

out. LILY stands for a moment very crestfallen. She picks up the little stove with its tube. She opens the trunk and puts it away with the curtains, then stands for a moment thinking her own thoughts. When a KNOCK sounds on the door, she runs to it eagerly.)

Val?

(She opens the door. ROSIE is standing there.)

I thought you were my husband, but of course, he wouldn't knock.

ROSIE. This came for you.

(It's a small white box recognizable to most women as a florist's box. LILY doesn't know what it is.)

LILY. Are you sure that's for me?

ROSIE. It says your name on it.

LILY. It does? I wonder what it is.

(ROSIE wonders, too. She edges her way into the room and watches as LILY opens the box at the table.)

It's flowers! (She lifts out a delicate bouquet and she is mystified by it. Suddenly a great look of happiness spreads over her face) It's from the Minister, Rosie. From the Reverend Emsley. He said he'd send a message. Oh, what a sweet way of doing it. But he's written something, too. (She picks up a little white card and hands it to ROSIE) Rosie, can you read writing?

ROSIE. (Loftily) Sure I can. Can't you?

LILY. I— I haven't my glasses.

ROSIE. (She gives her a sidelong glance to show that she isn't one bit deceived. She begins to read the note. She reads with a little difficulty) "Dear Mrs. Barton: These poor little flowers are not as lovely as you are but I trust you will do both them and me the honor of wearing them.

(LILY looks completely baffled. ROSIE gives her a suspicious look. She goes back to the reading.)

May I hope that you are planning to dine with me this evening?" He's a minister? "Of course, many others have been invited, but the house will seem empty if you are not there. Yours, M. L. Richards."

LILY. (Disappointedly) Richards! Doesn't it say anything at all there about the Reverend Emsley?

ROSIE. (Turning the card backwards and forwards) Not a word about Emsley. (She looks at the card in disgust) And this man's a Minister, you say. Never did I hear the likes of—

LILY. No, Mr. Richards isn't a Minister. The Reverend Emsley is the Minister. (She gets one of the milk mugs, pours water for her flowers and puts them in the mug, setting it decoratively in the center of the table.)

ROSIE. Was you planning on dining with him, too?

LILY. I'm not planning on dining with anyone but Mr. Barton.

ROSIE. Yes, Ma'am. (She exits.)

LILY. You can leave the door open.

(ROSIE obeys. LILY walks back to the window. She stands for a moment merely gazing down and then her anxiety over VAL causes her to lean out so that she can see farther up and down the street. While she is so occupied CARLO and the LENOIR BOYS dash into the room on their eternal game of tag. One of the BOYS is in pursuit of his brother and CARLO. They run swiftly once around the room and out again as casually as though they were in the park. As CHILDREN run out the door, LILY calls:)

Carlo, Daddy's coming.

CARLO. (Calling back to her) I'm playing.

(LILY stands waiting at the door for a brief time, then VAL arrives. She throws her arms around him.)

LILY. You were gone so long today.

VAL. (He walks into the room. It is obvious at once

that something is up. He closes the door behind him) We were rehearsing.

LILY. Rehearsing? Who was rehearsing? What do you mean?

VAL. Here are some sandwiches, Lily. Bill Moore's mother made them. They're roast lamb. She— (*Noticing flowers*) Where did you get those?

LILY. Mr. Richards sent them.

VAL. Who?

LILY. You know, Mr. Strobel's friend. The one who bought the balloon for Carlo.

VAL. (*Rushing to the business of getting ready. Taking off coat*) Oh, the one who had to find out you were married.

LILY. Well, I could have been a widow.

VAL. Over my dead body!

LILY. Val, that isn't funny.

VAL. (*Laughing. Tie off*) Oh, I think it is, Lily. We're going on at the Washington.

LILY. Who's going on at the Washington?

VAL. Bill and I.

LILY. But I thought you were writing an act for Johnny and Bill and—

VAL. Bill's mother delivered an ultimatum. She wants Johnny to stick to his job and forget the theatre. But that leaves Bill high and dry unless I team up with him tonight.

LILY. No, Val, you mustn't do it. Julia was here and I borrowed five dollars from her—

VAL. (*Going to the bureau and opening a drawer*) I wish you hadn't done that.

LILY. Well, it's done now so we're sure of a few meals anyway, so you mustn't—

VAL. (*Rummaging about*) Do you remember a blue shirt I used to have? Is it still around? I think if Bill and I both—

LILY. (*Making no attempt to help him find the shirt*) There was a man here today from Leffertsville.

VAL. (*Busy at the corner*) From where?

LILY. Leffertsville, Staten Island. The school!

VAL. Oh. What did he say?

LILY. Nothing much. He was only here a short time. He was a Minister.

VAL. (*Indifferently— Crosses, pulls out box from under bed*) That's done it.

LILY. He said he'd consider you, Val.

VAL. Well, if things go right tonight, Honey, he can forget me.

