CRIMES OF THE HEART

by Beth Henley

2M, 4W

The scene is Hazlehurst, Mississippi, where the three Magrath sisters have gathered to await news of the family patriarch, their grandfather, who is living out his last hours in the local hospital. Lenny, the oldest sister, is unmarried at thirty and facing diminishing marital prospects; Meg, the middle sister, who quickly outgrew Hazlehurst, is back after a failed singing career on the West Coast; while Babe, the youngest, is out on bail after having shot her husband in the stomach. Their troubles, which are grave and yet, somehow, hilarious, are highlighted by their priggish cousin, Chick, and by the awkward lawyer who tries to keep Babe out of jail while helpless not to fall in love with her. In the end the play is the story of how its young characters escape the past to seize the future—but the telling is so true and touching and consistently hilarious that it will linger in the mind long after the curtain has descended.

Winner of the Pulitzer Prize and the New York Drama Critics Circle Award

"While this play overflows with infectious high spirits, it is also, unmistakably, the tale of a very troubled family. Such is Miss Henley's prodigious talent that she can serve us pain as though it were a piece of cake."
— N.Y. Times

"It has heart, wit and surprisingly sassy passion that must carry all before it ... it would certainly be a crime for anyone interested in the theatre not to see this play."
— N.Y. Post

"From time to time a play comes along that restores one's faith in our theatre ...."
— New York Magazine

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ABUNDANCE, AM I BLUE,
THE MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST,
THE LUCKY SPOT, THE WAKE OF JAMEY FOSTER,
HYMN IN THE ATTIC

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BY BETH HENLEY

DRAMATISTS
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CRIMES
OF THE HEART
BY BETH HENLEY

Set for the Broadway production of “Crimes of the Heart.” Designed by John Lee Beatty.
CRIMES OF THE HEART was presented on Broadway by Warner Theatre Productions, Inc./Claire Nichtern, Mary Lea Johnson, Martin Richards, and Francine Lefrak; at the Golden Theatre, in New York City, on November 4, 1981. It was directed by Melvin Bernhardt; the set was by John Lee Beatty; costumes were by Patricia McGourty; and the lighting was by Dennis Parichy. The associate producer was Ethel Watt. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

LENNY MAGRATH ....................... Lizbeth Mackay
CHICK BOYLE ........................ Sharon Ullrich
DOC PORTER .......................... Raymond Baker
MEG MAGRATH ....................... Mary Beth Hurt
BABE BOTRELL ....................... Mia Dillon
BARNETTE LLOYD .................... Peter MacNicol

CRIMES OF THE HEART received its New York premiere at the Manhattan Theatre Club, in 1980.

Originally produced by Actors Theatre of Louisville, Inc. in February, 1979.
"For Len, C.C., and Kayo."

THE CAST

LENNY MAGRATH, 30, the oldest sister
CHICK BOYLE, 29, the sisters’ first cousin
DOC PORTER, 30, Meg’s old boyfriend
MAG MAGRATH, 27, the middle sister
BABE BOTTICELLI, 24, the youngest sister
BARNETTE LLOYD, 26, Babe’s lawyer

THE SETTING

The setting of the entire play is the kitchen in the Magrath sisters’ house in Hazlehurst, Mississippi, a small southern town. The old-fashioned kitchen is unusually spacious, but there is a lived-in cluttered look about it. There are four different entrances and exits to the kitchen: the back door; the door leading to the dining room and the front of the house; a door leading to the downstairs bedroom; and a staircase leading to the upstairs room. There is a table near the center of the room, and a cot has been set up in one of the corners.

THE TIME

In the fall; five years after Hurricane Camille

CRIMES OF THE HEART

ACT I

The lights go up on the empty kitchen. It is late afternoon. Lenny Magrath, a thirty-year-old woman with a round figure and face, enters from the back door carrying a white suitcase, a saxophone case, and a brown paper sack. She sets the suitcase and the sax case down and takes the brown sack to the kitchen table. After glancing quickly at the door, she gets the cookie jar from the kitchen counter, a box of matches from the stove and then brings both objects back down to the kitchen table. Excitedly, she reaches into the brown sack and pulls out a package of birthday candles. She quickly opens the package and removes a candle. She tries to stick the candle into a cookie—it falls off. She sticks the candle in again but the cookie is too hard and it crumbles. Frantically, she gets a second cookie from the jar. She strikes a match, lights the candle and begins dripping wax onto the cookie. Just as she is beginning to smile we hear Chick’s voice from Offstage.

CHICK’S VOICE. Lenny! Oh, Lenny! (Lenny quickly blows out the candle and stuffs the cookie and candle into her dress pocket. Chick, 29, enters from the back door. She is a brightly dressed matron with yellow hair and shiny, red lips.)

CHICK. Hi! I saw your car pull up.

LENNY. Hi.

CHICK. Well, did you see today’s paper? (Lenny nods.) It’s
just too awful! It's just way too awful! How I'm gonna continue holding my head up high in this community, I do not know. Did you remember to pick up those pantyhose for me?

LENNY. They're in the sack.

CHICK. Well, thank goodness, at least I'm not gonna have to go into town wearing holes in my stockings. (Chick gets the package, tears it open and proceeds to take off one pair of stockings and put on another, throughout the following scene. There should be something slightly grotesque about this woman changing her stockings in the kitchen.)

LENNY. Did Uncle Watson call?

CHICK. Yes, Daddy has called me twice already. He said Babe's ready to come home. We've got to get right over and pick her up before they change their simple minds.

LENNY. (Hesitantly.) Oh, I know, of course, it's just—

CHICK. What?

LENNY. Well, I was hoping Meg would call.

CHICK. Meg?

LENNY. Yes, I sent her a telegram: about Babe, and—

CHICK. A telegram? Couldn't you just phone her up?

LENNY. Well, no, cause her phone's... out of order.

CHICK. Out of order?

LENNY. Disconnected. I don't know what.

CHICK. Well, that sounds like Meg. My, these are snug. Are you sure you bought my right size?

LENNY. (Looking at the box.) Size extra petite.

CHICK. Well, they're skimping on the nylon material. (Struggling to pull up the stockings.) That's all there is to it. Skimping on the nylon. (She finishes on one leg and starts on the other.) Now, just what all did you say in this "telegram" to Meg?

LENNY. I don't recall exactly. I, well, I just told her to come home.

CHICK. To come home! Why, Lenora Josephine, have you lost your only brain, or what?

LENNY. (Nervously, as she begins to pick up the mess of dirty stockings and plastic wrappings.) But Babe wants Meg home. She asked me to call her.

CHICK. I'm not talking about what Babe wants.

LENNY. Well, what then?

CHICK. Listen, Lenora, I think it's pretty accurate to assume that after this morning's paper, Babe's gonna be incurring some mighty negative publicity around this town. And Meg's appearance isn't gonna help out a bit.

LENNY. What's wrong with Meg?

CHICK. She had a loose reputation in high school.

LENNY. (Weakly.) She was popular.

CHICK. She was known all over Copiah County as cheap Christmas trash, and that was the least of it. There was that whole sordid affair with Doc Porter, leaving him a cripple.

LENNY. A cripple—he's got a limp. Just, kind of, barely a limp.

CHICK. Well, his mother was going to keep me out of the Ladies' Social League because of it.

LENNY. What?

CHICK. That's right. I never told you, but I had to go plead with that mean, old woman and convince her that I was just as appalled and upset with what Meg had done as she was, and that I was only a first cousin anyway and I could hardly be blamed for all the skeletons in the Magraths' closet. It was humiliating; I tell you, she even brought up your mother's death. And that poor cat.

LENNY. Oh! Oh! Oh, please, Chick! I'm sorry. But you're in the Ladies' League now.

CHICK. Yes. That's true, I am. But frankly, if Mrs. Porter hadn't developed that tumor in her bladder, I wouldn't be in the club today, much less a committee head. (As she brushes her hair.) Anyway, you be a sweet potato and wait right here for Meg to call, so's you can convince her not to come back home. It would make things a whole lot easier on everybody. Don't you think it really would?

LENNY. Probably.

CHICK. Good, then suit yourself. How's my hair?

LENNY. Fine.

CHICK. Not poaching out in the back, is it?

LENNY. No.

CHICK. (Cleaning the hair from her brush.) All right then, I'm on my way. I've got Annie May over there keeping an eye on
Peekay and Buck Jr., but I don’t trust her with them for long periods of time. (*Dropping the ball of hair onto the floor.*) Her mind is like a loose sieve. Honestly it is. (*She puts the brush back into her purse.*) Oh! Oh! Oh! I almost forgot. Here’s a present for you. Happy Birthday to Lenny, from the Buck Boyles! (*Chick takes a wrapped package from her bag and hands it to Lenny.*)

LENNY. Why, thank you, Chick. It’s so nice to have your remember my birthday every year like you do.

CHICK. (*Modestly.*) Oh well, now, that’s just the way I am, I suppose. That’s just the way I was brought up to be. Well, why don’t you go on and open up the present?

LENNY. All right. (*She starts to unwrap the gift.*)

CHICK. It’s a box of candy—assorted cremes.

LENNY. Candy—that’s always a nice gift.

CHICK. And you have a sweet tooth, don’t you?

LENNY. I guess.

CHICK. Well, I’m glad you like it.

LENNY. I do.

CHICK. Oh, speaking of which, remember that little polka dot dress you got Peekay for her fifth birthday last month?

LENNY. The red and white one?

CHICK. Yes; well, the first time I put it in the washing machine, I mean the very first time, it fell all to pieces. Those little polka dots just dropped right off in the water.

LENNY. (*Crushed.*) Oh, no. Well, I’ll get something else for her then—a little toy.

CHICK. Oh, no, no, no, no, no! We wouldn’t hear of it! I just wanted to let you know so you wouldn’t go and waste any more of your hard-earned money on that make of dress. Those inexpensive brands just don’t hold up. I’m sorry but not in these modern washing machines.

DOC PORTER’S VOICE. Hello! Hello, Lenny!

CHICK. (*Taking over.*) Oh, look, it’s Doc Porter! Come on in, Doc! Please come right on in! (*Doc Porter enters through the back door. He is carrying a large sack of pecans. Doc is an attractively worn man with a slight limp that adds rather than detracts from his quiet seductive quality. He is 30 years old, but appears slightly older.*) Well, how are you doing? How in the world are you doing?

DOC. Just fine, Chick.

CHICK. And how are you liking it now that you’re back in Hazleton?

DOC. Oh, I’m finding it somewhat enjoyable.

CHICK. Somewhat! Only somewhat! Will you listen to him! What a silly, silly, silly man! Well, I’m on my way. I’ve got some people waiting on me. (*Whispering to Doc.*) It’s Babe. I’m on my way to pick her up.

DOC. Oh.

CHICK. Well, goodbye! Farewell and goodbye!

LENNY. Bye. (*Chick exits.*)

DOC. Hello.

LENNY. Hi. I guess you heard about the thing with Babe.

DOC. Yeah.

LENNY. It was in the newspaper.

DOC. Uh huh.

LENNY. What a mess.

DOC. Yeah.

LENNY. Well, come on and sit down. I’ll heat us up some coffee.

DOC. That’s okay. I can only stay a minute. I have to pick up Scott; he’s at the dentist’s.

LENNY. Oh; well, I’ll heat some up for myself. I’m kinda thirsty for a cup of hot coffee. (*Lenny puts the coffee pot on the burner.*)

DOC. Lenny—

LENNY. What?

DOC. (*Not able to go on.*) Ah...

LENNY. Yes?

DOC. Here, some pecans for you. (*He hands her the sack.*)

LENNY. Why, thank you, Doc. I love pecans.

DOC. My wife and Scott picked them up around the yard.

LENNY. Well, I can use them to make a pie. A pecan pie.

DOC. Yeah. Look, Lenny, I’ve got some bad news for you.

LENNY. What?

DOC. Well, you know, you’ve been keeping Billy Boy out on our farm; he’s been grazing out there.

LENNY. Yes—
DOC. Well, last night, Billy Boy died.
LENNY. He died?
DOC. Yeah. I'm sorry to tell you when you've got all this on you; but I thought you'd want to know.
LENNY. Well, yeah. I do. He died?
DOC. Uh huh. He was struck by lightning.
LENNY. Struck by lightning? In that storm yesterday?
DOC. That's what we think.
LENNY. Gosh, struck by lightning. I've had Billy Boy so long. You know. Ever since I was ten years old.
DOC. Yeah. He was a mighty old horse.
LENNY. (Stung.) Mighty old.
DOC. Almost twenty years old.
LENNY. That's right, twenty years. Cause; ah; I'm thirty years old today. Did you know that?
DOC. No, Lenny, I didn't know. Happy Birthday.
LENNY. Thanks. (She begins to cry.)
DOC. Oh, come on now, Lenny. Come on. Hey, hey, now. You know I can't stand it when you Magrath women start to cry. You know it just gets me.
LENNY. Oh-ho! Sure! You mean when Meg cries! Meg's the one you could never stand to watch cry! Not me! I could fill up a pig's trough!
DOC. Now, Lenny... stop it. Come on. Jesus!
LENNY. Okay! Okay! I don't know what's wrong with me. I don't mean to make a scene. I've been on this crying jag. (She blows her nose.) All this stuff with Babe and old Grandad's gotten worse in the hospital and I can't get in touch with Meg.
DOC. You tried calling Meggy?
LENNY. Yes.
DOC. Is she coming home?
LENNY. Who knows. She hasn't called me. That's what I'm waiting here for—hoping she'll call.
DOC. She still living in California?
LENNY. Yes; in Hollywood.
DOC. Well, give me a call if she gets in. I'd like to see her.
LENNY. Oh, you would, huh?
DOC. Yeah, Lenny, sad to say, but I would.

