

BLANCHE:

Gracious!

STELLA:

And when he comes back I cry on his lap like a baby...

[She smiles to herself.]

BLANCHE:

I guess that is what is meant by being in love....

[Stella looks up with a radiant smile.]

Stella--

STELLA:

What?

BLANCHE [in an uneasy rush]:

I haven't asked you the things you probably thought I was going to ask. And so I'll expect you to be understanding about what I have to tell you.

STELLA:

What, Blanche?

[Her face turns anxious.]

BLANCHE:

Well, Stella--you're going to reproach me, I know that you're bound to reproach me--but before you do--take into consideration--you left! I stayed and struggled! You came to New Orleans and looked out for yourself. I stayed at Belle Reve and tried to hold it together! I'm not meaning this in any reproachful way, but all the burden descended on my shoulders.

STELLA:

The best I could do was make my own living, Blanche.

[Blanche begins to shake again with intensity.]

BLANCHE:

I know, I know. But you are the one that abandoned Belle Reve, not I! I stayed and fought for it, bled for it, almost died for it!

STELLA:

Stop this hysterical outburst and tell me what's happened! What do you mean fought and bled? What kind of--

BLANCHE:

I knew you would, Stella. I knew you would take this attitude about it!

STELLA:

About--what?--please!

BLANCHE [slowly]:

The loss--the loss...

STELLA:

Belle Reve? Lost, is it? No!

BLANCHE:

Yes, Stella.

[They stare at each other across the yellow-checked linoleum of the table. Blanche slowly nods her head and Stella looks slowly down at her hands folded on the table. The music of the "blue piano" grows louder. Blanche touches her handkerchief to her forehead.]

STELLA:

But how did it go? What happened?

BLANCHE [springing up]:

You're a fine one to ask me how it went!

STELLA:

Blanche!

BLANCHE:

You're a fine one to sit there accusing me of it!

STELLA:

Blanche!

BLANCHE:

I, I, I took the blows in my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, mother! Margaret, that dreadful way! So big with it, it couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned like rubbish! You just came home in time for the funerals, Stella. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths--not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, and sometimes it rattles, and sometimes they even cry out to you, "Don't let me go!" Even the old, sometimes, say, "Don't let me go." As if you were able to stop them! But funerals are quiet, with pretty flowers. And, oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! Unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, "Hold me!" you'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! Saw! Saw! And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go! How in hell do you think all that sickness and dying was paid for? Death is expensive, Miss Stella! And old Cousin Jessie's right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!... Stella. Belle Reve was his headquarters! Honey--that's how it slipped through my fingers! Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left a cent of insurance even? Only poor Jessie--one hundred to pay for her coffin. That was all, Stella! And I with my pitiful salary at the school. Yes, accuse me! Sit there and stare at me, thinking I let the place go! I let the place go? Where were you! In bed with your--Polack!

STELLA [springing]:

Blanche! You be still! That's enough!

[She starts out.]

BLANCHE:

Where are you going?

STELLA:

I'm going into the bathroom to wash my face.

BLANCHE:

Oh, Stella, Stella, you're crying!

STELLA:

Does that surprise you?

BLANCHE:

Forgive me--I didn't mean to--

[The sound of men's voices is heard. Stella goes into the bathroom, closing the door behind her. When the men appear, and Blanche realizes it must be Stanley returning, she moves uncertainly from the bathroom door to the dressing table, looking apprehensively toward the front door. Stanley enters, followed by Steve and Mitch. Stanley pauses near his door, Steve by the foot of the spiral stair, and Mitch is slightly above and to the right of them, about to go out. As the men enter, we hear some of the following dialogue.]

STANLEY:

Is that how he got it?

STEVE:

Sure that's how he got it. He hit the old weather-bird for 300 bucks on a six-number-ticket.

MITCH:

Don't tell him those things; he'll believe it.

[Mitch starts out.]

STANLEY [restraining Mitch]:

Hey, Mitch-come back here.

