

HE SAID AND SHE SAID

a play in one-act

by Alice Gerstenberg

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CHARACTERS

DIANA CHESBROUGH, a society girl
ENID HALDEMAN, her friend
FELIX Haldeman, her husband
MRS. CYRUS PACKARD, their friend

SETTING

Living-room at the Haldemans, before dinner.

[Living-room at the Haldemans. Discovered Enid setting the room to rights. Enter in hat and coat and jingling a bunch of house keys Felix Haldeman. He kisses Enid affectionately as if it were a daily habit, and then tosses down the evening paper.]

FELIX: Hello, dear.

ENID: Felix, I asked Diana and Mrs. Packard over for dinner. You'd better hurry and wash up a bit.

FELIX: What? Am I to be the only man *again*?

ENID: Can't help it, darling. Mr. Packard's in Washington and all of Diana's suitors are in the trenches.

FELIX: There must be some old greybeard left somewhere to invite for Diana.

ENID: Oh, there are a few left-overs floating around but Diana doesn't like them. If she can't get the best *male* company she prefers *female*.

FELIX: Diana's a peach! She should have married one of the boys before they all went over. Poor Aubrey Laurence was madly in love with her.

ENID: Hurry up, there's soot on your cheek. *[She taps it affectionately.]*

FELIX: All right, if I have to dine with three women I'd better look my best.

ENID: *(Admiringly)* Yes, my dear Cock of the Walk.

FELIX: There're the evening papers. We gained three miles again. *[Exit down left.]*

[Enid is about to glance at the paper but is interrupted by the breezy entrance of Mrs. Packard.]

MRS. PACKARD: My dear, your maid told me to come right in.

ENID: Oh, Mrs. Packard, I'm so glad you could come on such short notice.

MRS. PACKARD: I jumped at the invitation. It's so lonesome with John away. How lucky *you* are to have your husband at home.

ENID: Thanks to his business, the Government prefers him here. Take off your things.

MRS. PACKARD: I'm a little early but I took advantage of the chance to ride this way in Mrs. Morgan's car. Do you like Mrs. Morgan?

ENID: Why, yes, don't you?

MRS. PACKARD: I don't think *you* ought to like her.

ENID: Why not?

MRS. PACKARD: She has a long, bad tongue.

ENID: Talks about people--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Raises her eyebrows*) Does she? You ought to hear her--but then *you* ought *not* to hear her.

ENID: About me?

MRS. PACKARD: Now, there, my dear, I have come for a jolly little dinner-party and I'm *not* going to gossip.

ENID: Still, if she said anything against *me*, I ought to protect myself--

MRS. PACKARD: That's just it, that's what I thought--and when she said--Oh, no, why should I tell you--

ENID: Why *shouldn't* you tell me?

MRS. PACKARD: Yes, why shouldn't I? After all, I'm one of your *best* friends and you ought to know--

ENID: Certainly, I ought to know--

MRS. PACKARD: But you may never forgive me--

ENID: Not forgive you for protecting me?

MRS. PACKARD: That's true, you must protect yourself. It is my duty to tell you.

ENID: What *is* it? You have me quite scared.

MRS. PACKARD: If she tells me a thing like that, of course, she will tell everyone else. By this time, no doubt, it's all over town.

ENID: How dreadful--what have I done--

MRS. PACKARD: It isn't what you've done--it's about Diana Chesbrough.

ENID: She's coming tonight.

MRS. PACKARD: *Is she? Your invitation?*

ENID: Why, yes--

MRS. PACKARD: Are you sure?

ENID: *(A bit impatiently)* Of course, I'm sure.

MRS. PACKARD: Well-- *(She raises her shoulders and eyebrows.)*

ENID: But in what way can gossip couple my name with Diana's? She is one of my *best* friends.

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, *is* she?

ENID: *(Stoutly)* I am quite sure she is.

MRS. PACKARD: Maybe she is--still, they wonder why Diana didn't marry one of the boys before they went off to war.

ENID: Why should she have--

MRS. PACKARD: Yes, why should she have really--still--anyone as attractive as Diana--she had plenty of chances, didn't she?

ENID: Oh, yes.

MRS. PACKARD: That's what they say. All nice men, too, and one or two real catches--don't you think it's strange Diana didn't marry one of them?

ENID: Yes, I do think it's strange.

MRS. PACKARD: *(Pouncingly)* There! Of course you do! I *said* it. But why do you think she didn't?

