

ACT TWO

SCENE III

*The lights come up in the kitchen.
It is later that night.*

RUTH is in the kitchen, wearing a pretty bath-robe and is dancing with herself—just sort of swaying to the music of her portable radio—dancing as she can never dance with a man—a sort of pure narcissism. DON comes from behind the house and up to the kitchen door. He stands at the door watching RUTH. He is obviously under a strain, but he is trying to keep himself reined in. He watches RUTH dance for a few moments, and then enters the kitchen.

DON. You dance nice. My star pupil. [RUTH puts her arms down and crosses to table, turns off radio.] I don't understand you, Ruth. [Crosses to screen door.]

RUTH. [Crosses to sink to pour coffee.] Don't you. Any sign of Willie?

DON. No.

RUTH. [Pours coffee.] Harry and Dad are looking for him. He'll come back.

DON. Maybe.

RUTH. [Crosses to down left stool with coffee cup, sits.] Don't look at me.

112

11]

ALL SUMMER LONG

113

DON. Why did you talk like that? Why do you act like that? The sexiest girl in the neighborhood, and you're ashamed of sex.

RUTH. What do you know about it? You never heard boys snickering in school, on street-corners, looking at you—finding any excuse to handle you—dancing with you not to dance but to— What do you know about it?

DON. [To up Center of table.] Maybe not much. But I do know the way you talked to Willie was—

RUTH. Look, he'll come back.

ION. Maybe. But how?

RUTH. They'll find him—in the movies or someplace. Or he'll just walk in.

DON. [Sits on up Center chair.] I meant how—how? What kind of Willie's gonna come back?

RUTH. Jesus, you take on so— You'd think it was the end of the world.

DON. No, it's nothing as big as that, Ruth. But it is the end of something—the end of Willie as a boy—the end of innocence—the beginning of shame.

RUTH. Well, he should be ashamed.

DON. This was such an important summer for him, and I wanted it to be so good and so right. I wanted to protect him from all this cheapness. All summer, I tried—all summer long—

RUTH. [Impatiently.] Ok— [She takes her cup of coffee and starts for the sink. DON sticks out his hand to stop her.] Hey, watch out. [She juggles the coffee cup to keep from spilling it, then puts it in sink.]

DON. [*Rises.*] I want to talk to you, Ruth.

RUTH. I'm tired. I want to go to bed.

DON. It won't take long.

RUTH. It's been a rough day.

DON. I know. But I've got to talk to you about Willie, and what you said to him this evening.

RUTH. Look, Mother's already talked to me. You can forget it.

DON. Maybe I can, but Willie's still going to ask me about it. He's going to ask me if what he did was wrong, and I'm going to tell him "No."

RUTH. [*Crosses, sits down Right chair, picking up cigarette on table.*] All right. All right.

DON. [*Follows her.*] And then he's going to ask me why you acted the way you did. And that's what I want to talk to you about, about what I'm going to tell him, when he asks me this.

RUTH. I don't care what you tell him.

DON. But, the only thing is, that now he's not going to believe what I tell him.

RUTH. And that kills you, doesn't it? To have him doubt what you say. To have him find out you can be wrong.

DON. But I'm not wrong, Ruthie, and you know it. And it'll have to be you that tells him, since you're the one that did it.

RUTH. [*Rises.*] You can tell him anything you want.

DON. [*Stopping her again by grabbing her arms.*] Look, Ruth, I don't like to talk like this, but this is important to me, and if you don't—I can tell Willie everything I know about you.

RUTH. Such as?

DON. I can tell him there's a child in your body and you hate it.

RUTH. You wouldn't!

DON. Why not?

RUTH. Let go!

DON. I can tell him how it was that night on the porch, and that it wasn't an accident that you hurt yourself on the fence. I can tell him what an ugly barren bitch you really are, and that he is never to be hurt by you, ever, and that he is only to pity you, as I pity you. [*RUTH slaps DON. After a moment, goes on.*] I can make it so that nothing you ever say or do to him after that could hurt him. I can tell him just once and get it over with.

RUTH. You wouldn't dare.

DON. The Hell I wouldn't. I'd do anything to keep that kid from being hurt by you, from getting your warped ideas on what's right and wrong, what's beautiful and what's ugly.

RUTH. You mean you'd do anything to get him back to believing that you're God Almighty on a throne.