[Blanche, at the sound of voices, retires in the bedroom. She picks up Stanley's photo from dressing table, looks at it, puts it down. When Stanley enters the apartment, she darts and hides behind the screen at the head of bed.]

STEVE [to Stanley and Mitch]:

Hey, are we playin' poker tomorrow?

STANLEY:

Sure--at Mitch's.

MITCH [hearing this, returns quickly to the stair rail]:

No--not at my place. My mother's still sick!

STANLEY:

Okay, at my place....

[Mitch starts out again]

But you bring the beer!

[Mitch pretends not to hear,--calls out "Goodnight all," and goes out, singing.]

Eunice's voice is heard, above:

Break it up down there! I made the spaghetti dish and ate it myself.

STEVE [going upstairs]:

I told you and phoned you we was playing.

[To the men] Jax beer!

EUNICE:

You never phoned me once.

STEVE:

I told you at breakfast--and phoned you at lunch....

EUNICE:

Well, never mind about that. You just get yourself home here once in a while.

STEVE:

You want it in the papers?

[More laughter and shouts of parting come from the men. Stanley throws the screen door of the kitchen open and comes in. He is of medium height, about five feet eight or nine, and strongly, compactly built. Animal joy in his being is implicit in all his movements and attitudes. Since earliest manhood the center of his life has been pleasure with women, the giving and taking of it, not with weak indulgence, dependency, but with the power and pride of a richly feathered male bird among hens. Branching out from this complete and satisfying center are all the auxiliary channels of his life, such as his heartiness with men, his appreciation of rough humor, his love of good drink and food and games, his car, his radio, everything that is his, that bears his emblem of the gaudy seed-bearer. He sizes women up at a glance, with sexual classifications, crude images flashing into his mind and determining the way he smiles at them.]

BLANCHE [drawing involuntarily back from his stare]:

You must be Stanley. I'm Blanche.

STANLEY:

Stella's sister?

BLANCHE:

Yes.

STANLEY:

H'lo. Where's the little woman?

BLANCHE:

In the bathroom.

STANLEY:

Oh. Didn't know you were coming in town.

BLANCHE:

I--uh--

STANLEY:

Where you from, Blanche?

BLANCHE:

Why, I--live in Laurel.

[He has crossed to the closet and removed the whiskey bottle.]

STANLEY:

In Laurel, huh? Oh, yeah. Yeah, in Laurel, that's right. Not in my territory. Liquor goes fast in hot weather.

[He holds the bottle to the light to observe its depletion.]

Have a shot?

BLANCHE:

No, I--rarely touch it.

STANLEY:

Some people rarely touch it, but it touches them often.

BLANCHE [faintly]:

Ha-ha.

STANLEY:

My clothes 're stickin' to me. Do you mind if I make myself comfortable?

[He starts to remove his shirt.]

BLANCHE:

Please, please do.

STANLEY:

Be comfortable is my motto.

BLANCHE:

It's mine, too. It's hard to stay looking fresh. I haven't washed or even powdered my face and-- here you are!

STANLEY:

You know you can catch cold sitting around in damp things, especially when you been exercising hard like bowling is. You're a teacher, aren't you?

BLANCHE:

Yes.

STANLEY:

What do you teach, Blanche?

BLANCHE:

English.

STANLEY:

I never was a very good English student. How long you here for, Blanche?

BLANCHE:

I--don't know yet.

STANLEY:

You going to shack up here?

BLANCHE:

I thought I would if it's not inconvenient for you all.

STANLEY:

Good.

BLANCHE:

Traveling wears me out.

STANLEY:

Well, take it easy.

[A cat screeches near the window. Blanche springs up.]

BLANCHE:

What's that?

STANLEY:

Cats.... Hey, Stella!

STELLA [faintly, from the bathroom]:

Yes, Stanley.

STANLEY:

Haven't fallen in, have you?

[Be grins at Blanche. She tries unsuccessfully to smile back. There is a silence]

I'm afraid I'll strike you as being the unrefined type. Stella's spoke of you a good deal. You were married once, weren't you?

[The music of the polka rises up, faint in the distance.]

