

БІБЛІОТЕКА ЖУРНАЛУ «АНГЛІЙСЬКА МОВА та ЛІТЕРАТУРА»

С. В. Бондаренко

# АМЕРИКАНСЬКІ П'ЄСИ

КНИГА 2



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ГРУПА

ОСНОВА

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# THE AUTUMN GARDEN

by Lillian Hellman

## Characters

(In order of their speaking)

Rose Griggs

Mrs. Mary Ellis

General Benjamin Griggs

Edward Crossman

Frederick Ellis

Carrie Ellis

Sophie Tuckerman

Leon

Constance Tuckerman

Nicholas Denery

Nina Denery

Hilda

*The time is September 1949. The place is the Tuckerman house in a summer resort on the Gulf of Mexico, about one hundred miles from New Orleans.*

## Act I

*Monday night after dinner.*

## Act II

SCENE 1: *The following Sunday morning.*

SCENE 2: *That night.*

## Act III

*Early the next morning.*

## ACT ONE

SCENE: *The living room of the Tuckerman house in a town on the Gulf of Mexico<sup>1</sup>, a hundred miles from New Orleans<sup>2</sup>. A September evening, 1949, after dinner. To the right of the living room is a side porch, separated from the room by a glass door. Upstage left is a door leading into the entrance hall of the house: through this door we can see the hall and staircase. On the porch are chairs and tables. The furniture of the living room is handsome but a little shabby. It is all inherited from another day. (Right and left are the audience's right and left.) On stage at rise of curtain.*

GENERAL GRIGGS, *a good-looking man of fifty-three, is seated at one side of the room reading a newspaper. His wife —*

ROSE GRIGGS, *ex-pretty, soft-looking and about forty-three, is seated at a table wearing an evening dress that is much too young for her. She is chatting across the room with —*

CARRIE ELLIS, *a distinguished-looking woman of about forty-five, who is sitting on a side chair, near her son,*

FREDERICK, *and her mother-in-law —* MRS. MARY ELLIS, *in her seventies, sprightly in manner and movement when she wishes to be, broken and senile. She has piled cushions on her chair so she can read a manuscript over the shoulder of her grandson —* FREDERICK ELLIS, *a pleasant-looking young man of around twenty-five. Occasionally he makes a correction in the manuscript, looks up amused and annoyed at his grandmother. On the right porch —* EDWARD CROSSMAN, *about forty-six, tired and worn-looking as if he is not in good health, is sitting alone, his back to those in the room. There is a second of silence after the curtain goes up.*

ROSE: (*Gets up from her chair. She finds silence uncomfortable and breaks into song "We Stroll the Lane Together".*) Now where is it? Everything's been so topsy-turvy all evening. If I can't have it immediately after dinner then I just about don't want it. At home you can bet it's right waiting for us when we leave the dining room, isn't it, Ben? Too bad it's Thursday. I'd almost rather go and see him than go to the party. (*To MRS. ELLIS*) I think it's what keeps you awake, Mrs. Ellis. I mean a little is good for your heart, the doctor told me always to have a little, but my goodness the amount you have every night.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Pleasantly*) Would you mind telling me what you're talking about, Mrs. Griggs? You said if it wasn't for the party you'd go and see *him*, but you thought I drank too much on a Thursday?

ROSE: (*Giggles*) Coffee. I meant you drink too much coffee.

MRS. ELLIS: Then it is coffee you wish to go and see?

ROSE: Now, now. You're teasing. You know very well I mean Robert Taylor<sup>3</sup> in that thing.

MRS. ELLIS: Believe me, I did *not* know you meant Robert Taylor in that thing. You know. General Griggs, after seven summers I have come to the conclusion that your wife considers it vulgar to mention anything by name. There's nothing particularly genteel about pronouns, my dear. Coffee is coffee and not it, Robert Taylor is Robert Taylor and not him, I suppose, and a fool is a fool and not her.

ROSE: (*Pleasantly*) I know. It's a naughty habit. Ben has been telling me for years. (*She is close to BEN.*) Do you like my dress, Ben?

GRIGGS: It's nice.

ROSE: Have I too much rouge? (*To others*) Know what she used to say? (*Quickly*) Ben's mother, I mean. She used to say it before she died. (*To CROSSMAN*) Come and join us. (*To others*) She used to say that Southern women painted a triangle of rouge on, their faces as if they were going out to square the hypotenuse. Ben came from Boston<sup>4</sup>, and his mother was sometimes a little sharp about Southerners.

MRS. ELLIS: Who could have blamed her?

ROSE: (*Calling out to CROSSMAN*) Know what she told me last winter when I met her at the Club?

CROSSMAN: (*Turns, smiles*) Ben's mother?

ROSE: No. Your sister, of course. She said we see more of you here on your summer vacation than she sees all year round in New Orleans. She says you're getting to be a regular old hermit. You have to watch that as you get older. You might get to like being alone — and that's dangerous.

MRS. ELLIS: I used to like being alone. When you get old, of course, then you don't any more. But somewhere in the middle years, it's fine to be alone. A room of one's own isn't nearly enough. A house, or, best, an island of one's own. Don't you agree, General Griggs? (*Very quickly*) Happiest year of my life was when my husband died. Every month was springtime and every day I seemed to be tipsy, as if my blood had turned a lovely *vin rose*<sup>5</sup>.

CARRIE: You're lyrical, Mother.

MRS. ELLIS: (*To FREDERICK*) Do you know I almost divorced your grandfather, Frederick? During the racing season in 1901.

FREDERICK: (*Looks up, laughs*) You don't feel it's a little late to talk about it? (*The phone rings.*)

MRS. ELLIS: Thought you might like to write my biography — when you're finished with regional poetry<sup>6</sup>. (*As the phone rings again, SOPHIE comes into the hall to answer it.*)

SOPHIE: (*Into the phone*) No, sir. We do not take transient guests. No, never, sir. Only permanent guests. You might telephone to Mrs. Prescott in the village. Thank you, sir.

ROSE: (*Calls into hall*) Dear Sophie, where is coffee?

(*SOPHIE comes to the hall door. She is a plain-looking, shy girl of about seventeen. She has a hesitant, overpolite manner and speaks with a slight accent. She has on a party dress, covered by a kitchen apron.*)

SOPHIE: Aunt Constance is most sorry for the delay. We bring it immediately. (*She disappears.*)

ROSE: Frederick, do you know I've been giving Sophie dancing lessons, or trying to? She's a charming child, your intended, but she's never going to be a dancer.

FREDERICK: (*Pleasantly*) Terrible expression, Mrs. Griggs: my intended. Sounds like my indentured. Did you tell Mrs. Griggs, Mother? I thought we agreed that once there were no definite plans as yet —

CARRIE: (*A little uncomfortable*) It's natural that I should speak about my son's marriage, isn't it?

ROSE: Why, goodness, yes indeed it is. I'd have felt hurt —

GRIGGS: Don't you know that women have no honor, Frederick, when it comes to keeping secrets about marriage or cancer?

FREDERICK: (*Looks at his mother*) No, sir. I didn't know. I'm too young for my age.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Who has been busy reading the manuscript*) I know I'm too young to be reading Payson's book. Full of the most confused sex. I can't tell who is what. And all out of doors. Is that new, so much sex out of doors? Is it, General?

GRIGGS: I don't think it's a question of "new". I think it's a question of climate.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Points to book*) But aren't sexual relations the way they used to be: between *men and women*! It's so twitched about in Mr. Payson's book. You know, I think the whole country is changing.

GRIGGS: (*As if he wished to help FREDERICK*) Has Payson written a good book, Fred?

FREDERICK: It's a wonderful book. I think he's going to be the most important young writer —

CARRIE: You said the first two books were wonderful, Frederick. And they didn't sell very well.

MRS. ELLIS: I don't know why they didn't — I always thought houses of prostitution had a big lending-library trade. (*FREDERICK gets up, as if he were angry.*)

CARRIE: Will this new book sell, Frederick?

FREDERICK: I don't know, Mother.

CARRIE: I hope it sells. Any man is better off supporting himself.

FREDERICK: (*Smiles*) Mother, sometimes I think no people are quite so moral about money as those who clip coupons for a living.

MRS. ELLIS: And why not? Particularly your mother who is given the coupons already clipped by me who has the hardship of clipping them. That leaves her more time to grow moral. And then, of course, you who don't even have that much trouble are left at leisure to be moral about those who have to go to the trouble of living on unearned money.

CARRIE: (*To GENERAL GRIGGS*) You mustn't look uncomfortable, General. You should know by this time that my mother-in-law enjoys discussing family matters in public. And the more uncomfortable you look, the longer she will continue.

GRIGGS: Do I look uncomfortable? I was thinking how hard it is to be young.

ROSE: (*To BEN*) Won't you come to the party? (*To others*) Ben has never gone to the Carter party. I am sure they're just as insulted every year —

GRIGGS: I don't think so.

ROSE: But what will you do with yourself? Why don't you go to see Robert Taylor? It's that war picture where he does so well and you'll want to see if it's accurate.

GRIGGS: No, I don't want to see if it's accurate.

ROSE: Do you like my dress?

GRIGGS: It's nice.

MRS. ELLIS: You are a patient man. (*To ROSE*) Do you know you've asked him that five times since rising from dinner?

ROSE: Well, I feel young and gay, and I'm going to a party. I wish the Denerys would come before we leave. I like meeting new people and they sound so interesting. I thought they were supposed to arrive in time for dinner. (*To CARRIE*) Is he absolutely fascinating?

CARRIE: I don't know, Mrs. Griggs. I haven't seen him in twenty years or more.

ROSE: (*Calling to CROSSMAN*). Is he fascinating, Mr. Crossman?

CROSSMAN: (*Pleasantly*) You're making it a little harder than usual. Is who fascinating?

ROSE: Nicholas Denery, of course.

CROSSMAN: Of course. I don't know.

ROSE: But, goodness. Didn't you all grow up together? I mean you and Constance and Mrs. Ellis and —

CROSSMAN: I don't remember any of us as fascinating. Do you, Carrie? (*CARRIE shakes her head, laughs.*)

(*SOPHIE, carrying a tray with brandy and brandy glasses, comes into the room. She is followed by LEON, a young, colored butler, carrying coffee and coffee cups. FREDERICK rises and takes the tray from SOPHIE. She looks at him and smiles.*)

ROSE: Let's see your dress, Sophie (*SOPHIE smiles shyly, begins to take off her apron as LEON pours coffee.*) Oh. It's right nice. But you should wear tighter things, dear. (*Comes in back of her, begins to fool with her hair.*) I'd like to try your hair again. (*SOPHIE moves to help LEON but is cornered by ROSE.*) Now you just sit down. How's this? (*CROSSMAN comes into the room.*)

CROSSMAN: Makes her look like everybody else. That's desirable, isn't it?

ROSE: What does Frederick think? We're out to please Frederick, after all, aren't we, dear?

FREDERICK: (*Turns to look*) I like Sophie her own way.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) I have no "way".

ROSE: But most European girls have such chic — (*GENERAL GRIGGS gets up, as if he were annoyed.*) They have, Ben. You said it yourself when you came back from the Pacific, and I was jealous.



MRS. ELLIS: Pacific? I thought you fought in Europe.

GRIGGS: I did. Robert Taylor fought in the Pacific. (*He rises, wanders off to the porch.*)

ROSE: (*Holding SOPHIE's hair another way*) Or is *this* better?

FREDERICK: (*Smiles to SOPHIE*) Don't you mind being pulled about?

SOPHIE: No. Well. (*Gently pulls away*) I am grateful for the trouble that Mrs. Griggs — Thank you.

CROSSMAN: Sophie doesn't mind anything. All she has said all summer is thank you.

(*Through his speech the phone rings. FREDERICK starts for the phone. At the same time, CONSTANCE TUCKERMAN comes through the hall. She is a handsome woman of forty-three or forty-four. She is carrying two flower vases.*

*She puts down one of the vases in order to answer the phone.*)

CONSTANCE: Yes. Just a minute. Frederick, Mr. Payson would like to speak to you. (*She picks up the other vase, comes in to the door, as if she were in a hurry. FREDERICK immediately moves to the phone.*) Sorry coffee was late. You all want more just ring. And do, Carrie, explain to the Carters why I can't come to their party this year —

ROSE: Any news from them, Constance?

CONSTANCE: (*Carefully*) News from whom?

ROSE: (*Laughs*) Oh, come now. Stop pretending. When do the Denerys arrive?

CONSTANCE: Don't wait up for them, Rose. You'll see them at breakfast. (*She turns, goes out and goes up the stairs.*)

ROSE: My, Constance is nervous. Well, I suppose I should be if I were seeing an old beau for the first time in — But I don't believe in old beaux. Beaux should be brand-new, or just friends, don't you think? (*CROSSMAN starts out to porch, carrying his coffee and the brandy bottle, ROSE points outside, meaning GENERAL GRIGGS and CROSSMAN.*) Now are you boys just going to sit here share the bottle —

CROSSMAN: General Griggs is only being kind when he says he shares the bottle with me. (*He goes off. FREDERICK comes in, starts to speak, changes his mind.*)

CARRIE: (*Carefully*) Was that Mr. Payson on the phone? Is he coming to the party?

FREDERICK: How many generations do you have to summer in this joint before you're invited to the Carters'?

MRS. ELLIS: Oh, that's not true. They're very liberal lately. (*Points to ROSE,*) After all, the last few years they've always included Mrs. Griggs. (*To ROSE*) And nobody can be more *nouveau riche* than your family, can they? I mean your brother during the war and all that.

ROSE: (*Giggles*) My. Everybody is so jealous of Henry.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, of course we are. I wish we were *nouveau riche* again.

FREDERICK: (*Sharply*) All right, Grandma.

ROSE: Oh, I don't mind. I enjoy your grandmother.

FREDERICK: (*To his mother*) I'm sorry I'm not going to be able to take you to the party. I hope you'll excuse me, Sophie. Mother. Grandma.

CARRIE: (*Carefully*) What has happened, Frederick?

FREDERICK: Payson had a wire from his publishers. They want the manuscript in the mail tomorrow morning. (*He goes to take the manuscript from the table.*) So I'll have to proofread it with him tonight. It's a nasty job alone, almost impossible —

CARRIE: (*Slowly*) I don't understand.

ROSE: (*Hurriedly*) I must fix my face. As you get older your face needs arranging more often. (*She goes off.*)

CARRIE: We're ready to leave, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Mother, I'm not going to the party. I wasn't making a joke —

CARRIE: Oh. I hoped you were. You have no obligation to us, or Sophie? An appointment broken, because Payson summons you?

FREDERICK: I am sorry, Sophie. Maybe I can pick you up later. (*Haltingly*) I am sorry.

SOPHIE: I do not mind, really. It is better this way.

CARRIE: Don't you? Why not? (*No answer*) Why don't you mind, Sophie?

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) I do not like parties. I did not want to go. Now Frederick has some important business and must leave quickly —

CARRIE: Perhaps you are going to make *too* good a wife.

FREDERICK: Suppose you let me decide that, Mother. Good night. Have a good time. See you in the morning —

CARRIE: I want to talk to you, Frederick.

FREDERICK: (*Stops, smiles*) When you use that tone of voice you need two hours. Let's make it in the morning, Mother. (*SOPHIE has turned away, gone upstage, as if she wanted to be as far away as possible.*)

CARRIE: I ask you to break your appointment with Payson. As a favor to me.

FREDERICK: There's nothing important about my being at the party and it is important to him. He wants to consult me —

CARRIE: (*Sharply*) He is always consulting you. You talk like a public accountant or a landscape gardener. Why should he want to consult *you* about his work?

FREDERICK: (*Hurt*) Maybe because I try to write and maybe because he thinks I know a little. I realize that's hard for you to believe —

CARRIE: I didn't mean that.

FREDERICK: I think you did. Good night.

CARRIE: You have no sense of obligation to me. (*Looks around for SOPHIE who is trying at this minute to leave the room*) And none to Sophie. Who evidently won't speak for herself. Do stay here, Sophie, it's your business as well as mine — (*SOPHIE stands still.*) I am getting tired of Mr. Payson, Frederick, and with good reason. When he came to stay with us in town last winter, I fully understood that he was a brilliant and gifted man and I was glad for you to have such a friend. But when he followed you down here this summer —

FREDERICK: (*Slowly, angrily*) He did not follow me down here and I wouldn't like you to put it that way again. He came here for the summer and is that your business, Mother?

CARRIE: There is just too much of Mr. Payson. Every day or every evening — How often do you take Sophie with you? (*Sharply*) How often have you seen Mr. Payson this summer, Sophie? (*There is no answer.*) Please answer me.

FREDERIC: And please stop using that tone to Sophie. Say what you have to say to me.

CARRIE: (*Turning to MRS. ELLIS, who has been watching them*) Mother —

MRS. ELLIS: I've been dozing. How many hours have passed?

CARRIE: (*Slowly*) You are always dozing when there is something unpleasant to face out with Frederick.

MRS. ELLIS: What better time? You all want to know something's been worrying me all day? Nobody in the South has tapeworm any more. In my day that was all you ever heard. Tapeworm, tapeworm, tapeworm. (*Gets up.*) Now kiss your mother good night, boy. Otherwise she'll be most unhappy. And say you forgive her.

FREDERICK: I have nothing to forgive her for, Grandma.

MRS. ELLIS: Of course not. But even when your mother starts out being right she talks and talks until she gets around to being wrong. (*She exits. There is silence.*)

CARRIE: (*Softly*) I'm sorry if I spoke unfairly, or ill the wrong time —

FREDERICK: (*Comes to her, smiling*) You didn't, you didn't. Now don't feel bad. Nothing's happened. And don't let Grandma tease you.

CARRIE: I know. (*She turns to go.*) You go ahead, dear. Try to join us later. (*He kisses her. She smiles, pleased, and goes out. FREDERICK turns to SOPHIE*)

FREDERICK: Sophie, Mother didn't mean to be sharp with you. But when she is, you mustn't let her. She's a little bossy from time to time, but no harm in it. You look so worried.

SOPHIE: (*Very puzzled*) Your mother is not angry now?

FREDERICK: Of course not. You mustn't take these things too seriously. Mother is like that.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) You know it is most difficult in another language. Everything in English sounds so important. I get a headache from the strain of listening.

FREDERICK: (*Laughs*) Don't. It's not worth it. (*Looks at her, then slowly*) Mother is right: I have been rude and neglectful. But I haven't meant to be, Sophie.

SOPHIE: No, no. You have not been.

FREDERICK: And in two weeks Mother and I will be going off to Europe. I hope you don't mind about the European trip. It was all arranged long before you and I — (*Stares at her, smiles*) got engaged. SOPHIE *smiles at him as if she were embarrassed, then she coughs and clears her throat.*) We're an awkward pair. I like you, Sophie.

SOPHIE: (*Warmly*) I like you, Frederick.

FREDERICK: Sophie, I think we'll have to sit down soon and talk about ourselves, I don't think we even know how we got engaged. We haven't said much of anything —

SOPHIE: Sometimes it is better not to say things. There is time and things will come as they come.

FREDERICK: The day we got engaged we tried to speak as honestly as we both knew how but we didn't say very much —

SOPHIE: And I think we should not try so hard to talk. Sometimes it is wise to let things grow more roots before one blows them away with many words — (*Shyly touches his hand*) It will come better if we give it time.

FREDERICK: We will give it time. And you'll make no decisions and set no dates until you are sure about what you think and feel.

SOPHIE: Oh, I have made the decision for myself. And I am pleased.

FREDERICK: (*Pleased*) And you are quite sure of your decision?

SOPHIE: You know, sometimes I have thought that with rich people — (*Very quickly*) with educated people, I mean, decisions are made only in order to speak about changing them. It happens often with Aunt Constance and with your mother, also, I think. And the others.

FREDERICK: Yes. (*Takes her hand*) We'll get along fine. I want you to know that I feel very lucky —

SOPHIE: Lucky? You will have to be patient with me. I am not a good success here.

FREDERICK: Now, you stop that. I don't want you a good success. And you're to stop thinking it. You're to stop a lot of things: letting Mother boss you about, letting Mrs. Griggs tell you what to wear, or pull your hair —

SOPHIE: Oh, I do not mind. Because I look so bad makes Mrs. Griggs think she looks so good.

FREDERICK: (*Smiles*) Good night, my dear.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) Good night. (*He exits. SOPHIE begins to pick up the coffee cups, brandy glasses, etc. After a minute ROSE GRIGGS comes down the steps carrying a light summer wrap. She comes in the room.*)

ROSE: Where are the Ellises?

SOPHIE: They went to the party, Mrs. Griggs.

ROSE: No! Without me? I must say that's very rude. They can't have done that, Sophie — (*She hurries to the hall, looks out. Then she comes back in, goes to the porch.*) Ben. (*He looks up.*) The Ellises left without me, Ben!

GRIGGS: Yes?

ROSE: You'll have to walk me over. I just won't go in, alone.

GRIGGS: It's across the street, Rose. Not a very dangerous journey.

ROSE: (*Gently*) Ben. (*He rises, comes in.*) You know, I think it's shocking. In front of other people. God knows what they know or guess this summer. (*Suddenly notices SOPHIE who is collecting cups*) Sophie. Don't wait here listening. (*SOPHIE turns, surprised, but before she can speak —*)

GRIGGS: (*Sharply*) Rose!

ROSE: (*Who is always charming at this point. To SOPHIE*) I am sorry, my dear. Please most earnestly I ask your pardon —

SOPHIE: Yes, ma'am.

ROSE: (*Tries to catch her at door*) I'm just a nervous old silly these days. Now say you forgive me — (*SOPHIE disappears.*)

GRIGGS: (*Smiles, as if he has seen this before*) All right, Rose. You're charming.

ROSE: You won't even walk over with me, just to the door?

GRIGGS: Certainly I will.

ROSE: (*Smiles*) No, you don't have to. I just wanted to see if you would. Will you call for me, at twelve, say?

GRIGGS: No.

ROSE: Then will you meet me at twelve, at the tavern?

GRIGGS: No. What mischief is this, Rose?

ROSE: Is it mischief to want to talk with you?

GRIGGS: Again? Tonight? And every night and every day? The same things over and over? We're worn out, Rose, both of us. (*Kindly*) There is no more to say.

ROSE: (*Softly*) No more to say. Do people get divorces, after twenty-five years, by just saying they want them and that's all and walking off?

GRIGGS: I suppose some men do. But I haven't walked off and I have said all I know how to say.

ROSE: But you haven't really explained anything to me. You tell me you want a divorce. — And I ask why, why, why. We've been happy together.

GRIGGS: (*Looks at her*) You don't believe that.

ROSE: When people get our age, well, the worst is over — and what else can one do? (*Exasperated*) I never really heard of such a thing. I'm just not taking you seriously and I do wish you'd stop talking about it. (*After a pause*) You've never given me a good reason. I ask you ten times a day if there's another woman, I could understand that. Of course you say no, naturally —

GRIGGS: There is no other woman.

ROSE: (*Giggles*) You know what I think? I think it's that little blonde at the drugstore, and the minute my back is turned —

GRIGGS: Please, Rose. Please stop that.

ROSE: Never at any time, during this divorce talk, have you mentioned them. You'd think we didn't have sons, and the awful effect on them. Did you write them today?

GRIGGS: I did not write them because you begged me not to.

ROSE: Oh, yes, I forgot. It will break their hearts.

GRIGGS: Their hearts won't be broken. They won't even bother to finish the letter.

ROSE: (*Softly, shocked*) You can't love them, to speak that way.

GRIGGS: I don't love them. I did love them don't now. They're hard men to love.

ROSE: Oh, I don't believe a word you say. You've always enjoyed shocking me. You've been a wonderful father and you're just as devoted to them as they are to you.

GRIGGS: They aren't the least devoted to me — when they think about me it is to find my name useful and when it isn't useful they disapprove of me.

ROSE: (*Moving to door*) Look, Ben. I just can't stay and talk all night. I'm late now. There's no use our saying the same things over and over again — (*He laughs*). If you won't come to the party what are you going to do?

GRIGGS: I am going down by the water, sit on a bench and study from a Chinese grammar.

ROSE: You'll be lonely.

GRIGGS: Yes, but not for parties.

ROSE: It's very hard to take seriously a man who spends the evening with a Chinese grammar. I'll never forget that winter with the Hebrew phonograph records. (*Pats his arm*) Now, good night, darling. And don't worry about me: I am going to try to have a good time. We'll talk about all this another day. (*She starts out.*)

GRIGGS: (*Sharply*) No. No, we're not going to do that. You're turning it into a pleasure, Rose, something to chatter about on a dull winter night in the years to come. I've told you it isn't going to be that way. (*She is in the hall.*) It isn't going to be that way. When you go back to town next week I'm not going with you. (*He turns to see that she has gone.*)

ROSE'S VOICE: (*From the hall*) Good night, darling.

GRIGGS: (*He stands still for a minute. Then he turns, sees his book on the porch table. Goes out to the porch, realizes the doors have been open. To CROSSMAN*) I guess we thought the doors were closed. I am sorry.

CROSSMAN: Don't be.

GRIGGS: There are so many things I want to do that I don't know which to do first. Have you ever thought about starting a new life?

CROSSMAN: (*Smiles*) I've often thought that if I started all over again, I'd go right back to where I started and start from there. Otherwise, it wouldn't prove anything.

GRIGGS: (*Laughs*) Where'd you start from?

CROSSMAN: (*Laughs*) Nowhere. That's the trouble.

GRIGGS: I started with mathematics. Seems strange now, but that's why I went to West Point<sup>7</sup> — wonderful mathematics department. So I got myself two wars instead. I want to go somewhere now and study for a few years, or — (*Smiles*) Anyway, sit down by myself and think.

GROSSMAN: Europe?

GRIGGS: I don't think so. Europe seemed like a tourist joint the last time. With all the aimless, dead bitterness of — tourist joints. I don't want sentimental journeys to old battlefields. I'll start tame enough. I've written my sister that I'd like to stay with her for a month or two.

GROSSMAN: Isn't that a sentimental journey?

GRIGGS: I suppose it is. I really want to see her because she looks like my mother. The last six months I've thought a lot about my mother. If I could just go back to her for a day. Crazy at my age —

CROSSMAN: I know. We all do at times. Age has nothing to do with it. It's when we're in trouble.

GRIGGS: I don't know why I want to say this out well, don't think too badly of my wife.

GROSSMAN: Why should I think badly of anybody?

GRIGGS: (*As he turns to go*) All professional soldiers marry Rose. It's in the Army Manual. She is as she always was. It is my fault, not hers.

CROSSMAN: Haven't you lived in the South long enough to know that nothing is ever anybody's fault?

(GENERAL GRIGGS *laughs, starts out as* CONSTANCE *comes downstairs. CONSTANCE has on a different dress and is buttoning the belt as she comes into the room. GENERAL GRIGGS crosses the room and exits by the stage left windows. CONSTANCE looks around, finds the room is neat, goes out to the porch, talking as she goes.*)

CONSTANCE: I *think* everything is ready. I've put Nick in Sophie's room — Sophie says she doesn't mind sleeping down here. Anyway it happens every summer. And I've given Mrs. Denery the yellow room. They wanted *two* rooms, Nick said on the phone.

CROSSMAN: Fashionable people don't sleep together, don't you know that? It's not sanitary.

CONSTANCE: (*Sits down*) I'm tired, Ned.

CROSSMAN: Have a brandy.

CONSTANCE: No. It would make me nervous.

CROSSMAN: Remarkable the things that make people nervous: coffee, brandy, relatives, running water, too much sun, too little sun. Never anything in themselves, eh, Constance?

CONSTANCE: They have a maid and a chauffeur. I'll have to put them in the boathouse. It's all so much work at the end of the season. Sophie's been cleaning all day, and I've been cooking — Why did I say they could come?

CROSSMAN: (*Smiles*) I wonder why.

CONSTANCE: Well, of course, I want to see Nick again. But I am nervous about meeting her. (*Points to his glass*) Do you think perhaps a sip?

CROSSMAN: Only drunkards borrow other people's drinks. Have one of your own. (*Through her next speech he pours her a drink and hands it to her. When she finishes it, he will take back the glass and pour himself a drink.*)

CONSTANCE: I got out Mama's good, old linen sheets. I don't care how rich the Denerys are, or where they've been, they never could have had finer linen. And, I've stuffed some crabs and there's white wine — Remember how Nick loved stuffed crabs?

CROSSMAN: (*Smiles*) No. I don't remember.

CONSTANCE: It was twenty-three years ago, the eighteenth of next month. I mean the night he decided to go to Paris to study. Not so many young men from New Orleans went to Paris in those days.

CROSSMAN: Just as many young men met rich young ladies on boats.

CONSTANCE: (*Sharply*) *He fell in love*. People can't be blamed for changing their hearts — it just happens. They've had a fine marriage, and *that's* given me happiness all these years.

CROSSMAN: How do you know they've had a "fine" marriage?

CONSTANCE: (*Smiles*) I know.

CROSSMAN: The rest of us don't know anything about any marriage — but you know all about one you've never seen. You're very wise, Constance. It must come from not thinking.

CONSTANCE: Is this dress all right?

CROSSMAN: You've changed your dress three times since dinner.

CONSTANCE: My dresses are all so sort of — She'll think they're cheap. (*Smiles*) Well, and so they are. (*There is silence. Then*) Have we changed much, Ned?

CROSSMAN: Yes, my dear. You've changed, I've changed. But you're still handsome, if that's what you mean.

CONSTANCE: Ned, you don't look so well this summer. (*He is pouring himself another brandy. She points to bottle.*) I wanted to tell you — Don't you think —



CROSSMAN: (*Very pleasantly*) Don't I think you should mind your business? Yes, I do. (*SOPHIE comes into living room carrying sheets, a quilt, a pillow, puts them down and moves to porch.*)

CONSTANCE: Isn't what happens to you my business?

SOPHIE: You look pretty, Aunt Constance.

CONSTANCE: (*To CROSSMAN*) Sophie made this dress for me. Last winter. What could the girls at school have thought? Sophie sitting sewing for an old country aunt when she could have been out dancing —

SOPHIE: I sew better than I dance.

CONSTANCE: (*To CROSSMAN*) Sophie's mother taught her to sew. You know that Ann-Marie is a modiste?

SOPHIE: (*Laughs*) Oh, she is not. She is what you call here a home-seamstress, or sometimes a factory worker.

CONSTANCE: But she *designs*. She wrote me and you told me —

SOPHIE: (*Laughs*) Oh no. You did not understand. She does — (*Outside the house there is a noise of a car coming to a stop. CONSTANCE turns towards the room, then steps back, moves around the table and suddenly runs into the house. CROSSMAN turns to stare at her. Timidly, pointing out towards living room.*) Should I — Should I stay, Mr. Ned?

CROSSMAN: I don't know the etiquette of such meetings.

SOPHIE: Why is Aunt Constance so nervous about the visit of this lady and gentleman?

CROSSMAN: Because she was once in love with Nicholas Denery, this gentleman.

SOPHIE: Oh. Such a long, long time to stay nervous. (*Sententious*) Great love in tender natures. And things of such kind. (*As he turns to stare at her*) It always happens that way with ladies. For them it is once and not again: it is their good breeding that makes it so.

CROSSMAN: What is the matter with you?

SOPHIE: (*Laughs*) I try very hard to sound nice. I try too hard, perhaps? (*She begins to move out into the room; then, as she hears voices, she runs out of the room, exits off porch.*) NICK'S VOICE (*Offstage*) Constance! (*NICK appears in the hall and comes into the room. He is about forty-five, handsome, a little soft-looking and in a few years will be too heavy. He is followed by NINA DENERY, who is a woman of about forty, good-looking, chic, tired and delicate. She stops and stands in the doorway.*)

NICK: (*Calling*) Constance! (*NICK and NINA are followed by a maid, HILDA, who stands waiting in the hall. She is carrying a jewelry case, an overnight bag, two coats. CROSSMAN starts to come forward, changes his mind, draws back.*)

HILDA: (*In German*) Shall I take the bags upstairs, madame?

NINA: (*In German*) We don't know where upstairs is.

NICK: Oh, I know where upstairs is. I know every foot of this house. (*Examining the room*) It was *the* great summer mansion and as kids we were here more than we were at home — (*Softly*) The great summer mansion! Did the house change, or me? (*Sees NINA in doorway*) Come on in.

NINA: Perhaps it would be pleasanter for you to see old friends without me. In any case, I am very tired —

NICK: *Oh, now don't get tired. We've just come. What have you got to be tired about? Do you realize how often these days you're tired?*

NINA: I realize it very well. And I know it bores you.

NICK: It worries me. (*By this time, NICK, wandering around the room, has reached the porch. CROSSMAN turns and, realizing that he has been seen, now comes forward.*) Could you tell me where we could find Miss Tuckerman?

CROSSMAN: Hello, Nick. Good to see you.

NICK: (*After a second*) My Good, Willy. How many years, how many years? (*He puts his arm around CROSSMAN, embraces him.*) Nina, this may be my oldest and best friend in the world. Nina, tell Willy how often I've talked about him and what I said.

CROSSMAN: (*Who is shaking hands with NINA, amused*) Then I hope he told you that my name is Edward, not Willy.

NINA: (*Amused*) I hope so — but I am not sure.

NICK: Your mother always called you Willy. Don't you remember?

CROSSMAN: (*Goes out into the hall*) No. I thought it was my brother's name. (*Calls out, loudly*) Constance, Nick is here.

NICK: (*Coming to CROSSMAN*) Tell me before I see her. What has happened here? I don't know anything.

CROSSMAN: There's very little to know. Old man Tuckerman surprised everybody by dying broke. Constance sold the New Orleans house and managed to hang on to this by turning it into what is called a summer guest house. That's about all, Nick.

NICK: Where is Mrs. Tuckerman? I was crazy about her, Nina: she had style.

CROSSMAN: I don't know where she is, although I've asked myself often enough. She died shortly after Mr. Tuckerman — just to show him anybody could do it.

NICK: (*Laughs, pats CROSSMAN*) Good to see you, boy. You know, if anybody had asked me, I would have said this room was as large as an eighteenth-century ballroom and as elegant. I think it shrank. All the fine things were sold?

CROSSMAN: The size hasn't changed. And nothing was sold.

NICK: Could I have been so wrong all these years? Seems so shabby now and —

NINA: (*Quickly*) I think it is a pleasant room.

NICK: Does Sam live here?

CROSSMAN: Sam died during the war. He went to Europe, oh, in the thirties, married there and never came back. You'll meet his daughter. Constance imported her five years ago.

NICK: Well, Sam was always the devoted brother until it came to being devoted. And Constance sacrificed her life for him.

CROSSMAN: (*To NINA*) Nick is still a Southerner. With us every well-born lady sacrifices her life for something: a man, a house, sometimes a gardenia bush. Is it the same where you come from?

NINA: (*Smiles*) New York is too cold for gardenias.

(*Through CROSSMAN's speech, CONSTANCE appears in the hall. As she moves into the room, she trips, recovers herself, smiles nervously and waits for NICK to come to her. He takes her face in his hands and kisses her. Then he stands back to look at her.*)

NICK: This is a good hour of my life, Constance.

CONSTANCE: (*Softly*) And of mine.

NICK: (*Holds her face*) You've changed and you've changed well. Do you still have the portrait, Constance?

CONSTANCE: (*Smiles*) Still have the portrait! It's the only important thing I have got — (*Then she remembers NINA, becomes confused, moves away from him and comes to NINA*) Forgive me, Mrs. Denery.

NINA: (*Puts out her hand, warmly*) Hello.

CONSTANCE: (*Flossy*) I should have been here to make you welcome as you truly are. I was reading when you arrived, reading a book, and I didn't hear the car. (*She sees CROSSMAN is staring at her and she looks nervously away from him.*)

NICK: I had expected you standing in the driveway with the sun in your face, in the kind of lovely pink thing you used to wear —

NINA: The sun is not usually out at night — even for you.

NICK: (*To CONSTANCE*) Instead, you are reading. As if you were waiting for the groceries to come.

CONSTANCE: (*Quickly*) I wasn't reading. It was a silly lie. I was just pretending — (*Embarrassed*) Well. I 'm even forgetting my manners. You must be hungry, Mrs. Denery, and I've got —

NICK: (*Laughs, takes her hands, pulls her to the couch*) No, no. Stop your manners, girl. There's a great deal I want to know. (*They sit down.*) Now. Is the portrait as good as I remember it? I want Nina to see it. Nina knows a great deal about painting. Sometimes I think she knows more than I.

CONSTANCE: (*Smiles to NINA, nods. Then to NICK*) You know, Nick, I subscribe to the New York Sunday Times<sup>8</sup>. Because of the art section. I wanted to follow your career.

NICK: (*Carefully*) You haven't often found me in the *Times*. I've only exhibited in Europe.

CONSTANCE: (*Relieved*) Oh. That explains it. (*There is a slight, awkward pause*) I like painting. I like painting. I like Renoir<sup>9</sup> best. The summer ladies in the gardens, so very, very pretty.

NICK: (*Bored*) Yes, very pretty. This is the same wonderful place — My God, we had happy summers here, all of us. We loved each other so very much. Remember, Ned?

CROSSMAN: I don't remember that much love.

NINA: (*Laughs*) I like you, Mr. Crossman.

NICK: Of course you like him. These are my oldest friends. I think as one grows older it is more and more necessary to reach out your hand for the sturdy old vines you knew when you were young and let them lead you back to the roots of things that matter. (NINA coughs. CROSSMAN moves away, smiling. Even CONSTANCE is a little overwhelmed.) Isn't that true, Ned? Now what have you been up to all these years?

CROSSMAN: I still work in the bank and come here for my vacation. That's about all.

NICK: I bumped into Louis Prescott in Paris a couple of years ago and he told me you and Constance had never married — (Pats CONSTANCE's hand; CONSTANCE looks embarrassed.) Couldn't understand it. No wonder you drink too much, Ned.

CROSSMAN: Louis Prescott go all the way to Paris to tell you that?

NICK: (*Anxious, gets up*) Oh, look old boy. I didn't mean anything — I drink too much myself. I only want to know about you and have you know about me. I hope you didn't mind, Ned.

CROSSMAN: Not a bit. I want to know about you, too. Ever have syphilis, Nick? Kind of thing one has to know right off, if you understand me.

CONSTANCE: (*Gets up, very disturbed*) Ned, how can you speak that way?

NICK: (*Smiles*) You've grown edgy. I didn't remember you that way.

CROSSMAN: (*Pleasantly*) Oh, I don't think I've changed. See you in the morning.

NICK: Hope you'll take me around, show me all the old places —

CROSSMAN: Of course I will. Good night, Mrs. Denery. (*He exits up staircase.*)

NICK: (*To CONSTANCE, meaning CROSSMAN*) I'm sorry if I said anything —

CONSTANCE: You know, for years I've been meeting you and Mrs. Denery — in my mind, I mean — and I've played all kinds of roles. Sometimes I was the dignified old friend, and sometimes I was a very, very old lady welcoming you to a gracious table. It was so important to me — our first meeting — (*Sadly*) And now when it happens —

NICK: (*Heartily*) Nonsense. My home-coming, is just as it should be. It's as if I had gone away yesterday. We took up right where we left off: even Ned and I. Let us be as we were, my dear, with no years between us, and no pretending.

CONSTANCE: (*Delighted with him, warmly*) Thank you. (*Goes to NINA*) All these years I wanted to write you. I did write but I never sent the letters. It seemed so intrusive of me. I could see you getting the letter and just not knowing who I was.

NICK: I told Nina about you the first night I met her and through the years she has done quite a little teasing — You are too modest, Constance. (*Suddenly*) Now are you going to let me do another portrait of you?

CONSTANCE: (*Laughs*) Another portrait? No, no, indeed. I want to remember myself as I was in the picture upstairs.

NICK: Go and get it for me. I want to look at it with you. (*She smiles, exits. There is silence.*) You haven't been too warm or gracious, Nina.

NINA: What can I do when I don't even know the plot?

NICK: What are you talking about?

NINA: You told me about Constance Tuckerman the first night we met? And about dear Willy or Ned, and I've done quite a little teasing about her all these years?

NICK: I did tell you about her immediately —

NINA: You mentioned her very casually, last week, years after the night you met me and you said that you could hardly remember anything more about her than a rather silly —

NICK: (*Quickly*) Are you going to be bad-tempered for our whole visit here? For years I've looked forward to coming back — (*NINA laughs.*)

NINA: So you came to do her portrait?

NICK: No, I didn't "come to do her portrait". I thought about it driving down here. If the one I did is as good as I remember, it would be wonderful for the show. The young girl, the woman at forty-five. She's aged. Have we changed that much? I don't think you've changed, darling.

NINA: I've changed a great deal. And I wouldn't want it pointed out to me in a portrait to be hung side by side with a picture of what I used to be. (*He doesn't answer her.*) That isn't a nice reason for being here and if I had known it —

NICK: We have no "reason" for being here. I just wanted to come back. Nothing mysterious about it —

NINA: You're simply looking for a new area in which to exercise yourself. It has happened many, many times before. But it *always* happens when we return from Europe and spend a month in New York. It's been too important to you, for many years, that you cannot manage to charm my family. And so,

when our visit is finished there, you inevitably look around for — Well, you know. You know what's been the trouble.

NICK: (*Cheerfully*) I don't know what the hell, you're talking about.

NINA: I'm tired of such troubles, Nick —

NICK: Do you know that these sharp moods of yours grow more sharp with time? Now I would like to have a happy visit here. But if something is disturbing you and you'd prefer not to stay, I'll arrange immediately —

NINA: (*As if she were a little frightened*) I'd only prefer to go to bed. Sorry if I've been churlish about your — home-coming. (*She starts out, meets CONSTANCE who comes in carrying portrait.*) Will you excuse me, Constance? The long drive gave me a headache.

CONSTANCE: I am sorry. Will I bring you a tray upstairs?

NINA: No, thank you. (*CONSTANCE moves as if to show her the way.*)

NICK: Come, I want to see the picture. Nina will find her way. (*He takes the picture from CONSTANCE.*)

CONSTANCE: The yellow room on the left, Your maid is unpacking. I peeked in. What lovely clothes. Can I come and see them tomorrow?

NINA: (*Going up the stairs*) Yes, of course. Thank you and good night. (*CONSTANCE watches her and then comes into room.*)

NICK: (*Who is looking at the picture*) I was nervous about seeing it. Damn good work for a boy eighteen.

CONSTANCE: You were twenty-two, Nick.

NICK: No, I wasn't. I —

CONSTANCE: You finished it the morning of your birthday. (*She points to windows. And when you put down your brushes you said damn good work for a boy of twenty-two and then you asked me to marry you. Don't you remember — (She stops, embarrassed.)* Why should you remember? And I don't want to talk that way.

NICK: (*Who is preoccupied with the picture*) Oh, nonsense. Talk any way you like. We were in love, very much in love, and why shouldn't we speak of it?

CONSTANCE: (*Hastily, very embarrassed*) After I die, the picture will go to the Delgado Museum<sup>10</sup>.

NICK: (*Laughs*) I want to borrow it first. I'm having a retrospective show this winter, in London. I've done a lot of fancy people in Europe, you know that, but I'll be more proud of this — And I want to do another portrait of you as you are now. (*Moves toward window, excited*) You standing there. As before. Wonderful idea; young girl, woman at — Be a sensation. Constance, it's fascinating how faces change, mold firm or loose, have lines that start in youth and —

CONSTANCE: (*Amazed*) Oh, Nick. I don't want to see myself now. I don't want to see all the changes. And I don't want other people to stand and talk about them. I don't want people to laugh at me or pity me. (*Hurt*) Oh, Nick.

NICK: I see. (*Turns*) Well, it would have meant a lot to me. But that's that I'll be off to bed now —

CONSTANCE: (*Coming after him*) But we haven't had a minute. And I have supper all ready for you —

NICK: Good night, my dear.

CONSTANCE: (*Slowly*) You think I'm being selfish and vain? I mean, am I the only woman who wouldn't like —

NICK: No, I think most women would feel the same way. (*He starts out.*)

CONSTANCE: Do you prefer breakfast in bed? And what shall I make for your dinner? Pompano<sup>11</sup> — (*He is at the door as CARRIE and ROSE come into the hall. CARRIE is holding ROSE's arm.*)

CARRIE: Hello, Nick.

NICK: (*fakes her hands*) My God, Carrie, I didn't know you were here. How come? It's wonderful —

CARRIE: We come every summer.

