

COURT DANCING

Three One Act Plays

POLKA · WALTZ · TANGO

By

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SYNOPSIS

COURT DANCING is three related one-act plays that deal with the German experience in the United States between and after the World Wars. All three plays are set in the Palm Court of a New York City hotel.

The first play, "Polka" is set in 1925. Juliana, a girl in her twenties, is there to meet an old family friend, August, a man in his sixties. She's fresh off the boat from Germany, thinking she's in New York on a vacation provided by August. August, however, has entered into an arrangement with Juliana's mother in which Juliana has become, essentially, his mail-order bride. Juliana has no intention of taking part in something in which she has no bargaining power.

The second, "Waltz" takes place just after V-E day in 1945. Winnie (the niece of Juliana) has come to New York from St. Louis to meet her husband's ship. Carl, her husband, has just been discharged as a private in the army. As she paints a picture of how their life in St. Louis will resume, Carl (who has seen the world and his own mortality) has no intention of following Winnie's prescription for life.

The last play, "Tango" is set in 1965. Tamara, a high-powered literary agent in her sixties and a Holocaust survivor, is meeting her protégé, James (in his twenties), following her husband's funeral. Thrilled that they can now carry on their affair out in the open, the Palm Court is merely a stopping point on the way to an upstairs suite. James (the son of Winnie and Carl), however, has been sitting on a number of secrets that threaten to end their relationship irrevocably.

Together, the three plays offer a view of how it feels to be considered the "other", particularly in times of war when fear and prejudice often run unchecked. It also offers a look at three relationships that, while far from ideal, show how two people can be bound together in a dance of mutual interdependence.

PRODUCTION NOTES

There is no curtain. The set is the Palm Court of a large hotel in New York City. Onstage are three tables; down-right, up-center and down-left. There are potted palms, leaded glass, stained glass, mirrored glass, carved wood. Three major chandeliers.

Up-center is the entrance to the room, indicated by a green velvet rope. Next to the entrance is a podium for the HEADWAITER, with a book for reservations. Up-left is a platform for the MUSICIANS. The down-center area of the stage is uncarpeted and reserved for dancing.

The MUSICIANS should be onstage and playing as the audience enters the theatre.

As the audience enters, the HEADWAITER and WAITER are onstage, setting up the three tables for two persons each. THEY rush about, arranging things, lighting candles, dimming lights, polishing mirrors, picking lint off the carpet.

SET/COSTUMES: Between acts, the tables are not re-set; they remain as they are until the end of the play. Please also note that although WALTZ occurs twenty years after POLKA and TANGO twenty years after WALTZ, the HEADWAITER, WAITER and MUSICIANS should remain exactly the same throughout the evening; no attempt should be made to age them.

MUSICIANS: If live musicians are not possible, convincing pre-recorded selections can be used with the musicians and audio source suggested off-stage, perhaps allowing the music to bloom out into the house at end of play.

LANGUAGE: In POLKA, the proper name AUGUST should use the German pronunciation: ow-goost. The name JULIANA should be pronounced with a soft 'a' sound: joo-lee-ah-nah. The gibberish is simply short bits of actual English with syllables randomly juggled or skewed to create nonsense, leaving a language-common noun inserted on occasion to provide some focus.

POLKA

CAST OF CHARACTERS

AUGUST, 60 years old

JULIANA, 20 years old

A HEADWAITER

A WAITER

FIVE MUSICIANS - Piano, Accordion, Violin, Viola, Cello

TIME

October 12, 1925. After breakfast.

PLACE

The Palm Court of a large hotel in New York City

(JULIANA enters the Palm Court. SHE stands at the entrance to the room, looking around, darting her head like a bird. The HEADWAITER approaches)

JULIANA

I'm looking... I don't see him. Could you help me?
(The HEADWAITER speaks. His sentences are in complete gibberish. JULIANA stares at him for a moment, then speaks)
You see, I'm meeting someone here, but I guess he's not...
Could you check your book?
(The HEADWAITER speaks, again in gibberish. A question)
Do you speak German?
(A pause. The HEADWAITER shrugs, starts to move away)
Wait! Please. Could I have a table? I know this is the place. I had directions. I know this much, at least.
(The HEADWAITER speaks gibberish. Seems annoyed. Demands something of her. A pause. HE demands again)
I'm sorry, I don't... I don't understand. What do you want of me?
(The HEADWAITER demands again)
What are you saying? I don't understand you, you idiot. I told you... Oh, God...
(SHE laughs. The HEADWAITER mutters, shakes his head and moves away. HE talks to another WAITER, points to JULIANA, exits. The WAITER approaches her, asks her a question in gibberish)
Do you speak the language?
(The WAITER shrugs)
Oh, God. Look. I just want to wait here. Sit down, you know, sit?
(SHE mimes sitting, points to a table. The WAITER looks her over, moves away)
Wait! I'm meeting a gentleman.
(SHE rummages through her purse, takes out a photo)
This man.
(SHE shows it to the WAITER, who recognizes the photo. The WAITER calls the HEADWAITER over, shows him the photo. The HEADWAITER recognizes him as well. Smiles. Looks at JULIANA)
At last! Do you know him? Yes, well, he's meeting me...
(SHE points to the photo, points to herself, points to a table. The HEADWAITER checks the reservation book, nods, goes to JULIANA. HE speaks to her in gibberish; very humble, very apologetic. Pulls the rope aside, allows her into the room)
Oh, I see, and now it's alright, is that it? Well, it's about time. You're a real jerk, do you know that?

(HE brings her to a table, as SHE takes off her coat and hat)

JULIANA (CONTINUED)

Which of you idiots will take my coat?

(The WAITER takes her coat)

Oh, this idiot. Thank you.

(SHE smiles. HE bows and exits. The HEADWAITER pulls out a chair for her.

SHE taps his shoulder lovingly)

My, what a gracious little oaf you are. You have the longest nose hairs I've ever seen, did you know that?

(SHE seats herself)

Thank you so much. I'll bet that's duck fat you use in your hair, isn't it? Isn't it?

(SHE smiles. HE bows, exits. SHE looks around the room, sighs. SHE takes off her gloves as the ORCHESTRA begins to play. SHE takes the menu off the table. Holds it side-ways, upside-down, gives up on it, puts it down. SHE looks around. The WAITER sees her, rushes over to her. Says something)

Oh, you. What now?

(HE hands her the menu)

No, no, get that away from me. I'd like some coffee, if you could trouble yourself to get that fat behind into the kitchen.

(A pause. HE stares at her)

You know.

(SHE mimes sipping from a cup and saucer. Oh, yes, the WAITER nods and exits. SHE puts her head in her hands)

I'm going home, it's as simple as that.

(After a moment, the WAITER re-enters, pushing a cart with a tea service. HE brings it to the table)

That looks suspiciously like tea, you little gorilla.

(HE pours)

It is. It's tea. I hate tea, but you don't care about that, do you? Do I look like a Chinaman to you? Yes, thank you, thank you, you runny-nosed clod. Now go away before I pour the pot down your shirt-front. Yes, that's right, show me your rotten yellow teeth. Very nice.

(The WAITER smiles, exits. SHE looks into the teacup. Lifts it to her lips, sips as if it's poisoned. SHE shakes her head, puts the cup down)

I can't. I can't drink that.

(AUGUST enters. SHE looks around, sees him. Her impulse is to run to him, but SHE stops herself. Instead, SHE looks in the opposite direction. HE sees her, as the HEADWAITER pulls aside the rope, HE runs to her)

AUGUST

You're here! You're here already. Ooooooh, look at you, look, look!

(HE kisses both her cheeks)

JULIANA

Please!

AUGUST

Just as I remember you. Only so... you're so much... your hair... and your... well, you're a woman! Look!

JULIANA

Uncle August, please. This is embarrassing. Sit down.

AUGUST

Have I kept you waiting? Have you got something? Oh, tea. Good. Yes, I'll sit now.

(HE does)

Give me your hands.

(HE takes them)

JULIANA

What do you want my hands for?

AUGUST

Just to... Look! You've got your mother's beauty mark. I never noticed before. But then, you were Little Juliana, I didn't bother with you then. It's different now, isn't it?

JULIANA

Uncle August, I won't ask you again.

AUGUST

What? What is it? There's no one here... no one to see me make an old fool of myself.

JULIANA

The waiters. I feel them on my back.

AUGUST

Nonsense.

JULIANA

They are. I don't like this.

(A pause. AUGUST releases her hands)

AUGUST

Very well. It can't be too good for me, anyway; to get so excited. I just... Well, I never imagined... Ooooooh, look at you!

(SHE giggles)

JULIANA

You must stop. It's enough.

AUGUST

I can't get over it. I imagined pigtails, you know. Chocolate stains down your front...

JULIANA

Well, that was...

AUGUST
A figure like a dumpling. Or worse, a matchstick. But
look...

JULIANA
Well, when was the last time you saw me?

AUGUST
Oh, I don't know...

JULIANA
When I was fourteen?

AUGUST
Could it be?

JULIANA
Well, that was six years ago.

AUGUST
I guess it must be.

JULIANA
Well, then.

(A long pause)

AUGUST
You're finally here.

JULIANA
Ummmm-hmmmm...

(The WAITER comes to the table. HE
speaks gibberish to AUGUST, who responds
in kind. THEY share a joke. JULIANA
glares at the two of them)

AUGUST
Have you eaten?

JULIANA
What?

AUGUST
Would you like something to eat?

JULIANA
I don't think they'd have anything I like.

AUGUST
Have a sandwich.
(HE speaks to the WAITER. The WAITER
nods, refills JULIANA's teacup, exits.
A long pause)
Is there something wrong?

JULIANA
No.

AUGUST

Of course there is, I can tell. You must tell me.

JULIANA

No, never mind, it's nothing. It doesn't matter anymore.

AUGUST

Because I kept you waiting? I thought I was on time. I think it was you: I think you were maybe early.

JULIANA

You said eleven. The clock right outside the door said eleven when I walked in.

AUGUST

It doesn't matter. I'm sorry, in any case.

JULIANA

Oh, that's not it.

AUGUST

Well, I can't do anything about it until you tell me what's wrong.

JULIANA

It's nothing. I've forgotten now what it was. It's just that I wanted coffee and that idiot brought me tea.

(AUGUST gestures for the WAITER)

No, no, don't bring him over here, please, I don't want to see him, it doesn't matter. Tea is fine. No, really, tell him it's fine.

(AUGUST speaks to the WAITER, points to the teacup. The WAITER is apologetic, takes away the tea service)

AUGUST

There, now. That wasn't so difficult.

JULIANA

Thank you, Uncle August. I'm sorry.

AUGUST

You have nothing to apologize for. Except calling me Uncle August. That's a no-no.

JULIANA

That's what I've always called you.

AUGUST

Yes, in Lippstadt, that's what you called me. But we're in my place now, and I ask you to call me something else.

JULIANA

Why shouldn't I call you Uncle August?

AUGUST

Because I'm not your uncle.

JULIANA

Well, Mamma seemed to have a lot of brothers. What would you have me call you, then?

AUGUST

Just August. That's good enough.

JULIANA

I don't think I can get used to that.

AUGUST

Try.

(JULIANA shrugs)

When you were a little girl, you called me that as a sign of respect. That was fine. But you're a big girl. You don't have to respect me anymore. How was your trip?

JULIANA

Okay.

AUGUST

Did you see Liberty when you came into the harbor?

JULIANA

Yes.

AUGUST

Wasn't that something?

(JULIANA shrugs)

JULIANA

It was a statue.

(A pause)

AUGUST

And your hotel room? Is it all right?

JULIANA

It's satisfactory. My room doesn't get very much light, but enough to see by, so I won't complain. I caught one of the maids smoking a cigarette in my room, but the sheets are clean and changed daily, so that's something. The bed is lumpy.

AUGUST

Well, you won't be there long. Just until other arrangements can be made.

JULIANA

I see.

(A pause)

Where is my coffee?

AUGUST

It will come.

JULIANA

You asked for it a long time ago.

AUGUST

The waiter must be busy.

JULIANA

But we're the only ones here! You'd think he'd sit at the table with us.

AUGUST

The waiting is all a part of it here. If you don't have to wait for something, you don't enjoy what you get when you get it.

JULIANA

Excuse me, but I don't understand that at all.

AUGUST

You'll learn.

JULIANA

Yes, I'm sure. I'm just not sure that I care to, is all.

AUGUST

What's wrong? You've been behaving badly since I got here. Don't you like it here? Should we go somewhere else?

JULIANA

Excuse me! I didn't mean to offend you, Uncle August.

AUGUST

You're not offending me, child.

JULIANA

I'm not a child anymore.

AUGUST

Then don't call me Uncle August anymore. If you're unhappy, tell me, and we'll go. There are other restaurants. I just thought of this place because of the music.

JULIANA

Yes, the music is nice.

(A pause)

I don't like that waiter. He makes me feel stupid.

AUGUST

What did he do?

JULIANA

Nothing. Everyone here makes me feel stupid. They look at me like my dress is open with everything showing. The servants treat me like a servant. The others treat me like a moron.

AUGUST

Why don't you try acting as if they're the morons?

JULIANA

I have! They don't understand me. Oh, I don't mean to take this all out on you. It's just... oh, it's so good to hear German again, I can't tell you. I can't remember the last time I spoke, even. On the boat, sometime. It's such a good feeling to be able to be understood. I'm sorry you have to listen...

AUGUST

Look: here's coffee.

(The WAITER returns, serves them, exits)

You'll feel better after some food. It will cheer you up.

JULIANA

Doesn't anybody here speak the language? I don't understand it. Every family in Lippstadt has had somebody come here. Where did they all go? I've only met one, a Berliner, since I've been here, and I've been here a week. And him, when I spoke, he kept looking around embarrassed, like I was laughing in church.

AUGUST

They're here. You just have to know where to look. Plus, it's a big country. They're all over. Detroit. Milwaukee. I know a good German restaurant uptown. We'll go there for dinner tonight, if that'll make you feel better.

JULIANA

Oh, is that it? You call it a "German" restaurant over here? Not just a restaurant?

AUGUST

You must understand, Juliana, they're just like you. They get off the boat, they feel so alone, they go where their people are. They stay in groups: they live together, eat together. They work among people who make them feel like morons, as you put it. So, when their work is done, they like to be with people who understand them.

JULIANA

Yes, it's easy for you to be so high up, looking down. You speak the language.

AUGUST

I've been here a long time. You'll speak the language, too.

JULIANA

I don't know that I care to. It's an ugly language, from what I've heard. Sounds like Chinamen. I liked it in Lippstadt. I knew everyone, I knew where all the bathrooms were. I didn't have to ask anyone for anything.

AUGUST

What, are you saying now that you want to go back home?

JULIANA

Yes.

(A long pause)

What do the Americans look like?

AUGUST

What do you mean? You've seen them, haven't you? They look like us. No difference.

JULIANA

The real Americans?

AUGUST

Well, the real Americans are the Indians, I guess. They were here first.

JULIANA

They still have Indians here?

AUGUST

I guess they do. I've never seen one. I don't know where they keep them nowadays. But the regular Americans you pass on the street every day.

JULIANA

I don't know that I've seen one. The lady at the hotel is an Irishwoman, I think. We communicated by pointing to maps. She drew a four leaf clover and danced a jig. I pretended I was pouring a beer and drew a pretzel. That's what I'm sick of the most. Playing parlor games, clucking like a chicken when I want my breakfast. Mooing to get cream in my coffee. It's ridiculous. There's a man down the hall from me who I guess is an American. At least I think so because they don't look at him the same way they look at me. He calls me "Strudel" to get my attention. I don't like him at all.

(A pause)

There's a black man who works in the elevator. Is he an American?

AUGUST

Yes, they consider them Americans. They've been here a long time, anyway.

JULIANA

What about the waiter? Is he an American?

AUGUST

No, I think he's Italian.

JULIANA

Oh? Is this an Italian sandwich?

AUGUST

No, no. He just works here, he doesn't do the cooking. That's an American sandwich.

JULIANA

I see. The bread here is very dull. What is that?

AUGUST

That? I think it's mayonnaise. For the sandwich.

JULIANA

It's green.

AUGUST

Yes, they sometimes do that. They color it. With herbs. To make it look pretty.

JULIANA

You're joking.

(AUGUST shakes his head)

Well, that's the silliest thing I've ever heard. I think they made it look disgusting.

AUGUST

Yes, I agree. I don't understand it either.

JULIANA

You see? This is some crazy place you brought me to.

AUGUST

It's nice, though. It's nice here, isn't it?

JULIANA

Yes, nice if you have money. Not so nice if you work in a bakery in St. Louis like my Aunt Trudy.

AUGUST

What has your Aunt Trudy got to do with it? You don't have to work in a bakery in St. Louis.

JULIANA

Who says? What am I supposed to do?

AUGUST

Why are you being so naive this afternoon? Juliana?

(A pause)

JULIANA

Who, me?

AUGUST

Yes, you.

JULIANA

I just don't like the idea of ending up like Aunt Trudy.

AUGUST

You're only twenty little years old, what are you worrying for? Aunt Trudy's probably sixty-nine, gray-haired, fat: who wants her?

JULIANA

She is not. She's only three years older than Mamma, so there. She has gray hair, yes, but she colors it. And from the pictures I saw, she's the same size as Mamma. And that didn't seem to stop you, did it?

AUGUST

This is a public place...

JULIANA

You want me naive or don't you, make up your mind. She lives in an apartment in St. Louis and works in a bakery because her husband's a good-for-nothing. She married an Irishman, and they're even worse than the Italians, Mamma says. Italians, they only cheat on you. But the Irish drink and cheat. And beat up on you. So you see. And she has four daughters, different sizes, and what good will they do her when she's old, I ask you?

AUGUST

Juliana?

JULIANA

Yes?

AUGUST

Enough of your Aunt Trudy.

JULIANA

I'm just telling you...

AUGUST

Enough.

JULIANA

I'm just trying to make conversation. Pardon me. I certainly didn't mean to bore you, offend you, whatever. You'd just like me to sit here in silence, with a little china-doll smile on my mouth.

AUGUST

Yes, I would.

(A long pause. JULIANA looks away)

We're getting off on the wrong foot, as they say. Only in this case, we're getting off on the wrong ankle, shin, thigh; the whole leg. Let's just sit. And listen to the music. And try to remember why we're here.

(A pause)

The music is nice, isn't it?

(A long pause)

JULIANA

Yes, it is. Is this what they call The Charleston?

AUGUST

(Laughs:) No, Juliana, this is a polka.

JULIANA

What? No, it can't be.

AUGUST

Sure it is. Listen. One-and-two-and-one-and-two. It's a polka.

JULIANA

They have no tuba. How can they play a polka?

AUGUST

They have an accordion.

JULIANA

Yes, but you need... all those metal instruments. Listen to it. Like soup with too much water and too little salt. They don't know how to play a polka here.

AUGUST

Still. It's nice.

JULIANA

Nice, but no polka. Flimsy. Everything is flimsy here. Look: this coffee cup. I'll bet if I dropped this on the floor, it'd break into a million pieces.

AUGUST

Don't.

JULIANA

No, I'm just saying. Mamma has coffee cups, you could throw 'em against the wall, they'd bounce. These chairs...

AUGUST

They're pretty, no?

JULIANA

Yes, pretty, but that's hardly the point. They look as if they're made of porcelain. You couldn't, for instance, bring my Aunt Katl here. She'd sit on one and fall right on her behind. I don't understand; they must not allow fat people in here. They must have a scale hidden under the rug over there, when you come in. They can check and see if you're going to ruin their furniture.

AUGUST

No, they have a way of doing it over here. They can make things that look pretty and delicate, yet they're strong as steel.

JULIANA

Oh, go away.

AUGUST

No, really, look at me. My chair didn't break and I'm not exactly on a diet.

JULIANA

Well, I'm lighter than you and I can hear my chair creaking from the strain.

AUGUST

Nonsense.

JULIANA

But everything is like that over here, you know. Those buildings that stretch way up to the sky, looking like one strong wind will send them crashing down.

AUGUST

Yes, but the point is, they don't. They stay up. They'll be there years after both you and I are dead and buried.

JULIANA

In any case, they make me nervous. The walls in my room: I can push on them and they move. There's a married couple in the room next to me. I can hear them so plainly it's as if the wall wasn't even there. And the door to my room! A child of six could break it down with one kick.

(A pause)

This looks like a nice hotel.