BLANCHE:

Yes. When I was quite young.

STANLEY:

What happened?

BLANCHE:

The boy--the boy died.

[She sinks back down]

I'm afraid I'm-going to be sick!

[Her head falls on her arms.]

SCENE TWO

It is six o'clock the following evening. Blanche is bathing. Stella is completing her toilette. Blanche's dress, a flowered print, is laid out on Stella's bed. Stanley enters the kitchen from outside, leaving the door open on the perpetual "blue piano" around the corner.

STANLEY:

What's all this monkey doings?

STELLA:

Oh, Stan!

[She jumps up and kisses him which he accepts with lordly composure]

I'm taking Blanche to Galatoire's for supper and then to a show, because it's your pok'r night

STANLEY:

How about my supper, huh? I'm not going to no Galatoire's for supper!

STELLA:

I put you a cold plate on ice.

STANLEY:

Well, isn't that just dandy!

STELLA:

I'm going to try to keep Blanche out till the party breaks up because I don't know how she would take it. So we'll go to one of the little places in the Quarter afterwards and you'd better give me some money.

STANLEY:

Where is she?

STELLA:

She's soaking in a hot tub to quiet her nerves. She's terribly upset.

STANLEY:

Over what?

STELLA:

She's been through such an ordeal.

STANLEY:

Yeah?

STELLA:

Stan, we've--lost Belle Reve!

STANLEY:

The place in the country?

STELLA:

Yes.

STANLEY:

How?

STELLA [vaguely]:

Oh, it had to be--sacrificed or something.

[There is a pause while Stanley considers. Stella is changing into her dress]

When she comes in be sure to say something nice about her appearance. And, oh! Don't mention the baby. I haven't said anything yet, I'm waiting until she gets in a quieter condition.

STANLEY [ominously]:

So!

STELLA:

And try to understand her and be nice to her, Stan.

BLANCHE [singing in the bathroom]:

"From the land of the sky blue water, They brought a captive maid!"

STELLA:

She wasn't expecting to find us in such a small place. You see I'd tried to gloss things over a little in my letters.

STANLEY:

So?

STELLA:

And admire her dress and tell her she's looking wonderful. That's important with Blanche. Her little weakness!

STANLEY:

Yeah. I get the idea. Now let's skip back a little to where you said the country place was disposed of.

STELLA:

Oh!--yes...

STANLEY:

How about that? Let's have a few more details on that subject.

STELLA:

It's best not to talk much about it until she's calmed down.

STANLEY:

So that's the deal, huh? Sister Blanche cannot be annoyed with business details right now!

STELLA:

You saw how she was last night.

STANLEY:

Uh-hum, I saw how she was. Now let's have a gander at the bill of sale.

STELLA:

I haven't seen any.

STANLEY:

She didn't show you no papers, no deed of sale or nothing like that, huh?

STELLA:

It seems like it wasn't sold.

STANLEY:

Well what in hell was it then, give away? To charity?

STELLA:

Shhh! She'll hear you.

STANLEY:

I don't care if she hears me. Let's see the papers!

STELLA:

There weren't any papers, she didn't show any papers, I don't care about papers.

STANLEY:

Have you ever heard of the Napoleonic code?

STELLA:

No, Stanley, I haven't heard of the Napoleonic code, if I have, I don't see what it--

STANLEY:

Let me enlighten you on a point or two, baby.

STELLA:

Yes?

STANLEY:

In the state of Louisiana we have the Napoleonic code according to which what belongs to the wife belongs to the husband and vice versa. For instance if I had a piece of property, or you had a piece of property--

STELLA:

My head is swimming!

STANLEY:

All right, I'll wait till she gets through soaking in a hot tub and then I'll inquire if she is acquainted with the Napoleonic code. It looks to me like you have been swindled, baby, and when you're swindled under the Napoleonic code I'm swindled too. And I don't like to be swindled.

STELLA:

There's plenty of time to ask her questions later but if you do now she'll go to pieces again. I don't understand what happened to Belle Reve but you don't know how ridiculous you are being when you suggest that my sister or I or anyone of our family could have perpetrated a swindle on anyone else.

