

## Scene Five

BLANCHE is seated in the bedroom fanning herself with a palm leaf as she reads over a just-completed letter. Suddenly she bursts into a peal of laughter. STELLA is dressing in the bedroom.

STELLA What are you laughing at, honey?

BLANCHE Myself, myself, for being such a liar! I'm writing a letter to Shep. [She picks up the letter.] "Darling Shep. I am spending the summer on the wing, making flying visits here and there. And who knows, perhaps I shall take a sudden notion to swoop down on Dallas! How would you feel about that? Ha-ha! [She laughs nervously and brightly, touching her throat as if actually talking to SHEP.] Forewarned is forearmed, as they say!"—How does that sound?

STELLA Uh-huh . . .

BLANCHE [going on nervously] "Most of my sister's friends go north in the summer but some have homes on the Gulf and there has been a continued round of entertainments, teas, cocktails, and luncheons—"

[A disturbance is heard upstairs at the Hubbells' apartment.]

STELLA Eunice seems to be having some trouble with Steve.

[EUNICE's voice shouts in terrible wrath.]

EUNICE I heard about you and that blonde!

STEVE That's a damn lie!

EUNICE You ain't pulling the wool over my eyes! I wouldn't mind if you'd stay down at the Four Deuces, but you always going up.

STEVE Who ever seen me up?

EUNICE I seen you chasing her 'round the balcony—I'm gonna call the vice squad!

STEVE Don't you throw that at me!

EUNICE [shrieking] You hit me! I'm gonna call the police!

[A clatter of aluminum striking a wall is heard, followed by a man's angry roar, shouts and overturned furniture. There is a crash; then a relative hush.]

BLANCHE [brightly] Did he kill her?

[EUNICE appears on the steps in daemonic disorder.]

STELLA No! She's coming downstairs.

EUNICE Call the police, I'm going to call the police! [She rushes around the corner.]

[They laugh lightly. STANLEY comes around the corner in his green and scarlet silk bowling shirt. He trots up the steps and bangs into the kitchen. BLANCHE registers his entrance with nervous gestures.]

STANLEY What's a matter with Eun-uss?

STELLA She and Steve had a row. Has she got the police?

STANLEY Naw. She's gettin' a drink.

STELLA That's much more practical!

[STEVE comes down nursing a bruise on his forehead and looks in the door.]

STEVE She here?

STANLEY Naw, naw. At the Four Deuces.

STEVE That rutting hunk! [He looks around the corner a bit timidly, then turns with affected boldness and runs after her.]

BLANCHE I must jot that down in my notebook. Ha-ha! I'm compiling a notebook of quaint little words and phrases I've picked up here.

STANLEY You won't pick up nothing here you ain't heard before.

BLANCHE Can I count on that?

STANLEY You can count on it up to five hundred.

BLANCHE That's a mighty high number. [He jerks open the bureau drawer, slams it shut and throws shoes in a corner. At each noise BLANCHE winces slightly. Finally she speaks.] What sign were you born under?

STANLEY [while he is dressing] Sign?

BLANCHE Astrological sign. I bet you were born under Aries. Aries people are forceful and dynamic. They dote on noise! They love to bang things around! You must have had lots of banging around in the army and now that you're out, you make up for it by treating inanimate objects with such a fury!

[STELLA has been going in and out of closet during this scene. Now she pops her head out of the closet.]

STELLA Stanley was born just five minutes after Christmas.

BLANCHE Capricorn—the Goat!

STANLEY What sign were you born under?

BLANCHE Oh, my birthday's next month, the fifteenth of September; that's under Virgo.

STANLEY What's Virgo?

BLANCHE Virgo is the Virgin.

STANLEY [contemptuously] Hah! [He advances a little as he knots his tie.]

Say, do you happen to know somebody named Shaw?

[Her face expresses a faint shock. She reaches for the cologne bottle and dampens her handkerchief as she answers carefully.]

BLANCHE Why, everybody knows somebody named Shaw!

STANLEY Well, this somebody named Shaw is under the impression he met you in Laurel, but I figure he must have got you mixed up with some other party because this other party is someone he met at a hotel called the Flamingo.

[BLANCHE laughs breathlessly as she touches the cologne-dampened handkerchief to her temples.]

BLANCHE I'm afraid he does have me mixed up with this "other party." The Hotel Flamingo is not the sort of establishment I would dare to be seen in!

STANLEY You know of it?

BLANCHE Yes, I've seen it and smelled it.

STANLEY You must've got pretty close if you could smell it.

BLANCHE The odor of cheap perfume is penetrating.

STANLEY That stuff you use is expensive?

