

THE BOND

by AMY LOWELL & ROBERT FROST

adapted for the stage by WALTER WYKES

CHARACTERS

MAGGIE

JUNE

RUTH

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THE BOND

[Three women. Three spotlights. MAGGIE is downstage right, JUNE downstage left, RUTH center stage. Each woman speaks directly to the audience, unaware of the others.]

MAGGIE
The lawyer, are you?

JUNE
I should have told you.

MAGGIE
Well, I ain't got nothin' to say.

JUNE
I should have said.

MAGGIE
Nothin'!

JUNE
How glad I was to have you come and camp here on our land.

MAGGIE
I told the police I had nothin'.

JUNE
I promised myself to get down some day and see the way you lived.

MAGGIE
They know real well 'twas me.

JUNE
But I don't know—

MAGGIE
There warn't no supposin', ketchin' me in the woods as they did.

JUNE
With a houseful of hungry men to feed ...

MAGGIE
Folks don't walk miles an' miles in the drifted snow with no hat nor wrap on 'em if everythin's all right, I guess.

RUTH

You want to know what's wrong with me?

MAGGIE

All right? Ha! Ha! Ha!

RUTH

Do you?

MAGGIE

Nothin' warn't right with me. Never was.

JUNE

I guess you'd find ...

RUTH

My! Ain't men blinder'n moles!

JUNE

I can't express my feelings any more than I can raise my voice or want to lift my hand.

MAGGIE

Oh, Lord!

JUNE

Oh, I can lift it when I have to.

MAGGIE

Why did I do it?

RUTH

It ain't nothin' new, be sure o' that.

JUNE

Did you ever feel so? I hope you never. It's got so I don't know for sure whether I'm glad, sorry, or what have you.

MAGGIE

Why ain't it yesterday, and Ed here agin?

JUNE

There's nothing but a voice inside that tells me how I ought to feel and would feel if it hadn't all gone wrong.

RUTH

Why, if you'd had eyes you'd ha' seen me changin' under your very nose.

JUNE

Take the lake.

RUTH

Each day a little diff'rent.

JUNE

I look and look at it.

RUTH

But you never see nothin'. You don't.

JUNE

I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water. I stand and make myself repeat out loud the advantages it has, so long and narrow, like a deep piece of some old running river cut short at both ends. It lies five miles straight away through the mountain notch from the sink window where I wash the plates, and all our storms come up toward the house, drawing the slow waves whiter and whiter and whiter.

RUTH

Don't touch me, Jake!

JUNE

It took my mind off doughnuts and soda biscuits.

MAGGIE

Many's the time I've set up with him nights—

RUTH

Don't you dare touch me!

MAGGIE

—when he had cramps, or rheumatism, or somethin'.

RUTH

I ain't in no humor.

MAGGIE

I used ter nurse him same's ef he was a baby.

JUNE

I used to step outdoors and take the water dazzle in on a sunny morning, or take the rising wind about my face and body and through my wrapper when a storm threatened from the Dragon's Den, and a cold shivered across the lake.

MAGGIE

I wouldn't hurt him! I love him!

JUNE

I see it's a fair, pretty sheet of water.

MAGGIE

Don't you dare say I killed him! 'Twarn't me!

JUNE

Listen to that!

MAGGIE

Somethin' got aholt o' me.

JUNE

You let things more like feathers regulate your going and coming.

MAGGIE

I couldn't help it.

RUTH

That's what's come over me—

JUNE

And you like it here?

RUTH

Jest a change clear through.

JUNE

I can see how you might. But I don't know ... it would be different if more people came, then there would be business. As it is, the cottages Len built, sometimes we rent them, sometimes we don't.

MAGGIE

What should I do?

JUNE

We've a good piece of shore that ought to be worth something, and may yet. But I don't count on it as much as Len.

MAGGIE

What should I do?!

RUTH

You lay still, an I'll tell you.

JUNE

He looks on the bright side of everything. Including me.