STANLEY:

Then where's the money if the place was sold?

STELLA:

Not sold--lost, lost!

[He stalks into bedroom, and she follows him.]

Stanley!

[He pulls open the wardrobe trunk standing in middle of room and jerks out an armful of dresses.]

STANLEY:

Open your eyes to this stuff! You think she got them out of a teacher's pay?

STELLA:

Hush!

STANLEY:

Look at these feathers and furs that she come here to preen herself in! What's this here? A solid-gold dress, I believe! And this one! What is these here? Fox-pieces!

[He blows on them]

Genuine fox fur-pieces, a half a mile long! Where are your fox-pieces, Stella? Bushy snow-white ones, no less! Where are your white fox-pieces?

STELLA:

Those are inexpensive summer furs that Blanche has had a long time.

STANLEY:

I got an acquaintance who deals in this sort of merchandise. I'll have him in here to appraise it. I'm willing to bet you there's thousands of dollars invested in this stuff here!

STELLA:

Don't be such an idiot, Stanley!

[He hurls the furs on the daybed. Then he jerks open small drawer in the trunk and pulls up a fist-full of costume jewellery.]

STANLEY:

And what have we here? The treasure chest of a pirate!

STELLA:

Oh, Stanley!

STANLEY:

Pearls! Ropes of them! What is this sister of yours, a deep-sea diver who brings up sunken treasure? Or is she the champion safe-cracker of all time! Bracelets of solid gold, too! Where are your pearls and gold bracelets?

STELLA: Shhh ! Be still, Stanley!

STANLEY: And diamonds! A crown for an empress!

STELLA:

A rhinestone tiara she wore to a costume ball.

STANLEY:

What's rhinestone?

STELLA:

Next door to glass.

STANLEY:

Are you kidding? I have an acquaintance that works in a jewellery store. I'll have him in here to make an appraisal of this. Here's your plantation, or what was left of it, here!

STELLA:

You have no idea how stupid and horrid you're being! Now close that trunk before she comes out of the bathroom!

[He kicks the trunk partly closed and sits on the kitchen table.]

STANLEY:

The Kowalskis and the DuBois have different notions.

STELLA [angrily]:

Indeed they have, thank heavens!--I'm going outside.

[She snatches up her white hat and gloves and crosses to the outside door.]

You come out with me while Blanche is getting dressed.

STANLEY:

Since when do you give me orders?

STELLA:

Are you going to stay here and insult her?

STANLEY:

You're damn tootin' I'm going to stay here.

[Stella goes out to the porch. Blanche comes out of the bathroom in a red satin robe.]

BLANCHE [airily]:

Hello, Stanley! Here I am, all freshly bathed and scented, and feeling like a brand new human being!

[He lights a cigarette.]

STANLEY:

That's good.

BLANCHE [drawing the curtains at the windows]:

Excuse me while I slip on my pretty new dress!

STANLEY:

Go right ahead, Blanche.

[She closes the drapes between the rooms.]

BLANCHE:

I understand there's to be a little card party to which we ladies are cordially not invited!

STANLEY [ominously]:

Yeah?

[Blanche throws off her robe and slips into a flowered print dress.]

BLANCHE:

Where's Stella?

STANLEY:

Out on the porch.

BLANCHE:

I'm going to ask a favor of you in a moment.

STANLEY:

What could that be, I wonder?

BLANCHE:

Some buttons in back! You may enter!

[He crosses through drapes with a smoldering look.]

How do I look?

STANLEY:

You look all right.

BLANCHE:

Many thanks! Now the buttons!

STANLEY:

I can't do nothing with them.

BLANCHE:

You men with your big clumsy fingers. May I have a drag on your cig?

STANLEY:

Have one for yourself.

BLANCHE:

Why, thanks!... It looks like my trunk has exploded.

STANLEY:

Me an' Stella were helping you unpack.

BLANCHE:

Well, you certainly did a fast and thorough job of it!

