

CORIE. Good . . . Hey, let's open my presents and see what I've got. And you try to act surprised. (*Gets presents and brings them down to paint can.*)

MOTHER. You won't let me buy you anything . . . Oh, they're just a few little things.

CORIE. (*Sitting down and shaking smallest box vigorously.*) What's in here. It sounds expensive.

MOTHER. Well, *now* I think it's a broken clock.

CORIE. (*Opens box, throwing wrappings and tissue paper on floor.*) I'll bet you cleaned out Saks' Gift Department. I think I'm a regular stop on the delivery route now. (*Looks at clock, puts it back in box and puts it aside and begins to open largest box.*)

MOTHER. Aunt Harriet was with me when I picked it out. (*Laughs.*) She thinks I'm over here every day now.

CORIE. You know you're welcome, Mother.

MOTHER. I said, "Why, Harriet? Just because I'm alone now," I said. "I'm not afraid to live alone. In some ways it's better to live alone," I said.

(CORIE examines the blanket she finds in package, closes box, puts it aside and begins to open final package.)

MOTHER picks up piece of tissue paper and smooths it out on her lap.)

MOTHER. But you can't tell her that. She thinks a woman living alone, way out in New Jersey is the worst thing in the world . . . "It's not," I told her. "It's not the worst thing . . ."

CORIE. (*Has package open and takes out the dismantled parts of a coffee pot.*) Hey, does this come with directions?

MOTHER. If I knew about this kitchen, it would have come with hot coffee. (*Laughs.*)

CORIE. (*Picks up box with clock and takes it with parts of coffee pot up into kitchen.*) Mother, you're an absolute angel. But you've got to stop buying things for me. It's getting embarrassing. (*Puts clock on refrigerator and coffee pot on sink.*) If you keep it up I'm going to open

a discount house . . . (*Takes blanket and places it with suitcase near windows.*)

MOTHER. It's my pleasure, Corie. (*Begins to gather up wrappings and tissue paper and place them in box from coffee pot.*) It's a mother's greatest joy to be able to buy gifts for her daughter when she gets married. You'll see some day. I just hope your child doesn't deprive *you* of that pleasure.

CORIE. I'm not depriving you, Mother.

MOTHER. I didn't say you were.

CORIE. (*Moves down to MOTHER.*) Yes, you did.

MOTHER. Then why are you?

CORIE. Because I think you should spend the money on yourself, that's why.

MOTHER. Myself? What does a woman like me need? Living all alone . . . Way out in New Jersey. (*Picks up box with wrappings and places it outside front door.*)

CORIE. (*Follows MOTHER.*) It's only been six days. And you're five minutes from the city.

MOTHER. Who can get through that traffic in five minutes?

CORIE. Then why don't you move into New York?

MOTHER. Where . . . ? Where would I live?

CORIE. Mother, I don't care where you live. The point is, you've got to start living for yourself now . . . (*MOTHER moves back into room.*) Mother, the whole world has just opened up to you. Why don't you travel? You've got the time, the luggage. All you need are the shots.

MOTHER. (*Sits on suitcase.*) Travel! . . . You think it's so easy for a woman of my age to travel alone?

CORIE. You'll meet people.

MOTHER. I read a story in the Times. A middle-aged woman travelling alone fell off the deck of a ship. They never discovered it until they got to France.

CORIE. (*Moves L. and turns back to MOTHER.*) I promise you, Mother, if *you* fell off a ship, *someone* would know about it.

MOTHER. I thought I might get myself a job.

CORIE. (*Straws in the wind.*) Hey, that's a great idea. (*Sits on paint can.*)

MOTHER. (*Shrugs, defeated.*) What would I do?

CORIE. I don't know what you would do. What would you *like* to do?

MOTHER. (*Considers.*) I'd like to be a grandmother. I think that would be nice.

CORIE. A grandmother?? . . . What's your rush? You know, underneath that Army uniform, you're still a young, vital woman . . . Do you know what I think you *really* need?

MOTHER. Yes, and I don't want to hear it. (*Gets up and moves away.*)

CORIE. (*Goes to her.*) Because you're afraid to hear the truth.

MOTHER. It's not the truth I'm afraid to hear. It's the *word* you're going to use.

CORIE. You're darn right I'm going to use that word . . . It's love!

MOTHER. Oh . . . Thank you.

CORIE. A week ago I didn't know what it meant. And then I checked into the Plaza Hotel. For six wonderful days . . . And do you know what happened to me there?

MOTHER. I promised myself I wouldn't ask.

CORIE. I found *love* . . . spiritual, emotional and physical love. And I don't think anyone on earth should be without it.

MOTHER. I'm not. I have you.

CORIE. I don't mean *that* kind of love. (*Moves to ladder and leans against it.*) I'm talking about late at night in . . .

MOTHER. (*Quickly.*) I *know* what you're talking about.

CORIE. Don't you even want to discuss it?

MOTHER. Not with *you* in the room.

CORIE. Well, what are you going to do about it?

MOTHER. I'm going back to New Jersey and give myself a Toni Home Permanent. Corie, sweetheart, I appreciate your concern, but I'm very happy the way I am.

CORIE. I'll be the judge of who's happy. (*They embrace.*)

(*The door flies open and PAUL staggers in with the bottle of scotch. He closes the door behind him and wearily leans his head against it, utterly exhausted.*)

MOTHER. Oh, Paul, you shouldn't have run . . . Just for me. (*The DOORBELL buzzes, AUNT HARRIET'S special buzz.*) Ooh, and there's Harriet. I've got to go. (*Picks up purse from L. of suitcase.*)

CORIE. Some visit.

MOTHER. Just a sneak preview. I'll see you on Friday for the World Premiere . . . (*To PAUL.*) Goodbye, Paul . . . I'm so sorry . . . (*To CORIE.*) Goodbye, love . . . I'll see you on Friday . . . (*PAUL opens the door for her.*) Thank you . . . (*Glances out at the stairs.*) *Ge-ronimo!* (*Exits.*)

(*PAUL shuts door and, breathing hard, puts bottle down at foot of the ladder. He moves L., turns, and glares at CORIE.*)

CORIE. What is it? . . . The stairs? (*PAUL shakes his head "no."*) The hole? (*PAUL shakes his head "no."*) The bathtub? (*PAUL shakes his head "no."*) Something new? (*PAUL nods his head "yes."*) Well, what . . . ?

PAUL. (*Leaning against U. L. wall.*) Guess!

CORIE. Paul, I can't guess. Tell me.

PAUL. Oh, come on, Corie. Take a wild stab at it. Try something like, "All the neighbors are crazy."

CORIE. *Are* all the neighbors crazy?

PAUL. (*A pitchman's revelation.*) I just had an interesting talk with the man down in the liquor store . . . Do you know we have some of the greatest weirdos in the country right here, in this house?

CORIE. Really? Like who? (*Puts bottle on kitchen platform.*)

PAUL. (*Gathering his strength, paces R.*) Well, like to