AUGUST

It is, it's very nice. I tried to put you up here, but all their rooms were taken. You made up your mind so quickly, I wasn't able to plan as much as I'd have liked...

JULIANA

It doesn't matter.

AUGUST

No, but I'm shocked about your hotel. I was told it was a De Luxe. I'll have to complain.

JULIANA

Complaining never does any good.

AUGUST

Well, then, I'll get you out of there as soon as I can.

JULIANA

Oh, don't bother yourself. I'm sure it's just me. It's a nice hotel, I'm sure. I'm just not used to the way things are over here. I expected... different. In fact, I won't complain again. From the stories I've heard, I should be grateful. I should think of myself as fortunate. The stories I've heard...

AUGUST

Please, Juliana. I don't want to get mad at you. Let's talk of something else.

JULIANA

But why should you get mad at me? What, don't people complain over here? Is it un-American?

AUGUST

Why complain? When there's so much that's nice?

JULIANA

Then what on earth do you talk about?

AUGUST
We can talk of many things.

JULIANA
Yes. Go ahead.

AUGUST
The news of the day.

JULIANA
Yes, well, I can't read the papers; Lippstadt may have been
swallowed by a giant fish and I wouldn't know, so: next?

AUGUST
The weather.

JULIANA
Yes, all right. The weather is nice today.

AUGUST
See? Yes. Good. Yes, it is. It's a lovely day.

JULIANA
Like spring, almost. I wish I hadn't worn such heavy
clothing. But I wasn't sure what to pack. I didn't expect
it to still be so hot that I'd need summer clothing.

AUGUST
You look lovely, though.

JULIANA
Yes, well, I feel totally inappropriate. And I can tell I'm
getting looks. Will it stay this warm for long?

AUGUST
Well, we can get you some new things... I'll take you to
the stores...

JULIANA
No, I don't want to put you out.

AUGUST
It's nothing. Now, we were talking about the weather.

JULIANA
Oh, yes. Pardon me. It's nice.

AUGUST
Let's not get side-tracked. A beautiful day like this, we
should be out. After we leave here, we can take a stroll
through the park.

JULIANA
A stroll? I'm afraid I don't have the right type of shoes
for any kind of a stroll.

AUGUST
It won't be long. Just a stroll. Let's not skip ahead now.
We were talking about the weather. How nice it is.

JULIANA

And again, I'm sorry. Yes, it's beautiful. I love a day like this. It makes you almost forgive all the bad days for one day like this.

AUGUST

There. You see how easy?

JULIANA

When I woke up this morning, I actually heard birds singing outside my window. I didn't think there even were any birds in this city, but sure enough, I heard them. I didn't see any, mind you, but I could hear them.

AUGUST

Of course there are birds.

JULIANA

Yes, well, I'm telling you. I got up this morning, and opened the windows. To get rid of that musty smell in my room. I can't figure why there should be such a smell, but sure enough, every morning, there it is. Like an attic. They don't dry the linens properly, I think.

AUGUST

Yes, a beautiful day. Not even a cloud to complain about.

JULIANA

Umm-hmm... beautiful. The sky is a different blue here than in Lippstadt, I think. But it's pretty, nonetheless. Very nice.

AUGUST

Yes, it is. You're going to love it here, Juliana. I'll show you only the nice things.

JULIANA

I can only wish it was this nice the day we docked. There was a bad storm at sea, almost every day, a storm that seemed to follow us...

AUGUST

But that day is gone now. And today it's clear and bright.

JULIANA

Yes, which reminds me. I don't want you to go spending a lot of money on me, but I would like a new hat. One with a wider brim. The sun here is so bright, the glare makes it hard for me to see, almost.

AUGUST

Of course you can have a hat. There's a store I'll take you to where they have all shapes and sizes. Anything you could want.

JULIANA

But we were talking about the weather. And I was telling you about this storm. The first day out, it was so rough, half the passengers didn't leave their cabins, even. I don't usually get seasick, but I turned the color of that potted palm over there. No one could keep their food down. And that stretch through the channel there is very rocky. Very treacherous, and that captain, well, I don't know, but I don't think he knew what he was doing. He wasn't German, that's for sure...

AUGUST

Juliana, please! I did not pay for your passage and your hotel room and this lunch and everything else to listen to you whine and nag about everything under the sun, including the sun! Now, please.

(A long pause)

JULIANA

Excuse me.

AUGUST

I don't mean to insult you, my dear. But understand. I've looked forward to seeing you for so long... I want everything to be just right. I want you to enjoy yourself. Yes, and I want to enjoy myself, too. I don't want to hear every little thing that's gone wrong since you got off the boat, if you don't mind. In fact, if you want to start in, I could top you twenty times over. At my age, when every bone starts to creak and your muscles don't do what they used to and you find yourself starting to lose control over your own body, you find you have a great deal to complain about. But I've learned to ignore it; that's where the trouble starts. You get too involved in your own problems, the problems, they start to control you. You understand what I'm telling you? Don't get me started. For every problem you've got, I've got ten that'll beat it. Let's just enjoy what time we have.

(A long pause)

JULIANA

How much do I owe you?

AUGUST

Hmmmm?

JULIANA

For this lunch. How much was it?

AUGUST

Oh, Juliana. What is it now?

JULIANA

I don't have very much money on me at the moment. And I don't even understand how the money works over here, it's so confusing. But I'll give you what little I have.

AUGUST

Now don't start. Please.

JULIANA

I won't have you holding this over my head. And the hotel. And the trip. I'll pay it all back, as soon as I can, I swear to you.

AUGUST

Now stop it, Juliana. I didn't mean I'm regretting spending the money.

JULIANA

You can send me a bill, if you like, I don't care. I thought I was being invited. I thought I was a guest. But if that's the way you want to be, it's fine.

AUGUST

You are. You're my guest.

JULIANA

Well, no, it seems that now I'm not. It seems you're tallying up every little thing over my head. It seems there's a price tag on my stay here, and I don't like that at all. If I say anything that doesn't agree with you, you start thinking I'm not worth the expense; you paid too much. Well, what am I supposed to do? Just sit here, even if something bothers me? Afraid that you'll return me if I get too disagreeable? Oh, yes, Uncle August. How nice. Isn't everything lovely, Uncle August. Oh, what a time I'm having.

AUGUST

Let's dance.

JULIANA

Huh?

AUGUST

Let's dance. The band has started up again, and see: it's a polka. Come on.

JULIANA

Have you gone crazy?

AUGUST

I haven't danced in so long, it'll do me good. For me. Do it for me. Just one dance. We'll get back to your argument, I promise you. You can yell all you want, slap me in the face and leave, if you want. But let's dance first.

JULIANA

Don't be preposterous. Let go.

AUGUST

What, you mean to tell me your mother didn't teach you how to dance? Your mother? I don't believe it.

JULIANA

Of course I know how to dance.

AUGUST

Well then?

JULIANA

Let's not make fools of ourselves, shall we?

AUGUST

There's no one here. No one to see. Come.

JULIANA

The waiters. They've been laughing at us all along. Now this. Please sit down.

AUGUST

Your mother used to dance with me all the time. She'd dance 'til she dropped. But I guess you haven't picked up any of her good traits, eh?

JULIANA

Let go of my arm, Uncle August, and sit down. I'm not going to tell you again.

AUGUST

The band is playing only for us, Juliana. I'm sure they want us to enjoy ourselves.

JULIANA

I've told you, I can't dance to this music. I don't even recognize it.

AUGUST

Such lame excuses. I won't, I won't sit down 'til you dance. Or give me a better excuse, at least.

JULIANA

Fine: you're old. How's that, Uncle August?

(A long pause)

I'm sorry, but you have to admit it's true. It worries me. We start dancing, who knows what it will lead to, you have a heart attack and drop dead at my feet, what am I supposed to do with you then? Hmmm? Now sit down and behave yourself.

(HE sits)

AUGUST

I may be many, many years older than you, Juliana. But right now you're reminding me of my grandmother.

JULIANA

Well,, it looks as if you need somebody to be your grandmother. To keep you in line. To keep you from killing yourself.

AUGUST

What a life. A child telling an old man how to live.

(A pause)

You're just a child. How could you possibly know what I need?

JULIANA

Yes, well, calm down.

(A long pause)

What does a person need to do in this place to get more coffee?

AUGUST

Simply this.

(HE snaps his fingers. The WAITER appears. AUGUST gestures to JULIANA's cup. HE refills it and exits)

JULIANA

I can't understand why there aren't more people in here. Where is everybody? Have you any idea?

(AUGUST is silent)

I thought you told me this was supposed to be such a nice place? Well, in Lippstadt, if a place gets a reputation as being a good place to go, it's always crowded, you can't get a table. But I guess it's different here.

(A pause)

Of course, it's a little too late for breakfast, and it's too early for lunch, so maybe that's the reason, huh? That must be it. It'll get crowded soon. I'm not complaining; it's nice like this, just us two. Can you have dinner here as well, or just breakfast, lunch and tea? I really don't care for tea, but I'll bet they have a nice tea here. That Italian waiter probably serves all kinds of Italian pastries. All those specialties. Have you ever been here for tea?

AUGUST

I'll tell you what I need, if you really want to know. Since you seem so concerned. Better than that, even. I'll tell you what I don't need. Then you can fill in the blanks. How's that?

JULIANA

I don't know what you...

AUGUST

I don't need a nursemaid. I can still get up stairs, I can still make it to the potty by myself. I don't have any medicines I have to take to keep me going. I have eyes and ears and they still work pretty good. Therefore, I don't need help crossing the street, I don't need to be read to, et cetera. You understand so far? I don't need a nursemaid.

JULIANA

Yes.

AUGUST

Good. I don't need a mother. No, I don't need someone to take me by the hand and show me what to do. I'm sixty years old, although I hesitate to say it so openly. I know what I like and what I don't like, I'm as set in my beliefs as it's possible to be, and I don't think any woman is going to come along and be able to change me. At least, I don't want one to try. So, I don't need a mother. Besides, I've already had one mother, and she was more than enough for one lifetime. God rest her soul.

JULIANA

So then, what do you...?

AUGUST

I don't need someone to tell me how to run my business. I've been in it all my life, I've made more money than I ever expected to make. More than enough to last me the rest of my life. In fact, enough to last several people through several lives. So there isn't that problem. I don't need a boss, an overseer, whatever.

JULIANA

Oh, you don't need to tell me about that, Mamma's told me...

AUGUST

So, what else is there? A cook? A servant girl? No. You might be interested to know that I have one of the former and two of the latter, and they do their jobs quite well, more than efficiently, so I see no need to replace them. What else?

JULIANA

It seems you've covered just about everything.

AUGUST

Just about.

JULIANA

Well, then, I guess you don't need anyone. You seem to be doing just fine all by yourself.

AUGUST

I do all right.

JULIANA

Sure. You've got money, you got your health, I don't see what else. You have friends?

AUGUST

More than enough.

JULIANA

See there? All you could ask for. So, what's the big to-do about?

AUGUST

Yes, although I wouldn't be against trading in my old friends for a new set. You see, all my friends are of the same age, that age that I inadvertently mentioned before but won't mention again. And yet, I seem to have outlived them, outlived them in spite of the fact that they still breathe, eat, shuffle around. They have pills they forget to take, appointments they miss because they forget to wind the clock. They discuss food mostly. Which is fine, I don't mind a good conversation about a pot roast now and again. But their conversations are more about which foods are their enemies: this gives me heartburn, that makes me constipated. They behave as they believe they should at this age, and so they look it. They've damned themselves. And I don't want any part of it. Do I look sixty to you?

JULIANA

Well, you don't look forty. I'm sorry. Did you want politeness? Is that it? Is that what you wanted? Someone who says, "Go on, ride the Ferris wheel, so what if you look like an idiot?" "Buy the hat; it was made for a man forty years younger, but you can carry it"? That kind of nonsense?

AUGUST

No, but I don't want someone who stands next to me, pointing into the grave and waiting to shove me in, either. You know what I want.

JULIANA

No, I'm afraid you've stumped me.

AUGUST

Please, Juliana. I know your mother well enough to know she didn't just push you on the boat with a farewell and a basket of fruit.

JULIANA

Really. I don't know what you're getting at.

AUGUST

Stop it, stop it now, Juliana. Your mother made a promise to me. Everything explained, everything agreeable. Don't be so coy. I'm too old for this kind of thing.

JULIANA

See! You do it yourself. "You're too old," you said.

AUGUST

I meant I'm too old... I'm old enough to know that these little parlor games are stupid.

JULIANA

All right, then. I'm young. Sometimes I don't understand. Maybe I'm a little thick. So then would you please just tell me what on earth you're talking about?

AUGUST

This! I'm talking about this!

(HE takes a box out of his pocket, slams
it on the table in front of her)

I had planned... well, I wanted to wait a bit... in nicer
surroundings, under a tree, in the park, but here... Take
it.

(SHE opens the box)

JULIANA

What is it?

AUGUST

(Contemptuously:) What is it.

JULIANA

It's a ring.

AUGUST

Yes! Good! A ring.

JULIANA

It's very pretty.

AUGUST

Pretty? It cost two thousand dollars. It's beautiful.

JULIANA

Yes... beautiful.

(SHE looks at it. HE looks at her. SHE
smiles at him. A pause. Her smile
fades)

You don't seriously... Oh, God! Oh, my God...

(SHE puts her face in her hands)

AUGUST

I don't believe this. She didn't tell you?

(SHE shakes her head)

JULIANA

I don't know whether to laugh or to cry. It's so... I
think laugh. It's the only thing I know to do.

(SHE laughs)

AUGUST

How could she do this to me? To pull a stunt like this.
And now she laughs: it gets worse. If I ever get my hands
on that woman... No, I won't get my hands on her because I
never want to see her again!

(The WAITER approaches the table,
speaking in gibberish)

JULIANA

Oh, look, now he's here! Just when you don't want him, he shows up.

(This makes her laugh all the more.
AUGUST shakes his head. The WAITER
exits)

I'm sorry, I'm so sorry, Uncle August.

AUGUST

She really didn't tell you anything? She didn't say why you were coming here?

JULIANA

No, really. Nothing.

AUGUST

And what did you think? Nothing? That you were coming all this way for a vacation or something?

JULIANA

Well, she... Mamma acted funny at the dock, like she was never going to see me again. That was odd. Not odd for Mamma, though. She doesn't like traveling. The idea of it. She's seen so many people go and never come back. You know, Mamma's never once left Lippstadt. Not her whole life. She never wanted to, even.

AUGUST

We had a deal.

JULIANA

Pardon me? A deal?

AUGUST

Yes, it was all worked out. She explained it to you, she said. You had agreed, she said. I asked her to send you to me, I sent her money, I booked the passage. I kept up my end of the bargain.

JULIANA

Oh, I'm a bargain, am I? Excuse me, but why didn't you just write to me? I read, you know. I write. I can make decisions too, difficult as it may be for you to believe. So, if you want to... propose...
(SHE breaks herself up)

AUGUST

Fine, fine.

JULIANA

No, I'm sorry. In a moment I'll stop. What I'm saying is, you ask her before you ask me? No, no. You ask her without asking me? What is that?

AUGUST

Oh, I don't know. She told me... Oh, this is making me sick.

JULIANA

Well, I hope I fetched a good price. Honestly, Uncle August, it was me you were talking about. A person. Did you think it was like buying a chicken? With Mamma the butcher?

AUGUST

Well, yes, of course now I see that I should have asked you. Of course. I should've... No, I'll tell you what I should've done. Before I met your mother, the first thing I heard about her was that she had a birthmark. Above her lip. Round and black, just like yours there. Same thing: you have it too. And I was told that such a birthmark was the sign of a witch. And this by a grown, educated man. Well, we laughed over it, of course. Such nonsense in this day and age. Now I know I should've listened.

JULIANA

What a terrible thing to say. Are you now going to say that I'm a witch, too?

AUGUST

No, no. I'm sorry. What I'm going to do now, I think, is go home and sit in the dark for a few months. Maybe just crawl under the table and suck on my thumb like a baby.

JULIANA

Don't get so upset, Uncle August. I don't really see why you're making such a fuss over this.

AUGUST

Oh, you don't. Let me see if I can explain it, then. Juliana, I waited sixty years before I decided to ask a woman to marry me. Sixty years. Do you understand that? Think of how long you've lived. All the experiences you've had, the people you've met, all the many things you remember happening in your life up to this point. Now, multiply that by three. That's how long I've waited. Oh, I had everything so nicely planned. Under the false assumption that you knew what was going on here, I planned out every day, every week: I knew what we were going to be doing with every minute of every day for the next two months! Where I'd take you, what I'd show you. Now that's all been spoiled.

JULIANA

Well, maybe you shouldn't take so much for granted all the time.

AUGUST

Oh, lovely. I'll embroider that and put it on the wall, it's so good.

JULIANA

Well, really, Uncle August. Just because you've got forty years on me, doesn't necessarily mean that you'll always be the teacher. With me the student.

AUGUST

I've told you, I don't need a mother. I know the way things work, I know how to live my life, I know what goes on. And I don't believe I have to explain myself to you. A child.

JULIANA

Pardon me then, but for somebody who knows the way things work, you seem to have mucked this up quite well. In this child's opinion. I don't even let my own mother make decisions for me, you think I'd let you? You, who I hardly know? How could you think I'd agree to such a thing without talking to you, seeing you?

AUGUST

I'm sorry I called you a child.

JULIANA

Yes, well, I don't think I forgive you. Dragging me across the world, deals being made behind my back. This child thinks this well-respected gentleman is awfully stupid.

AUGUST

Juliana, it's the way it's always been done. The... the groom... asks the bride's mother. That happens to be protocol.

JULIANA

Not in my book, it isn't. I don't even consider ideas which I think are idiotic. Which are idiotic.

AUGUST

I'm having this argument with the wrong person, anyway. You're not to blame. This is your mother's doing. I shouldn't take it out on you. This is between us. She broke a promise.

JULIANA

She has nothing to do with it, what do I have to do to get you to understand that? God, you're tiresome.

AUGUST

No, you are! You're tiresome! You're killing me with all this. I don't embarrass easily, but I've never had anything like this happen to me before.

JULIANA

Well, whose fault is that? Would it have been so difficult to write me a letter? Just cross out my mother's name and write "Dear Juliana"? It was only a letter. You wouldn't be there to see my face when I opened it.

AUGUST

If I'd had the courage to do it, I'd have done it, believe me. Is that good enough for you? Now can we let it rest? And if you had been me, what would you have done? I was frightened. Terrified. It's as simple as that. What girl, just starting out her life, would promise herself to me? Look at me, sitting here, and old man, falling apart at the seams. Who? Do you know of anyone? If so, send them over. You have a sister? I'll make a deal with you.

(A pause)

AUGUST (CONTINUED)

When your mother responded to me, saying you'd agreed, of course I was wary, of course I was. But, I decided to take my chances. It was a mistake. I see it now. You taught me good, okay? I've learned my lesson. And I suppose you'll tell me now that you'd like to go home to Lippstadt.

JULIANA

Yes, I would.

AUGUST

Fine. Good. Go. You and your mother can have a fine laugh over this, I'm sure. A good giggle. Go on. Tell your mother... no. Don't tell her anything. I'll send her a letter. I'm composing quite a good one, now, as we sit here. Shall we go? I don't like it here so much anymore.

JULIANA

I'd like to finish my coffee first, if that's all right.

AUGUST

Good. Torture me. May I go, then? I'll pay the bill on the way out.

JULIANA

Listen to the music. It's lovely. Another polka.

AUGUST

Is that all they know to play? And you're right, they don't know how to play it. It needs brass. Loud. To drown out everything else.

(HE puts his head in his hands)

JULIANA

Don't, Uncle August.

AUGUST

And do you have to keep saying that Uncle, Uncle, over and over again, like a curse? A death sentence?

JULIANA

I'm sorry.

(A pause)

Would you like something else?

AUGUST

What?

JULIANA

More coffee?

AUGUST

No, no. Nothing else. No more.

JULIANA

Would you mind if I...?

AUGUST

Why is she doing this to me?

(JULIANA snaps her fingers. The WAITER appears. SHE gestures regally to her cup. HE pours, bows, exits)

JULIANA

Look at that! He did it, and didn't make a face. I'll just go through life snapping my fingers. Won't that be nice?

AUGUST

Yes, just like your mother, the witch. Same disposition. Same birthmark, same... What happened?

JULIANA

Excuse me?

AUGUST

Am I losing my mind now, as well? Where's your birthmark?