NICK: You're handsome, Carrie. But you always were.

CARRIE: (*Smiles*) And you always remembered to say so. (*ROSE coughs delicately.*) This is Mrs. Griggs. (*To CONSTANCE*) Mrs. Griggs didn't feel well, so I brought her home. She became a little dizzy, dancing.

ROSE: (*To NICK, who is shaking hands with her*) You're a famous gentleman in this town, sir, and I've been looking forward to seeing you. We lead dull lives here, you know —

NICK: (*Laughs*) You don't look as if you do.

ROSE: Oh, thank you. But I don't look well tonight I became suddenly a little ill —

CARRIE: (*Tartly*) Yes. Well, come along. If you still feel ill.

NICK: Can I help you, Mrs. Griggs?

ROSE: (*Delighted*) Oh, thank you. That would be nice. I haven't been well this summer — (*NICK starts into hall.*)

CONSTANCE: Nick — (*He pays no attention, CARRIE moves quickly ahead of him, takes ROSE's arm.*)

CARRIE: Come. Good night, Nick. I look forward to seeing you in the morning. Hope you're staying for a while.

NICK: I think we'll have to leave tomorrow.

ROSE: Oh, don't do that. (*Then*) Constance, if Ben comes in would you tell him I was taken ill? (*CARRIE impatiently pushes her ahead and up the steps.*)

NICK: (*Meaning ROSE*) Pretty woman, or was. (*Looks at CONSTANCE*) What is it, Con?

CONSTANCE: How can you talk of leaving tomorrow? (*He doesn't answer.*) Don't be mad with me, Nick.

NICK: I don't get mad, darling.

CONSTANCE: (*Catches him as he is almost out the door.*) Please, Nick, please, let me change my mind. You are welcome to take this picture and I am flattered you wish to do another. But I'll have to pose early, before they're all down for breakfast —

NICK: (*Turns casually*) Good. We'll start in the morning. Do you make a living out of this place, darling?

CONSTANCE: (*Gaily*) Not much of one. The last few years have been a little hard. I brought Sam's daughter from Europe — she and her mother went through the occupation and were very poor — And I've tried to send her to the best school and then she was to make her debut only now she wants to get married, I think, and —

NICK: The girl expected all that from you?

CONSTANCE: Oh, no. Her mother didn't want to come and Sophie didn't want to leave her mother. I finally had really to *demand* that Sam's daughter was not to grow up — Well, I just can't describe it. At thirteen she was working in a fish store or whatever you call it over there. I just *made* her come over —

NICK: Why didn't you ever marry Ned?

CONSTANCE: I can't answer such questions, Nick. Even for you.

NICK: Why not? I'd tell you about myself or Nina.

CONSTANCE: Oh, it's one thing to talk about lives that have been good and full and happy and quite another — Well, I don't know. We just never did marry.

NICK: (*Bored*) Well, then, tomorrow morning. I'll do a good portrait of you because it's the face of a good woman — (*He stops as SOPHIE comes in. She sees NICK and CONSTANCE and draws back a little.*)

CONSTANCE: Sophie. (*SOPHIE comes into the room.*) This is Sam's daughter.

NICK: (*Very warmly to SOPHIE*) I've been looking forward to meeting you for many years. (*CONSTANCE turns, puzzled.*)

SOPHIE: How do you do, sir?

NICK: You follow in the great tradition of Tuckerman good looks.

SOPHIE: Er. Er.

CONSTANCE: (*Smiles*) Don't er, dear. Say thank you. (*GRIGGS enters from left porch.*) Do come in. (*GRIGGS comes in.*) This is General Griggs. My very old friend, Nicholas Denery.

NICK: Are you General Benjamin Griggs? I've read about you in Raymond's book and Powell's<sup>12</sup>.

GRIGGS: (*As they shake hands*) I hear they disagree about me.

NICK: We almost met before this. When your boys marched into Paris. I was in France during the German occupation. (*SOPHIE turns sharply.*)

GRIGGS: That must have been unpleasant for you.



NICK: Yes, it was. But in the end, one has to be just: the Germans were damn smart about the French. They acted like gentlemen.

GRIGGS: (*Pleasantly*) That's a side of them I didn't see. (*Looks over at SOPHIE*) You didn't either, Sophie?

(*During his speech HILDA, the maid, appears in the doorway.*)

HILDA: (*In German*) Excuse me, Mr. Denery. Mrs. Denery would like you to come for a minute before you retire. She has a little surprise gift she bought for you in New Orleans.

NICK: (*In German*) No. Tell Mrs. Denery I will see her in the morning. Tell her to take a sleeping pill.

HILDA: (*In German*) Thank you, sir.

CONSTANCE: (*Who hasn't understood the German but who is puzzled because SOPHIE is frowning and GRIGGS has turned away*) Can I — Does Nina want something?

NICK: No, no. She's fine. (*SOPHIE begins to make up the couch. NICK turns to her.*) That means one of us must have put you out of your room. I'm sorry and I thank you.

SOPHIE: Not at all sir. It is nothing.

NICK: (*Comes to her*) You're a sweet child and I look forward to knowing you. Good night. (*To GRIGGS*) Good night, sir. A great pleasure. (*GRIGGS bows. NICK kisses CONSTANCE.*) Wonderful to be here, darling. (*He goes out. CONSTANCE moves to help SOPHIE make up the couch. There is silence for a minute while they arrange the bedclothes. GRIGGS watches them.*)

CONSTANCE: I suppose I shouldn't ask but what did the German maid want? Something from the kitchen or — (*No answer*) Sophie. (*No answer*) Sophie.

SOPHIE: (*Slowly*) Mrs. Denery wanted to say good night to Mr. Denery.

GRIGGS: Mrs. Denery had bought a little gift for him in New Orleans and wanted to give it to him.

CONSTANCE: After all these years. To have a little gift for him. Isn't that nice? (*She looks at GRIGGS and SOPHIE. Neither answers her. She becomes conscious of something strained.*) What did Nick say?

SOPHIE: He said she should take a sleeping pill and go to sleep.

CONSTANCE: Just like that?

SOPHIE: Down at the beach there is the frankfurter concession. I think I will get the sleeping-pill concession and grow very rich.

CONSTANCE: Why, Sophie. Are you disturbed about something, dear? (*Looks at her dress*) You didn't go to the party! I've been so busy, I didn't realize — Why, where's Fred and —

SOPHIE: I did not wish to go to the party, Aunt Constance. And Frederick had a most important appointment.

CONSTANCE: More important than being with you? Young people get engaged and act toward each other with such — I don't know. (*To GRIGGS*)

In our day we made marriage more romantic and I must say I think we had more fun. If you can't have fine dreams now, then when can you have them? (*Pats SOPHIE*) Never mind. I guess the new way is more sensible. But I liked our way better. (*To GRIGGS*) Didn't you? Oh, what's the matter with me? I forgot. Rose came back from the party. She said she was ill. I mean, I think she just didn't feel well — Carrie is upstairs with her. (*He doesn't move.*) I think Carrie probably wants to go back to the party and is waiting for you to come.

GRIGGS: Yes. Of course. Thank you. Good night. (*He exits.*)

CONSTANCE: (*She kisses SOPHIE.*) You'll be comfortable? See you in the morning, dear.

(*She exits through the hall. SOPHIE finishes with the couch, goes out. After a second, CROSSMAN comes down the stairs. He sticks his head in the door, sees nobody, crosses the room, goes out to the porch, takes the bottle of brandy and a glass, moves back into the room and crosses it as SOPHIE returns carrying pajamas and a robe.*)

CROSSMAN: (*His voice and his manner are slightly different now*). I needed another book and another bottle. Royalty gone to bed? Does anybody improve with age? Just tell me that, Sophie, and I'll have something to lie awake and think about.

SOPHIE: I do not know, Mr. Ned.

CROSSMAN: For God's sake, Sophie, have opinion about something. Try it, and see what comes out.

SOPHIE: (*Laughs*) Some people improve with age, some do not.

CROSSMAN: (*Nods, amused*) Wonderful, Sophie, wonderful. Some improve with age, some do not. Medical statistics show that 61 per cent of those who improve have bought our book on Dianetics<sup>13</sup> and smoke Iglewitz cigarettes. You're beginning to talk like an advertisement, which is the very highest form of American talk. (*Sharply*) It's not *your* language, nor your native land. You don't have to care about it. You shouldn't even understand it.

SOPHIE: Sometimes I understand.

CROSSMAN: That's dangerous to admit, Sophie. You've been so busy cultivating a pseudo-stupidity. Not that you'd ever be a brilliant girl, but at least you used to be normal. Another five years and you won't be *pseudo*-stupid.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) I will not mind. It will be easier. (*Carefully*) You notice me too much, Mr. Ned. Please do not feel sorry or notice me so much.

CROSSMAN: You came here a nice little girl who had seen a lot of war and trouble. You had spirit, in a quiet way, and you were gay in a quiet way, which is the only way women should be gay since they are never really gay at all. Only serious people are ever gay and women are very seldom serious people. They are earnest instead. But earnestness has nothing to do with seriousness. So (*Sud-denly*) What the hell is this marriage business between you and Fred Ellis?

SOPHIE: (*Softly*) It is the marriage business between me and Fred Ellis.

GROSSMAN: But what's the matter with you? Haven't you got sense enough to know —

SOPHIE: (*Quickly*) I do the best I can. I do the best I can. And I thank you for worrying about me, but you are an educated man with ideas in English that I am not qualified to understand.

CROSSMAN: Listen to me, Sophie. Sometimes when I've had enough to drink — just exactly enough — I feel as if I were given to understand that which I may not understand again. And sometimes then — but rarely — I have an urge to speak out. Fewer drinks, more drinks, and I'm less certain that I see the truth, or I get bored, and none of my opinions and none of the people and issues involved seem worth the trouble. Right now, I've had just enough: so listen to me, Sophie. I say turn yourself around, girl, and go home. Beat it quick.

SOPHIE: You take many words to say simple things. All of you. And you make the simple things — like going to sleep — so hard, and the hard things — like staying awake — so easy. Go home, shall I? Just like that, you say it. Aunt Constance has used up all her money on me, wasted it, and for why and what? How can I go home?

CROSSMAN: If that's all it is I'll find you the money to go home.

SOPHIE: (*Wearily*) Oh, Mr. Ned. We owe money in our village, my mother and I. In my kind of Europe you can't like where you owe money. Go home. Did I ever want to come? I have no place here and I am lost and homesick I like my mother, I — Every night plan to go. But it is five years now and there is no plan and no chance to find one. Therefore I will do the best I can. (*Very sharply*) And I will not cry about it and I will not speak of it again.

CROSSMAN: (*Softly, as if he were moved*) The best you can?

SOPHIE: I think so. (*Sweetly*) Maybe you've never tried to do that, Mr. Ned. Maybe none of you have tried.

CROSSMAN: Sophie, lonely people talking to each other can make each other lonelier. They should be careful because maybe lonely people are the only people who can't afford to cry. I'm sorry. (*He exits through the hall, goes up the stairs as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT TWO

### Scene One

SCENE: *The same as Act One. A week later, eight-thirty Sunday morning.*

AT RISE: CONSTANCE is standing against the outside edge of the porch, leaning on the railing. NICK is standing in front of an easel. CONSTANCE has on a most unbecoming house dress and her hair is drawn back tight. She looks ten

years older. *In the living room, SOPHIE has finished folding her bedclothes and is hurrying around the room with a carpet sweeper. After a second, LEON appears from the direction, of the dining room with a tray and dishes and moves out to the porch. He puts down the tray, moves the table, begins to place the dishes. CONSTANCE tries desperately to ask him if everything is all right in the kitchen. She does this by moving her lips and trying not to move her head. LEON sees her motions but doesn't understand what she is trying to say. The noise of the rattling dishes, and the carpet sweeper, becomes sharp.*

NICK: Constance, please ask them to stop that noise. (*Waves his hand to LEON and SOPHIE*) Go away, both of you.

CONSTANCE: They can't, Nick. I explain it to you every morning! We simply have to get ready for breakfast. (*Quietly*) Sophie, is everything all right in the kitchen?

SOPHIE: Yes, ma'am. Everything is fine.

NICK: (*To CONSTANCE, sharply*) Please keep the pose. Just a few minutes more.

CONSTANCE: (*To LEON*) Tell Sadie not to cook the liver until everybody is downstairs, like she always does. Did she remember about the grits this Sunday? (*To NICK, sees his face*) All right. I'm sorry. But really, I can't run a boarding-house and pose for — (*She sighs, settles back. SOPHIE picks up her bedclothes and exits through the hall. LEON finishes with the porch table and comes back into the living room as MRS. ELLIS comes down the steps.*)

MRS. ELLIS: (*To LEON*) My breakfast ready?

LEON: No, ma'am. We'll ring the bell.

MRS. ELLIS: What's the matter with my breakfast?

LEON: Nothing the matter with it. It will be like always.

MRS. ELLIS: It gets later and later every day.

LEON: No, ma'am. That's just you. Want it in the dining room or on the porch?

MRS. ELLIS: Too damp on the porch. Whole house is damp. I haven't slept all summer, Leon.

LEON: Just as well not to sleep in summer.

MRS. ELLIS: (*As LEON exits*) You're going to have to explain that to me sometime. (*She turns, goes toward porch, comes around in front of CONSTANCE.*) Constance, he's made you look right mean and ten years older. Why have you done that, Nicholas? (*SOPHIE comes back into living room with a large urn of coffee and small cups. She puts the tray on a table.*)

NICK: (*To MRS. ELLIS*) Shoo, shoo. This is forbidden ground.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Calls*) Sophie, give me a cup. I have to stay awake for church. (*To CONSTANCE*) Ten years older. When you pay an artist to paint your portrait he makes you ten years younger. I had my portrait done when

I was twenty-one, holding my first baby. And the baby looked older than I did. Was rather a scandal or like those people in Tennessee.

NICK: You know if you wouldn't interrupt me every morning, I think I'd fall in love with you.

MRS. ELLIS: (*She goes toward SOPHIE to get her coffee. During her speech, SOPHIE puts three spoons of sugar in the small cup.*) I wouldn't like that. Even if I was the right age I wouldn't like it. Although I realize it would make me dangerously different from every other woman in the world. You would never have been my dish of tea, and isn't that a silly way if saying it? (*To SOPHIE: she is now in the living room*) You're the only one who ever remembers about my sugar. Sophie, will you come up to town (*CROSSMAN comes down the steps and into the room.*) and stay with me for a few weeks when Carrie and Frederick are in Europe?

SOPHIE: I would like that.

MRS. ELLIS: Ned, what shall I give Sophie for her wedding present? My pearls or my mother's diamonds?

CROSSMAN: (*To SOPHIE*) The rich always give something old and precious to their new brides. Something that doesn't cost them new money. Same thing true in your country?

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) I do not know the rich in my country.

MRS. ELLIS: He's quite right, Sophie. Not only something old but something so old that we're sick of it. CROSSMAN: Why don't you give her a nice newcheck?

MRS. ELLIS: Only if I have to.

CONSTANCE: (*On porch*) Nick, my neck is breaking —

NICK: All right. All finished for this morning. (*Turns the picture around so that CONSTANCE cannot see it. SOPHIE brings two cups of coffee to the porch.*)

CONSTANCE: (*Collapsing in a chair*) Whew. (*Takes the coffee from SOPHIE, pals her arm. SOPHIE takes the other cup to NICK.*)

NICK: You're the girl I want to paint. Change your mind and we'll start today. Why not, Sophie? (*He is holding her hand.*)

SOPHIE: I am not pretty, Mr. Nicholas.

NICK: You are better than pretty. (*CROSSMAN comes out to the porch. SOPHIE disengages her hand, moves off.*)

CROSSMAN: (*Staring at CONSTANCE*) My God, you look awful, Constance. What did you get done up like that for? You're poor enough not to have to pretend you are poor.

NICK: (*Laughing*) Go way, Ned. You've got a hangover. I know I have. (*NINA comes down the steps, comes into the room, says good morning to MRS. ELLIS who says good morning to her. She pours herself a cup of coffee. She is close enough to the porch to hear what is said.*)

CONSTANCE: You know, I waited up until twelve o'clock for you both —

NICK: We were late. We had a good get-together last night. Like old times, wasn't it, Ned? (To CONSTANCE) If you have the normal vanity you'd be pleased at the amount of time we spent on you. Ned loosened up and talked —

CROSSMAN: I did? I thought that was you.

NICK: (*Laughs*) I knew you wouldn't remember what you'd said — Don't regret it: did you good to speak your heart out — for once.

CROSSMAN: My heart, eh?

NICK: In a juke-box song called Constance.

CONSTANCE: What? I don't understand.

CROSSMAN: (*Who has turned sharply, then decided to laugh*) Neither do I. The stage of not remembering, or speaking out my heart, will come in time, I am sorry to say. But I hope it hasn't come yet. (*As he turns to go out, LEON appears in the hall and begins to ring the bell.*)

NINA: (*A little timidly*) Good morning, Mr. Crossman.

CROSSMAN: Good morning, Mrs. Denery. I 'm sorry you didn't join us last night — to hear me pour my heart out.

NINA: I'm never invited to the pouring of a heart.

CROSSMAN: I looked for you, but Nick said you had a headache.

NINA: Nick always says I have a headache when he doesn't want me to come along, or sees to it that I do have one.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Gets up quickly*) All right, Leon. I'm ready. I haven't eaten since four this morning. (*Goes out. As she passes stairs, she shouts up.*) Carrie! Frederick! I simply won't wait breakfast any longer. (CROSSMAN follows her out.)

CONSTANCE: (*Gets up*) Well, they seemed to have managed in the kitchen without me. I reckon I better change now. Where'd you get this dress, Nick?

NICK: Place on Dreyenen Street.

CONSTANCE: In a Negro store! You bought this dress in a Negro store! (*He looks at her and laughs.*) I don't mean that. I mean Ned's right. You must have wanted to make me look just about, as awful as — For some reason I don't understand, Nick, what *are* you doing? And why won't you let me see the portrait?

NICK: Haven't you yet figured out that Ned is jealous?

CONSTANCE: Jealous of what?

NICK: He's in love with you, girl. As much as he was when we were kids. You're all he talked about last night. How lonely he's been, how much he's wanted you, how often he asked you to marry him —

CONSTANCE: I just don't believe you. Ned never talks about himself. I just don't believe he said such things —

NICK: You know damn well he loves you and you know he's rotting away for you. He said last night —

CONSTANCE: (*Prissy*) Nick, if he did talk, and it's most out of character, I don't think I should hear what he said in confidence just to you.

NICK: Oh, run along, honey! You're pleased as punch. When you're not pretending to be genteel.

CONSTANCE: (*Laughs*) Genteel? How awful of me. Mama used to say gentility was the opposite of breeding and — (*She has started to move out of the room.*) Did Ned say — er — (*NICK laughs, she laughs, and exits. NICK begins to put away portrait and to fold easel as NINA puts down her coffee and comes out to the porch.*)

NICK: (*Kisses her*) Morning, darling. (*NINA sits down, watches him.*) What's the matter? (*LEON appears with breakfast dishes. He serves NICK and NINA during the next few speeches.*)

NINA: Why have you done that? To Constance?

NICK: Done what? Tell her the truth?

NINA: How could you know it to be the truth? I don't believe Crossman talked to you —

NICK: Look, it makes her happy — and if I can get a little sense into her head it will make him happy. I don't have to have an affidavit to know what's going on in the human heart. (*He leans over, kisses her, sits down to eat his breakfast.*)

NINA: (*Laughs*) Oh, you are enjoying yourself so much here. I've seldom seen it this hog-wild. (*LEON exits.*)

You're on a rampage of good will. Makes me nervous for even the trees outside. But here's something impertinent about warning an oak tree. How should I do it?

NICK: (*Laughs*) First tell me how to understand what you're talking about. (*They eat in silence for a minute.*)

NINA: Are we staying much longer, Nick?

NICK: *A few more days. The house officially closes this week, Constance says. The Ellises go tomorrow and the Griggses on Tuesday, I think. Just till I finish.*

NINA: Finish what?

NICK: (*Carefully*) The portrait, Nina.

(*ROSE GRIGGS comes down the stairs, carrying a small overnight case. She is done up in a pretty, too fussy, hat and a pretty, too fussy, dress. She looks in the room, puts the case down, comes hurrying out to the porch.*)

ROSE: Oh, good morning. Sorry to interrupt. You look so handsome together. (*Makes a gesture to NICK meaning "Could you come here?"*) Nick —

NICK: (*Hospitable*) Come on out.

ROSE: I'd rather. Could you —

NICK: Come and join us.

ROSE: (*Hesitantly*) Well, I wanted to tell you but I don't want to worry Nina. You see —

NINA: I'd go away, Mrs. Griggs, but I've been dismissed from so many meals lately that I'm getting hungry.

ROSE: (*Smiles to NINA. Speaks to NICK*) I called him last night. Just like you advised. And I'm driving right over now. He's the executor of my trust fund, you know. He's very wise: I've got gilt-edged securities.

NICK: Who is this?

ROSE: My brother, of course. Henry, like I told you. (*To NINA*) It sounds so mysterious, but it isn't. He's much older. You know he builds ships, I mean during our wars. I'll tell him the whole story, Nick, and he'll know what to do.

N I C K: (*Amused*) Of course he will.

ROSE: I'm going to drive over to my doctor's. He's going to wait for me on a hot Sunday. It'll be expensive — (*To NINA*) I had a heart murmur. They had to take me out of school for a year.

NINA: Recently? (*NICK chokes back a laugh.*)

ROSE: (*Giggles*) That's charming — "recently". (*To NICK*) There's so much I wanted to consult you about. I waited up for you last night, but — well. Should I do *just* as you told me yesterday?

NICK: (*Who doesn't remember what he told her*) Sure.

ROSE: Everything?

N I C K: Well —

NINA: I think, Mrs. Griggs, you'll have to remind Nick what he told you. Yesterday is a long time ago when you have so many ladies to attend to —

ROSE: (*As NICK laughs*) I shouldn't have brought it up like this. Oh, Mrs. Denery, you might as well know: it's about a divorce, and Nick has been most kind.

NINA: I am sure of it.

ROSE: Just one more thing. What should I do about our boys? Should I telephone them or let Henry? One of our

sons works on the atom bomb, you know. He's the religious will be traumatic for him. What do you think. Nick?

NINA: (*Gets up quickly, trying not to laugh, moves away*) Goodness.

NICK: I think you should go and have your breakfast. It's my firm belief that women only look well in hats after they've eaten.

ROSE: (*To NICK, softly, secretly*) And I'm going to just *make* Henry commission the portrait — and for the very good price that he can afford to pay. You remember though that I told you she can't take the braces off her teeth for another six months.

NICK: (*Laughs*) Go along now, my dear.

ROSE: (*Pleased*) Thank you for all you've done. And forgive me, Nina. I'll be back tonight, Nick, before you go to bed because you'll want to know how everything turns out. (*She exits through the room. NINA stands without speaking.*)



NICK: (*Looks up at her*) There was a day when we would have laughed together about this. Don't you have fun any more?

NINA: I don't think so.

NICK: She's quite nice, really. And very funny.

NINA: I suppose it's all right to flirt with, or to charm, women and men and children and animals but nowadays it seems to me you include books-in-vellum and sirloin steaks, red squirrels and lamp shades.

NICK: (*Smiles*) Are you crazy? Flirt with that silly woman? Come and eat your breakfast, Nina. I've had enough seriousness where none is due.

(*Through this speech, CARRIE has come down the steps. She meets SOPHIE, who is going through the hall to the dining room. SOPHIE is carrying a tray.*)

CARRIE: Good morning, dear. Is Frederick in the dining room?

SOPHIE: No. He has not come down as yet. (*She goes on past. CARRIE comes into the room, continues on to the porch.*)

CARRIE: (*To NICK and NINA*) Good morning. Your maid said you wanted to see me, Nick.

NICK: (*Hesitantly*) Carrie, I hesitated all day yesterday. I told myself perhaps you knew, but maybe, just maybe, you didn't.

NINA: (*Laughs*) Oh, it sounds so serious.

CARRIE: (*Smiles*) It does indeed.

NICK: (*Carefully*) Don't you know that man's reputation, Carrie? You can't travel around Europe with him.

CARRIE: Travel around Europe with *him*? I'm going to Europe with Frederick. (*Then sharply, as she sees his face*) What do you mean, Nick?

NICK: I — (*SOPHIE comes into room, goes out to porch. During next speeches, she pours coffee.*)

CARRIE: Please tell me.

NICK: I saw Frederick in the travel agency yesterday with a man I once met in Europe. Not the sort of man you'd expect to see Frederick with.

CARRIE: Are you talking about Mr. Payson?

NICK: Yes, I am. Well, I waited until they left the travel place and then I went in.

NINA: Why did you go in?

NICK: Luther hadn't seen me since we were kids and we got to talking. He said he had booked your passage on the *Elizabeth*<sup>14</sup> and now he had another for Mr. Payson and Fred had just paid for it — (*CARRIE gets up, turns sharply, does not speak.*) I didn't know whether you knew, Carrie, or if I should tell you —

CARRIE: I didn't know. I thank you for telling me. (*After a second, she turns.*) What did you mean, Nick, when you asked me if I knew Payson's reputation? I don't like to press you for gossip, but —

NINA: He didn't mean anything, Mrs. Ellis.

NICK: Oh, look here, Nina, you know he's part of Count Denna's set and on the nasty fringe of that (SOPHIE, *very quietly, leaves the porch.*)

CARRIE: What does that mean: Count Denna's set and the nasty fringe of that?

NINA: (*Quickly*) It means very little. The Count is a foolish old man who gives large parties —

NICK: (*To NINA*) Would you want your young son with such people at such parties?

NINA: (*Angrily*) I have no son. And I don't know: perhaps I would have wanted only to leave him alone —

CARRIE: (*Gently*) All people who have no children think that, Mrs. Denny. But it just isn't true. (*To NICK*)

I don't know much about Mr. Payson but I've been worried for a long time that he's taken Frederick in. Frederick admires his writing, and — Yet I know so little about him. He stayed with us a few weeks in town last winter. He'd just come back from Europe then —

NICK: He'd just come back from a filthy little scandal in Rome. It was all over the papers.

NINA: You don't know it was true.

CARRIE: What kind of scandal? (*No answer. Softly*) Please help me. I don't understand.

NICK: (*Gets up*) Look, Carrie, there's nothing to understand. The guy is just no good. That's all you need to know. He's nobody to travel around Europe with.

CARRIE: How could Fred have — (*She hesitates for a minute.*) It was kind and friendly of you to tell me. I am grateful to you both. (*She goes slowly across the room and into the hall toward the dining room. There is a long pause: NICK takes a sip of coffee, looks around at NINA.*)

NICK: What would you have done?

NINA: (*Idly*) I don't know. Have you ever tried leaving things alone?

NICK: I like Carrie. She doesn't know what the hell it's all about — and the chances are the boy doesn't either. I'm sorry for them. Aren't you? (*When she doesn't answer*) What's the matter, Nina?

NINA: I can smell it: it's all around us. The flower-like odor right before it becomes troublesome and heavy. It travels ahead of you, Nick, whenever you get most helpful, most loving and most lovable. Down through the years it runs ahead of us — I smell it — and I want to leave.

NICK: (*Pleasantly*) I think maybe you're one of the few neurotics in the world who didn't marry a neurotic. I wonder how that happened?

NINA: *I want to leave.*

NICK: (*Sharply*) Then leave.

NINA: (*After a second*) You won't come?

NICK: I told you: we'll go Friday. If you want to go before, then go. But stop talking about it, Nina. Or we'll be in for one of your long farewells — and long returns. I don't think I can stand another. Spare yourself, darling. You pay so heavy, inside. (*Comes to her, puts his arms around her*) Friday then. And in the meantime, gentle down to the pretty lady you truly are. (*He kisses her. Exits.*) NINA stands quietly for a minute, SOPHIE comes onto the porch, begins to gather the dishes.)

SOPHIE: (*Gently*) Would you like something, Mrs. Denery?

NINA: (*Softly*) No, thank you. (*She moves off, through the room and toward the staircase. As she starts up the stairs, FREDERICK comes down.*)

FREDERICK: Good morning.

NINA: Good morning, Mr. Ellis. (*Stops as if she wanted to tell him something*) I — er. Good morning. (*She goes up as SOPHIE, who has heard their voices, leaves the dishes and comes quickly into the room.*)

SOPHIE: (*Calling into the hall*) Fred. Fred. (*He comes in. Shyly*) Would you like to have your breakfast on the kitchen porch?

FREDERICK: Sure. Why?

SOPHIE: Your mother is — er — (*Points toward dining room*) She has found out that — Come.

FREDERICK: Denery told her he saw me in the travel agency. I was sure he would. There's nothing to worry about. I intended to tell her this morning.

SOPHIE: But perhaps it would be more wise —

FREDERICK: (*Smiles to her*) We'll be leaving here tomorrow and for Europe on the sixteenth. You and I won't see each other for six months. Sophie, you're sure you feel all right about my going?

SOPHIE: (*Quickly*) Oh, I do.

FREDERICK: We will visit your mother. And —

SOPHIE: (*Very quickly*) No, no, please do not do that. I have not written to her about us —

FREDERICK: Oh.

SOPHIE: You see, we have as yet no date of time, or —

FREDERICK: (*Smiles*) I don't think you want a date of time, Sophie. And you don't have to be ashamed of wishing you could find another way. But if there isn't any other way for you, then I'll be just as good to you as I know how. And I know you will be to me.

SOPHIE: You are a kind man. And I will also be kind, I hope.

FREDERICK: It isn't any deal for you. You are a girl who should love, and will one day, of course.

SOPHIE: (*Puts her hand up to her mouth*) Shssh. Such things should not be said (*Cheerfully*) It will be nice in your house with you, and I will be grateful for it.

FREDERICK: I have no house, Sophie. People like me never have their own houses, so-to-speak.

SOPHIE: Never mind. Whatever house. It will be nice. We will make it so. *(He smiles, pats her arm.)*

FREDERICK: Everybody in the dining room? *(She nods. He starts for hall.)* Might as well face it out.

SOPHIE: I would not. No, I would not. All of you face out too much. Every act of life should not be of such importance —

FREDERICK: *(Calling into dining room)* Mother. *(SOPHIE shrugs, smiles, shakes her head, and exits. FREDERICK comes back into room, pours himself a cup of coffee. After a minute, CARRIE appears. She comes into the room obviously very disturbed. But she does not speak.)* There's nothing to be so upset about.

CARRIE: *(After a pause)* You think that, really? *(MRS. ELLIS appears in the hall.)*

FREDERICK: We're going to have a companion. That's all. We know nothing of traveling and Payson knows all of Europe.

MRS. ELLIS: Of course. You're lucky to get Mr. Payson to come along. *(Both of them turn to look at her.)*

FREDERICK: *(After a second, to CARRIE)* What is it, Mother?

CARRIE: I can't say it. It's shocking for you to take along a guest without consulting me. You and I have planned this trip for three years and —

FREDERICK: I didn't consult you because the idea came up quickly and Payson had to get his ticket before the travel office closed for the week end —

CARRIE: Payson had to get his ticket?

FREDERICK: I thought you'd given up going through my checkbooks.

CARRIE: *Please don't speak that way to me. (Pause, quietly, delicately)* We are not going to Europe.

FREDERICK: *(After a second, quietly)* I am.

CARRIE: We are not going, Fred. We, are not going.

MRS. ELLIS: Your mother's feelings are hurt. She had looked forward to being alone with you. Of course.

FREDERICK: *(Uncomfortably)* We'll still be together.

CARRIE: *(To MRS. ELLIS)* I don't wish to be interpreted, Mother. *(To FREDERICK)* There's no sense talking about it: we'll go another time.

FREDERICK: *(Laughs, unpleasantly)* Will you stop acting as if you're taking me back to school? I will be disappointed if you don't wish to come with me but I am sailing on the sixteenth. *(Then, quietly)* I've never had much fun. Never seen the things I wished to see, never met the people I wanted to meet or been the places where I could. There are wonderful things to see and to learn about and to try to understand. We're lucky to have somebody who knows about them and who is willing to have us tag along. I'm not much to drag

around — (*Softly*) I'll come back, and you can take up my life again. Six months isn't much to ask.

MRS. ELLIS: Six months? Sad to ask so little.

CARRIE: (*As if she recognized a tone of voice*) Mother, please. I —

MRS. ELLIS: Perhaps you won't want to come back at all? I wouldn't blame you.

CARRIE: (*Nervously*) Fred, don't make a decision now. Promise me you'll think about it until tomorrow and then we'll talk quietly and —

MRS. ELLIS: (*To FREDERICK*) Don't make bargains with your mother. Everything always ends that way between you. I advise to go now, or stay.

FREDERICK: I am going. There is nothing to think about. I'm going. (*He turns and exits, goes up staircase. There is a pause.*)

CARRIE: (*Angry*) You always do that, Mother. You always arrange to come out his friend and make me his enemy. You've been amusing yourself that way all his life.

MRS. ELLIS: There's no time for all that, Carrie. I warned you to say and do nothing. I told you to make the best of it and go along with them.

CARRIE: (*Softly*) How could I do that? That man is a scoundrel and Fred doesn't know it, and won't believe it. What am I to do now?

MRS. ELLIS: You're to go upstairs and say that you are reconciled to his leaving without you but that Frederick is to make clear to his guest that his ten thousand a year ends today and will not begin again. Tell him you've decided young people have a happier time in Europe without American money —

CARRIE: (*Sharply*) I couldn't do that. He'd hate me for it. Maybe we'd better let him go, and perhaps I can join him later. Time will — (*Sees MRS. ELLIS's face*) I will not cut off his allowance.

MRS. ELLIS: I didn't know it was you who wrote the check.

CARRIE: (*With dignity*) Are you quite sure you wish to speak this way?

MRS. ELLIS: Relatively sure.

CARRIE: Then I will say as sharply that the money is his father's money, and not yours to threaten him, or deprive him, in any proper sense.

MRS. ELLIS: In any *proper* sense. There is no morality to money, Carrie, and very immoral of you to think so.

CARRIE: If you stop his allowance, Mother, I will simply send him mine.

MRS. ELLIS: Then I won't give you yours. (*CARRIE turns sharply, as if she were deeply shocked. MRS. ELLIS now speaks, gently.*) Yes, old people are often harsh, Carrie, when they control the purse. You'll see, when your day comes. And then, too, one comes to be bored with those who fool themselves. I say to myself — one should have power, or give it over. But if one keeps it, it might as well be used, with as little mealy-mouthness as possible. Go up now, and press him hard, and do it straight. (*CARRIE turns to exit.*) Tell yourself you're doing it for his own good.

CARRIE: (*Softly*) I wouldn't be doing it otherwise.

MRS. ELLIS: Perhaps. Perhaps not. Doesn't really matter. (*Laughs, amused*) I'm off to church now. You can skip church today, Carrie.

CARRIE: Thank you for the dispensation. (*She begins to move off toward hall and toward stairs as ROSE comes from the direction of the dining room and into the room.*)

MRS. ELLIS: (*To CARRIE, as CARRIE moves off*) Quite all right. You have God's work to do. (*She turns to watch ROSE who is elaborately settling herself in a chair as if she were arranging for a scene — which is what she is doing.*) What are you doing, Mrs. Griggs? (*ROSE nervously points to left window. MRS. ELLIS looks toward it, watches ROSE fix her face.*) Is it Robert Taylor you're expecting or Vice-President Barkley<sup>15</sup>? (*GRIGGS comes in from the left windows. He has on riding pants and an old shirt.*) Oh.

GRIGGS: (*To them both*) Good morning.

MRS. ELLIS: Your wife's getting ready to flirt. You'd be safer in church with me. (*She exits as GRIGGS laughs. He goes to coffee urn.*)

ROSE: (*Meaning MRS. ELLIS*) Nasty old thing. (*Then*) I'm driving over to see him. I'm sorry I had to make such a decision, but I felt it was necessary now.

GRIGGS: Are you talking about your brother?

ROSE: Yes, of course. Now, I know it will be bad for you, Ben, but since you're being so stubborn, I didn't know what else to do.

GRIGGS: I think you should see Henry.

ROSE: But he's going to be very, very angry, Ben. And you know how much influence he has in Washington

GRIGGS: (*Turns, carefully*) Tell him to use his influence. And tell him to go to hell.

ROSE: (*Giggles*) On a Sunday?

GRIGGS: (*Gently*) Rose, no years will make you serious.

ROSE: You used to like me that way.

GRIGGS: So you always wanted to believe.

ROSE: How can I just walk into Henry's happy house and say Ben wants a divorce, and I don't even know the reason. I *ask* him and I *ask* him but he says there is no reason —

GRIGGS: I never said there was no reason. But it isn't the reason that you like, or will accept. If I love with another woman you'd rather enjoy that. And certainly Henry would.

ROSE: It would at least be human. And I am not convinced it isn't so. I've done a good deal of thinking about it, and I've just about decided it's why you stayed in Europe so long.

GRIGGS: I didn't arrange World War II and don't listen to the rumors that I did.

ROSE: He said it at the time. He said he had known a good many professional soldiers but nobody had managed to make so much fuss about the war as you did, or stay away so long. Henry said that.

GRIGGS: I guessed it was Henry who said that.

ROSE: (*Laughs*) But you didn't guess that it was Henry who got you the last promotion.

GRIGGS: Rose, stop that. You're lying. You always do it about now. (*Turns to her*) Give Henry this reason: tell him my wife's too young for me. For Henry's simple mind, a simple reason.

ROSE: I've wanted to stay young, I've —

GRIGGS: You've done more than stay young: you've stayed a child.

ROSE: What about your mother, Ben, have you thought of her? It would kill her —

GRIGGS: She's been dead sixteen years. Do you think this will kill her?

ROSE: You know what I mean. She loved me and she was happy for our marriage.

GRIGGS: No, she didn't. She warned me not to marry — (*With feeling*) I began my life with a serious woman. I doubt if any man gets over that, or ever really wants any other kind of woman.

ROSE: *Your mother loved me.* You have no right to malign the dead. I say she loved me, I know she did.

GRIGGS: (*Wearily*) What difference does it make?

ROSE: You never think anybody loves me. Quite a few men have found me attractive —

GRIGGS: (*Quickly*) And many more will, my dear.

ROSE: I always knew in the end I would have to tell you although I haven't seen him since you came home. That I promise you. I told him you were a war hero with a glorious record and he said he wouldn't either any longer —

GRIGGS: (*Who is at the left window*) Henry's chauffeur is outside, Rose.

ROSE: He was very, very, very, very much in love with me while he was at the Pentagon.

GRIGGS: Good place to be in love. The car is outside, Rose.

ROSE: Even after we both knew it, he kept on saying that you didn't make love to a friend, more than a friend's wife.

GRIGGS: (*Gently*) Rose, don't let's talk this way.

ROSE: Does it hurt you? Well, you've hurt me enough. The third time you went to Europe was when it really began, maybe the second. Because I, too, wanted affection.

GRIGGS: (*Gently*) I can understand that.

ROSE: Ask me who it was. Ask me, Ben, and I will tell you. (*No answer*) Just ask me.

GRIGGS: No, I won't do that, Rose.

ROSE: Remember when the roses came from Teheran, I mean wired from Teheran, last birthday? That's who sent them. You didn't even like Teheran. You said it was filthy and the people downtrodden. But he sent roses.

GRIGGS: He sounds like the right man. Go to him, Rose, the flying time is nothing now.

ROSE: (*Angrily*) You just stop being nasty. (*Then*) And now I am going to tell you who it is.

GRIGGS: (*Begins to move toward door, as if he were backing away from her*) Please, Rose. We have had so many years of this — Please (*As she is closer to him*) Do I have to tell you that I don't care who it is?

ROSE: (*She begins to move on him.*) I'd like to whisper it. I knew if I ever told you I'd have to whisper it. (*He begins now really to back away.*) Ben, you come right here. Ben, stand still. (*He starts to laugh.*) Stop that laughing. (*Very loudly, very close to him*) It was your cousin, Ralph Sommers. There. (*She turns away.*) There. You won't ever speak with him about it?

GRIGGS: You can be sure of that.

ROSE: (*Outside an automobile horn is sounded.*) Oh, I'm late. I can't talk any more now, Ben. (*She starts for door, stops.*) What am I going to tell Henry? Anyway, you know Henry isn't going to allow me to give you a divorce. You know that, Ben. (*Carefully*) And therefore I won't be able to do what you want, and the whole day is just wasted. Please tell me not to go, Ben.

GRIGGS: (*As if he has held onto himself long enough*) Tell Henry that I want a divorce. But in any case I am going away. I am leaving. That is all that matters to me or need matter to you or him. I would prefer a divorce. But I am going, whatever you and Henry decide. Understand that, Rose, the time has come to understand it.

ROSE: (*Gently, smiling*) I am going to try, dear. Really I am. It's evidently important to you.

(*She exits through hall. GRIGGS sits down as if he were very tired. A minute later, CROSSMAN comes from the direction of the dining room, carrying the Sunday papers. He looks at BEN, goes to him, hands him the front page. BEN takes it, nods, sits holding it. CROSSMAN crosses to a chair, sits down, begins to read the comic section. A second later, NINA comes down the stairs, comes into the room, starts to speak to BEN and CROSSMAN, changes her mind and sits down. Then CONSTANCE, in an old-fashioned flowered hat and carrying a large palmetto fan, comes through the hall and into the room.*)

CONSTANCE: I'm off to church. Anybody want anything just ring for Leon or Sophie. (*Bravely*) Want to come to church with me, Ned? (*He peers over his paper, amazed.*) All right. I just thought — Well, Nick told us that you told him last night —

CROSSMAN: (*Laughs*) I think perhaps I shall never again go out at night.



CONSTANCE: Oh, it's good for all of us to confide in somebody — (*She becomes conscious of NINA and GRIGGS, Whiles awkwardly and then with great determination leans over and kisses CROSSMAN.*) Good-bye, darling. (*Surprised, he gets up, stands watching her leave the room. Then he sits down, staring ahead.*)

NINA: (*After a minute, hesitantly*) I've got a car and a full picnic basket and a cold bottle of wine. Would you — (*Turning to CROSSMAN and then to GRIGGS*) like to come along? I don't know where to go, but —

CROSSMAN: Got enough in your picnic basket for lunch *and* dinner?

NINA: (*Smiles*) I think so.

CROSSMAN: Got a mandolin?

NINA: (*Smiles*) No. Does that rule me out?

CROSSMAN: Almost. But we'll make do. The General whistles very well.

GRIGGS: (*Smiles, gets up*) Is one bottle of wine enough on a Sunday?

NINA: (*Laughs as she goes toward hall*) Not for the pure in heart. I'll get five or six more.

(*GRIGGS follows her out through hall. CROSSMAN gets up, folds the comic section, puts it under his arm, exits through hall. As he exits, SOPHIE comes on the porch. She begins to pile the breakfast dishes on a tray. She sees a half-used roll and a piece of bacon, fixes it for herself, goes out carrying the tray and chewing on the roll as the curtain falls.*)

## CURTAIN

### Scene Two

SCENE: *The same. Nine-thirty that evening.*

AT RISE: NICK is lying on the couch. Next to him, on the floor, is an empty champagne glass. On the table, in a silver cooler, is a bottle of champagne. CONSTANCE is sitting at the table playing solitaire and humming to the record on the phonograph. On the porch, SOPHIE is reading to MRS. MARY ELLIS.

NICK: (*Looks up from couch to CONSTANCE, irritably*) Please don't hum.

CONSTANCE: Sorry. I always like that so much, I —

NICK: And please don't talk. Mozart doesn't need it.

CONSTANCE: Haydn.

NICK: Mozart.

CONSTANCE: (*Tartly*) I'm sorry but it's Haydn.

NICK: You know damn well I know what I'm talking about.

CONSTANCE: You don't know what you're talking about. Go look.

NICK: (*Gets up, picks up his glass, goes to phonograph, shuts it off, looks down, turns away annoyed, picks up a champagne bottle, pours himself a drink, then brings the bottle to CONSTANCE.*) Ready for another?

CONSTANCE: I haven't finished this. (NICK carries the bottle out to the porch.)

MRS. ELLIS: (*Looks up at him*) For the fourth time, we don't want any. Please go away. We're having a nice time. We're in the part I like best.