RUTH

I've had my mind to tell you fer some time.

JUNE

He thinks I'll be all right with doctoring. But it's not medicine—

MAGGIE

Why warn't I struck dead or paralyzed afore my hands done it?!

JUNE

Lowe is the only doctor's dared to say so—it's rest I want.

MAGGIE

Oh my god!

JUNE

There. I've said it—from cooking meals for hungry hired men and washing dishes after them—from doing things over and over that just won't stay done.

RUTH

It's a strain livin' a lie from mornin' till night.

MAGGIE

What should I do?

RUTH

I'm goin' to put an end to it right now.

JUNE

I ought not to have so much put on me, but there seems no other way.

MAGGIE

No, sir. There ain't no extenuatin' circumstances. An' I don't want none.

JUNE

Len says one steady pull more ought to do it. He says the best way out is always through.

MAGGIE

I want a bolt o' lightnin' to strike me dead right now!

JUNE

And I agree to that, in so far as I can't see no other way out but through—leastways for me.

MAGGIE

Oh, I'll tell you.

RUTH

When I married you I loved you.

MAGGIE

But it won't make no difference. Nothin' will.

RUTH

I did.

JUNE

It's not that Len don't want the best for me.

MAGGIE

Yes, I killed him.

JUNE

It was his plan our moving over in beside the lake—ten miles from anywhere.

MAGGIE

I killed him because o' th' silence.

JUNE

We didn't change without some sacrifice—

MAGGIE

The long, long silence. And he wouldn't break it.

RUTH

Back then, your voice 'ud make me go hot and cold all over.

MAGGIE

I tried to make him ...

RUTH

An' your kisses—

MAGGIE

But he was terrible taciturn, Ed was.

RUTH

—most stopped my heart from beatin’.

MAGGIE

He never spoke ‘cept when he had to. An’ then he’d only say “yes” and “no”.

RUTH

Lord, I was a silly fool!

MAGGIE

You can’t even guess what that silence was. I’d hear it whisperin’ in my ears, an’ I got frightened, ‘twas so thick, an always comin’ back.

JUNE

His work’s a man’s, of course, from sun to sun.

MAGGIE

If Ed would ha’ talked sometimes, it would ha’ driven it away.

MAGGIE

But he never would.

JUNE

But work ain’t all.

RUTH

That’s the way ‘twas.

MAGGIE

He didn’t hear it same as I did.

JUNE

Len undertakes too much.

MAGGIE

You see, our farm was off the main road, and set away back under the mountain. And the village was seven mile off. We didn’t have no hired man, ‘cept in hayin’ time, an’ Dane’s place, that was the nearest, was clear way ‘tother side the mountain.

JUNE

He’s into everything in town. This year it’s highways.

MAGGIE

There was a cart-track took you to Dane’s in summer, an’ it warn’t above two mile that way, but it warn’t never broke out winters.

RUTH

Well, I married you.

MAGGIE

I used to dread the winters.

RUTH

An' I thought Heav'n was comin' to set on the door-step.

MAGGIE

You don't know what snow's like when yer with it day in an' day out.

RUTH

Heav'n didn't do no settin'.

MAGGIE

Ed would be out all day loggin', an' I set at home and look at the snow layin' over everythin'.

JUNE

He's got too many men around him to look after that make waste.

MAGGIE

It 'ud dazzle me blind, till it warn't white anymore, but black as ink.

JUNE

They take advantage of him something shameful.

MAGGIE

Then the quiet 'ud commence rushin' past my ears till I most went mad listenin' to it.

JUNE

We have four here to board, great good-for-nothings, sprawling about the kitchen with their talk while I fry their bacon.

RUTH

The first year warn't so bad.

JUNE

Much they care!

MAGGIE

Many's the time I've dropped a pan on the floor jest to hear it clatter.

RUTH

The baby's fever threw you off some, I guess.

