

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?

looking for hints on the his feelings? Cause for his or winds...

LENNY. It's Meg! I could just wring her neck! I could just wring it!

BABE. Why? Wha'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 coffeepot 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 apiece? 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 Porter.

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 very 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-*