LENNY. It is sad. It's very sad indeed. (They stare at each other, then look away. There is a moment of tense silence.)
DOC. Hey, Jello Face, your coffee's boiling.
LENNY. (Going to check.) Oh, it is? Thanks. (After she checks the pot.) Look, you'd better go on and pick Scott up. You don't want him to have to wait for you.
DOC. Yeah, you're right. Poor kid. It's his first time at the dentist.
LENNY. Poor thing.
DOC. Well, 'bye. I'm sorry to have to tell you about your horse.
LENNY. Oh, I know. Tell Joan thanks for picking up the pecans.
DOC. I will. (He starts to leave.)
LENNY. Oh, how's the baby?
DOC. She's fine. Real pretty. She, ah, holds your finger in her hand; like this.
LENNY. Oh, that's cute.
DOC. Yeah. Bye, Lenny.
LENNY. 'Bye. (Doc exits. Lenny stares after him for a moment, then goes and sits back down at the kitchen table. She reaches into her pockets and pulls out a somewhat crumpled cookie and a wax candle. She lights the candle again, lets the wax drip onto the cookie, then sticks the candle on top of the cookie. She begins to sing the "Happy Birthday Song" to herself. As the end of the song she pauses, silently makes a wish, and blows out the candle. She waits a moment, then relights the candle, and repeats her actions, only this time making a different wish at the end of the song. She starts to repeat the procedure for the third time, as the phone begins to ring. She goes to answer it.) Hello... oh, hello, Lucille, how's Zackery?... Oh, no!... Oh, I'm so sorry. Of course, it must be grueling for you... Yes, I understand. Your only brother... no, she's not here yet. Chick just went to pick her up... oh, now, Lucille, she's still his wife, I'm sure she'll be interested... Well, you can just tell me the information and I'll relate it all to her... Uh-hum, his liver's saved. Oh, that's good news!... Well, of course, when you look at it like that... Breathing stabilized... Damage to the spinal column, not yet determined... Okay... Yes, Lucille, I've got it all down... Uh-hum, I'll give her that message. 'Bye, 'bye.
LENNY. (Overlapping as she falls apart.) It’s horrible! It’s horrible! It’s just horrible!!
MEG. Now calm down, Lenny. Just calm down. Would you like a Coke? Here, I’ll get you some Coke. (Meg gets a Coke from the refrigerator. She opens it and downs a large swig.) Why? Why would she shoot him? Why? (Meg hands the Coke bottle to Lenny.)

LENNY. I talked to her this morning and I asked her that very question. I said, “Babe, why would you shoot Zackery? He was your own husband. Why would you shoot him?” And do you know what she said? (Meg shakes her head.) She said, “Cause I didn’t like his looks. I just didn’t like his looks.”

MEG. (After a pause.) Well, I don’t like his looks.

LENNY. But you didn’t shoot him! You wouldn’t shoot a person ‘cause you didn’t like their looks! You wouldn’t do that! Oh, I hate to say this—I do hate to say this—but I believe Babe is ill. I mean in-her-head-ill.

MEG. Oh, now, Lenny, don’t you say that! There’re plenty of good sane reasons to shoot another person and I’m sure that Babe had one. Now what we’ve got to do is get her the best lawyer in town. Do you have any ideas on who’s the best lawyer in town?

LENNY. Well, Zackery is, of course; but he’s been shot!

MEG. Well, count him out! Just count him and his whole firm out!

LENNY. Anyway, you don’t have to worry, she’s already got her lawyer.

MEG. She does? Who?

LENNY. Barrette Lloyd. Annie Lloyd’s boy. He just opened his office here in town. And Uncle Watson said we’d be doing Annie a favor by hiring him up.

MEG. Doing Annie a favor? Doing Annie a favor?! Well, what about Babe? Have you thought about Babe? Do we want to do her a favor of thirty or forty years in jail?! Have you thought about that?

LENNY. Now, don’t snap at me! Just don’t snap at me! I try to do what’s right! All this responsibility keeps falling on my shoulders, and I try to do what’s right!

(Lenny drops the pencil and paper down. She sighs deeply, wipes her cheeks with the back of her hand, and goes to the stove to pour herself a cup of coffee. After a few moments, the front door is heard slamming. Lenny starts. A whistle is heard, then Meg’s voice.)

MEG’S VOICE. I’m home! (She whistles the family whistle.) Anybody home?!!!

LENNY. Meg? Meg! (Meg, 27, enters from the dining room. She has sad, magic eyes and wears a hat. She carries a worn-out suitcase.)

MEG. (Dropping her suitcase, running to hug Lenny.) Lenny—

LENNY. Well, Meg! Why, Meg! Oh, Meggy! Why didn’t you call? Did you fly in? You didn’t take a cab, did you? Why didn’t you give us a call?

MEG. (Overlapping.) Oh, Lenny! Why, Lenny! Dear, Lenny! (Then she looks at Lenny’s face.) My God, we’re getting so old! Oh, I called for heaven’s sake. Of course, I called!

LENNY. Well, I never talked to you—

MEG. Well, I know! I let the phone ring right off the hook!

LENNY. Well, as a matter of fact, I was out most of the morning seeing to Babe—!

MEG. Now just what’s all this business about Babe? How could you send me such a telegram about Babe? And Zackery! You say somebody’s shot Zackery?!

LENNY. Yes; they have.

MEG. Well, good Lord! Is he dead?

LENNY. No. But he’s in the hospital. He was shot in his stomach.

MEG. In his stomach! How awful! Do they know who shot him? (Lenny nods.) Well, who? Who was it? Who? Who?

LENNY. Babe! They’re all saying Babe shot him! They took her to jail! And they’re saying she shot him! They’re all saying it! It’s horrible! It’s awful!

MEG. (Overlapping.) Jail! Good Lord, jail! Well, who? Who’s saying it? Who?!!

LENNY. Everyone!! The policemen, the sheriff, Zackery, even Babe’s saying it! Even Babe herself!!

MEG. Well, for God’s sake. For God’s sake.
MEG. Well, boo hoo, boo, hoo! And how in the hell could you send me such a telegram about Babe!
LENNY. Well, if you had a phone, or if you didn’t live way out there in Hollywood and not even come home for Christmas maybe I wouldn’t have to pay all that money to send you a telegram!!
MEG. (Overlapping.) ‘Babe’s in terrible trouble—Stop! Zachery’s been shot—Stop! Come home immediately—Stop! Stop!’
LENNY. And what was that you said about how old we’re getting? When you looked at my face, you said, “My God, we’re getting so old!” But you didn’t mean we—you meant me! Didn’t you? I’m thirty years old today and my face is getting all pinched up and my hair is falling out in the comb.
MEG. Why, Lenny! It’s your birthday, October 23rd. How could I forget. Happy Birthday!
LENNY. Well, it’s not. I’m thirty years old and Billy Boy died last night. He was struck by lightning. He was struck dead.
MEG. (Reaching for a cigarette) Struck dead. Oh, what a mess. What a mess. Are you really thirty? Then I must be twenty-seven and Babe is twenty-four. My God, we’re getting so old. (They are silent for several moments as Meg drags off her cigarette and Lenny drinks her Coke.) What’s the cut doing in the kitchen?
LENNY. Well, I rolled it out when Old Granddaddy got sick. So I could be close and hear him at night if he needed something.
MEG. (Glancing toward the door leading to the downstairs bedroom.) Is Old Granddaddy here?
LENNY. Why, no. Old Granddaddy’s at the hospital.
MEG. Again?
LENNY. Meg!
MEG. What?
LENNY. I wrote you all about it. He’s been in the hospital over three months straight.
MEG. He has?
LENNY. Don’t you remember? I wrote you about all those blood vessels popping in his brain?
MEG. Popping——
LENNY. And how he was so anxious to hear from you and to find out about your singing career. I wrote it all to you. How they have to feed him through those tubes now. Didn’t you get my letters?
MEG. Oh, I don’t know, Lenny. I guess I did. To tell you the truth, sometimes I kinda don’t read your letters.
LENNY. What?
MEG. I’m sorry. I used to read them. It’s just since Christmas reading them gives me these slicing pains right here in my chest.
LENNY. I see. I see. Is that why you didn’t use that money Old Granddaddy sent you to come home Christmas; because you hate us so much? We never did all that much to make you hate us. We didn’t!
MEG. Oh, Lenny! Do you think I’d be getting slicing pains in my chest, if I didn’t care about you?! If I hated you? Honestly, now, do you think I would?
LENNY. No.
MEG. Okay, then. Let’s drop it. I’m sorry I didn’t read your letters. Okay?
LENNY. Okay.
MEG. Anyway, we’ve got this whole thing with Babe to deal with. The first thing is to get her a good lawyer and get her out of jail.
LENNY. Well, she’s out of jail.
MEG. She is?
LENNY. That young lawyer, he’s gotten her out.
MEG. Oh, he has?
LENNY. Yes, on bail. Uncle Watson’s put it up. Chick’s bringing her back right now—she’s driving her home.
MEG. Oh; well, that’s a relief.
LENNY. Yes, and they’re due home any minute now; so we can just wait right here for ‘em.
MEG. Well, good. That’s good. (As she leans against the counter.) So, Babe shot Zachery Botrelle, the richest and most powerful man in all of Hazlehurst, slap in the gut. It’s hard to believe.
LENNY. It certainly is. Little Babe—shooting off a gun.
MEG. Little Babe.
LENNY. She was always the prettiest and most perfect of the
three of us. Old Grandomoly used to call her his Dancing Sugar
Plum. Why, remember how proud and happy he was the day
she married Zackery.
MEG. Yes, I remember. It was his finest hour.
LENNY. He remarked how Babe was gonna skyrocket right
to the heights of Hazlehurst society. And how Zackery was just
the right man for her whether she knew it now or not.
MEG. Oh, Lordy, Lordy. And what does Old Grandomoly say
now?
LENNY. Well, I haven’t had the courage to tell him all about
this as yet. I thought maybe tonight we could go to visit him
at the hospital and you could talk to him and...
MEG. Yeah, well, we’ll see. We’ll see. Do we have anything
to drink around here—to the tune of straight bourbon?
LENNY. No. There’s no liquor.
MEG. Hell. (Meg gets a Coke from the refrigerator and opens
it.)
LENNY. Then you will go with me to see Old Grandomoly at
the hospital tonight?
MEG. Of course. (Meg goes to her purse and gets out a bottle
of Empirin Compound. She takes out a tablet and puts it on
her tongue.) Brother, I know he’s gonna go on about my singing
career. Just like he always does.
LENNY. Well, how is your career going?
MEG. It’s not.
LENNY. Why, aren’t you still singing at that club down on Mali-
ibu beach?
MEG. No. Not since Christmas.
LENNY. Well, then, are you singing some place new?
MEG. No, I’m not singing. I’m not singing at all.
LENNY. Oh. Well, what do you do then?
MEG. What do I do is I pay cold storage bills for a dog food com-
pany. That’s what I do.
LENNY. (Trying to be helpful.) Gosh, don’t you think it’d be
a good idea to stay in the show business field?
MEG. Oh, maybe.
LENNY. Like Old Grandomoly says, “With your talent all you
need is exposure. Then you can make your own breaks!” Did
you hear his suggestion about getting your foot put in one of
those blocks of cement they’ve got out there? He thinks that’s
real important.
MEG. Yeh. I think I’ve heard that. And I’ll probably hear it
again when I go to visit him at the hospital tonight; so let’s
just drop it. Okay? (She notices the sack of pecans.) What’s
this? Pecans? Great, I love pecans! (Meg takes out two pecans
and tries to open them by cracking them together.) Come on...
Crack, you demons! Crack!
LENNY. We have a nutcracker!
MEG. (Trying with her teeth.) Ah, where’s the sport in a nut-
cracker? Where’s the challenge?
LENNY. (Getting to get the nutcracker.) It’s over here in
the utensil drawer. (As Lenny gets the nutcracker, Meg opens
the pecan by stepping on it with her shoe.)
MEG. There! Open! (Meg picks up the crumbled pecan and
eats it.) Mmmm, delicious. Delicious. Where’d you get the fresh
pecans?
LENNY. Oh... I don’t know.
MEG. They sure are tasty.
LENNY. Doc Porter brought them over.
MEG. Doc. What’s Doc doing here in town?
LENNY. Well, his father died a couple of months ago. Now he’s
back home seeing to his property.
MEG. Gosh, the last I heard of Doc, he was up in the East
painting the walls of houses to earn a living. (Amused.) Heard
he was living with some Yankee woman who made clay pots.
LENNY. Joan.
MEG. What?
LENNY. Her name’s Joan. She came down here with him. That’s
one of her pots. Doc’s married to her.
MEG. Married—
LENNY. Uh huh.
MEG. Doc married a Yankee?
LENNY. That’s right; and they’ve got two kids.
MEG. Kids—
LENNY. A boy and a girl.
MEG. God. Then his kids must be half-Yankee.
LENNY. I suppose.
MEG. God. That really gets me. I don’t know why, but somehow that really gets me.
LENNY. I don’t know why it should.
MEG. And what a stupid-looking pot! Who’d buy it anyway?
LENNY. Wait—I think that’s them. Yeah, that’s Chick’s car! Oh, there’s Babe! Hello, Babe! They’re home, Meg! They’re home. (Meg bides.)
BABE’S VOICE. Lenny! I’m home! I’m free! (Babe, 24, enters exuberantly. She has an angelic face and fierce, violet eyes. She carries a pink pocketbook.) I’m home! (Meg jumps out of hiding.) Oh, Meg—Look, it’s Meg! (Running to hug her.) Meg! When did you get home?
MEG. Just now!
BABE. Well, it’s so good to see you! I’m so glad you’re home! I’m so relieved. (Chick enters.)
MEG. Why, Chick; hello.
CHICK. Hello, Cousin Margaret. What brings you back to Hazlehurst?
MEG. Oh, I came on home….(Turning to Babe.) I came on home to see about Babe.
BABE. (Running to hug Meg.) Oh, Meg—
MEG. How are things with you, Babe?
CHICK. Well, they are dismal, if you want my opinion. She is refusing to cooperate with her lawyer, that nice-looking young Lloyd boy. She won’t tell any of us why she committed this heinous crime, except to say that she didn’t like Zackery’s looks—
BABE. Oh, look, Lenny brought my suitcase from home! And my saxophone! Thank you! (Babe runs over to the cot and gets out her saxophone.)
CHICK. Now that young lawyer is coming over here this afternoon, and when he gets here he expects to get some concrete answers! That’s what he expects! No more of this nonsense and stubbornness from you, Rebecca Magrath, or they’ll put you in jail and throw away the key!

BABE. Meg, come look at my new saxophone. I went to Jackson and bought it used. Feel it. It’s so heavy.
MEG. It’s beautiful. (The room goes silent)

CHICK. Isn’t that right, won’t they throw away the key?
LENNY. Well, honestly, I don’t know about that—
CHICK. They will! And leave you there to rot. So, Rebecca, what are you going to tell Mr. Lloyd about shooting Zackery when he gets here? What are your reasons going to be?
BABE. (Glares.) That I didn’t like his looks! I just didn’t like his stinking looks! And I don’t like yours much either, Chick-the-Stick! So, just leave me alone! I mean it! Leave me alone! Oooh! (Babe exits up the stairs. There is a long moment of silence.)