BLANCHE Twenty-five dollars an ounce! I'm nearly out. That's just a hint if you want to remember my birthday! [*She speaks lightly but her voice has a note of fear.*]

STANLEY Shaw must've got you mixed up. He goes in and out of Laurel all the time so he can check on it and clear up any mistake.

[*He turns away and crosses to the portieres. BLANCHE closes her eyes as if faint. Her hand trembles as she lifts the handkerchief again to her forehead. STEVE and EUNICE come around corner. STEVE's arm is around EUNICE's shoulder and she is sobbing luxuriously and he is cooing love-words. There is a murmur of thunder as they go slowly upstairs in a tight embrace.*]

STANLEY [*to STELLA*] I'll wait for you at the Four Deuces!

STELLA Hey! Don't I rate one kiss?

STANLEY Not in front of your sister.

[*He goes out. BLANCHE rises from her chair. She seems faint; looks about her with an expression of almost panic.*]

BLANCHE Stella! What have you heard about me?

STELLA Huh?

BLANCHE What have people been telling you about me?

STELLA Telling?

BLANCHE You haven't heard any—unkind—gossip about me?

STELLA Why, no, Blanche, of course not!

BLANCHE Honey, there was—a good deal of talk in Laurel.

STELLA About you, Blanche?

BLANCHE I wasn't so good the last two years or so, after Belle Reve had started to slip through my fingers.

STELLA All of us do things we—

BLANCHE I never was hard or self-sufficient enough. When people are soft—soft people have got to shimmer and glow—they've got to put on soft colors, the colors of butterfly wings, and put a—paper lantern over the light. . . . It isn't enough to be soft. You've got to be soft *and attractive*. And I—I'm fading now! I don't know how much longer I can turn the trick.

[*The afternoon has faded to dusk. STELLA goes into the bedroom and turns on the light under the paper lantern. She holds a bottled soft drink in her hand.*]

BLANCHE Have you been listening to me?

STELLA I don't listen to you when you are being morbid! [*She advances with the bottled Coke.*]

BLANCHE [*with abrupt change to gaiety*] Is that Coke for me?

STELLA Not for anyone else!

BLANCHE Why, you precious thing, you! Is it just Coke?

STELLA [*turning*] You mean you want a shot in it!

BLANCHE Well, honey, a shot never does a Coke any harm! Let me! You mustn't wait on me!

STELLA I like to wait on you, Blanche. It makes it seem more like home.

[*She goes into the kitchen, finds a glass and pours a shot of whiskey into it.*]

BLANCHE I have to admit I love to be waited on . . .

[*She rushes into the bedroom. STELLA goes to her with the glass. BLANCHE suddenly clutches STELLA's free hand with a moaning sound and presses*

*the hand to her lips. STELLA is embarrassed by her show of emotion. BLANCHE speaks in a choked voice.*

You're—you're—so good to me! And I—

STELLA Blanche.

BLANCHE I know, I won't! You hate me to talk sentimental! But honey, believe I feel things more than I tell you! I won't stay long! I won't, I promise I—

STELLA Blanche!

BLANCHE [*hysterically*] I won't, I promise, I'll go! Go soon! I will really! I won't hang around until he—throws me out . . .

STELLA Now will you stop talking foolish?

BLANCHE Yes, honey. Watch how you pour—that fizzy stuff foams over! [*BLANCHE laughs shrilly and grabs the glass, but her hand shakes so it almost slips from her grasp. STELLA pours the Coke into the glass. It foams over and spills. BLANCHE gives a piercing cry.*]

STELLA [*shocked by the cry*] Heavens!

BLANCHE Right on my pretty white skirt!

STELLA Oh . . . Use my hanky. Blot gently.

BLANCHE [*slowly recovering*] I know—gently—gently . . .

STELLA Did it stain?

BLANCHE Not a bit. Ha-ha! Isn't that lucky? [*She sits down shakily, taking a grateful drink. She holds the glass in both hands and continues to laugh a little.*]

STELLA Why did you scream like that?

BLANCHE I don't know why I screamed! [*continuing nervously*] Mitch—Mitch is coming at seven. I guess I am just feeling nervous about our relations. [*She begins to talk rapidly and breathlessly.*] He hasn't gotten a thing but a good-night kiss, that's all I have given him, Stella. I want his respect. And men don't want anything they get too easy. But on the other hand men lose interest quickly. Especially when the girl is over—thirty. They think a girl over thirty ought to—the vulgar term is—"put out." . . . And I—I'm not "putting out." Of course he—he doesn't know—I mean I haven't informed him—of my real age!

STELLA Why are you sensitive about your age?