(JULIANA's hand goes to her face)

JULIANA

What birthmark?

AUGUST

The birthmark above your lip that I've already pointed out twice.

JULIANA

I don't... You must be...

AUGUST

There! There it is, there, on your butter plate.

JULIANA

No, that's... don't be ridiculous, now. It's a crumb.

AUGUST

Well then, if it is, what happened to the birthmark that you had above your lip until about three minutes ago?

JULIANA

Oh, all right, all right.

(SHE picks her birthmark up off the table, wets it with her tongue, slaps it back over her lip)

There. There now. Happy?

AUGUST

I don't understand.

JULIANA

No, you've been stupid all day long.

AUGUST

You don't really have a birthmark?

JULIANA
Yes, but I was just taking it out for a walk. Honestly.

AUGUST
Well then, why?

JULIANA
Because...
(SHE shrugs)
Because I was told it was the thing to do. It's considered beautiful, I was told.

AUGUST
Told? By whom? Your mother? You mean her's is fake, too?

JULIANA
No, no, Mamma's is real.

AUGUST
I thought you didn't do what your mother told you.

JULIANA
I don't. I thought this up all by myself.

AUGUST
I thought you just said someone told you to do it.

JULIANA
No, that's not what I meant. You're confusing me no end. I meant that I had heard it was stylish. You know. Like green mayonnaise.

AUGUST
To wear a birthmark?

JULIANA
Yes.

AUGUST
In the same spot your mother has one? In the same shape?

JULIANA
No, that's the part I thought up.

AUGUST
I see. Why?

JULIANA
No reason.

AUGUST
I see.
(A pause)
I think maybe yes, some more coffee after all.
(HE snaps his fingers. The WAITER appears, pours coffee)
Anything, Juliana?

JULIANA

No, enough for me. I must be going soon, anyway. I'll have a lot of re-packing to do.

(AUGUST shakes his head. The WAITER exits)

AUGUST

What will you do now, once you're home?

JULIANA

Why, nothing. Nothing in particular. Just go on as I was. After all, I only thought I was coming here on vacation, remember.

AUGUST

Of course.

JULIANA

So.

AUGUST

Before you go, though, I hope you'll spend just another week here. And let me show you around. Just as a tourist. No other expectations. There are a great many things you'd like to see, I'm sure.

JULIANA

I've seen enough. Thank you, anyway.

AUGUST

Ah, yes, but remember, I assumed you were coming to stay. So you'll have to wait at least until I can book passage for your return trip.

JULIANA

Oh, goodness. How long will that take, do you suppose?

AUGUST

Very hard to say, my dear. You see, I need to check which ships are sailing, and when, and if they have room. A hundred little details. I mean, of course you understand it's not like a ferryboat. You can't just get on whenever you feel like it.

(HE laughs)

JULIANA

Well, I know. Of course not.

AUGUST

A week at the least.

JULIANA

Well... so be it.

AUGUST

In the meantime, I'll move you into another hotel.

JULIANA
Why, thank you. It's not necessary.

AUGUST
No, I insist.

JULIANA
Very decent of you.

AUGUST
Not at all. Is that your mother's dress?

JULIANA
Excuse me?

AUGUST
I asked you if that dress belongs to your mother. Many years ago, before you were even born, when I first knew your mother, I remember a dress... similar to that. Of course, it's way too young for her now. I wondered if she gave it to you.

JULIANA
This dress is my own, thank you very much.

AUGUST
I just wondered. It's an old style.

JULIANA
Well, it's coming back. It's no particular style. It's just a dress.

AUGUST
It looked familiar. I just thought I'd ask.

JULIANA
Well, you did, and I responded, so may we please move on to some subject other than my clothing?

AUGUST
Of course.
(A pause)
Go ahead.

JULIANA
Well, I don't know.
(SHE looks around the room)
What are those plants?

AUGUST
Palms.

JULIANA
I see. Like in Hawaii?

AUGUST
Yes, they're tropical plants.

JULIANA

That's very interesting. Mamma says you have a house in the country, besides your house in town. Is this true?

AUGUST

Yes.

JULIANA

Uh-huh.

(A pause)

Well?

AUGUST

Well?

JULIANA

Tell me about it. Is it nice?

AUGUST

Very nice. Fourteen rooms. On a lake.

JULIANA

Oh...

(A pause)

Go on. What else?

AUGUST

Your mother wears her hair like that, doesn't she?

JULIANA

Like what?

AUGUST

Pulled up on top of her head like that, and then long in the back. Isn't that the way your mother wears her hair?

JULIANA

Yes, I guess so.

AUGUST

That's very interesting. Why do you wear it that way?

JULIANA

This is the way I've always worn my hair; how should I know? I thought I might get it all cut off short, like I've seen them wearing it. You know, like a boy, the way that's so popular now. Get it all cut off before I leave, give everyone back home a big surprise. What do you think?

AUGUST

It wouldn't become you. It would look silly.

JULIANA

Did I ask your opinion?

AUGUST

Yes, you just did.

JULIANA

Oh.

(SHE looks around the restaurant)

AUGUST

I like it the way your mother wears it.

JULIANA

Oh, damn you and my mother! This is the way I wear it! What is all this talk about my mother? Why didn't you mail your proposal to her, since you seem to find her so preferable?

AUGUST

I don't at all. I just find it interesting that you try to look like your mother, when you really look nothing like her at all.

JULIANA

I'm not trying to look anything.

AUGUST

The dress, the hair, even a fake birthmark.

JULIANA

I've explained all of that to you already.

AUGUST

Yes, and the explanations all make sense, separately, by themselves. But the three together tells a different story. It's quite a funny coincidence, don't you agree?

JULIANA

Yes, it's hilarious.

AUGUST

I mean, why bother? When you're infinitely more beautiful?

(A long pause)

JULIANA

Well, her looks didn't seem to bother you any. From what she's told me about you, you didn't seem to think she was ugly.

AUGUST

I didn't say that, did I? No, your mother's a lovely woman. But nowhere near as beautiful as the treasure she's been hiding.

(A long pause)

JULIANA

Well, I think I've had enough of this. I really must get going now. I'll have to start thinking about what I'll do. I mean, until you can send me home. I haven't much money left; certainly not enough to last a full week.

AUGUST

What on earth are you talking about?

JULIANA

I mean, I'm going to have to find something to do. To pay for my food. My bills at the hotel. So please, try to find a nice hotel, but a reasonable one.

AUGUST

What, you mean you're going to work?

JULIANA

Of course.

AUGUST

In a bakery? Like your Aunt Trudy?

JULIANA

Yes, as a matter of fact, that's a very good idea. Do you know of any bakeries nearby?

AUGUST

If you're doing this to impress me, it isn't working, my dear.

JULIANA

I'm sure I don't know...

AUGUST

I invited you here as my bride, yes, that's true. And you've decided to go home. But you're still my guest here. I have no intention of putting you to work.

JULIANA

Well, I have no intention of letting you pay all my bills. I'd like to go home with a clean conscience, if you please. I don't want to owe you anything.

AUGUST

Who said anything about owing me? It's my pleasure. Well, that certainly one difference between you and your mother. She spent my money as if it were hers.

JULIANA

Well, now I really say no. Not so you can talk about me like that in twenty years' time.

AUGUST

In twenty years, you'll be playing a polka and dancing on my grave, so what are you so upset about?

(A long pause)

I wish I could get you to stay, Juliana. There's nothing for you to go home to: everyone's here. This country is really coming to life now. We have all the best people. A girl like you, just starting out, could really make something of herself. Back in Lippstadt, what have you got? Do you have a boyfriend?

JULIANA
No. No one in particular. There was a boy at school...

AUGUST
Then why go back?

JULIANA
What's to make me stay?

(A long pause)

AUGUST
I don't know.

(A pause)

JULIANA
So you see. If I could think of a reason, any reason to stay, I might. It would be a challenge, I think. But...
(A pause. SHE looks at him)
I guess not. No, in Lippstadt, I know everyone, they know me. It's very comfortable. I have a way of life.
(SHE stands)
And now. Goodbye, Uncle August.

AUGUST
Well, it's not goodbye yet. I still haven't arranged for your trip home; we'll need to stay in contact.

JULIANA
Still, there's no need for you to feel you must baby-sit me.

AUGUST
Nonsense. Perhaps we could have dinner tonight? And I'll show you your new hotel.

JULIANA
Yes, of course. That would be fine.

AUGUST
So. I'll see you soon.

JULIANA
Yes. You know where my hotel is.

(SHE starts to exit)

AUGUST
Juliana? I'm afraid there is one thing you do owe me.

JULIANA
Yes?

AUGUST
Well, now. This is difficult. I did invite you here, I've paid for your passage and I've agreed to pay for the rest of your stay here and for the trip back. So this whole... business, mistake, whatever... hasn't cost you anything, other than some time. Do you agree?

(JULIANA nods. A pause)

AUGUST (CONTINUED)

(Quickly:) I wonder if I might have the engagement ring back. Since you seem not to be using it. I only ask because... well, I did want you to have it, I gave it to you with all my heart, I didn't intend to put a price on it. But it was a great deal of money, and... oh, God. I'm embarrassing myself again.

JULIANA

Not at all.

(SHE takes the ring out of her purse, extends it to him)

AUGUST

No, no, I can't take it now. I can't. I can't even look at you. You keep it. Please. Keep it. It was selfish and I'm an old fool.

(HE turns away from her. SHE looks at him a moment, then places the ring on the table. SHE turns to leave. SHE turns back to him)

JULIANA

Uncle August, I'm going to say one more thing to you, and then I'm going. And this time I swear it.

(A pause)

I knew about the proposal, of course I did. I don't pack all my worldly belongings and come to America just for a vacation. Let me finish. I just don't want you to blame Mamma. She kept up her end of the bargain. It's true: she did tell me of your proposal, and it's true that I did agree. To her. I agreed to her that I would marry you. But I have not agreed to you. After all, how could I? You see, you haven't even asked me. You understand, Uncle August, what I said before still holds true. I don't like all this stuff going on behind my back. I don't honor it. After all, I'm not a child any longer. I can make my own deals now.

AUGUST

What are you saying?

JULIANA

I don't know. Didn't it make sense to you? It made sense to me. Ah, well. See you for dinner.

AUGUST

Then will you marry me, Juliana?

JULIANA

Yes, August, I think I will.

(A pause)

AUGUST

You're trying to kill me, is that it?

JULIANA

All I wanted was for you to ask me. It wasn't so tough, was it?

AUGUST

I can't take all this in one day. Up, down, up, down. Is this what marriage to you is going to be like?

JULIANA

How on earth should I know? I've never been married to me. It's a beautiful ring, August.

AUGUST

You not doing this just to pull the rug out from under me, are you?

JULIANA

Don't be ridiculous, August. What do other people call you? I'll have to get a name for you. Auggie? Gus? Sweetie-pie?

(SHE laughs)

Apple-dumpling?

AUGUST

Call me whatever the hell you want.

(HE laughs with her)

Take off that birthmark. Let down your hair. Tomorrow, we buy you a new dress. It's morbid, you looking like your mother. Are you sure about all of this? You're not just doing this to cheer me up? You'll settle for me? Not someone young? Strong? With blond, wavy hair? Me?

JULIANA

August, I've loved you since I was fourteen years old.

AUGUST

A wife. A wife. I don't believe it. I snore, by the way.

JULIANA

Me too.

AUGUST

To have someone in bed next to me. I mean, for good. And children! Oh, I want children. Grandchildren. Great-grandchildren!

JULIANA

We'd better hurry.

AUGUST

My plans for you. They've all flown out of my head now. Where to take you... I want to show you off.

JULIANA

Let's dance.

AUGUST

What?

JULIANA

Come on. The band's started up again. It's an awfully shipshod polka, but I'll try to dance to it if you will.

AUGUST

Dancing, too. What is she trying to do to me?

JULIANA

You don't think so? It's no big thing, we don't have to. Whatever you think is best.

AUGUST

Come on. Let's go.

(THEY start to dance)

JULIANA

We'll dance slowly.

AUGUST

The hell with it, slowly. I've already signed my will over to you. If I keel over, you stand to inherit half a million dollars.

JULIANA

Slower, August. I can't keep up with you!

AUGUST

Slower, nothing. Faster! Faster!

(THEY dance, picking up speed. THEY spin round and round, across the empty dance floor)

SLOW FADE TO BLACK

WALTZ

CAST OF CHARACTERS

CARL, 40 years old
WINNIE, 40 years old
A HEADWAITER
A WAITER
FIVE MUSICIANS - Piano, Accordion, Violin, Viola, Cello

TIME

November 11, 1945. After lunch.

PLACE

The Palm Court of a large hotel in New York City.

(WINNIE enters the Palm Court. SHE trudges over to the HEADWAITER'S podium. The HEADWAITER approaches)

HEADWAITER

Yes, ma'am?

WINNIE

We have a reservation. I hope we do.

HEADWAITER

Your name, please?

(SHE peers over his shoulder at the book)

WINNIE

That's us. There. Three o'clock. We're a little early: is that all right?

HEADWAITER

Of course, ma'am. Will you follow me?

(HE pulls the rope aside)

The rest of your party: will they be meeting you?

WINNIE

I'm sorry, what?

HEADWAITER

The rest of your party...

WINNIE

Party? No, it's just us.

HEADWAITER

Us?

WINNIE

I don't understand.

HEADWAITER

Pardon, ma'am, but neither do I.

WINNIE

We just need a table for two. Carl, would you explain...

(SHE turns around)

Good God, would you excuse me? My apologies.

(SHE exits and quickly re-enters, holding CARL'S arm. HE is dressed in an Army uniform: a private. HE pulls away from her after entering)

CARL

Music!

(HE brushes past the HEADWAITER, moves to the center of the room, begins to sway)

That's my party.

WINNIE

This way, please.

HEADWAITER

Let's cut a rug.

CARL

No more dancing. Please.

WINNIE

Come on, you old bag. There's no one here, even.

CARL

Not for long, though. It's almost dinnertime.

WINNIE

Yeah, almost dinnertime in St. Louis. People here don't eat until eight o'clock at night, the earliest. Come on, come on.

(WINNIE takes off her cardigan, hands it to him)

WINNIE

Here. Enjoy yourself.

(CARL takes the sweater, holds out the arms, dances with it. To the HEADWAITER:)

He's not drunk. Believe me.

HEADWAITER

Of course.

WINNIE

He's been overseas, you see.

HEADWAITER

Yes, ma'am. We're used to it by now. It's been like this since May.

WINNIE

I'm so sorry.

HEADWAITER

Not at all. Let him enjoy himself. It's deserved.

(HE exits)

WINNIE

Yes, of course...

CARL

Hey, fellas! Pick it up; I'm dancing to a dirge.

WINNIE

Carl... Carl...

CARL

Who can dance to that?

(HE comes back to the table)

It's like a funeral in here. Hey, fellas! We won, ya know.

WINNIE

Maybe they're German.

CARL

I wouldn't be surprised. I'm surrounded by krauts.

WINNIE

Carl, shut up. Sit down and stop acting like a gorilla. Give me my sweater, please.

(HE gives her the sweater, but won't sit)

Well? Sit.

CARL

Oh, Winnie, Winnie... I'm gonna call you "Whiny" from now on. "Whiny Winnie." Why should I sit? I sit all the time. Can I get a drink in here, or is that verboten?

WINNIE

Sit, or they're going to throw you out like the last place. And it's way too early to start drinking.

CARL

It is not, it must be, what? Three o'clock. In Italy, they were drinking at breakfast.

WINNIE

In Italy, they probably put their feet on the table and cut their toenails.

CARL

Awww, Winnie. Loosen up. I feel like I'm on a date with a Sunday School teacher.

WINNIE

Carl, with you like this, Hedy Lamarr would look like a Sunday School teacher.

CARL

What did you bring me to this joint for in the first place? You know me well enough.

WINNIE

Too well. And I assumed you wouldn't have the gall to act the way you've been acting in here. I can see I was wrong.

CARL

The shoe's on the other foot here, the way I see it. You're the one acting dumb, in my opinion.

WINNIE

Is that so?

CARL

Yeah, it is. What the hell are we doing in here?

WINNIE

(Through her teeth:) Sit down and keep your voice down, for God's sake!

(CARL sits)

CARL

Down, down. What's happened to you, Winnie?

WINNIE

What's happened to me, you ask?

CARL

When did you decide to become such a wet blanket? Huh?

(A pause)

I see you give me that look. Like when I asked that guy and his buddy to have a drink with us. You give me a look: you should've seen it. What's that for, anyway?

WINNIE

You didn't even know who they were. They could've been anyone.

CARL

So what?

WINNIE

One of those men had an earring. Like a pirate.

CARL

He was in the service. Like me. And we're celebrating, Winnie. Is that all right with you?

WINNIE

(Overlapping:) I don't care if he was in the ministry, I don't think you should take your wife carousing with a couple of sailors. If you don't mind me saying so.

CARL

Yeah, I DO mind. This is my time. And I get to do what I feel like doing, Miss Priss. Stop putting a damper on everything when I wanna enjoy myself. Understand? First thing, I wanna get out of here. This place gives me the creeps.

WINNIE

Good. Go on. I can't keep up with you anymore, Carl. You go have a good time, and I'll meet you back at the hotel. Go on. Go. I'm tired of running around.

CARL

No, you have to come.

WINNIE

I don't want to. Bye-bye.

CARL
You mean you don't mind if I just leave?

WINNIE
Not at all. Have fun with your friends.

CARL
I will, too. I'll go.

WINNIE
Go, then. I just can't keep going like this, I need to slow down. Just don't expect me to bail you out of whatever trouble you get into.

CARL
Goodbye, then. I'll see you for dinner, okay?

WINNIE
Fine.

(CARL slowly leaves. WINNIE is alone. The orchestra begins to play. SHE breathes a long sigh of relief. The WAITER approaches)

WAITER
Would you care to order, ma'am, or will you wait for the gentleman?

WINNIE
No, no. He's not coming back. I'm alone.

WAITER
I see.

WINNIE
Is that all right? Can I still have the table?

WAITER
Of course, ma'am. May I get you something?

WINNIE
Oh... some tea, I think. No. Just a minute. Can I get liquor here?

(The WAITER nods)
Bring me a whiskey and soda, then.

WAITER
Anything else, ma'am?

WINNIE
Oh, yes, I guess so. Um. Something small. What have you got?

WAITER
We have some tea sandwiches.

WINNIE

Yes, yes, that'll be fine.

(The WAITER bows, removes the other place setting from the table)

Would you like me to move? If you need the table...

WAITER

No, no...

WINNIE

If you have a table for one...

WAITER

Not at all, ma'am. As you can see, business is light.

WINNIE

Well, if it fills up, feel free...

WAITER

The book is pretty empty tonight. You can sit wherever you want.

WINNIE

Thank you.

(The WAITER bows, exits. WINNIE sits for a moment. SHE listens to the music. SHE looks around. SHE poses. Then SHE stands and moves toward the musicians. The HEADWAITER comes to her)

HEADWAITER

Can I get you something, ma'am?

WINNIE

No, no, I just... I'm sorry.

(SHE goes back to her table and sits. The WAITER re-enters with her sandwiches)

Oh, thank you. It's lovely here.

WAITER

Yes. Thank you, ma'am.

WINNIE

So nice and warm, too. It's getting so chilly out. I guess winter's on her way.

WAITER

Yes, ma'am.

WINNIE

And such a gray day. And it gets dark so early now. I'm just not ready for it. It's going to rain, they said. But in here, it's like summertime. It's like the places Mamma... my mother... used to tell me about. When she was a little girl, her parents took her to the big city. Which was Vienna. She mostly remembered the cookies and the cakes.

(SHE laughs)

I was sure it would be crowded, this time of day. Why is no one here?

WAITER

Oh, they prefer to go elsewhere, I guess.

WINNIE

I don't understand.

WAITER

They don't like the music.

WINNIE

It's beautiful.

WAITER

We used to get quite a crowd in here for cocktail hours, but now... Well, they continually ask the band to play that kind of music that's so popular. We don't oblige. So, they go away... Now, it's mostly the ladies who live in the hotel. They come for tea. But it's a bit early yet.

WINNIE

I see. Well, it's very nice. A private concert.

WAITER

We get out-of-towners, too. But they don't usually stay, they just pass through, like it's a museum.

WINNIE

Yes, we're from St. Louis.

WAITER

Oh, do you like the city?