NICK: A nice time? Will I think such a time is a nice time when I am your age? I suppose so.

MRS. ELLIS: No, Mr. Denery. If you haven't learned to read at your age, you won't learn at mine.

NICK: (*Laughs, pats her shoulder*) Never mind, I like you.

MRS. ELLIS: You must be damn hard up. People seldom like those who don't like them.

NICK: (*Pleased*) You haven't forgotten how to flirt. Come on inside and talk to me. My wife disappears, everybody disappears — (*Stretches*) I'm bored, I'm bored.

MRS. ELLIS: And that's a state of sin.

NICK: Unfortunately, it isn't. I've always said I can stand any pain, any trouble — but not boredom.

MRS. ELLIS: My advice is to try something intellectual for a change. Sit down with your champagne — on which you've been chewing since early afternoon — and try to make a paper hat out of the newspaper or get yourself a nice long piece of string.

NICK: (*Goes to SOPHIE*) Sophie, come in and dance with me.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Calls in*) Constance, whistle for Mr. Denery, please.

NICK: (*To SOPHIE*) You don't want to sit here and read to Mrs. Ellis.

SOPHIE: Yes, sir. I do. I enjoy the adventures of Odysseus. And the dollar an hour Mrs. Ellis pays me for reading to her.

NICK: (*Laughs, as MRS. ELLIS laughs*) Give you two dollars an hour to dance with me.

MRS. ELLIS: It's not nearly enough. Sophie.

NICK: (*Pats MRS. ELLIS*) You're a corrupter of youth — you steal the best hours.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Shakes his hand off her shoulder*) And you're a toucher: you constantly touch people or lean on them. Little moments of sensuality. One should have sensuality whole or not at all. Don't you find pecking at it ungratifying? There are many of you: the touchers and the leaners. All since the depression, is my theory.

NICK: (*Laughs, pats her again*) You must have been quite a girl in your day.

MRS. ELLIS: I wasn't. I wasn't at all. (NICK wanders into the room. MRS. ELLIS speaks to SOPHIE.) I was too good for those who wanted me and not good enough for those I wanted. Like Frederick, Sophie. Life can be hard for such people and they seldom understand why and end bitter and confused.

SOPHIE: I know.

MRS. ELLIS: Do you? Frederick is a nice boy, Sophie — and that is all. But that's more than most, and precious in a small way.

SOPHIE: Yes, I think so.

(MRS. ELLIS *smiles, pats her hand*; SOPHIE *begins again to read*.)

NICK: (*Near the phonograph, to CONSTANCE*) Dance with me?

CONSTANCE: I don't know how any more.

NICK: (*Turns away from the phonograph*) Has it been wise, Constance, to lose all the graces in the service of this house?

CONSTANCE: Do you think I wanted it that way?

NICK: I'm not sure you didn't. You could have married Ned, instead of dangling him around, the way you've done.

CONSTANCE: Ned has come here each summer because, well, because I guess this is about the only home he has. I loved Ned and honored him, but I just wasn't in love with him when we were young. You know that, and you'd have been the first to tell me that you can't marry unless you're in love — (*He begins to laugh*.) What are you laughing at?

NICK: "*Can't marry unless you're in love*". What do you think the rest of us did? I was in love with you. I've never been in love again.

CONSTANCE: (*Very sharply*) I don't want you to talk to me that way. And I don't believe you. You fell in love with Nina and that's why you didn't come back — (*Desperately*) You're very much in love with Nina. Then and now. Then —

NICK: Have it your way. What are you so angry about? Want to know something: I've never been angry in my life. (*Turns to her, smiles*) In the end, we wouldn't have worked out. You're a good woman and I am not a good man.

CONSTANCE: Well, whatever the reason, things turned out for the best. (*Carefully*) About Ned. What did he say last night? I mean did he really talk about me?

NICK: (*Expansively*) He said he loved you and wanted you and had wasted his life loving you and wanting you. And that he wasn't coming here any more. This is his last summer in this house.

CONSTANCE: (*She turns, pained, startled*.) His last summer? He said that? He really said it was his last summer — (*CARRIE comes quickly into the room*.)

CARRIE: Has Fred come back?

NICK: (*To her*) Well, where have you been? Come and have a drink and talk to me. (*He moves to pour her a drink as she crosses to the porch*.)

CARRIE: (*Softly, to MRS. ELLIS*) I've been everywhere. Everywhere possible. I even forced myself to call on Mr. Payson.

MRS. ELLIS: And what did he say?

CARRIE: That Fred came in to see him after he left here this morning, stayed a few minutes, no more, and he hasn't seen him since.

MRS. ELLIS: Ah, that's good.

CARRIE: What's good about it? It means we don't know where he's been since ten this morning. (*Softly, as she sits down*) I don't know what else to do or where else to look. What should I do? Shall I call the police, what else is there to do?

MRS. ELLIS: Nothing.

CARRIE: How can I do nothing? You shouldn't have made me threaten him. We were wrong. It wasn't important that he wanted to go to Europe with a man his own age. What harm was there in it?

MRS. ELLIS: All his life you've been plucking him this way and plucking him that. Do what you like. Call the police.

NICK: (*Who has come to the door carrying a glass for CARRIE. He hears the last few speeches; gently.*) Can I do anything, Carrie?

CARRIE: I don't know, Nick. I only found one person who had seen him, down by the water —

NICK: Is he — would he have — is that what you're thinking, Carrie?

CARRIE: I'm afraid, I'm afraid.

NICK: (*Quickly, the kind of efficiency that comes with liquor and boredom*) Then come on, Carrie. You must go to the police right away. I'll get a boat. Tell the police to follow along. Right away. (CARRIE gets up. Starts toward NICK, SOPHIE gets up.)

SOPHIE: (*Angrily, in French, to NICK*) Do not enjoy the excitement so much. Stop being a fool.

NICK: (*Amazed*) What?

SOPHIE: (*In German*) I said don't enjoy yourself so much. Mind your business.

CARRIE: What? What is it, Sophie?

SOPHIE: (*To CARRIE*) Frederick is in the cove down by the dock. He has been there all day.

NICK: (*To SOPHIE*) You said I was a fool. I don't like such words, Sophie. I don't.

CARRIE: (*Carefully, to SOPHIE*) You've let me go running about all day, frantic with terror —

SOPHIE: He wanted to be alone, Mrs. Ellis. That is not so terrible a thing to want.

CARRIE: How dare you take this on yourself? How dare you —

MRS. ELLIS: I hope this is not a sample of you as a mother-in-law.

SOPHIE: (*Gently, to CARRIE*) He will return, Mrs. Ellis. Leave him alone.

NICK: (*Softly*) Sophie, I think you owe me an apology. You are by way of being a rather sharp little girl underneath all that shyness, aren't you? I'm waiting. (*No answer*) I'm waiting.

MRS. ELLIS: Well, wait outside, will you? (*He stares at her, turns, goes in the room.*)

NICK: (*Very hurt, to CONSTANCE*) I don't think I like it around here, Constance. No, I don't like it. (*He goes out left windows as CONSTANCE stares at him.*)

CARRIE: *Since Frederick has confided in you, Sophie, perhaps you should go to him.*

SOPHIE: He has not confided in me. Sometimes his troubles are his own.

(*She gets up, walks through room, sits down near CONSTANCE, who looks at her curiously. On the porch, MRS. ELLIS leans over and whispers to CARRIE.*)

CARRIE: Not tonight.

MRS. ELLIS: Why not tonight? We'll be leaving in the morning.

CARRIE: Because I've changed my mind. I think it best now that we let him go to Europe.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Gets up*) He will not want to go to Europe. Haven't you understood that much?

CARRIE: (*Hesitantly*) How do you know what he wants or feels —

MRS. ELLIS: I know. (*She comes into room, sits near CONSTANCE and SOPHIE. After a second CARRIE follows her in, stands near them.*) Sophie, I think a decision had best be made now. There should be no further postponement.

CARRIE: (*Very nervous*) This isn't the time. Fred will be angry —

MRS. ELLIS: (*To SOPHIE*) I don't want to push you, child, but nothing will change, nothing. I know you've wanted to wait, and so did Frederick, both of you hoping that maybe — But it will all be the same a year from now. Miracles don't happen. I'm telling you the truth, Sophie.

SOPHIE: Yes, Mrs. Ellis, and I agree with you. Nothing will change. If Frederick is willing for an early marriage then I am also willing.

CONSTANCE: Is this the way it's been? *Willing to marry, willing to marry* —

SOPHIE: (*Looks at her*) I do not use the correct word?

CONSTANCE: (*To MRS. ELLIS and CARRIE*) If that's the way it is, then I am not willing. I thought it was two young people who — who — who loved each other. I didn't ever understand it, and I didn't ask questions, but — Willing to get married. What have you been thinking of, why — (*Sharply, hurt*) What kind of unpleasant thing has this been?

CARRIE: I — I know. I can't —

MRS. ELLIS: (*To CONSTANCE and CARRIE*) Why don't you take each other by the hand and go outside and gather in the dew?

SOPHIE: I think Aunt Constance is sad that we do not speak of it in the romantic words of love.

CONSTANCE: Yes, I am. And shocked. When Carrie first talked to me about the marriage, I asked you immediately and you told me you were in love —

SOPHIE: I never told you that, Aunt Constance.

CONSTANCE: I don't remember your exact words but of course I understood — You mean, you and Frederick have never been in love? Why? Then why have you —

SOPHIE: Aunt Constance, I do not wish to go on with my life as it has been. I have not been happy, and I cannot continue here. I cannot be what you have wished me to be, and I do not want the world you want for me. It is too late —

CONSTANCE: (*Softly*) Too late? You were thirteen years old when you came here. I've tried to give you everything —

SOPHIE: I came from another world and in that world thirteen is not young. I know what you have tried to give me, and I am grateful. But it has been a foolish waste for us both.

CONSTANCE: (*Softly*) Were you happy at home, Sophie?

SOPHIE: I did not think in such words.

CONSTANCE: Please tell me.

SOPHIE: I was comfortable with myself, if that is what you mean, and I am no longer.

CONSTANCE: (*Gently, takes her hand*) I have been so wrong. And so careless in not seeing it. Do you want to go home now?

SOPHIE: No. My mother cannot — Well, it is not that easy, I do not — (*As if it were painful*) I do not wish to go home now.

CONSTANCE: (*Puzzled*) It's perfectly simple for you to go home. Why, why isn't it?

SOPHIE: I do not want to say, Aunt Constance. I do not want to. (*With feeling*) Please do not talk of it any more. Please allow me to do what I wish to do, and know is best for me. (*Smiles*) And don't look such a way Frederick and I will have a nice life will make it so. (*Goes out*)

CARRIE: (*Sharply*) Don't be too disturbed, Constance. I have decided that Frederick should go to Europe and this time I am not going to allow any interference of any kind. (*FREDERICK appears in the hall, comes into the room.*)

FREDERICK: I'm not going to Europe, Mother.

CARRIE: (*Turns to him*) I have had a bad day. And I have thought of many things. I was mistaken and you were right. You must go wherever you want — however you want

FREDERICK: I am not going, Mother. Payson made that very clear to me this morning.

MRS. ELLIS: Don't, Frederick. It's not necessary. know.

FREDERIC: But evidently Mother doesn't — Payson made it clear to me that I was not wanted and never had been unless I supplied the money. (CONSTANCE gets up, moves off to the porch.)

CARRIE: (After a second) I — Er — I don't believe he meant that. You just tell him that it's all been a mistake and there will certainly be money for the trip. Just go right back and say that, Frederick —

FREDERICK: (Very sharply) Mother! I don't want to see him again! Ever.

CARRIE: You often imagine people don't like you for yourself. I'll go and tell Mr. Payson that it's all fixed now —

MRS. ELLIS: Carrie, you're an ass. (To FREDERICK) But I hope you haven't wasted today feeling bitter about Mr. Payson. You have no right to bitterness. No right at all. Why shouldn't Mr. Payson have wanted your money, though I must say he seems to have been rather boorish about not getting it. People like us should pay for the interest of people like him. Why should they want us otherwise? I don't believe he ever pretended to feel anything else about you.

FREDERICK: (Softly) No, he never pretended.

MRS. ELLIS: Then understand that you've been the fool, not he the villain. Take next week to be sad: a week's long enough to be sad in, if it's true sadness. Plenty long enough.

FREDERICK: (Smiles) All right, Grandma. I'll take a week. (SOPHIE appears at the hall door.)

SOPHIE: (To FREDERICK) You have had no dinner? (Puts out her hand) Then come. I have made a tray for you. (He turns, goes to her, takes her hand, goes out.)

MRS. ELLIS: (Gets up, looks at CARRIE) Are you going to interfere this time, Carrie? (No answer. Gently) I hope not. (She goes out. CARRIE stands for a minute near the porch. Then she goes out to CONSTANCE.)

CARRIE: I don't like it either.

CONSTANCE: (Wearily) Whole thing sounds like the sale of a shore-front property. I don't know. Seems to me I've been so mixed up about so much. Well, maybe you all know what you're doing.

CARRIE: I don't know what I'm doing.

CONSTANCE: Why did you want the marriage, Carrie? I mean a month ago when you spoke to me —

CARRIE: I don't even know that.

CONSTANCE: You always seem so clear about everything. And so strong. Even when we were girls. I envied you that, Carrie, and wanted to be like you.

CARRIE: (Laughs) Clear and strong? I wish I could tell you what I've missed and what I've wanted. Don't envy me, Con.

(She exits toward hall and staircase. As she does, NICK comes in. He is now a little more drunk than when he went out.)

NICK: Come on out, Carrie. It's wonderful night. Take you for a sail.

CARRIE: (*Laughs*) Good night, Nick.

NICK: (*As she goes up steps*) I'm lonely, Carrie. I wouldn't leave you if you were lonely. (*When she doesn't answer, he goes into room, looks around, sees CONSTANCE sitting on the porch, goes over, stands in the door looking out. After a second*) I wish I wanted to go to bed with you, Con. I just can't want to. I don't know why. I just don't want it.

CONSTANCE: (*Very sharply*) Stop talking that way. You've had too much to drink. (*She gets up, comes into room. He grabs her arm.*)

NICK: Now you're angry again. (*Puts his arms around her*) I'll sing you a lullaby. Will you like that?

CONSTANCE: Look, Nick, you've been rather a trial tonight. Do go to bed.

NICK: I'm not going to bed. I'm lonely. I'm — (*The phone rings, CONSTANCE goes to it. NICK pours himself a glass of champagne.*)

CONSTANCE: Yes? General Griggs isn't in, Rose. Oh. Yes. Just a minute. (*To NICK*) Rose Griggs wants to talk to you.

NICK: What's the matter, she got some new trouble?

CONSTANCE: (*Annoyed*) Do you want the call or don't you?

NICK: Tell her I'm busy.

CONSTANCE: (*In phone*) He's busy drinking, Rose. Shall I leave a message for General Griggs — Oh. (*She puts the phone down, annoyed.*) She says it's absolutely and positively urgent that she speak with you. Not her husband. Absolutely and positively. (*She exits through hall, NICK rises and goes to phone.*)

NICK: Look here, my dear, don't be telling people you want to speak to me and not to your husband. Sounds awful. (*Laughs*) Oh. A most agreeable doctor. Must get to know him. Look, you don't have to convince me. Save it for your husband. Oh, come on. You're getting like those people who believe their own press agents. Anyway, I once knew a woman with heart trouble and it gave her a nice color. You didn't go to the doctor to believe him — (*Sighs, listens*) All right, of course I'm sorry. It sounds jolly nice and serious and I apologize. (*Listens*) Oh. Well, that is kind of you. Yes, tell your brother I'd like to stay with him. Oh, by Friday, certainly. How old is your niece? Is she the one with the braces on her teeth? (*NINA appears from the hall entrance. She is followed by GRIGGS who is carrying the picnic basket.*) No, I won't paint anything out. That big a hack I'm not. Yes, we'll have plenty of time together. You're a good friend. (*To NINA and GRIGGS*) Had a nice day? (*Into phone*) No, I'm talking to your husband. Oh. Good-bye. Take care of yourself. (*He hangs up. To GRIGGS*) That was Rose. (*Gaily, to NINA*; I've had a dull day, darling. (*CROSSMAN comes in.*) Where'd you skip to?

NINA: We drove over to Pass Christian.

NICK: Did you put the car in the garage?



CROSSMAN: (*Gives NINA the keys*) Yes, all safe.

NICK: Did you drive, Ned? That heavy Isotta<sup>16</sup>? (*To NINA*) Nobody who drinks as much as Ned should be driving that car. Or any car belonging to me.

NINA: And nobody as tight as you are should talk that way.

NICK: (*Laughs*) Have a drink, Ned. (*He brings CROSSMAN a glass.*)

CROSSMAN: Thank you, no. (*NICK turns, hands glass to GRIGGS.*)

GRIGGS: No, thank you.

NICK: What the hell is this? Refusing to have a drink with me — (*To CROSSMAN*) I'm trying to apologize to you. Now take the drink —

NINA: Nick, please —

NICK: Stay out of it, Nina. Women don't know anything about the etiquette of drinking.

CROSSMAN: (*Laughs*) Has it got etiquette now? (*As NICK again hands him glass. Shakes his head*) Thank you.

NICK: (*Drunk, hurt*) Look here, old boy, I say in the light of what's happened, you've just got to take this. It's my way of apologizing and I shouldn't have to explain that to a gentleman. (*He grabs CROSSMAN's arm, playfully presses the glass to CROSSMAN's lips.*)

CROSSMAN: (*Quietly*) Don't do that.

NICK: Come on, old boy. If I have to pour it down you —

CROSSMAN: Don't do that. (*NICK, laughing, presses the glass hard against CROSSMAN's mouth. CROSSMAN pushes the glass and it falls to the floor.*)

NINA: (*Sits down*) Well, we got rid of that glass. But there are plenty more, Nick.

NICK: (*Sad, but firm* CROSSMAN) Now you've put yourself on the defensive, my friend. That's always tactically unwise, isn't, General Griggs?

GRIGGS: I know nothing of tactics, Mr. Denery. Certainly not of yours.

NICK: Then what the hell are you doing as a general?

GRIGGS: Masquerading. They had a costume left over and they lent it to me.

NICK: (*To CROSSMAN*) I'm waiting, Ned. Pour yourself a drink, and make your apologies.

CROSSMAN: You are just exactly the way I remember you. And that I wouldn't have believed of any man. (*He turns, goes out.*)

NICK: (*Like a hurt child*) What the hell does that mean? (*Calling*) Hey, Ned. Come on back and have it your way. (*Gets no answer, turns, hearty again*) Come on, General. Have a bottle with me.

NINA: Are we going to start again?

NICK: General, got something to tell you: your wife telephoned but she didn't want to speak to you.

GRIGGS: That's most understandable. Good night, Mrs. Denery, and thank you for a pleasant day.

NICK: But she'll want to speak to you in the morning. Better stick around in the morning.

GRIGGS: (*Stares at him*) Thank you. Good night.

NICK: (*Following him*) I think you're doing the wrong thing, wanting to leave Rose. You're going to be lonely at your age without.

GRIGGS: If my wife wishes to consult you, Mr. Denery, that's her business. But I don't wish to consult you. (*He exits.*)

NICK: Sorry. Forget it. (NICK *turns, takes his drink to the couch, lies down.*)

NINA: (*After a pause*) You know, it's a nasty business hating yourself.

NICK: Who's silly enough to do that?

NINA: Me.

NICK: (*Warmly*) Come on over here, darling, and tell me about yourself. I've missed you.

NINA: To hate yourself, all the time.

NICK: I love you, Nina.

NINA: (*Gets up*) Here we go with that routine. Now you'll bait me until I tell you that you've never loved any woman, or any man, nor ever will. (*Wearily*) I'll be glad to get out of this house before Constance finds you out. She can go back to sleeping with her dreams. (*After a second*) You still think you can wind up everybody's affairs by Friday?

NICK: Oh, sure. Friday. Then we're going up to spend a month with Rose's brother, Henry something or other. In New Orleans.

NINA: (*Carefully*) What are you talking about?

NICK: Rose fixed it for me. I'm going to do a portrait of her niece, the heiress to the fortune. The girl is balding and has braces. (*Looks at her*) Five thousand dollars.

NINA: Are you crazy?

NICK: Not a bit.

NINA: It's all right to kid around here —

NICK: (*Gets up*) I don't know what you mean.

NINA: (*Violently*) Please don't let's talk this way. Just tell Mrs. Griggs that you've changed your mind —

NICK: I demand that you tell me what you mean.

NINA: (*Angrily*) How many years have we avoided saying it? Why must you walk into it now? (*Pauses, looks at him*) All right. Maybe it's time: you haven't finished a portrait in twelve years. And money isn't your reason for wanting to do this portrait. You're setting up a silly flirtation with Mrs. Griggs. I'm not going to New Orleans, Nick. I am not going to watch it all again. I can't go on this way with myself — (*Then softly*) Don't go. Call it off. You know how it will end. Please let's don't this time — We're not young any more, Nick. Somewhere we must have learned something.

NICK: (*Softly, carefully*) If I haven't finished every picture I started it's because I'm good enough to know they weren't good enough. All these years you never understood that? I think I will never forgive you for talking that way.

NINA: Your trouble is that you're an amateur, a gifted amateur. And like all amateurs you have very handsome reasons for what you do not finish — between trains and boats.

NICK: You have thought that about me, all these years?

NINA: Yes.

NICK: Then it was good of you and loyal to pretend you believed in me.

NINA: Good? Loyal? What do they mean? I loved you.

NICK: Yes, good and loyal. But I, too, have a little vanity — (*She laughs: he comes to her.*) And no man can bear to live with a woman who feels that way about his work. I think you ought to leave tomorrow, Nina. For good and forever.

NINA: (*Softly*) Yes. (*She turns.*) Yes, of course. (*She starts to exit. He follows behind her, talking.*)

NICK: But it must be different this time. Remember I said years ago — "Ten times of threatening is out, Nina", I said — the tenth time you stay gone.

NINA: All right. Ten times is out. (*Quietly, desperately*) I promise for good and forever.

NICK: (*She is climbing the staircase*) This time, spare yourself the return. And the begging and the self-humiliation and the self-hate. And the disgusting self-contempt. This time they won't do any good. (*He is following her but we cannot see him.*) Let's write it down, darling. And have a drink to seal it.

(*On the words "disgusting self-contempt", CONSTANCE comes into the hall.*

*She hears the words, recognizes NICK's voice and stands, frowning, and thoughtful. Then she turns out the lights on the porch, puts on all lights except one lamp, comes back into the living room and begins to empty the ashtrays, etc. SOPHIE comes into the room carrying pillow, sheets, quilts, a glass of milk, and crosses to couch. Without speaking, CONSTANCE moves to help her and together they begin to make couch for the night.)*

SOPHIE: (*After a minute, smiles*) Do not worry for me, Aunt Constance.

CONSTANCE: I can't help it.

SOPHIE: I think perhaps you worry sometimes in order that you should not think.

CONSTANCE: (*Smiles*) Yes, maybe. I won't say any more. I'll be lonely without you, Sophie. I don't like being alone, any more. It's not a good way to live. And with you married, I'll be alone forever, unless — Well, Ned's loved me and it's been such a waste, such a waste. I know it now but — well — I don't know. (*Shyly, as a young girl would say it*) I wanted you to understand. You

understand, Sophie? (SOPHIE stares at her, frowning. Then CONSTANCE speaks happily.) Sleep well, dear.

(She comes to SOPHIE, kisses her, exits, closing door. SOPHIE finishes with the bed, brings her milk to the bed table, takes off her robe, puts it around her shoulders, gets into bed, and lies quietly, thinking. Then she turns as she hears footsteps in the hall and she is staring at the door as NICK opens it. He trips over a chair, recovers himself, turns on a lamp.)

NICK: (Sharply) Constance! What is this — a boys' school with lights out at eleven! (He sees SOPHIE.) Where's your aunt? I want to talk to her. What are you doing?

SOPHIE: I think I am asleep, Mr. Denery.

NICK: You're cute. Maybe too cute. (He pours himself a drink.) I'm going down to the tavern and see if I can get up a beach party. Tell your aunt. Just tell her that. (Going toward door) Want to come? You couldn't be more welcome. (She shakes her head.) Oh, come on, throw on a coat. I'm not mad at you any more. (He comes back toward her, looks down at her.) I couldn't paint you, Sophie. You're too thin. Damn shame you're so thin. (Suddenly sits down on bed) I'm sick of trouble. Aren't you? Like to drive away with me for a few days? (Smiles at her) Nobody would care. And we could be happy. I hate people not being happy. (He lies down. His head is now on her knees.) Move your knees, baby, they're bony. And get me a drink.

SOPHIE: Take the bottle upstairs, Mr. Denery. NICK: Get me a drink. And make it poison. Slowly, wearily, she gets up, takes his glass, goes to bottle, pours drink. He begins to sing. She brings glass back to him. He reaches up to take the glass, decides to pull her toward him, and spills the liquid on the bed.) Clumsy, honey, clumsy. But I'll forgive you. (He is holding her, and laughing.)

SOPHIE: (Calmly) Please go somewhere else, Mr. Denery.

NICK: (Springs up, drunk-angry) People aren't usually rude to me, Sophie. Poor little girls always turn rude when they're about to marry rich little boys. What a life you're going to have. That boy doesn't even know what's the matter with him —

SOPHIE: (Very sharply) Please, Mr. Denery, go away.

NICK: (Laughs) Oh, you know what's the matter with him? No European would be as innocent of the world as you pretend. (Delighted) I tricked you into telling me. Know that?

SOPHIE: You are drunk and am tired. Please go away.

NICK: (Sits down across the room) Go to sleep, child. I'm not disturbing you. (She stares at him, decides she can't move him, gets into bed, picks up a book, begins to read.) I won't say a word. Ssh. Sophie's reading. Do you like to read? Know the best way to read? With someone you love. Out loud. Ever try it that way, honey? (He gets up, comes to bed, stands near her, speaking over her shoulder.) I used to know a lot of poetry. Brought up on Millay<sup>17</sup>. My candle and all

that<sup>18</sup>. "I had to be a liar. My mother was a leprechaun, my father was a friar". Crazy for the girl. (*Leans over and kisses her hair. She pulls her head away.*) Ever wash your hair in champagne, darling? I knew a woman once. (*Tips the glass over her head*) Let's try it.

SOPHIE: (*Sharply*) Let us not try it again.

NICK: (*Sits down beside her*) Now for God's sake don't get angry. (*Takes her shoulders and shakes her*) I'm sick of angry women. All men are sick of angry women, if angry women knew the truth. Sophie, we can always go away and starve. I'll manage to fall in love with you.

SOPHIE: (*He is holding her.*) Mr. Denery, I am sick of you.

NICK: (*Softly*) Tell me you don't like me and I will go away and not come back.

SOPHIE: No, sir. I do not like you.

NICK: People have hated me. But nobody's ever not liked me. If I thought you weren't flirting, I'd be hurt. Is there any aspirin downstairs? If you kiss me, Sophie, be kind to me for just a minute, I'll go away. I may come back another day, but I'll go all by myself — (*Desperately*) Please, Sophie, please.

SOPHIE: (*Sighs, holds up her side face to him*) All right. Then you will go, remember. (*He takes her in his arms, pulls her down on the bed. She struggles to get away from him. She speaks angrily.*) Do not make yourself such a clown. (*When she cannot get away from him*) I will call your wife, Mr. Denery.

NICK: (*Delighted*) That would be fun, go ahead. We're getting a divorce. Sophie, let's make this night our night. God, Julie, if you only knew what I've been through —

SOPHIE: (*Violently*) Oh shut up. (*She pulls away from him with great effort. He catches her robe and rolls over on it.*)

NICK: (*Giggles as he settles down comfortably*) Come on back. It's nice and warm here and I love you very much.

But we've got to get some sleep, darling. Really we have to. (*Then he turns over and lies still. She stands looking at him.*)

SOPHIE: (*After a minute*) Get up, Mr. Denery. I will help you upstairs. (*No answer*) Please, please get up.

NICK: (*Gently, half passed-out*) It's raining out. Just tell the concierge I'm your brother. She'll understa — (*The words fade off. SOPHIE waits a second and then leans over and with great strength begins to shake him.*) Stop that. (*He passes out, begins to breathe heavily. She turns, goes to hall, stands at the foot of the steps. Then she changes her mind and comes back into the room. She goes to the couch, stands, looking at him, decides to pull him by the legs.*) (*Softly*) I'll go away in a few minutes. Don't be so young. Have a little pity. I am old and sick. (*SOPHIE draws back, moves slowly to the other side of the room as the curtain falls.*)

CURTAIN

## ACT THREE

SCENE: *Seven o'clock the next morning. NICK is asleep on the couch. SOPHIE is sitting in a chair, drinking a cup of coffee. A minute after the rise of the curtain, MRS. ELLIS comes down the steps, comes into the room.*

MRS. ELLIS: I heard you bumping around in the kitchen, Sophie. The older you get the less you sleep, and the more you look forward to meals. Particularly breakfast, because you've been alone all night, and the nights are the hardest — (*She sees NICK, stares, moves over to look at him.*) What is this?

SOPHIE: It is Mr. Denery.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Turns to stare at her*) What's he doing down here?

SOPHIE: He became drunk and went to sleep.

MRS. ELLIS: He has been here all night? (*SOPHIE nods.*) What's the matter with you? Get him out of here immediately.

SOPHIE: I cannot move him. I tried. Shall I get you some coffee?

MRS. ELLIS: (*Staring at her*) Are you being silly, Sophie? Sometimes it is very hard to tell with you. Why didn't you call Constance or Mrs. Denery?

SOPHIE: I did not know what to do. Mr. and Mrs. Denery had some trouble between them, or so he said, and I thought it might be worse for her if — (*Smiles*) Is it so much? He was just a little foolish and sleepy. (*Goes toward door*) I will get Leon and Sadie and we will take him upstairs.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Crosses to door*) You will not get Leon and Sadie. Rose Griggs may be President of the gossip club for summer Anglo-Saxons, but Leon is certainly President of the Negro chapter. You will get this, er, out of here before anybody else sees him. (*She crosses back to bed, pulls blanket off NICK*) At least he's dressed. Bring me that cup of coffee. (*SOPHIE brings cup*) Mr. Denery! Sit up! (*NICK moves his head slightly. To SOPHIE*) Hold his head up. (*SOPHIE holds NICK's head; MRS. ELLIS tries to make him drink.*)

NICK: (*Very softly*) Please leave me alone.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Shouting in his ear*) Mr. Denery, listen to me. *You are to get up and get out of here immediately.*

NICK: (*Giving a bewildered look around the room; then he closes his eyes*) Julie.

SOPHIE: He has been speaking of Julie most of the night.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Very sharply*) Shall I wake your wife and see if she can locate Julie for you, or would you rather be cremated here? Get up, Mr. Denery. (*He opens his eyes, shuts them again.*)

SOPHIE: You see how it is? (*She tries to pull her robe from under him.*) Would you get off my robe, Mr. Denery?

MRS. ELLIS: (*Stares at her*) Sophie, you're a damned little ninny. (*Very loudly, to NICK*) Now get up. You have no right to be here. You must get up immediately. I say *you*, you get up. (*Shouting*) Get to your room. Get out of here.

NICK: (*Turns, opens his eyes, half sits up, speaks gently*) Don't scream at me, Mrs. Ellis (*Sees SOPHIE, begins to realize where he is, groans deeply*) I passed out?

SOPHIE: Yes, sir. Most deeply.

MRS. ELLIS: I'm sure after this he won't mind if you don't call him "sir".

NICK: Champagne's always been a lousy drink for me. How did I get down here? (*He turns over.*) I'm sorry, child. What happened?

SOPHIE: You fell asleep.

NICK: (*Hesitantly*) Did I — God, I'm a fool. What did I — Did I do anything or say anything? Tell me, Sophie.

MRS. ELLIS: Please get up and get out of here.

NICK: I'm thirsty. I want a quart of water. Or a bottle of beer. Get me a bottle of cold beer, Sophie, will you?

(*Looks around the bed*) Where'd you sleep? Get me the beer, will you?

MRS. ELLIS: (*Carefully*) Mr. Denery, you are in Sophie's bed, in the living room of a house in a small Southern town where for a hundred and fifty years it has been impossible to take a daily bath without everybody in town advising you not to dry out your skin. You know that as well as I do. Now get up and go out by the side lawn to the boathouse. Put your head under water, or however you usually treat these matters, and come back through the front door for breakfast.

NICK: (*Laughs*) I couldn't eat breakfast.

MRS. ELLIS: I don't find you cute. I find only that you can harm a young girl. Do please understand that.

NICK: Yes, I do. And I'm sorry. (*He sits up, untangling himself from the robe.*) What's this? Oh, Sophie, child, I must have been a nuisance. I am so sorry.

MRS. ELLIS: (*Very loudly*) Get up and get the hell out of here.

(*The door opens and ROSE, carrying her overnight handbag, sticks her head in.*)

ROSE: (*To MRS. ELLIS, who is directly on a line with the door*) You frightened me. I could hear you outside on the lawn, so early. Oh, Nick. How nice you're downstairs. I never expected it — (*Her voice trails off as she sees SOPHIE and realizes NICK is on the bed.*) Oh. (*Giggles, hesitantly*) You look like you just woke up, Nick. I mean, just woke up where you are.

MRS. ELLIS: (*To NICK*) Well, that's that. Perhaps you wanted it this way, Mr. Denery. (*She starts out. as LEON appears carrying the coffee urn. ROSE stands staring at NICK.*)

LEON: (*Very curious, but very hesitant in doorway*) Shall I put it here this morning, like every day, or —

MRS. ELLIS: Who told you, Leon?

LEON: Told me what, Mrs. Ellis? Sadie says take on in the urn —

MRS. ELLIS: I'm not talking about the urn. Who told you about Mr. Denery being here?

LEON: Told me? Why Miss Sophie came in for coffee for them.

MRS. ELLIS: (*After a second, shrugs, points to coffee urn*) Take it into the dining room.

LEON: You want me come back and straighten up, Miss Sophie?

MRS. ELLIS: (*Waves him out*) Mrs. Griggs will be glad to straighten up. (*She exits.*)

ROSE: (*Softly to NICK*) You were here all night? I come back needing your help and advice as I've never before needed anything. And I find you —

NICK: Rose, please stop moving about. You're making me seasick. And would you go outside? I'd like to speak to Sophie.

ROSE: I am waiting for you to explain, Nick. I don't understand.

NICK: There is no need for you to understand.

ROSE: I'm not judging you. I know that there's probably a good explanation — But please tell me, Nick, what happened and then I won't be angry.

NICK: What the hell are you talking about? What's it your business? Now go upstairs, Rose.

ROSE: (*Softly, indignantly*) "Go upstairs, Rose". "What's it your business?" After I work my head off getting the commission of the portrait for you and after I go to the doctor's on your advice, although I never would have gone if I had known, and I come back here and find you this way. (*Sits down*) You've hurt me and you picked a mighty bad day to do it.

(*The door opens and CONSTANCE comes in. She goes to NICK, stands looking at him.*)

CONSTANCE: Nick, I want you to go to that window and look across the street. (*He stares at her. Then he gets up slowly and slowly moves to the window.*) The Carters have three extra guests on their breakfast porch, the Gable sisters are unexpectedly entertaining — (*With feeling*) This house was not built to be stared at.

NICK: (*Gently*) It can't be that bad, Constance.

CONSTANCE: It is just that bad.

NICK: I'm sorry. I was silly and drunk but there's no sense making more out of it than that.

CONSTANCE: I am not making anything out of it. But I know what is being made out of it. In your elegant way of life, I daresay this is an ordinary occurrence. But not in our village. (*The telephone rings. CONSTANCE picks up phone, says "Hello" pauses, "Hello, Mrs. Sims". Then her face becomes angry and she hangs up. She stands looking at the phone, and then takes it off the hook.*)



Turns to NICK) Please explain to me what happened. (*Points to telephone and then across the street*) I only know what they know.

SOPHIE: Mr. Denery came down looking for someone to talk to. He saw me, recited a little poetry, spoke to me of his troubles, tried to embrace me in a most mild fashion. He was uncertain of my name and continued throughout the night to call me Julie although twice he called for Cecile. And fell into so deep a sleep that I could not move him. Alcohol. It is the same in my country, every country.

CONSTANCE: (*Softly, as if it pained her*) You are taking a very light tone about it, Sophie.

SOPHIE: (*Turns away, goes toward couch, and through the next speeches will strip the bed and pile the clothes*) I will speak whichever way you think most fits the drama, Aunt Constance.

CONSTANCE: Will you tell me why you stayed in the room? Why didn't you come and call me, or —

NICK: Oh, look here. It's obvious. The kid didn't want to make any fuss and thought I'd wake up and go any minute. Damn nice of you, Sophie, and I'm grateful.

CONSTANCE: It was the most dangerous "niceness" I've ever heard of. (*SOPHIE looks up, stares at CONSTANCE.*)

NICK: I know it's hard for you, Constance, but it's not all that much.

CONSTANCE: Isn't it? You've looked out of the window. Now go down to the drugstore and listen to them and I think you'll change your mind.

NICK: Look. A foolish guy drinks, passes out —

ROSE: (*Amazed as she turns to look at SOPHIE*) Why look at Sophie. Just as calm as can be. Making the bed. Like it happened to her every night.

CONSTANCE: (*Turns, realizes ROSE is in the room*) What are you doing here, Rose?

ROSE: Sitting here thinking that no man sleeps in a girl's bed unless she gives him to understand — (*CONSTANCE stares at her.*) You can blame Nick all you like. But you know very well that a nice girl would have screamed.

CONSTANCE: How dare you talk this way? Whatever gave you the right — I hope it will be convenient for you to leave today. I will apologize to the General.

ROSE: (*Softly*) That's all right, Constance, I must leave today, in any case. You see, I have to — (*sighs, sincerely*) You won't be mad at me for long when you know the story. Oh, I'm very tired now. Could I have my breakfast in bed? Doctor's orders. (*She goes out, passes CROSSMAN who is coming in. In sepulchral tones*) Good morning, dear Ned. (*Then in a sudden burst*) Have you heard —?

CROSSMAN: (*Cheerful*) Good morning. Yes, I've heard. I'm not the one deaf man in town. (*Passes her. She stares at his back, reluctantly exits.*)

CONSTANCE: (*Turns*) Ned, what should we do?

CROSSMAN: Is there always something that can be done, remedied, patched, pulled apart and put together again? There is nothing to "do", Con. (*Smiles to SOPHIE, amused*) How are you, Sophie?

SOPHIE: I am all right, Mr. Ned.

NICK: Ned, is it as bad as (*Gestures toward window and CONSTANCE*) Constance thinks?

CONSTANCE: What's the difference to you? You're just sitting there telling yourself what provincial people we are and how you wish you were in the Ritz<sup>19</sup> bar with people who would find it amusing with their lunch. (*Very angrily*) You came here as my friend and in our small life — in our terms — you have dishonored my house. It has taken me too many years to find out that you —

CROSSMAN: All right, Con, maybe that's the truth; but what's the good of discussing Nick's character and habits now?

NICK: (*Sincerely, to CONSTANCE*) Whatever you think of me, I didn't want this. I know what it will mean to Sophie and I'll stay here and face anything that will help you. Anything I can say or do —

SOPHIE: (*She finishes folding the clothes.*) What will it "mean" to me, Mr. Ned?

CONSTANCE: (*Softly*) You're old enough to know. And I believe you do know.

SOPHIE: I want to know from Mr. Ned what he thinks.

CROSSMAN: (*To SOPHIE*) I know what you want to know: the Ellis name is a powerful name. They won't be gossiped about out loud. They won't gossip about you and they won't listen to gossip about you. In their own way they'll take care of things. (*Carefully*) You can be quite sure of that. Quite sure.

SOPHIE: (*After a second*) And that is all?

CROSSMAN: That is all.

SOPHIE: (*Softly, carefully*) Thank you, Mr. Ned.

CONSTANCE: Take care of things? She hasn't done anything. Except be stupid. The Tuckerman name is as good as the Ellis name —

CROSSMAN: Yes, yes. Sure enough. (*SOPHIE looks at CROSSMAN, exits. She passes LEON in the hall. He is carrying his hat.*)

LEON: Mrs. Ellis is cutting up about her breakfast. And Sadie's waiting for orders. We're messed this morning, for good.

CONSTANCE: Not at all. Tell Sadie I'm coming. (*She goes toward door.*) What's your hat for, Leon?

LEON: Well, kind of a hot sun today.

CONSTANCE: Not in here. Rest your hat: you'll have plenty of time to gossip when the sun goes down. (*She goes out.*)

NICK: (*Miserably*) Ned. Ned, you understand I never thought it would make all this — Is Constance being — I mean, is she being old-maid fussy or is it really unpleasant —

CROSSMAN: It is unpleasant. She loves the girl, and she's worried for her.

NICK: (*Groans*) If I could do something —

CROSSMAN: You did; but don't make too much of it.

NICK: (*The first kind word he's heard*) Thank you, boy.

CROSSMAN: Or too little. (NICK *groans*.) Nobody will blame you too much. The girl's a foreigner and they don't understand her and therefore don't like her. You're a hometown boy and as such you didn't do anything they wouldn't do. Boys will be boys and in the South there's no age limit on boyishness. Therefore, she led you on, or whatever is this morning's phrase. You'll come off all right. But then I imagine you always do.

NICK: You think this is coming off all right?

CROSSMAN: No, I don't.

NICK: I didn't even want her. Never thought of her that way.

CROSSMAN: (*Too sympathetic*) That is too bad. Better luck next time. You're young — in spirit. (*He exits into hall toward dining room as HILDA, carrying a jewel case, and hat box, comes down the steps. She has on her hat and gloves.*)

NICK: (*Who is sitting on a line with the door and sees her, speaks in German*) Where you going?

HILDA: (*In German*) Good morning, sir. I am taking madame's luggage to the nine-thirty train. (*She moves off as NINA appears. NINA has on a hat and gloves. On her heels is ROSE in a fluffy negligee. ROSE is talking as she follows NINA down the steps.*)

ROSE: I'm not trying to excuse him. Of course it was indiscreet but you're a woman of the world, Nina, and you know what young girls are with a tipsy man. Nina, do believe that I saw them this morning and he didn't have the slightest interest in her. Nina —

NINA: (*Turns to her, very pleasantly*) I know it's eccentric of me, Mrs. Griggs, but I dislike being called by my first name before midnight.

ROSE: (*Hurt, softly*) You shouldn't allow yourself such a nasty snub. I'm only trying to help Nick. I know him well enough to know that he didn't do a thing — (NINA *laughs*.) He's been my good friend. I'm trying to be a friend to him.

NINA: You will have every opportunity.

NICK: (*Very angry*) Will you please not stand there in the hall discussing me?

ROSE: Oh! (*Looks at NICK, then at NINA, steps back into hall, calls toward kitchen*) Leon! Could I have my tray upstairs? (*As she goes past room and upstairs*) Anybody seen my husband this morning? (*Exits*)

NICK: Nina. (*She comes in.*) I just want to say before you go that they're making an awful row about nothing —

NINA: You don't owe me an explanation, Nick.

NICK: Nothing happened, Nina, I swear. Nothing happened.

NINA: Try out phrases like "nothing happened" on women like Mrs. Griggs.

NICK: (*Smiles*) I'm sorry as all hell but they sure are cutting up —

NINA: Well, it is a tasty little story. Particularly for a girl who is going to be married.

NICK: My God, I'd forgotten about the boy, I must say he's an easy boy to forget about. Now I'll have to take *him* out and explain —

NINA: Don't do that, Nick. He isn't a fool.

NICK: (*Looks around, thinking of anything to keep her in the room*) Shall I get you a cup of coffee, darling?

NINA: No. Darling will have it on the train. (*She turns.*)

NICK: Nina, I swear I didn't sleep with her.

NINA: I believe you. The girl doesn't like you.

NICK: Doesn't she? She's been very kind to me. She could have raised hell. That doesn't sound as if she doesn't like me. (*NINA laughs.*) Don't laugh at me this morning. (*After a second*) What can I do for her, Nina?

NINA: You used to send wicker hampers of white roses. With a card saying "White for purity and sad parting".

NICK: Stop being nasty to me. (*Then he smiles and comes toward her.*) Or maybe it's a good sign.