STANLEY:

It looks like you raided some stylish shops in Paris.

BLANCHE:

Ha-ha! Yes--clothes are my passion!

STANLEY:

What does it cost for a string of fur-pieces like that?

BLANCHE:

Why, those were a tribute from an admirer of mine!

STANLEY:

He must have had a lot of--admiration!

BLANCHE:

Oh, in my youth I excited some admiration. But look at me now!

[She smiles at him radiantly]

Would you think it possible that I was once considered to be--attractive?

STANLEY:

Your looks are okay.

BLANCHE:

I was fishing for a compliment, Stanley.

STANLEY:

I don't go in for that stuff.

BLANCHE:

What--stuff?

STANLEY:

Compliments to women about their looks. I never met a woman that didn't know if she was good-looking or not without being told, and some of them give themselves credit for more than they've got. I once went out with a doll who said to me, "I am the glamorous type, I am the glamorous type!" I said, "So what?"

BLANCHE:

And what did she say then?

STANLEY:

She didn't say nothing. That shut her up like a clam.

BLANCHE:

Did it end the romance?

STANLEY:

It ended the conversation--that was all. Some men are took in by this Hollywood glamor stuff and some men are not.

BLANCHE:

I'm sure you belong in the second category.

STANLEY:

That's right.

BLANCHE:

I cannot imagine any witch of a woman casting a spell over you.

STANLEY:

That's right.

BLANCHE:

You're simple, straightforward and honest, a little bit on the primitive side I should think. To interest you a woman would have to--

[She pauses with an indefinite gesture.]

STANLEY [slowly]:

Lay... her cards on the table.

BLANCHE [smiling]:

Well, I never cared for wishy-washy people. That was why, when you walked in here last night, I said to myself--"My sister has married a man!"--Of course that was all that I could tell about you.

STANLEY [booming]:

Now let's cut the re-bop?

BLANCHE [pressing hands to her ears]:

Ouuuuu!

STELLA [calling from the steps]:

Stanley! You come out here and let Blanche finish dressing!

BLANCHE:

I'm through dressing, honey.

STELLA:

Well, you come out, then.

STANLEY:

Your sister and I are having a little talk.

BLANCHE [lightly]:

Honey, do me a favor. Run to the drugstore and get me a lemon-coke with plenty of chipped ice in it!--Will you do that for me, Sweetie?

STELLA [uncertainly]:

Yes.

[She goes around the corner of the building.]

BLANCHE:

The poor little thing was out there listening to us, and I have an idea she doesn't understand you as well as I do.... All right; now, Mr. Kowalski, let us proceed without any more double-talk. I'm ready to answer all questions. I've nothing to hide. What is it?

STANLEY:

There is such a thing in this state of Louisiana as the Napoleonic code, according to which whatever belongs to my wife is also mine--and vice versa.

BLANCHE:

My, but you have an impressive judicial air!

[She sprays herself with her atomizer; then playfully sprays him with it. He seizes the atomizer and slams it down on the dresser. She throws back her head and laughs.]

STANLEY:

If I didn't know that you was my wife's sister I'd get ideas about you!

BLANCHE:

Such as what!

STANLEY:

Don't play so dumb. You know what!

BLANCHE [she puts the atomizer on the table]:

All right. Cards on the table. That suits me.

[She turns to Stanley.]

I know I fib a good deal. After all, a woman's charm is fifty percent illusion, but when a thing is important I tell the truth, and this is the truth:

I haven't cheated my sister or you or anyone else as long as I have lived.

STANLEY:

Where's the papers? In the trunk?

BLANCHE:

Everything that I own is in that trunk.

[Stanley crosses to the trunk, shoves it roughly open and begins to open compartments.]

BLANCHE:

What in the name of heaven are you thinking of! What's in the back of that little boy's mind of yours? That I am absconding with something, attempting some kind of treachery on my sister?-- Let me do that! It will be faster and simpler....

[She crosses to the trunk and takes out a box]

I keep my papers mostly in this tin box.

[She opens it.]