WINNIE

Not much.

(A pause)

I'm sorry.

(A pause)

I'm also sorry about my husband... He's being difficult.

WAITER

I'll get you your drink.

WINNIE

Excuse me, could I get some mayonnaise?

WAITER

Yes, ma'am, but we're still severely rationed. It'll be extra.

That's fine.

WINNIE

(HE exits. CARL re-enters, cautiously, and approaches her table)

Hi. There's a movie across the street, if you wanna...

CARL

I'm eating now.

WINNIE

Oh. Sandwiches?
(WINNIE nods)
If there's something in particular you'd like to do...

CARL

I'm fine right where I am.

WINNIE

I'll wait for you, if you wanna go to the movies.

CARL

I don't want to see any movie. You go ahead.

WINNIE

I feel bad just leaving you flat.

CARL

Don't feel bad.

WINNIE

(A pause)

Well, then, I'll see you later.

CARL

Okay.

WINNIE

Okay. Around six, six-thirty.

CARL

Fine.

WINNIE

(CARL exits. The WAITER re-enters)

Should I re-set the gentleman's place?

WAITER

No, he's gone. He's just being silly.
(The WAITER puts down a dish of mayonnaise)
Thank you. What's your name?

WINNIE

My name? Joe.

WAITER

Thank you, Joe.
(A pause)
You didn't have to serve?

Excuse me?

In the war?

No, ma'am. Bad eyes.

I see... I mean, I understand.
(SHE laughs. The WAITER nods)
Any of your relatives?

My brother. He was killed.

Oh, I'm so sorry.

No, ma'am. You really shouldn't be sorry. You should be glad.
He was on the other side.

Oh, you're German?

Italian.

Oh...
(A long pause)
Isn't this hard for you? I mean, waiting on Americans? Serving
them? Isn't it hard?

Yes, ma'am. Excuse me.

(HE exits. CARL re-enters, comes to the
table)

Hi.

Yes, hello.

I came back.

This I can see.

CARL

I came back for you. I'm not about to leave my wife in a strange hotel. So: come on.

WINNIE

I'm not ready to leave yet. So: go or stay. Do what you want.

CARL

Well, I'll stay for a bit.

(The WAITER re-enters with her drink, puts it down)

WINNIE

Thank you, Joe. Oh, Joe... the gentleman's decided to stay, so if you could re-set the table...?

WAITER

Yes, ma'am.

(HE exits)

CARL

You know the waiter's name?

WINNIE

However, if you want to stay, we have to reach an agreement first, do you hear?

CARL

What's that you're drinking?

WINNIE

Whiskey.

CARL

Awww, Winnie. You know you shouldn't do that. You know what it does to you.

WINNIE

Well, Carl, maybe I've decided to become the good-time girl you want me to be. Drinking whiskey and flirting with strange waiters.

(The WAITER returns, sets another place at the table)

WAITER

What will you have, sir?

CARL

Oh, I think a whiskey and soda, same as my wife. No, make it a rum... rum and coke. Wait a second. Gin and tonic. That's what I want.

WINNIE

No, Carl.

CARL
Huh?

WINNIE
I said no. You can stay, but if you stay, you stay under my rules. No drinking.

CARL
You're drinking.

WINNIE
I didn't say the rules were fair. But if you want to sit at this table, I won't allow you to drink.

CARL
Can I at least have a beer?

WINNIE
That's drinking.

CARL
Well what, then? What can I have?

WINNIE
Anything without alcohol. What else have you got, Joe?

WAITER
We have some nice lemonade. And limeade.

WINNIE
No, it's too late for lemonade, I think.

WAITER
Juices: Orange, apple. Grapefruit. Pineapple.

WINNIE
He gets a sour stomach sometimes. Have you got any prune juice?

WAITER
I'm afraid not, ma'am.

CARL
Prune juice! Geez, Winnie. Why don't you get me a glass of milk? And some cookies?

WINNIE
Yes, that's good. Joe, bring him a glass of milk. And bring him his own plate of sandwiches; these are for me.

WAITER
Yes, ma'am.

(HE bows and exits)

CARL
Milk. Why don't you ask if he can put it in a bottle for me? And you can feed me on your lap.

WINNIE

Really, Carl.

CARL

Well, come on now, Winnie. This ain't right. You telling me what I can and cannot have. It's unnatural. I can just imagine what that waiter thinks of me now. You're my wife. It's like dancing: the man leads the woman.

WINNIE

Take my word for it, Carl. The waiter doesn't think any worse of you than when you walked in.

CARL

What's that supposed to mean?

WINNIE

Well, look at you! Forty years old and still a private! I'm embarrassed for you.

CARL

Haven't we been through this a hundred times already? Do I have to explain it all again?

WINNIE

Well, I guess so, because I still don't understand it.

CARL

They tried to raise my rank four times. And I turned them down. I told you that.

WINNIE

Yes, and this is what doesn't make sense. You turned down a promotion, is that what you're saying?

CARL

Yes.

WINNIE

They let you do that?

CARL

Why not? Sure they do. All my friends were privates, and we were having a good time together. I didn't want to leave them. What's wrong with that?

WINNIE

It just sounds like a very baby thing to do, Carl.

CARL

That's just 'cause you don't know the Army, WINNIE, so why don't you shut up about it?

WINNIE

And this didn't bother the top guys at all? The big brass? You turn them down, and they say, "Oh, fine"?

CARL

Well, they razzed me a little bit in the beginning... Oh, Winnie, why do you want to talk about a thing you can't possibly understand?

WINNIE

But I want to understand. This is the point. I think I don't know who you are anymore.

CARL

Well, same here, honey. The same goes for me. Look: I wanted to be with my friends. Is that so hard to understand? We had a good time.

WINNIE

A good time? It was a war.

CARL

I know what it was. Wanna dance?

WINNIE

Dance? This is a waltz, Carl. Not the Chicken-step, or the Bedbug-shuffle, or whatever it is you like to do.

CARL

I know how to waltz, too.

WINNIE

No, Carl! We've been dancing since you got off the boat. Remember: my rules. No drinking, no dancing. That's why I wanted to come here. So we could talk. Just talk. Ooooooh, look at your eyes! I can see that's put the fear of God in you. I guess the thought of just sitting here talking to me is more than you can stand, huh? Well, tough luck. You had your chance to leave and you didn't.

CARL

We talked.

WINNIE

Yes? When?

CARL

Last night. When I had dinner with you and the kid. We talked then.

WINNIE

That wasn't talking, it was passing time. The only subject you stayed on for more than a minute was your dinner. I don't call a discussion of the thickness of your steak talking, I'm sorry. Besides, I couldn't say anything with Jimmy there. He wouldn't know what was going on, and besides, I want to keep him out of this. I don't think he should be there when I call you on the carpet. What I'm saying is, this is the first chance we've had to be alone. Don't throw it away.

CARL

We've been alone.

WINNIE

Yes, but those times you've had other things on your mind.

(A pause)

Yes, and me too. But I thought here, in a public place, a respectable place, you'd behave yourself. Hah.

CARL

Don't pin this on me. It's not my fault you're always dragging the kid along.

WINNIE

The kid. Your own son. "The kid." Why do you do that?

CARL

See now. Here I am, willing to discuss whatever you want, and you keep changing the subject. If you wanna keep wasting time, don't blame me.

WINNIE

(Overlapping:) Well, Carl, I happen to think the way you talk about your son is important.

CARL

(Overlapping:) Or is that why you wanted me here? Just to pick on me, right? Oh, I get it. You just wanna complain for a few hours, get it all off your chest. Your rules. I see. I suppose I'm not allowed to talk back, either. Just sit here and nod.

WINNIE

No, Carl, no.

CARL

Well, explain it to me then. What do you want me to do? Well?

(The WAITER enters, serves CARL)

WINNIE

Thank you, Joe. And Joe: I'd like another.

(SHE holds up her glass)

WAITER

Yes, ma'am.

(HE exits)

CARL

I told you, you better cut that out. 'Cause I'm not gonna carry you back to the hotel.

WINNIE

With you like this, I need a couple under my belt. Don't criticize me.

CARL

I'm just warning you, I'm not gonna be nurse-maid tonight. I'm going out.

WINNIE

I thought we were all going to dinner.

CARL

Let's see how this little conference works out first, shall we? Before we go discussing future plans.

WINNIE

What are you saying, Carl? If I act up, you won't have dinner with us? You'll leave?

CARL

We'll see.

WINNIE

Why don't you just leave now and get it over with? I swear, I can't keep up with you. I don't want to.

CARL

I just wanted you to know.

WINNIE

Know what? That if I misbehave, you'll go elsewhere? And how long does this go on? Tonight? Just here in New York? Or does it continue back in St. Louis?

CARL

You see: it's the liquor. You're getting carried away with yourself. All I was saying is... where were we?

WINNIE

You were insulting your son, I believe.

CARL

I was not. Now that's you putting words in my mouth. What I meant about the kid, Jimmy, is what the hell is he doing here in the first place? Why couldn't he stay in St. Louis?

WINNIE

Where would I leave him?

CARL

You mean to tell me Trudy couldn't look after him for two lousy weeks?

WINNIE

He wanted to see his Papa.

CARL

But we can't do anything with him here. He makes me nervous, to tell you the God's honest truth, Winnie. Five years old and whenever I look at him, I feel like I've been called into the principal's office. You've raised him well, I'll give you that. He's your spitting image. Why doesn't he cry, like normal kids do? I've never seen him with a smudge on his face even, or a rip in his trousers. What's wrong with him, anyway?

WINNIE

Because he's a little gentleman, because he's not a noisy, screaming brat, because I've raised him to be polite and respectful, I've done something wrong, is that what you're telling me?

CARL

There were so many things I wanted to do. And now we can't do any of it. This was supposed to be like a vacation. I worked hard over there, you know. These four years haven't been any picnic. I thought when I came home, there'd be parades. Congratulations for saving your lives. I thought I'd be able to let loose, finally. They get the parades; I'm a babysitter.

WINNIE

Yes, Carl. That's called growing up. You are forty years old, Carl. Do you understand? You have a wife and child.

CARL

Awww, cut it out.

WINNIE

What did they teach you over there? How to act like a hooligan? I can just see you, you and your pack of chums, running around, throwing bricks through church windows, drawing horns and a tail on Hitler's picture: pranksters. And that's how we won the war. You probably stopped the invading forces by putting banana peels in the streets. Our heroes.

CARL

How do you dare to say such a thing?

WINNIE

It's time to grow up now, Carl. You're home. Your hosts have had it already, they gave up, the party's over. Now you have to get down to the really serious business, like coming home and taking care of your family. Look at it this way, Carl. You've got it a lot easier than it could have been. Now it's only one son to worry about.

CARL

Don't start.

WINNIE

I'm not starting anything. I'm just saying it's easier for you. One less responsibility.

CARL

Yes, you are starting, I can tell. This is why you shouldn't drink, Winnie. I knew this'd happen. You're gonna start bawling any minute.

WINNIE

I'm fine.

CARL

No you're not. You're doing that thing: you start looking up at the ceiling like the chandelier's gonna fall on your head.

WINNIE

Give me a minute.

(A pause)

I'll be fine. I'm just slowing down now, my head has stopped racing. It's just I have so much to say and for some reason I feel like there's no time to say it. But that's ridiculous. We can take our time. I'm feeling better now. The music helps.

CARL

You better call that waiter; cancel your drink.

WINNIE

The liquor helps. It's just... my head is like a stew right now. I had all the ingredients in neat little clusters, and now it's all tossed together any which way; I can't tell what anything is. I knew what I had to say. I rehearsed it, even. Ah, well. I should've made a list.

CARL

Well, I'll start then. I'll go easy so you can catch up, okay, Winnie? Nothing too hard at first.

WINNIE

Yes?

CARL

Now why couldn't you leave the kid with Trudy?

WINNIE

The kid.

CARL

Jimmy. Sorry. Why couldn't he stay with Trudy?

WINNIE

I've left Mamma in the lurch as it is. You know this is her busiest time. Then, to leave and have her take care of a baby as well, well, I couldn't ask her.

CARL

Ach. You listen to Trudy, every day of the year is her busiest time.

WINNIE

I didn't expect to be gone this long. This is why I'm so discombobulated, Carl. You've thrown me all off schedule. Mamma's all alone in the bakery now, there's only me to help her. I wrote you about Fritzie going off with the clerk from the A & P, didn't I? Yes, I wrote you about that. And Anna. Well, I don't need to tell you about Anna. She's like she was when you left, only worse. I don't know what she thinks she's doing. Well, she's killing Mamma, but aside from that, I don't know what she hopes to get out of it all. Except maybe a new dress and a steak dinner. You know, the night before I left, she didn't come home until three-fifteen? I could hear her on the porch, giggling, fumbling with her keys. I could hear them kiss goodnight. Then, they start in on the moaning and groaning. Just like animals. The whole neighborhood was probably watching.

WINNIE (CONTINUED)

I wasn't listening, mind you. She woke up Jimmy and he woke up me. The next morning I gave her a good talking-to, not that it did any good. So, there's just me and Mausie. And Mausie... she doesn't know whether she's coming or going half the time. She's not good for anything. So, like it or not, the bakery's mine. Or at least it will be someday.

(A long pause)

CARL

What do you want me to say? Goody?

WINNIE

I don't want you to say anything. I'm just remembering what I have to do. So we can get down to the matter at hand.

CARL

Don't you sound important.

(The WAITER returns)

WAITER

Excuse me.

CARL

Oh, geez. I don't know whether you should butt in right now, buddy. I think my wife's gonna drop the bomb.

(HE laughs. The WAITER smiles, serves food)

WINNIE

Carl, be quiet.

CARL

You got a wife?

WAITER

No, sir.

CARL

Smart man.

(The WAITER gives WINNIE her drink)

WAITER

Will there be anything else?

WINNIE

I don't think so...

CARL

(Overlapping:) Yeah, have you got a muzzle back there for my wife? Or give me earplugs. One or the other.

WINNIE

Shut up, Carl.

WAITER

Excuse me...

(HE exits)

CARL

(Shouting after him:) Better alert the medics! I might need some first aid after she gets through with me!

(A long pause. HE looks at her. His smile fades)

Sorry.

(WINNIE takes a long slug from her glass)

Winnie!

WINNIE

All right, Carl. Where have you been for the past two weeks?

CARL

What?

WINNIE

"What?"

CARL

No, I mean it. What did you say?

WINNIE

You heard me.

CARL

I don't know what you're talking about. I've spent most of the last two weeks on the ship coming home. You know that.

WINNIE

You know what I mean. The two weeks between the time you were supposed to leave and the day you arrived. There's two weeks missing in there. I've been here for three weeks waiting for you, Carl.

CARL

I don't know...

WINNIE

Oh, you know, you know! I saw it on your face when you got off the boat. You knew. And you knew that I knew. Why make such a big deal? All I'm asking is, where were you?

CARL

Oh, I know what you mean. Look, they couldn't get me on that first boat: no room. I had to wait until...

WINNIE

Don't, don't lie to me. What do you think, I'm stupid? Okay. I'll stall. I'll give you some time to think up a real good one. I'm not trying to put you on the spot, Carl. Honestly. I just think it's important that we get this out of the way before we go home. I won't make a big deal out of it. I just want you to know that I'm onto you.

CARL

How was I supposed to know you were going to come to New York? If you'd wired, if you'd sent me a letter, even...

WINNIE

I don't have time for this, Carl. As if I didn't have enough to think about as it is. I really should have made a list. In fact, that's what I'll do right now, instead of talking about it so much.

(SHE takes a pen and paper out of her purse)

First thing: this is Fair weather and Mamma always has to have a table at the one in St. Louis, and last year she went to one in Kansas City. I'm assuming she wants to go again this year. Did I tell you? Last year she won a ribbon at the State Fair.

CARL

Oh, yeah? How high were her bids?

WINNIE

She got a... what? What are you talking about?

CARL

Usually the biggest heifer fetches a higher price when you bring her into the ring.

WINNIE

(Overlapping:) Oh, yes. Very funny, Carl. She got an honorable mention in the pie category. And a blue ribbon for one of her breads. Not bad, considering one of the judges was named Goldberg. We've been able to make a nice living these past few years, in spite of everything. So: State Fair. What else? You know, it's not too early to start thinking about Thanksgiving. Pie crusts. I'm going to be up to my ears in crust. Mamma got a recipe for a mince meat that she likes a lot, so now she makes those as well as the apple and pumpkin. Pear. Which were very popular last year, for some reason. Better make twenty-five pear. What was the other thing? God, it's been in my head all day, and now of course, I can't remember. And don't think you're gonna have an easy time of it, Mister. Your work's been piling up, too. I've been saving it for you. While I'm kneading dough, you'll be putting up new wallpaper in Jimmy's room. It's terrible in there. Come to think of it, I'll make a separate list for you as well. One: wallpaper - Jimmy's room. Oh! That dinner! That's what it was. There's some bigwig political dinner at the beginning of next month, and Mamma promised she'd supply the breads. I knew it was something stupid. I told Mamma not to get involved in politics, but you know her. She's such a sucker for those things. Oh, wait, that goes on my list. We just finished all the breads for those Jewish holidays right before I left. That was a job and a half. We're still good enough to bake their bread for them, but they don't say hello to us on the street. Can you beat that? Ach, don't get me started. You know, a couple of weeks ago, I heard some idiot in the grocery store talking to her friend about our street, and she called it "the ghetto." Can you imagine? The German Ghetto, she said. I thought the point, the real point of this war was to get rid of hatred. Wasn't that it?

CARL

Not necessarily, Winnie.

WINNIE

Isn't that the point of any war? If you ask me, it's just created more. In St. Louis, at least.

CARL

I told you: you don't understand.

WINNIE

Enough, then. My list. Oh, I've got one for you. The kitchen plumbing is shot. I can't begin to tell you every little thing that's wrong, but take my word for it, it's shot. I didn't want to call anyone in though, not 'til you saw what you could fix yourself. I know you like that. So, I guess that becomes number one. And, of course, the leaves have started falling. The yard'll be a mess by the time we get home. And you know Mamma. She'll just sit there watching it all pile up around her. I'm sorry I had to miss this time of year in St. Louis. It's one of the only times it's nice. You get all that prettiness: the colored leaves, the bright, bright sunshine, the fresh crisp air - before winter comes and smacks you over the head. Of course, by the time we get home, the rain will have set in, and it'll be nothing but wet leaves and puddles of mud. And we'll all have colds. But you had better things to do, I guess, so we're late.

(A pause)

I don't know why I get so sad this time of year. I don't know if it's just the leaves falling, the dread of winter. Or if it's that and the memory... I don't know. I'm trying to remember how I used to feel at this time of year... But I can't. It's only five years, but I can't remember.

CARL

You're starting, Winnie. I'll leave.

WINNIE

I'm not starting, Carl. It's just another thing on my list. Here, Carl. Your list is done. Of course, when we get home, I'm sure you'll find a hundred other things, and then I'll find things, but that's it for now.

CARL

So there's no rush. I mean, you've made do without me for four years; this can wait a little longer.

WINNIE

Well, no, but. What are you saying?

CARL

It's not like we have to leave tomorrow, or anything.

WINNIE

Yes. Tomorrow. Yes, we do. The day after, at the very latest.

CARL

Oh, I don't know...

WINNIE

What are you thinking of, Carl? Of course we have to get home. I mean, aside from all these piddly little things, Jimmy has school, for one.

CARL

They have schools here, too, you know.

WINNIE

What is the matter with you? What, we're going to put him in a new school until you decide you want to go home? Don't be ridiculous. Besides, the first thing on MY list, the reason I have to go home: Sunday is the fifth anniversary of Freddie's death, and when those cemetery gates open at seven o'clock, I intend to be there.

CARL

You're drunk. I warned you twice. I won't listen.

WINNIE

I can talk about it, Carl. You don't seem to understand that I can talk about it without having a breakdown. I've gotten over most of it; I'm not like I was. I go to the cemetery. It helps me. It's really... it's beautiful there.

CARL

It's a bone yard.