NINA: It isn't. I just say these things by rote. (*Turns*) I don't know how long I'll be in New York, but you can call Horace and he'll take care of the legal stuff for us.

NICK: (*Close to her*) I told you last night that I would agree to the separation because I knew with what justice you wanted to leave me.

NINA: (*Coldly*) That's not at all what you said.

NICK: I was tight. It was what I meant to say —

NINA: (*Very angry*) You're lying. You said just what you meant to say: I was to leave. And not make you sick with my usual begging to come back —

NICK: Stop, Nina. Take any kind of revenge you want, but — please — some other day. (*Leans down, puts his face against her face*) Don't leave me. Don't ever leave me. We've had good times, wild times. They made up for what was bad and they always will. Most people don't get that much. We've only had one trouble; you hate yourself for loving me. Because you have contempt for me.

NINA: For myself. I have no right —

NICK: No, nobody has. No right at all.

NINA: I wouldn't have married you, Nick, if I had known —

NICK: You would have married me. Or somebody like me. You've needed to look down on me, darling. You've needed to make fun of me. And to be ashamed of yourself for doing it.

NINA: (*Softly*) Am I that sick?

NICK: I don't know about such words. You found the man you deserved. That's all. I am no better and no worse

than what you really wanted. You like to — to demean yourself. And so you chose me. You must say I haven't minded much. Because I've always loved you and known we'd last it out. Come back to me, Nina, without shame in wanting to. (*He leans down, kisses her neck.*) Put up with me a little longer, kid. I'm getting older and I'll soon wear down.

NINA: (*She smiles, touched.*) I've never heard you speak of getting old.

NICK: (*Quickly*) Yes. (*Then*) The *Ile*<sup>20</sup> sails next week. Let's get on. We'll have fun. Tell me we're together again and you're happy. Say it, Nina, quick.

NINA: I'm happy. (*He takes her in his arms, kisses her. Then he stands away, looks at her, and smiles shyly.*)

NICK: There'll be no more of what you call my "home-coming". Old friends and all that. They are damned bores, with empty lives.

NINA: Is that so different from us?

NICK: If we could only do something for the kid. Take her with us, get her out of here until they get tired of the gossip —

NINA: (*Laughs*) I don't think we will take her with us.

NICK: (*Laughs*) Now, now. You know what I mean.

NINA: I know what you mean — and we're not taking her with us.

NICK: I suppose there's isn't anything to do. (*Softly, his hand to his head*) I feel sick, Nina.

NINA: You've got a hangover.

NICK: It's more than that. I've got a sore throat and my back aches. Come on, darling, let's get on the train.

NINA: You go. I'll stay and see if there's anything I can do. That's what you really want. Go on, Nicky. Maybe it's best.

NICK: I couldn't do that.

NINA: Don't waste time, darling. You'll miss the train. I'll bring your clothes with me.

NICK: (*Laughs, ruefully*) If you didn't see through me so fast, you wouldn't dislike yourself so much. (*Comes to her*) You're a wonderful girl. It's wonderful of you to take all this on —

NINA: I've had practice —

NICK: (*Hurt*) That's not true. You know this never happened before.

NINA: (*Smiles*) Nicky, it always confuses you that the fifth time something happens it varies slightly from the second and fourth. No, it never happened in this house before. Cora had a husband and Sylvia wanted one. And this isn't

a hotel in Antibes<sup>21</sup>, and Sophie is not a rich Egyptian. And this time you didn't break your arm on a boat deck and it isn't 1928 —

NICK: This is your day, Nina. But pass up the chance to play it too hard, will you? Take me or leave me now but don't —

NINA: You're right. Please go, darling. Your staying won't do any good. Neither will mine, but maybe —

NICK: When will you come? I tell you what: you take the car and drive to Mobile<sup>22</sup>. I'll get off there and wait at the Battle House<sup>23</sup>. Then we can drive the rest of the way together. Must be somewhere in Mobile I can waste time for a few hours —

NINA: (*Gaily*) I'm sure. But let's have a week's rest. Now go on.

NICK: (*Takes her in his arms*) I love you, Nina. And we'll have the best time of our lives. Good luck, darling. And thank you. (*He kisses her.*) They won't rag you, nobody ever does. We'll get the bridal suite on the *Ile* and have all our meals in bed. (*He moves away.*) If you possibly can, bring the new portrait with you. I can finish it now. And try to get me the old portrait, darling. Maybe Constance will sell it to you — (*NINA laughs.*) All right. Think what you want and I'll be what I am. I love you and you love me and that's that and always will be. (*He exits. She stands quietly.*)

NINA: You love me and I love you and that's that and always will be. (*Then she turns, goes to the bell cord, pulls it. After a second, CONSTANCE appears in the hall. NINA does not turn.*) Leon, could I have breakfast on the porch?

CONSTANCE: (*In the doorway. She is carrying a tray.*) Yes, of course. I'll tell Leon to bring it. (*NINA turns, stares at her.*)

NINA: I am very sorry, Constance.

CONSTANCE: I am sorry, too, my dear.

NINA: I don't know what else to say. I wish —

CONSTANCE: There's nothing for us to say. (*There is an awkward pause.*) Well. I'll tell Leon. Old lady Ellis is having her second breakfast. She always does on her last day. I don't know why. (*She starts out as CARRIE, followed by FREDERICK, comes down the steps. CARRIE has on her hat, etc., as if she were ready for traveling. FREDERICK is carrying two valises.*) Shall I send breakfast up to Nick?

NINA: (*Very quickly*) No, no. I'll just have mine and —

FREDERICK: (*Calling to CONSTANCE*) Where's Sophie?

CONSTANCE: I'll send her in.

FREDERICK: (*Smiles*) Don't sound so solemn, Miss Constance.

CONSTANCE: (*Sharply*) I didn't mean to. (*She disappears in the direction of the dining room. FREDERICK and CARRIE come into the room.*)

NINA: Mr. Ellis, I should be carrying a sign that says my husband is deeply sorry and so am I. (*He smiles at her. She turns, goes out on the porch, closes the door behind her.*)

CARRIE: (*Hesitantly*) She's nice woman, I think. Must be a hard life for her.

FREDERICK: (*Laughs*) I don't think so. (*Turns as he hears SOPHIE in the hall*) Now remember, Mother. (*SOPHIE appears in the door. FREDERICK goes to her, takes her chin in his hand, kisses her.*) I want to tell you something fast. I don't know how to explain it but I'm kind of glad this foolishness happened. It makes you seem closer to me, some silly way. You must believe that, although I can't make it clear. Now there are two things to do right away. Your choice.

SOPHIE: I have made bad gossip for you, Frederick. We must speak about that. Right away.

FREDERICK: There's no need to speak about it again. It's a comic story and that's all. And you must begin to laugh about it.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) I did laugh but nobody would laugh with me. And nobody will laugh in New Orleans, either. Is that not so, Mrs. Ellis?

CARRIE: I think you should travel up with us, Sophie. Right now. Whatever is to be faced, we will do much better if we face it all together and do it quickly.

FREDERICK: (*Looks at her, as if they had had previous talk*) You're putting it much too importantly. There's nothing to be faced.

CARRIE: I didn't mean to make it too important. Of course, it isn't —

SOPHIE: (*Puts her hand on his arm*) It is important to you. And you must not be kind and pretend that —

FREDERICK: (*Firmly*) I'm not being kind. I told you the truth. I've been in trouble, now you've been in a little. That's all, now or ever, (*Shyly*) As far as I'm concerned, it makes us seem less like strangers. I'd hope you'd feel the same way —

CARRIE: (*Quickly*) Run and pack a bag, Sophie. It's a lovely day for driving and we'll be in town for lunch. I think you and I will have it at the club — Now let's not talk about it any more —

SOPHIE: No. It would be most mistaken of me to come now. My leaving here would seem as if I must be ashamed and you shamed for me. I must not come with you today. I must stay here. (*Smiles*) It must be faced.

FREDERICK: All right. That makes sense. Mother and Grandma will drive up and I'll stay here —

SOPHIE: (*Very quickly*) No, no. You must not stay here. (*Points to window, meaning town*) They know you had made plans to leave today as usual. And so you must leave. We must act as if nothing had happened, and if we do that, and are not worried, it will all end more quickly. (*Goes to FREDERICK*) Believe me, Frederick. You know what I say is true. All must seem to be as it has been. (*To MRS. ELLIS*) You tell him that, please, Mrs. Ellis.

CARRIE: I don't know. You belong with us now, Sophie. We don't want to leave you, or Constance. I think she should come along and —

SOPHIE: Oh, she would not do that. You know she would not. (*Smiles, very cheerful*) Now. You are both very kind. But you know what I say is best for us all, and of no importance whether I come one week or the next. (*Takes FREDERICK'S arm*) You have said I must laugh about it. I do laugh, and so it will be nothing for me to stay. (*MRS. ELLIS comes to the door from the direction of the dining room.*)

CARRIE: Good-bye, Sophie. We will be waiting of you. (*She exits, passing MRS. ELLIS without speaking.*)

FREDERICK: (*Unhappily*) You all seem to know that's right, what's best, so much faster than I do. I —

SOPHIE: (*Smiles, puts her hand over his mouth*) This is best. Please.

FREDERICK: Then let us come back this week end. Can I do that?

SOPHIE: (*She touches his face.*) I think so. You are a nice man, Frederick.

FREDERICK: (*Kisses her*) And you're a nice girl to think so. See you in a few days. (*Turns to go out, passes MRS. ELLIS*) I feel happy, Grandma. (*MRS. ELLIS nods, waits for him to exit. SOPHIE sits down.*)

MRS. ELLIS: (*After a second*) Sophie.

SOPHIE: (*Smiles as if she knew what was coming*) Yes.

MRS. ELLIS: Did Carrie ask you to leave with us? (*SOPHIE nods.*) Ah. That's not good. When Carrie gets smart she gets very smart. Sophie, Frederick meant what he said to you. But I know them both and I would guess that in a week, or two or three, he will agree to go to Europe with his mother and he will tell you that it is only a postponement. And he will believe what he says. Time and decisions melt and merge for him and ten years from now he will be convinced that you refused to marry him. And he will always be a little sad about what could have been.

SOPHIE: Yes. Of course.

MRS. ELLIS: Carrie never will want him to marry. And she will never know it. Well, she, too, got cheated a long time ago. There is very little I can do — perhaps very little I want to do any more. Don't judge him too harshly, child. SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) No, I will not judge. I will write a letter to him.

MRS. ELLIS: That's my girl. Don't take from us what you don't have to take, or waste yourself on defeat. (*She gets up.*) Oh, Sophie, feel sorry for Frederick. He is nice and he is nothing. And his father before him and my other sons. And myself. Another way. Well. If there is ever a chance, come and see me. (*She moves out. SOPHIE remains seated. After a second CONSTANCE comes in from the hall. She looks at SOPHIE.*)

CONSTANCE: (*Hesitantly*) Carrie tells me you'll be going up to town in a few weeks to stay with them. I'm glad. (*No answer*) Er. Why don't you go up to my room, dear, and lie down for a while? (*Points to porch*) She's on the porch. I'm going to ask the Denerys to leave today. I am sure they will want to, anyway. And the Griggses will be going and then just you and I —



SOPHIE: I will not be going to New Orleans, Aunt Constance, and there will be no marriage between Frederick and me.

CONSTANCE: (*Stares at her*) But Carrie told me —

SOPHIE: Now she believes that she wants to. But it will not be so.

CONSTANCE: (*After a second*) I wish I could say I was surprised or angry. But I'm not sorry. No marriage without love —

SOPHIE: (*Pleasantly*) Yes. Yes.

CONSTANCE: (*Gently*) You're not to feel bad or hurt.

SOPHIE: I do not.

CONSTANCE: I'm — I'm glad. Mighty glad. Everything will work out for the best. You'll see. After everybody goes, we'll get the house and the accounts cleaned up and straightened out as usual. (*Gaily*) And then I think you and I will take a little trip. I haven't seen Memphis<sup>24</sup> in years and maybe in a few months — (*Gently*) You know what? We can even sell, rent, the place, if we want to. We can pick up and go anywhere we want. You'll see, dear. We'll have a nice time.

SOPHIE: (*Almost as if she were speaking to a child*) Yes, Aunt Constance.

(CONSTANCE goes out. SOPHIE turns to watch LEON, who, during CONSTANCE'S speech, has come out on the porch and is serving breakfast to NINA. SOPHIE rises and goes out to the porch. She takes the coffee pot from LEON — he has just finished, placing the other dishes — nods to him, and pours NINA's coffee. LEON exits. NINA turns, sees SOPHIE, turns back.)

SOPHIE: You are a pretty woman, Mrs. Denery, when your face is happy.

NINA: And you think my face is happy this morning?

SOPHIE: Oh, yes. You and Mr. Denery have had a nice reconciliation.

NINA: (*Stares at her*) Er. Yes, I suppose so.

SOPHIE: I am glad for you. This is as it has been and will always be. (*She sits down.*) Now could I speak with you and Mr. Denery?

NINA: (*Uncomfortably*) Sophie, if there was anything I can do — Er. Nick isn't here. I thought it best for us all —

SOPHIE: (*Softly*) Ah. Ah, my aunt will be most sad.

NINA: Sophie, there's no good my telling you how sorry, how — What can I do?

SOPHIE: You can give me five thousand dollars, Mrs. Denery. American dollars, of course. (*Demurely; her accent from now on grows more pronounced*) I have been subjected to the most degrading experience from which no young girl easily recovers. (*In French*) A most degrading experience from which no girl easily recovers —

NINA: (*Stares at her*) It sounds exactly the same in French.

SOPHIE: Somehow sex and money are simpler in French. Well. In English, then, I have lost or will lose my most beloved fiancé; I cannot return to school

and the comrades with whom my life has been so happy; my aunt is uncomfortable and unhappy in the only life she knows and is now burdened with me for many years to come. I am utterly, utterly miserable, Mrs. Denery. I am ruined. (NINA bursts out laughing. SOPHIE smiles.) Please do not laugh at me.

NINA: I suppose I should be grateful to you for making a joke of it.

SOPHIE: You make a mistake. I am most serious.

NINA: (*Stops laughing*) Are you? Sophie, it is an unpleasant and foolish incident and I don't wish to minimize it. But don't you feel you're adding considerable drama to it?

SOPHIE: No, ma'am. I did not say that is the way I thought of it. But that is the way it will be considered in this place, in this life. Little is made into very much here.

NINA: It's just the same in your country.

SOPHIE: No, Mrs. Denery. You mean it is the same in Brussels or Strasbourg or Paris, with those whom you would meet. In my class, in my town, it is not so. In a poor house if a man falls asleep drunk — and certainly it happens with us each Saturday night — he is not alone with an innocent young girl because the young girl, at my age, is not so innocent and because her family is in the same room, not having any other place to go. It arranges itself differently; you have more rooms and therefore more troubles.

NINA: Yes. I understand the lecture. (*Pauses*) Why do you want five thousand dollars, Sophie?

SOPHIE: I wish to go home.

NINA: (*Gently*) Then I will be happy to give it to you. Happier than you know to think we can do something.

SOPHIE: Yes. I am sure. But I will not accept it largesse — to make you happy. We will call it a loan, come by through blackmail. One does not have to be grateful for blackmail money, nor think of oneself as a charity girl.

NINA: (*After a second*) Blackmail money?

SOPHIE: Yes ma'am. You will give me five thousand dollars because if you do not I will say that Mr. Denery seduced me last night. (NINA stares at her, laughs.) You are gay this morning, madame.

NINA: (*Shocked*) Sophie, Sophie. What a child you are. It's not necessary to talk this way.

SOPHIE: I Wish to prevent you from giving favors to me.

NINA: I intended no favors and I don't like this kind of talk. Nick did not seduce you and I want no more jokes about it. (*Pleasantly*) Suppose we try to be friends —

SOPHIE: I am not joking, Mrs. Denery. And I do not wish us to be friends.

NINA: (*Gets up*) I would like to give you the money. And I will give it to you for that reason and no other.

SOPHIE: It does not matter to me what you would like. You will give it to me for my reason — or I will not take it. (*Angrily, NINA goes toward door, goes into the room, then turns and smiles at SOPHIE.*)

NINA: You are serious? Just for a word, a way of calling something, you would hurt my husband and me?

SOPHIE: For me it is more than a way of calling something.

NINA: You're 'a tough little girl.

SOPHIE: Don't you think people often say other people are tough when they do not know how to cheat them?

NINA: (*Angrily*) I was not trying to cheat you of anything —

SOPHIE: Yes, you were. You wish to be the kind lady who most honorably stays to discharge — within reason — her obligations. And who goes off, as she has gone off many other times, to make the reconciliation with her husband. How would you and Mr. Denery go on living without such incidents as me? I have been able to give you a second, or a twentieth, honeymoon.

NINA: (*Angrily*) Is that speech made before you raise your price?

SOPHIE: (*Smiles*) No. A blackmail bargain is still a bargain. (*CROSSMAN appears in the hall, SOPHIE sees him.*)

NINA: How would — How should we make the arrangements?

SOPHIE: (*Calling*) Mr. Ned. (*Pleasantly, to NINA*) Mr. Ned will know what to do.

NINA: (*After a second to CROSSMAN*) I'd like to get a check cashed. It's rather a large check. Could you vouch for me at the bank?

CROSSMAN: Sure. That's easy enough. The bank's just around the corner.

SOPHIE: Would you like me to come with you, Mrs. Denery?

NINA: (*Smiles*) You know, I think perhaps it's wisest for you to stay right here. You and I in a bank, cashing a check, this morning, could well be interpreted as a pay-off or blackmail. (*She goes out.*)

SOPHIE: I will be going home, Mr. Ned.

CROSSMAN: (*Smiles*) Good. (*Looks at her, turns to stare at NINA, as she passes him and goes into hall*) At least I hope it's good.

SOPHIE: I think it is more good than it is not good. (*He goes out.*)

(*ROSE comes down the steps. Her manner is hurried, nervous. She goes immediately to windows. She looks as if she saw somebody coming. Then she turns and sees SOPHIE.*)

ROSE: (*Very nervous*) Oh. Good morning, Sophie.

SOPHIE: We have seen each other earlier this morning, Mrs. Griggs.

ROSE: Oh, it's like a nightmare to me, as if a year had gone by. I've asked for my breakfast tray twice and nobody pays any attention. And the doctor says that's the way it *must* be.

SOPHIE: (*Exiting*) I will get it for you.

ROSE: (*Back at the window, speaks to SOPHIE who has left the room*) Not you, Sophie. You have your own troubles, God knows. I don't know how any, of us can eat anything today. (GRIGGS, *in riding pants and old shirt, comes in through the windows. Because she is upstage of the windows, he does not see her until she speaks.*) I've been looking everywhere for you, Ben.

GRIGGS: (*Turns*) Rose. You knew where I was.

ROSE: That was all we needed here today: a telephone call to the stables. Oh, Ben, it was I who found them. But you don't know about it —

GRIGGS: I've heard all about it.

ROSE: Terrible, isn't it?

GRIGGS: Not very.

ROSE: He's been a disappointment to me. I've been lying on the bed thinking about it. Nick Denery, I mean.

GRIGGS: I'm sorry.

ROSE: You know, Ben, I've just about come to the conclusion that I'm often wrong about people, mostly men.

GRIGGS: And what did you and Henry — ah — put together, Rose?

ROSE: It was so hot in town. Henry's got that wonderful air conditioning, of course, but it's never like your own air. I think Sunday's the hottest day of the year, anyway. Athalia's braces cost twenty-five hundred dollars at that Greek dentist's and believe me they don't make anybody look prettier —

GRIGGS: What point did you come to about my decision?

ROSE: Decision? Your decision —

GRIGGS: (*Tensely*) Please, stop playing the fool. I'm afraid of you when you start playing that game.

ROSE: *You* afraid of me?

GRIGGS: Yes, me afraid of you. This very minute. Be kind, Rose, and tell me what has been decided for me.

ROSE: (*Softly, very nervous*) It wasn't like that. Before I saw Henry I went to see Dr. Wills. You know he won't ever see patients on Sunday.

GRIGGS: Not unless the fee is over a hundred.

ROSE: I've always been sorry you didn't like Howard Wills. He's known as the best man in the South, Ben. He gave up a beach picnic with that woman, you know. Only that famous a man could buck having an open mistress —

GRIGGS: I don't want to hear about Wills. Come to the point. What did you and Henry —

ROSE: (*Grows sober, recognizing the tone*) I've been uneasy. I've sometimes been in pain, all summer. But I guess I've known since that army doctor in 1934 — I didn't want to talk about it — (*Moves toward him, frightened*) I have bad heart trouble, Ben.

GRIGGS: (*After a second, as if he were sick*) Don't play that trick, Rose. It's just too ugly.

ROSE: I am not playing a trick. Wills wrote you a letter about it. (*She reaches in the pocket of her robe, hands him a folded paper. He takes it from her, reads it.*)

GRIGGS: (*Violently*) How much did Henry pay Wills for this?

ROSE: (*Gently, seriously*) It wasn't bought. Even Henry couldn't buy it. (*She turns, goes toward door, as if she were a dignified woman.*)

GRIGGS: (*Softly*) Tell me about it.

ROSE: There's isn't much to tell. I've known some of it for years, and so have you. I just didn't know it was this bad, or didn't want to. Wills says I must lead a — well, a very different life. I'll have to go to the country somewhere and rest most of the day — not climb steps or go to parties or even see people much. I like people, I — Well, I just don't understand what I can do, except sit in the sun, and I hate sun — Oh, I don't know. He said worse than I am saying — I can't say it —

GRIGGS: Yes. (*After a second*) I'm sorry.

ROSE: I know you are. You've been my good friend. I'm frightened, Ben. I play the fool, but I'm not so big a fool that I don't know I haven't got anybody to help me. I pretend about the boys and what they're like but I know just as well as you do that they're not very kind men and won't want me and won't come to help me. (*With feeling*) And of course I know about Henry — I always have. I've got nobody and I'm not young and I'm scared. Awful scared.

GRIGGS: You don't have to be.

ROSE: (*Who is crying, very quietly*) Wills says that if I take good care I might be, probably will be, in fine shape at the end of the year. Please stay with me this year, just this year. I will swear a solemn oath — believe me I'm telling the truth now — I will give you a divorce at the end of the year without another word. I'll go and do it without any fuss, any talk. But please help me now. I'm so scared. Help me, please. One year's a lot to ask, I know, but — (*GRIGGS comes to her, presses her arm.*)

GRIGGS: Of course. Of course. Now don't let's speak of it again and we'll do what has to be done.

(*She turns, goes out. He stands where he is. A minute later, GROSSMAN comes in, stares at GRIGGS as if he knew something was wrong. Then he speaks casually.*)

CROSSMAN: Seen Sophie?

GRIGGS: (*As if it were an effort, idly*) In the kitchen, I guess. Tough break for the kid, isn't it?

CROSSMAN: Perhaps it isn't. I don't know. (*He watches as GRIGGS takes out a cigarette and lights it. GRIGGS's hands are shaking and as he puts out the match, he stares at them.*)

GRIGGS: (*Smiles*) My hands are shaking.

CROSSMAN: What's the matter?

GRIGGS: Worst disease of all. I'm all gone. I've just looked and there's no Benjamin

CROSSMAN: (*After a second*) Oh, that. And you've just found that out?

GRIGGS: Just today. Just now.

GROSSMAN: My God, you're young.

GRIGGS: (*Laughs*) I guess I was. (*Slowly, carefully*) So at any given moment you're only the sum of your life up to then. There are no big moments you can reach unless you've a pile of smaller moments to stand on. That big hour of decision, the turning point in your life, the someday you've counted on when you'd suddenly wipe out your past mistakes, do the work you'd never done, think the way you'd never thought, have what you'd never had — it just doesn't come suddenly. You've trained yourself for it while you waited — or you've let it all run past you and frittered yourself away. (*Shakes his head*) I've frittered myself away, Grossman.

CROSSMAN: Most people like us.

GRIGGS: That's no good to me. Most people like us haven't done anything to themselves; they've let it be done to them. I had no right to let it be done to me, but I let it be done. What consolation can I find in not having made myself any more useless than an Ellis, a Denery, a Tuckerman, a —

CROSSMAN: Say it. I won't mind. Or a Crossman.

GRIGGS: The difference is you've meant to fritter yourself away.

CROSSMAN: And does that make it better?

GRIGGS: Better? Worse? All I know is it makes it different. Rose is a sick woman. But you know I'm not talking only about Rose and me, don't you?

CROSSMAN: I know.

GRIGGS: (*Very slowly*) I am not any too sure I didn't partly welcome the medical opinion that made it easier for me to give up. (*Then in a low voice as if to himself*) And I don't like Rose. And I'll live to like her less. (*He starts toward door, CONSTANCE appears in the hall carrying a tray. She is followed by SOPHIE who is carrying a carpet sweeper and a basket filled with cleaning rags, etc. CONSTANCE comes to the door. She speaks wearily.*)

CONSTANCE: (*To GRIGGS*) Sorry about Rose's breakfast. I forgot it. Sophie is going to help Rose to get packed. I don't mean to sound inhospitable but since you were going tomorrow, anyway — (*Gently*) I'm just tired and it would be easier for us. Please forgive me but you're an old friend and you will understand.

GRIGGS: (*Smiles, pats her arm*) I'll take the tray. (*He takes it from her, goes up the steps. CONSTANCE comes in the room, sighs, sits down.*)

GROSSMAN: Sophie. (*SOPHIE comes to him.*) I was asked to give you this. (*He hands her an envelope.*)

SOPHIE: Thank you, Mr. Ned.

CONSTANCE: (*Idly, without much interest.*) Secrets?

CROSSMAN: That's right. Secrets. Old love letters or something.

(SOPHIE *laughs, goes out.*)

CONSTANCE: (*After a silence*) I hate this house today.

CROSSMAN: Well, they'll all be gone soon.

CONSTANCE: You won't go? Please.

CROSSMAN: I'll stay for a few days if you'd like me to.

CONSTANCE: Oh, yes. I need you to stay.

CROSSMAN: (*Points out of window*) Don't worry about what the town thinks. Just act as if nothing had happened and they'll soon stop talking.

CONSTANCE: Oh, I'm not worrying about that. (*Pauses*) I feel so lost, Ned. As if I distrusted myself, didn't have anything to stand on. I mean, right now, if you asked me, I just wouldn't know what I thought or believed, or ever had, or — (*Shyly*) Well, what *have* I built my life on? Do you know what I mean?

CROSSMAN: Sure. I know.

CONSTANCE: (*As if she had trouble with the words*) It's — it's so painful. (*Then as if she wished to change the subject quickly*) Sophie will be going back to Europe. She just told me. She *wants* to go. Did you know that?

CROSSMAN: Is that so?

CONSTANCE: I was so sure I was doing the right thing, bringing her here. You see? That's part of what I mean by not knowing the things I thought I knew. Well. She wants me to come with her and live with them, but I told her I'd be no happier in a new life than she was. (*Pauses as if she were coming to something that frightens her*) Nick said you wouldn't be coming here next summer. Did you say anything like that, or was it one of Nick's lies? (*He does not answer her. She stares at him.*) Why, Ned?

CROSSMAN: Hasn't anything to do with you, Con. Just think I'd be better off. You know, it's kind of foolish — two weeks a year — coming back here and living a life that isn't me anymore. (*Laughs*) It's too respectable for me, Con. I ain't up to it anymore.

CONSTANCE: Oh. It's what I look forward to every summer. What will I — (*Very quickly*) Where is Nick? I haven't seen him. I wish they'd leave —

CROSSMAN: They've gone.

CONSTANCE: (*Stares at him*) Without a word to me? Exactly the way he left years ago. I didn't ever tell you that, did I? We had a date for dinner. He didn't come. He just got on the boat. I didn't ever tell anybody before. (*Violently*) What a fool. All these years of making a shabby man into the kind of hero who would come back some day all happy and shining —

CROSSMAN: Oh, don't do that. He never asked you to make him what he wasn't. Or to wait twenty years to find him out.

CONSTANCE: No, he didn't. That's true. (*She rises, goes to the portrait and stands staring at it.*) Do I look like this?

CROSSMAN: You look nice.

CONSTANCE: Come and look at it.

CROSSMAN: No, I don't want to.

CONSTANCE: Much older than I thought or — And I don't look very bright. (*Puts the picture away from her*) Well, I haven't been very bright. I want to say something to you. I can't wait any longer. Would you forgive me?

CROSSMAN: Forgive you? For what?

CONSTANCE: For wasting all these years. For not knowing what I felt about you, or not wanting to. Ned, would you have me now?

CROSSMAN: (*After a second*) What did you say?

CONSTANCE: Would you marry me? (*There is a pause. Then SOPHIE comes from the direction of the dining room carrying a carpet sweeper and a cleaning basket. As she goes up the steps she is singing a cheerful French song. CONSTANCE smiles.*) She's happy. That's good. I think she'll come out all right, always.

CROSSMAN: (*Stares at CONSTANCE, then slowly, carefully*) I live in a room and I go to work and I play a game called getting through the day while you wait for night. The night's for me — just me — and I can do anything with it I want. There used to be a lot of things to do with it, good things, but now there's a bar and another bar and the same people in each bar. When I've had enough I go back to my room — or somebody else's room — and that never means much one way or the other. A few years ago I'd have weeks of reading — night after night — just me. But I don't do that much anymore. Just read, all night long. You can feel good that way.

CONSTANCE: I never did that. I'm not a reader.

CROSSMAN: (*As if he hadn't heard her*) And a few years ago I'd go on the wagon twice a year. Now I don't do that anymore. And I don't care. (*Smiles*) And all these years I told myself that if you'd loved me everything would have been different. I'd have had a good life, been worth something to myself. I wanted to tell myself that. I wanted to believe it. Griggs was right. I not only wasted myself, but I wanted it that way. All my life I guess, I wanted it that way.

CONSTANCE: And you're not in love with me, Ned?

CROSSMAN: No, Con. Not now.

CONSTANCE: (*Gets up, goes to him*) Let's have a nice dinner together, just you and me, and go to the movies. Could we do that?

CROSSMAN: I've kept myself busy looking into other people's hearts so I wouldn't have to look into my own. (*Softly*) If I made you think I was still in love, I'm sorry. Sorry I fooled you and sorry I fooled myself. And I've never liked liars — least of all those who lie to themselves.

CONSTANCE: Never mind. Most of us lie to ourselves, darling, most of us.

CURTAIN



## QUESTIONS AND TASKS FOR HOMEWORK

### THE AUTUMN GARDEN BY LILLIAN HELLMAN

born Jun. 20, 1905, New Orleans, U.S.

died Jun. 30, 1984, Martha's Vineyard, U.S.

In full *Lillian Florence Hellman*, an American play write, the author of a string of plays, among which *The Little Foxes* (1939), *Watch On The Rhine* (1941), *Another Part of the Forest* (1946), *The Autumn Garden* (1951) spreading strong antifascist and left-wing message, and autobiographical *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973) and *Scoundrel Time* (1978).

### I. The author's biography and her work

- Read L. Hellmann's biography and speak on the impact of the author's life on the spirit of her play.

Hellman is somewhat out of fashion these days. A brief survey of new and used bookshops in our home town turned up a single (tatty) second hand copy of *Pentimento* — a tie in with Fred Zinnemann's 1977 screen adaptation *Julia* (an autobiographical film). Inside the front cover someone had scribbled that 'the film stinks because of what they left out. A quick flick to the appropriate page showed the word 'communist' underscored several times. And this reveals the real reason for her unfashionable status. Hellman was a heavyweight dramatist who wrote about serious issues and at a time when the musical has monopolized much theatre space such work struggles to find an audience. Interest in Hellman's life, however, is quite considerable.

She was born on June 20th, 1905 in New Orleans and although moving to New York at the age of five, she frequently returned to the South which later emerged as a setting for *The Little Foxes*. She spent time at New York State (where she first read Marx etc) and Columbia University and after her studies were completed she worked in publishing — first writing advertising copy and later as a play reader. In 1925 she met and married Arthur Kober a writer and editor who took her to France and published some of her work. She also wrote for the Herald Tribune at this time. In 1929 they moved to Hollywood where Arthur had been employed by Paramount. By this time she was unhappy with her marriage, Hellman and Kober were divorced in 1931.

Her first *The Great Drumsheugh Case* promised to make a good scenario for a play — the true story of a scandal at a Scottish boarding school where a malicious pupil accused two teachers of having a lesbian affair. The play opened in November 1934 to great acclaim.

Her next play *Days To Come* (1936), which dealt with a strike at a brush factory, was a flop and only played for seven performances.

In 1937 she visited Europe attending a theatre festival in Moscow and accompanying Hemingway for a first hand view of the Spanish Civil War.

On her return she immediately got down to work on a new play: *The Little Foxes*, the story of an avaricious family scheming and plotting for power in a Southern town. The play opened in Baltimore in February 1939 and on its move to New York was huge success. In May of that year with the royalties from her plays she bought Hardscrabble Farm in Pleasantville, New York which served her as a retreat for many years to come.

Her next play *Watch On The Rhine* dealt with the treatment of an anti-fascist on American soil. It was produced in 1941 and was an attempt to portray the seriousness of the European war to a nation, which had not yet entered the fray. It was another success.

Her next production *The Searching Wind* (1944) also carried a strong anti-fascist message. Later that year Hellman was asked by Washington to visit Moscow where two of her plays were being produced. She stayed on and spent two weeks on the Eastern Front doing research for a magazine article.

In 1946 she completed a 'prequel' to *The Little Foxes*. Set earlier, *Another Part of the Forest*, used the same characters as they competed with each other for power.

In 1948 she returned to Europe where she interviewed Marshall Tito in Belgrade. Whilst in Paris she was taken by a staging of Nicholas Ruble's *Montserrat* and on her return to New York she began a translation, Hellman directed the production herself, which opened in the autumn of 1949 but it was too wordy and philosophical for an American audience and failed to impress audiences.

For her next production she returned to the fertile ground of the South, *The Autumn Garden* features a group of characters pondering their disappointing lives from a boarding house. The play opened in spring 1951 and was a hit.

The 1950's were a turbulent time. In 1952 she was forced to appear before Senator Joseph McCarthy's House Un-American Activities Committee and landed with an unexpected tax bill. With no other resources at her disposal she was forced to sell Hardscrabble Farm — a bitter blow. Living with malicious slander was a major theme of *The Children's Hour* and so it seemed entirely contemporary to revive the production and the proceeds helped Hellman settle in New York.

In 1954 Hellman set to work on another translation *The Lark* (adapted from *L'Alouette* by Jean Anouilh), another success which enabled her to purchase some property in Martha's Vineyard. In 1956 on the heels of the success of *The Lark* Hellman started work on a musical version of Voltaire's *Candide*.

By 1959 almost a decade had passed without Hellman writing an original work when *Toys in the Attic* appeared, the story of a man struggling to become successful. Only when he gets there the people who helped him don't like him any more.

In her later years Hellman concentrated on her three volumes of Autobiography, *An Unfinished Woman* (1969), *Pentimento* (1973) and *Scoundrel Time* (1978) which dealt with the McCarthy era.

She died on 30th June 1984 of a heart attack at Martha's Vineyard.

## II. Vocabulary study of selected words and phrases

- Find in the text of the play sentences containing the following phrases and translate them into Ukrainian. Remembering the phrases and their Ukrainian equivalents, use them further to discuss the characters.

to discuss family matters in public (p. 7); to be cornered (p. 8); to pull smb. about (p. 9); to boss smb. about (p. 12); to proofread (p. 10); to speak for oneself (p. 11); to be sharp with smb. (p. 11); to be preoccupied with smth. (p. 22); to change one's mind (p. 24); to take a sleeping pill (p. 25); to be homesick (p. 27); to be one's dish of tea (p. 29); to speak out (p. 27); to pour one's heart out (p. 30); to have a heart murmur (p. 32); to malign smb. (p. 39); to confide in smb. (p. 41); to be a trial (p. 48); an ordinary occurrence (p. 56); to look down on smb. (p. 61); to play the fool (p. 69); to judge smb. too harshly (p. 64).

- Explain in your own words the meaning of the following passages from the play:

a) Act I, Scene One, p. 6:

FREDERICK: (*Pleasantly*) Terrible expression, Mrs Griggs: my intended. Sounds like my indentured.

b) Act I, Scene One, p. 14:

GRIGGS: (*Sharply*) No. No, we're not going to do that. You're turning it into a pleasure, Rose —

c) Act I, Scene One, p. 15:

GRIGGS: (*As he turns to go*) All professional soldiers marry Rose. It's in the Army Manual.

d) Act II, Scene One, p. 29:

MRS ELLIS: ...You would never have been my dish of tea, and isn't that a silly way of saying it?

e) Act II, Scene One, p. 34:

NINA: I can smell it: it's all around us. The flower-like odor right before it becomes troublesome and heavy. It travels ahead of you, Nick, whenever you get most helpful, most loving and most lovable.

f) Act II, Scene Two, p. 42:

MRS ELLIS: (*Shakes his hand off her shoulder*) And you're a toucher: you constantly touch people or lean on them. Little moments of sensuality. One should have sensuality whole or not at all. Don't you find pecking at it un-

gratifying? There are many of you: the touchers and the leaners. All since the depression, is my theory.

g) Act III, p. 66:

SOPHIE: ...I did not say that is the way I thought of it. But that is the way it will be considered in this place, in this life. Little is made into very much here.

3. Translate into Ukrainian the conversation about financial arrangements between Sophie and Nina Denery from Act III. Start with: "NINA: Yes, I understand the lecture.:" (p. 66). End with: "SOPHIE: I will be going home " (p. 67).
4. Try and answer the following 'tricky' questions:
  - 1) What color of skin did Leon have?
  - 2) How much and for what services did Mrs Ellis pay Sophie? (A dollar an hour for reading Odysseus.)
  - 3) What game was Constance playing at the beginning of Scene Two of the second act? Who was Rose's lover? Grigg's cousin, Ralph Sommers
  - 4) How old was Nick when he painted Constance's portrait
  - 5) Did Nick confuse Mozart's music with Haydn or Beethoven's on the phonograph?
  - 6) How old was Sophie when she came to the U.S.?
  - 7) How many love affairs or scandals with Nick did Nina recollect?
  - 8) What was the name of Rosa's influential brother?
  - 9) Did General Griggs fight in the Pacific?
5. Recollect and reproduce the situations in which the following were used. Say, who these phrases belong to and what episode or circumstances of the plot they refer to.
  - 1) ...After; several summers I have come to the conclusion that your wife considers it vulgar to mention anything by name (p. 5).
  - 2) ...Sometimes I think no people are quite so moral about money as those who clip coupons for a living (p. 7).
  - 3) I started with mathematics. Seems strange now, but that's why I went to West Point — wonderful mathematics department. So I got myself two wars instead (p. 15)
  - 4) You've been so busy cultivating a pseudo-stupidity (p. 26).
  - 5) I'll come back, and you can take up my life again (p. 37).
  - 6) ...You have dishonored my house (p. 58).
  - 7) They are damned bores, with empty lives (p. 61).

### III. Character Sketches

#### General Griggs

1. Give a brief sketch of General Griggs' distinguished military career, his glorious war-record. Was it a sort of life he wanted for himself? Explain how his youth's ambitions came into conflict with reality.
2. Does he seem content and satisfied with his present existence? What makes, him want a divorce so desperately? What are the chances of his getting it?

#### Rose Griggs

Sum up Rose Griggs. In what way may she be called typical? What makes her cling to her husband? She is unmovable in her refusal to give him a divorce, isn't she? Is it love or selfishness that motivates her refusal?

#### Frederick Ellis

1. How did the fact that his whole life is domineered over by two strong possessive women his mother and his grandmother, tell upon Frederick's personality?
2. Do you think Old Mrs Ellis is right when she says to Sophie: Oh, Sophie, feel sorry for Frederick. He is nice and he is nothing (p. 64).
3. What are Frederick's reasons for wanting to marry Sophie? Is it a case of passionate romantic love?

#### Carrie Ellis and Old Mrs Ellis

1. Do you think Carrie Ellis behaves like a wise mother watching and dictating her son's every move? (Supply illustrations from the play). Has she got any other interests in life but her son? To what extent can Carrie's devotion to Frederick be characterized as selfish? How does she earn her living?
2. Why does Carrie consider Sophie to be a desirable daughter-in-law at the beginning of the play?
3. Old Mrs Ellis is the person who actually "pulls all the strings" in the family. What gives her power over her relations?
4. What episodes of the play are illustrative of Mrs Ellis's intelligence and ability to see through people and their motives?

#### Constance Tuckerman

1. What has Constance built her life on? Can her first name serve as a sort of guide to her character? Was hers a worthy ideal?
2. Don't you think that Constance Tuckerman, for all her goodness and sacrifice, her unshakeable devotion to the ideals of her youth, seems a trifle dull and colourless? If you think the contrary is true, motivate your disagreement.

3. Comment on Crossman's words, addressed to her: You're very wise, Constance. It must come from not thinking (p. 16)
4. Cite Sophi's remark, echoing this judgement to some extent (p. 26).
5. With which side of Constance's personality does you sympathy lie?

### **Edward Crossman**

1. In the closing episode of the drama Crossman sums himself up as a man "wanted it that way" (p. 43) and "who frittered himself away" (p. 70). Do you think this self-definition is true?
2. What is the nature of his attachment to Constance Tuckerman?
3. What episodes of the play prove that Crossman is a wise man, perhaps, the cleverest one among the party assembled at Constance Tuckerman's summer-house?
4. What evidences are there that Crossman has a sense of humour?

### **Nick Denery**

1. What is the reason of Nick's so-called "homecoming"? What is the true purpose of all his masquerading?
2. What is your estimate of Nick Denery as a painter? Was his artistic career really as successful as he wants everybody to believe? (Supply proofs to the contrary from the play)
3. What feelings does Nick inspire in Mrs Ellis? Crossman? Rose Griggs? What makes him so repulsive to Sophie?
4. Comment on the contrast between Constance's idealised view of Nick and his real self?
5. Say which of the following adjectives and nouns would fit the description of Nick's character; give proofs from the plot to illustrate each.

Boring; malicious; tolerant; self-conscious; self-concentrated; tactless; vulnerable; sensitive; touchy; bossy; spiteful; phlegmatic; vitriolic; hypocritical; bizarre; ambitions; fussy; ego-centred; quick-tempered; well turned out; amorous; conceited; shallow-minded; high-spirited; shrewd; a meddler; a boaster; a hypochondriac.

### **Nina Denery**

1. Did Nina have any understanding of Nick's true character?
2. Can you explain the nature of Nina's feelings towards her husband? She is obviously his superior in every respect-intelligence, breeding, taste. She has contempt for Nick, nevertheless, she is terrified at the slightest possibility of their separation. How can you account for these contradictions? Or do you believe these are natural contrasts and contradictions within the woman's nature?
3. What could Nick Denery mean when he said: You found the man you deserved. (p. 61)

**Sophie Tuckerman**

1. Sophie is introduced to the reader as Frederick Ellis's fiancée. But as presented by the author at the beginning of the play she is hardly the type to inspire romantic fancies. What was the outward impression she produced on people? Did her appearance, her reserved, even humble manner answer her true character?
2. How does the reader gradually come to know that plain, submissive Sophie has "hidden depths" in her? What episodes from the play are illustrative of the fact that Sophie had only been "busy cultivating a pseudo-stupidity", as Crossman put it (p. 26)?
3. In what situations did she behave like a typical girl her age? How did her behaviour differ that of other young girls and what can account for that difference? (In order to answer those questions try to remember what Sophie had been through in France, her experiences during the Nazi occupation of Paris, her conduct during and after the night "adventure" with Nick Denery).
4. What was the real motivation for Sophie's acceptance of Frederick as her future husband? Cite at least three possible motivations and choose one, which is the most convincing to you. Develop reasons for your choice of the one and your rejection of the other two. Would Sophie have made Frederick a good wife had she married him? Are there reasons to believe that she would?
5. Do you think Sophie capable of real love? How do you imagine a man Sophie might really fall in love with? Would he resemble Frederick Ellis?
6. Can Sophie be justified for extorting five thousand dollars from the Deneries? What were the unusual terms on which she was prepared to accept the money?
7. Make a brief analysis of Sophie's language. What features of her speech point her out as a foreigner? Supply examples.
8. Is Sophie Tuckerman depicted with sympathy? humour? contempt? admiration?