BLANCHE Because of hard knocks my vanity's been given. What I mean is—he thinks I'm sort of—prim and proper, you know! [*She laughs out sharply.*] I want to deceive him enough to make him—want me . . .

STELLA Blanche, do you want him?

BLANCHE I want to rest! I want to breathe quietly again! Yes—I want Mitch . . . very badly! Just think! If it happens! I can leave here and not be anyone's problem . . .

[*STANLEY comes around the corner with a drink under his belt.*]

STANLEY [*bawling*] Hey, Steve! Hey, Eunice! Hey, Stella!

[*There are joyous calls from above. Trumpet and drums are heard from around the corner.*]

STELLA [*kissing BLANCHE impulsively*] It will happen!

BLANCHE [*doubtfully*] It will?

STELLA It will! [*She goes across into the kitchen, looking back at BLANCHE.*] It will, honey, it will. . . . But don't take another drink! [*Her voice catches as she goes out the door to meet her husband.*]

[BLANCHE sinks faintly back in her chair with her drink. EUNICE shrieks with laughter and runs down the steps. STEVE bounds after her with goat-like screeches and chases her around corner. STANLEY and STELLA twine arms as they follow, laughing. Dusk settles deeper. The music from the Four Deuces is slow and blue.]

BLANCHE Ah, me, ah, me, ah, me . . .

[Her eyes fall shut and the palm leaf fan drops from her fingers. She slaps her hand on the chair arm a couple of times. There is a little glimmer of lightning about the building. A YOUNG MAN comes along the street and rings the bell.]

BLANCHE Come in.

[The YOUNG MAN appears through the portieres. She regards him with interest.]

BLANCHE Well, well! What can I do for you?

YOUNG MAN I'm collecting for *The Evening Star*.

BLANCHE I didn't know that stars took up collections.

YOUNG MAN It's the paper.

BLANCHE I know, I was joking—feebly! Will you—have a drink?

YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. No, thank you. I can't drink on the job.

BLANCHE Oh, well, now, let's see. . . . No, I don't have a dime! I'm not the lady of the house. I'm her sister from Mississippi. I'm one of those poor relations you've heard about.

YOUNG MAN That's all right. I'll drop by later. [He starts to go out. She approaches a little.]

BLANCHE Hey! [He turns back shyly. She puts a cigarette in a long holder.] Could you give me a light? [She crosses toward him. They meet at the door between the two rooms.]

YOUNG MAN Sure. [He takes out a lighter.] This doesn't always work.

BLANCHE It's temperamental? [It flares.] Ah!—thank you. [He starts away again.] Hey! [He turns again, still more uncertainly. She goes close to him.]

Uh—what time is it?

YOUNG MAN Fifteen of seven, ma'am.

BLANCHE So late? Don't you just love these long rainy afternoons in New Orleans when an hour isn't just an hour—but a little piece of eternity dropped into your hands—and who knows what to do with it? [She touches his shoulders.] You—uh—didn't get wet in the rain?

YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. I stepped inside.

BLANCHE In a drugstore? And had a soda?

YOUNG MAN Uh-huh.

BLANCHE Chocolate?

YOUNG MAN No, ma'am. Cherry.

BLANCHE [laughing] Cherry!

YOUNG MAN A cherry soda.

BLANCHE You make my mouth water. [She touches his cheek lightly, and smiles. Then she goes to the trunk.]

YOUNG MAN Well, I'd better be going—

BLANCHE [stopping him] Young man!

[He turns. She takes a large, gossamer scarf from the trunk and drapes it about her shoulders. In the ensuing pause, the "Blue Piano" is heard. It continues through the rest of this scene and the opening of the next. The young man clears his throat and looks yearningly at the door.]

Young man! Young, young, young man! Has anyone ever told you that you look like a young Prince out of the Arabian Nights?

*[The YOUNG MAN laughs uncomfortably and stands like a bashful kid. BLANCHE speaks softly to him.]*

Well, you do, honey lamb! Come here. I want to kiss you, just once, softly and sweetly on your mouth!

*[Without waiting for him to accept, she crosses quickly to him and presses her lips to his.]*

Now run along, now, quickly! It would be nice to keep you, but I've got to be good—and keep my hands off children.

*[He stares at her a moment. She opens the door for him and blows a kiss at him as he goes down the steps with a dazed look. She stands there a little dreamily after he has disappeared. Then MITCH appears around the corner with a bunch of roses.]*

BLANCHE *[gaily]* Look who's coming! My Rosenkavalier! Bow to me first . . . now present them! Ahhhh—Merciiii!<sup>2</sup>

*[She looks at him over them, coquettishly pressing them to her lips. He beams at her self-consciously.]*