CHICK. Well, I was only trying to warn her that she’s going to have to help herself. It’s just that she doesn’t understand how serious the situation is. Does she? She doesn’t have the vaguest idea. Does she now?
LENNY. Well, it’s true, she does seem a little confused.
CHICK. And that’s putting it mildly, Lenny honey. That’s putting it mighty mild. So, Margaret, how’s your singing career going? We keep looking for your picture in the movie magazines. (Meg moves to light a cigarette.) You know, you shouldn’t smoke. It causes cancer. Cancer of the lungs. They say each cigarette is just a little stick of cancer. A little death stick.
MEG. That’s what I like about it, Chick—taking a drag off of death. (Meg takes a long, deep drag.) Mmm! Gives me a sense of controlling my own destiny. What power! What exhilaration! Want a drag?
LENNY. (Trying to break the tension.) Ah, Zackery’s liver’s been saved! His sister called up and said his liver was saved. Isn’t that good news?
MEG. Well, yes, that’s fine news. Mighty fine news. Why I’ve been told that the liver’s a powerful important bodily organ. I believe it’s used to absorb all of our excess bile.
LENNY. Yes—well—it’s been saved. (The phone rings. Lenny gets it.)
MEG. So! Did you hear all that good news about the liver, Little Chick?
CHICK. I heard it. And don’t you call me Chicken! (Meg clucks like a chicken.) I’ve told you a hundred times if I’ve told you once not to call me Chicken. You cannot call me Chicken.
LENNY. ...Oh, not... Of course, we'll be right over! 'Bye!  
(She hangs up the phone.) That was Annie May—Peekay and  
Buck Jr. have eaten paints!  
CHICK. Oh, no! Are they all right? They're not sick? They're  
ot not sick, are they??  
LENNY. I don't know. I don't know. Come on. We've got to  
run on next door.  
CHICK. (Overlapping.) Oh, God! Oh, please!! Please let them  
be all right! Don't let them die!! Please, don't let them die!!  
(Chick runs. Off bowling with Lenny following after. Meg sits  
down, finishing her cigarette. After a moment, Babe's voice  
it heard.)  
BABE'S VOICE. Pst—Pst! (Meg looks around. Babe comes  
tiptoeing down the stairs.)  
BABE. Has she gone?  
MEG. She's gone. Peekay and Buck Jr. just ate their paints.  
BABE. What idiots.  
MEG. Yeah.  
BABE. You know, Chick's hated us ever since we had to mov  
here from Vicksburg to live with Old Grandmama and Old Grand-  
daddy.  
MEG. She's an idiot.  
BABE. Yeah. Do you know what she told me this morning while  
I was still behind bars and couldn't get away?  
MEG. What?  
BABE. She told me how embarrassing it was for her all those  
years ago, you know, when mama—  
MEG. Yeah, down in the cellar.  
BABE. She said our mama had shamed the entire family, and  
we were known notoriously all through Hazlehurst. (About to  
cry.) Then she went on to say how I would now be getting just  
as much bad publicity and humiliating her and the family all  
over again.  
MEG. Ah, forget it, Babe. Just forget it.  
BABE. I told her, "Mama got national coverage! National!"  
And if Zackery wasn't a senator from Copiah County, I probably  
wouldn't even be getting state-wide.  
MEG. Of course you wouldn't.

BABE. (After a pause.) Gosh, sometimes I wonder...  
MEG. What?  
BABE. Why she did it. Why mama hung herself.  
MEG. I don't know. She had a bad day. A real bad day. You  
know how it feels on a real bad day.  
BABE. And that old yellow cat. It was sad about that old cat.  
MEG. Yeah.  
BABE. I bet if Daddy hadn't of left us, they'd still be alive.  
MEG. Oh, I don't know.  
BABE. 'Cause it was after he left that she started spending  
whole days just sitting there and smoking on the back porch  
steps. She'd sling her ashes down onto the different bugs and  
ants that'd be passing by.  
MEG. Yeah. Well, I'm glad he left.  
BABE. That old yellow cat'd stay back there with her.  
MEG. God, he was a bastard.  
BABE. I thought if she felt something for anyone it woulda been  
that old cat. Guess I musta been mistaken.  
MEG. Really, with his white teeth, Daddy was such a bastard.  
BABE. Was he? I don't remember. (Meg blows out a mouthful  
of smoke. After a moment, uneasily.) I think I'm gonna make  
some lemonade. You want some?  
MEG. Sure. (Babe cuts lemons, dumps sugar, stirs ice cubes,  
etc., throughout the following exchange.) Babe, why won't you  
talk? Why won't you tell anyone about shooting Zackery?  
BABE. Oooh—  
MEG. Why not? You must have had a good reason. Didn't you?  
BABE. I guess I did.  
MEG. Well, what was it?  
BABE. I... I can't say.  
MEG. Why not? (Pause) Babe, why not? You can tell me.  
BABE. 'Cause... I'm sort of... protecting someone.  
MEG. Protecting someone? Oh, Babe, then you really didn't  
shoot him? I knew you couldn't have done it!! I knew it!!!  
BABE. No, I shot him. I shot him all right. I meant to kill him.  
I was aiming for his heart, but I guess my hands were shaking  
and I—just got him in the stomach.  
MEG. (Collapsing.) I see.
BABE. *(Stirring the lemonade.)* So I'm guilty. And I'm just gonna have to take my punishment and go on to jail.
MEG. Oh, Babe—
BABE. Don't worry, Meg, jail's gonna be a relief to me. I can learn to play my new saxophone. I won't have to live with Zackery anymore. And I won't have his snooty old sister, Lucille, coming over and pushing me around. Jail will be a relief. Here's your lemonade.
MEG. Thanks.
BABE. It taste okay?
MEG. Perfect.
BABE. I like a lot of sugar in mine. I'm gonna add some more sugar. *(Babe goes to add more sugar to her lemonade, as Lenny bursts through the back door in a state of excitement and confusion.)*
LENNY. Well, it looks like the paint is primarily on their arms and faces; but Chick wants me to drive them all over to Doctor Winn's just to make sure. *(Lenny grabs her car keys off of the counter and as she does so, she notices the mess of lemons and sugar.)* Oh, now, Babe, try not to make a mess here; and be careful with this sharp knife. Honestly, all that sugar's gonna get you sick. Well, 'bye, 'bye. I'll be back as soon as I can.
MEG. Bye, Lenny.
BABE. 'Bye. *(Lenny exits.)* Boy, I don't know what's happenning to Lenny.
MEG. What do you mean?
BABE. "Don't make a mess; don't make yourself sick; don't cut yourself with that sharp knife." She's turning into Old Grandmama.
MEG. You think so?
BABE. More and more. Do you know she's taken to wearing Old Grandmama's torn sunhat and her green garden gloves?
MEG. Those old lime green ones?
BABE. Yeah; she works out in the garden wearing the lime green gloves of a dead woman. Imagine wearing those gloves on your hands.
MEG. Poor Lenny. She needs some love in her life. All she does is work out at that brick yard and take care of Old Granddaddy.

BABE. Yeah. But she's so shy with men.
MEG. *(Biting into an apple.)* Probably because of that shrunken ovary she has.
BABE. *(Slinging ice cubes.)* Yeah, that deformed ovary.
MEG. Old Granddaddy's the one who's made her feel self-conscious about it. It's his fault. The old fool.
BABE. It's so sad.
MEG. God—you know what?
BABE. What?
MEG. I bet Lenny's never even slept with a man. Just think, thirty years old and never even had it once.
BABE. *(Slyly.)* Oh, I don't know. Maybe she's... had it once?
MEG. She has?
BABE. Maybe. I think so.
MEG. When? When?
BABE. Well... maybe I shouldn't say—
MEG. Babe!
BABE. *(Rapidly telling the story.)* All right then; it was after Old Granddaddy went back to the hospital this second time. Lenny was really in a state of deep depression, I could tell that she was. Then one day she calls me up and asks me to come over and to bring along my polaroid camera. Well, when I arrive she's waiting for me out there in the sun parlour wearing her powder blue Sunday dress and this old curled up wig. She confided that she was gonna try sending in her picture to one of those lonely hearts clubs.
MEG. Oh, my God.
BABE. Lonely Hearts of the South. She'd seen their ad in a magazine.
MEG. Jesus.
BABE. Anyway, I take some snapshots and she sends them in to the club, and about two weeks later she receives in the mail this whole load of pictures of available men, most of 'em fairly odd looking. But of course she doesn't call any of 'em up 'cause she's real shy. But one of 'em, this Charlie Hill from Memphis, Tennessee, he calls her.
MEG. He does?
BABE. Yeah. And time goes on and she says he's real funny
on the phone; so they decide to get together to meet.
MEG. Yeah?!
BABE. Well, he drives down here to Hazelhurst 'bout three or four different times and has supper with her, then one weekend she goes up to Memphis to visit him; and I think that is where it happened.
MEG. What makes you think so?
BABE. Well, when I went to pick her up from the bus depot, she ran off the bus and threw her arms around me and started crying and sobbing as though she'd like to never stop. I asked her, I said, "Lenny, what's the matter?" And she said, "I've done it, Babe! Honey, I have done it!"
MEG. (Whispering.) And you think she meant that she'd done it?
BABE. (Whispering back, slyly.) I think so.
MEG. Well, goddamn! (They laugh with glee.)
BABE. But she didn't say anything else about it. She just went on to tell me about the boot factory where Charlie worked and what a nice city Memphis was.
MEG. So, what happened to this Charlie?
BABE. Well, he came to Hazelhurst just one more time. Lenny took him over to meet Old Granddaddy at the hospital and after that they broke it off.
MEG. 'Cause of Old Granddaddy?
BABE. Well, she said it was on account of her missing ovary. That Charlie didn't want to marry her on account of it.
MEG. Ah, how mean. How hateful.
BABE. Oh, it was. He seemed like such a nice man, too—kinda chubby with red hair and freckles, always telling these funny jokes.
MEG. Hmm, that just doesn't seem right. Something about that doesn't seem exactly right. (Meg paces about the kitchen and comes across the box of candy Lenny got for her birthday.) Oh, God. "Happy Birthday to Lenny from the Buck Boyles"
BABE. Oh! No! Today's Lenny's birthday!
MEG. That's right.
BABE. I forgot all about it!
MEG. I know, I did too.

BABE. Gosh, we'll have to order up a big cake for her. She always loves to make those wishes on her birthday cake.
MEG. Yeah, let's get her a big cake! A huge one! (Suddenly noticing the plastic wrapper on the candy box.) Oh, God, that Chick's so cheap!
BABE. What do you mean?
MEG. This plastic has poinsettias on it!
BABE. (Running to see.) Oh, let me see—(She looks at the package with disgust.) Boy, oh, boy! I'm calling that bakery and ordering the very largest size cake they have! That Jumbo Deluxe!
MEG. Good!
BABE. Why, I imagine they can make one up to be about—this big. (She demonstrates.)
MEG. Oh, at least; at least that big. Why, maybe, it'll even be this big. (She makes a very, very, very large size cake.)
BABE. You think it could be that big?
MEG. Sure!
BABE. (After a moment, getting the idea.) Or, or what if it were this big? (She maps out a cake that covers the room.) What if we get the cake and it's this big?? (She gulsps down a fistful of cake.) Gulp! Gulp! Gulp! Tasty treat!
MEG. Hmmm—I'll have me some more! Give me some more of that birthday cake! (Suddenly there is a loud knock at the door.)
BARNETTE'S VOICE. Hello... hello! May I come in?
BABE. (To Meg, in a whisper, as she takes cover.) Who's that?
MEG. I don't know.
BARNETTE'S VOICE. (Still knocking.) Hello! Hello, Mrs. Borelre!
BABE. Oh, shoot! It's that lawyer. I don't want to see him.
MEG. Oh, Babe, come on. You've got to see him sometime.
BABE. No, I don't! (She starts up the stairs.) Just tell him I died—I'm going upstairs.
MEG. Oh, Babe! Will you come back here?
BABE. (As she exits.) You talk to him, please, Meg. Please! I just don't want to see him—
MEG. Babe—Babe! Oh, shit... ah, come on in! Door's open!
(Barnette Lloyd, 26, enters carrying a briefcase. He is a slender, intelligent young man with an almost fanatical intensity that he subdued by sheer will.)

BARNETTE. How do you do? I'm Barnette Lloyd.
MEG. Pleased to meet you. I'm Meg Magrath, Babe's older sister.
BARNETTE. Yes, I know. You're the singer.
MEG. Well, yes...
BARNETTE. I came to hear you five different times when you were singing at that club in Biloxi. Greeny's I believe was the name of it.
MEG. Yes, Greeny's.
BARNETTE. You were very good. There was something sad and moving about how you sang those songs. It was like you had some sort of vision. Some special sort of vision.
MEG. Well, thank you. You're very kind. Now... about Babe's case—
BARNETTE. Yes?
MEG. We've just got to win it.
BARNETTE. I intend to.
MEG. Of course. But, ah... (She looks at him.) Ah, you know, you're very young.
BARNETTE. Yes. I am. I'm young.
MEG. It's just, I'm concerned, Mr. Lloyd—
BARNETTE. Barnette, please.
MEG. Barnette; that, ah, just maybe we need someone with, well, with more experience. Someone totally familiar with all the ins and outs and the this and that of the legal dealings and such. As that.
BARNETTE. Ah, you have reservations.
MEG. (Relieved.) Reservations. Yes, I have... reservations.
BARNETTE. Well, possibly it would help you to know that I graduated first in my class from Ole Miss Law School. I also spent three different summers taking advanced courses in criminal law at Harvard Law School. I made A's in all the given courses. I was fascinated!
MEG. I'm sure.
BARNETTE. And even now, I've just completed one year work-

ing with Jackson's top criminal law firm, Manchester and Wayne. I was invaluable to them. Indispensable. They offered to double my percentage, if I'd stay on; but I refused. I wanted to return to Hazlehurst and open my own office. The reason being, and this is a key point, that I have a personal vendetta to settle with one Zackery F. Botrelle.

MEG. A personal vendetta?
BARNETTE. Yes, ma'am. You are correct. Indeed, I do.
MEG. Hmmm. A personal vendetta... I think I like that. So you have some sort of a personal vendetta to settle with Zackery?
BARNETTE. Precisely. Just between the two of us, I not only intend to keep that sorry S.O.B. from ever being re-elected to the state senate by exposing his shady, criminal dealings; but I also intend to decimate his personal credibility by exposing him as a bully, a brute, and a red-neck thug!
MEG. Well; I can see that you're—fanatical about this.
BARNETTE. Yes; I am. I'm sorry, if I seem outspoken. But, for some reason, I feel I can talk to you... those songs you sang. Excuse me; I feel like a jackass.
MEG. It's all right. Relax. Relax, Barnette. Let me think this out a minute. (She takes out a cigarette. He lights it for her.) Now just exactly how do you intend to get Babe off? You know, keep her out of jail.

BARNETTE. It seems to me that we can get her off with a plea of self-defense, or possibly we could go with innocent by reason of temporary insanity. But basically, I intend to prove that Zackery Botrelle brutalized and tormented this poor woman to such an extent that she had no recourse but to defend herself in the only way she knew how!

MEG. I like that!
BARNETTE. Then, of course, I'm hoping this will break the ice and we'll be able to go on to prove that the man's a total criminal, as well as an abusive bully and contemptible slob!