**IV. Ideas for written and oral report or class discussion**

1. It is easy to find examples of what L. Hellman's dislikes about her personages. What are some characteristics of the young people or the older generation that she obviously finds worthy of approval? Give examples from the play.
2. L. Hellman isn't generally known as a humourist. Nevertheless humour is felt distinctly in some scenes of "The Autumn Garden". Humour can be developed by a writer through situation, character and language. Select several examples of each technique, and explain how the author achieved her efforts.

3. Satire is a literary device in which the weaknesses, stupidities, and abuses of mankind are held up to ridicule. Find one or two examples of satire in the play and explain how the effect is achieved in each instance.
4. Would it be sufficient to sum up Nick's and Constance's youth's romance merely as a story of an unhappy love affair, of a man's cruelty and selfishness to a woman who loved him, or has it a wider social significance?
5. The scene of the drama is laid in a small provincial town of the American South. What are the unmistakable signs of this?
6. "The Autumn Garden" can justly be called a play about love. How many different kinds of love are treated in the play? What motivates the person doing the loving in the various relationships? What does love demand of a person if his experience is to be rewarding and his emotions reciprocated? To what extent is it possible for love to be motivated by selfishness? Cite examples. What effect can selfishness have upon the person loved and the person loving? Which of the loves, if any, dealt with in the play do you consider reasonably healthy and rewarding? Why? If none, what was wrong in each case?
7. The composition of the play is rather dynamic, though we have not much change of the scene. How does the plot develop? What detail of the plot would you select as symbolizing the crucial point of the drama?
8. What type of play is "The Autumn Garden"? A tragedy, comedy, farce, melodrama, thriller, etc.? Is it serious in intent or does it set primarily to entertain?

## COMMENTS

### The Autumn Garden

1. *The Gulf of Mexico* the gulf situated in the southeastern coast of North America.
2. *New Orleans* city, southeastern Louisiana, U.S. Unquestionably one of the most distinctive cities of the New World, New Orleans was established at great cost in an environment of conflict. Its strategic position, commanding the mouth of the great Mississippi-Missouri river system, which drains the rich interior of North America, made it a pawn in the struggles of Europeans for the control of North America. As a result, the peoples of New Orleans evolved a unique culture and society, while at the same time blending many heritages. Its citizens of African descent provided a special contribution in making *New Orleans the birthplace of jazz*.

The city used to have a solid economic base: it is the largest city in Louisiana, one of the country's most important ports, a major tourist resort, and a medical, industrial, and educational centre. It was devastated by Hurricane Katrina in August 2005, when the levees protecting the city were



breached and nearly all of the city was flooded. The storm and its aftermath killed hundreds, caused massive property damage, and forced a full-scale evacuation of the city.

3. **Robert Taylor** (born August 5, 1911, Filley, NA, USA — died June 8, 1969) *byname* of Spangler Arlington Brugh, an outstanding American film actor. Possessing decisively handsome features, bore a nickname "The Man with the Perfect Profile". Famous for starring in *Stand Up and Fight* (1939), *Stand for the Action* (1942), *Bataan* (1943), *Quo Vadis* (1951) and many other films.
4. **Boston** city, capital of the state of Massachusetts, and seat of Suffolk county, in the northeastern United States.
5. **Vin rosé** light French vine with gas.
6. **Regional poetry** here low-rate poetry.
7. **West Point** *byname* of the United States Military Academy, institution of higher education for the training of commissioned officers for the U.S. Army. It was originally founded as a school for the U.S. Corps of Engineers on March 16, 1802, and is one of the oldest service academies in the world. Framed by the Hudson Highlands and poised above the Hudson River, the academy currently occupies about 16,000 acres (6,000 hectares) of Orange county, N.Y., 50 miles (80 km) north of New York City.
8. **The New York Sunday Times** Sunday additions to a morning daily newspaper published in New York City, one of the world's great newspapers. Its strength is in its editorial excellence; it has never been the largest newspaper in terms of circulation. The *Times* was established in 1851 as a penny paper that would avoid sensationalism and report the news in a restrained and objective fashion.
9. **Renoir, Pierre August** (born February 25, 1841, Limoges, France — died December 3, 1919, Cagnes) French painter originally associated with the Impressionist movement. His early works were typically Impressionist snapshots of real life, full of sparkling colour and light. By the mid-1880s, however, he had broken with the movement to apply a more disciplined, formal technique to portraits and figure paintings, particularly of women.
10. **The Delgado Museum** one of the arts museums in New Orleans
11. **Pompano**, any of several marine fishes of the family Carangidae. Pompanos, some of which are highly prized as food, are deep-bodied, toothless fishes with small scales, a narrow tail base, and a forked tail. They are usually silvery and are found along shores in warm waters throughout the world. The Florida, or common, pompano (*T. carolinus*), considered the tastiest, is a valued commercial food fish of the American Atlantic and Gulf coasts and grows to a length of about 45 cm (18 inches) and weight of 1 kg (2 pounds). The blue and silver great pompano (*T. goodei*), or permit, is found off Florida and the West Indies.

12. *Raymond's book and Powell's* invented names of the authors.
13. *Dianetics* international movement that emerged in the 1950s in response to the thought of Lafayette Ronald Hubbard (b. March 13, 1911, Tilden, Nebraska, U.S. — d. January 24, 1986, San Luis Obispo, California), a writer who introduced his ideas to the general public in *Dianetics: The Modern Science of Mental Health* (1950). Hubbard's stated goal was to analyze humankind's mental aberrations and to offer a means for overcoming them. He eventually moved away from Dianetics' focus on the mind to a more religious approach to the human condition, which he called Scientology. The Church of Scientology was founded in 1954.
14. *On the Elizabeth*, one of the largest passenger liners ever built. Launched in 1938 and used as a troopship during World War II, it entered the regular transatlantic service of the Cunard Line in 1946. The ship was 1,031 feet (314 m) long and 118.5 feet (36 m) wide and had a draft of 38 feet (11.6 m) and an original gross tonnage of 83,673. The *Queen Elizabeth* was retired in 1968 and sold for conversion to a seagoing university, but it burned and sank in January 1972 during refitting at Hong Kong. Its successor, the *Queen Elizabeth 2*, launched in 1967, made its maiden voyage in 1969.
15. *Barkley Alben* (William) (born Nov. 24, 1877, Graves County, Ky., U.S. — died April 30, 1956, Lexington, Va.), 35th vice president of the United States (1949–53) in the Democratic administration of President Harry S. Truman. He was one of the chief architects of the New Deal in the 1930s and a major symbol of Democratic Party continuity as a member of Congress for almost 40 years.
16. *Isotta-Fraschini*, a classic brand of Italian cars.
17. *Millay Edna St Vincent* (born Feb. 22, 1892, Rockland, Maine, U.S. — died Oct. 19, 1950, Austerlitz, N.Y.), American poet and dramatist who came to personify romantic rebellion and bravado in the 1920s.
18. *My candle and all that* the first line of one of the rhymes by E. Millay written in 1923 is meant:  

My candle burns at both ends;  
 It will not last the night;  
 But oh, my foes, and oh, my friends —  
 It gives a lovely light.
19. *Ritz* the worldwide network of hotels, a synonym for elegance and luxury, founded in Paris by César Ritz (born Feb. 23, 1850, Niederwald, Switz. — died Oct. 26, 1918, Küsnacht, near Lucerne).
20. *The Ile* the name of the ship the *Ile de France*, the first luxurious large liner built after the conclusion of WWI.
21. *Antibes* port town, Alpes-Maritimes *département*, Provence-Alpes-Côte-d'Azur *région*, France, on the eastern side of the Garoupe Peninsula across the Baie des Anges (Bay of the Angels) from Nice. Juan-les-Pins, with its

parasol pines and sand beach, is part of the Antibes *commune*, which also includes the luxury resort of Cap d'Antibes. Tourism now dominates the local economy; apart from the attraction of the beaches, the area offers a series of large yachting harbours.

22. **Mobile** [mou`bɪ:l] city, seat (1812) of Mobile county, southwestern Alabama, U.S. It lies on Mobile Bay (an arm of the Gulf of Mexico) at the mouth of the Mobile River and is a river port and Alabama's only seaport.
23. **Battle House** one of the sites in Mobile since during the Amercian Civil War Mobile was one of the most important Confederate ports, and it maintained its trade with the West Indies and Europe despite a Union blockade begun in 1861. The port functioned until August 1864, when the Battle of Mobile Bay, fought between the opposing Union and Confederate fleets, was won by the Union admiral David Farragut.
24. **Memphis** city, seat (1819) of Shelby county, extreme southwestern Tennessee, U.S. It lies on the Chickasaw bluffs above the Mississippi River where the borders of Arkansas, Mississippi, and Tennessee meet. Memphis is Tennessee's most populous city and is at the centre of the state's second largest metropolitan area.

# ORPHEUS DESCENDING

by Tennessee Williams

## Cast

Dolly Hamma Beulah Binnings

Pee Wee Binnings

Dog Hamma

Carol Cutrere

Eva Temple

Sister Temple

Uncle Pleasant

Val Xavier

Vee Talbott

Lady Torrance Jabs Torrance

Sheriff Talbott

Mr. Dubinsky

Woman

David Cutrere

Nurse Porter

First Man

Second Man

*The entire action of the play takes place in a general drygoods store and part of a connecting "confectionary" in a small Southern town, during a rainy season, late winter and early spring.*

## Act I

Prologue

SCENE 1: *Late dusk.*

SCENE 2: *A couple of hours later that night.*

## Act II

SCENE 1: *Afternoon, a, few weeks later.*

SCENE 2-4: *Late that night.*

## Act III

SCENE 1: *Early Morning, the Saturday before Easter.*

SCENE 2: *Sunset, the same day.*

SCENE 3: *Half an hour later.*

## ACT ONE

### Prologue

SCENE: *The set represents in nonrealistic fashion a general drygoods store and part of a connecting "confectionery" in a small Southern town. The ceiling is high and the upper walls are dark, as if streaked with moisture and cobwebbed. A great dusty window upstage offers a view of disturbing emptiness that fades into late dusk. The action of the play occurs during a rainy season, late winter and early spring, and sometimes the window turns opaque but glistening silver with sheets of rain. "TORRANCE MERCANTILE STORE" is lettered on the window in gilt of old-fashioned design.*

*Merchandise is represented very sparsely and it is not realistic. Bolts of pep-perel and percale stand upright on large spools, the black skeleton of a dressmaker's dummy stands meaninglessly against a thin white column, and there is a motionless ceiling fan with strips of flypaper hanging from it.*

*There are stairs that lead to a landing and disappear above it, and on the landing there is a sinister-looking artificial palm tree in a greenish-brown jardinière.*

*But the confectionery, which is seen partly through a wide arched door, is shadowy and poetic as some inner dimension of the play.*

*Another, much smaller, playing area is a tiny bedroom alcove which is usually masked by an Oriental drapery which is worn dim but bears the formal design of a gold tree with scarlet fruit and fantastic birds.*

*At the rise of the curtain two youngish middle-aged women, DOLLY and BEULAH, are laying out a on a pair of pink-and-grey-veined marble-topped tables with gracefully curved black-iron legs, brought into the main area from the confectionery. They are wives of small planters and tastelessly overdressed in a somewhat bizarre fashion.*

*A train whistles in the distance and dogs bark in response from various points and distances. The women pause in their occupations at the tables and rush to the archway, crying out harshly.*

DOLLY: Pee Wee<sup>1</sup>!

BEULAH: Dawg!

DOLLY: Cannonball<sup>2</sup> is comin' into th' depot!

BEULAH: You all git down to th' depot an' meet that train!

*(Their husbands slouch through, heavy, red-faced men in clothes that are too tight for them, or too loose, and mud-stained boots.)*

PEE WEE: I fed that one-armed bandit<sup>3</sup> a hunnerd nickels an' it coughed up five.

DOG: Must have hed indigestion.

PEE WEE: I'm gonna speak to Jabe about them slots. (*They go out and a motor starts and pauses.*)

DOLLY: I guess Jabe Torrance has got more to worry about than the slot machines and pinball games in that confectionery.

BEULAH: You're not tellin' a lie. I wint to see Dr. Johnny about Dawg's condition. Dawg's got sugar in his urine again, an' as I was leavin' I ast him what was the lacks about Jabe Torrance's operation in Mimphis. Well —

DOLLY: What'd he tell you, Beulah?

BEULAH: He said the worse thing a doctor ever can say.

DOLLY: What's that, Beulah?

BEULAH: Nothin' a-tell, not a spoken word did he utter! He just looked at me with those big dark eyes of his and shook his haid like this!

DOLLY: (*With doleful satisfaction*) I guess he signed. Jabe Torrance's death warrant with just that single silent motion of his haid.

BEULAH: That's exactly what passed through my mind. I understand that they cut him open — (*Pauses to taste something on the table.*)

DOLLY: An' sewed him right back up! — that's what I heard —

BEULAH: I didn't know these olives had seeds in them!

DOLLY: You thought they was stuffed?

BEULAH: Uh-huh. Where's the Temple sisters?

DOLLY: Where d'you think?

BEULAH: Snoopin' aroun' upstairs. If Lady catches 'em at it she'll give those two old maids a touch of her tongue! She's not a Dago for nothin'!

DOLLY: Ha, ha, no! You spoke a true word, honey — (*Looks out door as car passes.*) Well, I was surprised when I wint up myself!

BEULAH: You wint up you'self?

DOLLY: I did and so did you because I seen you, Beulah.

BEULAH: I never said that I didn't. Curiosity is a human instinct.

DOLLY: They got two separate bedrooms which are not even connectin'. At opposite ends of the hall, and everything is so dingy an' dark up there. Y'know what it seemed like to me? A county jail! I swear to goodness it didn't seem to me like a place for white people to live in! — that's the truth —

BEULAH: (*Darkly*) Well, I wasn't surprised. Jabe Torrance bought that woman.

DOLLY: Bought her?

BEULAH: Yais, he bought her, when she was a girl of eighteen! He bought her and bought her cheap because she'd been thrown over and her heart was broken by that (*Jerks head towards a passing car, then continues:*) — that Cutreter boy — Oh, what a — Mmmm, what a — beautiful thing he was — And those two met like you struck two stones together and made a fire! — yes — fire —

DOLLY: What?

BEULAH: Fire! — Ha — (*Strikes another match and lights one of the candles. Mandolin begins to fade in. The following monologue should be treated*

*frankly as exposition, spoken to audience, almost directly, with a force that commands attention. DOLLY does not remain in the playing area, and after the first few sentences, there is no longer any pretence of a dialogue.)*

— Well, that was a long time ago, before you and Dog moved into Two River County. Although you must have heard of it. Lady's father was a Wop from the old country and when he first come here with mandolin and a monkey that wore a little green velvet suit, ha ha.

— He picked up dimes and quarters in the saloons — this was before Prohibition —

— People just called him the Wop, nobody knew his name, just called him 'The Wop', ha ha ha —

DOLLY: (*Off, vaguely*) Anh-hannnnh —

*(BEULAH switches in the chair and fixes the audience with her eyes, leaning slightly forward to compel their attention. Her voice is rich with nostalgia, and at a sign of restlessness, she rises and comes straight out to the proscenium, like a pitchman. This monologue should set the nonrealistic key for the whole production.)*

BEULAH: Oh, my law, well, that was Lady's daddy! Then come prohibition an' first thing ennyone knew, The Wop had took to bootleggin' like a duck to water! He picked up a piece of laud cheap, it was on the no'th shore of Moon Lake which used to be the old channel of the river and people thought some day the river might swing back that way, and so he got it cheap — (*Moves her chair up closer to proscenium.*) He planted an orchard on it, he covered the whole no'th shore of the lake with grapevines and fruit trees, and then he built little arbors, little white wooden arbors with tables and benches to drink in and carry on in, ha ha! And in the spring and the summer, young couples would come out there, like me and Pee Wee, we used to go out there, an' court up a storm, ha ha, just court up a — storm! Ha ha! — The county was dry in those days, I don't mean dry like now, why, now you just walk a couple of feet off the highway and whistle three times like a jaybird and a nigger pops out of a bush with a bottle of corn!

DOLLY: Ain't that the truth? Ha-ha.

BEULAH: But in those days the county was dry for true, I mean bone dry except for The Wop's wine garden. So we'd go out to The Wop's an' drink that Dago red wine an' cut up an' carry on an' raise such Cain in those arbors! Why, I remember one Sunday old Doctor Tooker, Methodist minister then, be bust a blood vessel denouncing The Wop in the pulpit!

DOLLY: Lawd have mercy!

BEULAH: Yes, ma'am! — Each of those white wooden arbors had a lamp in it, and one by one, here and there, the lamps would go out as the couples begun to make love —

DOLLY: Oh — Oh —

BEULAH: What strange noises you could hear if you listened, calls, cries, whispers, moans — giggles — (*Her voice is soft with recollection.*) — And then,

one by one, the lamps would be lighted again, and The Wop and his daughter would sign and play Dago songs — (*Bring up mandolin: voice under "Diciten-cello Vuoi".*) But sometimes The Wop would look around for his daughter, and all of a sudden Lady wouldn't be there!

DOLLY: Where would she be?

BEULAH: She'd be with David Cutrere.

DOLLY: Awwwww — ha ha —

BEULAH: Carol Cutrere's big brother, Lady and him would disappear in the orchard and old Papa Romano, The Wop, would holler, "Lady, Lady!" — no answer whatsoever, no matter how long he called and no matter how loud —

DOLLY: Well, I guess it's hard to shout back, "Here I am, Papa", when where you are is in the arms of your lover!

BEULAH: Well, that spring, no, it was late that summer — (*DOLLY retires again from the playing area.*) — Papa Romano made a bad mistake. He sold liquor to niggers. The Mystic Crew<sup>4</sup> took action. — They rode out there, one night, with gallons of coal oil — it was a real dry summer — and set that place on fire! — They burned the whole thing up, vines, arbors, fruit trees. — Pee Wee and me, we stood on the dance pavilion across the lake and watched that fire spring up. Inside of tin minutes the whole nawth shore of the lake was a mass of flames, a regular sea of flames, and all the way over the lake we could hear Lady's papa shouting. "Fire, fire, fire!" — as if it was necessary to let people know, and the whole sky lit up with it, as red as Guinea red wine! — Ha ha ha ha — Not a fire engine, not a single engine pulled out of a station that night in Two River County! — The poor old fellow, The Wop, he took a blanket and run up into the orchard to fight the fire single handed — and burned *alive* — Uh-huh! *burned alive* — (*Mandolin stops short. DOLLY has returned to the table to have her coffee.*) You know what I sometimes wonder?

DOLLY: No. What do you wonder?

BEULAH: I wonder sometimes if Lady has any suspicion that her husband, Jabe Torrance, was the leader of the Mystic Crew the night they burned up her father in his wine garden on Moon Lake?

DOLLY: Beulah Binnings, you make my blood run cold with such a thought! How could she live in marriage twenty years with a man if she knew he'd burned her father up in his wine garden?

(*Dog bays in distance.*)

BEULAH: She could live with him in hate. People can live together in hate for a long time, Dolly. Notice their passion for money. I've always noticed when couples don't love each other they develop a passion for money. Haven't you seen that happen? Of course you have. Now there's not many couples that stay devoted for ever. Why, some git so they just barely tolerate each other's existence. Isn't that true?



DOLLY: You couldn't of spoken a truer word if you read it out loud from the Bible!

BEULAH: Barely tolerate each other's existence, and some don't even do that. You know, Dolly Hamma, I don't think half as many married men have committed suicide in this county as the Coroner says has done so!

DOLLY: (*With voluptuous appreciation of BEULAH's wit*) You think it's their wives that give them the deep six<sup>5</sup>, honey?

BEULAH: I don't think so, I know so. Why there's couples that loathe and despise the sight, smell and sound of each other before that round-trip honeymoon ticket is punched at both ends, Dolly.

DOLLY: I hate to admit it but I can't deny it.

BEULAH: But they hang on together.

DOLLY: Yes, they hang on together.

BEULAH: Year after year, accumulating property and money, building-up wealth and respect and position in the towns they live in and the counties and cities and the churches they go to, belonging to the clubs and so on and so forth and not a soul but them knowin' they have to go wash their hands after touching something the other one just put down! ha ha ha ha ha! —

DOLLY: Beulah, that's an evil laugh of yours, that laugh of yours is evil!

BEULAH: (*Louder*) Ha ha ha ha ha! — But you know it's the truth.

DOLLY: Yes, she's tellin' the truth! (*Nods to audience.*)

BEULAH: Then one of them — gits — *cincer* or has a — *stroke* or some-thin'? — The other one —

DOLLY: — Hauls in the loot?

BEULAH: That's right, hauls in the loot! Oh, my, then you should see how him or her blossoms out. New house, new car, new clothes. Some of 'em even change to a different church! — If it's a widow, she goes with a younger man, and if it's a widower, he starts courtin' some chick, ha ha ha ha ha!

And so I said, I said to Lady this morning before she left for Mamphis to bring Jabe home, I said, "Lady, I don't suppose you're going to reopen the confectionery till Jabe is completely recovered from his operation". She said, "It can't wait for anything that might take that much time". Those are her exact words. It can't wait for anything that might take that much time. Too much is invested in it. It's going to be done over, redecorated, and opened on schedule the Saturday before Easter this spring! — Why? — Because — she knows Jabe is dying and she wants to clean up quick!

DOLLY: An awful thought. But a true one. Most awful thoughts are.

(*They are startled by sudden light laughter from the dim upstage area. The light changes on the stage to mark a division.*)

## Scene One

*The women turn to see CAROL CUTRERE in the archway between the store and the confectionery. She is past thirty and, lacking prettiness, she has on odd,*

*fugitive beauty which is stressed, almost to the point of fantasy, by a style of make-up with which a dancer named Valli has lately made such an impression in the bohemian centres of France and Italy, the face and lips powdered white and the eyes outlined and exaggerated with black pencil and the lids tinted blue. Her family name is the oldest and most distinguished in the country.*

BEULAH: Somebody don't seem to know that the Store is closed.

DOLLY: Beulah?

BEULAH: What?

DOLLY: Can you understand how anybody would deliberately make themselves look fantastic as that?

BEULAH: Some people have to show off, it's a passion with them, anything on earth to get attention.

DOLLY: I sure wouldn't care for that kind of attention. Not me. I wouldn't desire it —

*(During these lines, just loud enough for her to hear them, CAROL has crossed to the pay-phone and deposited a coin.)*

CAROL: I want Tulane 0370 in New Orleans. What? Oh. Hold on a minute.

*(EVA TEMPLE is descending the stairs, slowly, as if awed by CAROL'S appearance. CAROL rings open the cashbox and removes some coins; returns to deposit coins in phone.)*

BEULAH: She helped herself to money out of the cashbox.

*(EVA passes CAROL like a timid child skirting a lion cage.)*

CAROL: Hello, Sister.

EVA: I'm Eva.

CAROL: Hello, Eva.

EVA: Hello — *(Then in a loud whisper to BEULAH and DOLLY)* She took money out of the cashbox.

DOLLY: Oh, she can do as she pleases, she's a Cutrere!

BEULAH: Shoot —

EVA: What is she doin' barefooted?

BEULAH: The last time she was arrested on the highway, they say that she was naked under her coat.

CAROL: *(To operator)* I'm waiting. *(Then to women)* — I caught the heel of my slipper in that rotten boardwalk out there and it broke right off. *(Raises slipper in hand.)* They say if you break the heel of your slipper in the morning it means you'll meet the love of your life before dark. But it was already dark when I broke the heel of my slipper. Maybe that means I'll meet the love of my life before daybreak. *(The quality of her voice is curiously clear and childlike. SISTER TEMPLE appears on stair landing bearing an old waffle iron.)*

SISTER: Wasn't that them?

EVA: No, it was Carol Cutrere!

CAROL: (*At phone*) Just keep on ringing, please, he's probably drunk. (SISTER crosses by her as EVA did.) Sometimes it takes quite a while to get through the living-room furniture —

SISTER: She a sight?

EVA: Uh-huh!

CAROL: Bertie? — Carol! — Hi, doll! Did you trip over something? I heard a crash. Well, I'm leaving right now, I'm already on the highway and everything's fixed, I've got my allowance back on condition that I remain for ever away from Two River County! I had to blackmail them a little. I came to dinner with my eyes made up and my little black sequin jacket and Betsy Boo, my brother's wife, said, "Carol, you going out to a fancy dress ball?" I said, "Oh, no, I'm just going jopking tonight up and down the Dixie Highway between here and Memphis like I used to when I lived here." Why, honey, she flew so fast you couldn't see her passing and came back in with the ink still wet on the cheque! And this will be done once a month as long as I stay away from Two River County — (*Laughs gaily.*) — How's Jackie? Bless his heart, give him a sweet kiss for me! Oh, honey, I'm driving straight through, not even stopping for pickups unless you need one! I'll meet you in the Starlite Lounge before it closes, or if I'm irresistibly delayed, I'll certainly join you for coffee at the Morning Call before the all-night places have closed for the day — I — Bertie? Bertie? (*Laughs uncertainly and hangs up.*) — let's see, now — (*Removes a revolver from her trench-coat pocket and crosses to fill it with cartridges back of counter.*)

EVA: What she looking for?

SISTER: Ask her.

EVA: (*Advancing*) What're you looking for, Carol?

CAROL: Cartridges for my revolver.

DOLLY: She don't have a license to carry a pistol.

BEULAH: She don't have a license to drive a car.

CAROL: When I stop for someone I want to be sure it's someone I want to stop for.

DOLLY: Sheriff Talbott ought to know about this when he gits back from the depot.

CAROL: Tell him, ladies. I've already given him notice that if he ever attempts to stop me again on the highway, I'll shoot it out with him —

BEULAH: When anybody has trouble with the law —

(*Her sentence is interrupted by a panicky scream from EVA immediately repeated by SISTER. The TEMPLE SISTERS scramble upstairs to the landing. DOLLY also cries out and turns, covering her face. A Negro CONJURE MAN has entered the store. His tattered garments are fantastically bedizened with*

*many talismans and good-luck charms of shell and bone and feather.*

*His blue-black skin is daubed with cryptic signs in white paint.)*

DOLLY: Git him out, git him out, he's going to mark my baby!

BEULAH: Oh, shoot, Dolly — (DOLLY has now fled after the TEMPLE SISTERS, to the landing of the stairs. The CONJURE MAN advances with a soft, rapid, toothless mumble of words that sound like wind in dry grass. He is holding out something in his shaking hand.) It's just that old crazy conjure man from Blue Mountain. He cain't mark your baby.

*(Phrase of primitive music or percussion as NEGRO moves into light. BEULAH follows DOLLY to landing.)*

CAROL: *(Very high and clear voice)* Come here, Uncle, and let me see what you've got there. Oh, it's a bone of some kind. No, I don't want to touch it, it isn't clean yet, there's still some flesh clinging to it. *(Women make sounds of revulsion.)* Yes, I know it's the breastbone of a bird but it's still tainted with corruption. Leave it a long time on a bare rock in the rain and the sun till every sign of corruption is burned and washed away from it, and then it will be a good charm, a white charm, but now it's a black charm, Uncle. So take it away and do what I told you with it — *(The NEGRO makes a ducking obeisance and shuffles slowly back to the door.)* Hey, Uncle Pleasant, give us the Choctaw cry. *(NEGRO stops in confectionery.)* He's part Choctaw<sup>6</sup>, he knows the Choctaw cry.

SISTER TEMPLE: Don't let him holler in here!

CAROL: Come on, Uncle Pleasant, you know it!

*(She takes off her coat and sits on the R. window sill. She starts the cry herself. The NEGRO throws back his head and completes it: a series of barking sounds that rise to a high sustained note of wild intensity. The women on the landing retreat further upstairs. Just then, as though the cry had brought him, VAL enters the store. He is a young man, about 30, who has a kind of wild beauty about him that the cry would suggest. He does not wear Levi's or a T-shirt, he has on a pair of dark serge pants, glazed from long wear and not excessively tight-fitting. His remarkable garment is a snake skin jacket, mottled white, black and grey. He carries a guitar which is covered with inscriptions.)*

CAROL: *(Looking at the young man)* Thanks, Uncle —

BEULAH: Hey, old man, you! Choctaw! Conjure man! Nigguh! Will you go out-a this sto'? So we can come back down stairs?

*(CAROL hands NEGRO a dollar; he goes out right cackling. VAL holds the door open for VEE TALBOTT, a heavy, vague woman in her forties. She does primitive oil paintings and carries one into the store, saying:)*

VEE: I got m'skirt caught in th' door of the Chevrolet an' I'm afraid I tore it. *(The women descend into store: laconic greetings, interest focused on VAL.)* Is

it dark in here or am I losin' my eyesight? I been painting all day, finished a picture in a ten-hour stretch, just stopped a few minutes fo' coffee and went back to it again while I had a clear vision. I think I got it this time. But I'm so exhausted I could drop in my tracks. There's nothing more exhausting than that kind of work on earth, it's not so much I: that it tires your body out, but it leaves you drained inside. Y'know what I mean? Inside? Like you was burned out by something? Well! Still! — You feel you've accomplished something when you're through with it, sometimes you feel — *elevated!* How are you, Dolly?

DOLLY: All right, Mrs. Talbott.

VEE: That's good. How are *you*, Beulah?

BEULAH: Oh, I'm all right, I reckon.

VEE: Still can't make out much. Who is that there? (*Indicates CAROL'S figure by the window. A significant silence greets this question. VEE, suddenly*) Oh! I thought her folks had got her out of the county — (*CAROL utters a very light slightly rueful laugh, her eyes drifting back to VAL as she moves back into confectionery.*) Jabe and Lady back yet?

DOLLY: Pee Wee an' Dawg have gone to the depot to meet 'em.

VEE: Aw. Well, I'm just in time. I brought my new picture with me, the paint isn't dry on it yet. I thought that Lady might want to hang it up in Jabe's room while he's convalescin' from the operation, cause after a close shave with death, people like to be reminded of spiritual things. Huh? Yes! This is the Holy Ghost ascending —

DOLLY: (*Looking at canvas*) You didn't put a head on it.

VEE: The head was a blaze of light, that's all I saw in my vision.

DOLLY: Who's the young man with yuh?

VEE: Aw, excuse me, I'm too worn out to have manners. This is Mr. Valentine Xavier, Mrs. Hamma and Mrs. — I'm sorry Beulah. I never *can* get y'last name!

BEULAH: I fo'give you. My name is Beulah Binnings.

VAL: What shall I do with this here?

VEE: Oh, that bowl of sherbet. I though that Jabe might need something light an' digestible so I brought a bowl of sherbet.

DOLLY: What flavor is it?

VEE: Pineapple.

DOLLY: Oh, goody, I love pineapple. Better put it in the icebox before it starts to melt.

BEULAH: (*Looking under napkin that covers bowl*) I'm afraid you're lockin' th' stable after the horse is gone.

DOLLY: Aw, is it melted already?

BEULAH: Reduced to juice.

VEE: Aw, shoot. Well, put it on ice anyhow, it might thicken up. (*Women are still watching VAL.*) Where's the icebox?

BEULAH: In the confectionery.

VEE: I thought that Lady had closed the confectionary.

BEULAH: Yes, but the Frigidaire's<sup>7</sup> still there. (VAL goes out R. through confectionery.)

VEE: Mr. Xavier is a stranger in our midst. His car broke down in that storm last night and I let him sleep in the lockup. He's lookin' for work and I thought I'd introduce him to Lady an' Jabe because if Jabe can't work they're going to need somebody to help out in th' store.

BEULAH: That's a good idea.

DOLLY: Uh-huh.

BEULAH: Well, come on in, you all, it don't look like they're comin' straight home from the depot anyhow.

DOLLY: Maybe that wasn't the Cannonball Express.

BEULAH: Or maybe they stopped off fo' Pee Wee to buy some liquor.

DOLLY: Yeah — at Ruby Lightfoot's.

(They move past CAROL and out of sight. CAROL has risen. Now she crosses into the main store area, watching VAL with the candid curiosity of one child observing another. He pays no attention but concentrates on his belt buckle which he is repairing with a pocketknife).

CAROL: What're you fixing?

VAL: Belt buckle.

CAROL: Boys like you are always fixing something. Could you fix my slipper?

VAL: What's wrong with your slipper?

CAROL: Why are you pretending not to remember me?

VAL: It's hard to remember someone you never met.

CAROL: Then why'd you look so startled when you saw me?

VAL: Did I?

CAROL: I thought for a moment you'd run back out the door.

VAL: The sight of a woman can make me walk in a hurry but I don't think it's ever made me run. — You're standing in my light.

CAROL: (*Moving aside slightly*) Oh, excuse me. Better?

VAL: Thanks —

CAROL: Are you afraid I'll snitch?

VAL: Do what?

CAROL: Snitch? I wouldn't; I'm not a snitch. But I can prove that I know you if I have to. It was New Year's Eve in New Orleans.

VAL: I need a small pair of pliers —

CAROL: You had on that jacket and a snake ring with a ruby eye.

VAL: I never had a snake ring with a ruby eye.

CAROL: A snake ring with an emerald eye?

VAL: I never had a snake ring with any kind of an eye — (*Begins to whistle softly, his face averted.*)

CAROL: (*Smiling gently*) Then maybe it was a dragon ring with an emerald eye or a diamond or a ruby eye. You told us that it was a gift from a lady osteopath that you'd met somewhere in your travels and that any time you were broke you'd wire this lady osteopath collect, and no matter how far you were or how long it was since you'd seen her, she'd send you a money order for twenty-five dollars with the same sweet message each time. "I love you. When will you come back?" And to prove the story, not that it was difficult to believe it, you took the latest of these sweet messages from your wallet for us to see — (*She throws back her head with soft laughter. He looks away still further and busies himself with the belt buckle.*) — We followed you through five places before we made contact with you and I was the one that made contact. I went up to the bar where you were standing and touched your jacket and said, "What stuff is this made of?" and when you said it was snakeskin, I said, "I wish you'd told me before I touched it". And you said something not nice. You said, "Maybe that will learn you to hold back your hands". I was drunk by that time which was after midnight. Do you remember what I said to you? I said, "What on earth can you do on this earth but catch at whatever comes near you, with both your hands, until your fingers are broken?" I'd never said that before, or even consciously thought it, but afterwards it seemed like the truest thing that my lips had ever spoken, what on earth can you do but catch at whatever comes near you with both your hands until your fingers are broken — You gave me a quick, sober look. I think you nodded slightly, and then you picked up your guitar and began to sing. After singing you passed the kitty<sup>8</sup>. Whenever paper money was dropped in the kitty you blew a whistle. My cousin Bertie and I dropped in five dollars, you blew the whistle five times and then sat down at our table for a drink, Schenley's with Seven Up. You showed us all those signatures on your guitar — Any correction so far?

VAL: Why are you so anxious to prove I know you?

CAROL: Because I want to know you better and better! I'd like to go out jooking with you tonight.

VAL: What's jooking?

CAROL: Oh, don't you know what that is? That's where you get in a car and drink a little and drive a little and stop and dance a little to a juke box and then you drink a little more and drive a little more and stop and dance a little more to a juke box and then you stop dancing and you just drink and drive and then you stop driving and just drink, and then, finally, you stop drinking —

VAL: What do you do, then?

CAROL: That depends on the weather and who you're jooking with. If it's a clear night you spread a blanket among the memorial stones on Cypress Hill, which is the local bone orchard, hut if it's not a fair night, and this one certainly

isn't, why, usually then you go to the Idlewild cabins between here and Sunset on the Dixie Highway —

VAL: That's about what I figured. But I don't go that route. Heavy drinking and smoking the weed and shacking with strangers is okay for kids in their twenties but this is my thirtieth birthday and I'm all through with that route. (*Looks up with dark eyes.*) I'm not young any more.

CAROL: You're young at thirty — I hope so! I'm twenty-nine!

VAL: Naw, you're not young at thirty if you've been on a goddamn party since you were fifteen!

(*Picks up his guitar and sings and plays "Heavenly Grass"*<sup>9</sup>. CAROL has taken a pint of bourbon from her trench-coat pocket and she passes it to him.)

CAROL: Thanks. That's lovely. Many happy returns of your birthday, Snakeskin.

(*She is very close to him. VEE enters and says sharply.*)

VEE: Mr. Xavier don't drink.

CAROL: Oh, ex-cuse me!

VEE: And if you behaved yourself better your father would not be paralysed in bed!

(*Sound of car out front. Women come running with various cries. LADY enters, nodding to the women, and holding the door open for her husband and the men following him. She greets the women in almost toneless murmurs, as if too tired to speak. She could be any age between thirty-five and forty-five, in appearance, but her figure is youthful. Her face taut. She is a woman who met with emotional disaster in her girlhood; verges on hysteria under strain. Her voice is often shrill and her body tense. But when in repose, a girlish softness emerges again and she looks ten years younger.*)

LADY: Come in, Jabe. We've got a reception committee here to meet us. They've set up a buffet supper.

(JABE enters. A gaunt, wolfish man, grey and yellow. The women chatter idiotically.)

BEULAH: Well, look who's here!

DOLLY: Well, Jabe?

BEULAH: I don't think he's been sick. I think he's been to Miami. Look at that wonderful color in his face!

DOLLY: I never seen him look better in my life!

BEULAH: Who does he think he's foolin'? Ha ha ha! — not me!

JABE: Whew, Jesus — I'm mighty — tired —

(*An uncomfortable silence, everyone staring greedily at the dying man with his tense, wolfish smile and nervous cough.*)

PEE WEE: Well, Jabe, we been feedin' lots of nickels to those one-arm bandits in there.



DOG: An' that pinball machine is hotter'n a pistol.

PEE WEE: Ha ha.

(EVA TEMPLE *appears on stairs and screams for her sister.*)

EVA: Sistuh! Sistuh! Sistuh! Cousin Jabe's here!

(*A loud clatter upstairs and shrieks.*)

JABE: Jesus —

(*EVA rushing at him — stops short and bursts into tears.*)

LADY: Oh, cut that out, Eva Temple! — What were you doin' upstairs?

EVA: I can't help it, it's so good to see him, it's so wonderful to see our cousin again, oh, Jabe, *blessed!*

SISTER: Where's Jabe, where's precious Jabe? Where's our precious cousin?

EVA: Right here, Sister!

SISTER: Well, bless your old sweet life, and look it I he color he's got in his face, will you?

BEULAH: *I just told him he looks like he's been to Miami and got a Florida suntan, ha ha ha!*

(*The preceding speeches are very rapid, all overlapping.*)

JABE: I ain't been out in no sun an' if you all will excuse me I'm gonna do my celebratin' upstairs in bed because I'm kind of — worn out. (*Goes creakily to foot of steps while EVA and SISTER sob into their handkerchiefs behind him.*) — I see they's been some changes made here. Uh-huh. Uh-huh. How come the shoe department's back here now? (*Instant hostility as if habitual between them*)

LADY: We always had a problem with light in this store.

JABE: *So you put the shoe department further away from the window? That's sensible. A very intelligent solution to the problem, Lady.*

LADY: Jabe, you know I told you we got a fluorescent tube coming to put back here.

JABE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. Well. Tomorrow I'll get me some niggers to help me move the shoe department back front.

LADY: You do whatever you want to, it's your store.

JABE: Uh-huh. Uh-huh. I'm glad you reminded me of it.

(*LADY turns sharply away. He starts up stairs. PEE WEE and DOG follow him up. The women huddle and whisper in the store. LADY sinks wearily into chair at table.*)

BEULAH: That man will never come down those stairs again!

DOLLY: Never in this world, honey.

BEULAH: He has th' death sweat on him! Did you notice that death sweat on him?

DOLLY: An' yellow as butter, just as yellow as —

(SISTER sobs.)

EVA: Sister, Sister!

BEULAH: (*Crossing to LADY*) Lady, I don't suppose you feel much like talking about it right now but Dog and me are so worried.

DOLLY: Pee Wee and me are worried sick about it.

LADY: About what?

BEULAH: Jabe's operation in Memphis. Was it successful?

DOLL Y: Wasn't it successful?

(*LADY stares at them blindly. The women, except CAROL, close avidly about her, tense with morbid interest.*)

SISTER: Was it too late for surgical interference?

EVA: Wasn't it successful?

(*A loud, measured knock begins on the floor above.*)

BEULAH: Somebody told us it had gone past the knife.

DOLLY: We do hope it ain't hopeless.

EVA: We hope and pray it ain't hopeless.

(*All their faces wear faint, unconscious smiles. LADY looks from face to face; then utters a slight, startled laugh and springs up from the table and crosses to the stairs.*)

LADY: (*As if in flight*) Excuse me, I have to go up, Jabe's knocking for me. (*LADY goes upstairs. The women gaze after her.*)

CAROL: (*Suddenly and clearly, in the silence*) Speaking of knocks, I have a knock in my engine. It goes knock, knock, and I say who's there. I don't know whether I'm in communication with some dead ancestor or the motor's about to drop out and leave me stranded in the dead of night on the Dixie Highway. Do you have any knowledge of mechanics? I'm sure you do. Would you be sweet and take a short drive with me? So you could hear that knock?

VAL: I don't have time.

CAROL: What have you got to do?

VAL: I'm waiting to see about a job in this store.

CAROL: I'm offering you a job.

VAL: I want a job that pays.

CAROL: I expect to pay you.

(*Women whisper loudly in the background.*)

VAL: Maybe sometime tomorrow.

CAROL: I can't stay here overnight; I'm not allowed to stay overnight in this county. (*Whispers rise. The word "corrupt" is distinguished. Without turning,*

*smiling very brightly*) What are they saying about? Can you hear what those women are saying about me?

VAL: Play it cool —

CAROL: I don't like playing it cool! What are they saying about me? That I'm corrupt?

VAL: If you don't want to be talked about, why do you make up like that, why do you —

CAROL: *To show off!*

VAL: What?

CAROL: *I'm an exhibitionist!* I want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt! I want them to know I'm alive! Don't you want them to know you're alive?

VAL: I want to live and I don't care if they know I'm alive or not.

CAROL: Then why do you play a guitar?

VAL: Why do you make a goddamn show of yourself?

CAROL: That's right, for the same reason.

VAL: We don't go the same route — *(He keeps moving away from her; she continually follows him. Her speech is compulsive.)*

CAROL: I used to be what they call a Christ-bitten reformer. You know what that is? — A kind of benign exhibitionist — I delivered stump speeches, wrote letters of protest about the gradual massacre of the colored majority in the county. I thought it was wrong for pellagra and slow starvation to cut them down when the cotton crop failed from army worm or boll weevil<sup>10</sup> or too much rain in summer. I wanted to, tried to, put up, free clinics, I squandered the money my mother left me on it. And when that Willie McGee<sup>11</sup> thing came along — he was sent to the chair for having improper relations with, a white whore — *(Her voice is like a passionate incantation.)* I made a fuss about it. I put on a potato sack and set out for the capitol on foot. This was in winter. I walked barefoot in this burlap sack to deliver a personal protest to the Governor of the State. Oh, I suppose it was partly exhibitionism on my part, but it wasn't completely exhibitionism; there was something else in it, too. You know how far I got? Six miles out of town — hooted, jeered at even spit on! — every step of the way — and then arrested! Guess what for? Lewd vagrancy! Uh-huh, that was the charge, "lewd vagrancy", because they said that potato sack I had on was not a respectable garment — Well, all that was a pretty long time ago, and now I'm not a reformer any more. I'm just a "lewd vagrant". And I'm showing the "S.O.B.S."<sup>12</sup> how lewd a "lewd vagrant" can be if she puts her whole heart in it like I do mine! All right. I've told you my story, the story of an exhibitionist. Now I want you to do something for me. Take me out to Cypress Hill in my car. And we'll hear the dead people talk. They do talk there. They chatter together like birds on Cypress Hill, but all they say is one word and that one word is "live", they say "Live, live, live, live, live!" It's all they've learned, it's the only advice they can give. — Just live — *(She opens the door.)* Simple! — a very simple instruction —

*(Goes out. Women's voices rise from the steady, indistinct murmur, like hissing geese.)*

WOMEN'S VOICES: — No, not liquor! Dope!

— Something not normal all right!

— Her father and brother were warned by the Vigilantes<sup>13</sup> to keep her out of this county.

— She's absolutely degraded!

— Yes, corrupt!