ENID: I don't know.

MRS. PACKARD: What does *she* say?

ENID: I think she--

MRS. PACKARD: Exactly! It's just what everyone is saying. And everybody feels so sorry for *you*.

ENID: Sorry for *me*?

MRS. PACKARD: My dear, *you* get all the sympathy.

ENID: What for?

MRS. PACKARD: Is it possible you have been so blind?

ENID: Blind, I?

MRS. PACKARD: You're with each other a great deal aren't you?

ENID: Yes--

MRS. PACKARD: And your husband--

ENID: Ah, *that's* what you mean--

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, my poor dear, *that's* what they say--

ENID: Just *what* do they say?

MRS. PACKARD: That she and--oh, no, my dear, of course I don't believe it, but--

ENID: (*Worried*) But just in exact words *what do* they say--

MRS. PACKARD: Hasn't he ever admired her in your presence--

ENID: Yes--

MRS. PACKARD: What does *he* say--

ENID: Oh, that she's a peach and popular and all the men like her and many of them want to marry her and--

MRS. PACKARD: There you are! That's *just* it! They said so and Mrs. Morgan told me that Diana refused the other men because--well she said because-- (*Sees Diana entering, changes the subject quickly.*) Oh, Diana, you dear, sweet thing, good evening.

DIANA: (*Enters back center, gay, happy, pretty, unconsciously friendly*) Hello, Mrs. Packard. Hello, Enid, old top. (*Kisses Enid.*) I'm early, because I came straight up from town after dressing at the club. Canteen work all day. How's everybody?

ENID: I've been nursing at the hospital all afternoon.

DIANA: Isn't Enid a trump, doing the home nursing and releasing someone else to get the glory over there? I'd have gone over there myself--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Pouncingly*) Why didn't you?

DIANA: Against the law. I have relatives in the trenches. Oh, I'd *love* the romance of being there. Enid, get the letter from your brother, won't you, and read it to Mrs. Packard? He gives such unusually interesting descriptions--

ENID: Yes, it's most interesting. Excuse me a moment, it's in my desk upstairs.

[Exit Enid back center.]

MRS. PACKARD: (*With a backward glance to see if Enid is out of hearing*) My dear Miss Chesbrough, pardon me for seeming to presume, but I am only trying to save you. Are you aware of what people are saying about you?

DIANA: Saying about me?

MRS. PACKARD: Of course they wouldn't say it *to* you--

DIANA: *What* wouldn't they say?

MRS. PACKARD: It is so much easier to flatter than to say disagreeable things--

DIANA: People are saying disagreeable things about me?

MRS. PACKARD: You haven't heard?

DIANA: No, but I should certainly like to know--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course you would; any young girl like you--but my dear, do you really think you should come to this house--

DIANA: Come to this house? Why, Enid and I went to school together, she is one of my oldest and best friends--

MRS. PACKARD: *Best*--did you say?

DIANA: You doubt it?

MRS. PACKARD: After what *she* said?

DIANA: *She* said something to make you doubt her friendship to *me*--surely you are mistaken--

MRS. PACKARD: My dear girl, I have eyes and ears--I can see and hear--

DIANA: What did Enid say?

MRS. PACKARD: She said she wished you had married one of the boys before they went to war--

DIANA: *Oh, that*--

MRS. PACKARD: You admit it! And still you come here--*that* is what people say--

DIANA: What do I admit? I don't follow your reasoning--I don't see--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course you don't see--love is always blind.

DIANA: Love! We haven't said a word about love--

MRS. PACKARD: Of course not, it is a delicate word to use and in this matter it is--well, the world does not think it becoming--

DIANA: (*Indignantly*) Mrs. Packard I do not understand your innuendos--tell me the plain facts--what are people saying--and what has love got to do with it?

MRS. PACKARD: Mr. Haldeman.

DIANA: (*Laughs*) Felix?

MRS. PACKARD: And *you!*

DIANA: I?

MRS. PACKARD: They couple your names together.

DIANA: (*Furiously*) They say that Felix and I--it is a lie--

MRS. PACKARD: It doesn't make any difference if it *is* a lie--the point is what people say--

DIANA: The people who say such things have rotten little minds that haven't enough brains to entertain themselves--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Shocked*) My dear Miss Chesbrough--

DIANA: And you're just the same repeating such slander--

MRS. PACKARD: (*Angrily*) You insinuate that I am one of the--

DIANA: I do.