WINNIE

Yes, I know what it is. It can still be beautiful. Well, you were only there once, right? That was the only time, and that was in November, and that doesn't count. In spring, it's different. Wait'll you see. You walk in through the main gates; it's like entering another world. Well, first of all, it's in that miserable section of town, as you know. You turn away from the highway and those run-down row houses and first, you see the trees. And the rolling sweep of the lawns. You walk in and after ten steps, you can breathe again. The exhaust fumes and the stench from the factories is taken over by roses and the fresh-cut grass. Then, as you walk further in, with each step a bad muffler on the highway is overpowered by the call of a blue jay. A car horn turns into a chirping cricket. The rumble of the slaughterhouse is replaced by the tinkle of the water fountain. And you're in. It's all behind you. Sometimes I go and I don't even visit Freddie's grave. I go just to go. I bring a book and I sit under a tree. Sometimes I bring Jimmy and he feeds the ducks in the duck pond.

CARL

Don't you have anything better to do?

WINNIE

What, better? What would you have me do? Sit at home with my ear pressed up against the radio, like Mrs. Yaegle next door? Get my fingernails painted at the beauty parlor when I know I'll be alone on Saturday night?

CARL

There must be things you could do...

WINNIE

There are. This is it. I'm telling you. It makes me forget. I forget that my husband left me to run around Europe killing people....

CARL

Awww, Winnie...

WINNIE

You just have to see it to understand. I always keep fresh flowers on Freddie's grave; there's always something growing there. Which reminds me: my list. I have some marigolds in the backyard that I want to transplant. And then, the gladiola bulbs need to be removed for the winter, or the squirrels will get to them. Then I need to put down the tulip and the daffodil bulbs. I think, and not to brag, but Freddie has one of the nicest plots in the whole cemetery. Wait'll you see. It's on a little hill, if you remember, and at the foot of the grave, there's a stone wall... Let me show you. This paper is too small - let me have that menu.

(SHE takes the menu and draws on the back)

Here: the grave is here. And then, there's a big willow tree over here, which keeps it nice and shady. It lets the sun in, mind you, but the sun doesn't beat down on you all day, like the rest of the cemetery. Then here, there's a stone wall, and at the base of the wall, there's a pond, like this. And they have two white swans in the pond who glide back and forth all day long. I usually sit here, on the wall, and look at the water. And the swans. There are always flower petals floating on the water. And if you look straight out, you can see the whole cemetery spread out before you for a good long ways. And only if you squint and look very carefully, at the bottom of the hill, very far away, you can just see the tip of smokestack sticking out.

(A pause)

A lot of times I just sit and watch the other people who come there. I know them all. Not by name, necessarily, but I know them. There are some, just a few, who come every day, or every other day, like me. Mostly women. But they don't stay as long as I do. There are some who come once a week, Sundays usually, or once a month, or just for holidays. These people don't usually stay very long. They just drop the flowers, bow their heads, and jump back in the car as fast as they can. We never speak to each other. A nod, maybe. It's like a rule. But still, I know who they are. And sometimes, after they leave, when I know they've gone, I'll sneak over and look at their graves. And for the most part, I can figure out who they've been visiting. There's one fairly young woman who comes there about as often as I do. I've decided the man on the headstone must be her husband. He died young: only twenty-seven. Of course, it could be her brother, but I doubt it. He died only last year, so I suppose that's why she's there every day. You mark my words: her visits will slow down now that it's been over a year. We'll see. Sometimes I go there and there's a funeral in progress. Whenever that happens, I always keep a keen eye there to see how long it takes before somebody shows up with flowers. Sometimes the next day. Sometimes months, sometimes never. You'd be surprised.

WINNIE (CONTINUED)

There's one group, a whole family, that drives out every Sunday after church. They all pile out, they bring flowers, the adults pray, the children run around playing tag, they bring out a basket with food, and have a picnic. Italians, probably. Then they all pile in this beat-up Plymouth and drive off. I figure it must be Grandma. There's another older woman who visits her husband. And when I snuck over to take a look at that headstone I saw the man's name, and next to it, his wife's name with her birthdate and a dash. Then the number nineteen. It's reserved for her, and they're waiting to fill in the last two numbers. From the look of her, they might as well put in the four. Last week, I noticed someone I had never seen before. A woman and a little girl, about seven years old. At first, I thought they were visiting her husband - the little girl's father, and I felt sad. After they left, I went over and saw that it was the grave of a little boy who died last month, who died when he was seven. And then I realized that the woman was his mother and the little girl was not only his sister, but his twin. And I cried.

(SHE cries. A pause)

And when I left that day, I began to wonder. I wondered if people watched me there. If they saw me, sitting by Freddie's grave. If they waited until I left, if they snuck over and looked at the stone. If they realized that he was my son, that he died when he was five years old, and if they cried. I wonder if they think sad thoughts for me.

(A very long pause)

I've done a terrible thing, Carl. I'm sure you'll throw one of your tantrums and yell and scream that it's a terrible extravagance, but I might as well tell you now and get it over with. While you were away, I don't know whether you heard about it, but they were rationing gasoline. We'd get these coupons that entitled us to a certain amount. Well, Mamma and I don't really use the car that much, in fact, hardly ever. I really had no use for these coupons, and at the end of the month, I'd usually throw them out. But then, you remember Mamma's nephew Bubbi? He told me there were people who'd be willing to buy them from me. So I gave him all these ration coupons, he sold them, he gave me the money, after taking his cut. I even said we needed more, since we had the bakery and had to make deliveries. And I got them. I knew that maybe it wasn't the most honest thing to do, but I wasn't hurting anyone. Besides, if anyone were to get into trouble over it, it would've been Bubbi. Besides, people have done worse things and gotten away with it. Anyway, I saved up all this money that Bubbi got for me, and I bought three plots: the three plots next to Freddie. I was able to get them. Look:

(SHE draws on the back of the menu)

See? You'll be here, right next to the willow tree, and I'll be here, between you and Freddie. And Jimmy will be next to Freddie, but I don't think we'll have to worry about that... I thought it best to get them now, just in case. Well, you know, in case. What's the matter with you Carl? You got St. Vitas' Dance?

CARL

No, I love it. Tell me more. What else? Did you turn the bakery into a funeral home while I was gone? Let me have my list. Wallpaper - Jimmy's room. What color did you have in mind? Black? Why don't we throw out our double bed and sleep in two coffins, huh?

WINNIE

My God, Carl...

CARL

Boy. I think of that saying: "How're ya gonna keep the boy down on the farm..." The hell with that, I'll take the farm; you wanna bring me home to a cemetery. Get this map the hell out of my face.

(HE tears up the menu)

What a great welcome home present, Winnie. A cemetery plot. It sure is original, I'll give you that.

WINNIE

Come on, Carl. Let's go.

CARL

Jesus Christ Almighty. I've been seeing nothing but death and dying for four years. Can't you talk about nothing else?

WINNIE

Carl, I'm finished here. Let's not talk about it now. Get the check, please.

CARL

No, no, I wanna talk about it now. No more of your rules: you've been hogging the floor too long. My rules now. It's my turn and I say what goes. And you sit down and you listen, or I'll walk out of here. And I mean it. I'll walk out and I won't come back. I mean ever. I won't even look back. You got me?

(A pause. WINNIE stares at him)

All right, then. Sit down and clam up. Geez, and you wonder where I was. Why I didn't come home right away and run into your arms.

WINNIE

Oh? Are you ready at last to tell me? To tell me, or just throw me another lie?

CARL

Jesus, Winnie, shut up. I mean it, shut the hell up. What difference does it make where I was? I was someplace where I got to talk for a change. How's that? What does it matter where I was? I don't even remember anymore.

WINNIE

That figures.

CARL

I got listened to, that's all that mattered to me. And we didn't sit around talking about corpses. Okay? I didn't want to come home. Can you understand that? I knew what I'd be in for. This. You.

(A pause. WINNIE opens her mouth to speak)
I'm not finished. Shut up. You don't seem to have any idea what I went through over there, do you? What I did for you.

WINNIE

For me?

CARL

Yeah, you. Everyone. I've seen nothing but death for four years. All my friends, people I cared about. One guy, one night, we split a pack of cigarettes. Next morning, he's dead. No legs. No face. We recognize him from a ring on his finger.

WINNIE

Why are you doing this?

CARL

You started it; you're the one who wants to talk about funerals. This is what it's really like, Winnie. We didn't have any funerals over there, Winnie. They got shoved in sacks and were sent home, Winnie. Closed coffins, no make-up, no flowers all around. After all, you can't open the coffin when all that's left is an arm.

WINNIE

You're just trying to make me sick, is that it?

CARL

Goddammit, Winnie!

(HE stands)

I'm gonna leave if you don't let me talk.

WINNIE

But you're not talking, Carl, you're yelling, you're just yelling at me...

CARL

I'm just trying to get you to see that after four years, I've had enough. I risked my life. I did a good thing. I was a hero. We all were. And everyone seems to agree. Everyone but you.

(A pause)

CARL (CONTINUED)

And then you wanna bring me back to that house of crepe-hangers. Tell me, does your mother still read the obituaries first thing in the morning? Does she still smell like mothballs? The last time I saw her, she was sitting at the kitchen table, eating beets, letting the juice run out of her mouth and dribble down her chin. Does she still do that? And Fritzie. Oh, no, Fritzie's gone. At least you won't have to put up with those hour-long reports on her upset stomach and her ingrown toenails. I'll never forget those days I'd come into the kitchen and say good morning and Fritzie'd look at me like she just swallowed a tooth. And Mausie. Mausie and her scissors, cutting out those things in the newspaper about hatchet murders and Chinese abortion parlors. Does Mausie still have that picture of Jesus over the bed, the one with all the blood?

WINNIE

Don't you pick on Mausie. She can't help it.

CARL

And yet you all pick on poor Anna. Anna, who only wants to have a little fun. You'd think after serving time in that mortuary, you'd let her out of her wooden kimono and look the other way. But no, you have to pick holes in her just because she dares to enjoy herself. Oh, but I've forgotten. You don't allow any fun in that house. Hell, the way I remember it, you don't allow any fun in St. Louis. Ooooooh, I can't tell you how homesick I was, Winnie. What else did I miss? I sure missed those Thursday afternoon pinochle games for all the neighborhood widows. All that lively conversation. And the livestock in the backyard, I sure missed that. Do you still have to get the goats out of Mrs. Yaegle's flower bed every single morning? Does that goddamn rooster still crow at two A.M.? I tell you, that's why Anna stays out 'til three. She just wants to get some sleep. And those filthy rabbit hutches. Are they still there? So your mother can make that lousy hasenpfeffer with half the fur still on? Who else did I miss back there? The pig. Oh, but that pig must be dead by now.

WINNIE

No, Carl. The pig isn't dead.

CARL

Yeah, it figures. He's gonna hang around forever, making people miserable, like everyone else in the neighborhood. It must be something in the water. Tell me, Winnie, are all the neighbors still eighty year-old widows?

WINNIE

No, Carl, they're not.

(A pause)

No, as a matter of fact, a new couple moved in across the street about a year ago. Mrs. Bartsch finally passed away.

CARL

Awwww...

WINNIE

They're very nice and you'll like them. They have a little girl around Jimmy's age, and the husband likes to go bowling on Saturdays. He's an auto mechanic. You'll like him. And her, oh, I'm sure you'll like her. She does nothing but smile all the time.

CARL

If he's so great, why wasn't he in the army?

WINNIE

I guess because he has a wife and child to take care of; he knew where his duty lay. He didn't go jump on the bandwagon in spite of everyone's better judgment, Carl.

CARL

Let me tell you a little story, Winnie.

WINNIE

Also, he has a bum leg.

CARL

The whole time I was overseas, I never ran into anyone else from St. Louis. Not once. Until about a week before I came home. I was in a bar in Paris. Paris, Winnie. Paris, France.

WINNIE

Was this the week you were supposed to be home? The week you should've been with me?

CARL

I ran into this guy from St. Louis. I didn't know him. It just came out. We were both getting ready to go home, I asked him where he was going, he asked me, you know. Anyway, we started talking about it. He wasn't married, but he had a girl waiting for him. And for the first time, I really started to get homesick. I thought about you. He talked about his girlfriend, how he'd take her to Forest Park, and I started thinking about our time there. And just when I was really missing you the most, we started talking about what we were going to do for work, and I told him I worked in the bakery. "Oh, the Krazy Krauts," he said. "You work for the Krazy Krauts." He knew the place. He knew you, knew your mother. You'll be happy to know the bakery is now famous in Paris. And he laughed and laughed. When he started asking if you used gas ovens in the bakery, that's when I walked out. The Krazy Krauts.

WINNIE

You're a kraut too, Carl.

CARL

No, I am not. Not like you. I proved myself. I proved I'm an American.

WINNIE

Please, Carl, I won't get into it with you.

(SHE waves for the WAITER)

CARL

And I don't have to prove anything to you. They were the enemy. Cut and dried. Nothing else comes into it, as far as I'm concerned, as far as they taught me. It's just good guys and bad guys. You can't be of two minds, or you're a dead man. You got it?

WINNIE

I want to leave now.

CARL

I'm not finished with you.

WINNIE

You can finish at the hotel. On the train tomorrow.

(SHE stands. The WAITER enters)

WAITER

Anything else, ma'am?

WINNIE

No, Joe. Thank you. I think we'd like the check.

(The WAITER bows, exits)

Good lord, when I think of all the work, I could just... We have to put up the winter preserves, I forgot to put that on my list. One more thing. What's that look for? Yes, you think it's silly now, but you'll be the first to complain when there's no raspberry jam for your toast in February. And doughnuts. God, I forgot about doughnuts. We should've left yesterday.

CARL

You used to be so much fun, Winnie. What happened?

WINNIE

I guess I grew up.

CARL

I don't get you. I mean, all you do, all day long, is complain. About St. Louis, your mother, everything under the sun. We could do something about it. I mean, if you're not happy... I'm not happy there. Why should we go back? I mean, if you hate it so much, why don't you, we, start over?

WINNIE

Because I am forty years old, Carl. You are forty years old.

CARL

What kind of a reason is that? That's no good.

WINNIE

It is the only reason there need be. It has taken me forty years to get to this point. For the past forty years my head was filled with a thousand questions about what I'm supposed to do here, what this life is all about. Now, I've finally got enough of the answers, enough that I can live with myself. And you. And our son. That is our life. And yet you want to throw it all away and start from scratch, as if these past forty years have taught us nothing. And this new life you've got planned for us: what happens when you get bored? When those same questions start popping up again? Just because you don't understand something, Carl, you don't just throw it away and keep running. Sit down with me and we'll figure it out and I'll help you if I can.

(The WAITER returns with the check)

Oh. Thank you, Joe.

WAITER

Yes, ma'am. I just thought you'd like to know it's started to rain, ma'am.

WINNIE

Oh, dear...

WAITER

If you'd like for me to call a taxi-cab...

WINNIE

How long will it last, do you think?

(The WAITER shrugs)

Well, if you don't need the table, would it be all right if we stayed? Just until it's clear?

WAITER

Certainly.

WINNIE

Thank you.

(The WAITER bows, exits)

Oh, look, Carl. Isn't that pretty?

(SHE picks something off the table)

They give you this when they give you the check. That's very nice.

CARL

What is it?

WINNIE

Those pretty colored almonds. You know, like you get at a wedding. And in a little basket.

(SHE starts to tie it up in her napkin)

CARL

What are you doing?

WINNIE

I'm wrapping it up to take back as a present for Jimmy. He loves things like this.

CARL

Some present. A little lace basket with some pink almonds. You give that to a boy?

(A pause. SHE stares at him)

WINNIE

Carl, if they put a football on the table, I'd bring him a football.

CARL

No, I mean it. I wish I'd known this was the way you were raising him. I'd have brought him back some decent presents.

WINNIE

Oh, I have no doubt. Some tear-gas, maybe? Maybe one of Hitler's fingers? Or a swastika armband. A souvenir off some dead kraut.

CARL

Winnie, shut up.

WINNIE

You'd be just like one of those idiot-women I see in the park, I'm sure of it. They give their little boys guns to play with. Baby-blue pistols. Little tin tommy guns. And they sit there, rooting, cheering them on to do this kind of thing. "Go get 'em! Kill 'em! Knock 'em down, don't you let him get away with that!" What fun. And then they laugh. Oh, so funny. "Isn't he cute?" Carl, don't you laugh too. It's absolutely disgusting.

CARL

They're just playing, Winnie. God, what an old grouch you are.

WINNIE

And is this any better than what they said about the Hitler Youth? At least Hitler had the sense to give his children the genuine article. And real bullets. They don't think it's some kind of game. He taught them early.

CARL

Well, that's what those ladies are doing. Teaching 'em.

WINNIE

"Go kill a German for Mommy, and she'll give you a cookie." What kind of a lesson is that? Once, I told one of those women what I thought and we almost came to blows. Our husbands are off getting themselves killed in this stupid war, and back home we're wrestling in the playground dirt.

CARL

I'm not warning you again.

WINNIE

Warning me?

CARL

Don't call the war stupid.

WINNIE

It is stupid.

CARL

Not this war.

WINNIE

Ach. This war, that war. It's all stupid, in my opinion. My son has better things to do. I teach him, I show him the good things his heritage has produced. When he gets insulted every day by the radio, the newspapers, I play him Beethoven. Brahms. Mendelssohn. I give him the great composers. The great literature. Our philosophers. Everyone tries to ignore that now. They call us names with their mouths full of tube steak and liberty cabbage.

(SHE laughs)

If we're here, I'm having another drink. Joe!

CARL

Winnie, you're gonna get worse.

WINNIE

Oh, you can drink too, forget the rules, I don't care anymore.

(The WAITER approaches)

Joe, I'd like another drink. This time though, give me a shot of whiskey with the soda on the side. Carl?

CARL

Nothing. I don't want anything.

(The WAITER bows, exits)

Winnie...

WINNIE

I play him the Austrians, too. The Viennese. I'm not biased. He seems to like Wagner the best. I guess because it's loud.

CARL

Winnie...

(A long pause)

I'm not going.

WINNIE

What? Well, no, neither am I. Not while it's raining.

CARL

No, Winnie. I'm not going back to St. Louis is what I meant. I can't. Well, no, I can. I mean I won't. I won't go back to St. Louis with you. Ha-ha.

WINNIE

Oh, ha-ha to you. Stop being so silly.

CARL

I mean it, Winnie. I'm not going back, not if you put a gun to my head. You see, I look at it as: I'm only forty years old. And I'm not going to do what you say, staying in one place, swaying back and forth, too scared to take a step forward.

WINNIE

Better than to step backward.

CARL

You don't take me seriously, do you?

WINNIE

An understatement.

CARL

You see, Winnie, I thought I had no choice. I thought I had to go back to St. Louis, whether I wanted to or not. But I don't. I don't! I can go anywhere I want. I made friends all over this country, and I have an open invitation with all of them. Wherever I want to go, I have a place to stay. I have a friend in Colorado. Do you know how beautiful it is there?

WINNIE

No. Neither do you.

CARL

I've seen pictures! I know. Or Florida. I could live there for a while. Florida is like a paradise, Winnie. Warm all the time. And I'm supposed to give all that up for a bakery? How can I?

WINNIE

The bakery's warm all the time, too.
(SHE laughs)

CARL

You can say what you want about it, Winnie; the Army opened my eyes.

WINNIE

And took out your brain, too. What about us, Carl? Me and Jimmy. I suppose these are such good friends they'll open their doors to you and to your wife and to your son? They see the two of us tagging along, they'll lock their doors and turn out the lights. You didn't think about that, did you?

CARL

Yeah, I thought about it.

WINNIE

Oh, yes? And what did you decide?

CARL

I'm going alone. I don't need you along with me. I can do it by myself. I guess I have to. I don't need you anymore, Winnie.

(A long pause)

Besides, I just couldn't go back to that house. I can't live with Trudy anymore, having to answer to her. It makes me feel like a kid.

WINNIE

You are a kid. A baby!

CARL

I am not!

(A pause)

So...

WINNIE

When did you decide all this, Carl? Those two weeks you disappeared? Out on the town, three o'clock in the morning, you thought, "What do I need with old Winnie? And 'the kid.'" What if I hadn't been here, Carl? Waiting for you? What if I'd just stayed in St. Louis? What would you have done, just sent me a telegram? "I'm not coming home." Period.

CARL

No, Winnie. I was planning to come home. It's all your fault, if you wanna know the truth. I thought I'd gotten it out of my system and I was ready to come home. But you had to meet my ship. This was all your idea, remember. You helped me decide. You made me see I can't go back there.

WINNIE

I see. Well, then. Goodbye.

CARL

Awww, Winnie. Don't get like that.

WINNIE

Like what? You said you want to leave. Go on, get the hell out of here.

CARL

I'll bring you back to the hotel.