MEG. That sounds good! To me that sounds very good!

BARNETTE. It's just our basic game plan.

MEG. But, now, how are you going to prove all this about Babe
being brunalized? We don't want anyone perjured. I mean to commit perjury.
BARNETTE. Perjury? According to my sources, there'll be no need for perjury.
MEG. You mean it's the truth?
BARNETTE. This is a small town, Miss Magrath. The word gets out.
MEG. It's really the truth?
BARNETTE. (Opening his briefcase.) Just look at this. It's a photostatic copy of Mrs. Botrelle's medical chart over the past four years. Take a good look at it, if you want your blood to boil!
MEG. (Looking over the chart.) What! What! This is maddening. This is madness! Did he do this to her? I'll kill him; I will—I'll fry his blood!! Did he do this?
BARNETTE. (Alarmed.) To tell you the truth, I can't say for certain what was accidental and what was not. That's why I need to talk with Mrs. Botrelle. That's why it's very important that I see her!
MEG. (Her eyes are wild, as she shoves him toward the door.) Well, look, I've got to see her first. I've got to talk to her first. What I'll do is I'll give you a call. Maybe you can come back over later on—
BARNETTE. Well, then, here's my card—
MEG. Okay. Goodbye.
BARNETTE. Bye!
MEG. Oh, wait! Wait! There's one problem with you.
BARNETTE. What?
MEG. What if you get so fanatically obsessed with this vendetta thing that you forget about Babe? You forget about her and sell her down the river just to get at Zackery. What about that?
BARNETTE. I—wouldn't do that.
MEG. You wouldn't?
BARNETTE. No.
MEG. Why not?
BARNETTE. Because, I'm—I'm fond of her.
MEG. What do you mean you're fond of her?
BARNETTE. Well, she... she sold me a pound cake at a ba-zaar once. And I'm fond of her.
MEG. All right; I believe you. Goodbye.
BARNETTE. Goodbye. (Barnette exits.)
MEG. Babe! Babe, come down here! Babe! (Babe comes hurrying down the stairs.)
BABE. What? What is it? I called about the cake—
MEG. What did Zackery do to you?
BABE. They can't have it for today.
MEG. Did he hurt you? Did he? Did he do that?
BABE. Oh, Meg, please—
MEG. Did he? Goddammit, Babe—
BABE. Yes, he did.
MEG. Why? Why?
BABE. I don't know! He started hating me, 'cause I couldn't laugh at his jokes. I just started finding it impossible to laugh at his jokes the way I used to. And then the sound of his voice got to where it tired me out awful bad to hear it. I'd fall asleep just listening to him at the dinner table. He'd say, "Hand me some of that gravy!" Or, "This roast beef is too damn bloody." And suddenly I'd be out cold like a light.
MEG. Oh, Babe. Babe, this is very important. I want you to sit down here and tell me what all happened right before you shot Zackery. That's right, just sit down and tell me.
BABE. (After a pause.) I told you I can't tell you on account of I'm protecting someone.
MEG. But Babe, you've just got to talk to someone about all this. You just do.
BABE. Why?
MEG. Because it's a human need. To talk about our lives. It's an important human need.
BABE. Oh. Well, I do feel like I want to talk to someone. I do.
MEG. Then talk to me; please.
BABE. (A decision.) All right. (After thinking a minute.) I don't know where to start.
MEG. Just start at the beginning. Just there at the beginning.
BABE. (After a moment.) Well, do you remember Willie Jay? (Meg shakes her head.) Cora's youngest boy?
MEG. Oh, yeah, that little kid we used to pay a nickel to, to run down to the drugstore and bring us back a cherry Coke.

BABE. Right. Well, Cora irons at my place on Wednesdays now, and she just happened to mention that Willie Jay'd picked up this old stray dog and that he'd gotten real fond of him. But now they couldn't afford to feed him anymore, so she was gonna have to tell Willie Jay to set him loose in the woods.

MEG. (Trying to be patient.) Uh huh.

BABE. Well, I said I liked dogs and if he wanted to bring the dog over here, I'd take care of him. You see, I was alone by myself most of the time 'cause the senate was in session, and Zackery was up in Jackson.

MEG. Uh huh. (Meg reaches for Lenny's box of birthday candy. She takes little nibbles out of each piece, throughout the rest of the scene.)

BABE. So the next day, Willie Jay brings over this skinny, old dog with these little crossed-eyes. Well, I asked Willie Jay what his name was, and he said they called him Dog. Well, I liked the name; so I thought I'd keep it.

MEG. (Getting up.) Uh huh. I'm listening. I'm just gonna get me a glass of cold water; do you want one?

BABE. Okay.

MEG. So you kept the name—Dog.

BABE. Yeah. Anyway, when Willie Jay was leaving he gave Dog a hug and said, "Goodbye, Dog. You're a fine ole dog." Well, I felt something for him, so I told Willie Jay he could come back and visit with Dog any time he wanted, and his face just kinda lit right up.

MEG. (Offering the candy.) Candy—

BABE. No thanks. Anyhow, time goes on and Willie Jay keeps coming over and over. And we talk about Dog and how fat he's getting and then, well, you know, things start up.

MEG. No, I don't know. What things start up?

BABE. Well, things start up. Like sex. Like that.

MEG. Babe, wait a minute—Willie Jay's a boy. A small boy, about this tall. He's about this tall!

BABE. No! Oh, no! He's taller now! He's fifteen now. When you knew him he was only about seven or eight.

MEG. But, even so—fifteen. And he's a black boy; a colored boy; a Negro.

BABE. (Pleading.) Well, I realize that, Meg. Why do you think I'm so worried about his getting public exposure? I don't want to ruin his reputation!

MEG. I'm amazed, Babe. I'm really, completely amazed. I didn't even know you were a liberal.

BABE. Well, I'm not! I'm not a liberal! I'm a democratic! I was just lonely! I was so lonely. And he was good. Oh, he was so, so good. I'd never had it that good. We'd always go out into the garage and—

MEG. It's okay. I've got the picture; I've got the picture! Now, let's just get back to the story. To yesterday, when you shot Zackery.

BABE. All right, then. Let's see...Willie Jay was over. And it was after we'd—

MEG. Yeah! Yeah.

BABE. And we were just standing around on the back porch playing with Dog. Well, suddenly, Zackery comes from around the side of the house. And he startled me 'cause he's supposed to be away at the office, and there he is coming from 'round the side of the house. Anyway, he says to Willie Jay, "Hey, boy, what are you doing back here?" And I said, "He's not doing anything. You just go on home, Willie Jay! You just run right on home." Well, before he can move, Zackery comes up and knocks him once right across the face and then shoves him down the porch steps, causing him to skin up his elbow real bad on that hard concrete. Then he says, "Don't you ever come around here again, or I'll have them cut out your gizzard!"

Well, Willie Jay starts crying, these tears come streaming down his face, then he gets up real quick and runs away with Dog following off after him. After that, I don't remember much too clearly; let's see...I went on into the living room, and I went right up to the davenport and opened the drawer where we keep the burglar gun...I took it out. Then I—I brought it up to my ear. That's right. I put it right inside my ear. Why, I was gonna shoot off my own head! That's what I was gonna do. Then I heard the back door slamming and suddenly, for some reason, I thought about mama...how she'd hung herself. And here I was about ready to shoot myself. Then I realized—that's
right I realized how I didn’t want to kill myself. And she—she probably didn’t want to kill herself. She wanted to kill him, and I wanted to kill him, too. I wanted to kill Zackery, not myself. 'Cause I—I wanted to live! So I waited for him to come on into the living room. Then I held out the gun, and I pulled the trigger, aiming for his heart, but getting him in the stomach. (After a pause.) It’s funny that I really did that.

MEG. It’s a good thing that you did. It’s a damn good thing that you did.

BABE. It was.

MEG. Please, Babe, talk to Barnette Lloyd. Just talk to him and see if he can help.

BABE. But how about Willie Jay?

MEG. (Starting towards the phone.) Oh, he’ll be all right. You just talk to that lawyer like you did to me. (Looking at the number on the card, she begins dialing.) See, ‘cause he’s gonna be on your side.

BABE. No! Stop, Meg, stop! Don’t call him up! Please don’t call him up! You can’t! It’s too awful. (She runs over and jerks the bottom half of the phone away from Meg. Meg stands, holding the receiver.)

MEG. Babe! (Babe slams her half of the phone into the refrigerator.)

BABE. I just can’t tell some stranger all about my personal life. I just can’t.

MEG. Well, hell, Babe; you’re the one who said you wanted to live.

BABE. That’s right. I did. (She takes the phone out of the refrigerator and hands it to Meg.) Here’s the other part of the phone. (Babe moves to sit at the kitchen table. Meg takes the phone back to the counter. Babe, as she slices a lemon out of her glass and begins sucking on it.)

MEG. What?

BABE. I called the bakery. They’re gonna have Lenny’s cake ready first thing tomorrow morning. That’s the earliest they can get it.

MEG. All right.

BABE. I told them to write it on it, “Happy Birthday Lenny—A

Day Late.” That sound okay?

MEG. (At the phone.) It sounds nice.

BABE. I ordered up the very largest size cake they have. I told them chocolate cake with white icing and red trim. Think she’ll like that?

MEG. (Dialing on the phone.) Yeah, I’m sure she will. She’ll like it.

BABE. I’m hoping.

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT I
ACT II

The lights go up on the kitchen. It is later that evening on the same day. Meg's suitcase has been moved upstairs. Babe's saxophone has been taken out of the case and put together. Babe and Barnette are sitting at the kitchen table. Barnette is writing and re-checking notes with explosive intensity. Babe, who has changed into a casual shift, sits eating a bowl of oatmeal, slowly.

BARNETTE. (To himself.) Mmm-huh! Yes! I see, I see! Well, we can work on that! And of course, this is mere conjecture! Difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Ha! Yes. Yes, indeed. Indeed—
BABE. Sure you don't want any oatmeal?
BARNETTE. What? Oh, no. No, thank you. Let's see, ah, where were we?
BABE. I just shot Zackery.
BARNETTE. (Looking at his notes.) Right. Correct. You've just pulled the trigger.
BABE. Tell me, do you think Willie Jay can stay out of all this?
BARNETTE. Believe me, it is in our interest to keep him as far out of this as possible.
BABE. Good.
BARNETTE. (Throughout the following, Barnette stays glued to Babe's every word.) All right, you've just shot one Zackery Borrelle, as a result of his continual physical and mental abuse—what happens now?
BABE. Well, after I shot him, I put the gun down on the piano bench and then I went out into the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade.

BARNETTE. Lemonade?
BABE. Yes, I was dying of thirst. My mouth was just as dry as a bone.
BARNETTE. So in order to quench this raging thirst that was choking you dry and preventing any possibility of you uttering intelligible sounds or phrases, you went out to the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade?
BABE. Right. I made it just the way I like it with lots of sugar and lots of lemon—about ten lemons in all. Then I added two trays of ice and stirred it up with my wooden stirring spoon.
BARNETTE. Then what?
BABE. Then I drank three glasses, one right after the other. They were large glasses, about this tall. Then suddenly, my stomach kind of swoll all up. I guess what caused it was all that sour lemon.
BARNETTE. Could be.
BABE. Then what did I do... I wiped my mouth off with the back of my hand, like this... (She demonstrates.)
BARNETTE. Hmmm.
BABE. I did it to clear off all those little beads of water that had settled there.
BARNETTE. I see.
BABE. Then I called out to Zackery. I said, "Zackery, I've made some lemonade. Can you use a glass?"
BARNETTE. Did he answer? Did you hear an answer?
BABE. No. He didn't answer.
BARNETTE. So, what'd you do?
BABE. I poured him a glass anyway and took it out to him.
BARNETTE. You took it out to the living room?
BABE. I did. And there he was; lying on the rug. He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said, "What?... Lemonade?... You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?" Then I got the idea, he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help. So I got on the phone and called up the hospital. I gave my name and address and I told them my husband was shot and he was lying on the rug and there was plenty of blood. (Babe pauses a minute, as Barnette works frantically on his notes.) I guess that's gonna look kinda bad.
BARNETTE. What?
BABE. Me fixing that lemonade, before I called the hospital.
BARNETTE. Well, not... necessarily.
BABE. I tell you, I think the reason I made up the lemonade, I mean besides the fact that my mouth was bone dry, was that I was afraid to call the authorities. I was afraid. I--I really think I was afraid they would see that I had tried to shoot Zackerly, in fact, that I had shot him, and they would accuse me of possible murder and send me away to jail.
BARNETTE. Well, that's understandable.
BABE. I think so. I mean, in fact, that's what did happen. That's what is happening--cause here I am just about ready to go right off to the Parchment Prison Farm. Yes, here I am just practically on the brink of utter doom. Why, I feel so all alone.
BARNETTE. Now, now, look--Why, there's no reason for you to get yourself so all upset and worried. Please, don't please. (They look at each other for a moment.) You just keep filling in as much detailed information as you can about those incidents on the medical reports. That's all you need to think about. Don't you worry, Mrs. Borelle, we're going to have a solid defense.
BABE. Please, don't call me Mrs. Borelle.
BARNETTE. All right.
BABE. My name's Becky. People in the family call me Babe; but my real name's Becky.
BARNETTE. All right, Becky. (Barnette and Babe stare at each other for a long moment.)
BABE. Are you sure you didn't go to Hazlehurst High?
BARNETTE. No, I went away to a boarding school.
BABE. Gosh, you sure do look familiar. You sure do.
BARNETTE. Well, I--I doubt you'll remember, but I did meet you once.
BABE. You did? When?
BARNETTE. At the Christmas bazaar, year before last. You were selling cakes and cookies and... candy.
BABE. Oh, yes! You bought the orange pound cake!
BARNETTE. Right.
BABE. Of course, and then we talked for a while. We talked about the Christmas angel.