MRS. PACKARD: You have insulted me!

DIANA: Not more than you have insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD: (*Furiously*) Miss Chesbrough, you will suffer for this! I tell you something in all friendliness of spirit to protect you from the slanders of the world and then you reward me by--

DIANA: You listen to idle tongues and then you come and rob me of my happiness--by putting poison into my mind--

MRS. PACKARD: I was telling you the *truth*, but people do not thank you for telling them the truth--

DIANA: *I* am the one who knows what the truth is! I know that Enid and I are friends and that Enid and Felix and I are friends and that is all. Felix adores Enid, he would never care for any other woman--

MRS. PACKARD: Oh, wouldn't he? Does the world know more than Mrs. Haldeman herself? It does *not!* Just a few moments ago in this very room she told me herself that she wished you had married because she knows that Felix is in love with you--she pretends to be your friend but in her heart she

hates you--

DIANA: It's not true!

MRS. PACKARD: It is not pleasant to argue with you, Miss Chesbrough. I shall find my hostess and make my excuses and not stay to dinner-- (*Exit up center.*)

DIANA: (*Goes as if to follow her*) If I have been too utterly rude, I humbly apologize but I cannot allow you to circulate such outrageous--

FELIX: (*Enters from down left*) Hello, Diana, when did *you* get here? Want to help me mix the cocktails? (*Goes to side table and begins to mix drinks.*)

DIANA: Felix, a terrible thing has happened--they talk about us!

FELIX: Who is *they* and who is *us*?

DIANA: People are talking about you and me--

FELIX: (*Mixing cocktail*) Why, what have we done? Do you like a drop of orange bitters?

DIANA: You're not taking it seriously.

FELIX: But what is there--

DIANA: That's just it--what *is* there--if there really *were* something-- (*She watches him anxiously.*) It's most embarrassing for *me*--I don't know how to say it to *you*--

FELIX: My dear Diana, you can say anything to me--haven't I proved myself a real friend--

DIANA: But if what they say is really--true--

FELIX: Don't *you* know whether it's true or not--

DIANA: I thought I did--but after she said it I began to wonder--

FELIX: Wonder *what*?

DIANA: (*Hesitates*) Oh--

FELIX: Out with it!

DIANA: You know I love Enid--

FELIX: Why, you've grown up together--

DIANA: I wouldn't hurt her for worlds--

FELIX: No, you trump!

DIANA: So do *you* love her more than any one else--don't you?

FELIX: Of course--but--

DIANA: (*Horrified*) Don't say *but*--

FELIX: But *why*--

DIANA: Why did you say "but"--

FELIX: Did I say "but"? I don't know, what was I saying--

DIANA: You said *of course*--*BUT*--

FELIX: I don't remember--you have me all confused--

DIANA: You don't think I'm in love with you, do you?

FELIX: Great Scott, do they say you are in love with me?

DIANA: You never have thought have you--

FELIX: I'm not so conceited to think I could--

DIANA: Ah, then--*but*--

FELIX: Well, *now, what, but*--

DIANA: *Are* you in love with me?

FELIX: (*Shouts*) No!

DIANA: Thank goodness! But--

FELIX: What--

DIANA: *That's* what they say--

FELIX: That I am in love with you--

DIANA: And that I am in love with *you*--

FELIX: And--

DIANA: Exactly!

FELIX: Holy smokes!

DIANA: But it's *not* true!

FELIX: (*Shouts*) No!

DIANA: But they *say* it's true!

FELIX: And what they *say*--

DIANA: Amounts to the same thing--

FELIX: What can we do?

DIANA: That's what I'm asking *you*--

FELIX: Go straight to Enid--

DIANA: But Enid believes it!

FELIX: Nonsense!

DIANA: *She* said so--

FELIX: What "she" said so?

DIANA: Mrs. Packard said they *all* say it.

FELIX: How do *they* know?

DIANA: They *don't*, but they *think* they do so it amounts to the same thing.