JUNE

No more put out in what they do or say than if I wasn't in the room at all. Coming and going all the time.

RUTH

An' then I took her death real hard.

MAGGIE

I was most frantic when dinner-time come an' Ed was back from the woods. I'd ha' give my soul to hear him speak.

JUNE

I don't learn their names, let alone their characters or whether they're safe to have inside the house.

MAGGIE

But he'd never say a word till I asked him did he like the raised biscuits or whatever, an' then sometimes he'd jest nod his answer.

RUTH

A mopey wife kind o' disgusts a man.

MAGGIE

Then he'd go out agin, an' I'd watch him from the kitchen' winder. It seemed the woods come marchin' out to meet him an' the trees 'ud press round him an' hustle him in.

JUNE

I'm not afraid of them though, if they're not afraid of me.

MAGGIE

I got so I was scared o' the trees.

JUNE

There's two can play at that.

MAGGIE

I thought they come nearer, every day a little nearer, closin' up round the house.

JUNE

It runs in the family.

RUTH

I ain't blamin' you exactly.

JUNE

My father's brother wasn't right.

RUTH

But that's how 'twas.

JUNE

They kept him locked up for years back there at the old farm.

MAGGIE

I never went in t' th' woods winters, though in summer I liked 'em well enough.

RUTH

Do lay quiet.

JUNE

I've been away once—yes, I've been away. The State Asylum.

RUTH

I know I'm slow, but ...

JUNE

I wouldn't have sent anyone of mine there.

MAGGIE

It warn't so bad when my little boy was with us.

RUTH

It's ...

MAGGIE

He used to go sleddin' and skatin', an every day his father fetched him to school in the pung an' brought him back again.

RUTH

It's harder to say 'n I thought.

JUNE

My father's brother, he went mad quite young.

MAGGIE

We scraped an' scraped for Neddy.

JUNE

Some thought he'd been bitten by a dog, but it's more likely he was crossed in love, or so the story goes.

MAGGIE

We wanted him to have a' education.

JUNE

It was some girl.

MAGGIE

We sent him to high school, an' then he went up to Boston to Technology.

JUNE

Anyway all he talked about was love.

RUTH

There come a time when I got to be more wife agin than mother.

MAGGIE

He was a minin' engineer, an' doin' real well. A credit to his bringin' up.

JUNE

They soon saw he'd do someone mischief if he wa'n't kept strict watch of.

MAGGIE

But his very first position there was an explosion in the mine.

RUTH

The mother part was sort of a waste.

MAGGIE

And I'm glad! I'm glad he ain't here to see me now!

JUNE

It ended in father's building him a sort of cage.

MAGGIE

Neddy! Neddy!

JUNE

A room within a room.

MAGGIE

I can't bear it! I can't!

RUTH

You'd got used to lots o' things.

JUNE

Hickory poles, like stanchions in the barn, from floor to ceiling, and a narrow passage all around.

RUTH

You was all took up with the farm.

JUNE

Anything they put in for furniture he'd tear to pieces, even a bed, so they made the place comfortable with straw, like a beast's stall.

RUTH

Many's the time I'd foller yer around like a dog, an' set in the chair you'd be'n settin' in, jest to feel its arms around me, so long's I didn't have yours.

MAGGIE

No, sir. Not till after Neddy died. 'Twas the next winter the silence come. I don't remember noticin' it afore.

JUNE

Of course they had to feed him without dishes.

MAGGIE

That was five year ago, an' it's been gittin' worse an' worse.

RUTH

It preyed on me, I guess.

MAGGIE

I asked Ed to put in a telephone.

JUNE

They tried to keep him clothed, but ...

MAGGIE

I thought ef I felt the whisperin' comin' on, I could ring up some o' th' folks.

RUTH

Longin' and longin' while you was busy all day, and snorin' all night.

MAGGIE

But Ed wouldn't hear of it.

JUNE

I 'spose they did the best they knew.