BARNETTE. You do remember.
BABE. I remember it very well. You were even thinner then than you are now.
BARNETTE. Well, I'm surprised. I'm certainly... surprised. (The phone begins to ring.)
BABE. (As she goes to answer the phone.) This is quite a coincidence! Don't you think it is? Why, it's almost a fluke. (She answers the phone.) Hello... Oh, hello, Lucille... Oh, he is?... Oh, he does?... Okay. Oh, Lucille, wait! Has Dog come back to the house?... Oh, I see... Okay. Okay. (After a brief pause.) Hello, Zackery? How are you doing?... Uh huh... uh huh... oh, I'm sorry... Please, don't scream... uh huh... uh huh... You want what?... No, I can't come up there now... Well, for one thing, I don't even have the car. Lenny and Meg are up at the hospital right now, visiting with Old Grandaddy... What?... Oh, really?... Oh, really?... Well, I've got me a lawyer that's over here right now, and he's building me up a solid defense!... Wait just a minute, I'll see. (To Barnette.) He wants to talk to you. He says he's got some blackening evidence that's gonna convict me of attempting to murder him on the first degree!
BARNETTE. (Disgustedly.) Oh, bluff! He's bluffing! Here, hand me the phone. (He takes the phone and becomes suddenly cool and suave.) Hello, this is Mr. Barnette Lloyd speaking. I'm Mrs. ... ah, Becky's attorney... Why, certainly, Mr. Borelle, I'd be more than glad to check out any pertinent information that you may have... Fine, then I'll be right on over. Goodbye. (He hangs up the phone.)
BABE. What did he say?
BARNETTE. He wants me to come see him at the hospital this evening. Says he's got some sort of evidence. Sounds highly suspect to me.
BABE. Ooooh! Didn't you just hate his voice? Doesn't he have the most awful voice? I just hate! I can't bear to hear it!
BARNETTE. Well, now--now, wait. Wait just a minute.
BABE. What?
BARNETTE. I have a solution. From now on I'll handle all communications between you two. You can simply refuse to speak with him.
BABE. All right— I will. I'll do that.
BARNETTE. (Starting to pack his briefcase.) Well, I'd better get over there and see just what he's got up his sleeve.
BABE. (After a pause.) Barnette.
BARNETTE. Yes?
BABE. What's the personal vendetta about? You know, the one you have to settle with Zackery.
BARNETTE. Oh, it's—it's complicated. It's a very complicated matter.
BABE. I see.
BARNETTE. The major thing he did was to ruin my father's life. He took away his job, his home, his health, his respectability. I don't like to talk about it.
BABE. I'm sorry. I just wanted to say—I hope you win it. I hope you win your vendetta.
BARNETTE. Thank you.
BABE. I think it's an important thing that a person could win a life-long vendetta.
BARNETTE. Yes. Well, I'd better be going.
BABE. All right. Let me know what happens.
BARNETTE. I will. I'll get back to you right away.
BABE. Thanks.
BARNETTE. Goodbye, Becky.
BABE. Goodbye, Barnette. (Barnette exits. Babe looks around the room for a moment, then goes over to her white suitcase and opens it up. She takes out her pink hair curlers and a brush. She begins brushing her hair.) Goodbye, Becky. Goodbye, Barnette. Goodbye, Becky. Oooh. (Lenny enters. She is fuming. Babe is rolling her hair throughout most of the following scene.)
Lenny, hi!
LENNY. Hi.
BABE. Where's Meg?
LENNY. Oh, she had to go by the store and pick some things up. I don't know what.
BABE. Well, how's Old Granddaddy?
LENNY. (As she picks up Babe's bowl of oatmeal.) He's fine. Wonderful! Never been better!
BABE. Lenny, what's wrong? What's the matter?
LENNY. It's Meg! I could just wring her neck! I could just wring it!
BABE. Why? What'd she do?
LENNY. She lied! She sat in that hospital room and shamelessly lied to Old Granddaddy. She went on and on telling such untrue stories and lies.
BABE. Well, what? What did she say?
LENNY. Well, for one thing she said she was gonna have a RCA record coming out with her picture on the cover, eating pineapples under a palm tree.
BABE. Well, gosh, Lenny, maybe she is! Don't you think she really is?
LENNY. Babe, she sat here this very afternoon and told me how all that she's done this whole year is work as a clerk for a dog food company.
BABE. Oh, shoot. I'm disappointed.
LENNY. And then she goes on to say that she'll be appearing on the 'Johnny Carson Show' in two weeks' time. Two weeks' time! Why, Old Granddaddy's got a TV set right in his room. Imagine what a letdown it's gonna be.
BABE. Why, mercy me.
LENNY. (Slamming the coffee pot on.) Oh, and she told him the reason she didn't use the money he sent her to come home Christmas was that she was right in the middle of making a huge multi-million-dollar motion picture and was just under too much pressure.
BABE. My word!
LENNY. The movie's coming out this spring. It's called, "Singing in a Shoe Factory." But she only has a small leading role—not a large leading role.
BABE. (Laughing.) For heaven's sake—
LENNY. I'm sizzling. Oh, I just can't help it! I'm sizzling!
BABE. Sometimes Meg does such strange things.
LENNY. (Slowly, as she picks up the opened box of birthday candy.) Who ate this candy?
BABE. (Hesitantly.) Meg.
LENNY. My one birthday present, and look what she does! Why, she's taken one little bite out of each piece and then just put
it back in! Ooh! That's just like her! That is just like her!

BABE. Lenny, please—
LENNY. I can't help it! It gets me mad! It gets me upset! Why, Meg's always run wild—she started smoking and drinking when she was fourteen years old, she never made good grades—never made her own bed! But somehow she always seemed to get what she wanted. She's the one who got singing and dancing lessons; and a store-bought dress to wear to her senior prom. Why do you remember how Meg always got to wear twelve jingle bells on her petticoats, while we were only allowed to wear three a piece? Why?! Why should Old Grandmama let her sew twelve golden jingle bells on her petticoats and us only three?!

BABE. (Who has heard all this before.) I don't know!! Maybe she didn't jingle them as much!
LENNY. I can't help it! It gets me mad! I resent it. I do.
BABE. Oh, don't resent Meg. Things have been hard for Meg. After all, she was the one who found Mama.
LENNY. Oh, I know; she's the one who found Mama. But that's always been the excuse.
BABE. But, I tell you, Lenny, after it happened, Meg started doing all sorts of these strange things.
LENNY. She did? Like what?
BABE. Like things I never wanted to tell you about.
LENNY. What sort of things?
BABE. Well, for instance, back when we used to go over to the library, Meg would spend all her time reading and looking through this old, black book called Diseases of the Skin. It was full of the most sickening pictures you'd ever seen. Things like rotting-away noses and eyeballs drooping off down the sides of people's faces and scabs and sores and eaten-away places all over all parts of people's bodies.
LENNY. (Trying to pour her coffee.) Babe, please! That's enough.
BABE. Anyway, she'd spend hours and hours just forcing herself to look through this book. Why, it was the same way she'd force herself to look at the poster of crippled children stuck up in the window at Dixieland Drugs. You know, that one where they want you to give a dime. Meg would stand there and stare at their eyes and look at the braces on their little crippled-up legs—then she'd purposely go and spend her dime on a double scoop ice cream cone and eat it all down. She'd say to me, "See. I can stand it. I can stand it. Just look how I'm gonna be able to stand it."
LENNY. That's awful.
BABE. She said she was afraid of being a weak person. I guess 'cause she cried in bed every night for such a long time.
LENNY. Goodness mercy. (After a pause.) Well, I suppose you'd have to be a pretty hard person to be able to do what she did to Doc Potter.
BABE. (Exasperated.) Oh, shoot! It wasn't Meg's fault that hurricane wiped Biloxi away. I never understood why people were blaming all that on Meg—just because that roof fell in and crunched Doc's leg. It wasn't her fault.
LENNY. Well, it was Meg who refused to evacuate. Jim Craig and some of Doc's other friends were all down there and they kept trying to get everyone to evacuate. But Meg refused. She wanted to stay on because she thought a hurricane would be—oh, I don't know—a lot of fun. Then everyone says she baited Doc into staying with her. She said she'd marry him if he'd stay.
BABE. (Taken aback by this new information.) Well, he has a mind of his own. He could have gone.
LENNY. But he didn't. 'Cause... 'cause he loved her. And then after the roof caved and they got Doc to the high school gym, Meg just left. She just left him there to leave for California—'cause of her career, she says. I think it was a shameful thing to do. It took almost a year for his leg to heal and after that he gave up his medical career altogether. He said he was tired of hospitals. It's such a sad thing. Everyone always knew he was gonna be a doctor. We've called him Doc for years.
BABE. I don't know. I guess, I don't have any room to talk, 'cause I just don't know. (Pause.) Gosh, you look so tired.
LENNY. I feel tired.
BABE. They say women need a lot of iron... so they won't feel tired.
LENNY. What's got iron in it? Liver?
BABE. Yeah, liver's got it. And vitamin pills. (After a moment, Meg enters. She carries a bottle of bourbon that is already minus a few slugs and a newspaper. She is wearing black boots, a dark dress, and a hat. The room goes silent.)

MEG. Hello.

BABE. (Fooling with her hair.) Hi, Meg. (Lenny quietly sips her coffee.)

MEG. (Handing the newspaper to Babe.) Here's your paper.

BABE. Thanks. (She opens it.) Oh, here it is, right on the front page. (Meg lights a cigarette.) Where's the scissors, Lenny?

LENNY. Look in there in the ribbon drawer.

BABE. Okay. (Babe gets the scissors and glue out of the drawer and slowly begins cutting out the newspaper article.)

MEG. (After a few moments, filled only with the snipping of scissors.) All right—I lied! I lied! I couldn't help it... these stories just came pouring out of my mouth! When I saw how tired and sick Old Granddaddy'd gotten—they just flew out! All I wanted was to see him smiling and happy. I just wasn't going to sit there and look at him all miserable and sick and sad! I just wasn't!

BABE. Oh, Meg, he is sick, isn't he—

MEG. Why, he's gotten all white and milky—he's almost evaporated!

LENNY. (Gasping and turning to Meg.) But still you shouldn't have lied! It just was wrong for you to tell such lies—

MEG. Well, I know that! Don't you think I know that? I hate myself when I lie for that old man. I do. I feel so weak. And then I have to go and do at least three or four things that I know he'd despise just to get even with that miserable, old, bossy man!

LENNY. Oh, Meg, please, don't talk so about Old Granddaddy! It sounds so ungrateful. Why, he went out of his way to make a home for us; to treat us like we were his own children. All he ever wanted was the best for us. That's all he ever wanted. MEG. Well, I guess it was; but sometimes I wonder what we wanted.

BABE. (Taking the newspaper article and glue over to her suit-

case.) Well, one thing I wanted was a team of white horses to ride Mama's coffin to her grave. That's one thing I wanted. (Lenny and Meg exchange looks.) Lenny, did you remember to pack my photo album?

LENNY. It's down there at the bottom, under all that stuff.

BABE. Oh, I found it.

LENNY. Really, Babe, I don't understand why you have to put in the articles that are about the unhappy things in your life. Why would you want to remember them?

BABE. (Putting the article in.) I don't know. I just like to keep an accurate record, I suppose. There. (She begins flipping through the book.) Look, here's a picture of me when I got married.

MEG. Let's see. (Babe brings the photo album over to the table. They all look at it.)

LENNY. My word, you look about twelve years old.

BABE. I was just eighteen.

MEG. You're smiling, Babe. Were you happy then?

BABE. (Laughing.) Well, I was drunk on champagne punch. I remember that! (They turn the page.)

LENNY. Oh, there's Meg singing at Greeny's!

BABE. Oooh, I wish you were still singing at Greeny's! I wish you were!

LENNY. You're so beautiful!

BABE. Yes, you are. You're beautiful.

MEG. Oh, stop! I'm not—

LENNY. Look, Meg's starting to cry.

BABE. Oh, Meg—

MEG. I'm not—

BABE. Quick, better turn the page; we don't want Meg crying—(She flips the pages.)

LENNY. Why, it's Daddy.

MEG. Where'd you get that picture, Babe? I thought she burned them all.

BABE. Ah, I just found it around.

LENNY. What does it say here? What's that inscription?

BABE. It says "Jimmy—clowning at the beach—1952."

LENNY. Well, will you look at that smile.
MEG. Jesus, those white teeth—turn the page, will you; we can't do any worse than this! *(They turn the page. The room goes silent.)*

BABE. It's Mama and the cat.

LENNY. Oh, turn the page—

BABE. That old yellow cat. You know, I bet if she hadn't of hung that old cat along with her, she wouldn't have gotten all that national coverage.

MEG. *(After a moment, hopelessly.)* Why are we talking about this?

LENNY. Meg's right. It was so sad. It was awfully sad. I remember how we all three just sat up on that bed the day of the service all dressed up in our black velveteen suits crying the whole morning long.

BABE. We used up one whole big box of Kleenexes.

MEG. And then Old Granddaddy came in and said he was gonna take us out to breakfast. Remember, he told us not to cry any more 'cause he was gonna take us out to get banana splits for breakfast.

BABE. That's right—banana splits for breakfast!

MEG. Why, Lenny was fourteen years old and he thought that would make it all better—

BABE. Oh, I remember he said for us to eat all we wanted. I think I ate about five! He kept shoving them down us!

MEG. God, we were so sick!

LENNY. Oh, we were!

MEG. *(Laughing.)* Lenny's face turned green—

LENNY. I was just as sick as a dog!

BABE. Old Grandmama was furious!

LENNY. Oh, she was!

MEG. The thing about Old Granddaddy is he keeps trying to make us happy and we end up getting stomach aches and turning green and throwing up in the flower arrangements.

BABE. Oh, that was me! I threw up in the flowers! Oh, no! How embarrassing!

LENNY. *(Laughing.)* Oh, Babe—

BABE. *(Hugging her sisters.)* Oh, Lenny! Oh, Meg!

MEG. Oh, Babe! Oh, Lenny! It's so good to be home!

LENNY. Hey, I have an idea—

BABE. What?

LENNY. Let's play cards!!

BABE. Oh, let's do!

MEG. All right!

LENNY. Oh, good! It'll be just like when we used to sit around the table playing hearts all night long.

BABE. I know! *(Getting up.)* I'll fix us up some popcorn and chocolate—

MEG. *(Getting up.)* Here, let me get out that old black popcorn pot.

LENNY. *(Getting up.)* Oh, yes! Now, let's see, I think I have a deck of cards around here somewhere.

BABE. Gosh, I hope I remember all the rules—Are hearts good or bad?

MEG. Bad, I think. Aren't they, Lenny?

LENNY. That's right. Hearts are bad, but the Black Sister is the worst of all—

MEG. Oh, that's right! And the Black Sister is the Queen of Spades.

BABE. *(Figuring it out.)* And spades are the black cards that aren't the puppy dog feet?

MEG. *(Thinking a moment.)* Right. And she counts a lot of points.

BABE. And points are bad?

MEG. Right. Here, I'll get some paper so we can keep score.

*(The phone begins to ring.)*

LENNY. Oh, here they are!

MEG. I'll get it—

LENNY. Why, look at these cards! They're years old!

BABE. Oh, let me see!

MEG. Hello... No, this is Meg Magrath... Doc. How are you? ... Well, good... You're where? ... Well, sure. Come on over ... Sure, I'm sure. Yeah, come right on over... All right. Bye. *(She hangs up.)* That was Doc Porter. He's down the street at Al's Grill. He's gonna come on over.

LENNY. He is?