— Corrupt! (*Etc., etc.*)

*(As if repelled by their hissing voices, VAL suddenly picks up his guitar and goes out of the store as — VEE TALBOTT appears on the landing and calls down to him.)*

VEE: Mr. Xavier! Where is Mr. Xavier?

BEULAH: Gone, honey.

DOLLY: You might as well face it, Vee. This is one candidate for salvation that you have lost to the opposition.

BEULAH: He's gone off to Cypress Hill with the Cutrere girl.

VEE: (*Descending*) If some of you older women in Two River County would set a better example there'd be more decent young people!

BEULAH: What was that remark?

VEE: I mean that people who give drinkin' parties an' get so drunk they don't know which is their husband and which is somebody else's and people who serve on the altar guild and still play cards on Sundays —

BEULAH: Just stop right there! Now I've discovered the source of that dirty gossip!

VEE: I'm only repeating what I've been told by others. I never been to these parties!

BEULAH: No, and you never will! You're a public kill-joy, professional hypocrite!

VEE: I try to build up characters! You and your drink-in' parties are only concerned with tearin' characters down! I'm goin' upstairs, I'm goin' back upstairs! (*Rushes upstairs*)

BEULAH: Well, I'm glad I said what I said to that woman. I've got no earthly patience with that sort of hypo-criticism. Dolly, let's put this perishable stuff in the Frigidaire and leave here. I've never been so thoroughly disgusted!

DOLLY: Oh, my Lawd. (*Pauses at stairs and shouts*) Pee Wee! (*Goes off with the dishes.*)

SISTER: Both of those wimmen are as common as dirt.

EVA: Dolly's folks in Blue Mountain are nothin' at all but the poorest kind of white trash. Why, Lollie Tucker told me the old man sits on the porch with his shoes off drinkin' beer out of a bucket! — Let's take these flowers with us to put on the altar.

SISTER: Yes, we can give Jabe credit in the parish notes.

EVA: *I'm going to take these olive-nut sandwiches, too. They'll come in handy for the Bishop Adjutant's tea.*

(DOLLY and BEULAH cross through.)

DOLLY: We still have time to make the second show.

BEULAH: (*Shouting*) Dog!

DOLLY: Pee Wee! (*They rush out of store.*)

EVA: Sits on the porch with his shoes off?

SISTER: Drinkin' beer out of a bucket! (*They go out with umbrellas, etc. Men descend stairs.*)

SHERIFF TALBOTT: Well, it looks to me like Jabe will more than likely go under before the cotton comes up.

PEE WEE: He never looked good.

DOG: Naw, but now he looks worse. (*They cross to door.*)

SHERIFF: Vee!

VEE: (*From landing*) Hush that bawling. I had to speak to Lady about that boy and I couldn't speak to her in front of Jabe because he thinks he's gonna be able to go back to work himself.

SHERIFF: Well, move along, quit foolin'.

VEE: I think I ought to wait till that boy gits back.

SHERIFF: I'm sick of you making a goddamn fool of yourself over every stray bastard that wanders into this county.

(*Car horn honks loudly. VEE follows her husband out. Sound of cars driving off.*)

*Dogs bay in distance as lights dim to indicate short passage of time.)*

## Scene Two

*A couple of hours later that night. Through the great window the landscape is faintly luminous under a scudding moonlit sky. Outside a girl's laughter, CAROL'S, rings out high and clear and is followed by the sound of a motor, rapidly going off. VAL enters the store before the car sound quite fades out and while a dog is still barking at it somewhere along the highway. He says "Christ" under his breath, goes to the buffet table and scrubs lipstick stain off his mouth and face with a paper napkin, picks up his guitar which he had left on a counter. Footsteps descending: LADY appears on the landing in a flannel robe, shivering in the cold air; she snaps her fingers impatiently for the old dog, Bella, who comes limping down beside her. She doesn't see VAL, seated on the shadowy counter, and she goes directly to the phone near the stairs. Her manner is desperate, her voice harsh and shrill.*

LADY: Ge'me the drugstore, will you? I know the drugstore's closed, this is Mrs. Torrance, my store's closed, too, but I got a sick man here, just back from the hospital, yeah, yeah, an emergency, wake up. Mr. Dubinsky, keep

ringing till he answers, it's an emergency! (*Pause: she mutters un-tilfr her breath*) — *Porca la miseria!*<sup>14</sup> — *I wish I was dead, dead, dead —*

VAL: (*Quietly*) No, you don't, lady.

(*She gasps, turning and seeing him. without leaving the phone, she rings the cashbox open and snatches out something.*)

LADY: What're you doin' here? You know this store is closed!

VAL: I seen a light was still on and the door was open so I come back to —

LADY: You see what I got in my hand? (*Raises revolver above level of counter*)

VAL: You going to shoot me?

LADY: You better believe it if you don't get out of here, mister!

VAL: That's all right, Lady, I just come back to pick up my guitar.

LADY: To pick up your guitar? (*He lifts it gravely.*) Huh —

VAL: Miss Talbott brought me here. I was here when you got back from Memphis, don't you remember?

LADY: Aw. Aw, yeah — You been here all this time?

VAL: No, I went out and come back.

LADY (*Into the phone*): I told you to keep ringing till he answers! Go on, keep ringing, keep ringing! (*Then to VAL*) You went out and come back?

VAL: Yeah.

LADY: What for?

VAL: You know that girl that was here?

LADY: Carol Cutrere?

VAL: She said she had car trouble and could I fix it.

LADY: Did you fix it?

VAL: She didn't have no car trouble, that wasn't her trouble, oh, she had trouble, all right, but *that* wasn't it —

LADY: What was her trouble?

VAL: She made a mistake about me.

LADY: What mistake?

VAL: She thought I had a sign "Male at Stud" hung on me.

LADY: She thought you — ? (*Into phone suddenly*) Oh, Mr. Dubinsky, I'm sorry to wake you up but I just brought my husband back from the Memphis hospital and I left my box of luminal tablets in the — I got to have some! I ain't slep' for three nights, I'm going to pieces, you hear me, I'm going to pieces, I ain't slept in three nights, I got to have some tonight. Now you look here, if you want to keep my trade, you send me over some tablets. Then bring them yourself, God damn it, excuse my French! Because I'm going to pieces right this minute! (*Hangs up violently.*) — *Mannage la miseria!*<sup>15</sup> — Christ — I'm shivering! — It's cold as a goddam ice-plant in this store, I don't know why, it never seems to hold heat, the ceiling's too high or something, it don't hold heat at all. — Now what do you want? I got to go upstairs.

VAL: Here. Put this on you.

*(He removes his jacket and hands it to her. She doesn't take it at once, stares at him questioningly and then slowly takes the jacket in her hands and examines it, running her fingers curiously over the snakeskin.)*

LADY: What is this stuff this thing's made of? It looks like it was snake-skin.

VAL: Yeah, well, that's what it is.

LADY: What're you doing with a snakeskin jacket?

VAL: It's a sort of a trademark; people call me Snake-skin.

LADY: Who calls you Snakeskin?

VAL: Oh, in the bars, the sort of places I work in — but I've quit that. I'm through with that stuff now —

LADY: You're a — entertainer?

VAL: I sing and play the guitar.

LADY: Aw? *(She puts the jacket on as if to explore it.)* It feels warm all right.

VAL: It's warm from my body, I guess —

LADY: You must be a warm-blooded boy —

VAL: That's right —

LADY: Well, what in God's name are you lookin' for around here?

VAL: Work.

LADY: Boys like you don't work.

VAL: What d'you mean by boys like me?

LADY: Ones that play th' guitar and go around talkin' about how warm they are —

VAL: That happens t' be the truth. My temperature's always a couple degrees above normal the same as a dog's, it's normal for me the same as it is for a dog, that's the truth —

LADY: Huh!

VAL: You don't believe me?

LADY: I have no reason to doubt you, but what about it?

VAL: Why — nothing —

*(LADY laughs softly and suddenly; VAL smiles slowly and warmly.)*

LADY: You're a peculiar somebody all right, you sure are! How did you get around here?

VAL: I was driving through here last night and an axle broke on my car, that stopped me here, and I went to the county jail for a place to sleep out of the rain. Mizz Talbott took me in and give me a cot in the lockup and said if I hung around till you got back that you might give me a job in the store to help out since your husband was taken sick.

LADY: Uh-huh. Well — she was wrong about that — If I took on help here it would have to be local help, I couldn't hire no stranger with a — snakeskin jacket and a guitar — and that runs a temperature as high as a dog's! (*Throws back her head in another soft, sudden laugh and starts to take off the jacket*)

VAL: Keep it on.

LADY: No, I got to go up now and you had better be going —

VAL: I got nowhere to go.

LADY: Well, everyone's got a problem and that's yours.

VAL: What nationality are you?

LADY: What do you ask me that?

VAL: You seem to be like a foreigner.

LADY: I'm the daughter of a Wop bootlegger burned to death in his orchard! — Take your jacket —

VAL: What was that you said about your father?

LADY: Why?

VAL: A "A Wop bootlegger"?

LADY: They burned him to death in his orchard! What about it? The story's well known around here. (*JABE knocks on ceiling.*) I got to go up, I'm being called for.

(*She turns out light over counter and at the same moment he begins to sing softly with his guitar: "Heavenly Grass". He suddenly stops short and says abruptly.*)

VAL: I do electric repairs. (*LADY stares at him softly.*) I can do all kinds of odd jobs. Lady, I'm thirty today and I'm through with the life that I've been leading. (*Pause. Dog bays in distance.*) I lived in corruption but I'm not corrupted. Here is why. (*Picks up his guitar.*) My life's companion! It washes me clean like water when anything unclean has touched me — (*Plays softly, with a slow smile*)

LADY: What's all that writing on it?

VAL: Autographs of musicians I run into here and there.

LADY: Can I see it?

V A L: Turn on that light above you. (*She switches on green-shaded bulb over counter. VAL holds the instrument tenderly between them as if it were a child; his voice is soft, intimate, tender.*) See this name? Leadbelly?<sup>16</sup>

LADY: Leadbelly?

VAL: Greatest man ever lived on the twelve-string guitar! Played it so good he broke the stone heart of a Texas governor with it and won himself a pardon out of jail — And see this name Oliver? King Oliver<sup>17</sup>? That name is immortal, Lady. Greatest man since Gabriel on a horn<sup>18</sup> —

LADY: What's this name?

VAL: Oh. That name? That name is also immortal. The name Bessie Smith<sup>19</sup> is written in the stars! — Jim Grow killed her, John Barleycorn and Jim



Crow killed Bessie Smith but that's another story — See this name here? That's another immortal!

LADY: Fats Waller? Is his name written in the stars, too?

VAL: Yes, his name is written in the stars, too —

*(Her voice is also intimate and soft: a spell of softness between them, their bodies almost touching, only divided by the guitar.)*

LADY: You had any sales experience?

VAL: All my life I been selling something to someone.

LADY: So's everybody. You got any character reference on you?

VAL: I have this — letter.

*(Removes a worn, folded letter from a wallet, dropping a lot of snapshots and cards of various kinds on the floor. He passes the letter to her gravely and crouches to collect the dropped articles while she peruses the character reference.)*

LADY: *(Reading slowly aloud)* "This boy worked for mo three months in my auto repair shop and is a real hard worker and is good and honest but is a peculiar talker and that is the reason I got to let him go but would like to — *(Holds letter closer to light)* — would like to — keep him. Yours truly". *(VAL stares at her gravely, blinking a little.)* Huh! — Some reference!

VAL: Is that what it says?

LADY: Didn't you know what it said?

VAL: No — The man sealed the envelope on it.

LADY: Well, that's not the sort of character reference that will do you much good, boy.

VAL: Naw. I guess it ain't.

LADY: However —

VAL: What?

LADY: What people say about you don't mean much. Can you read shoe sizes?

VAL: I guess so.

LADY: What does 75 David mean? *(VAL stares at her, shakes head slowly.)* 75 means seven and one half long and David means "D" wide. You know how to make change?

VAL: Yeah, I could make change in a store.

LADY: Change for better or worse? Ha ha! — Well — *(Pause)* Well — you see that other room there, through that arch there? That's the confectionery; it's closed now but it's going to be reopened in a short while and I'm going to compete or the night life in this county, the after-the-movies trade. I'm going to serve setups in there and I'm going to redecorate. I got it all planned. *(She is talking eagerly now, as if to herself.)* Artificial branches of fruit trees in flower on the walls and ceilings! — It's going to be like an orchard in the spring! — My father, he had an orchard on Moon Lake. He made a wine garden of it. We had

fifteen little white arbors, with tables in them and they were covered with — grapevines and — we sold Dago red wine an' bootleg whisky and beer. — hey burned it up! My father was burned up in it — (*JABE nocks above more loudly and a hoarse voice shouts "Lady!" Figure appears at the door and calls: "Mrs. Torrance?"*) Oh, that's the sandman with my sleeping tablets. (*Crosses to door*) Thanks, Mr. Dubinsky, sorry I had to disturb you, sorry I — (*Man mutters something and goes. She closes the door.*) Well, go to hell, then, old bastard — (*Returns with package*) — You ever have trouble sleeping?

VAL: I can sleep or not sleep as long or short I want to.

LADY: Is that right?

VAL: I can sleep on a concrete floor or go without sleeping, without even feeling sleepy, for forty-eight hours. And I can hold my breath three minutes without blacking out; I made ten dollars betting I could do it and I did it! And I can go a whole day without passing water.

LADY: (*Startled*) Is that a fact?

VAL: (*Very simply as if he'd made an ordinary remark*) That's a fact. I served time on a chain gang for vagrancy once and they tied me to a post all day and I stood there all day without passing water to show the sons of bitches that I could do it.

LADY: I see what that auto repair man was talking about when he said this boy is a peculiar talker! Well — what else can you do? Tell me some more about your self-control!

VAL: (*Grinning*) Well, they say that a woman can burn a man down. But I can burn down a woman.

LADY: Which woman?

VAL: Any two-footed woman.

LADY: (*Throws back her head in sudden friendly laughter as he grins at her with the simple candour of a child*) — Well, there's lots of two-footed women round here that might be willin' to test the truth of that statement.

VAL: I'm saying I could. I'm not saying I would.

LADY: Don't worry, boy. I'm one two-footed woman that you don't have to convince of your perfect controls.

VAL: No, I'm done with all that.

LADY: What's the matter? Have they tired you out?

VAL: I'm not tired. I'm disgusted.

LADY: Aw, you're disgusted, huh?

VAL: I'm telling you, Lady, there's people bought and sold in this world like carcasses of hogs in butcher shops!

LADY: You ain't tellin' me nothin' I don't know.

VAL: You might think there's many and many kinds of people in this world but, Lady, there's just two kinds of people, the ones that are bought and the buyers! No! — there's one other kind —

LADY: What kind's that?

VAL: The kind that's never been branded.

LADY: You will be, man.

VAL: They got to catch me first.

LADY: Well, then, you better not settle down in this county.

VAL: You know they's a kind of bird that don't have legs so it can't light on nothing but has to stay all its life on its wings in the sky? That's true. I seen one once, it had died and fallen to earth and it was light-blue colored and its body was tiny as your little finger, that's the truth, it had a body as tiny as your little finger and so light on the palm of your hand it didn't weigh more than a feather, but its wings spread out this wide but they was transparent, the color of the sky and you could see through them. That's what they call protection coloring. Camouflage, they call it. You can't tell those birds from the sky and that's why the hawks don't catch them, don't see them up there in the high blue sky near the sun!

LADY: How about in grey weather?

VAL: They fly so high in grey weather the goddam hawks would get dizzy. But those little birds, they don't have no legs at all and they live their whole lives on the wing, and they sleep on the wind, that's how they sleep at night, they just spread their wings and go to sleep on the wind like other birds fold their wings and go to sleep on a tree — (*Music fades in.*) — They sleep on the wind and — (*His eyes grow soft and vague and he lifts his guitar and accompanies the very faint music.*) — never light on this earth but one time when they die!

LADY: I'd like to be one of those birds.

VAL: So'd I like to be one of those birds; they's lots of people would like to be one of those birds and never be — corrupted!

LADY: *If one of those birds ever dies and falls on the ground and you happen to find it, I wish you would show it to me because I think maybe you just imagine there is a bird of that kind in existence. Because I don't think nothing living has ever been that free, not even nearly. Show me one of them birds and I'll say, Yes, God's made one perfect creature! — I sure would give this mercantile store and every bit of stock in it to be that tiny bird the color of the sky — for one night to sleep on the wind and — float! — around under*

th' — stars — (*JABE knocks on floor. LADY'S eyes return to VAL.*) Because I sleep with a son of a bitch who bought me at a fire sale, not in fifteen years have I had a single good dream, not one — oh! — *Shit* — I don't know why I'm — telling a stranger — this — (*She rings the cashbox open.*) Take this dollar and go eat at the Al-Nite on the highway and come back here in the morning and I'll put you to work. I'll break you in clerking here and when the new confectionery opens, well, maybe I can use you in there. — That door locks when you close it! — But let's get one thing straight.

VAL: What thing?

LADY: I'm not interested in your perfect functions, in fact you don't interest me no more than the air that you stand in. If that's understood we'll have a good working relation, but otherwise trouble! — Of course I know you're crazy, but they's lots of crazier people than you are still running loose and some of them in high positions, too. Just remember. No monkey business with me. Now go. Go eat, you're hungry.

VAL: Mind if I leave this here? My life's companion? *(He means his guitar.)*

LADY: Leave it here if you want to.

VAL: Thanks, Lady.

LADY: Don't mention it.

*(He crosses towards the door as a dog barks with passionate clarity in the distance. He turns to smile back at her and says.)*

VAL: I don't know nothing about you except you're nice but you are just about the nicest person that I have ever run into! And I'm going to be steady and honest and hardworking to please you and any time you have any more trouble sleeping. I know how to fix that for you. A lady osteopath taught me how to make little adjustments in the neck and spine that give you sound, natural sleep. Well, g'night, now.

*(He goes out. Count five. Then she throws back her head and laughs as lightly and gaily as a young girl. Then she turns and wonderingly picks up and runs her hands tenderly over his guitar as the curtain falls.)*

## ACT TWO

### Scene One

*The store, afternoon, a few weeks later. The table and chair are back in the confectionery. LADY is hanging up the phone. VAL is standing just outside the door. He turns and enters. Outside on the highway a mule team is laboring to pull a big truck back on the icy pavement. A Negro's voice shouts: "Hyyyyyyyyy-up".*

VAL: *(Moving to R. window)* One a them big Diamond T trucks an' trailers gone off the highway last night and a six mule team is tryin't' pull it back on — *(He looks out window.)*

LADY: *(Coming from behind to R. of counter)* Mister, we just now gotten a big fat complaint about you from a woman that says if she wasn't a widow her husband would come in here and beat the tar out of you.

VAL: *(Taking a step toward her)* Yeah? — Is this a small pink-headed woman?

LADY: *Pin-headed woman did you say?*

LADY: Naw, I said, "Pink!" — A little pink-haired woman, in a checkered coat with pearl buttons this big on it.

LADY: I talked to her on the phone. She didn't go into such details about her appearance but she did say you got familiar. I said, "How? by his talk or behavior?" And she said, "Both!" — Now I was afraid of this when I warned you last week, "No monkey business here, boy!"

VAL: This little pink-headed woman bought a valentine from me and all I said is my name is Valentine to her. Few minutes later a small colored boy come in and delivered the valentine to me with something wrote on it an' I believe I still got it — (*Finds and shows it to LADY, who goes to him. LADY reads it, and tears it fiercely to pieces. He lights a cigarette.*)

LADY: Signed it with a lipstick kiss? You didn't show up for this date?

VAL: No, ma'am. That's why she complained. (*Throws match on floor*)

LADY: Pick that match up off the floor.

VAL: Are you bucking for sergeant, or something?

(*He throws match out the door with elaborate care. Her eyes follow his back.*)

VAL returns lazily towards her.)

LADY: Did you walk around in front of her that way?

VAL: (*At counter*) What way?

LADY: Slew-foot, slew-foot! (*He regards her closely with good-humored perplexity.*) Did you stand in front of her like that? That close? In that, that — position?

VAL: What position?

LADY: Ev'rything you do is suggestive!

VAL: Suggestive of what?

LADY: Of what you said you was through with — somethin' — *Oh, shoot, you know what I mean* — Why'd 'ya think I give you a plain, dark business suit to work in?

VAL: (*Sadly*) Uh-huh — (*Sighs and removes his blue jacket.*)

LADY: Now what're you takin' that off for?

VAL: I'm giving the suit back to you. I'll change my pants in the closet. (*Gives her the jacket and crosses into alcove.*)

LADY: Hey! I'm sorry! You hear me? I didn't sleep well last night. Hey! I said I'm sorry! You hear me? (*She enters alcove and returns immediately with VAL's guitar and crosses to D.R. He follows.*)

VAL: Le' me have my guitar, Lady. You find too many faults with me and I tried to do good.

LADY: I told you I'm sorry. You want me to get down and lick the dust off your shoes?

VAL: Just give me back my guitar.

LADY: I ain't dissatisfied with you. I'm pleased with you, sincerely!

VAL: You sure don't show it.

LADY: My nerves are all shot to pieces. (*Extends hand to him*) Shake.

VAL: You mean I ain't fired, so I don't have to quit?

*(They shake hands like two men. She hands him guitar — then silence falls between them.)*

LADY: You see, we don't know each other, we're, we're — just gettin' — acquainted.

VAL: That's right, like a couple of animals sniffin' around each other —  
*(The image embarrasses her. He crosses to counter, leans over and puts guitar behind it.)*

LADY: Well, not exactly like that, but —!

VAL: We don't know each other. How do people get to know each other? I used to think they did it by touch.

LADY: By what?

VAL: By touch, by touchin' each other.

LADY: *(Moving up and sitting on shoe-fitting chair which has been moved to R. window)* Oh, you mean by close — contact!

VAL: But later it seemed like that made them more strangers than ever, uhh, huh, more strangers than ever —

LADY: Then how d'you think they get to know each other?

VAL: *(Sitting on counter)* Well, in answer to your last question, I would say this: Nobody ever gets to know *no body!* We're all of us sentenced to solitary confinement inside our own skins, for life! You understand me, Lady? — I'm tellin' you it's the truth, we got to face it, we're under a life-long, sentence to solitary confinement inside our own lonely skins for as long as we live on this earth!

LADY: *(Rising and crossing to him)* Oh, no, I'm not a big optimist but I cannot agree with something as sad as that statement!

*(They are sweetly grave as two children; the store is somewhat dusky. She sits in chair R. of counter.)*

VAL: *Listen!* — When I was a kid on Witches Bayou. After my folks all scattered away like loose chicken's feathers blown around by the wind. — I stayed there alone on the bayou, hunted and trapped out of season and hid from the law! — *Listen!* — All that time, all that lonely time, I felt I was — waiting for something!

LADY: What for?

VAL: What does anyone wait for? For something to happen, for anything to happen, to make things make more sense — It's hard to remember what that feeling was like because I've lost it now, but I was waiting for something like if you ask a question you wait for someone to answer, but you ask the wrong question or you ask the wrong person and the answer don't come. Does everything stop because you don't get the answer? No, it goes right on as if the answer was

given, day comes after day and night comes after night, and you're still waiting for someone to answer the question and going right on as if the question was answered. And then — well — then —

LADY: Then what?

VAL: You get the make-believe answer.

LADY: What answer is that?

VAL: Don't pretend you don't know because you do!

LADY: Love?

VAL: (*Placing hand on her shoulder*): That's the make-believe answer. It's fooled many a fool besides you an' me, that's the God's truth, Lady, and you had better believe it. (*LADY looks reflectively at VAL and he goes on speaking and sits on stool below counter.*) I met a girl on the bayou when I was fourteen. I'd had a feeling that day that if I just kept poling the boat down the bayou a little bit further I would come bang into whatever it was I'd been so long expecting!

LADY: Was she the answer, this girl that you met on the bayou?

VAL: She made me think that she was.

LADY: How did she do that?

VAL: By coming out on the dogtrot of a cabin as naked as I was in that flat-bottom boat! She stood there a while with the daylight burning around her as bright as heaven as far as I could see. You seen the inside of a shell, how white that is, pearly white? Her naked skin was like that. — Oh, God, I remember a bird flown out of the moss and its wings made a shadow on her, and then it sung a single, high clear note, and as if she was waiting for that as a kind of a signal to catch me, she turned and smiled, and walked on back in the cabin —

LADY: You followed?

VAL: Yes, I followed, I followed, like a bird's tail follows a bird, I followed! I thought that she give me the answer to the question I'd been waiting for, but afterwards I wasn't sure that was it, but from that time the question wasn't much plainer than the answer and —

LADY: What?

VAL: At fifteen I left Witches Bayou. When the dog died I sold my boat and the gun — I went to New Orleans in this snakeskin jacket — It didn't take long for me to learn the score.

LADY: What did you learn?

VAL: I learned that I had something to sell besides snakeskins and other wild things' skins I caught on the bayou. I was corrupted! That's the answer —

LADY: Naw, that ain't the answer!

VAL: Okay, *you* tell me the answer!

LADY: I don't know the answer, I just know corruption ain't the answer. I know that much. If I thought that was the answer I'd take Jabe's pistol or his morphine tablets and —

(*A woman bursts into store.*)

WOMAN: I got to use your pay-phone!

LADY: Go ahead. Help yourself. (*Woman crosses to phone, deposits coin.*)

LADY crosses to confectionary. To VAL) Get me a coke from the cooler.

(*VAL crosses and goes out R. During the intense activity among the choral women<sup>20</sup>, LADY and VAL seem bemused as if they were thinking back over their talk before. For the past minute or two a car horn has been heard blowing repeatedly in the near distance.*)

WOMAN: (*At phone*) Cutrere place, get me the Cutrere place, will yuh? David Cutrere or his wife, whichever comes to the phone!

(*BEULAH rushes in from the street to R.C.*)

BEULAH: Lady, Lady, where's Lady! Carol! Cutrere is —!

WOMAN: Quiet, please: I am callin' her brother about her! (*LADY sits at table in confectionery. At phone*) Who's this I'm talking to? Good! I'm calling about your sister, Carol Cutrere. She is blowing her car horn at the Red Crown station, she is blowing and blowing her car horn at the Red Crown station because my husband give the station attendants instructions not to service her car. and she is blowing and blowing and blowing on her horn, drawing a big crowd there and, Mr. Cutrere, I thought that you and your father had agreed to keep that girl out of Two River County for good, that's what we all understood around here.

(*Car horn*)

BEULAH: (*Listening with excited approval*) Good! Good! Tell him that if — (*DOLLY enters.*)

DOLLY: She's gotten out of the car and —

BEULAH: Shhh!

WOMAN: Well, I just wanted to let you know she's back here in town makin' another disturbance and my husband's on the phone now at the Red Grown station — (*DOLLY goes outside and looks off.*) trying to get the Sheriff, so if she gits picked up again by th' law, you can't say I didn't warn you, Mr. Cutrere.

(*Car horn*)

DOLLY: (*Coming back in*) Oh, good! Good!

BEULAH: Where is she, where's she gone now?

WOMAN: You better be quick about it. Yes, I do, I sympathize with you and your father and with Mrs. Cutrere, but Carol can not demand service at our station, we just refuse to wait on her, she's not — Hello? Hello? (*She jiggles phone violently.*)

BEULAH: What's he doin'? Comin' to pick her up?



DOLLY: Call the Sheriff's office! (BEULAH goes outside again. VAL comes back with a bottle of Coca-Cola, hands it to LADY and leans on juke box. Going out to BEULAH) What's goin' on now?

BEULAH: (Outside) Look, look, they're pushing her out of the station driveway.

(They forget LADY in this new excitement. Ad libs continual<sup>21</sup>. The short woman from the station charges back out of the store.)

DOLLY: Where is Carol?

BEULAH: Going into the White Star Pharmacy!

(DOLLY rushes back in to the phone.)

BEULAH: (Crossing to LADY) Lady, I want you to give me your word that if that Cutrere girl comes in here, you won't wait on her! You hear me?

LADY: No.

BEULAH: What? Will you refuse to wait on her?

LADY: I can't refuse to wait on anyone in this store.

BEULAH: Well, I'd like to know why you can't.

DOLLY: Shhhh! I'm on the phone!

BEULAH: Who you phonin', Dolly?

DOLLY: That White Star Pharmacy! I want to make sure that Mr. Dubinsky refuses to wait on that girl! (Having found and deposited coin) I want the White Far Starmacy. I mean the — (stamps foot) — White Star Pharmacy! — I'm so upset my tongue's twisted! (LADY hands coke to VAL. BEULAH is at the window.) I'm getting a busy signal. Has she come out yet?

BEULAH: No, she's still in the White Star!

DOLLY: Maybe they're not waiting on her.

BEULAH: Dubinsky'd wait on a purple-bottom baboon if it put a dime on th' counter an' pointed at something!

DOLLY: I know she set at a table in the Blue Bird Cafe half'n hour last time she was here and the waitresses never came near her!

BEULAH: That's different. They're not foreigners there! (DOLLY crosses to counter.) You can't ostracize a person out of this county unless everybody co-operates. Lady just told me that she was going to wait on her if she comes here.

DOLLY: Lady wouldn't do that.

BEULAH: Ask her! She told me she would!

LADY: (Rising and turning at once to the women and shouting at them). Oh, for God's sake, no! I'm not going to refuse to wait on her because you all don't like her! Besides I'm delighted that wild girl is givin' her brother so much I rouble! (After this outburst she goes back of the counter.)

DOLLY: (At phone) Hush! Mr. Dubinsky! This is Dolly Hamma, Mr. "Dog" Hamma's wife! (CAROL quietly enters the front door.) I want to ask you, is Carol Cutrere in your drugstore?

BEULAH: (*Warningly*) Dolly!

CAROL: No. She isn't.

DOLLY: What?

CAROL: She's here.

(BEULAH goes into confectionery. CAROL moves towards VAL to D.R.C.)

DOLLY: Aw! — Never mind, Mr. Dubinsky, I — (*Hangs up furiously and crosses to door*)

(*A silence in which they all stare at the girl from various positions about the store. She has been on the road all night in an open car: her hair is blown wild, her face flushed and eyes bright with fever. Her manner in the scene is that of a wild animal at bay, desperate but fearless.*)

LADY: (*Finally and quietly*) Hello, Carol.

CAROL: Hello, Lady.

LADY: (*Defiantly cordial*) I thought that you were in New Orleans, Carol.

CAROL: Yes, I was. Last night.

LADY: Well, you got back fast.

CAROL: I drove all night.

LADY: In that storm?

CAROL: The wind took the top off my car but I didn't stop.

(*She watches VAL steadily; he steadily ignores her; turns away and puts bottles of Coca-Cola on a table.*)

LADY: (*With growing impatience*) Is something wrong at home, is some one sick?

CAROL: (*Absently*) No. No, not that I know of, I wouldn't know if there was, they — may I sit down?

LADY: Why, sure.

CAROL: (*Crossing to chair at counter and sitting*) They pay me to stay away so I wouldn't know — (*Silence. VAL walks deliberately past her and goes into alcove.*) I think I have a fever, I feel like I'm catching pneumonia, everything's so far away —

(*Silence again except for the faint, hissing whispers of BEULAH and DOLLY at the back of the store.*)

LADY: (*With a touch of exasperation*) Is there something you want?

CAROL: Everything seems miles away —

LADY: Carol, I said is there anything you want here?

CAROL: Excuse me! — yes —

LADY: Yes, what?

CAROL: Don't bother now. I'll wait.

(*VAL comes out of alcove with the blue jacket on.*)

LADY: Wait for what, what are you waiting for! You don't have to wait for nothing, just say what you want and if I got it in stock I'll give it to you!

(*Phone rings once.*)

CAROL (*vaguely*): Thank you — no —

LADY: (*to VAL*) Get that phone, Val.

(*DOLLY crosses and hisses something inaudible to BEULAH.*)

BEULAH: (*Rising*) I just want to wait here to see if she does or she don't.

DOLLY: She just said she would!

BEULAH: Just the same, I'm gonna wait!!

VAL: (*At phone*) Yes, sir, she is. — I'll tell her. (*Hangs up and speaks to LADY,*) Her brother's heard she's here and he's coming to pick her up.

LADY: *David Cutrere is not coming in this store!*

DOLLY: Aw-aw!

BEULAH: David Cutrere used to be her lover.

DOLLY: I remember you told me.

LADY: (*Wheels about suddenly toward the women*) Beulah! Dolly! Why're you back there hissing together like geese? (*Coming from behind counter to R.C.*) Why don't you go to th' — Blue Bird and — have some hot coffee — talk there!

BEULAH: It looks like we're getting what they call the bum's rush.

DOLLY: I never stay where I'm not wanted and when I'm not wanted somewhere I never come back!

(*They cross out and slam door.*)

LADY: (*After a pause*) What did you come here for?

CAROL: To deliver a message.

LADY: To me?

CAROL: No.

LADY: Then who? (*CAROL stares at LADY gravely a moment, then turns slowly to look at VAL.*) Him? — Him? (*CAROL nods slowly and slightly.*) O.K., then, give him the message, deliver the message to him.

CAROL: It's a private message. Could I speak to him alone, please?

(*LADY gets a shawl from a hook.*)

LADY: Oh, for God's sake! Your brother's plantation is ten minutes from here in that sky-blue Cadillac his rich wife give him. Now look, he's on his way here but I won't, let him come in, I don't even want his hand to touch the door-handle. I know your message, this boy knows your message, there's nothing private about it. But I tell you, that this boy's not for sale in my store! — Now — I'm going out to watch for the sky-blue Cadillac on the highway. When I see it, I'm going to throw this door open and holler and when I Holler, I want you out of this door like a shot from a pistol! — that fast! Understand?

NOTE: *Above scene is overextended. This can be remedied by a very lively performance. It might also help to indicate a division between the Lady — Val scene and the group scene that follows.*

(LADY slams door behind her. The loud noise of the door-slam increases the silence that follows. VAL's oblivious attitude is not exactly hostile, but deliberate. There's a kind of purity in it; also a kind of refusal to concern himself with a problem that isn't his own. He holds his guitar with a specially tender concentration, and strikes a soft chord on it. The girl stares at VAL; he whistles a note and tightens a guitar string to the pitch of the whistle, not looking at the girl. Since this scene is followed by the emotional scene between LADY and DAVID, it should be keyed somewhat lower than written; it's important that VAL should not seem brutal in his attitude towards CAROL; there should be an air between them of two lonely children.)

VAL: *(In a soft, preoccupied tone)* You told the lady I work for that you had a message for me. Is that right, Miss? Have you got a message for me?

CAROL: *(She rises, moves a few steps towards him, hesitantly. VAL whistles, plucks guitar string, changes pitch)* You've spilt some ashes on your new blue suit.

VAL: Is that the message?

CAROL: *(Moves away a stop)* No. No, that was just an excuse to touch you. The message is —

VAL: What?

*(Music fades in — guitar.)*

CAROL: I'd love to hold something the way you hold your guitar, that's how I'd love to hold something, with such — *tender protection!* I'd love to hold you that way, with that same — *tender protection!* *(Her hand has fallen on to his knee, which he has drawn up to rest a foot on the counter-stool).* — *Because you hang the moon for me!*

VAL: *(He speaks to her, not roughly but in a tone that holds a long history that began with a romantic acceptance of such declarations as she has just made to him, and that turned gradually to his present distrust. He puts guitar down and goes to her.)* Who're you tryin' t' fool beside you'self? You couldn't stand the weight of a man's body on you. *(He casually picks up her wrist and pushes the sleeve back from it.)* What's this here? A human wrist with a bone? It feels like a twig I could snap with two fingers — *(Gently, negligently, pushes collar of her trench coat back from her hare throat and shoulders. Runs a finger along her neck tracing a vein.)* Little girl, you're transparent, I can see the veins in you. A man's weight on you would break you like a bundle of sticks —

*(Music fades out.)*

CAROL: *(Gazes at him, startled by his perception)* Isn't it funny! You've hit on the truth about me. The act of love-making is almost unbearably painful,

and yet, of course, I do bear it, because to be not alone, even for a few moments, is worth the pain and the danger. It's dangerous for me because I'm not built for childbearing.

VAL: Well, then, fly away, little bird, fly away before you — get broke. (*He turns back to his guitar.*)

CAROL: Why do you dislike me?

VAL: (*Turning back*) I never dislike nobody till they interfere with me.

CAROL: How have I interfered with you? Did I snatch when I saw my cousin's watch on you?

VAL: (*Beginning to remove his watch*) — You won't take my word for a true thing I told you. I'm thirty years old and I 'm done with the crowd you run with and the places you run to. The Club Rendezvous, the Starlite Lounge, the Music Bar, and all the night places. *Here* — (*Offers watch*) — take this Rolex Chronometer that tells the time of the day and the day of the week and the month and all the crazy moon's phases. I never stole nothing before. When I stole that I known it was time for me to get off the party, so take it back, now, to Bertie — (*He takes her hand and tries to force the watch into her fist. There is a little struggle, he can't open her fist. She is crying, but staring fiercely into his eyes. He draws a hissing breath and hurls watch violently across the floor.*) That's my message to you and the pack you run with!

CAROL: (*Flinging coat away*) I RUN WITH NOBODY! — I hoped I could run with you — (*Music stops short.*) You're in danger here, Snakeskin. You've taken off the jacket that said: "I'm wild, I'm alone!" and put on the nice blue uniform of a convict! — Last night I woke up thinking about you again. I drove all night to bring you this warning of danger — (*Her trembling hand covers her lips.*) — The message I came here to give you was a warning of danger! I hoped you'd hear me and let me take you away before it's too late.

(*Door bursts open. LADY rushes inside, crying out.*)

LADY: Your brother's coming, go out! He can't come in! (*CAROL picks up coat and goes into confectionery, sobbing. VAL crosses towards door.*) Lock that door! Don't let him come in my store!

(*CAROL sinks sobbing at table. LADY runs up to the landing of the stairs as DAVID CUTRERE enters the store. He is a tall man in hunter's clothes. He is hardly less handsome now than he was in his youth but something has gone: his power is that of a captive who rules over other captives. His face, his eyes, have something of the same desperate, unnatural hardness that LADY meets the world with.*)

DAVID: Carol?

VAL: She's in there. (*He nods toward the dim confectionery into which the girl has retreated.*)

DAVID (*crossing*): Carol! (*She rises and advances a few steps into the lighted area of the stage.*) You broke the agreement. (*CAROL nods slightly, staring at*

VAL. *Harshly*) All right. I'll drive you back. Where's your coat? (CAROL  *murmurs something inaudible, staring at VAL.*) Where is her coat, where is my sister's coat?

(VAL *crosses below and picks up the coat that CAROL has dropped on the floor and hands it to DAVID. He throws it roughly about CAROL'S shoulders and propels her forcefully towards the store entrance. VAL moves away to D.R.*).

LADY: (Suddenly and sharply) Wait, please!

(DAVID *looks up at the landing; stands frozen as LADY rushes down the stairs.*)

DAVID: (Softly, hoarsely) How — are you, Lady?

LADY: (Turning to VAL) Val, go out.

DAVID: (To CAROL) Carol, will you wait for me in my car?

(He opens the door for his sister; she glances back at VAL with desolation in her eyes. VAL crosses quickly through the confectionery. Sound of door closing in there. CAROL nods slightly as if in sad response to some painful question and goes out of the store. Pause.)

LADY: I told you once to never come in this store.

DAVID: I came for my sister — (He turns as if to go.)

LADY: No, wait!

DAVID: I don't dare leave my sister alone on the road.

LADY: I have something to tell you I never told you before. (She crosses to him. DAVID turns back to her, then moves away to D.R.C.) I — carried your child in my body the summer you quit me.

(Silence.)

DAVID: I — didn't know.

LADY: No, no, I didn't write you no letter about it; I was proud then; I had pride. But I had your child in my body the summer you quit me, that summer they burned my father in his wine garden, and you, you washed your hands clean of any connection with a Dago bootlegger's daughter and — (Her breathless voice momentarily falters and she makes a fierce gesture as she struggles to speak.) — took that — society girl that — restored your homeplace and give you such — (Catches breath) — wellborn children —

DAVID: I — didn't know.

LADY: Well, now you do know, you know now I carried your child in my body the summer you quit me but I had it cut out of my body, and they cut my heart out with it!

DAVID: I — didn't know.

LADY: I wanted death after that, but death don't come when you want it, it comes when you don't want it! I wanted death, then, but I took the next best

thing. *You sold yourself. I sold my self. You was bought. I was bought. You made whores of us both!*

DAVID: I — didn't know —

*(Mandolin, barely audible, "Dicitincello Vuoi".)*

LADY: But that's all a long time ago. Some reason I drove by there a few nights ago; the shore of the lake where my father had his wine garden? You remember? You remember the wine garden of my father? (DAVID *stares at her. She, turns away.*) No, you don't? You don't remember it even?

DAVID: Lady, I don't — remember — anything else —

LADY: The mandolin of my father, the songs that I sang with my father in my father's wine garden?

DAVID: Yes, I don't remember anything else —

LADY: *Core Ingrata! Come Le Rose!* And we disappeared and he would call, "Lady? Lady?" (Turns to him) *How could I answer him with two tongues in my mouth! (A sharp hissing intake of breath, eyes opened wide, hand clapped over her mouth as if what she said was unendurable to her. He turns instantly, sharply away.) (Music stops short. JABE begins to knock for her on the floor above. She crosses to stairs, stops, turns.) I hold hard feelings! —*Don't ever come here again. If your wild sister comes here, send somebody else for her, not you. Because I hope never to feel this knife again in me. *i (Her hand is on her chest; she breathes with difficulty. He turns away from her; starts towards the door. She takes a step towards him.)* And don't pity me neither. I haven't gone down so terribly far in the world. I got a going concern in this mercantile store, in there's the confectionery which'll reopen this spring, it's being done over to make it the place that all the young people will come to, it's going to be like — (He touches the door, pauses with his back to her.) the wine garden of my father, those wine-drinking nights when you had something better than anything you've had since!

DAVID: Lady — That's —

LADY: What?

DAVID: True! (Opens door)

LADY: Go now. I just wanted to tell you my life ain't over. (He goes out as JABE continues knocking. She stands, stunned, motionless till VAL quietly re-enters the store. She becomes aware of his return rather slowly; then she murmurs) I made a fool of myself —

VAL: What?

*(She crosses to stairs.)*

LADY: I made a fool of myself!

*(She goes up the stairs with effort as the lights change slowly to mark a division of scenes.)*

## Scene Two

*Sunset of that day. VAL is alone in the store, as if preparing to go. The sunset is fiery. A large woman opens the door and stands there looking dazed. It is VEE TALBOTT.*

VAL: (*Turning*) Hello, Mrs. Talbott.

VEE: Something's gone wrong with my eyes. I can't see nothing.

VAL: (*Going to her*) Here, let me help you. You probably drove up here with that setting sun in your face. (*Leading her to shoe-fitting chair at R. window.*) There now. Set down right here.

VEE: Thank you — so — much —

VAL: I haven't seen you since that night you brought me here to ask for this job.

VEE: Has the minister called on you yet? Reverend Tooker? I made him promise he would. I told him you were new around here and weren't affiliated to any church yet. I want you to go to ours.

VAL: That's — mighty kind of you.

VEE: The Church of the Resurrection, it's Episcopal.

VAL: Uh, huh.

VEE: Unwrap that picture, please.

VAL: Sure. (*He tears paper off canvas.*)

VEE: It's the Church of the Resurrection. I give it a sort of imaginative treatment. You know, Jabe and Lady have never darkened a church door. I thought it ought to be hung where Jabe could look at it, it might help to bring that poor dying man to Jesus —

(*VAL places it against chair R. of counter and crouches before the canvas, studying it long and seriously. VEE coughs nervously, gets up, bends to look at the canvas, sits uncertainly back down. VAL smiles at her warmly, then back to the canvas.*)

VAL: (*At last*) What's this here in the picture?

VEE: The steeple.

VAL: Aw. — Is the church steeple red?

VEE: Why — no, but —

VAL: Why'd you paint it red, then?

VEE: Oh, well, you see, I — (*Laughs nervously, childlike in her growing excitement*) — I just, just *felt* it that way! I paint a thing how I feel it instead of always the way it actually is. Appearances are misleading, nothing is what it looks like to the eyes. You got to have — *vision* — to see!