WINNIE

No, you're not going to the hotel.

CARL

Well, we can still all have dinner.

WINNIE

No.

CARL

I didn't mean I was leaving this second. Just tonight, and tomorrow I'll see you to the train.

WINNIE

No.

CARL

What, you mean I can't at least stay the night?

WINNIE

No.

CARL

I have to pick up my things.

No. WINNIE

CARL
You have to let me see Jimmy before I go.

No. WINNIE

Jesus, Winnie. CARL

WINNIE
No, Carl. If this is the way you want to do this, I'm not going to make it easy for you. You just go.

CARL
You just want me to leave? Now?

WINNIE
You're the one who wants to leave.

CARL
Okay. If this is the way you wanna do it.

WINNIE
Don't give me that.

(A long pause)

CARL
Listen, once I get settled somewhere, I'll send for my things.

WINNIE
Your things?

CARL
In St. Louis.

WINNIE
Send, nothing. You can come out to St. Louis and pick up whatever the river hasn't washed downstream.

(A long pause)

CARL
Maybe I didn't make myself clear. I'm just saying I need some time by myself. Once everything is settled, I'll send for you and Jimmy.

WINNIE
Fine.

CARL
I realize I've been terrible about this. I didn't do it the right way. But I had to. Come on. I'll pay the check, and I'll see you to a taxi. At least let me do that.

WINNIE

I don't think I can stand up. I'd like to stay for a while, anyway. I enjoy the music. But you go.

(HE stands, crosses to her)

Don't kiss me.

(BLACKOUT.

The music stops. A long pause. The HEADWAITER lights a match in the dark)

HEADWAITER

Don't be alarmed. I'm so sorry. Please forgive this. I think... Joe, is it just us?

WAITER

I think so, sir.

HEADWAITER

It isn't a total blackout. It just seems we've blown a fuse... or something. Everything's under control.

(The HEADWAITER lights two candles on the piano. To the PIANIST:)

Play something.

(HE plays. The other MUSICIANS leave the stage. The HEADWAITER rushes about, lighting candles. The WAITER goes to WINNIE and CARL and lights the candle on their table)

WAITER

I'm sorry for the inconvenience.

CARL

What's happened?

WAITER

Oh, this has been happening on and off. We get overloaded. Probably the rain had something to do with it. The wires are old; we haven't been able to get a decent electrician in years. The lights should be on in a minute.

WINNIE

Bring me a drink.

WAITER

Yes, ma'am.

(HE exits. A long pause)

CARL

God, Winnie. Let's get outta here. I feel like I'm back in an air-raid shelter.

(A long pause)

Let's go, I said.

WINNIE

What makes you think I'd have taken you back, Carl? You take an awful lot for granted. How do you know I didn't come to New York to say goodbye to you?

CARL

Very funny.

WINNIE

Funny?

CARL

Well, you'd have said it before now. Don't try to get even with me.

WINNIE

What makes you think Mamma would even allow you in her house after what you've done? How do you think she could live with you, that I could? Are you accountable for your actions? Do you have an alibi? I'm afraid I'd need to know before I'd let you so much as touch me again. How do we know that you're not the one that pushed the button that dropped the bomb that killed my grandmother? The morning she ignored the sirens on her way to church?

CARL

That was the Air Force.

WINNIE

Air Force, Marines, what the hell difference does it make? You're all the same bunch of hoodlums. How do I know you're not the one who was waiting behind the door when my Uncle Ollie opened his shop in the morning? The nephews I never met, lying in their graves; how do I know you're not the one who put them there? If not you, it was one of you, that's all that matters. That seems to be the opinion at home these days. You're all responsible. I was born in this country, I'm an American, and yet I'm held responsible for the whims of a madman thousands of miles away. Somebody who thought he was better than everybody else. But isn't that what you think? Isn't that what your General told you to say to yourself when you pushed my aunt down a flight of stairs? That's what they think in St. Louis, when they throw bricks through the bakery windows. When they paint a swastika on the gates to the cemetery. They think that's funny. It gets written up on page sixty-three of the newspaper this big. They hate us there; we're all afraid. No one goes out anymore. And I'm not about to bring that kind of hatred right into the house. With a Welcome Home sign, no less.

(A pause)

WINNIE (CONTINUED)

My God, my God. When you wrote me you were coming home, I couldn't wait. I only thought of it as Carl, just Carl, my husband who I haven't seen in four years. I see those pictures in Life Magazine, the soldiers kissing their wives in the middle of the street. I wanted to be here. I thought that would be us. But we could do them one better. We have Jimmy. And I stood on the dock with the rest of them, watching that boat come in, that boat you weren't even on, waving, blowing kisses, I stuck a flag in Jimmy's hand, we sang patriotic songs... When I think of it now, I could... Well, I could just kill myself. I was an idiot. I should have prayed the Germans had just one more bomb, and they were saving it for you.

(A long pause)

And all your high talk about being a hero, you saved the world singlehandedly. You don't even have courage enough to face your wife. God, you're a coward, and don't let anybody try to tell you different. A coward.

(A long pause)

CARL

I gotta make a phone call.

WINNIE

Are you coming back?

CARL

I just gotta find a place to stay tonight.

(HE exits. WINNIE is alone)

WINNIE

Yes, you find a place. You make your plans...

(The WAITER returns with her drink)

WAITER

Ma'am.

WINNIE

Thank you. And I'll want another. Is it...?

WAITER

Raining? Yes, ma'am.

WINNIE

I'm going to be here awhile.

(The WAITER bows, exits. CARL re-enters)

CARL

All set.

WINNIE

Are you in love with someone else? Is that it? Is there someone else?

CARL

No. No one in particular.

(A long pause. WINNIE looks at him)

WINNIE

Why didn't you die, Carl?

(A pause)

Why couldn't you have died? They've been clearing a whole new acre of land at the cemetery. I've been watching. And they've been planting the boys there as they get sent home. A whole plot of land, as far as you can see. Waiting for you. And I'd have visited you every day, I'd have kept you company. It would have been so much easier. At least I'd know where you were.

(A long pause)

They'll have drained the pond by the time I get home. They'll have sent the swans back to the zoo.

(SHE downs her whiskey)

CARL

Let's go now.

WINNIE

I'm going to stay a little bit longer. I like the music.

CARL

I can't just leave you here. Let me see you back to the hotel.

WINNIE

I said no. I don't want to see you leave. I won't look at your back. I'll tell you what I want.

CARL

Yes?

(WINNIE stands)

WINNIE

I want you to dance with me.

CARL

Dance? You're drunk.

WINNIE

Remember how we used to dance at the beer-garden around the corner?

CARL

Winnie, I'm not going to start doing a polka.

WINNIE

No, Carl. We used to do the slow dances, too. I remember that. Just listen to the music. Sway with me. I'm going to keep my eyes closed. Just hold onto me and, at some point, let go and leave. Don't tell me you're going, don't say goodbye, just do it. I don't want to know, my eyes will be closed. It makes it easy for you. And easier for me.

CARL

If that's what you want.

WINNIE

Come.

(SHE takes him to the center of the dance floor, puts her arms around him, and THEY begin to sway to the music. SHE closes her eyes and keeps them closed. Slowly, THEY begin to move into something that looks more like dancing. CARL swings her out, so that only their hands are touching. HE misses the downbeat; THEY don't come together. HE looks at the doorway. WINNIE's brow wrinkles. A pause. HE swings her back in and THEY dance. WINNIE smiles, holding him tighter. The WAITER moves about the room, blowing out the candles on the tables. Suddenly, CARL breaks from her, tosses money on the table and exits. WINNIE stays where she is, swaying slightly, her eyes closed, her arms outstretched as if still holding him. The WAITER extinguishes all the candles)

BLACKOUT

TANGO

CAST OF CHARACTERS

JAMES, 25 years old

TAMARA, 65 years old

A HEADWAITER

A WAITER

FIVE MUSICIANS - Piano, Accordion, Violin, Viola, Cello

TIME

October 31, 1965. After dinner.

PLACE

The Palm Court of a large hotel in New York City.

(The WAITER strikes a match in the dark and lights the candle on the table. Lights come up full. A third chair has been placed at this particular table. JAMES is already seated at the table, two empty rocks glasses in front of him. HE holds a third)

WAITER
There, now. That's better, huh?

JAMES
And I'd like another brandy, when you get a chance.

WAITER
Of course. I haven't been ignoring you, please understand. It's just... As you can see, we've very busy these days.

JAMES
Whenever you get a chance.

WAITER
It will only be a moment, sir. We try to have everything ready, under control... it just seems impossible. What I wouldn't give to sit down, you know?

(JAMES laughs politely)

JAMES
Yes, it does seem busier than usual.

WAITER
You don't know the half. Just look around. Tables unmade, people leave without paying... there just isn't enough time in the day, it seems.

JAMES
What is it, tourists?

WAITER
Oh, it's everyone. You see, they made that movie here, and now we're very popular. They seem to think it's... you know, chic all of a sudden. And we can't pay as much attention to our regulars, you know, you and Mrs. Raines. Not as much as we'd like.

JAMES
It'll pass.

WAITER
I certainly hope so. We were overstaffed for so long, now that it's so busy the manager is either too proud or too cheap to hire more help. And nothing gets done, as you can see.

JAMES
Umm-hmm...

WAITER

Of course, I'm bringing home more money these days, but that's not the point, you know? I've half a mind to quit. If my wife didn't enjoy her shopping so much.

(HE laughs. JAMES smiles)

You see, sir, it's the type of people we get in here these days. You know? I find I spend half my time scraping chewing gum from underneath the tables. Did you see the movie?

JAMES

No, not yet.

WAITER

I'm in it, you know. Just for a bit. And the busboy got up and left yesterday, meaning I have all of his work besides...

JAMES

Well, maybe you should do some of it. And then you can bring me my drink.

(A pause)

WAITER

Yes, sir. Excuse me.

(HE bows, exits. The music plays. JAMES lights a cigarette. At an effective point in the music, TAMARA enters the Palm Court. SHE stands at the entrance to the room, surveying all, dressed in designer widow's weeds. SHE spots JAMES. The HEADWAITER approaches, but SHE has no time for him. SHE fumbles with the velvet rope that cordons her off from the restaurant. JAMES sees her and stands. The HEADWAITER untangles the rope for her and SHE rushes into the room. SHE stumbles, but keeps going, practically falling into JAMES' arms. HE rights her, takes her hand as if to kiss it. SHE stares at him)

TAMARA

What is this bullshit?

(SHE pulls her hand away. SHE grabs his head with both her hands and kisses him strongly on the mouth. The kiss lasts for a good long time and the HEADWAITER looks away. Finally, JAMES ends the kiss, laughing)

JAMES

Tamara, really.

TAMARA

What? What is it, darling?

(SHE takes his hands, begins to sway to the music, begins to pull him closer)

JAMES

This is a restaurant.

TAMARA

Oh, bullshit. Let them look.

(SHE kisses him again, with less violence)

JAMES

You're supposed to be in mourning...

TAMARA

Who are we kidding? They all know; everyone knows.
(SHE rips off her hat and veil, throws it on
the table)

No more pretending. I don't have to say you're my nephew, my
hairdresser, the telephone repairman, no, not anymore. It's
over.

JAMES

Let's sit down at least, please.

TAMARA

You've been drinking already.

JAMES

Oh? I have?

TAMARA

I can smell it on you.

JAMES

So?

TAMARA

So, nothing. You started without me. That's very unfair of you.
Who's the third chair for?

(JAMES takes the back of her chair to seat
her. SHE turns around and kisses him)
One more, and I'll stop. I can't help myself.

JAMES

Would you sit down? And behave?

TAMARA

(Smacking her lips:) Mmmmmm, brandy. The good stuff, too.

JAMES

Are you deliberately trying to be disgusting?

TAMARA

Oh, humor me, for God's sake. What's the third chair?

(The WAITER approaches the table)

WAITER

Good evening, Mrs. Raines. Let me first express my deepest
sympathy...

TAMARA
(Overlapping:) Oh, yes, yes, very nice...

WAITER
...for what must be a great loss...

TAMARA
Yes, thank you...

WAITER
As you know, we were all very fond of Mr. Adams...

TAMARA
But why are you drinking brandy, darling? No, none of that.
We'll have a bottle of champagne, please.

WAITER
I just wanted you to know how deeply we...

TAMARA
Champagne, please!

WAITER
Yes, ma'am.

TAMARA
And some of the caviar, if it's fresh. You feel like caviar, my dear?

(SHE takes JAMES' hand)

WAITER
Oh. Excuse me.

(HE exits)

TAMARA
(Shouting after him:) Yes, caviar!

JAMES
It would be the decent thing to do to keep some slight vestige of respectability, you know. Keep up appearances, at least until we get up to a room.

TAMARA
Appearances, bah. You know how long I've had to keep up appearances?

JAMES
Yes, I do. But I don't suppose that'll stop you from giving me a lecture.

TAMARA
No, I won't give you a lecture. If you promise to stop scolding me.

JAMES

I just think... well, no. You just shouldn't be so... sprightly for someone who's just buried her husband. In spite of the dress, you look a little too happy.

TAMARA

Happy? Are you joking? When I tossed that first handful of sand on the coffin, I felt like jumping into the grave and doing a soft-shoe on the lid.

JAMES

A bolt of lightning is going to come down and fry you on the spot if you keep that up.
(HE laughs)

TAMARA

Well, really, I can't help it...
(SHE laughs)
You're the one who wanted to meet here. You should've known how I'd be. It's your fault, really. Why here, of all places? All this wasted time talking while we should be screwing.

JAMES

My God, I'm going to leave you here. And I mean it.
(HE laughs)
At least keep your voice down.

TAMARA

Take off your shoe and diddle me under the table; then I'll calm down.

JAMES

Tamara!
(SHE laughs)
I'd like to see you if I did.

(A pause. TAMARA jumps)

TAMARA

Stop that!

JAMES

Just as I thought. Come on, Miss Show-Off. Up on the table. Let's go to it.

TAMARA

All right, now. The waiter's coming. You've made your point. I hope you won't think I'm getting nasty, but...

(SHE takes off her cape. SHE makes quite a show of it)

JAMES

What a performance.

TAMARA

You might've helped me.

JAMES

And step in while you're doing a solo turn? You wouldn't hear of it.

TAMARA

I'm not doing anything. It's hot as an oven in here.

JAMES

And you know about ovens, of course.

TAMARA

Of, you're the one getting nasty. Or should I say getting Nazi?

(A pause)

Look, Jimmy. I've decided to forget about last week. Just forget about it. Can we agree on that?

JAMES

You mean you realized I was right after all?

TAMARA

Of course not. I just want to start anew. Things are different now. Okay, Jimmy?

(A pause)

Jimmy?

JAMES

Hmmmm?

TAMARA

Okay?

(A pause. The WAITER enters, carrying a champagne bucket and glasses. The WAITER shows the label to JAMES)

JAMES

Show her. I have no idea.

(HE shows the label to TAMARA)

WAITER

Mrs. Raines?

TAMARA

Yes, that's fine. Joe, why is it so damn hot in here?

WAITER

Oh, yes. Well, the weather's been...

TAMARA

Don't you have air-conditioning?

WAITER

Yes, ma'am, we do, as a rule. But you see, summer's gone. The manager shuts it off mid-September, and it won't be turned on again 'til June.

(HE opens the champagne)

TAMARA

But it's unbearable!

WAITER

Yes, ma'am. I know, I know, we've had nothing but complaints. It doesn't matter if the mercury hits one hundred, if the calendar says October, it's no-go. Everyone suffers.

TAMARA

Well, tell the manager for me it's intolerable. He's going to lose what few regular patrons he has.

WAITER

Yes, ma'am. Excuse me.

(HE exits)

TAMARA

We really must find another place. It was nice here once, but no more. It used to be you'd come in, the waiter was right there, you practically had the place to yourself. It's just become too popular; there isn't the time to do things the right way. Look: the palms have an inch of dust on them.

JAMES

I like it here. It's classy.

TAMARA

It was. Once. When I first came.

JAMES

This was during the Gold Rush?

(A pause. SHE stares at him)

TAMARA

Just a few years ago. When you were still sucking lollipops out in Nebraska.

JAMES

Missouri.

TAMARA

Same difference. Anyway, it was lovely. There was a group of regulars, they knew us, we were treated like royalty. With respect. That's all gone now, I guess. Look: spots on the silverware. It's like being at the Automat. And the help! They've overworked them, underpaid them. They don't give a hoot in hell anymore. Their shirt-cuffs are filthy, have you noticed? Ties on crooked, they run around as if their pants are on fire. Like being in a delicatessen. Don't drink your champagne yet! I'm going to make a toast.

JAMES

Well, I figure by the time you finish your sermon, it'll be warm as milk.

TAMARA

I'm just saying I won't come here again. There's too many people here. Listen! Listen to how noisy. And the kind of people they get in here these days, it's disgraceful. They don't know how to dress, how to behave. The women! Look at that woman - it looks like she put her make-up on with a paintbrush. And her hair. It's embarrassing. Go back to Great Neck. It's another world in here, it's so out-of-date. They don't know how to handle these upstarts who come in, acting as if they own the place.

JAMES

Well, they're your people. Cheers.

TAMARA

No, no, wait! I want to have a toast, please. A toast to you.

JAMES

Me?

TAMARA

Yes, dear. I've got some interest from Random House on your thing.

JAMES

My thing?

TAMARA

Your novel, novella, novelette, whatever you're calling it this week. So this is a celebration after all.

JAMES

If you're discussing my work, I wish you'd be a little more respectful.

TAMARA

Oh, please. You know what I meant.

JAMES

Are you like this with all your clients? "Oh, the Theatre Guild wants to produce your whatzit." "Did I tell you? I sold your dingle-dangle to Esquire."

TAMARA

I thought you'd be happy. Pardon me.

JAMES

What kind of interest?

TAMARA

Speaking of which, the last time I was here, I came for a business meeting. I thought this place would be perfect. Quiet. Good service. You know - appropriate. Well, this... boy comes up to me, he couldn't have been more than twenty, straight out of Brighton beach or someplace. He comes up to me, I don't know how he knew who I was, but that's what I get for allowing them to use my picture in that New Yorker profile. Anyway, I'm sitting here with a client, contracts all over the table, and here comes this kid. "Shalom aleichem!" he says. Shalom aleichem! In the Palm Court! "I just wanted you to... I'm a friend of such and such..." And he gives me his manuscript. And then he starts telling me what it's about, and where he lives, and any help I can give him; on and on and on. And I'm with a client! I've never been so embarrassed.

JAMES

Was it any good?

TAMARA

What was?

JAMES

The book. Was it a novel?

TAMARA

Who knows? I threw it in the first ash-can I could find. Cute as a button, though. If he hadn't been so pushy.

JAMES

Oh, Tamara, that's terrible. Probably his whole life in that book.

TAMARA

Spare me. There's such a thing as good manners; appropriate behavior.

JAMES

Yes, you're a fine one to discuss etiquette.

TAMARA

There's just... a certain way things are done. Nobody understands that anymore. A certain civility, a kind of...

JAMES

You're boring me beyond belief. May I say that?

TAMARA

Okay. You talk for a while, then. And I expect to be fascinated.

(A pause)

Go on, scintillate me.

JAMES

How about if we get down to business?

TAMARA

Now you're talking. But we can't do that here, darling; it's a public place.

JAMES

No, that's not what I mean.

TAMARA

Would you like to take this time to explain why there's another setting at the table?

JAMES

I'll get around to that eventually. Right now, I'd like to...

TAMARA

Listen, Jimmy, we're wasting time here. I forgot to tell you, we got an invitation to Laszlo's Halloween party. It's at the Carlyle this year. I'd rather not go, you know how those things are. But I know how much you enjoy those things, and I figured I'd better tell you now rather than put up with recriminations later. So. We're invited. If you want to go.

JAMES

We are?

TAMARA

Yes. Oh, you don't really want to go.

JAMES

Both our names are on the invitation?

TAMARA

What? Well, no, of course not, it was sent to the house. Oh, God. Are you getting into one of your spoiled brat moods again? I'm sure Laszlo just took it for granted that I'd be bringing you. Here, I'll show you the invitation, goddamn it anyway.

(SHE fishes in her purse)

Look. Well, look at it! It wasn't addressed to Wallace, either. Not to Mr. And Mrs. Wallace Adams. Just Tamara Raines and Guest. Now what does that tell you? Now that Wallace is... where he should be, we'll both be getting invitations. Does that make you any happier, little boy?