MEG. He said he wanted to come see me.
LENNY. Oh. (After a pause.) Well, do you still want to play?
MEG. No, I don’t think so.
LENNY. All right. (Lenny starts to shuffle the cards, as Meg brushes her hair.) You know, it’s really not much fun playing Hearts with only two people.
MEG. I’m sorry; maybe after Doc leaves, I’ll join you.
LENNY. I know; maybe Doc’ll want to play, then we can have a game of bridge.
MEG. I don’t think so. Doc never liked cards. Maybe we’ll just go out somewhere.
LENNY. (Putting down the cards. Babe picks them up.) Meg—
MEG. What?
LENNY. Well, Doc’s married now.
MEG. I know. You told me.
LENNY. Oh. Well, as long as you know that. (Pause.) As long as you know that.
MEG. (Still priming.) Yes, I know. She made the pot.
BABE. How many cards do I deal out?
LENNY. (Leaving the table.) Excuse me.
BABE. All of ‘em, or what?
LENNY. Ah, Meg? Could I—could I ask you something? (Babe proceeds to deal out all the cards.)
MEG. What?
LENNY. I just wanted to ask you—
MEG. What? (Unable to go on with what she really wants to say, Lenny runs up and picks up the box of candy.)
LENNY. Well, just why did you take one little bite out of each piece of candy in this box and then just put it back in?
MEG. Oh. Well, I was looking for the ones with nuts.
LENNY. The ones with nuts.
MEG. Yeah.
LENNY. But there are none with nuts. It’s a box of assorted cremes—all it has in it are cremes!
MEG. Oh.
LENNY. Why couldn’t you just read on the box? It says right here, “Assorted Cremes,” not nuts! Besides this was a birthday present to me! My one and only birthday present; my only one!
MEG. I’m sorry. I’ll get you another box.

LENNY. I don’t want another box. That’s not the point!
MEG. What is the point?
LENNY. I don’t know; it’s—it’s—You have no respect for other people’s property! You just take whatever you want. You just take it! Why, remember how you had layers and layers of jingle bells sewed onto your petticoats while Babe and I only had three apiece?!
MEG. Oh, God! She’s started up about those stupid jingle bells!
LENNY. Well, it’s an example! A specific example of how you always got what you wanted!
MEG. Oh, come on, Lenny, you’re just upset because Doc called.
LENNY. Who said anything about Doc? Do you think I’m upset about Doc? Why, I’ve long since given up worrying about you and all your men.
MEG. (Turning in anger.) Look, I know I’ve had too many men. Believe me, I’ve had way too many men. But it’s not my fault you haven’t had any—or maybe just that one from Memphis.
LENNY. (Stopping.) What one from Memphis?
MEG. (Slowly.) The one Babe told me about. From the—club.
LENNY. Babe!!!
BABE. Meg!!!
LENNY. How could you??? I asked you not to tell anyone! I’m so ashamed! How could you??? Who else have you told? Did you tell anyone else?
BABE. (Overlapping, to Meg.) Why’d you have to open your big mouth?!
MEG. (Overlapping.) How am I supposed to know? You never said not to tell!
BABE. Can’t you use your head just for once?!!! (Then to Lenny.) No, I never told anyone else. Somehow it just slipped out to Meg. Really, it just flew out of my mouth—
LENNY. What did you two have—wings on your tongues?
BABE. I’m sorry, Lenny. Really sorry.
LENNY. I’ll just never, never, never be able to trust you again—
MEG. (Furiously, coming to Babe’s defense.) Oh, for heaven’s sake, Lenny, we were just worried about you! We wanted to find a way to make you happy!
LENNY. Happy! Happy! I’ll never be happy!
MEG. Well, not if you keep living your life as Old Granddaddy's nursemaid—

BABE. Meg, shut up!

MEG. I can't help it! I just know that the reason you stopped seeing this man from Memphis was because of Old Granddaddy. LENNY. What—Babe didn't tell you the rest of the story—

MEG. Oh, she said it was something about your shrunken ovary.

BABE. Meg!!

LENNY. Babe!!

BABE. I just mentioned it!

MEG. But I don't believe a word of that story!

LENNY. Oh, I don't care what you believe! It's so easy for you—you always have men falling in love with you! But I have this underdeveloped ovary and I can't have children and my hair is falling out in the comb—so what man can love me?!

What man's gonna love me?

MEG. A lot of men!

BABE. Yeah, a lot! A whole lot!

MEG. Old Granddaddy's the only one who seems to think otherwise.

LENNY. 'Cause he doesn't want to see me hurt! He doesn't want to see me rejected and humiliated.

MEG. Oh, come on now, Lenny, don't be so pathetic! God, you make me angry when you just stand there looking so pathetic! Just tell me, did you really ask the man from Memphis? Did you actually ask that man from Memphis all about it?

LENNY. (Breaking apart.) No; I didn't. I didn't. Because I just didn't want him to want me—

MEG. Lenny—

LENNY. (Furious.) Don't talk to me anymore! Don't talk to me! I think I'm gonna vomit—I just hope all this doesn't cause me to vomit! (Lenny exits up the stairs sobbing.)

MEG. See! See! She didn't even ask him about her stupid ovary! She just broke it all off 'cause of Old Granddaddy! What a jackass fool!

BABE. Oh, Meg, shut up! Why do you have to make Lenny cry? I just hate it when you make Lenny cry! (Babe runs up the stairs.) Lenny! Oh, Lenny—(Meg takes a long sigh and goes to get a cigarette and a drink.)

MEG. I feel like hell. (Meg sits in despair—smoking and drinking bourbon. There is a knock at the back door. Meg starts. She brushes her hair out of her face and goes to answer the door. It is Doc.)

DOC. Hello, Meggy.

MEG. Well, Doc. Well, it's Doc.

DOC. (After a pause.) You're home, Meggy.

MEG. Yeah; I've come home. I've come on home to see about Babe.

DOC. And how's Babe?

MEG. Oh, fine. Well, fair. She's fair. (Doc nods.) Hey, do you want a drink?

DOC. Whatcha got?

MEG. Bourbon.

DOC. Oh, don't tell me Lenny's stocking bourbon.

MEG. Well, no. I've been to the store. (Meg goes him a glass and pours them each a drink. They click glasses.) So, how's your wife?

DOC. She's fine.

MEG. I hear ya got two kids.

DOC. Yeah. Yeah, I got two kids.

MEG. A boy and a girl.

DOC. That's right, Meggy, a boy and a girl.

MEG. That's what you always said you wanted, wasn't it? A boy and a girl.

DOC. Is that what I said?

MEG. I don't know. I thought it's what you said. (They finish their drinks in silence.)

DOC. Whose cot?

MEG. Lenny's. She's taken to sleeping in the kitchen.

DOC. Ah. Where is Lenny?

MEG. She's in the upstairs room. I made her cry. Babe's up there seeing to her.

DOC. How'd you make her cry?

MEG. I don't know. Eating her birthday candy; talking on about
her boyfriend from Memphis. I don't know. I'm upset about it. She's got a lot on her. Why can't I keep my mouth shut?

DOC. I don't know, Meggy. Maybe it's because you don't want to.

MEG. Maybe. *(They smile at each other. Meg pours each of them another drink.)*

DOC. Well, it's been a long time.

MEG. It has been a long time.

DOC. Let's see—when was the last time we saw each other?

MEG. I can't quite recall.

DOC. Wasn't it in Biloxi?

MEG. Ah, Biloxi. I believe so.

DOC. And wasn't there a—a hurricane going on at the time?

MEG. Was there?

DOC. Yes, there was, one hell of a hurricane. Camille, I believe they called it. Hurricane Camille.

MEG. Yes, now I remember. It was a beautiful hurricane.

DOC. We had a time down there. We had quite a time. Drinking vodka, eating oysters on the half shell, dancing all night long. And the wind was blowing.

MEG. Oh, God, was it blowing.

DOC. Goddamn, was it blowing.

MEG. There never has been such a wind blowing.

DOC. Oh, God, Meggy. Oh, God.

MEG. I know, Doc. It was my fault to leave you. I was crazy. I thought I was choking. I felt choked!

DOC. I felt like a fool.

MEG. No.

DOC. I just kept on wondering why.

MEG. I don't know why... 'Cause I didn't want to care. I don't know. I did care though. I did.

DOC. *(After a pause.)* Ah, hell—*(He pours them both another drink.)* Are you still singing those sad songs?

MEG. No.

DOC. Why not?

MEG. I don't know, Doc. Things got worse for me. After a while, I just couldn't sing anymore. I tell you, I had one hell of a time over Christmas.

DOC. What do you mean?

MEG. I went nuts. I went insane. Ended up in L.A. County Hospital. Psychiatric ward.

DOC. Hell. Ah, hell, Meggy. What happened?

MEG. I don't really know. I couldn't sing anymore; so I lost my job. And I had a bad toothache. I has this incredibly painful toothache. For days I had it, but I wouldn't do anything about it. I just stayed inside my apartment. All I could do was sit around in chairs, chewing on my fingers. Then one afternoon I ran screaming out of the apartment with all my money and jewelry and valuables and tried to stuff it all into one of those March of Dimes collection boxes. That was when they nabbed me. Sad story. Meg goes mad. *(Doc stares at her for a long moment. He pours them both another drink.)*

DOC. *(After quite a pause.)* There's a moon out.

MEG. Is there?

DOC. Wanna go take a ride in my truck and look out at the moon?

MEG. I don't know, Doc. I don't wanna start up. It'll be too hard, if we start up.

DOC. Who says we're gonna start up? We're just gonna look at the moon. For one night just you and me are gonna go for a ride in the country and look out at the moon.

MEG. One night?

DOC. Right.

MEG. Look out at the moon?

DOC. You got it.

MEG. Well... all right. *(She gets up.)*

DOC. Better take your coat. *(He helps her into her coat.)* And the bottle— *(He takes the bottle. Meg picks up the glasses.)* Forget the glasses—

MEG. *(Laughing.)* Yeah—forget the glasses. Forget the goddamn glasses. *(Meg shuts off the kitchen lights, leaving the kitchen lit by only a dim light over the kitchen sink. Meg and Doc leave. After a moment, Babe comes down the stairs in her slip.)*

BABE. Meg—Meg? *(She stands for a moment in the moonlight wearing only a slip. She sees her saxophone then moves to pick
it up. She plays a few shrilling notes. There is a loud knock on the back door.

BARNETTE'S VOICE. Becky! Becky, is that you? (Babe puts down the saxophone.)

BABE. Just a minute. I'm coming. (She puts a raincoat on over her slip and goes to answer the door. It is Barnette.) Hello, Barnette. Come on in. (Barnette comes in. He is troubled but is making a great effort to hide the fact.)

BARNETTE. Thank you. 

BABE. What is it?

BARNETTE. I've, ah, I've just come from seeing Zackery at the hospital.

BABE. Oh?

BARNETTE. It seems... Well, it seems his sister, Lucille, was somewhat suspicious.

BABE. Suspicious?

BARNETTE. About you?

BABE. Me?

BARNETTE. She hired a private detective, he took these pictures. (He hands Babe a small envelope containing several photographs. Babe opens the envelope and begins looking at the pictures in stunned silence.) They were taken about two weeks ago. It seems, she wasn't going to show them to Borrelle straight away. She, ah, wanted to wait till the time was right. (The phone rings one and a half times. Barnette glances uneasily towards the phone.) Becky? (The phone stops ringing.)

BABE. (Looking up at Barnette, slowly.) These are pictures of Willie Jay and me... out in the garage.

BARNETTE. (Looking away.) I know.

BABE. You looked at these pictures?

BARNETTE. Yes—well... professionally, I looked at them.

BABE. Oh, mercy. Oh, mercy! We can burn them, can't we? Quick, we can burn them—

BARNETTE. It won't do any good. They have the negatives.

BABE. (Holding the pictures, as she bends herself hopelessly into the stove, table, cabinets, etc.) Oh, no; oh, no; oh, no! Oh, no—

BARNETTE. There—there, now—there—

LENNY'S VOICE. Babe? Are you all right? Babe—

BABE. (Hiding the pictures.) What? I'm all right. Go on back to bed. (Lenny comes down the stairs. She is wearing a coat and wiping white night cream off of her face with a wash rag.)

LENNY. What's the matter? What's going on down here?

BABE. Nothin'! (Then as she begins dancing ballet style around the room.) We're—we're just dancing. We were just dancing around down here. (Signaling to Barnette to dance.)

LENNY. Well, you'd better get your shoes on, 'cause we've got—

BABE. All right, I will! That's a good idea! (As she goes to get her shoes, she hides the pictures.) Now, you go on back to bed. It's pretty late and—

LENNY. Babe, will you listen a minute—

BABE. (Holding up her shoes.) I'm putting 'em on—

LENNY. That was the hospital that just called. We've got to get over there. Old Grandaddy's had himself another stroke.

BABE. Oh. All right. My shoes are on. (She stands. They all look at each other as the lights blackout.)

END OF ACT II
ACT III

The lights go up on the empty kitchen. It is the following morning. After a few moments, Babe enters from the back door. She is carrying her hair curlers in her hands. She goes and lies down on the cot. A few moments later, Lenny enters. She is tired and weary. Chick's voice is heard.