VAL: Yes. Vision. Vision! — to see — (*Rises, nodding gravely, emphatically*)

VEE: I paint from vision. They call me a visionary.

VAL: Oh.

VEE: (*With shy pride*) That's what the New Orleans and Memphis newspaper people admire so much in my work. They call it a primitive style, the



work of a visionary. One of my pictures is hung on the exhibition in Audubon Park museum<sup>22</sup> and they have asked for others. I can't turn them out fast enough! — I have to wait for — visions, no, I — I can't paint without — visions — I — couldn't *live* without visions!

VAL: Have you always had visions?

VEE: No, just since I was born, I — (*Stops short, startled by the absurdity of her answer. Both laugh suddenly, then she rushes on, her great bosom heaving with curious excitement, twisting in her chair, gesturing with clenched hands.*) I was born, I was born with a caul! A sort of thing like a veil, a thin, thin sort of a web was over my eyes. They call that a caul. It's a sign that you're going to have visions, and I did, I had them! (*Pauses for breath; light fades*) — When I was little my baby sister died. Just one day old, she died. They had to baptize her at midnight to save her soul.

VAL: Uh-huh. (*He sits opposite her, smiling, attentive.*)

VEE: The minister came at midnight, and after the baptism service, he handed the bowl of holy water to me and told me, "Be sure to empty this out on the ground!" — I didn't. I was scared to go out at midnight with, with — death! in the — house and — I sneaked into the kitchen; I emptied the holy water into the kitchen sink — thunder struck! — the kitchen sink turned black, the kitchen sink turned absolutely black!

(SHERIFF TALBOTT enters the front door.)

TALBOTT: Mama! What're you doin'?

VEE: Talkin'.

TALBOTT: I'm gonna see Jabe a minute, you go out and wait in th' car. (*He goes up. She rises slowly, picks up canvas and, moves to counter.*)

VEE: Oh, I — tell you! — since I got into this painting, my whole outlook is different. I can't explain how it is, the difference to me.

VAL: You don't have to explain. I know what you mean. Before you started to paint, it didn't make sense.

VEE: What — what didn't?

VAL: Existence!

VEE: (*Slowly and softly*) No — no, it didn't — existence didn't make sense — (*She places canvas on guitar on counter and sits in chair.*)

VAL: (*Rising and crossing to her*) You lived in Two River County, the wife of the county Sheriff. You saw awful things take place.

VEE: Awful! Things!

VAL: Beatings!

VEE: Yes!

VAL: Lynchings!

VEE: Yes!

VAL: Runaway convicts torn to pieces by hounds!

(*This is the first time she could express this horror.*)

VEE: *Chain-gang dogs!*

VAL: Yeah?

VEE: Tear fugitives!

VAL: Yeah?

VEE: *To pieces —*

*(She had half risen: now sinks back faintly. VAL looks beyond her in the dim store, his light eyes have a dark gaze. It may be that his speech is too articulate: counteract this effect by groping, hesitations.)*

VAL: *(Moving away a step)* But violence ain't quick always. Sometimes it's slow. Some tornadoes are slow. Corruption — rots men's hearts and — rot is slow —

VEE: How do you —?

VAL: Know? I been a witness, I know!

VEE: *I been a witness! I know!*

VAL: We seen these things from seats down front at the show. *(He crouches before her and touches her hands in her lap. Her breath shudders.)* And so you begun to paint your visions. Without no plan, no training, you started to paint as if God touched your fingers. *(He lifts her hands slowly, gently from her soft lap.)* You made some beauty out of this dark country with these two, soft, woman hands — *(TALBOTT appears on the stair landing, looks down, silent.)* Yeah, you made some beauty! *(Strangely, gently, he lifts her hands to his mouth. She gasps. TALBOTT calls out)*

TALBOTT: *Hey! (VEE springs up, gasping. Descending) Cut this crap! (VAL moves away to R. C. To VEE) Go out. Wait in the car. (He stares at VAL till VEE lumbers out as if dazed. After a while) Jabe Torrance told me to take a good look at you. (Crosses to VAL) Well, now, I've taken that look. (Nods shortly. Goes out of store. The store is now very dim. As door closes on TALBOTT, VAL picks up painting; he goes behind counter and places it on a shelf, then picks up his guitar and sits on counter. Lights go down to mark a division as he sings and plays "Heavenly Grass".)*

### Scene Three

*As VAL finishes the song, LADY descends the stair. He rises and turns on a green-shaded light bulb.*

VAL: *(To LADY)* You been up there a long time.

LADY: I gave him morphine. He must be out of his mind. He says such awful things to me. He says I want him to die.

VAL: You sure you don't?

LADY: I don't want no one to die. Death's terrible, Val. *(Pause. She wanders to the front window R. He takes his guitar and crosses to the door.)* You gotta go now?

VAL: I'm late.

LADY: Late for what? You got a date with somebody?

VAL: No —

LADY: Then stay a while. Play something. I'm all unstrung — (*He crosses back and leans against counter; the guitar is barely audible, under the speeches.*) I made a terrible fool of myself down here today with —

VAL: That girl's brother?

LADY: Yes, I — threw away — pride —

VAL: His sister said she'd come here to give me a warning. I wonder what of?

LADY: (*Sitting in shoe-fitting chair*) I said things to him I should of been too proud to say —

(*Both are pursuing their own reflections; guitar continues softly.*)

VAL: Once or twice lately I've woke up with a fast heart, shouting something, and had to pick up my guitar to calm myself down — Somehow or other I can't get used to this place, I don't feel safe in this place, but I — want to stay —

(*Stops short; sound of wild baying.*)

LADY: The chain-gang dogs are chasing some runaway convict —

VAL: *Run boy! Run fast, brother! If they catch you, you never will run again! That's —* (*He has thrust his guitar under his arm on this line and crossed to the door.*) — for sure — (*The baying of the dogs changes, becomes almost a single savage note.*) — Uh-huh — the dogs've got him — (*Pause*) They're tearing him to pieces! (*Pause. Baying continues. A shot is fired. The baying dies out. He stops with his hand on the door; glances back at her; nods; draws the door open. The wind sings loud in the dusk.*)

LADY: *Wait!*

VAL: Huh?

LADY: Where do you stay?

VAL: When?

LADY: Nights.

VAL: I stay at the Wildwood cabins on the highway.

LADY: You like it there?

VAL: Uh-huh.

LADY: Why?

VAL: I got a comfortable bed, a two-burner stove, a shower and icebox there.

LADY: You want to save money?

VAL: I never could in my life.

LADY: You could if you stayed on the place.

VAL: What place?

LADY: This place.

VAL: Whereabouts on this place?

LADY: (*Pointing to alcove*) Back of that curtain.

VAL: Where they try on clothes?

LADY: There's a cot there. A nurse slept on it when Jabe had his first operation, and there's a washroom down here and I'll get a plumber to put in a hot an' cold shower! I'll — fix it up nice for you — (*She rises, crosses to foot of stairs. Pause. He lets the door shut, staring at her.*)

VAL: (*Moving D. C.*) I — don't like to be — obligated.

LADY: There wouldn't be no obligation, you'd do me a favor. I'd feel safer at night with somebody on the place. I would; it would cost you nothing! And you could save up that money you spend on the cabin. How much? Ten a week? Why, two or three months from now you'd — save enough money to — (*Makes a wide gesture with a short laugh as if startled*) Go on! Take a look at it! See if it don't suit you! — All right —

(*But he doesn't move; he appears reflective.*)

LADY: (*Shivering, hugging herself*) Where does heat go in this building?

VAL: (*Reflectively*) Heat rises —

LADY: You with your dog's temperature, don't feel cold, do you? I do! I turn blue with it!

VAL: Yeah —

(*The wait is unendurable to LADY.*)

LADY: Well, aren't you going to look at it, the room back there, and see if it suits you or not?!

VAL: I'll go and take a look at it —

(*He crosses to the alcove and disappears behind the curtain. A light goes on behind it, making its bizarre pattern translucent: a gold tree with scarlet fruit and white birds in it, formally designed. Truck roars; lights sweep the frosted window.*)

LADY gasps aloud; takes out a pint bottle and a glass from under the counter, setting them down with a crash that makes her utter a startled exclamation: then a startled laugh. She pours a drink and sits in chair R. of counter. The lights turn off behind the alcove curtain and VAL comes back out. She sits stiffly without looking at him as he crosses back lazily, goes behind counter, puts guitar down. His manner is gently sad as if he had met with a familiar, expected disappointment. He sits down quietly on edge of counter and takes the pint bottle and pours himself a shot of the liquor with a reflective sign. Boards creak loudly, contracting with the cold. LADY's voice is harsh and sudden, demanding.)

LADY: Well, is it okay or — what?

VAL: I never been in a position where I could turn down something I got for nothing in my life. I like that picture in there. That's a famous picture, that "Sep-

tember Morn"<sup>23</sup> picture you got on the wall in there. Ha ha! I might have I rouble sleeping in a room with that picture. I might keep turning the light on to take another look at it! The way she's cold in that water and sort of crouched over in it, holding her body like that, that — might — ha ha! — sort of keep me awake —

LADY: Aw, you with your dog's temperature and your control of all functions, it would take more than a picture to keep you awake!

VAL: I was just kidding.

LADY: I was just kidding, too.

VAL: But you know how a single man is. He don't come home every night with just his shadow.

*(Pause. She takes a drink.)*

LADY: You bring girls home nights to the Wildwood cabins, do you?

VAL: I ain't so far. But I would like to feel free to. That old life is what I'm used to. I always worked nights in cities and if you work nights in cities you live in a different city from those that work days.

LADY: Yes. I know, I — imagine —

VAL: The ones that work days in cities and the ones that work nights in cities, they live in different cities. The cities have the same name but they are different cities. As different as night and day. There's something wild in the country that only the night people know —

LADY: Yeah, I know!

VAL: I'm thirty years old! — but sudden changes don't work, it takes —

LADY: Time — yes —

*(Slight pause which she finds disconcerting. He slides off counter and moves around below it.)*

VAL: You been good to me, Lady. — Why d'you want me to stay here?

LADY: *(Defensively)* I told you why.

VAL: For company nights?

LADY: Yeah, to, to! — *guard the store*, nights!

VAL: To be a night watchman?

LADY: Yeah, to be a night *watchman*.

VAL: You feel nervous alone here?

LADY: Naturally now! — Jabe sleeps with a pistol next to him but if somebody broke in the store, he couldn't git up and all I could do is holler! — Who'd *hear* me? They got a telephone girl on the night shift with — sleepin' sickness, I think! Anyhow, why're you so suspicious? You look at me like you thought I was *plottin'*. — Kind people *exist*: Even me! *(She sits up rigid in chair, lips and eyes tight closed, drawing in a loud breath which comes from a tension both personal and vicarious.)*

VAL: I understand, Lady, but — Why're you sitting up so stiff in that chair?

LADY: Ha! (*Sharp laugh; she leans back in chair.*)

VAL: You're still unrelaxed.

LADY: I know.

VAL: Relax. (*Moving around close to her*) I'm going to show you some tricks I learned from a lady osteopath that took me in, too.

LADY: What tricks?

VAL: How to manipulate joints and bones in a way that makes you feel like a loose piece of faring. (*Moves behind her chair. She watches him.*) Do you trust me or don't you?

LADY: Yeah, I trust you completely, but —

VAL: Well, then, lean forward a little and raise your arms up and turn sideways in the chair. (*She follows these instructions.*) Drop your head. (*He manipulates her head and neck.*) Now the spine, Lady. (*He places his knee against the small of her backbone and she utters a sharp, startled laugh as he draws her backbone hard against his kneecap.*)

LADY: Ha, ha! — That makes a sound like, like, like! — boards contracting with cold in the building, ha ha!

(*He relaxes.*)

VAL: Better?

LADY: Oh, yes! — much — thanks —

VAL: (*Stroking her neck*) Your skin is like silk. You're light-skinned to be Italian.

LADY: Most people in this country think Italian people are dark. Some are but not all are! Some of them are fair — very fair — My father's people were dark but my mother's people were fair. Ha ha! (*The laughter is senseless. He smiles understandingly at her as she chatters to cover confusion. He turns away, then, goes above and sits on counter close to her.*) My mother's mother's sister — come here from Monte Cassino<sup>24</sup>, to die, with relations! — but I think people always die alone — with or without relations. I was a little girl then and I remember it took her such a long, long time to die we almost forgot her. — And she was so quiet — in a corner — And I remember asking her one time, Zia Teresa<sup>25</sup>, how does it feel to die? — Only a little girl would ask such a question, ha ha! Oh, and I remember her answer. She said, "It's a lonely feeling".

I think she wished she had stayed in Italy and died in a place that she knew — (*Looks at him directly for the first time since mentioning the alcove*) Well, there is a washroom, and I'll get the plumber to put in a hot and cold shower! Well — (*Rises, retreats awkwardly from the chair. His interest seems to have wandered from her.*) I'll go up and get some clean linen and make up that bed in there. (*She turns and walks rapidly, almost running, to stairs. He appears lost in some private reflection but as soon as she has disappeared above the landing, he says something under his breath and crosses directly to the cashbox. He coughs loudly to cover the sound of ringing it open; scoops out a fistful of bills and coughs*

again to cover the sound of slamming drawer shut. Picks up his guitar and goes out the front door of store. LADY returns downstairs, laden with linen. The outer darkness moans through the door left open. She crosses to the door and a little outside it, peering both ways down the dark road. Then she comes in furiously, with an Italian curse, shutting the door with her foot or shoulder, and throws the linen down on counter. She crosses abruptly to cashbox, rings it open and discovers theft. Slams drawer violently shut.) Thief! Thief!

(Turns to phone, lifts receiver. Holds it a moment, then slams it back into place. Wanders desolately back to the door, opens it and stands staring out into the starless night as the scene dims out. Music: blues-guitar.)

#### Scene Four

Late that night. VAL enters the store, a little unsteadily, with his guitar; goes to the cashbox and rings it open. He counts some bills off a big wad and returns them to the cashbox and the larger wad to the pocket of his snakeskin jacket. Sudden footsteps above; light spills on to stair landing. He quickly moves away from the cashbox as LADY appears on the landing in a white sateen robe; she carries a flashlight.

LADY: Who's that?

(Music fades out.)

VAL: Me.

(She turns the flashlight on his figure.)

LADY: Oh, my God, how you scared me!

VAL: You didn't expect me?

LADY: How'd I know it was you I heard come in?

VAL: I thought you give me a room here.

LADY: You left without letting me know if you took it or not. (She is descending the stairs into store, flashlight still on him.)

VAL: Catch me turning down something I get for nothing.

LADY: Well, you might have said something so I'd expect you or not.

VAL: I thought you took it for granted.

LADY: I don't take nothing for granted. (He starts back to the alcove.) Wait! — I'm coming downstairs — (She descends with the flashlight beam on his face.)

VAL: You're blinding me with that flashlight.

(He laughs. She keeps the flashlight on him. He starts back again towards the alcove.)

LADY: The bed's not made because I didn't expect you.

VAL: That's all right.

LADY: I brought the linen downstairs and you'd cut out.

VAL: Yeah, well — (*She picks up linen on counter.*) Give me that stuff. I can make up my own rack. Tomorrow you'll have to get yourself a new clerk. (*Takes it from her and goes again towards alcove*) I had a lucky night. (*Exhibits a wad of bills*)

LADY: *Hey! (He stops near the curtain. She goes and turns on green-shaded bulb over cashbox.) Did you just open this cashbox?*

VAL: Why you ask that?

LADY: I thought I heard it ring open a minute ago, that's why I come down here.

VAL: In your — white satin — kimona?

LADY: *Did you just open the cashbox?!*

VAL: I wonder who did if I didn't —

LADY: Nobody did if you didn't, but somebody did! (*Opens cashbox and hurriedly counts money. She is trembling violently.*)

V A L: How come you didn't lock the cash up in the safe this evening, Lady?

LADY: Sometimes I forget to.

VAL: That's careless.

LADY: Why'd you open the cashbox when you come in?

VAL: I opened it twice this evening, once before I went out and again when I come back. I borrowed some money and put it back in the box an' got all this left over! (*Shows her the wad of bills*) I beat a blackjack dealer five times straight. With this much loot I can retire for the season — (*He returns money to pocket*)

LADY: *Chicken-feed!*<sup>26</sup> — I'm sorry for you.

VAL: You're sorry for me?

LADY: I'm sorry for you because nobody can help you. I was touched by your — strangeness, your strange talk. — That thing about birds with no feet so they have to sleep on the wind? — I said to myself, "This hoy is a bird with no feet so he has to sleep on the wind", and that softened my fool Dago heart and I wanted to help you — Fool, me! — I got what I should of expected. You robbed me while I was upstairs to get sheets to make up your bed! (*He starts out towards the door.*) I guess I'm a fool to even feel disappointed.

VAL: (*Stopping C. and dropping linen on counter*) You're disappointed in me. I was disappointed in you.

LADY: (*Coming from behind counter*) How did I disappoint you?

VAL: There wasn't no cot behind that curtain before. You put it back there for a purpose.

LADY: It was back there! — folded behind the mirror.

VAL: It wasn't back of no mirror when you told me three times to go and —

LADY: (*Cutting in*) I left that money in the cashbox on purpose, to find out if I could trust you.



VAL: You got back th' —

LADY: No, no, no, I can't trust you, now I know I can't trust you, I got to trust anybody or I don't want him.

VAL: That's O. K., I don't expect no character reference from you.

LADY: I'll give you a character reference. I'd say this boy's a peculiar talker! But I wouldn't say a real hard worker or honest. I'd say a peculiar slew-footer that sweet talks you while he's got his hand in the cashbox.

VAL: I took out less than you owed me.

LADY: Don't mix up the issue. I see through you, mister!

VAL: I see through you, Lady.

LADY: What d'you see through me?

VAL: You sure you want me to tell?

LADY: I'd love for you to.

VAL: A not so young and not so satisfied woman, that hired a man off the highway to do double duty without paying overtime for it — I mean a store clerk days and a stud nights, and —

LADY: God, no! You —! *(She raises her hand as if to strike at him.)* Oh, God no — you cheap little — *(Invectives fail her so she uses her fists, hammering at him with them. He seizes her wrists. She struggles a few moments more, then collapses, in chair, sobbing. He lets go of her gently.)*

VAL: It's natural. You felt — lonely —

*(She sobs brokenly against the counter.)*

LADY: Why did you come back here?

VAL: To put back the money I took so you wouldn't remember me as not honest or grateful — *(He picks up his guitar and starts to the door nodding gravely. She catches her breath, rushes to intercept him, spreading her arms like a crossbar over the door.)*

LADY: NO, NO, DON'T GO — I NEED YOU!!! *(He faces her for five beats. The true passion of her outcry touches him then, and he turns about and crosses to the alcove — As he draws the curtain across it he looks back at her.)* TO LIVE — TO GO ON LIVING!!!

*(Music fades in — "Lady's Love Song" — guitar. He closes the curtain and turns on the light behind it, making it translucent. Through an opening in the alcove entrance, we see him sitting down with his guitar. LADY picks up the linen and crosses to the alcove like a spellbound child. Just outside it she stops, frozen with uncertainty, a conflict of feelings, but then he begins to whisper the words of a song so tenderly that she is able to draw the curtain open and enter the alcove. He looks up gravely at her from his guitar. She closes the curtain behind her. Its bizarre design, a gold tree with white birds and scarlet fruit in it, is softly translucent with the bulb lighted behind it. The guitar continues softly for a few moments; stops; the stage darkens till only the curtain of the alcove is clearly visible.)*

**ACT THREE****Scene One**

*An early morning. The Saturday before Easter. The sleeping alcove is lighted. VAL is smoking, half dressed, on the edge of the cot. LADY comes running, panting downstairs, her hair loose, in dressing robe and slippers and calls out in a panicky, shrill whisper.*

LADY: Val! Val, he's com in' downstairs!

VAL: (*Hoarse with sleep*) Who's — what?

LADY: Jabe!

VAL: Jabe?

LADY: I swear he is, he's coming downstairs!

VAL: What of it?

LADY: Jesus, will you get up and put some clothes on? The damned nurse told him that he could come down in the store to check over the stock! You want him to catch you half dressed on that bed there?

VAL: Don't he know I sleep here?

LADY: Nobody knows you sleep here but you and me. (*Voices above.*) Oh, God! — they've started.

NURSE: Don't hurry now. Take one step at a time.

*(Footsteps on stairs, slow, shuffling. The professional, nasal cheer of a nurse's voice.)*

LADY: (*Panicky*) Get your shirt on! Come out!

NURSE: That's right. One step at a time, one step at a time, lean on my shoulder and take one step at a time.

*(VAL rises, still dazed from sleep. LADY gasps and sweeps the curtain across the alcove just a moment before the descending figures enter the sight-lines on the landing. LADY breathes like an exhausted runner as she backs away from the alcove and assumes a forced smile. JABE and the nurse, MISS PORTER, appear on the landing of the stairs and at the same moment scudding clouds expose the sun. A narrow window on the landing admits a brilliant shaft of light upon the pair. They have a bizarre and awful appearance, the tall man, his rusty black suit hanging on him like an empty sack, his eyes burning malignantly from his yellow face, leaning on a stumpy little woman with bright pink or orange hair, clad all in starched white, with a voice that purrs with the faintly continuous cheer and sweetness of those hired to care for the dying.)*

NURSE: Aw, now, just look at that, that nice bright sun comin' out.

LADY: Miss Porter? — it's cold down here!

JABE: What's she say?

NURSE: She says it's cold down here.

LADY: The — the — the air's not warm enough yet, the air's not heated!

NURSE: He's determined to come right down, Mrs. Torrance.

LADY: I know but —

NURSE: *Wild horses couldn't hold him a minute longer.*

JABE: (*Exhausted*) Let's — rest here a minute —

LADY: (*Eagerly*) Yes! Rest there a minute!

NURSE: Okay. We'll rest here a minute —

(*They sit down side by side on a bench under the artificial palm tree in the shaft of light. JABE glares into the light like a fierce dying old beast. There are sounds from the alcove. To cover them up, LADY keeps making startled, laughing sounds in her throat, half laughing, half panting, chafing her hands together at the foot of the stairs, and coughing falsely.*)

JABE: Lady, what's wrong? Why are you so excited?

LADY: It seems like a miracle to me.

JABE: What seems like a miracle to you?

LADY: You coming downstairs.

JABE: You never thought I would come downstairs again?

LADY: Not this quick! Not as quick as this, Jabe! Did you think he would pick up as quick as this, Miss Porter?

(JABE rises.)

NURSE: Ready?

JABE: Ready.

NURSE: He's doing fine, knock wood.

LADY: Yes, knock wood, knock wood! (*Drums counter loudly with her knuckles. VAL steps silently from behind the alcove curtain as the NURSE and JABE resume their slow, shuffling descent of the stairs. Moving back to D. R. C.*) You got to be careful not to overdo. You don't want another setback. Ain't that right, Miss Porter?

NURSE: Well, it's my policy to mobilize the patient.

LADY: (*To VAL in a shrill whisper*) Coffee's boiling, take the goddam coffee pot off the burner! (*She gives VAL a panicky signal to go in the alcove.*)

JABE: Who're you talking to, Lady?

LADY: To — to — to Val, the clerk! I told him to — get you a — chair!

JABE: Who's that?

LADY: Val, Val, the clerk, you know Val!

JABE: Not yet. I'm anxious to meet him. Where is he?

LADY: Right here, right here, here's Val! (*VAL returns from the alcove.*)

JABE: He's here bright and early.

LADY: The early bird catches the worm!

JABE: That's right. Where is the worm?

LADY: (*Loudly*) Ha ha!

NURSE: Careful! One step at a time, Mr. Torrance.

LADY: Saturday before Easter's our biggest sales-day of the year, I mean second biggest, but sometimes it's even bigger than Christmas Eve! So I told Val to get here a half-hour early.

(JABE misses his step and stumbles to foot of stairs. LADY screams. NURSE rushes down to him. VAL advances and raises the man to his feet.)

VAL: Here. Here.

LADY: Oh, my God.

NURSE: Oh, oh!

JABE: I'm all right.

NURSE: Are you sure?

LADY: Are you sure?

JABE: Let me go! (*He staggers to lean against counter, panting, glaring, with a malignant smile.*)

LADY: Oh, my God. Oh, my — God —

JABE: This is the boy that works here?

LADY: Yes, this is the clerk I hired to help us out, Jabe.

JABE: How is he doing?

LADY: Fine, fine.

JABE: He's mighty good-looking. Do women give him much trouble?

LADY: Whan school lets out the high-school girls are thick as flies in this store!

JABE: How about older women? Don't he attract older women? The older ones are the buyers, they got the money. They sweat it out of their husbands and throw it away! What's your salary, boy, how much do I pay you?

LADY: Twenty-two fifty a week.

JABE: You're getting him cheap.

VAL: I get — commissions.

JABE: Commissions?

VAL: Yes. One per cent of all sales.

JABE: Oh? Oh? I didn't know about that.

LADY: I knew he would bring in trade and he brings it.

JABE: I bet.

LADY: Val, get Jabe a chair, he ought to sit down.

JABE: No, I don't want to sit down. I want to take a look at the new confectionery.

LADY: Oh, yes, yes! Take a look at it! Val, Val, turn on the lights in the confectionery! I want Jabe to see the way I done it over! I'm — real — *proud*! (*VAL crosses and switches on light in confectionery. The bulbs in the arches and the juke box light up.*) Go in and look at it, Jabe. I am real proud of it!

(*He stares at LADY a moment; then shuffles slowly into the spectral radiance of the confectionery. LADY moves D. C. At the same time a calliope<sup>27</sup> becomes*

*faintly audible and slowly but steadily builds. MISS PORTER goes with the patient holding his elbow.)*

VAL: (*Returning to LADY*) He looks like death. LADY: (*Moving away from him*) Hush!

*(VAL goes up above counter and stands in the shadows.)*

NURSE: Well, isn't this artistic?

JABE: Yeh. Artistic as hell.

NURSE: I never seen anything like it before.

JABE: Nobody else did either.

NURSE: (*Coming back to U. R. C.*) Who done these decorations?

LADY: (*Defiantly*) I did them, all by myself!

NURSE: What do you know. It sure is something artistic.

*(Calliope is now up loud.)*

JABE: (*Coming back to D. R.*) Is there a circus or carnival in the country?

LADY: What?

JABE: That sounds like a circus calliope on the highway.

LADY: That's no circus calliope. It's advertising the gala opening of the Torrance Confectionery tonight!

JABE: Doing what did you say?

LADY: It's announcing the opening of our confectionery, it's going all over Glorious Hill this morning and all over Sunset and Lyon<sup>28</sup> this afternoon. Hurry on here so you can see it go by the store. (*She rushes excitedly to open the front door as the ragtime music of the calliope approaches.*)

JABE: I married a live one, Miss Porter. How much does that damn' thing cost me?

LADY: You'll be surprised how little. (*She is talking with an hysterical vivacity now.*) I hired it for a song!

JABE: How much of a song did you hire it for?

LADY: (*Closing door*) Next to nothing, seven-fifty an hour! And it covers three towns in Two River County!

*(Calliope fades out.)*

JABE: (*With a muted ferocity*) Miss Porter, I married a live one! Didn't I marry a live one? (*Switches off lights in confectionery*) Her daddy "The Wop" was just as much of a live one till he burned up. (*LADY gasps as if struck. With a slow, ugly grin*) He had a wine garden on the north shore of Moon Lake. The new confectionery sort of reminds me of it. But he made a mistake, he made a bad mistake, one time, selling liquor to niggers. We burned him out. We burned him out, house and orchard and vines and "The Wop" was burned up trying to fight the fire. (*He turns.*) I think I better go up.

LADY: Did you say "WE"?

JABE: I have a kind of a cramp —

NURSE: (*Taking his arm*) Well, let's go up.

JABE: Yes, I better go up —

(*They cross to stairs. Calliope fades in.*)

LADY: (*Almost shouting as she moves D. C.*) did you say "WE" did it, did you say "WE" did it?

JABE: (*At foot of stairs, stops, turns*) Yes, I "WE" did it. You heard me, Lady.

NURSE: One step at a time, one step at a time, take it easy.

(*They ascend gradually to the landing and above. The calliope passes directly before the store and a clown is seen, or heard, shouting through megaphone.*)

CLOWN: Don't forget tonight, folks, the gala opening of the Torrance Confectionery, free drinks and free favors<sup>29</sup>, don't forget it, the gala opening of the confectionery.

(*Fade. JABE and the NURSE disappear above the landing. Calliope gradually fades. A hoarse cry above. The NURSE runs back downstairs, exclaiming*)

NURSE: He's bleeding, he's having a hemm'rhage! (*Runs to phone*) Dr. Buchanan's office! (*Turns again to LADY*) Your husband is having a hemm'rhage!

(*Calliope is loud still. LADY appears not to hear. She speaks to VAL.*)

LADY: Did you hear what he said? He said "We" did it, "WE" burned — house — vines — orchard — "The Wop" burned fighting the fire —

(*The scene dims out; calliope fades out.*)

## Scene Two

*Sunset of the same day. At rise VAL is alone. He is standing stock-still down centre stage, almost beneath the proscenium, in the tense, frozen attitude of a wild animal listening to something that warns it of danger, his head turned as if he were looking off stage left, out over the house, frowning slightly, attentively. After a moment he mutters something sharply, and his body relaxes; he takes out a cigarette and crosses to the store entrance, opens the door and stands looking out. It has been raining steadily and will rain again in a while, but right now it is clearing: the sun breaks through, suddenly, with great brilliance; and almost at the same instant, at some distance, a woman cries out a great hoarse cry of terror and exaltation; the cry is repeated as she comes running nearer. VEE TALBOTT appears through the window as if blind and demented, stiff, groping gestures, shielding her eyes with one arm as she feels along the store window for the entrance, gasping for breath. VAL steps aside, taking hold of her arm to guide her into the store. For*

a few moments she leans weakly, blindly panting for breath against the glass of the door, then calls out.

VEE: I'm — struck blind!

VAL: You can't see?

VEE: No! Nothing —

VAL: (*Assisting her to stool below counter*) Set down here, Mrs. Talbott.

VEE: Where?

VAL: (*Pushing her gently*) Here. (VEE sinks moaning on to stool.) What hurt your eyes, Mrs. Talbott, what happened to your eyes?

VEE: (*Drawing a long, deep breath*) The vision I waited and prayed for all my life long!

VAL: You had a vision?

VEE: I saw the eyes of my Saviour! — They struck me blind. (*Leans forward, clasping her eyes in anguish*) Ohhhh, they burned out my eyes!

VAL: Lean back.

VEE: Eyeballs burn like fire —

VAL: (*Going off R.*) I'll get you something cold to put on your eyes.

VEE: I knew a vision was coming, oh, I had many signs!

VAL: (*In confectionery*) It must be a terrible shock to have a vision — (*He speaks gravely, gently, scooping chipped ice from the soft-drink cooler and wrapping it in his handkerchief.*)

VEE: (*With the naivete of a child, as VAL comes back to her*) I thought I would see my Saviour on the day of His passion, which was yesterday, Good Friday, that's when I expected to see Him. But I was mistaken, I was — disappointed. Yesterday passed and nothing, nothing much happened but — today — (VAL places handkerchief over her eyes.) this afternoon, somehow I pulled myself together and walked outdoors and started to go to pray in the empty church and meditate on the Rising of Christ tomorrow. Along the road as I walked, thinking about the mysteries of Easter, veils! — (*She makes a long shuddering word out of "veils".*) seemed to drop off my eyes! Light, oh, light! I never have seen such brilliance! It PRICKED my eyeballs like NEEDLES!

VAL: Light?

VEE: Yes, yes, light. YOU know, you know we live in light and shadow, that's what we live in, a world of — light and — shadow —

VAL: Yes. In light and shadow. (*He nods with complete understanding and agreement. They are like two children who have found life's meaning, simply and quietly, along a country road.*)

VEE: A world of light and shadow is what we live in, and — it's — confusing —

(*A man is peering in at store window.*)

VAL: Yeah, they — do ge — mixed —

VEE: Well, and then — (*Hesitates to recapture her vision*) — I heard this clap of thunder! Sky! — Split open! — And there in the split-open sky, I saw, I tell you, I saw the TWO HUGE BLAZING EYES OF JESUS CHRIST RISEN! — Not crucified but Risen! I mean Crucified and *then* RISEN! — The blazing eyes of Christ Risen! And then a great — (*Raises both arms and makes a great sweeping motion to describe an apocalyptic disturbance of the atmosphere*) — His hand! — *Invisible!* — I didn't see his hand! — But it touched me — *here!* (*She seizes VAL's hand and presses it to her great heaving bosom.*)

TALBOTT: (*Appearing R. in confectionery, furiously*) VEE!

(*She starts up, throwing the compress from her eyes. Utters a sharp gasp and staggers backward with terror and blasted ecstasy and dismay and belief, all confused in her look.*)

VEE: You!

TALBOTT: VEE!

VEE: *You!*

TALBOTT: (*Advancing*) VEE!

VEE: (*Making two syllables of the word "eyes"*) — The Eyes! (*She collapses, forward, falls to her knees, her arms thrown about VAL. He seizes her to lift her. Two or three men are peering in at the store window.*)

TALBOTT: (*Pushing VAL away*) Let go of her, don't put your hands on my wife! (*He seizes her roughly and hauls her to the door. VAL moves up to help VEE.*) Don't move. (*At door, to VAL*) I'm coming back.

VAL: I'm not goin' nowhere.

TALBOTT: (*To DOG, as he goes off L. with VEE*) Dog, go in there with that boy.

VOICE: (*Outside*) Sheriff caught him messin' with his wife.

(*Repeat: ANOTHER VOICE at a distance. "DOG" HAMMA enters and stands silently beside the door while there is a continued murmur of excited voices on the street. The following scene should be underplayed, played almost casually, like the performance of some familiar ritual.*)

VAL: What do you want?

(*DOG says nothing but removes from his pocket and opens a spring-blade knife and moves to D. R. PEE WEE enters. Through the open door — voices.*)

VOICES: (*Outside*) Son of a low-down bitch foolin' with —

— That's right, ought to be —

— Cut the son of a —

VAL: What do you —? (*PEE WEE closes the door and silently stands beside it, opening a spring-blade knife. VAL looks from one to the other.*) It's six o'clock. Store's closed.



(Men chuckle like dry leaves rattling. VAL crosses towards the door; is confronted by TALBOTT; stops short.)

TALBOTT: Boy, I said stay here.

VAL: I'm not — goin' nowhere —

TALBOTT: Stand back under that light.

VAL: Which light?

TALBOTT: That light. (*Points. VAL goes behind counter.*) I want to look at you while I run through some photos of men wanted.

VAL: I'm not wanted.

TALBOTT: A good-looking boy like you is always wanted. (*Men chuckle. VAL stands in hot light under green-shaded bulb. TALBOTT shuffles through photos he has removed from his pocket.*) How tall are you, boy?

VAL: Never measured.

TALBOTT: How much do you weigh?

VAL: Never weighed.

TALBOTT: Got any scars or marks of identification on your face or body?

VAL: No, sir.

TALBOTT: Open your shirt.

VAL: What for? (*He doesn't.*)

TALBOTT: Open his shirt for him, Dog. (*DOG steps quickly forward and rips shirt open to waist. VAL starts forward, men point knives; he draws back.*) That's right, stay there, boy. What did you do before?

(PEE WEE sits on stairs.)

VAL: Before — what?

TALBOTT: Before you come here?

VAL: Traveled and — played —

TALBOTT: Played?

DOG: (*Advancing to C.*) What?

PEE WEE: With wimmen?

(DOG laughs.)

VAL: No. Played guitar — and sang — (*VAL touches guitar on counter.*)

TALBOTT: Let me see that guitar.

VAL: Look at it. But don't touch it. I don't let nobody but musicians touch it.

(Men come close.)

DOG: What're you smiling for, boy?

PEE WEE: He ain't smiling, his mouth's just twitching like a dead chicken's foot.

(They laugh.)

TALBOTT: What is all that writing on the guitar?

VAL: Names —

TALBOTT: What of?

VAL: Autographs of musicians dead and living.

*(Men read aloud the names printed on the guitar: Bessie Smith, Leadbelly, Woody Guthrie<sup>30</sup> Jelly Roll Morion<sup>31</sup>, etc. They bend close to it, keeping the open knife blades pointed at VAL's body; DOG touches neck of the guitar, draws it towards him. VAL suddenly springs, with catlike agility, on to the counter. He runs along it, kicking at their hands as they catch at his legs. The NURSE runs down to the landing.)*

MISS PORTER: *What's going on!*

TALBOTT: *(At the same time): Stop that!*

*(JABE calls hoarsely above.)*

MISS PORTER: *(Excitedly, all in one breath, as JABE calls)* Where's Mrs. Torrance? I got a very sick man up there and his wife's disappeared. *(JABE calls out again.)* I been on a whole lot of cases but never seen one where a wife showed no concern for a —

*(JABE cries out again. Her voice fades out as she returns above.)*

TALBOTT: *(Overlapping NURSE's speech)* Dog! Pee Wee! You all stand back from that counter. Dog, why don't you an' Pee Wee go up an' see Jabe. Leave me straighten this boy out, go on, go on up.

PEE WEE: C'mon, Dawg —

*(They go up. VAL remains panting on counter.)*

TALBOTT: *(Sits in shoe chair at R. window. In TALBOTT's manner there is a curious, half-abashed gentleness, when alone with the boy, as if he recognized the purity in him and was, truly, for the moment, ashamed of the sadism implicit in the occurrence.)* Awright, boy. Git on down off th' counter, I ain't gonna touch y'r guitar. *(VAL jumps off counter.)* But I'm gonna tell you something. They's a certain county I know of which has a big sign at the county line that says, "Nigger, don't let the sun go down on you in this county." That's all it says, it don't threaten nothing, it just says, "Nigger don't let the sun go down on you in this county!" *(Chuckles hoarsely. Rises and takes a step towards VAL.)* Well, son! You ain't a nigger and this is not that county, but, son, I want you to just imagine that you seen a sign that said to you: "Boy, don't let the sun rise on you in this county". I said "rise", not "go down" because it's too close to sunset for you to git packed an' move on before that. But I think if you value that instrument in your hands as much as you seem to, you'll simplify my job by not allowing the sun tomorrow to rise on you in this county. 'S that understood, now, boy? *(VAL stares at him, expressionless, panting. Crossing to door)* I hope so. I don't like violence.

*(He looks back and nods at VAL from the door. Then goes outside in the fiery afterglow of the sunset. Dogs bark in the distance. Music fades in: "Dog Howl Blues" — minor — guitar. Pause in which VAL remains motionless, cradling guitar in his arms. Then VAL's faraway, troubled look is resolved in a slight, abrupt nod of his head. He sweeps back the alcove curtain and enters the alcove and closes the curtain behind him. Lights dim down to indicate a division of scenes.)*

### Scene Three

*Half an hour later. The lighting is less realistic than in the previous scenes of the play. The interior of the store is so dim that only the vertical lines of the pillars and such selected items as the palm tree on the stair landing and the ghostly paper vineyard of the confectionery are plainly visible. The view through the great front window has virtually become the background of the action. A singing wind sweeps clouds before the moon so that the witchlike country brightens and dims and brightens again. The Marshall's hounds are restless: their baying is heard now and then. A lamp outside the door sometimes catches a figure that moves past with mysterious urgency, calling out softly and raising an arm to beckon, like a shade in the under kingdom.*

*At rise, or when the stage is lighted again, it is empty but footsteps are descending the stairs as DOLLY and BEULAH rush into the store and call out, in soft shouts:*

DOLLY: Dawg?

BEULAH: Pee Wee?

EVA TEMPLE: *(Appearing on landing and calling down softly in the superior tone of a privileged attendant in a sick-chamber)* Please don't shout! — Mr. Binnings and Mr. Hamma *(Names of the two husbands)* are upstairs with Jabe — *(She continues her descent. Then SISTER TEMPLE appears, sobbing, on landing.)* Come down carefully, Sister.

SISTER: Help me, I'm all to pieces —

*(EVA ignores this request and faces the two women.)*

BEULAH: Has the bleedin' quit yit?

EVA: The hemorrhage seems to have stopped. Sister, Sister, pull yourself together, we all have to face these things sometime in life.

DOLLY: Has he sunk into a coma?

EVA: No, Cousin Jabe is conscious. Nurse Porter says his pulse is remarkably strong for a man that lost so much blood. Of course he's has a transfusion.

SISTER: Two of em.

EVA: *(Crossing to DOLLY)* Yais, an' they put him on glucose. His strength came back like magic.

BEULAH: She up there?

EVA: Who?

BEULAH: Lady!

EVA: No! When last reported she had just stepped into the Glorious Hill Beauty Parlor.

BEULAH: You don't mean it.

EVA: Ask Sister!

SISTER: She's planning to go ahead with —!

EVA: The gala opening of the confectionery. Switch on the lights in there, Sister. (*SISTER crosses and switches on lights and moves off R. The decorated confectionery is lighted. DOLLY and BEULAH exclaim in awed voices.*) Of course it's not normal behavior; it's downright lunacy, but still that's no excuse for it! And when she called up at five, about one hour ago, it wasn't to ask about Jabe, oh, no, she didn't mention his name. She asked if Ruby Lightfoot had delivered a case of Seagram's<sup>32</sup>. Yais, she just shouted that question and hung up the phone, before I could — (*She crosses and goes off R.*)

BEULAH: (*Going into confectionery*): Oh, I understand, now! Now I see what she's up to! Electric moon, cut-out silver-paper stars and artificial vines? Why, it's her father's wine garden on Moon Lake she's turned this room into!

DOLLY: (*Suddenly as she sits in shoe chair*): Here she comes, here she comes!

(*The TEMPLE SISTERS retreat from view in confectionery as LADY enters the store. She wears a hooded raincape and carries a large paper shopping bag and paper carton box.*)

LADY: Go on, ladies, don't stop, my ears are burning!

BEULAH: (*Coming in to U. R. C.*) Lady, oh, Lady, Lady —

LADY: Why d'you speak my name in that pitiful voice? Hanh? (*Throws back hood of cape, her eyes blazing, and places bag and box on counter.*) Val? Val! Where is that boy that works here?

(*DOLLY shakes her head.*) I guess he's havin' a T-bone steak with French fries and coleslaw fo' ninety-five cents at the Blue Bird — (*Sounds in confectionery.*) Who's in the confectionery, is that you, Val? (*TEMPLE SISTER emerge and stalk past her.*) Going, girls? (*They go out of store.*) Yes, gone! (*She laughs and throws off rain-cape, on to counter, revealing a low-cut gown, triple strand of pearls and a purple satin-ribboned corsage.*)

BEULAH: (*Sadly*) How long have I known you, Lady?

LADY: (*Going behind counter, unpacks paper hats and whistles*) A long time, Beulah. I think you remember when my people come here on a banana boat from Palermo, Sicily, by way of Caracas, Venezuela, yes, with a grind-organ and a monkey my Papa had bought in Venezuela. I was not much bigger than the monkey, ha ha! You remember the monkey? The man that sold Papa the

monkey said it was a very young monkey, but he was a liar, it was a very old monkey, it was on its last legs, ha ha ha! But it was a well-dressed monkey. (*Coming around to R. of counter*) It had a green velvet suit and a little red cap that it tipped and a tambourine that it passed around for money, ha ha ha — The grind-organ played and the monkey danced in the sun, ha ha! — “*Sole Mio, Da Da Da daaa — !*” (*Sits in chair at counter*) — One day, the monkey danced too much in the sun and it was a very old monkey and it dropped dead — My Papa, he turned to the people, he made them a bow and he said, “The show is over, the monkey is dead”. Ha ha!

(*Slight pause. Then DOLLY pipes up venomously.*)

DOLLY: Ain't it wonderful Lady can be so brave?

BEULAH: Yaiss, wonderful! Hanh —

LADY: For me the show is not over, the monkey is not dead yet! (*Then suddenly*) Val, is that you, Val?

(*Someone has entered the confectionery door, out of sight, and the draught of air has set the wind-chimes tinkling wildly. LADY rushes forward but stops short as CAROL appears. She wears a trench coat and a white sailor's cap with a turned-down brim, inscribed with the name of a vessel and a date, past of future, memory or anticipation.*)

DOLLY: Well, here's your first customer, Lady.