FELIX: But Enid can't believe it--

DIANA: But there's proof that she *does* believe it--

FELIX: It's too absurd--

DIANA: Mrs. Packard said that *Enid* said that *you* said you were in love with *me* or something like that-- and that Enid hates me--

FELIX: That's not true, I know she likes you--

DIANA: But Mrs. Packard wouldn't dare say anything--

FELIX: She said Enid hates you--

DIANA: Perhaps Enid does--perhaps she is jealous over nothing at all--perhaps she has been imagining things--perhaps she *does* hate me--perhaps she *too* has been saying things--making it seem as if--

[*She stops as Enid enters followed by Mrs. Packard center.*]

ENID: Diana, Mrs. Packard says you insulted her and that she feels she cannot stay for dinner--

DIANA: I apologized to Mrs. Packard but she would not accept my--

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, you *do* admit you insulted me--

DIANA: Only after you insulted *me!*

MRS. PACKARD: You hear, Mrs. Haldeman? It is just as I said, she accused me of insulting her when I was trying only to be kind and give her a little motherly advice--

DIANA: Mrs. Packard took it upon herself to repeat some things that people are saying--things that are manifestly untrue--

ENID: Whether they are true or not--it is highly unpleasant for me to have this altercation in my house--

DIANA: I can tell by your voice that you are willing to believe that woman--

MRS. PACKARD: Mrs. Haldeman, I resent being called *that* woman--

DIANA: I don't care what you resent--you've come in and spoilt a beautiful friendship I've had all my life and I don't care what I call you--

ENID: But in my house--my guests--

DIANA: Don't worry--I shall not be your guest another moment--I'm going-- (*Starts.*)

ENID: No, Diana, I can't let you leave in--anger.

DIANA: But I do--I leave with my heart black against you for listening to what she said--

MRS. PACKARD: What did I say?

DIANA: You said that Felix and I were in love with each other and you insinuated that--

MRS. PACKARD: I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA: Mrs. Packard! Why just a few moments ago in this very room you--

MRS. PACKARD: I never said such a thing in all my life!

DIANA: Can you look me straight in the eyes and tell me you never said it?

MRS. PACKARD: I *never* said it! never, never, *never!*

DIANA: Didn't you tell me that you have eyes and ears and that you can see and hear--and that everybody was saying--

MRS. PACKARD: But what *everybody* else says isn't what *I* say!

DIANA: Didn't you tell me that Felix was in love with me--

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't know that! *She* told me that! (*Turns to Enid.*)

ENID: I never told you that!

MRS. PACKARD: Why, my dear, you did! In this very room, a few moments ago--

ENID: I never said such a thing in all my life--and how can you imagine--

MRS. PACKARD: I imagine nothing! I know what I see and what I hear and you certainly told me that you ought to know all I had heard so you could *protect* yourself. So I told you in a friendly way, trying to be a help and there we are.

DIANA: (*Bitterly*) Yes, *where* are we?

MRS. PACKARD: You have no one to blame but yourself.

DIANA: We have no one to blame but *you*--

ENID: MRS. PACKARD, I didn't know I *had* to protect myself--until you insinuated--

MRS. PACKARD: Why, it was *you* yourself who said that he wanted to marry her--

ENID: I said nothing of the sort. I said that he said--

[*All women turn simultaneously upon Felix who up to this time has refrained from meddling in the quarrel. He is confused by this sudden demand upon him and answers foolishly.*]

FELIX: I don't know what you're talking about.

MRS. PACKARD: Didn't you say to your wife that you wanted to marry Miss Chesbrough and didn't--

FELIX: I never said such a thing in all my life and whoever said it got it out of whole cloth!

MRS. PACKARD: He denies it of course.

DIANA: He *has* to deny it. To admit it would be false.

MRS. PACKARD: Whether it was true or false he would have to deny it.

DIANA: Why would he have to deny it?

MRS. PACKARD: Because the ethics of a gentleman would make him deny it in order to protect you--

DIANA: (*Raging*) So it doesn't matter whether it is true or not--nothing we can say or do can wipe out the miserable thoughts in your mind--

MRS. PACKARD: Not my mind! *Everybody's* mind! *I* have nothing to do with it!

DIANA: Enid, can't you stand up and defend us?

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, you admit you must be defended.

DIANA: The whole world has to be defended against women like you! If you were in my house *I'd* show you the door. Enid, show her the door and prove that you trust Felix and me, that you know there isn't and never has been anything between us but the most innocent friendship--you don't move, you don't trust me--

ENID: I have always trusted you--I never had the slightest suspicion--but perhaps I have been blind--perhaps the world has been able to see better from the distance and understand--

FELIX: Are you going to take the world's word against ours? Are you going to believe a silly gossip and let one minute of slander outweigh the love and loyalty you've had from Diana and me for a lifetime--

MRS. PACKARD: Why don't you tell your wife you love her?