JAMES

I still don't see why he couldn't have addressed it to me as well. He knew Wallace was in the hospital. Or sent me one of my very own, to my apartment...

TAMARA

Oh, so he didn't, Jimmy! Who the hell cares. You're just being an imbecile as far as this is concerned, and I won't discuss it with you. Besides, I'm not going anyway, so what difference does it make? You don't want to go, do you?

JAMES

Maybe.

TAMARA

Oh, you know what it's going to be. Laszlo will be done up in one of the Countess' old ball gowns, and she'll be dressed as Kaiser Wilhelm or something, and have a carefully rehearsed monologue about how she's actually related to him. And I'll end up in a corner having my ear chewed off by Laszlo's latest protégée, the newest boy-wonder who writes poems about suicide and stories about being raped by his uncle behind the counter at the five and ten. And you'll be barefoot, singing "Mack The Knife" off-pitch and wind up passed out in the floor of the Men's Room. Well, I'm not going.

JAMES

Tamara...

TAMARA

The house is empty. Finally empty. And we have it all to ourselves. I gave Marie the rest of the week off. We haven't done it in the downstairs bathroom yet, and I've been looking forward to that all week.

JAMES

Tamara, listen. This is very sweet, really, it is, but I don't have time to waste talking dirty. I have a schedule to stick to and you're throwing me off. Now, can we please take care of business first? Then, we can do... whatever.

TAMARA

Well, first let me tell you that I think this is very rude. To make me come all the way into town. And today, of all days. Very sneaky. Now, I'm not going to get angry at you. And that's what you want, isn't it? Well, I won't. And I'm not going to discuss business with you. So there.

JAMES

Tamara, there just isn't much time.

TAMARA

Am I losing my mind, or didn't I order caviar two weeks ago? This is unbelievable.

JAMES

Well, look. He's very busy. Look, he's...
(JAMES starts to laugh)
He's like an extra in a Chaplin movie.

TAMARA

Well, if they're going to run the place like a beer-hall, I'm going to act like I'm in one.
(SHE stands. If possible, SHE might whistle through her fingers)
Hey, Joe! Over here!

JAMES

Tamara! For God's sake!

TAMARA

We're really going to have to start looking for another place to go. This won't do.

(The WAITER rushes over to the table)

WAITER

Mrs. Raines! What is it?

TAMARA

I ordered caviar a long time ago.

WAITER

Oh, is that all? Oh. I'm sorry. Really. We've run out of the caviar.

TAMARA

Run out?

WAITER

Yes, I'm sorry.

TAMARA

Well, what do you have?

WAITER

Oh, we have everything else on the menu. Except for the strawberry pie.

TAMARA

Well, no, I didn't want strawberry pie.

WAITER

We have the cheese board, with fresh fruit.

TAMARA

Cheese? Oh, no...

WAITER

Yes, a selection of four cheeses, arranged in a...

TAMARA

Oh, fine, fine, bring it. As long as we don't have to wait an hour for it.

WAITER

No, no, it's all ready.

(HE exits)

JAMES

That was nice and rude.

TAMARA

He's a waiter!

JAMES

Even so...

TAMARA

He should be used to it. He can take out his frustration on that couple from Syosset who shouldn't be here in the first place.

JAMES

You're behaving very badly tonight.

TAMARA

Well, really. No caviar. It's like going to Delmonico's and they say "No steak." We should go to the Automat from now on; at least they have everything.

JAMES

Could we please stay on one subject? It's really irritating. I have things to do tonight, and I don't have time for this nonsense. When I rang you up last week, I had intended...

TAMARA

What is that, "rang me up"?

JAMES

What now?

TAMARA

What, are you turning British all of a sudden? "Rang me up."
(With an accent:) "When you rang me up for a spot of tea, pip-pip, whoop-whoop.."

(The WAITER returns with the cheese)

WAITER

Excuse me.

TAMARA

Yes?

WAITER

Excuse me.

TAMARA

Yes, what is it?

WAITER

Hmmm? Oh, nothing. Just here's... you ordered...

TAMARA

Yes, thank you so much, you can leave it on the table and go, if you don't mind.

WAITER

Yes, excuse me.

(HE exits)

JAMES

I'm really going to put you over my knee and spank you in a minute.

TAMARA

You promise? Oh, and look at this. This dried-out slab of Muenster has been sitting in the kitchen since V-E Day. And look. The waiter's fingerprints are on it. And what they give us to cut it with. Look at this.

(SHE holds up a huge butcher knife)

They'd have done better to just put a chain-saw on the table. Why did you bring me here?

JAMES

I'd like to tell you, if you'd let me get the words out of my mouth.

TAMARA

At least the music hasn't changed. That's the only thing that's still nice. Although I'm sure next week they install the jukebox.

(SHE looks at the MUSICIANS. A long pause.

SHE jerks her head back)

Well? Would you tell me why I came so I can go?

JAMES

Well, as I said...

TAMARA

God, you're pretty.

JAMES

What?

TAMARA

Really, you are. Just now. Ooooooh, you're such a pretty boy.

(A long pause)

JAMES

Thank you.

TAMARA

Awww. I'm embarrassing you?

JAMES

Exasperating me. Besides, men shouldn't be pretty. Now would you let me talk, for chrissake? Now, when I rang you up...

TAMARA

There you go again, "rang me up."

JAMES

(Overlapping:) When I rang you up on the telly, I had intended...

(TAMARA bursts into hysterical laughter)

TAMARA

Oh, Jimmy, you are too much, really. Is this something you picked up from Laszlo? Rang me up on the telly, oh God!

(SHE guffaws)

JAMES

Tamara, I mean it, you're really steaming me.

TAMARA

If you want to act like we're at The Savoy, at least get the terminology straight. "Telly" is television, you idiot. Don't try to pretend, Jimmy. You can't pull it off. I know who you are. Where you came from. Why bother? It doesn't impress me.

JAMES

And you're so much better, I suppose? You do it too. You're just as bad.

TAMARA

I've always been honest with you.

JAMES

Oh?

TAMARA

Where are you going with this?

JAMES

"Tamara Raines, Limited." You don't even use your married name. Couldn't it be "Tamara Adams"? No, it has to be "Tamara Raines, Limited." And I suppose Raines is your maiden name, huh? Well?

TAMARA

Well?

JAMES

Is it? What's your real last name, O Queen of Honesty?

TAMARA

Something unpronounceable. Look, I have no qualms about telling you my name, if that's what all this comes down to.

JAMES

And Limited. Here in the good old U.S. of A. we say "Incorporated." "Hello, Tamara Raines, Limited. Chip-chip cheerio!" Trying to get people to believe you got your start on Savile Row, or whatever the hell it is, rather than over a burlesque house on Forty-Seventh Street. Next you'll be telling people you represented Thackeray. No, wait, you probably did.
(HE laughs)

TAMARA

Why do you have to drink so much?

JAMES

All I'm saying is, you make fun of me and you're just as bad. Probably Tamara isn't your real first name, either.

TAMARA

Please, what is all this about?

JAMES

It's probably Yetta. Or Gefilte. "Hello, Gefilte Raines, Limited."

(HE laughs)

TAMARA

Please, this is making me sick, Jimmy. Let's not get into a fight.

JAMES

I'm tired of playing footsie with the champagne. I want a real drink.

(HE waves for the WAITER)

TAMARA

Please.

(SHE grabs his arm)

Please don't, Jimmy. No more drinking.

JAMES

I want it.

(HE pulls his arm away)

TAMARA

No, please. You know what happens.

JAMES

Fuck you.

(SHE slaps his face, hard)

TAMARA

Remember who you're talking to. I said no drinking.

(A pause)

JAMES

I just want to stop pretending. It's time. I don't like you very much.

TAMARA

Well. Okay. And I don't want you drinking because I want you to be good for something later on. Fair enough? When you're with me, we play by my rules. If you want to get drunk, it's fine, don't waste my time. I have a zucchini at home that can do the job just as well. And it only cost a dime.

JAMES

What a lovely thing to say.

TAMARA

You wanted honest. I just want my money's worth.

JAMES

Yeah, I've heard that about you people.

TAMARA

Don't make a mistake. I knew this would happen if you hung out with Laszlo's beatniks long enough. Don't try to apply their philosophies to your life, Jimmy. You'll fall flat on your ass. Our relationship, your whole life is based on pretense. Don't challenge me to the truth. I'll always win.

JAMES

Maybe I'm thinking it's time to stop.

TAMARA

Too late. Maybe twenty seconds after we first met, we could've taken a different path. But after that... it's a one-way street.

JAMES

You know, when I was a kid I used to pretend I was British. Just like you, Tamara. Only things British weren't quite the rage back then that they are now. I even tried an accent for a while, but I couldn't pull it off. After all, I was still just a fat little German kid, and here I am talking like James Mason.

JAMES (cont'd)

I tried to be French for a while, but I couldn't get away with that, either. I was just tired of being the enemy. I wanted to be an ally. I thought of going Italian, but they weren't wild about Italians in St. Louis, either. It was my mother's fault, really. I could've gotten away with the British thing if she hadn't kept putting food into me. Have I ever told you about this? And yes, Tamara, you were right all along. I don't have an exotic pigmentation problem; those are indeed stretch marks. My mother was German cook. That meant buttered noodles with everything. I hurt her feelings if I didn't eat ten pancakes every morning before school. And, of course, she owned the bakery, so I had my choice of twenty different kinds of cream-filled monsters when I got home.

TAMARA

You told me your mother was a bohemian. A painter.

JAMES

No, no. Not painter. Baker. You must've misunderstood.

TAMARA

No, I didn't misunderstand. You told me she painted that monstrosity you have in your apartment.

JAMES

No I didn't.
(HE laughs)

TAMARA

Oh, I see. You're willing to start telling the truth, but won't admit to your previous lies. Now I understand. And your father? Was he really a poet?

JAMES

Hell, I don't know. He might've been. My father left us when I was five. But he kept waltzing in and out of our lives for the next few years. He'd come back, stay for a while, get fed up, and leave. He'd come back, stay for a while, she'd kick him out. Back and forth. He's living in Florida now, last I heard. No, I'm afraid I'm the only one in the family with artistic pretensions.

TAMARA

Pretensions is right.

JAMES

My grandmother was kind of interesting, though. Grandma Trudy was a gypsy. Really. She kept charms all over the house. Knew spells. I don't know if she ever used any. In fact, she was the character in that story you sold to the Ladies Home Journal. Remember?

TAMARA

No.

JAMES

Anyway, Grandma Trudy taught me how to read the cards. And to read palms, somewhat. I'm not very good at it, though. Let me see if I still remember. Give me your hand.

(HE takes her hand, turns her palm to the light)

TAMARA

Don't take my hand if you're not going to use it.

JAMES

I've never read your palm before?

TAMARA

No, Jimmy.

JAMES

I'm surprised. It's usually my opening line. Your Mound of Venus is very prominent, unsurprisingly.

(SHE leers at him)

Interesting. This line here, this represents your work, your career. And this line is family and home. See how close they are? They almost run together. That's very true for you, isn't it?

TAMARA

What is this nonsense, Jimmy?

JAMES

Your lifeline is very long. That's easy for me to say, though, isn't it? I mean, you're still here. Although there's a break here, somewhere in the middle. When you were around forty. Were you very sick? Like your life stopped, then started up again. Did something happen?

(SHE pulls her hand away)

TAMARA

Cut the crap, Jimmy. You call bullshit Laszlo and all your "literary friends," but not me.

JAMES

But that's just it. I'm not bullshitting you for a change. You should be grateful. I'm telling you the real story of my life. Don't you care?

(SHE laughs)

TAMARA

I told you, you don't want to start getting honest this late in the game.

JAMES

That's what my grandmother used to say when she looked at my hand. Prone to dishonesty. There was a streak of deception somewhere on my palm. A vase would lie broken in the hallway. I'd deny having done it, she'd grab for my hand. "But this says you did it, Jimmy. The palm never lies." I couldn't get away from it. Every time something went wrong, she'd see the truth, so she said, on my hand, in the cards. I started wearing gloves, no matter the weather. Around report card time, I used to think about cutting off my arm. But then again, she used to tell me how short my lifeline was. She used to promise me I'd be dead by the time I was twenty-three. Sweet, huh? Yet here I am. I wish I'd known then what a crock it was. She just used it as an excuse to get her way with me.

TAMARA

Fascinating.

JAMES

Oh, come on, Tamara, shut up. I'm always listening to your boring stories. I know how hard it is for you to have to listen to someone else. But anyway, I was just getting to the good part. Before you interrupted. So. I was a fat kid. I mean fat. And I used to pretend.

TAMARA

Used to?

JAMES

Well, this is how I learned my lesson. In first grade, we were studying geography, or some such nonsense, and we had some kind of little kiddie project where we had to stand up and say where our parents came from and bring in something from that country. So, the big day comes, I stand up, hold up a bottle of beer and say my grandparents came from Germany. Well, you could've heard a pin drop. This was 1946, remember. So, there's this silence and the teacher just ignores me and moves on to Joey DeRosa and his pizza pie. I didn't know what was going on, but the teacher - Mrs. Cohen, by the way - gave me a C minus. I wasn't prepared, she said. So from then on, I was English. My mother, needless to say, wasn't pleased.

TAMARA

Yes, from what I've heard, I'm sure.

JAMES

From what you've heard?

TAMARA

From what you've told me.

JAMES

I told you she was a painter.

TAMARA

I mean from what you've told me so far. I knew you got your attitude from someone.

JAMES

Oh, my mother wasn't a Nazi. Not really. She just wouldn't win any Good Samaritan awards from the B'nai Brith. During the war, she had a hard time of it. My father left...

TAMARA

During the war we all had a hard time. I'm sick of hearing about it and your mother and you and the horrible Jewess you had for a first grade teacher. Let's not get into another fight like last week, Jimmy. Please. You want to take out your frustrations, take me home and take it all out on me. In fact, I wish you would.

(A pause)

You're being very ungrateful this evening, if I may say so. I sit here, I'm offering you anything, everything you could possibly want. Why do you decide to turn your back on me? Look, Jimmy. I've finally gotten Wallace out of the house and into the ground where he belongs. The house is mine. The business is mine. And I'm willing to share it with you. I mean, to be honest - since that what you've asked for - in situations like this, you would be... well, kept until the husband passed away and then given the heave-ho. But I won't do that to you. I see that you're hurt and you're trying to hurt me. What I don't understand is: why?

JAMES

I've been having an affair.

(A pause)

TAMARA

Really? God, how cheap. What, an affair or just having sex? I mean, are you.. (Mockingly:) Are you in love?

(HE shrugs)

How long?

JAMES

Couple of months.

TAMARA

I see. Well, we have nothing more to say to each other, I suppose.

JAMES
I didn't want to tell you.

TAMARA
Bullshit.
(A pause)
Someone I know?

JAMES
Uh-huh.

TAMARA
Oh, it gets better. Well? Come on, Jimmy, it's so obvious
you're dying to tell me. Who?
(A pause)
One of Laszlo's friends?
(HE shakes his head)
What, shall I go through my address book with you? A guessing
game?

JAMES
I've been having an affair with your assistant.

(A pause)

TAMARA
Who, Suzy? I don't think it's fair to call Suzy my assistant. I
mean, she hasn't worked for me for two years, almost. Besides, I
heard she'd gotten married and moved to Omaha, Wisconsin, some
God-forsaken place.

JAMES
Not Suzy. Your assistant. Andrew.

(A pause. The MUSICIANS begin to play.
TAMARA starts to choke and jumps up from the
table, toppling it. SHE runs toward the
exit. JAMES goes after her, grabs her. SHE
screams to be let go, crumples to the floor,
taking JAMES with her. No one comes over to
help. The orchestra cover their words)

TAMARA
You son of a bitch, you son of a bitch...

JAMES
Stop it, come on, stop. Let's go back to the table.

TAMARA
Leave me alone.

JAMES
Come on.

TAMARA
No, no, I want to go. I want to go away.

JAMES

Jesus, you'd think somebody... Joe?

TAMARA

Why are you doing this to me?

JAMES

Stand up, at least. Come on, Tamara. Get up.

(A pause)

Fine. Stay there. Just lie there like a rug.

(HE leaves her, rights the table and re-sets it as best he can. SHE stays on the floor looking at him. Slowly, SHE stands, goes to him)

Come on, sit down. I'll try to get you some brandy if the waiter ever decides to mosey on by.

TAMARA

I don't want anything.

(SHE sits. Starts to laugh)

It's nice to know I could jump up on the table and let out a Tarzan yell and no one would pay the slightest attention. I really think I'd like to go home now.

JAMES

I told you, Tamara. I have some business to take care of.

TAMARA

It's because you're drunk that you're doing this to me. Am I right? What do you have in store for me next? Maybe you'll fill me in on all the gory details of what you and Andy have been doing together. With pictures to boot.

JAMES

It won't take more than a minute to take care of this stuff...

TAMARA

Oh, you and your business can go fuck yourselves, excuse me. I'm going home now. And you can tell your darling Andrew that yesterday was his last day at work, in case he doesn't know that already. When did this happen? How did it happen? When I kept you waiting in the outer office for an extra five minutes, the two of you started playing footsie under the reception desk? You mean to tell me those times I bawled him out for coming back late from lunch he was with you? Those dates you'd break at the last minute, you were with him? It's too disgusting to think about. That goddamned weasel, with his starched shirts and button-down vests and his fucking little bow-ties...

JAMES

Don't take it out on Andy, it's not his fault.

TAMARA

Oh, you seduced him, is that what you're saying? I don't want to hear about it, not another word. And what did he hope to get out of it? Use you to get to me? He screws you so you'll talk me into giving him a raise, is that even close? I just don't understand. What did he think would happen if I ever found out? And don't tell me he was swept away on a wave of ecstasy, I know him too well. He measures every move, every glance, every nod of the head to see how it affects him. He gets coffee as if it's a political maneuver. Doesn't he know I'd fire him? Does he even know you're telling me this?

JAMES

He knows.

TAMARA

He does? Then why isn't he here with a needle and thread, sewing your lips shut?

JAMES

Well, I think he was planning to leave your office anyway. I mean, he's been there five years. He wants to go out on his own.

TAMARA

As an agent?

JAMES

Yes.

(SHE laughs)

TAMARA

Well, that won't happen. You can tell him that for me. I'd like to think that after working this hard for this long, I've acquired some power. And I intend to prove it. He won't get a job in this business, in this city, not if I have anything to say. I'll make sure of it. You can tell him he might as well pack his bags tonight and be on the bus for Oklahoma, or wherever he's from, in the morning.

JAMES

He has more than enough money to start his own office.

TAMARA

So what? It takes more than money, he knows that. And he knows, or, at least, he should know that I have the ability to ruin him. He's been really stupid, Jimmy. You can tell him that. And you can tell him that if I see him near my office in the future, I'll... I'll make sure he's thrown out of the building without the convenience of an elevator.

JAMES

You can tell him yourself.

(HE pats the third chair)

TAMARA

Are you telling me...?

(HE nods)

My God, Jimmy. You certainly are carrying on in the tradition of your ancestors. I'll give you credit.

JAMES

What are you talking about?

TAMARA

You didn't starve me or shave my head. You didn't murder my parents or rape me and my sisters, but your methods of torture are just as effective. Congratulations.

JAMES

I don't understand.

TAMARA

Oh, you do, you do. You've seen me without my clothes on.

(SHE takes a napkin off the table, dips it in the water from the champagne bucket. SHE rubs her forearm with the napkin, revealing a number tattooed on her wrist)

Since we're being honest this evening.

JAMES

Oh, is that what that is? I always thought it was some old boyfriend's phone number.

(SHE slaps his face)

TAMARA

Some ignorant teacher hurts your feelings when you're five years old and you decide to take it out on every Jew you meet for the rest of your life?

JAMES

Some guy goes a little nuts and does some nasty things and all of you take it out on every German you meet for the rest of your lives.

TAMARA

What time is he coming?

JAMES

Soon. I asked him to give me an hour alone with you. I should've known that wouldn't be nearly enough time.

TAMARA

Well, you won't mind if I don't subject myself to his smirking face this evening?

(SHE stands)

This is the last time we'll be seeing each other, I suppose?

JAMES

Yes, it will.

TAMARA

So this is a serious thing, then? You'll be moving in together, going to costume balls, going to Judy Garland concerts?

