Come, David!

MRS. CARTER: Doctor!

DR. ANDERSON: Just a moment, Mrs. Carter. Understand me clearly. If you leave your mother-in-law in this cruel way, the shock might kill her.

(Lizzie comes down and takes David off.)

ANN: Kill her? Kill her? Don't worry, doctor! Let me see how many times have I heard that threat? . . . *(She pauses)* David said it would kill her if she knew we were keeping company. . . David said it would kill her if she heard we were secretly married. . . David said it would kill her if we told her about the child . . . And now it is David that is dead, but there she is . . . look at her . . . she's alive, alive.

MRS. CARTER: You! You dreadful girl to talk that way to a poor, old crippled woman! Have you no *pity*? *(Ann lets herself go and becomes strident with fury.)*

ANN: Pity! PITY! My God! how I loathe that word! It was pity for you that robbed us forever of the joys of a honeymoon. It was pity for you that spoiled the very intimacies of our married life. Night after night, I tossed alone so that David might go home to you. He knew you would not go to bed unless he was in the house. It was pity for you that made it necessary for me to hide away in a boarding house, like a guilty creature, instead of making a home for my husband and child. It was pity for you that forced David to lead a double life and spend twice as much as he should. Pity made my David weak when he should have been strong . . . And you . . . you talk about pity. Pity David! Pity me! But don't pity *her*! I'll show you I have no pity for her. . . David killed—!

DR. ANDERSON: Stop!

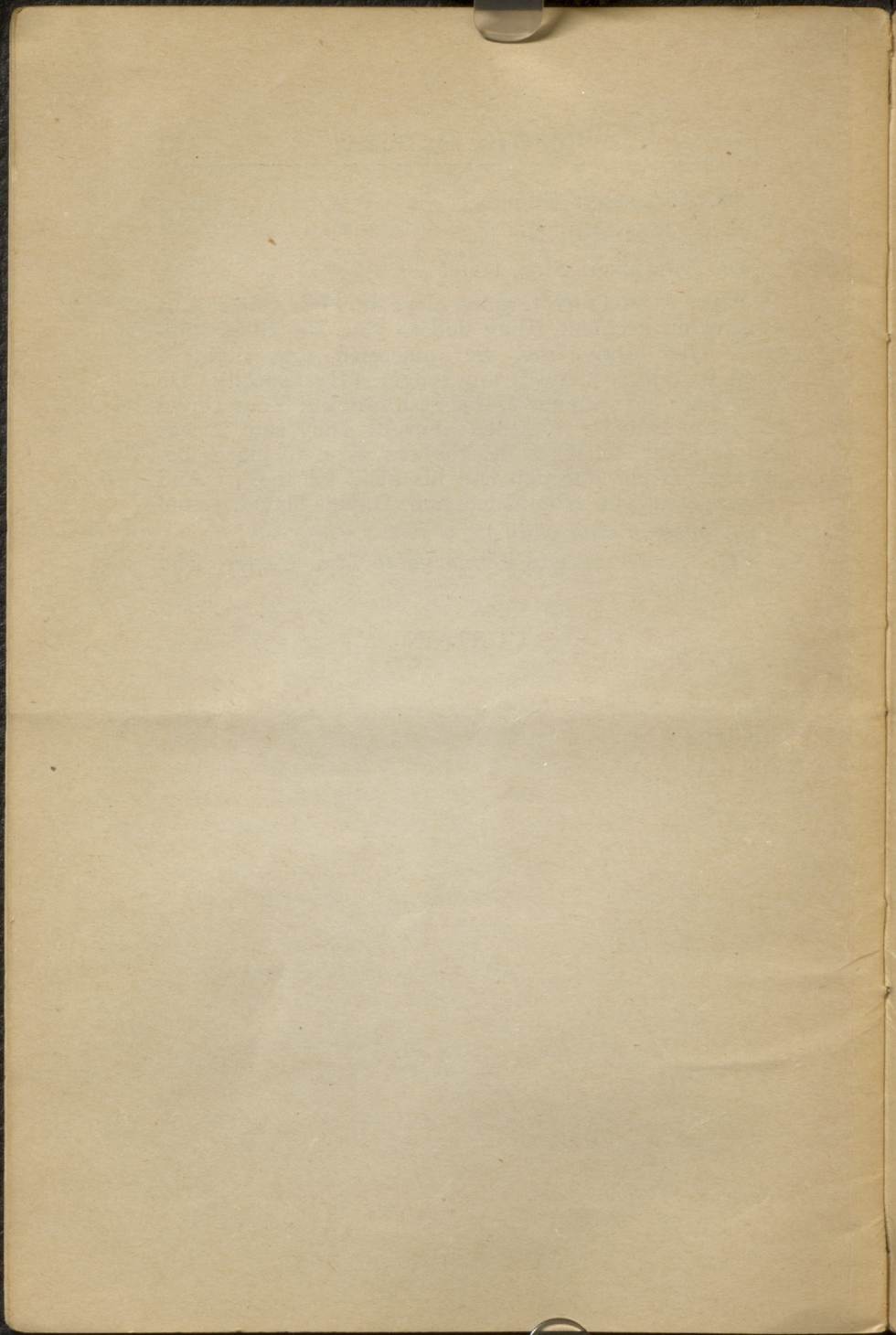
ANN (*defiantly*): No! No!

DR. ANDERSON: Stop, I say!

ANN: I won't (*She goes close to Mrs. Carter.*) It wasn't an accident. They lied to you. He killed himself. God forgive me, we quarreled that night. I said I couldn't stand it any longer. (*Hysterically*) Do you hear, old woman? David shot himself! Your David . . . my David . . . killed himself! They said it was an accident. That's a lie. He was worn to pieces between his pity for you and his need for me. . . And it was you, you who killed him. David! David, come! (*She goes off with child.*)

(*Dr. Anderson and Lizzie go to Mrs. Carter, who has collapsed.*)

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