FELIX: I love my wife but I do not see any reason to make a public statement of it. I stated that publicly when I married her. She knows I love her--don't you--

ENID: Do I?

DIANA: He adores you--

FELIX: Don't you know it--

ENID: But Diana is pretty and--

DIANA: Felix! I leave this house--forever! Thanks to you, Mrs. Packard, I have lost two friends who meant more to me than even the world's opinion. I shall never see either of you again!

FELIX: Diana, come back! It is too outrageous to allow such contemptible gossip to break your friendship with Enid.

MRS. PACKARD: You see he does not want her to go--

DIANA: It would never be the same between Enid and me again.

FELIX: I do not want her to go because I do not want to have an evil tongue like yours triumphant! If you had come into our home and stolen our silver you would be less a thief than you are now. New silver can be bought--but tarnished friendship can never be bright again. You caused this by your malicious remarks about my regard for Miss Chesbrough.

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't say it.

FELIX: Pardon me, you did!

MRS. PACKARD: I didn't say it, *she* did. (*Turning to Enid.*)

ENID: I didn't.

MRS. PACKARD: You did.

ENID: I didn't.

DIANA: What does it matter how it happened! It's done! Done! Our friendship is over but--I won't go without leaving my memory here white and clean--I don't care what the world believes but I want Enid to know I've never had a thought against her--and so I'm going to tell the truth even though I would rather have died than tell this before--

MRS. PACKARD: Ah, now we will hear something--

FELIX: Diana, be careful--you are under no obligations to--

ENID: (*To Felix*) So you know what she is going to say?

DIANA: No, he doesn't know. It is my secret. No one else has known. There is only one man I love or ever have loved and he's over there.

MRS. PACKARD: She's making it up, a likely story--

DIANA: I'm not making it up! If you don't believe me I'll have to tell you his name--

FELIX: No, no, Diana, it is not fair to demand that of you--

DIANA: They will not believe me--but I'll do anything for Enid--she'll have to know. It is Aubrey Laurence.

MRS. PACKARD: Aubrey Laurence! He wanted to marry you--

ENID: It's true he did--But Diana wouldn't--

MRS. PACKARD: Why wouldn't you?

DIANA: Because I *did*.

FELIX and ENID: You married him?

DIANA: (*Takes wedding-ring from chain about her neck*) Yes! I married him, the last day before he sailed--

MRS. PACKARD: But your family didn't like him--

DIANA: That's why I didn't tell them, but you can go now and tell them yourself, Mrs. Packard.

FELIX: Aubrey Laurence! Did you really, Diana?

MRS. PACKARD: He hasn't any money.

FELIX: But he's straight to the core! *I'm* awfully glad Diana!

ENID: So am I, Diana! Forgive me!

DIANA: There's the door, Mrs. Packard, and the world outside is waiting to hear the latest gossip!

MRS. PACKARD: I'll go, my dear, because I've offended you and I know you are not ready to forgive me, but I promise not to breathe it to a soul--not to a soul--

[Exit up center in such a way that one knows she is excited and eager to tell it to everyone she meets.]

ENID: Diana, I'll never *forgive you* for not telling *me* you *married* Aubrey. Why didn't you tell me that you married Aubrey?

DIANA: But I didn't.

FELIX: You didn't?

ENID: But you said--

DIANA: Oh, what I *said!* It doesn't matter what I *said*--

ENID: But she'll tell everyone.

DIANA: Of course she will--

ENID: But if it's not true--

DIANA: It might be true--

ENID: But it's not--is it?

DIANA: I told you it wasn't--

ENID: But now I don't know whether to believe you or not--

DIANA: Nor will other people know whether to believe her or not--

FELIX: But when *Aubrey* hears of it--Diana--what will *he* think--

DIANA: He will wish that it were true--

FELIX: But what will he say about *you*--

DIANA: He will say that *I* wish it were true--

FELIX: And *do* you?

DIANA: I do!

ENID: Have you found out since he left that you really love him--

DIANA: Madly--madly--madly--

FELIX: (*Teasingly*) Shall I cable him that?

DIANA: I have already.

ENID: You haven't!

DIANA: I *have*. I'm going to marry him by proxy.

FELIX: (*Offering glass*) Do have a cocktail on that.

ENID: But when we tell people you married him by proxy after Mrs. Packard has told them you are married already, what *will* people say?

DIANA: (*Takes cocktail with a smile*) What *will* people say? In *any* case, *exactly* what *they* choose!

CURTAIN