CHICK'S VOICE. Lenny! Oh, Lenny! (Lenny turns to the door. Chick enters energetically.) Well... how is he?
LENNY. He's stabilized; they say for now his functions are all stabilized.
CHICK. Well, is he still in the coma?
LENNY. Uh huh.
CHICK. Hmm. So do they think he's gonna be... passing on?
LENNY. He may be. He doesn't look so good. They said they'd phone us if there were any sudden changes.
CHICK. Well, it seems to me we'd better get busy phoning on the phone ourselves. (Removing a list from her pocket.) Now I've made out this list of all the people we need to notify about Old Grandaddy's predicament. I'll phone half if you'll phone half.
LENNY. But—what would we say?
CHICK. Just tell them the facts; that Old Grandaddy's got himself in a coma, and it could be, he doesn't have long for this world.
LENNY. I—I don't know. I don't feel like phoning.
CHICK. Why, Lenora, I'm surprised, how can you be this way? I went to all the trouble of making up the list. And I offered
to phone half of the people on it, even though I'm only one-fourth of the granddaughters. I mean, I just get tired of doing more than my fair share, when people like Meg can suddenly just disappear to where they can't even be reached in case of emergency!
LENNY. All right; give me the list. I'll phone half.
CHICK. Well, don't do it just to suit me.
LENNY. (She wearily tears the list into two halves.) I'll phone these here.
CHICK. (Taking her half of the list.) Fine then. Suit yourself. Oh, wait—let me call Sally Bell. I need to talk to her anyway.
LENNY. All right.
CHICK. So you add Great Uncle Spark Dude to your list.
LENNY. Okay.
CHICK. Fine. Well, I've got to get on back home and see to the kids. It is gonna be an uphill struggle till I can find someone to replace that good-for-nothing Annie May Jenkins. Well, you let me know if you hear anymore.
LENNY. All right.
CHICK. Goodbye, Rebecca. I said goodbye. (Babe blows her sax. Chick starts to exit in a flurry then pauses to add:) And you really ought to try to get that phoning done before twelve noon. (Chick exits.)
LENNY. (After a long pause.) Babe; I feel bad. I feel real bad.
BABE. Why, Lenny?
LENNY. Because yesterday I—I wished it.
BABE. You wished what?
LENNY. I wished that Old Grandaddy would be put out of his pain. I wished on one of my birthday candles. I did. And now he's in this coma, and they say he's feeling no pain.
BABE. Well, when did you have a cake yesterday? I don't remember you having any cake.
LENNY. Well, I didn't... have a cake. But I just blew out the candles anyway.
BABE. Oh. Well, those birthday wishes don't count unless you have a cake.
LENNY. They don't.
BABE. No. A lot of times they don’t even count when you do have a cake. It just depends.
LENNY. Depends on what?
BABE. On how deep your wish is, I suppose.
LENNY. Still, I just wish I hadn’t of wished it. Gosh, I wonder when Meg’s coming home.
BABE. Should be soon.
LENNY. I just wish we wouldn’t fight all the time. I don’t like it when we do.
BABE. Me, neither.
LENNY. I guess it hurts my feelings, a little, the way Old Granddaddy’s always put so much stock in Meg and all her singing talent. I think I’ve been, well, envious of her ‘cause I can’t seem to do too much.
BABE. Why, sure you can.
LENNY. I can?
BABE. Sure. You just have to put your mind to it; that’s all. It’s like how I went out and bought that saxophone, just hoping I’d be able to attend music school and start up my own career. I just went out and did it. Just on hope. Of course, now it looks like... Well, it just doesn’t look like things are gonna work out for me. But I know they would for you.
LENNY. Well, they’ll work out for you, too.
BABE. I doubt it.
LENNY. Listen, I heard up at the hospital that Zackery’s already in fair condition. They say soon he’ll probably be able to walk and everything.
BABE. Yeah. And life sure can be miserable.
LENNY. Well, I know, ‘cause—day before yesterday, Billy Boy was struck down by lightning.
BABE. He was?
LENNY. (Nearing sobs) Yeah. He was struck dead.
BABE. (Crushed.) Life sure can be miserable. (They sit together for several moments in morbid silence. Meg is heard singing a loud happy song. She suddenly enters through the dining room door. She is exuberant! Her hair is a mess and the heel of one shoe has broken off. She is laughing radiantly and limping as she sings into the broken heel.)

MEG. (Spotting her sisters.) Good morning! Good morning! Oh, it’s a wonderful morning! I tell you, I am surprised I feel this good. I should feel like hell. By all accounts, I should feel like utter hell! (She is looking for the glue.) Where’s that glue? This damn heel has broken off my shoe. La, la, la, la, la! Ah, here it is! Now let me just get these shoes off. Zip, zip, zip, zip, zip! Well, what’s wrong with you two? My God, you look like doom! (Babe and Lenny stare helplessly at Meg.) Oh, I know, you’re mad at me ‘cause I stayed out all night long. Well; I did.
LENNY. No, we’re—we’re not mad at you. We’re just... depressed. (She starts to sob.)
MEG. Oh, Lenny, listen to me, now, everything’s all right with Doc. I mean nothing happened. Well, actually a lot did happen, but it didn’t come to anything. Not because of me, I’m afraid. (Smearing glue on her heel.) I mean, I was out there thinking, “What will I say when he begs me to run away with him? Will I have pity on his wife and those two half-Yankee children? I mean, can I sacrifice their happiness for mine? Yes! Oh, yes! Yes, I can!” But... he didn’t ask me. He didn’t even want to ask me. I could tell by his certain look in his eyes that he didn’t even want to ask me. Why aren’t I miserable? Why aren’t I morbid! I should be humiliated! Devastated! Maybe these feelings are coming—I don’t know. But for now it was... just such fun. I’m happy. I realized I could care about someone. I could want someone. And I sang! I sang all night long! I sang right up into the trees! But not for Old Granddaddy. None of it was to please Old Granddaddy! (Lenny and Babe look at each other.)
BABE. Ah, Meg—
MEG. What—
BABE. Well, it’s just—it’s...—
LENNY. It’s about Old Granddaddy—
MEG. Oh, I know; I know. I told him all those stupid lies. Well, I’m gonna go right over there this morning and tell him the truth. I mean every horrible thing. I don’t care if he wants to
hears it or not. He's just gonna have to take me like I am. And if he can't take it, if it sends him into a coma, that's just too damn bad! (Babe and Lenny look at each other. Babe cracks a smile. Lenny cracks a smile.)

Babe. You're too late—Ha, ha, ha! (They both break up laughing.)

Lenny. Oh, stop! Please! Ha, ha, ha!

Meg. What is it? What's so funny?

Babe. (Still laughing.) It's not—it's not funny!

Lenny. (Still laughing.) No, it's not! It's not a bit funny!

Meg. Well, what is it then? What?

Babe. (Trying to calm down.) Well, it's just—it's just—

Meg. What?

Babe. Well, Old Granddaddy—he—he's in a coma! (Babe and Lenny break up laughing.)

Meg. He's what?

Babe. (Screaming.) In a coma!

Meg. My God! That's not funny!

Babe. (Calming down.) I know. I know. For some reason it just struck us as funny.

Lenny. I'm sorry. It's—it's not funny. It's sad. It's very sad. We've been up all night long.

Babe. We're really tired.

Meg. Well, my God. How is he? Is he gonna live? (Babe and Lenny look at each other.)

Babe. They don't think so! (They both break up again.)

Lenny. Oh, I don't know why we're laughing like this. We're just sick! We're just awful!

Babe. We are—we're awful!

Lenny. (As she collects herself.) Oh, good; now I feel bad. Now, I feel like crying. I do; I feel like crying.

Babe. Me, too. Me, too.

Meg. Well, you've gotten me depressed!

Lenny. I'm sorry. I'm sorry. It, ah happened last night. He had another stroke. (They laugh again.)

Meg. I see.

Lenny. But he's stabilized now. (She chokes up once more.)

Meg. That's good. You two okay? (Babe and Lenny nod.) You look like you need some rest. (Babe and Lenny nod again. Meg goes on, about her heel.) I hope that'll stay. (Meg puts the top on the glue. A realization—) Oh, of course, now I won't be able to tell him the truth about all those lies I told. I mean, finally, I get my wits about me, and he conks out. It's just like him. Babe, can I wear your slippers till this glue dries?

Babe. Sure.

Lenny. (After a pause.) Things sure are gonna be different around here... when Old Granddaddy dies. Well, not for you two really, but for me.

Meg. It'll work out.

Babe. (Depressed.) Yeah. It'll work out.

Lenny. I hope so. I'm afraid of being here all by myself. All alone.

Meg. Well, you don't have to be alone. Maybe Babe'll move back in here. (Lenny looks at Babe hopefully.)

Babe. No; I don't think I'll be living here.

Meg. (Realizing her mistake.) Well, anyway, you're your own woman. Invite some people over. Have some parties. Go out with strange men.

Lenny. I don't know any strange men.

Meg. Well you know that Charlie.

Lenny. (Shaking her head.) Not anymore.

Meg. Why not?

Lenny. (Breaking down.) I told him we should never see each other again.

Meg. Well; if you told him, you can just untell him.

Lenny. Oh, no I couldn't. I'd feel like a fool.

Meg. Oh, that's not a good enough reason! All people in love feel like fools. Don't they, Babe?

Babe. Sure.

Meg. Look, why don't you give him a call right now? See how things stand?

Lenny. Oh, no! I'd be too scared—
MEG. But what harm could it possibly do? I mean, it's not gonna make things any worse than this never seeing him again, at all, forever.
LENNY. I suppose that's true—
MEG. Of course it is; so call him up! Take a chance, will you? Just take some sort of chance!
LENNY. You think I should?
MEG. Of course! You've got to try—you do! (Lenny looks over at Babe.)
BABE. You do, Lenny—I think you do.
LENNY. Really? Really, really?
MEG. Yes! Yes!
BABE. You should!
LENNY. All right. I will! I will!
MEG. Oh, good!
BABE. Good!
LENNY. I'll call him right now, while I've got my confidence up!
MEG. Have you got the number?
LENNY. Uh huh. But, ah, I think I wanna call him upstairs. It'll be more private.
MEG. Ah, good idea.
LENNY. I'm just gonna go on; and call him up; and see what happens—(She has started up the stairs.) Wish me good luck!
MEG. Good luck!
BABE. Good luck, Lenny!
LENNY. Thanks. (Lenny gets almost out of sight, when the phone begins to ring. She stops, Meg picks up the phone.)
MEG. Hello? (Then in a whisper.) Oh, thank you very much... Yes, I will. 'Bye, 'bye.
LENNY. Who was it?
MEG. Wrong number. They wanted Weed's Body Shop.
LENNY. Oh. Well, I'll be right back down in a minute. (Lenny exits.)
MEG. (After a moment, whispering to Babe.) That was the bakery; Lenny's cake is ready!

BABE. (Who has become increasingly depressed.) Oh.
MEG. I think I'll sneak on down to the corner and pick it up.
(She starts to leave.)
BABE. Meg—
MEG. What?
BABE. Nothing.
MEG. You okay? (Babe shakes her head.) What is it?
BABE. It's just—
MEG. What? (Babe gets up and goes to her suitcase. She opens it and removes the envelope containing the photographs.)
BABE. Here. Take a look.
LENNY. (Taking the envelope.) What is it?
BABE. It's some evidence Zackery's collected against me. Looks like my goose is cooked. (Meg opens the envelope and looks at the photographs.)
MEG. My God, it's—it's you and... is that Willie Jay?
BABE. Yeah.
MEG. Well, he certainly has grown. You were right about that.
My, oh, my.
BABE. Please don't tell Lenny. She'd hate me.
MEG. I won't. I won't tell Lenny. (Putting the pictures back into the envelope.) What are you gonna do?
BABE. What can I do? (There is a knock on the door. Babe grabs the envelope and hides it.)
MEG. Who is it?
BARNETTE'S VOICE. It's Barnette Lloyd.
MEG. Oh. Come on in, Barnette. (Barnette enters. His eyes are ablaze with excitement.)
BARNETTE. (As he paces around the room.) Well; good morning! (Shaking Meg's hand.) Good morning, Miss Magrath. (Touching Babe on the shoulder.) Becky. (Moving away.) What I meant to say is... how are you doing this morning?
MEG. Ah—fine. Fine.
BARNETTE. Good. Good. I—I just had time to drop by for a minute.
MEG. Oh.
BARNETTE. So, ah, how's your Granddad doing?
MEG. Well, not very, ah—ah, he's in this coma. (*She breaks up laughing.*)
BARNETTE. I see—I see. (*To Babe.*) Actually, the primary reason I came by was to pick up that—envelope. I left it here last night in all the confusion. (*Pause.*) You, ah, still do have it? (*Babe hands him the envelope.*) Yes. (*Taking the envelope.*) That's the one. I'm sure it'll be much better off in my office safe. (*He puts the envelope into his coat pocket.*)
MEG. I'm sure it will.
BARNETTE. Beg your pardon?
BABE. It's all right. I showed her the pictures.
BARNETTE. Ah; I see.
MEG. So what's going to happen now, Barnette? What are those pictures gonna mean?
BARNETTE. (*After pacing a moment.*) Hmm. May I speak frankly and openly?
BABE.Uh huh.
MEG. Please do—
BARNETTE. Well, I tell you now, at first glance, I admit those pictures had me considerably perturbed and upset. Perturbed to the point that I spent most of last night going over certain suspect papers and reports that had fallen into my hands—rather recklessly.
BABE. What papers do you mean?
BARNETTE. Papers that pending word from three varied and unbiased experts, could prove graft, fraud, forgery, as well as a history of unethical behavior.
MEG. You mean about Zackery?
BARNETTE. Exactly. You see, I now intend to make this matter just as sticky and gritty for one Z. Botrell as it is for us. Why, with the amount of scandal I'll dig up, Botrell will be forced to settle this affair on our own terms!
MEG. Oh, Babe! Did you hear that?!
BABE. Yes! Oh, yes! So you've won it! You've won your lifelong vendetta!
BARNETTE. Well... well, now of course it's problematic in that, well, in that we won't be able to expose him openly in the courts. That was the original game plan.
BABE. But why not? Why?
BARNETTE. Well, it's only that if, well, if a jury were to—to get, say, a glance at these, ah, photographs, well... well possibly...
BABE. We could be sunk.
BARNETTE. In a sense. But! On the other hand, if a newspaper were to get a hold of our little item, Mr. Zackery Botrell could find himself boiling in some awfully hot water. So what I'm looking for very simply, is—a deal.
BABE. A deal?
MEG. Thank you, Barnette. It's a sunny day, Babe. (*Realizing she is in the way.*) Ooh, where's that broken shoe? (*She grabs her boots and runs upstairs.*)
BABE. So, you're having to give up your vendetta?
BARNETTE. Well, in a way. For the time. It, ah, seems to me you shouldn't always let your life be ruled by such things as, ah, personal vendettas. (*Looking at Babe with meaning.*) Other things can be imporant.
BABE. I don't know, I don't exactly know. How 'bout Willie Jay? Will he be all right?
BARNETTE. Yes, it's all been taken care of. He'll be leaving incognito on the midnight bus—heading north.
BABE. North.
BARNETTE. I'm sorry, it seemed the only... way. (*Barnette moves to her—She moves away.*)
BABE. Look, you'd better be getting on back to your work.
BARNETTE. (*Awkwardly.*) Right—cause I—I've got those important calls out. (*Full of hope for her.*) They'll be pouring in directly. (*He starts to leave, then says to her with love.*) We'll talk.
MEG. (*Reappearing in her boots.*) Oh, Barnette—
BARNETTE. Yes?
MEG. Could you give me a ride just down to the corner? I need to stop at Helen's Bakery.
BARNETTE. Be glad to.
MEG. Thanks. Listen, Babe, I'll be right back with the cake. We're gonna have the best celebration! Now, ah, if Lenny asks where I've gone, just say I'm... just say, I've gone out back to, ah, pick up some paw paws! Okay?

BABE. Okay.

MEG. Fine; I'll be back in a bit. Goodbye.

BABE. Bye.

BARNETTE. Goodbye, Becky.

BABE. Goodbye, Barnette. Take care. *(Meg and Barnette exit. Babe sits staring ahead, in a state of deep despair.)* Goodbye, Becky. Goodbye, Barnette. Goodbye, Becky. *(She stops when Lenny comes down the stairs in a fluster.)*

LENNY. Oh! Oh! Oh! I'm so ashamed! I'm such a coward! I'm such a yellow-bellied chicken! I'm so ashamed! Where's Meg?