MAGGIE

He said we'd paid so much for Neddy we couldn't hardly git along as 'twas.

RUTH

Yes, I know you're wide awake now, but now ain't then, an' I guess you'll think diff'rent when I'm done.

MAGGIE

He never understood me wantin' to talk.

JUNE

And just when he was at the height, father and mother married, and mother came, a bride, to help take care of such a creature.

RUTH

You'll think diff'rent then.

MAGGIE

Well, this year was worse'n all the others.

JUNE

That was what marrying father meant to her.

MAGGIE

We had a terrible spell o' stormy weather, an' the snow lay so thick ...

JUNE

She had to lie and hear love things made dreadful by his shouts in the night.

MAGGIE

You couldn't see the fences even.

JUNE

He'd shout and scream ...

MAGGIE

Ther warn't a hump or a holler fer as you could see.

JUNE

He'd pull his bars apart like bow and string and let them go and make them twang until his hands wore them as smooth as any ox-bow.

MAGGIE

It was so quiet the snappin' o' the branches back in the wood-lot sounded like pistol shots.

JUNE

I've heard them say, though, they found a way to put a stop to it.

RUTH

Do you mind the day you went to Hadrock?

MAGGIE

Ed was out all day, same as usual.

RUTH

I didn't want to stay home for reasons, but you said someone 'd have to be here 'cause Elmer was comin' to see t' th' telephone.

MAGGIE

He didn't even say "Good mornin'"—jest nodded or shook his head when I asked him things.

RUTH

An' you never see why I was so set on goin' with yer.

MAGGIE

On Monday he said he'd got to go over to Benton fer some oats.

RUTH

Our married life hadn't be'n any great shakes, still marriage is marriage, an' I was raised God-fearin'.

MAGGIE

I'd oughter ha' gone with him, but 'twas washin' day an' I was afeared the fine weather'd break an' I couldn't do my dryin'.

RUTH

Lord, you didn't notice nothin', an' Elmer hangin' around all winter!

MAGGIE

I can't tell you what that day was to me.

RUTH

'Twas a lovely mornin'.

MAGGIE

It dragged an' dragged.

RUTH

The apple-trees was jest elegant with their blossoms all flared out, an' there warn't a cloud in the sky.

MAGGIE

Every time I stopped stirrin' the water, I heard the whisperin' all about me.

JUNE

He was before my time—I never saw him.

RUTH

You went, you wouldn't pay no 'tention to what I said.

JUNE

But the pen stayed exactly as it was.

MAGGIE

I stopped oftener'n I should to see ef 'twas still there.

RUTH

I heard the Ford chuggin' for most a mile.

MAGGIE

It always was.

RUTH

The air was so still.

MAGGIE

An' gittin' louder.

RUTH

Then Elmer come.

JUNE

I often think of the smooth hickory bars.

MAGGIE

Once I threw up the winder to feel the wind.

RUTH

It's no use your frettin', Jake.

MAGGIE

But the woods looked so kind of menacin', I closed it quick.

JUNE

It got so I would say—you know, half fooling—"It's time I took my turn upstairs in jail."

RUTH

I'll tell you all about it. I know what I'm doin'.

MAGGIE

Ed come home 'bout four.

RUTH

An' what's worse, I know what I done.

MAGGIE

I seen him down the road.

JUNE

No wonder I was glad to get away.

RUTH

Elmer fixed th' phone in about two minutes.

JUNE

Mind you, I waited till Len said the word.

RUTH

He didn't seem in no hurry to go, an' I don't know as I wanted him to go either.

JUNE

I didn't want the blame if things went wrong.

RUTH

I was awful mad at your not takin' me with you.

JUNE

I was glad though, no end, when we moved out.

MAGGIE

I run out through the shed inter th' barn to meet him quicker.

RUTH

I was tired o' wishin' and wishin' an' gittin' no comfort.

JUNE

I looked to be happy, and I was ... for a while, at least.