LADY: (*Going behind counter*) Carol, that room ain't open.

CAROL: There's a big sign outside that says “Open Tonite!”

LADY: It ain't open to you.

CAROL: I have to stay here a while. They stopped my car, you see, I don't have a licence: my licence has been revoked and I have to find someone to drive me across the river.

LADY: You can call a taxi.

CAROL: I read that the boy that works for you is leaving tonight and I —

LADY: *Who said he's leaving?*

CAROL: (*Crossing to counter*) Sheriff Talbott. The County Marshall suggested I get him to drive me over the river since he's be crossing it too.

LADY: You got some mighty wrong information!

CAROL: Where is he? I don't see him?

LADY: Why d'you keep coming back here bothering that boy? He's not interested in you! Why would he be leaving here tonight? (*Door opens off as she comes from behind counter.*) Val, is that you, Val? (*CONJURE MAN enters through confectionery, mumbling rapidly, holding out something. BEULAH and DOLLY take flight out the door with cries of revulsion.*) No conjure stuff, go away! (*He starts to withdraw.*)

CAROL: (*Crossing to U. R. C.*) Uncle! The Choctaw cry! I'll give you a dollar for it.

(LADY turns away with a gasp, with a gesture of refusal. The NEGRO nods, then throws back his turkey neck and utters a series of sharp barking sounds that rise to a sustained cry of great intensity and wildness. The cry produces a violent reaction in the building. BEULAH and DOLLY run out of the store. LADY does not move but she catches her breath. DOG and PEE WEE run down the stairs with ad libs and hustle the NEGRO out of the store, ignoring LADY, as their wives call: "PEE WEE!" and "DAWG!" outside on the walk. VAL sweeps back the alcove curtain and appears as if the cry were his cue. Above, in the sick room, hoarse, outraged shouts that subside with exhaustion. CAROL crosses downstage and speaks to the audience and to herself)

CAROL: Something is still wild in the country! This country used to be wild, the men and women were wild and there was a wild sort of sweetness in their hearts, for each other, but now it's sick with neon, it's broken out sick, with neon, like most other places — I'll wait outside in my car. It's the fastest thing on wheels in Two River County!

(She goes out of the store R. LADY stares at VAL with great asking eyes, a hand to her throat.)

LADY: (With false boldness) Well, ain't you going with her?

VAL: I'm going with no one I didn't come here with. And I come here with no one.

LADY: Then get into your white jacket. I need your services in that room there tonight. (VAL regards her steadily for several beats. Clapping her hands together twice) Move, move, stop goofing! The Delta Brilliant<sup>33</sup> lets out in half'n hour and they'll be driving up here. You got to shave ice for the setups!

VAL: (As if he thought she'd gone crazy) "Shave ice for the setups"? (He moves up to counter.)

LADY: Yes, an' call Ruby Lightfoot, tell her I need me a dozen more half-pints of Seagram's. They all call for Seven-and-Sevens. You know how t' sell bottle goods under a counter? It's O. K. We're gonna git paid for protection. (Gasps, touching her diaphragm) But one thing you gotta watch out for is sellin' to minors. Don't serve liquor to minors. Ask for his driver's license if there's any doubt. Anybody born earlier than — let's see, twenty-one from — oh, I'll figure it later. Hey! Move! Move! Stop goofing!

VAL: (Placing guitar on counter) You're the one that's goofing, not me, Lady.

LADY: Move, I said, move!

VAL: What kick are you on, are you on a benny kick, Lady? 'Ve you washed down a couple of bennies<sup>34</sup> with a pot of black coffee t' make you come on strong for th' three o'clock show? (His mockery is gentle, almost tender, but he has already made a departure; he is back in the all-night bars with the B-girls and raffish entertainers. He stands at counter as she rashes about. As she crosses be-

tween the two rooms, he reaches out to catch hold of her bare arm and he pulls her to him and grips her arms.)

LADY: Hey!

VAL: Will you quit thrashin' around like a hooked catfish?

LADY: Go git in y'r white jacket an' —

VAL: Sit down. I want to talk to you.

LADY: I don't have time.

VAL: I got to reason with you.

LADY: It's not possible to.

VAL: You can't open a night-place here this night.

LADY: You bet your sweet life I'm going to!

VAL: Not *me*, not *my* sweet life!

LADY: I'm betting *my* life on it! Sweet or *not* sweet, I'm —

VAL: Yours is yours, mine is mine — (*He releases her with a sad shrug.*)

LADY: You don't get the point, huh? There's man up there that set fire to my father's wine garden and I lost my life in it, yeah, I lost ray life in it, *three* lives was lost in it, two *born* lives and *one* — *not* — I was made to commit a *murder* by him up there! (*Has frozen momentarily*) — I want that man to see the wine garden come open again when he's dying! I want him to hear it coming open again here tonight! While he's dying. It's necessary, no power on earth can stop it. Hell, I don't even want it, it's just necessary, it's just something's got to be done to square things away, to, to, to — *be not defeated! You get me? Just to be not defeated!* Ah, oh, I won't be defeated, not again, in my life! (*Embraces him*) Thank you for staying here with me! — God bless you for it — Now please go and get in your white jacket —

(VAL looks at her as if he were trying to decide between a natural sensibility of heart and what his life's taught him since he left *Witches' Bayou*. Then he sighs again, with the same slight, sad shrug, and crosses into alcove to put on a jacket and remove from under his cot a canvas-wrapped package of his belongings.)

LADY takes paper hats and carnival stuff from counter, crosses into confectionery and puts them on the tables, then starts back but stops short as she sees VAL come out of alcove with his snakeskin jacket and luggage.)

LADY: That's not your white jacket, that's that snakeskin jacket you had on when you come here.

VAL: I come and I go in this jacket.

LADY: Go, did you say?

VAL: Yes, ma'am, I did, I said go. All that stays to be settled is a little matter of wages.

(*The dreaded thing's happened to her. This is what they call "the moment of truth" in the bull ring, when the matador goes in over the horns of the bull to plant the mortal sword-trust.*)

LADY: So you're — cutting out, are you?

VAL: My gear's all packed. I'm catchin' the southbound bus.

LADY: Uh-huh, in a pig's eye. You're not conning me, mister. She's waiting for you outside in her high-powered car and you're —

*(Sudden footsteps on stairs. They break apart, VAL puts suitcase down, drawing back into shadow, as NURSE PORTER appears on the stair landing.)*

NURSE PORTER: Miss Torrance, are you down there?

LADY: *(Crossing to foot of stairs)* Yeah. I'm here. I'm back.

NURSE PORTER: Can I talk to you up here about Mr. Torrance?

LADY: *(Shouting to NURSE)* I'll be up in a minute. *(Door closes above.)*

LADY turns to VAL.) O. K. now, mister. You're scared about something, ain't you?

VAL: I been threatened with violence if I stay here.

LADY: I got paid for protection in this county, plenty paid for it, and it covers you too.

VAL: No, ma'am. My time is up here.

LADY: Y' say that like you'd served a sentence in jail.

VAL: I got in deeper than I meant to, Lady.

LADY: Yeah, and how about me?

VAL: *(Going to her)* I would of cut out before you got back to the-store, but I wanted to tell you something I never told no one before. *(Places hand on her shoulder)* I feel a true love for you, Lady! *(He kisses her.)* I'll wait for you out of this county, just name the time and the —

LADY: *(Moving back)* Oh, don't talk about love, not to me. It's easy to say "Love, Love!" with fast and free transportation wailing right out the door for you!

VAL: D'you remember some things I told you about me the night we met here?

LADY: *(Crossing to R. C.)* Yeah, many things. Yeah, temperature of a dog. And some bird, oh, yeah, without legs so it had to sleep on the wind!

VAL: *(Through her speech)* Naw, not that; not that.

LADY: And how you could burn down a woman? I said "Bull!" I take that back. You can! You can burn down a woman and stamp on her ashes to make sure the fire is put out!

VAL: I mean what I said about gettin' away from —

LADY: How long've you held this first steady job in your life?

VAL: Too long, too long!

LADY: Four months and five days, mister. All right! How much pay have you took?

VAL: I told you to keep out all but —

LADY: Y'r living expenses. I can give you the figures to a dime. Eighty-five bucks, no, ninety! Chicken-feed, mister! Y'know how much you got coming?



IF you get it? I don't need paper to figure, I got it all in my head. You got five hundred and eighty-six bucks coming to you, not, not chicken-feed, that. But, mister. (*Gasps for breath*) — If you try to walk out on me, now, tonight, without notice! — You're going to get just nothing! A great big zero — (*Somebody hollers at door off R.*: "Hey! You open?" *She rushes toward it shouting, "CLOSED! GO AWAY!"*) — VAL crosses to the cashbox. *She turns back towards him, gasps.*) Now you watch your next move and I'll watch mine. You open that cashbox and I swear I'll throw open that door and holler, clerk's robbing the store!

VAL: Lady?

LADY: (*Fiercely*) Hanh?

VAL: Nothing, you've —

LADY: Hanh?

VAL: Blown your stack. I will go without pay.

LADY: (*Coming to C.*) Then you ain't understood me! With or without pay, you're staying!

VAL: I've got my gear. (*Picks up suitcase. She rushes to seize his guitar.*)

LADY: Then I'll go up and git mine! And take this with me, just t'make sure you wait till I'm — (*She moves back to R. C. He puts suitcase down.*)

VAL: (*Advancing towards her*) Lady, what're you — ?

LADY: (*Entreating with guitar raised*) Don't — !

VAL: doing with —

LADY: Don't!

VAL: my guitar!

LADY: *Holding it for security while I —*

VAL: Lady, you been a lunatic since this morning!

LADY: Longer, longer than morning! I'm going to keep hold of your "life companion" while I pack! I am! I am goin' to pack an' go, if you go, where you go! (*He makes a move towards her. She crosses below and around to counter.*) You didn't think so, you actually didn't think so! What was I going to do, in your opinion? What, in your opinion, would I be doing? Stay on here in a store full of bottles and boxes while you go far, while you go fast and far, without me havin' your — forwarding address! — even?

VAL: I'll — give you a forwarding address —

LADY: Thanks, oh, thanks! Would I take your forwarding address back of that curtain? "Oh, dear forwarding address, hold me, kiss me, be faithful!" (*Utters grotesque, stifled cry; presses fist to mouth.*) (*He advances cautiously, hand stretched towards the guitar. She retreats above to U. R. C., biting lip, eyes flaring. JABE knocks above.*) Stay back! You want me to smash it!

VAL: (*D.C.*) He's — knocking for you —

LADY: I know! Death's knocking for me! Don't you think I hear him, knock, knock, knock? It sounds like what it is! Bones knocking bones — Ask me how it felt to be coupled with death up there, and I can tell you. My skin crawled when

he touched me. But I endured it. I guess my heart knew that somebody must be coming to take me out of this hell! You did. You came. Now look at me! I'm alive once more! (*Convulsive sobbing controlled: continues more calmly and harshly.*)

*I won't wither in dark!* Got that through your skull? Now. Listen! Everything in this rotten store is yours, not just your pay, but everything. — Death's scraped together down here! — but Death has got to die before we can go — You got that memorized, now? — Then get into your white jacket! — *Tonight is the gala opening — (Rushes through confectionery) — of the confectionery — (VAL runs and seizes her arm, holding guitar. She breaks violently free.) Smash me against a rock and I'll smash your guitar! I will, if you — (Rapid footsteps on stairs.)* Oh, Miss Porter!

(*She motions VAL back. He retreats into alcove. LADY puts guitar down beside juke-box. MISS PORTER is descending the stairs.*)

NURSE PORTER: (*Descending watchfully*) You been out a long time.

LADY: (*Moving U. R. C.*) Yeah, well, I had lots of — (*Her voice expires breathlessly. She stares fiercely, blindly, into the other's hard face.*)

NURSE PORTER: Of what?

LADY: Things to — things to — take care of — (*Draws a deep, shuddering breath, clenched fist to her bosom*)

NURSE PORTER: Didn't I hear you shouting to someone just now?

LADY: Uh-huh. Some drunk tourist made a fuss because I wouldn't sell him no — liquor —

NURSE: (*Crossing to the door*) Oh. Mr. Torrance is sleeping under medication.

LADY: That's good. (*She sits in shoe-fitting chair.*)

NURSE: I gave him a hypo at five.

LADY: Don't all that morphine weaken the heart, Miss Porter?

NURSE: Gradually, yes.

LADY: How long does it usually take for them to let go?

NURSE: It varies according to the age of the patient and the condition his heart's in. Why?

LADY: Miss Porter, don't people sort of help them let go?

NURSE: How do you mean, Mrs. Torrance?

LADY: Shorten their suffering for them?

NURSE: Oh, I see what you mean. (*Snaps her purse shut*) — I see what you mean, Mrs. Torrance. But killing is killing, regardless of circumstances.

LADY: Nobody said killing.

NURSE: You said "shorten their suffering".

LADY: Yes, like merciful people shorten an animal's suffering when he's —

NURSE: A human being is not the same as an animal, Mrs. Torrance. And I don't hold with what they call —

LADY: (*Overlapping*) Don't give me a sermon, Miss Porter, I just wanted to know if —

NURSE: (*Overlapping*) I'm not giving a sermon. I just answered your question. If you want to get somebody to shorten your husband's life —

LADY: (*Jumping up; overlapping*) Why, how dare you say that I —

NURSE: I'll be back at ten-thirty.

LADY: Don't!

NURSE: What?

LADY: (*Crossing behind counter*) Don't come back at ten-thirty, don't come back.

NURSE: I'm always discharged by the doctors on my cases.

LADY: This time you're being discharged by the patient's wife.

NURSE: That's something we'll have to discuss with Dr. Buchanan.

LADY: I'll call him myself about it. I don't like you. I don't think you belong in the nursing profession, you have cold eyes; I think you like to watch pain!

NURSE: I know why you don't like my eyes. (*Snaps purse shut*). You don't like my eyes because know they see clear.

LADY: Why are you staring at me?

NURSE: I'm not staring at you, I'm staring at the curtain. There's something burning in there, smoke's coming out! (*Starts towards alcove*) Oh.

LADY: Oh, no, you don't. (*Seizes her arm*)

NURSE: (*Pushes her roughly aside and crosses to the curtain. VAL rises from cot, opens the curtain and faces her coolly*) Oh, excuse me! (*She turns to LADY.*) — The moment I looked at you when I was called on this case last Friday morning I knew that you were pregnant. (*LADY gasps.*) I also knew the moment I looked at your husband it wasn't by him. (*She stalks to the door. LADY suddenly cries out.*)

LADY: Thank you for telling me what I hoped for is true.

MISS PORTER: You don't seem to have any shame.

LADY: (*Exalted*) No. I don't have shame. I have — great — joy!

MISS PORTER: (*Venomously*): Then why don't you get the calliope and the clown to make the announcement?

LADY: You do it for me, save me the money! Make the announcement, all over!

(*NURSE goes out. VAL crosses swiftly to the door and locks it. Then he advances toward her, saying*)

VAL: Is it true what she said? (*LADY moves as if stunned to the counter; the stunned look gradually turns to a look of wonder. On the counter is a heap of silver and gold paper hats and trumpets for the gala opening of the confectionery. In a hoarse whisper*) Is it true or not true, what that woman told you?

LADY: You sound like a scared little boy.

VAL: She's gone out to tell.

(Pause.)

LADY: You gotta go now — it's dangerous for you to stay here — Take your pay out of the cashbox, you can go. Go, go, take the keys to my car, cross the river into some other county. You've done what you came here to do —

VAL: It's true then, it's —?

LADY: (*Sitting in chair of counter*) True as God's word! I have life in my body, this dead tree, my body, has burst in flower! You've given me life, you can go!

(*He crouches down gravely opposite her, gently takes hold of her knotted fingers and draws them, to his lips, breathing on them as if to warm them. She sits bolt upright, tense, blind as a clairvoyant.*)

VAL: Why didn't you tell me before?

LADY: When a woman's been childless as long as I've been childless, it's hard to believe that you're still able to bear! — We used to have a little fig tree between the house and the orchard. It never bore any fruit, they said it was barren. Time went by it, spring after useless spring, and it almost started to — die — Then one day I discovered a small green fig on the tree they said wouldn't bear! (*She is clasping a gilt paper horn.*) I ran through the orchard. I ran through the wine garden shouting. "Oh, Father, it's going to bear, the fig tree is going to bear!" — It seemed such a wonderful thing, after those ten barren springs, for the little fig tree to bear, it called for a celebration — I ran to a closet, I opened a box that we kept Christmas ornaments in! — I took them out, glass bells, glass birds, tinsel, icicles, stars — And I hung the little tree with them, I decorated the fig tree with glass bells and glass birds, and silver icicles and stars, because it won the battle and it would bear! (*Rises ecstatic*) Unpack the box! Unpack the box with the Christmas ornaments in it, put them on me, glass bells and glass birds and stars and tinsel and snow! (*In a sort of delirium she thrusts a conical gilt paper hat on her head and runs to the foot of the stairs with the paper horn. She blows the horn over and over, grotesquely mounting the stairs, as VAL tries to stop her. She breaks away from him and runs up to the landing, blowing the paper horn and crying out*) I've won, I've won, Mr. Death, I'm going to bear! (*Then suddenly she falters, catches her breath in a shocked gasp and awkwardly retreats to the stairs. Then turns screaming and runs back down them, her cries dying out as she arrives at the floor level. She retreats haltingly as a blind person, a hand stretched out to VAL as slow, clumping footsteps and hoarse breathing are heard on the stairs. She moans.*) — Oh, God! Oh — God! —

(JABE appears on the landing, by the artificial palm tree in its dully lustrous green jardiniere, a stained purple robe hangs loosely about his wasted yellowed frame. He is death's self, and malignancy, as he peers, crouching, down into the store's dimness to discover his quarry.)

JABE: Buzzards! Buzzards! (*Clutching the trunk of the false palm tree, he raises the other hand holding a revolver and fires down into the store, LADY screams and rushes to cover VAL's motionless figure with hers. JABE scrambles down a few steps and fires again and the bullet strikes her, expelling her breath in a great "Hah!" He fires again; the great "Hah!" is repeated. She turns to face him, still covering VAL with her body, her face with all the passions and secrets of life and death in it now, her fierce eyes blazing, knowing, defying and accepting. But the revolver is empty; it clicks impotently and JABE hurls it towards them; he descends and passes them, shouting out hoarsely.*) I'll have you burned! I burned her father and I'll have you burned! (*He opens the door and rushes out on to the road, shouting hoarsely.*) The clerk is robbing the store, he shot my wife, the clerk is robbing the store, he killed my wife!

VAL: Did it —?

LADY: Yes! — it did — (*A curious, almost formal, dignity appears in them both. She turns to him with the sort of smile that people offer in apology for an awkward speech, and he looks back at her gravely, raising one hand as if to stay her. But she shakes her head slightly and points to the ghostly radiance of her make-believe orchard and she begins to move a little unsteadily towards it. Music. LADY enters the confectionery and looks about it as people look for the last time at a loved place they are deserting.*) The show is over. The monkey is dead —

(*Music rises to cover whatever sound Death makes in the confectionery. It halts abruptly. Figures appear through the great front window of the store, pocket-lamps stare through the glass and someone begins to force the front door open.*

VAL *cries out.*)

VAL: Which way!

(*He turns and through the dim radiance of the confectionery, out of our sight. Something slams. Something cracks open. Men are in the store and the dark is full of hoarse, shouting voices.*)

VOICES OF MEN: (*Shouting*) Keep to the walls! He's armed!

— Upstairs, Dog!

— Jack, the confectionery! (*Wild cry back of store*) Got him. GOT HIM!

— They got him!

— Rope, git rope!

— Git rope from th' hardware section!

— I got something better than rope!

— What've you got!

— What's that, what's he got?

— A BLOWTORCH!

— Christ —

(*A momentary hush.*)

- Come on, what in hell are we waiting for?
- Hold on a minute, I wanta see if it works!
- Wait, Wait!
- LOOK here!

*(A jet of blue flame stabs the dark. It flickers on CAROL'S figure in the confectionery. The men cry out together in hoarse passion crouching towards the fierce blue jet of fire, their faces lit by it like the faces of demons.)*

- Christ!
- It works!

*(They rush out. Confused shouting behind. Motors start. Fade quickly. There is almost silence, a dog bays in the distance. Then — the CONJURE MAN appears with a bundle of garments which he examines, dropping them all except the snakeskin jacket, which he holds up with a toothless mumble of excitement.)*

CAROL: *(Quietly, gently)* What have you got there, Uncle? Come here and let me see. *(He crosses to her.)* Oh yes, his snakeskin jacket. I'll give you a gold ring for it. *(She slowly twists ring off her finger. Somewhere there is a cry of anguish. She listens attentively till it fades out, then nods with understanding.)* Wild things leave skins behind them, they leave clean skins and teeth and white bones behind them, and these are tokens passed from one to another, so that the fugitive kind can always follow their kind —

*(The cry is repeated more terribly than before. It expires again. She draws the jacket about her as if she were cold, nods to the old NEGRO, handing him the ring. Then she crosses towards the door, pausing halfway as SHERIFF TALBOTT enters with his pocket-lamp.)*

SHERIFF: Don't no one move, don't move! *(She crosses directly past him as if she no longer saw him, and out the door. He shouts furiously.)* Stay here! *(Her laughter rings outside. He follows the girl, shouting.)* Stop! Stop!

*(Silence. The NEGRO looks up with a secret smile as the curtain falls slowly.)*

## QUESTIONS AND TASKS FOR HOMEWORK

### ORPHEUS DESCENDING BY TENNESSEE WILLIAMS

born March 26, 1911, Columbus, Miss., U.S.

died Feb. 25, 1983, New York City

*Original name Thomas Lanier Williams* U.S. dramatist whose plays reveal a world of human frustration in which sex and violence underlie an atmosphere of romantic gentility. His best-known plays are *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), *The Night of the Iguana* (1961), *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More* (1963) and *Clothes for a Summer Hotel* (1980)

## I. The author's biography and his work

- Read Tennessee Williams's biography and the play synopsis and speak on the impact of the author's life on the dramatic spirit of his work.

He was brilliant and prolific, breathing life and passion into such memorable characters as Blanche DuBois and Stanley Kowalski in his critically acclaimed *A Streetcar Named Desire*. And like them, he was troubled and self-destructive, an abuser of alcohol and drugs. He was awarded four Drama Critic Circle Awards, two Pulitzer Prizes and the Presidential Medal of Freedom. He was derided by critics and blacklisted by Roman Catholic Cardinal Spellman, who condemned one of his scripts as "revolting, deplorable, morally repellent, offensive to Christian standards of decency". He was Tennessee Williams, one of the greatest playwrights in American history.

Born in Mississippi in 1914, Tennessee was the son of a shoe company executive and a Southern belle. Williams described his childhood in Mississippi as happy and carefree. This sense of belonging and comfort were lost, however, when his family moved to the urban environment of St. Louis, Missouri. It was there he began to look inward, and to write — "because I found life unsatisfactory". Williams' early adult years were occupied with attending college at three different universities, a brief stint working at his father's shoe company, and a move to New Orleans, which began a lifelong love of the city and set the locale for *A Streetcar Named Desire*.

Williams spent a number of years traveling throughout the country and trying to write. His first critical acclaim came in 1944 when *The Glass Menagerie* opened in Chicago and went to Broadway. In it, Williams portrayed a declasse Southern family living in a tenement. The play is about the failure of a domineering mother, Amanda, living upon her delusions of a romantic past, and her cynical son, Tom, to secure a suitor for Tom's crippled and painfully shy sister, Laura, who lives in a fantasy world with a collection of glass animals. It won a Pulitzer Prize, the New York Drama Critics' Circle Award and, as a film, the New York Film Critics' Circle Award.

Williams' next major play, *A Streetcar Named Desire* (1947), won a Pulitzer Prize. It is a study of the mental and moral ruin of Blanche Du Bois, a former Southern belle, whose genteel pretensions are no match for the harsh realities symbolized by her brutish brother-in-law, Stanley Kowalski.

In 1953, *Camino Real*, a complex and bizarre work set in a mythical, microcosmic town whose inhabitants include Lord Byron and Don Quixote, was a commercial failure, but his *Cat on a Hot Tin Roof* (1955), which exposes the emotional lies governing relationships in the family of a wealthy Southern planter, was awarded a Pulitzer Prize and was successfully filmed.

The 1960s were perhaps the most difficult years for Williams, as he experienced some of his harshest treatment from the press. In 1961 he wrote *The*

*Night of the Iguana*, and in 1963, *The Milk Train Doesn't Stop Here Any More*. His plays, which had long received criticism for openly addressing taboo topics, were finding more and more detractors. Around this time, Williams' long-time companion, Frank Merlo, died of cancer.

Williams was in ill-health frequently during the 1960s, compounded by years of addiction to sleeping pills and liquor, problems that he struggled to overcome after a severe mental and physical breakdown in 1969. His later plays were unsuccessful, closing soon to poor reviews. They include *Vieux Carré* (1977), about down-and-outs in New Orleans; *A Lovely Sunday for Crève Coeur* (1978–79), about a fading belle in St. Louis during the Great Depression.

In 1975 he published *Memoirs*, which detailed his life and discussed his addiction to drugs and alcohol, as well as his homosexuality. In 1980 Williams wrote *Clothes for Summer Hotel*, based on the lives of Zelda and F. Scott Fitzgerald.

Only three years later, Tennessee Williams died in a New York City hotel filled with half-finished bottles of wine and pills. It was in this desperation, which Williams had so closely known and so honestly written about, that we can find a great man and an important body of work. His genius was in his honesty and in the perseverance to tell his stories.

*Orpheus Descending* is a play, which was first presented on Broadway in 1957 where it enjoyed a brief run with only modest success. The play is basically a rewrite of an earlier play by Williams called *Battle of Angels*, which was written in 1940 but had been poorly received.

When the play appeared in 1957, Williams wrote, “[o]n the surface it was and still is the tale of a wild-spirited boy who wanders into a conventional community of the South and creates the commotion of a fox in a chicken coop. But beneath that now familiar surface it is a play about unanswered questions that haunt the hearts of people and the difference between continuing to ask them — and the acceptance of prescribed answers that are not answers at all”.

The play is a retelling of the ancient Greek Orpheus legend in modern clothes and deals, in the most elemental fashion, with the power of passion, art, and imagination to redeem and revitalize life, giving it new meaning. The story is set in a dry goods store in a small southern town marked, in the play, by conformity, sexual frustration, narrowness, and racism. Into this scene steps Val, a young man with a guitar, a snakeskin jacket, a questionable past, and undeniable animal-erotic energy and appeal. He gets a job in the dry goods store run by a middle-aged woman named Lady, whose elderly husband is dying. Lady has a past and passions of her own. She finds herself attracted to Val and to the possibility of new life he seems to offer. It is a tempting antidote to her loveless marriage and boring, small-town life. The play describes the awakening of passion, love, and life — as well as its tragic consequences for Val and Lady.



The play deals with passion, its repression and its attempted recovery. On another level, it is also about trying to live bravely and honestly in a fallen world. The play is replete with lush, poetic dialogue and imagery. On the stage, the opening sections seem somewhat lacking in dramatic movement, but the play picks up power as the characters are developed and it moves to its climax. Val, representing Orpheus, represents the forces of energy and eros, which, buried as they are in compromise and everyday mundanity, have the tragic power to create life anew.

## II. Vocabulary study of selected words and phrases

- Find in the text of the play sentences containing the following words and phrases and translate them into Ukrainian. Supply the Ukrainian equivalents to the words and phrases listed below.

A buffet supper (p. 96); to give smb. a touch of one's tongue (p. 86); prohibition (p. 87); to hang on together (p. 89); a fancy dress ball (p. 91); to smoke the weed (p. 96); a kill-joy (p. 100); to go to pieces (p. 102); a character reference (p. 105) (also further down); some reference (p. 105); a valentine (p. 109); to ostracize smb. (p. 113); to knock wood (p. 131); a gala opening (p. 133); to be on one's last legs (p. 141); to sunk into a coma (p. 139).

- Supply the missing components in the italicized phrasal verbs. Explain the meaning of the phrasal verbs by using synonymous verbs or phrases.

- "He bought her and bought her cheap because she'd been thrown \_\_\_ and her heart was broken..." (p. 86).
- "He picked \_\_\_ a piece of land cheap, it was on the north shore of Moon Lake..." (p. 87).
- "That's all right, Lady, I just come back to pick \_\_\_ my guitar" (p. 102)
- "Her brother's heard she's here and he's coming to pick her \_\_\_" (p. 115).
- "I want Tulane 0370 in New Orleans. What? Oh. Hold \_\_\_ a minute" . (p. 90).
- "If you don't want to be talked about, why do you make \_\_\_ like that..." (p. 99).
- "I wanted to, tried to, put \_\_\_ free clinics, I squandered the money my mother left me on it" (p. 99).
- "I put \_\_\_ a potato sack and set \_\_\_ for capital on foot" (p. 99).
- "Well, its looks to me like Jabe will more than likely go \_\_\_ before the cotton comes \_\_\_" (p. 101).
- "Has the minister called \_\_\_ you yet? Reverend Tooker? (p. 120).
- "Well, there is a washroom, and I'll get the plumber to put \_\_\_ a hot and cold shower!" (p. 126).
- "I knew he would bring \_\_\_ trade and he brings it." (p. 132).

## 3. Translate into Ukrainian:

- a) Carol Cutrere's monologue about being an exhibitionist (p. 99);
- b) the conversation between Val and lady from Act II Scene One. Start with: "VAL: Well, in answer to your last question,..." (p. 110). End with: VAL: She made me think that she was" (p. 111).

**III. Character Sketches**

1. Consider the main characters' words and actions throughout the play and choose two most characteristic words or phrases, which may serve as definitions, summing up the personages (two for each case).
2. Consider the characters separately answering the following questions and doing tasks.

**Lady Torrance**

1. Through whose eyes and minds is the reader (and viewer) receiving the story of Lady's past, her unhappy love affair, her father's tragic death? What is the story?
2. Describe Lady using the following words and phrases: to meet with emotional disaster / to verge on hysteria strain / a girlish softness / desperate / to go to pieces / to get it all planned / not to have a single good dream in fifteen years / to want death / to go on living / to see the wine garden come open again / to square things away / won't be defeated / to burst into flower / to drop dead.
3. Do you think Lady's behaviour can be justified? How does she herself explain her defiant actions at the end of the play?

**Jabe Torrance**

1. Speak on the character using the following: to buy smb. cheap / the leader of the Magic Crew / tense wolfish smile / the death sweat on him / too late for surgical interference / his eyes burning malignantly / to be determined to — / a fierce dying old beast / to have smb. burned.
2. What illness is Jabe Torrance suffering from? What do you think it symbolizes? What is the social significance of this character?
3. Why do you think Jabe married Lady? Did he love her? Do you believe he guessed about the kind of relationship Lady had with Val? Some say that shooting his wife he shot his pangs of remorse. Do you agree with it?

**Carol Cutrere**

1. What made Carol Cutrere a town's outcast? Consider her words and actions throughout the play and try to compose an accurate sketch of her past. Use of the following phrases: past thirty / odd fugitive beauty / oldest and most distinguished in the country / look fantastic / arrested on the

highway / got her allowance back on condition that... / not to have a licence / to go out joking / an exhibitionist / want to be noticed, seen, heard, felt / a reformer / to be not built for childbirth / tender protection / to bring smb. a warming of danger / the fugitive kind.

2. What features are accentuated in the description of Carol's appearance and behaviour?
3. How does her striking, grotesque appearance contrast with her pathetic stay?
4. What is the aim of her "exhibitionism"?

### **Vee Talbot**

1. Do you agree with Beulah's description of Vee Talbot as "a public kill-joy, a professional hypocrite" (p. 100)? Use of the following: to paint from vision / couldn't live without... / existence didn't make sense / the wife of the country Sheriff / to see awful things take place / to be struck blind / a world of light and shadow / to be reminded of spiritual things.
2. What is the significance of her "visions"?
3. Why do you think was she blinded at the end of the play?

### **Val Xavier**

1. What features of Val Xavier does the author emphasize from the very start? Use the following: to be through with... / a life companion / the kind's never been branded / under a life-long sentence to solitary confinement / to hide from the law / to get the make-believe answer / to be corrupted.
2. Speak about the two categories Val subdivided people into. Which category did he refer himself to and why? What is his social stance? How does he make it obvious (pay attention to the fact what musicians he praises and whose autographs are on his guitar)?
3. Though Val is considered the symbol of Eros in the play, why do you think he was reluctant to have an affair with anyone in the town? Why did he arouse negative feelings of the men? Was it jealousy? Fear?
4. What brought Val and Lady together? Recall Val's story about a bird that "lives on the wings" and speak of its significance. Why does Val consider them both corrupted?

### **City Community**

1. What role is assigned to the conjure-man in the play? How many times does he appear on stage and what does his appearance signify each time?
2. Why do you think the town provoked constant violence? What spirit did the community support there? Analyse the behaviour of the town gossips, the sheriff and his assistants, the activity of the Mystic Crew.

3. Why at the background of the community, Lady, Val and Carol look outcasts? Are they really? Is it a chance coincidence that upon Val's death, his snake-skin was passed over to Carol Cutrere? What does the end of the play symbolize? Reread Carol's final remark in the closing-scene of the play (p. 150) and comment on it.

#### **IV. Ideas for written and oral report or class discussion**

1. Critics agree that "Orpheus Descending" may be read at many different levels and that each reader may arrive at his own version of the characters and events. Analyse your reactions to the play in relation to the following topics:
  - a) your own vision of Val Xavier's character and action;
  - b) your attitude towards other characters in the play (Lady Torrance, Carol Cutrere, Vee Talbott, Sheriff Talbott) as a result of their attitudes toward Val;
  - c) your view on whether the good triumphs over the wrong in the play or not.
2. Discuss the style and composition of the play:
  - a) what role in the development of the plot is assigned to Dolly Hamma and Beulah Binning? Why did the author think it necessary to make both these personages look "as common as dirt" (p. 100)?
  - b) could you guess the ending half-way through the play? Is the ending credible (a logical outcome of the story or an unexpected surprise)? Why do you think the author chose such an end? What is his message?
  - c) what main parts does the play fall into? How does the plot develop from the point of view of its tempo?
3. T. Williams' attitude toward society, especially its faults, is quite clear from the play. Find examples of his distaste for false holiness, snobbery, fake modesty, harsh social prejudices, lack of feeling.
4. What moral lessons does the author try to teach by his play? What does he warn against?
5. What character traits, behavioural patterns and attitudes does he seem to favour?
6. Read through the encyclopedic comment on Orpheus.
  - Comment on the title and the content of the play. Do you find similarities? What are they? Do you consider them accidental?

#### **Orpheus**

Ancient Greek legendary hero endowed with superhuman musical skills. He became the patron of a religious movement based on sacred writings said to be his own.

Traditionally, Orpheus was the son of a Muse (probably Calliope, the patron of epic poetry) and Oeagrus, a king of Thrace (other versions give Apollo). According to some legends, Apollo gave Orpheus his first lyre. Orpheus' singing and playing were so beautiful that animals and even trees and rocks moved about him in dance.

Orpheus joined the expedition of the Argonauts, saving them from the music of the Sirens by playing his own, more powerful music. On his return, he married Eurydice, who was soon killed by a snakebite. Overcome with grief, Orpheus ventured himself to the land of the dead to attempt to bring Eurydice back to life. With his singing and playing he charmed the ferryman Charon and the dog Cerberus, guardians of the River Styx. His music and grief so moved Hades, king of the underworld, that Orpheus was allowed to take Eurydice with him back to the world of life and light. Hades set one condition, however: upon leaving the land of death, both Orpheus and Eurydice were forbidden to look back. The couple climbed up toward the opening into the land of the living, and Orpheus, seeing the Sun again, turned back to share his delight with Eurydice. In that moment, she disappeared.

Orpheus himself was later killed by the women of Thrace. The motive and manner of his death vary in different accounts, but the earliest known, that of Aeschylus, says that they were Maenads urged by Dionysus to tear him to pieces in a Bacchic orgy because he preferred the worship of the rival god Apollo. His head, still singing, with his lyre, floated to Lesbos, where an oracle of Orpheus was established. The head prophesied until the oracle became more famous than that of Apollo at Delphi, at which time Apollo himself bade the Orphic oracle stop. The dismembered limbs of Orpheus were gathered up and buried by the Muses. His lyre they had placed in the heavens as a constellation.

## COMMENTS

### Orpheus Descending

1. *Pee Wee* a nick name for someone little or addressed tenderly.
2. *Cannonball* the name of the express train.
3. *One-armed bandit* another name for a pinball machine.
4. *The Mystic Crew* here the name of a Ku-Klux-Klan group.
5. *Give them the deep six* kill them (deep six stands for deep six feet, the depth of the grave).
6. *Choctaw* North American Indian tribe of Muskogean linguistic stock that traditionally lived in what is now southeastern Mississippi. In the mid-18th century, there were 20,000 Choctaw living in 60 or 70 settlements along the Pearl, Chickasawhay, and Pascagoula rivers. Their dwellings were thatched-roof cabins of logs or bark plastered over with mud. Among the southeastern agriculturalists the Choctaw were perhaps the most skillful farmers,

producing surplus crops to sell and trade. They planted corn (maize), beans, and pumpkins; fished; gathered nuts and wild fruits; and hunted deer and bear. Their most important community ritual was the Busk, or Green Corn, festival, a first-fruits and new-fire rite celebrated at midsummer. A notable funerary custom involved the ritual removal of the bones of the deceased from the body; subsequently, the bones were placed in an osuary. This ritual was performed by spiritually powerful men and women known as bone-gatherers or bone-pickers, with the departed's family members in attendance. Bone-gatherers were notable for their distinctive tattooing and long fingernails.

7. *Frigidaire* the name of one of the first brands of refrigerators.
8. *Passed the kitty* sent the cap to collect money from spectators in the street.
9. *Heavenly Grass* one of the four ballads by Tennessee Williams, which were included in his book *In the Winter of Cities* (1956):

My feet took a walk in heavenly grass.  
All day while the sky shone clear as glass,  
My feet took a walk in heavenly grass,  
All night while the lonesome stars rolled past.  
Then my feet come down to walk on earth  
And my mother cried when she gave me birth.  
Now my feet walk far and my feet walk fast,  
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.  
But they still got an itch for heavenly grass.

10. *Boll weevil* the most serious cotton pest in North America.
11. *Willie McGee* a young Afro-American worker from the State Mississippi, driver, the father of four children, in Dec. 1945 accused of an alleged adultery with a white woman, and notwithstanding a wave of protest rolling over the whole world, was electrocuted on 8 May 1951.
12. *S.O.B.S.* (abbr., vulg.) sons of bitches
13. *The Vigilantes* extremists groups practicing lunch law in the U.S.
14. *Porca la miseria!* (Ital.) God damn!
15. *Mannage la miseria!* (Ital.) curses.
16. *Leadbelly* (born c. Jan. 21, 1885?, Mooringsport, La., U.S. — died Dec. 6, 1949, New York, N.Y.) *byname of Huddie William Ledbetter* American folk-blues singer, songwriter, and guitarist whose ability to perform a vast repertoire of songs, in conjunction with his notoriously violent life, made him a legend.

Musical from childhood, Leadbelly played accordion, 6- and 12-string guitar, bass, and harmonica. He led a wandering life, learning songs by absorbing oral tradition. For a time he worked as an itinerant musician with Blind Lemon Jefferson. In 1918 he was imprisoned for murder; after

serving six years, he was pardoned by the governor of Texas, who had visited the prison and heard him sing.

Resuming a life of drifting, Leadbelly was imprisoned for attempted murder in 1930 in the Angola, La., prison farm. There he was discovered by the folklorists John and Alan Lomax, who were collecting songs for the Library of Congress. A campaign spearheaded by the Lomaxes secured his release in 1934, and he embarked on a concert tour of eastern colleges.

17. **King Oliver** (born May 11, 1885, Abbeville, La., U.S. — died April 8, 1938, Savannah, Ga.) *by name of Joseph Oliver* American cornetist who was a vital link between the semimythical prehistory of jazz and the firmly documented history of jazz proper. He is also remembered for choosing as his protégé the man generally considered to have been the greatest of all New Orleans musicians, Louis Armstrong.
18. **Gabriel on a horn** *Hebrew Gavriel, Arabic Gibrāil, Jabrail, or Jibril*, in the Bible and the Qurān, one of the archangels. Gabriel was the heavenly messenger sent to Daniel to explain the vision of the ram and the he-goat and to communicate the prediction of the Seventy Weeks.
19. Bessie Smith born (April 15, 1898?, Chattanooga, Tenn., U.S. — died Sept. 26, 1937, Clarksdale, Miss.) *in full Elizabeth Smith* American singer, one of the greatest of blues vocalists. She died from injuries sustained in a road accident. It was said that, had she been white, she would have received earlier medical treatment, thus saving her life, and Edward Albee made this the subject of his play *The Death of Bessie Smith* (1960).
20. **Choral women** (here) buzzing, talking women.
21. **Ad libs continual** buzzing continues.
22. **Audubon Park museum** one of the art museums, which used to be situated in one of the biggest parks of New Orleans.
23. **September Morn** a painting by Paul Chabas (1912) where a young maiden posed nude in the natural setting of the lake is depicted.
24. **Monte Cassino** *Latin Casinum*, town, Frosinone *provincia*, Lazio (Latium) *regione*, central Italy. Cassino lies along the Rapido River at the foot of Monte (mount) Cassino, 87 miles (140 km) southeast of Rome. It originated as Casinum, a town of the ancient Volsci people on a site adjacent to the modern town, on the lower slopes of the mountain.

The Benedictine monastery, stormed by the Lombards in 589, the Saracens in 884, and the Normans in 1030 and temporarily deserted, was each time refounded on the original site. The parent house of Western monasticism, it was during the Middle Ages an outstanding centre of the arts and of learning.

During World War II (1944) Cassino was a key point in the German winter defensive line (Garigliano-Sangro) blocking the Allied advance to Rome. On February 15 the Allies bombed and demolished the Benedictine monastery,

erroneously believing that the Germans had occupied and fortified it. Actually, the Germans were able to remove both the monks and the treasures of the abbey; and, after the bombardment ceased, they in fact occupied and fortified the ruins. A month later Allied aircraft dropped 1,400 tons of bombs on Cassino, leaving the town so heaped with rubble that tanks could not operate until bulldozers cleared paths for them.

After the war, both the town and the abbey were rebuilt on their previous sites, the town on a completely new plan, the abbey following substantially the lines of its predecessor. Little or nothing of the abbey's decorative detail was recoverable, but the famous bronze doors, cast in Constantinople for the abbot Desiderius in 1066, were found and restored. The archives, library, and some paintings were saved.

25. **Zia Teresa** (Ital.) Aunt Teresa.

26. **Chicken-feed!** (sl.) a negligible sum.

27. **Calliope** in music, a steam-whistle organ with a loud, shrill sound audible miles away; it is used to attract attention for circuses and fairs. It was invented in the United States about 1850 by A.S. Denny and patented in 1855 by Joshua C. Stoddard.

The calliope consists of a boiler that forces steam through a set of whistle pipes. Either a keyboard or a pinned cylinder (like that of a barrel organ or music box) controls the entry of steam into the proper pipes.

28. **Glorious Hill, Sunset, Lyon** made-up names of the towns.

29. **Free drinks and free favors** drinks and presents given without charge.

30. **Guthrie, Woody** (born July 14, 1912, Okemah, Oklahoma, U.S. — died October 3, 1967, New York, New York) *by name of Woodrow Wilson Guthrie* American singer and composer whose songs, many of them now classics, told of the common people and their struggles.

31. **Jelly Roll Morton** (born Oct. 20, 1890, New Orleans, La., U.S. — died July 10, 1941, Los Angeles, Calif.) *by name of Ferdinand Joseph La Menthe* American jazz composer and pianist who pioneered the use of prearranged, semiorchestrated effects in jazz-band performances.

32. **Seagram** the former Canadian corporation that was the world's largest producer and distributor of distilled spirits.

33. **The Delta Brilliant** the made-up name of a cinema.

34. **Bennies** a slang name of Benzedrine, a widely used synthetic drug, amphetamine sulfate, a white powder with a slightly bitter, numbing taste that has pronounced stimulatory actions on the central nervous system.