BABE. *(Suddenly bright.)* She's, ah—gone out back—to pick up some paw paws.

LENNY. Oh. Well, at least I don't have to face her! I just couldn't do it! I couldn't make the call! My heart was pounding like a hammer. Pound! Pound! Pound! Why, I looked down and I could actually see my blouse moving back and forth! Oh, Babe, you look so disappointed. Are you?

BABE. *(Despondently.)* Uh huh.

LENNY. Oh, no! I've disappointed Babe! I can't stand it! I've gone and disappointed my little sister, Babe! Oh, no! I feel like howling like a dog!

CHICK'S VOICE. Oooh, Lenny! *(Chick enters dramatically; dripping with sympathy.)* Well, I just don't know what to say! I'm so sorry! I am so sorry for you! And for Little Babe, here, too. I mean to have such a sister as that!

LENNY. What do you mean?

CHICK. Oh, you don't need to pretend with me. I saw it all from over there in my own backyard; I saw Meg stumbling out of Doc Porter's pickup truck, not 15 minutes ago. And her looking such a disgusting mess. You must be so ashamed! You must just want to die! Why, I always said that girl was nothing but cheap Christmas trash!

LENNY. Don't talk that way about Meg.

CHICK. Oh, come on now. Lenny, honey, I know exactly how you feel about Meg. Why, Meg's a low-class tramp and you need not have one more blessed thing to do with her and her disgusting behavior.

LENNY. I said don't you ever talk that way about my sister Meg again.

CHICK. Well, my goodness gracious, Lenora, don't be such a noodle—it's the truth!

LENNY. I don't care if it's the Ten Commandments. I don't want to hear it in my home. Not ever again.

CHICK. In your home?? Why, I never in all my life—This is my Grandfather's home! And you're just living here on his charity; so don't you get high-falutin' with me, Miss Lenora Josephine Magrath!

LENNY. Get out of here—

CHICK. Don't you tell me to get out! What makes you think you can order me around? Why, I've had just about my fill of you trashy Magraths and your trashy ways; hanging your selves in cellars; carrying on with married men; shooting your own husbands!

LENNY. Get out!

CHICK. *(To Babe.)* And don't think she's not gonna end up at the state prison farm or in some—mental institution. Why it's a clear-cut case of manslaughter with intent to kill!

LENNY. Out! Get out!

CHICK. *(Running on.)* That's what everyone's saying, deliberate intent to kill! And you'll pay for that! Do you hear me? You'll pay!

LENNY. *(She picks up a broom and threatens Chick with it.)* And I'm telling you to get out!

CHICK. You—you put that down this minute—are you a raving lunatic?

LENNY. *(Beating Chick with the broom.* I said for you to get out! That means out! And never, never, never come back!

CHICK. *(Overlapping, as she runs around the room.)* Oh! Oh!
Oh! You're crazy! You're crazy!
LENNY. (Chasing Chick out the door.) Do you hear me, Chick the Stick! This is my home! This is my house! Get out! Out!
CHICK. (Overlapping.) Oh! Oh! Police! Police! You're crazy! Help! Help! (Lenny chases Chick out of the house. They are both screaming. The phone rings. Babe goes and picks it up.)
BABE. Hello! ... Oh, hello, Zackery! ... Yes, he showed them to me! ... You're what! ... What do you mean? ... What! ... You can't put me out to Whitfield ... 'Cause I'm not crazy ... I'm not! I'm not! ... She wasn't crazy either ... Don't you call my mother crazy! ... No, you're not! You're not gonna. You're not! (She slams the phone down and stabs wildly ahead.) He's not. He's not. (As she walks over to the ribbon drawer.) I'll do it. I will. And he won't ... (She opens the drawer; pulls out the rope; becomes terrified; throws the rope back in the drawer and slams it shut. Lenny enters from the back door swinging the broom and laughing.)
LENNY. Oh, my! Oh, my! You should have seen us! Why, I chased Chick the Stick right up the mimosa tree. I did! I left her right up there screaming in the tree!
BABE. (Laughing; she is insanely delighted.) Oh, you did!
LENNY. Yes, I did! And I feel so good! I do! I feel good! I feel good!
BABE. (Overlapping.) Good! Good, Lenny! Good for you! (They dance around the kitchen.)
LENNY. (Stopping.) You know what—
BABE. What?
LENNY. I'm gonna call Charlie!!! I'm gonna call him right now!
BABE. You are?
LENNY. Yeah, I feel like I can really do it!
BABE. You do?
LENNY. My courage is up; my heart's in it; the time is right! No more beating around the bush! Let's strike while the iron is hot!
BABE. Right! Right! No more beating around the bush! Strike while the iron is hot! (Lenny goes to the phone. Babe rushes over to the ribbon drawer. She begins tearing through it.)
LENNY. (With the receiver in her hand.) I'm calling him up, Babe—I'm really gonna do it!
BABE. (Still tearing through the drawer.) Good! Do it! Good! Lenny. (As she dials.) Look. My hands aren't even shaking.
BABE. (Pulling out a red cord of rope.) Don't we have any stronger rope than this?
LENNY. I guess not. All the rope we've got's in that drawer. (About her hands.) Now they're shaking a little. (Babe takes the rope and goes up the stairs. Lenny finishes dialing the number. She waits for an answer.) Hello? ... Hello, Charlie. This is Len- ny Magrath ... Well, I'm fine. I'm just fine. (An awkward pause.) I was, ah, just calling to see—I'm just getting out ... Well, good. Good ... Yes, I know I said that. Now I wish I didn't say it ... Well, the reason I said that before, about not seeing each other again, was 'cause of me, not you ... Well, it's just I—can't have any children. I—have this ovary problem ... Why, Charlie, what a thing to say! ... Well, they're not all little snor- ned pigs! ... You think they are! ... Oh, Charlie, stop, stop! You're making me laugh ... Yes, I guess I was. I can see now that I was ... You are? ... Well, I'm dying to see you, too ... Well, I don't know when, Charlie ... soon. How about, well, how about tonight? ... You will? ... Oh, you will! ... All right, I'll be here. I'll be right here ... Goodbye, then, Charlie. Goodbye for now. (She hangs up the phone in a daze.) Babe. Oh, Babe! He's coming. He's coming! Babes! Oh, Babe, where are you? Meg! Oh ... out back—picking up paw paws. (As she exits through the back door.) And those paw paws are just ripe for picking up! (There is a moment of silence, then a loud, horrible thud is heard coming from upstairs. The telephone begins ringing immediately. It rings five times before Babe comes barrying down the stairs with a broken piece of rope hanging around her neck. The phone continues to ring.)
BABE. (To the phone.) Will you shut up! (She is jerking the rope from around her neck. She grabs a knife to cut it off.) Cheap! Miserable! I hate you! I hate you! (She throws the rope violently around the room. The phone stops ringing.) Thank God. (She looks at the stove, goes over to it, and turns the gas on. The sound of gas escaping is heard. Babe sniffs at it.) Come
on. Come on... Hurry up... I beg of you—hurry up! (Finally, Babe feels the oven is ready; she takes a deep breath and opens the oven door to stick her head into it. She spots the rack and furiously jerks it out. Taking another breath, she sticks her head into the oven. She stands for several moments tapping her fingers furiously on top of the stove. She speaks from inside the oven...) Oh, please. Please. (After a few moments, she reaches for the box of matches with her head still in the oven. She tries to strike a match. It doesn't catch.) Oh, Mama, please! (She throws the match away and is getting a second one.) Mama... Mama... So that's why you done it! (In her excitement she starts to get up, bangs her head and falls back in the stove. Meg enters from the back door, carrying a birthday cake in a pink box.)

MEG. Babe! (Meg throws the box down and runs to pull Babe's head out of the oven.) Oh, my God! What are you doing? What the hell are you doing?

BABE. (Dizzily.) Nothing. I don't know. Nothing. (Meg turns off the gas and moves Babe to a chair near the open door.)

MEG. Sit down. Sit down! Will you sit down!

BABE. I'm okay. I'm okay.

MEG. Put your head between your knees and breathe deep!

BABE. Meg—

MEG. Just do it! I'll get you some water. (Meg gets some water for Babe.) Here.

BABE. Thanks.

MEG. Are you okay?

BABE. Uh-huh.

MEG. Are you sure?

BABE. Yeah, I'm sure. I'm okay.

MEG. (Getting a damp rag and putting it over her own face.) Well good. That's good.

BABE. Meg—

MEG. Yes?

BABE. I know why she did it.

MEG. What? Why did she do it?

BABE. (With joy.) Mama. I know why she hung that cat along with her.

MEG. You do?

BABE. (With enlightenment.) It's 'cause she was afraid of dying all alone.

MEG. Was she?

BABE. She felt so unsure, you know, as to what was coming. It seems the best thing coming up would be a lot of angels and all of them singing. But I imagine they have high, scary voices and little gold pointed fingers that are as sharp as blades and you don't want to meet 'em all alone. You'd be afraid to meet 'em all alone. So it wasn't like what people were saying about her hating that cat. Fact is, she loved that cat. She needed him with her 'cause she felt so all alone.

MEG. Oh, Babe... Babe. Why, Babe? Why?

BABE. Why what?

MEG. Why did you stick your head into the oven?!

BABE. I don't know, Meg. I'm having a bad day. It's been a real bad day; those pictures; and Barnette giving up his vendetta; then Willie Jay, heading north; and—Zackery called me up. (Trembling with terror) He says he's gonna have me classified insane and send me on out to the Whitfield asylum.

MEG. What! Why, he could never do that!

BABE. Why not?

MEG. 'Cause you're not insane.

BABE. I'm not?

MEG. No! He's trying to bluff you. Don't you see it? Barnette's got him running scared.

BABE. Really?

MEG. Sure. He's scared to death—calling you insane. Ha! Why, you're just as perfectly sane as anyone walking the streets of Hazlehurst, Mississippi.

BABE. I am?

MEG. More so! A lot more so!

BABE. Good!

MEG. But, Babe, we've just got to learn how to get through these real bad days here. I mean, it's getting to be a thing in our family. (Slight pause as she looks at Babe.) Come on now. Look, we've got Lenny's cake right here. I mean don't
you wanna be around to give her her cake; watch her blow out the candles?

BABE. (Realizing how much she wants to be here.) Yeah, I do, I do. Cause she always loves to make her birthday wishes on those candles.

MEG. Well, then we’ll give her her cake and maybe you won’t be so miserable.

BABE. Okay.

MEG. Good. Go on and take it out of the box.

BABE. Okay. (She takes the cake out of the box. It is a magical moment.) Gosh, it’s a pretty cake.

MEG. (Handing her some matches.) Here now. You can go on and light up the candles.

BABE. All right. (She starts to light the candles.) I love to light up candles. And there are so many here. Thirty pink ones in all plus one green one to grow on.

MEG. (Watching her light the candles.) They’re pretty.

BABE. They are. (She stops lighting the candles.) And I’m not like Mama. I’m not so all alone.

MEG. You’re not.

BABE. (As she goes back to lighting candles.) Well, you’d better keep an eye out for Lenny. She’s supposed to be surprised.

MEG. All right. Do you know where she’s gone?

BABE. Well, she’s not here inside—so she must have gone on outside.

MEG. Oh, well, then I’d better run and find her.

BABE. Okay ‘cause these candles are gonna melt down. (Meg starts out the door.)

MEG. Wait—there she is coming. Lenny! Oh, Lenny! Come on! Hurry up!

BABE. (Overlapping and improvising as she finishes lighting candles,) Oh, no! No! Well, yes—yes! No, wait! Wait! Okay! (Lenny enters. Meg covers Lenny’s eyes with her hands.)

LENNY. (Terrified.) What?! What is it?! What?!!

MEG & BABE. Surprise! Happy Birthday! Happy Birthday to Lenny!!

LENNY. Oh, no! Oh me!!! What a surprise! I could just cry!

Oh, look, “Happy Birthday to Lenny—A Day Late!” How cute! My! Will you look at all those candles—it’s absolutely frightening.

BABE. (Spontaneous thought.) Oh, no, Lenny, it’s good! ‘Cause—cause the more candles you have on your cake, the stronger your wish is.

LENNY. Really?

BABE. Sure!

LENNY. Mercy. (They start the song. Lenny, interrupting the song.) Oh, but wait! I—I can’t think of my wish! My body’s gone all nervous inside.

MEG. For God’s sake, Lenny—come on!

BABE. The wax is all melting!

LENNY. My mind is just a blank, a total blank!

MEG. Will you please just—

BABE. (Overlapping.) Lenny, hurry! Come on!

LENNY. Okay! Okay! Just go!! (Meg and Babe burst into the “Happy Birthday Song.” As it ends Lenny blow out all of the candles on the cake. Meg and Babe applaud loudly.)

MEG. Oh, you made it!

BABE. Hurray!

LENNY. Oh, me! Oh, me! I hope that wish comes true! I hope it does!

BABE. Why? What did you wish for?

LENNY. (As she removes the candles from the cake.) Why, I can’t tell you that.

BABE. Oh, sure you can—

LENNY. Oh, no! Then it won’t come true.

BABE. Why, that’s just superstition! Of course it will, if you made it deep enough.

MEG. Really? I didn’t know that.

LENNY. Well, Babe’s the regular expert on birthday wishes.

BABE. It’s just I get these feelings. Now come on and tell us. What was it you wished for?

MEG. Yes, tell us. What was it?

LENNY. Well, I guess, it wasn’t really a specific wish. This—this vision just sort of came into my mind.

BABE. A vision? What was it of?
LENNY. I don't know exactly. It was something about the three of us smiling and laughing together.

BABE. Well, when was it? Was it far away or near?

LENNY. I'm not sure, but it wasn't forever; it wasn't for every minute. Just this one moment and we were all laughing.

BABE. What were we laughing about?

LENNY. I don't know. Just nothing, I guess.

MEG. Well, that's a nice wish to make. (Lenny and Meg look at each other a moment.) Here, now, I'll get a knife so we can go ahead and cut the cake in celebration of Lenny being born!

BABE. Oh, yes! And give each one of us a rose. A whole rose apiece!

LENNY. (Cutting the cake nervously.) Well, I'll try—I'll try!

MEG. (Licking the icing off a candle.) Mmmm—this icing is delicious! Here, try some!

BABE. Mmmm! It's wonderful! Here, Lenny!

LENNY. (Laughing joyously as she licks icing from her fingers and cuts huge pieces of cake that her sisters bite into ravenously.) Oh, how I do love having birthday cake for breakfast! How I do! (The sisters freeze for a moment laughing and catching cake; the lights change and frame them in a magical, golden, sparkling glimmer; saxophone music is heard. The lights dim to blackout, and the saxophone continues to play.)

END OF PLAY