MAGGIE

I hollered out, "Hullo!" but he didn't say nothin'—jest drove right in an' commenced unharnessin'.

RUTH

I guess it ain't necessary to tell you all the things.

MAGGIE

I asked him a heap o' questions.

RUTH

He stayed to dinner an' helped me do the dishes.

MAGGIE

Who he'd seen an' what he'd done.

JUNE

Somehow the change wore out like a prescription.

RUTH

He said a home was a fine thing, an' I said dishes warn't a home.

MAGGIE

Once in a while he'd nod or shake.

JUNE

There's more to it than just window-views and living by a lake.

RUTH

He said a lot o' things.

JUNE

I'm past such help.

RUTH

I fended him off at first, but he got to talkin' all around me, close up to the things I'd be'n thinkin'.

MAGGIE

'Twas gittin' dark then.

RUTH

What's the use o' me goin' on? You know.

MAGGIE

I was in a state, with the loneliness an' Ed payin' no attention like somethin' warn't livin'.

RUTH

He got all he wanted, an' I give it to him, an' what's more, I'm glad!

JUNE

Unless Len took the notion, which he won't, and I won't ask him ... I 'spose I've got to go the road I'm going.

RUTH

I ain't dead, anyway, an' somebody thinks I'm somethin'.

MAGGIE

All of a sudden it come—

JUNE

Other folks have to—why shouldn't I?

MAGGIE

—I don't know what, but I jest couldn't stand no more!

RUTH

Keep away, Jake!

JUNE

I almost think if I could do like you, drop everything and live out on the ground—

RUTH

You can kill me tomorrow if you like, but I'm goin' to have my say!

JUNE

—but it might be, come night, I shouldn't like it.

MAGGIE

It didn't seem 's though that was Ed—

JUNE

Or a long rain.

MAGGIE

—an' it didn't seem as though I was me.

JUNE

I should soon get enough, and be glad of a good roof overhead.

MAGGIE

I had to break a way out somehow!

JUNE

I've lain awake thinking of you, more than you have yourself, some of these nights.

Somethin' was closin' in!

MAGGIE

Funny thing!

RUTH

Ed's loggin' axe was there, an' I took it!

MAGGIE

Guess I ain't made to hold a man.

RUTH

Oh my god!

MAGGIE

Elmer ain't be'n here for mor'n two months.

RUTH

I haven't courage for a risk like that.

JUNE

I can't see nothin' else afore me!

MAGGIE

Mebbe if he'd be'n lately, I shouldn't have told you.

RUTH

I run out inter th' woods!

MAGGIE

I'll go away in the mornin', o' course.

RUTH

Seemed as ef they was pullin' me!

MAGGIE

Bless you, of course you're keeping me from work, but the thing is, I need to be kept.

JUNE

An' all the time I was wadin' through the snow!

MAGGIE

What you want the light fer?

RUTH

The snow! MAGGIE

I don't look no diff'rent. RUTH

I seed Ed in front of me where I'd laid him! MAGGIE

Ain't the moon bright enough to look at a woman that's deceived you by? RUTH

I see him now! MAGGIE

Don't, Jake! RUTH

There! MAGGIE

Don't! RUTH

There's work enough to do—there's always that. JUNE

What you holdin' me fer? MAGGIE

You can't love me now! RUTH

I want ter go to Ed! MAGGIE

It ain't a question of forgiveness. RUTH

He's bleedin'! MAGGIE

The worst you can do is set me back a little more behind. JUNE

MAGGIE

Stop holdin' me!

RUTH

I'd be thinkin' o' Elmer ev'ry minute ... it ain't decent.

MAGGIE

I got to go!

JUNE

I can't catch up in this world, anyway.

MAGGIE

I'm comin', Ed!

RUTH

Oh my god! It ain't decent any more either way!

MAGGIE

I'm comin'!

JUNE

I'd rather you'd not go ... unless you must.

[Slow fade to black.]

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