DON. That isn't it, Ruth, and you know it.

RUTH. [*Crosses up to landing of stairs.*] I'll tell Mother. I'll tell her what you said.

~~Don. I want to talk to you, Ruth.~~

(Relate to the circumstance)

DON. You tell Mother. And I'll tell Willie. And pretty soon there won't be anyone left for us to tell it to.

RUTH. You! You're the one that's going to tell them I'm ugly. Look at you. You're going to tell everybody. You! [*She tries to laugh.*]

DON. That's right. I'm the one.

RUTH. [*Coming down steps.*] Yes, you're the one. And I know why. Because you hate me. Because I'm a woman, and no woman will look at you any more. No woman would have you, and you hate me.

DON. I don't.

RUTH. You sit around all day doing nothing—nothing but reading books and telling Willie bad things. Damn you—damn you! Damn you! [*She sinks on chair down Left of table and buries her head in her arms.*]

DON. [*After a few moments, with some compassion.*] Ruthie, whatever happened to you? You were such a nice kid.

RUTH. [*She turns the radio on.*] Nothing happened to me.

DON. I know you wanted to get away from here—that that's partly why you married Harry.

RUTH. We'll get away.

DON. I wanted to get away too—as badly as you did. And I was thrown back too—but that's all the more reason we should have made it so Willie wouldn't feel the same way we did.

RUTH. [*Rises, crosses to screen door.*] I don't want to talk about it.

DON. Sometimes I see you sitting on the porch, looking out into space, as though you were looking for the little girl who used to live here. [*RUTH says nothing. She is miserable. When DON sees that he is getting nowhere, he goes on quietly.*] One way or the other, I would like to feel that what happened today won't happen again. The best way would be if you would tell Willie yourself that you were wrong, worried about work, or something. Anything. Just that it was a mistake and that you're sorry. And after that you could just leave him alone.

RUTH. [*After a while she lifts her head.*] All right—I'll tell him.

DON. Good.

RUTH. When I see him, I'll tell him. But I don't believe it. [*DON goes through kitchen door and exits up Right through gate. RUTH crosses down to table, turns radio up, moves table upstage and WILLIE'S stool to Left of table. As she moves the table, WILLIE enters Left from shed, opens screen door. She turns the radio off. They look at each other—then—.*] You came back. [*WILLIE nods his head, "Yes."*] Harry and Dad are out looking for you—Are you hungry? [*WILLIE shakes his head, "No."*] Then you'd better go up and tell Mom you're home. You got her worried sick. [*She starts to go up the stairs.*]

WILLIE. [*Crosses to below landing in hall.*] Ruthie!

RUTH. [*On landing.*] Yes?

WILLIE. I'm sorry I did something wrong, but— [*He stops.*]

RUTH. I know— Don told you it was all right. Well, I guess you've learned your lesson. [*She turns and goes up the stairs.*]

[*WILLIE stands there troubled—he's ashamed— He goes to the screen door, to the porch, and out.*]

DON. [*Has come back and is going toward the front porch when WILLIE comes out.*] Willie! [*WILLIE turns and goes back into the house.*] Willie, come here, please. [*DON crosses toward door. WILLIE stops—comes back—doesn't look at DON; sits on bench.*] Willie, about this evening— Ruth says she's sorry about it. About scolding you. Willie, look at me. Don't you believe me? Don't you trust me any more?

WILLIE. [*Without much conviction.*] Sure.

DON. [*Looks at him—trying to find out the truth—but can't. Then—.*] Anyway, I'm glad you came back.

WILLIE. [*Rises.*] I got going—I didn't get very far—and then I thought—we haven't finished the wall. So I came back.

DON. [*After a moment of pride.*] I guess we'd better be going in—

WILLIE. Yeah—

[*He goes on ahead, DON following. He goes inside the screen door, and lets it slam—almost in DON's face—though this is not rudely intentional—and starts up the stairs. DON, who is used to having WILLIE open the door for him whenever he's around, notices this and stands looking at the door, disturbed over the significance of it. WILLIE goes up a few stairs, senses that something is wrong—stops and looks around. He*

comes down the stairs again, and holds the screen door open for DON, who comes through. He looks into kitchen, then upstairs, then crosses into his room. WILLIE closes door and looks at DON

AS THE SCENE FADES TO MUSIC