(HE laughs)

JAMES

No, this is the last I'll be seeing of him as well.

TAMARA

Oh, so you have to play this same scene again? You've got balls, Jimmy. But I've always said that. So it was, what? A lapse? Just a little tryst to drive me insane? Now you've done it and you'll dump him too? Well, I don't know. That might be the kind of thing I could forgive. Give me a call in a couple of weeks. Let's see what happens. You might still be interested in dressing nicely and going to the best parties.

JAMES

No, this is it. I'm leaving the country. I'm going home.

TAMARA

You're going back to St. Louis?

JAMES

No, I said leaving the country. I'm going back to Germany.

TAMARA

Huh? You mean a vacation?

JAMES

No. For good.

TAMARA

My, you're just full of surprises, aren't you? What next?

JAMES

That's pretty much it.

TAMARA

I see. Any particular reason?

JAMES

I just feel I should go.

TAMARA

What's that supposed to mean? The Fatherland, all of that nonsense? (Sings:) "Deutschland, Deutschland..."

JAMES

No, no. I just want to go.

TAMARA

When did you decide all of this? Five minutes ago?

JAMES

No, it's something I've been thinking about for a while.

TAMARA

Have you thought about how you'll live? Huh? You know, after tonight, the money stops. If you leave me, I have no responsibility to you anymore.

JAMES

Of course not. No, I have a great-aunt who lives out on the Island. She married a very rich man who passed away a few years ago. I've spoken to her about it, and she's very enthusiastic. She's willing to help me get back to Germany. You'd like her. Aunt Juliana's about your age.

TAMARA

Oh, are you playing around with her as well?

JAMES

Don't be disgusting.

TAMARA

But why, all of a sudden? You owe me that, at least.

(A pause)

JAMES

I was drafted. And you know how ridiculous that would be, don't you? Can you just see me, running around in fatigues, in some rain forest somewhere, dodging bullets while trying to light a cigarette and not get my hair mussed? Hell, I'd give away top secret information, I'd become a traitor for the promise of a hot bath and an ice-cold martini. Funny, isn't it? There's a small town in the southwest where I have some family. A few miles from the Swiss border. I'll live there and if it should get a little too hot for me, I can just hop a train and I'm safe. But I've heard that once you do it, you're stuck there. No coming back. So...

TAMARA

Is that was all this is about? Oh, how stupid. If that's what you're worried about, Jimmy, I can take care of it.

JAMES

What, you'll serve for me?

TAMARA

No, darling. I have a good lawyer. You can buy your way out of anything these days. It's not a problem.

JAMES

I don't want you to.

TAMARA

I want to.

JAMES

No.

TAMARA

Don't be an ass. It'll be taken care of.

JAMES
What if you can't?

TAMARA
But I can.

JAMES
It's too late. I've made up my mind.

TAMARA
Why are you being so foolish and so tiresome? I can help you. But you're going to go ahead and spend the rest of your life on the other side of the world just because "you've made up your mind"? Well, un-make it. You know that you'll be there a week and be going crazy for a dinner at Trader Vic's. I'm telling you, I'll take care of it.

JAMES
But I don't want your help.

(A pause)

TAMARA
Fine, then. So, then. This is it. We'll say goodbye to each other. When do you leave?

JAMES
End of the week.

TAMARA
Oh, I see.

JAMES
Goodbye, Tamara. You've been a great help to me. I can't thank you enough. I'll try to write, but you know me. Why should I write a letter when I can write a story? So, I'll try to write you a story in the form of a letter. Or vice-versa.

TAMARA
Goodbye, Jimmy. Take care of yourself.
(SHE kisses him on the forehead. SHE turns and walks to the entranceway. SHE stands by the velvet rope. SHE looks offstage)

Joe!
(A pause. No one comes. With great dignity, SHE unhooks the rope for herself and exits. A pause. The ORCHESTRA plays. JAMES takes the champagne out of the bucket, picks a glass off the floor and pours out the rest of the bottle. HE cuts himself a piece of cheese. TAMARA re-enters, knocks over the rope, runs to the table.
I'll go with you, Jimmy.

JAMES
To Germany? Don't be ridiculous.

TAMARA
No, I want to.

JAMES
What for?

TAMARA
What a stupid question.

JAMES
You have responsibilities here. Besides, I want to go alone.

TAMARA
Somebody else will take care of the office. I'll find somebody to run things for me. Anybody. Besides, I'll still be allowed to go back and forth.

JAMES
I said no.

TAMARA
But why?

JAMES
That question is as stupid as mine.

TAMARA
How will you live? That aunt of yours is going to support you for the rest of your life, I suppose?

JAMES
She'll give me some money.

TAMARA
But just to live. What happens when you see that silk suit in a shop window? You'll stop eating for a month. You'll starve, but you'll be beautifully dressed.

JAMES
I'll make some sacrifices.

TAMARA
Not if I'm there, you won't have to.

JAMES
Well, now that we're back to this again, that's why I invited Andy here tonight. I'm going to sign everything over to him. He'll be representing me from now on. He'll sell my stories and forward my royalties. Also, he's promised not to take his commission, as a favor. So, I'll have some money coming in. I'll still be working.

TAMARA

You're kidding.

(A pause)

Well, since this is your evening for honesty, let's go the whole-hog, shall we? Your work stinks. Now I realize that maybe this sounds like I'm just trying to hurt you, to get back at you, to make you apologize. It just plain stinks, Jimmy, and that's the God's-honest truth. I just feel I should warn you, you know. Don't plan your life around the money that you expect to roll in. I'm not hurt that you don't want me to represent you anymore. In fact, it's a relief. I've never had to work so hard in my entire career. It's just that I love you and I think the air should be cleared completely before we say goodbye. In the past, there was no reason to say these things. But now I feel it's my duty. I'm so very sorry.

JAMES

What am I supposed to do now, thank you? I would've been able to make a living back here off my royalties. Not a comfortable one, I realize; you've helped me that way. But I could've lived. Why shouldn't things go on as they were? You just said that Random House is interested.

TAMARA

Which they wouldn't be if I didn't promise them first refusal on Bobby's new novel. Please, let's not get into this now. Believe me, you don't want to.

JAMES

No, please. I want to know.

TAMARA

Jesus, what are you asking me to do, kill you? I told you, Jimmy. We shouldn't stop pretending. It was a mistake. That was the reason everyone knew we were having an affair all along, don't you realize that? Not because we were seen in public together, not because I took you to the Island for the weekend. We could have had sex on the table-top and it wouldn't come as any surprise. They knew because I represented your work. I gave myself away.

JAMES

I'm sorry, I just don't believe you. You've sold too much of my work.

TAMARA

A lot of people owe me favors.

JAMES

The story you sold to Vanity Fair?

TAMARA

I can sell anything to Vanity Fair. I had an affair with the owner.

JAMES

My play that was done at that Off-Broadway theatre. I pretty much got that myself.

TAMARA

Only after I promised the producer I'd get his daughter a job in my office. Take my word for it, Jimmy. There's a favor attached to everything. You don't want to know.

JAMES

You're just getting back at me.

TAMARA

Oh, how I wish that I was. I'm very, very sorry, Jimmy. You asked me. You started it. You see, that's the problem with this truth-telling thing. You can't do it half-assed. You have to go all the way, or not at all.

JAMES

Oh, so you want to go all the way, do you? All right. How about if I tell you why I started seeing you in the first place?

TAMARA

Oh, Jimmy. You don't have to tell me. I can pretty well figure that one out.

JAMES

Well, good. I just want to make sure you didn't believe the lie that I loved you. I just don't want you to think I'm usually attracted to women forty years my senior. That I'm attracted to women who need to take yearly trips to Switzerland to have their wrinkles ironed out. Or that I'm attracted to women who are Jewish.

TAMARA

Or that you're attracted to women, period.

(A pause)

Now shall I tell you why I started seeing you?

JAMES

Because you read my story in that college magazine. Or, at least, that's what you said.

TAMARA

Well, now, you see, Jimmy, here's the danger. You start by pretending, and then you start to believe the pretense. You can't remember what's true and what's not.

JAMES

What's this lecture now? I don't follow.

TAMARA

We started our relationship on a lie. How could you hope to change the rules mid-stream? Did you ever have a story published in that college magazine?

(A pause)

Did you even go to that college?

(A pause)

JAMES

No, but when you called me the first time, I just assumed you'd gotten your facts mixed up. I mean, you got my name from somewhere.

TAMARA

Yes, I got your name from somewhere. But since it wasn't from that college magazine, did you ever stop to think where? What, did you think I'd just picked your name out of the Struggling Writers Index? To tell you the truth, Jimmy, the first time I met you, I'd never even read your work. It didn't matter. You see, I've known the truth about you all along. St. Louis, the bakery, your mother, your grandmother. Your favorite color, your most embarrassing moment. I never contradicted you when you told me those made-up stories. I just wanted to see how far you'd go. I knew your father, Jimmy. And I owed him a favor.

JAMES

Bullshit.

TAMARA

He took me out of Germany. He freed me, he brought me to this country. He gave me my life as it is now, in a sense. So, it was the least I could do to try to give his son a career. I had no intention of doing anything else. And then I got in over my head, just a little bit. Now I can't let you go.

JAMES

Then this is all very appropriate. My father brought my mother to the Palm Court twenty years ago when he wanted to dump her. For you, I suppose. While I waited in a hotel room.

TAMARA

I know. I waited, too. In a hotel in Bremen. For two months I waited. When he came, finally, he had to get me into the country illegally, he had to smuggle me out...

JAMES

So then it's appropriate that twenty years later, I'm here to dump you.

TAMARA

Your father was a wonderful lover, Jimmy. Almost as good as you. Hopefully, I'll live long enough to give your son a spin around the block.

(HE slaps her face, hard)

JAMES

You're a pig.

TAMARA

My God. Right now I want you so badly I'm probably leaving a puddle under my chair.

JAMES

What are you...?

TAMARA

Come, let's get a taxi and go straight home. We can spend the next three days in bed.

JAMES

What do I have to do to get you to shut up? Can't you understand that I never want to touch you again? What can I do? I can't torture you, can't insult you any more than I already have. You enjoy it too much. Perhaps I should've treated you this way from the beginning. I'd've gotten more of the things I wanted.

TAMARA

You can have anything you want, Jimmy. Forget this silly draft business. I'm telling you, we can lick it. Leave it all to me. I'll go on taking care of you.

JAMES

I don't want to be taken care of. Not by you. Not anymore. I'm going away from here. To a place where I can hold the reins. Where I can hold the purse-strings, too. Do you know how difficult it is for me to take money from you? Every time I do, it's another defeat. And you're the conqueror. I know what you're trying to prove. Don't you think I know my work is lousy? Don't you think I know? Of course I know. But I won't hear it from you. I won't let you have your way with me, I won't let you avenge an injustice that happened twenty years ago on me. Do you understand me? I'm not going to put my survival in the hands of someone I despise.

TAMARA

That's all very well and good, but I don't see what choice you have. You enjoy being popular too much.

JAMES

I'll make that sacrifice, thank you. It'll be worth it not to feel this guilt anymore. I'm going home. To a place where I don't have to be assaulted every day by the atrocities of the past. Where the people try to forget what happened yesterday and look to tomorrow. Where I'll be welcomed as a son, not shunned as the enemy. Where they don't have... people like you.

TAMARA

Yes, a whole country of liars. You'll feel right at home.

JAMES

"Oh, how terrible! How awful! What they did to me!" What is the point of rubbing our noses in it? Huh? Movies about it, books about it, T.V. Shows. Why does the villain always have a German accent? "So it never happens again," is the excuse. Bullshit. It's going to happen again. And again and again. It's happening right now, no matter what you try to do about it. Involuntary cruelty. That's just the way people are. You just want to make sure it doesn't happen again to you. Well, it might, if you don't shut up already. Never forgive, never forget. Unless I'm making money for you. Then I'm okay. Once that stops, then my work stinks. That's how it goes. "Who can forgive the suffering I endured?" As you slip behind the wheel of your Mercedes-Benz.

TAMARA

May I be excused from the philosophy lecture? It's awfully dull. I like it so much better when we're yelling at each other, Jimmy. You know where it always leads.

(SHE tickles his chin)

JAMES

And you can't live without me. At least that's some compensation. Don't force me to tell the truth when you're not prepared to. I'm going now.

TAMARA

Well, so am I. I'm not sticking around to play out your farewell to Andrew. Don't you leave me here.

JAMES

Oh, you're so stupid, Tamara. How can you demand honesty when you can spot a lie two feet in front of you? Have you ever known Andy to be even a minute late for anything? Especially when retaliation is involved? I mean, obviously he's not coming.

TAMARA

Well, good. He stood you up. Maybe you'll have to give him a spanking.

JAMES

He didn't stand me up, you idiot. He wasn't invited. I made it up.

TAMARA

You made what up?

JAMES

The whole story.

TAMARA

All of it?

JAMES

Almost.

TAMARA

Why?

(HE shrugs)

JAMES

Just for fun, maybe. One last lie for the road.

TAMARA

Are you really that drunk? So drunk you just want to hurt me? It makes you feel good?

JAMES

Maybe.

(HE stands to leave)

TAMARA

Wait a second, Mister. What else? You're not really moving to Germany, I suppose?

JAMES

No. That, in fact, is the truth. I'm really going.

TAMARA

I don't understand you at all Jimmy.

JAMES

No, I guess not. So long.

(HE starts to leave. SHE watches him. HE gets to the velvet rope, stands there. A pause)

TAMARA

You'll have to do it yourself.

(HE turns and comes back to the table)

JAMES

I just want you to understand that I didn't want to hurt you. I wanted to avoid that. But then you pressed on, and then I couldn't stop myself, and then it was too late. I know you don't understand what the hell I'm talking about, but you will. You see, when I told you the thing about Andrew, I just assumed you'd slap my face and leave. But you didn't. You stayed.

TAMARA

I tried to leave. You stopped me.

JAMES

That's right. I did, didn't I? Hmmmm. Interesting. Anyway, you stayed, so I had to keep going. I said the thing about the draft. You call me a lousy writer, Tamara, but you fell for the whole shebang. Hell, I didn't even believe it myself as it was coming out of my mouth, but you did. I'll have to give myself credit. And still you stayed. What else could I do?

TAMARA

Well, what is it? What is it you want?

JAMES

I just wanted a way out. A quick, easy way.

TAMARA

I'm never going to make it easy, Jimmy. You can count on that. I waited too long and gave up too much for you. Face it. You're stuck with me.

JAMES

I'm going to die.

(SHE laughs)

TAMARA

No, I'm going to kill you. You're going to cry wolf once too often.

JAMES

You keep forcing me to say things I don't want to. I'm going to sit back down, all right?

(HE does)

You told me you knew about my family. My father, my mother. Did you know about my brother? Probably not. My father was even worse when it came to the truth. My brother died right before I was born. He died when he was five years old. He died of a disease, something unpronounceable. It's one of those hereditary things that skips generations. My grandfather had it, and my brother. Now me. I'm dying of the same thing that killed my brother. So you see, Grandma Trudy was right.

(HE holds out his hand)

There's the truth, Tamara. You can see for yourself that I'm not lying this time. I outlived her prophesy, but it's finally caught up with me.

TAMARA

I don't believe you.

(HE laughs)

JAMES

Then I'll make sure you're invited to the funeral. You'll have to go back to Germany, though. I don't think you'd like that.

TAMARA

So why are you going, if not to escape?

JAMES

I just where I feel I belong. That's the best explanation I can offer.

TAMARA

Explain the disease.

JAMES

What?

TAMARA

Your disease. Explain it, please.

(The ORCHESTRA begins to play)

What are the symptoms, how long do you have, all that stuff.

JAMES

There's no need. I really wanted to keep this from you. I wanted you to go off in a huff and never want to see me again. I love you too much to put you through this. I know what my mother went through with my brother. It's excruciating to watch. It's my business now; I don't need your representation.

TAMARA

What kind of an ass do you take me for? You, who gets a cold and makes me bring him breakfast in bed? A toothache, and I have to hold your hand at the dentist. A pimple, and the world's coming to an end.

JAMES

This isn't a pimple. I'm going to leave now, this time for good, and I wish you wouldn't ask me anymore. Don't call me. Take care of your business, straighten up Wallace's estate. Keep busy.

TAMARA

I won't let it end like this, Jimmy.

JAMES

You've got to. You have no choice.

TAMARA

This isn't an ending. Sit down.

JAMES

Why are you being so difficult? This is hard enough for me as it is.

TAMARA

Hard for you? Do as I tell you and sit down.

(HE starts to leave. SHE blocks his way. HE brushes past her, SHE grabs his arm. HE tries to shake her free)

JAMES

Stop it.

(SHE moves behind him, puts her arms around him)

TAMARA

Please.

(HE grabs hold of her fingers, twists them. SHE screams and lets go. HE moves towards the velvet rope. SHE grabs the cheese knife off the table, beats him to the entrance. SHE holds the knife on him)

JAMES

Tamara...

TAMARA

You wanna make something out of it? Back to the table.
(HE stands there. A pause. SHE flicks the knife at him)
Back to the table!

(Keeping his eyes on her, HE backs up slowly, slowly, until he bumps into the table. The champagne bottle topples. A pause. TAMARA laughs)

TAMARA (CONTINUED)

Look at this, Jimmy. I'm holding a knife on you, no one comes to your aid. I'm glad you brought me here, to a public place, after all. I have a perfect alibi. I could go so far as to commit murder, no one pays the slightest attention. Look, that lady over there, she's looking at us. And she turns away. This can't possibly be happening here, in the Palm Court, right under her nose. After all, we're civilized people. So she turns away. She probably thinks you're a waiter. She thinks you deserve it.

(SHE laughs)

At least I have your attention. Sit down.

(HE doesn't. HE slowly circles the table.

SHE follows)

What am I doing this? I don't know the answer to that. After all, you've been perfectly fair. You want it to be over. Simple as that. I can understand it, you know, from your point of view. But for me Jimmy, for me, it's a little more complicated. You're not the perfect lover, you know. You're not my dream man. You're too short, for one thing. Too dark. I'm usually more partial to blonds. Blue eyes.

(SHE laughs)

Your eyes are nice, though. But you spend money foolishly. When we're in public, you don't seem to care two cents' worth for me. I'm like a mother who's spoiled you badly, and now you're exacting your revenge with exasperation and impatience. You rarely have a kind word for me, and after all I've done. God, I sound like I should hop on that piano and sing a torch song. But it's even deeper than that, I think. I mean, on the surface of it I can't let you go because I can't go through looking for another. I'm too... well, I'm getting older. I'm used to you. But beyond that, there's something holding us together. There's a score to settle. Like a bill that needs remittance, you know: a legacy. I can't let you go until that's been resolved once and for all.

JAMES

Oh, for God's sake, enough of the fancy footwork. I'm leaving.

TAMARA

Don't.

(SHE lunges at him with the knife)

JAMES

Oh, go on, go on, you old fool. Do it.

TAMARA

I will.

(SHE moves closer to him. SHE puts the knife against his heart)

JAMES

Go on, already. It's only a matter of months, anyway. I might as well get it over with. Go on.

(HE puts his hand on hers, on the handle of the knife. HE presses in so that the knife touches him. SHE resists)

Please. You'll be doing me a favor.

(SHE lets go of the knife. SHE grabs hold of his head with her hands and kisses him. HE takes the knife, puts it on the table)

TAMARA

Jimmy, Jimmy... You've lied to me all night long. You've admitted that. You've been lying to me all along, since I met you. How can you expect me to believe this?

JAMES

You'll have to.

TAMARA

I can't! Give me doctor's reports, blood tests, anything. Give me some proof. Not just some stupid lines on the palm of your hand.

JAMES

I can't.

TAMARA

But how will I know this isn't just another lie? When will I know the truth? How will I know?

JAMES

You'll just have to take my word for it.

(Briskly, HE moves to leave. SHE grabs his arm. HE tries to shake her free. HE looks at her. A beat. HE gives in and SHE throws herself around him, kissing him with all the strength SHE has. SHE holds the back of his head with her hands. One hand drops down, picks the knife off the table. SHE plunges it into him. His body stiffens, HE gasps, HE tries to pull away. SHE holds him tighter. HE relaxes, his head drops back. TAMARA takes a deep breath of air. SHE has blood on her mouth)

TAMARA

Now I know.

(SHE takes hold of his head once more, presses her lips to his)

BLACKOUTTHE PLAY IS OVER.