STANLEY:

What's them underneath?

[He indicates another sheaf of papers.]

BLANCHE:

These are love-letters, yellowing with antiquity, all from one boy.

[He snatches them up. She speaks fiercely]

Give those back to me!

STANLEY:

I'll have a look at them first!

BLANCHE:

The touch of your hands insults them!

STANLEY:

Don't pull that stuff!

[He rips off the ribbon and starts to examine them. Blanche snatches them from him, and they cascade to the floor.]

BLANCHE:

Now that you've touched them I'll burn them!

STANLEY [staring, baffled]:

What in hell are they?

BLANCHE [on the floor gathering them up]:

Poems a dead boy wrote. I hurt him the way that you would like to hurt me, but you can't! I'm not young and vulnerable any more. But my young husband was and I--never mind about that! Just give them back to me!

STANLEY:

What do you mean by saying you'll have to burn them?

BLANCHE:

I'm sorry, I must have lost my head for a moment. Everyone has something he won't let others touch because of their--intimate nature....

[She now seems faint with exhaustion and she sits down with the strong box and puts on a pair of glasses and goes methodically through a large stack of papers.] Ambler & Ambler. Hmmmm.... Crabtree.... More Ambler & Ambler.

STANLEY:

What is Ambler & Ambler?

BLANCHE:

A firm that made loans on the place.

STANLEY:

Then it was lost on a mortgage?

BLANCHE [touching her forehead]:

That must've been what happened.

STANLEY:

I don't want no ifs, ands or buts! What's all the rest of them papers?

[She hands him the entire box. He carries it to the table and starts to examine the papers.]

BLANCHE [picking up a large envelope containing more papers]:

There are thousands of papers, stretching back over hundreds of years, affecting Belle Reve as, piece by piece, our improvident grandfathers and father and uncles and brothers exchanged the land for their epic fornications--to put it plainly!

[She removes her glasses with an exhausted laugh]

The four-letter word deprived us of our plantation, till finally all that was left--and Stella can verify that!--was the house itself and about twenty acres of ground, including a graveyard, to which now all but Stella and I have retreated.

[She pours the contents of the envelope on the table]

Here all of them are, all papers! I hereby endow you with them! Take them, peruse them--commit them to memory, even! I think it's wonderfully fitting that Belle Reve should finally be this bunch of old papers in your big, capable hands!... I wonder if Stella's come back with my lemon-coke....

[She leans back and closes her eyes.]

STANLEY:

I have a lawyer acquaintance who will study these out.

BLANCHE:

Present them to him with a box of aspirin tablets.

STANLEY [becoming somewhat sheepish]:

You see, under the Napoleonic code--a man has to take an interest in his wife's affairs--especially now that she's going to have a baby.

[Blanche opens her eyes. The "blue piano" sounds louder.]

BLANCHE:

Stella? Stella going to have a baby?

[dreamily]

I didn't know she was going to have a baby!

[She gets up and crosses to the outside door. Stella appears around the corner with a carton from the drugstore.

[Stanley goes into the bedroom with the envelope and the box.

[The inner rooms fade to darkness and the outside wall of the house is visible. Blanche meets Stella at the foot of the steps to the sidewalk.]

BLANCHE:

Stella, Stella for star! How lovely to have a baby! It's all right. Everything's all right.

STELLA:

I'm sorry he did that to you.

BLANCHE:

Oh, I guess he's just not the type that goes for jasmine perfume, but maybe he's what we need to mix with our blood now that we've lost Belle Reve. We thrashed it out. I feel a bit shaky, but I think I handled it nicely, I laughed and treated it all as a joke.

[Steve and Pablo appear, carrying a case of beer.]

I called him a little boy and laughed and flirted. Yes, I was flirting with your husband!

[as the men approach]

The guests are gathering for the poker party.

[The two men pass between them, and enter the house.]

Which way do we go now, Stella--this way?

STELLA:

No, this way.

[She leads Blanche away.]

BLANCHE [laughing]:

The blind are leading the blind!

[A tamale vendor is heard calling.]