LILY. You mean to say that if you and Bill win a measly ten dollars you would throw over a—

VAL. (*Looking through box for shirt*) As it turns out the prize is more than ten dollars. You know what it is, Lily?

(*Lily shakes her head. Interrupts search for shirt to explain.*)

Well, it's the ten dollars to begin with but it's also a full week's work at a theatre down on the Jersey coast that's owned by the man who owns the Washington and the pay for the act would be forty dollars and that isn't all. After that the winners return to the Washington for another full week also at forty dollars. But even that isn't the important thing.

LILY. What is?

VAL. The important thing is that the bookers—the men who place acts in all the theatres—come to the Washington regularly to sign people up.

LILY. Oh! That's the important thing?

VAL. Certainly. If Bill and I— There's that darn shirt. If we're any good at all, we ought to sail along after tonight.

LILY. I thought you were all finished with the stage. I mean, going on yourself as an actor. I never dreamed that you—

VAL. Well, I never dreamed I would either but you can see for yourself the thing just happened. I didn't plan it. Sometimes the greatest opportunities in life occur just this way, unscheduled, unthought of and—

LILY. You call this a great opportunity?

VAL. (*Crosses to washstand. Washes face*) It could be. Bill has a good vaudeville personality and with decent material there isn't any limit to where he and I could go.

LILY. (*Quietly*) Where can you go, Val? From one town to another? From one hotel room to the next?

VAL. Why not? That can be a good life if you aren't broke.

LILY. (*Gazing about the room*) You mean that all the rest of our life would be made up of rooms like this?

VAL. No, not rooms like this. Beautiful rooms with good furniture and good service and—

LILY. All hotel rooms are alike.

VAL. (*Soaps face prior to shaving*) What are you talking about? Why some of them have— (*He breaks off and looks at her sharply*) Oh, you mean they're all alike in feeling. (*He smiles at her*) I'm always surprised when you throw me a curve. You're usually pretty literal-minded.

LILY. What does that mean?

VAL. (*Not noticing the question. Sharpens razor on strap*) But if Bill and I really succeed I'll tell you what we could do. You wouldn't have to travel with me. We'd buy a house somewhere and you and the baby could live in it and keep it warm while I was out of town.

LILY. What kind of a marriage would that be?

VAL. (*Shaving. A little impatient though still good-humored*) All right then, come with me. I guess we don't have to decide it tonight. I haven't signed any contracts yet.

LILY. (*She is quiet while VAL shaves. She walks over to the bed and sits lost in thought, looking down at the copy of Arnold's Essays. After a moment she picks it up and holds it as though she were protecting it from something*) Val, I've never been to an amateur night but I've heard—I've heard about them. Is it true that the audience throws things at the amateurs?

VAL. No. Oh, sometimes it's a trifle wild, but that's only where the management encourages the audience to act like that. At the Washington they don't stand for any rough behavior. Why? Are you afraid I'll get hit with a rotten egg?

LILY. (*Solemnly*) Yes.

VAL. You just have all kinds of confidence in me, haven't you?

LILY. (*Deadly serious*) How could you stand it if someone threw something at you?

VAL. (*Carelessly*) I guess I'd live through it.

LILY. You'd live through it but—but you'd be different afterwards.

VAL. (*Looking at her*) How would I be different afterwards?

LILY. You'd be a man who had let people throw things at him.

VAL. What of it?

LILY. (*Shaking her head*) You'd never be the same again. Val, you're not like Bill Moore. You've held a fine position.

VAL. And still Carlo needed shoes.

LILY. She didn't. She had a pair for school and a pair for Sundays. What more does anybody want?

VAL. It depends on the anybody you mean. I want more than a deathly dull routine that guarantees my kid two pairs of shoes. I want to feel I'm doing something, trying something. I want to feel I'm alive.

LILY. And going on amateur night at the Washington would make you feel that way? (*She shakes her head.*)

VAL. (*Answering her gravely*) I've put a damn good act together—even better than the one I did for Ryan and Ray—I want to get something out of it.

LILY. (*Clutching Arnold's Essays*) Val, remember how you used to argue with Dr. Harmon over all kinds of deep things like—like— (*She can't think of any deep things.*)

VAL. Yes, I remember.

LILY. You won't be able to argue with Bill Moore about those things.

VAL. (*Half-smiling*) I'll argue with him about prize fighting.

LILY. That's what I mean. You'll have nobody that—that will be able to talk with you about the things you know and pretty soon you won't care about knowing anything any more.

VAL. (*Picks up the blue shirt and puts it on*) Do you think I'll stop reading just because I'm in vaudeville? Do you think I'll stop thinking?

LILY. You've stopped thinking already. You stopped when you told Bill you'd go on at the Washington with him tonight. It isn't right. It isn't sensible.

VAL. For God's sake, Lily!

LILY. This—this teaching job in Leffertsville, Val—there is a little white house goes with it.

VAL. (*Sticking his shirt into his trousers and walking away with his back toward her as he gets the shirt properly settled*) We've had those little white houses before.

LILY. We never had a white house.

VAL. (*His back still toward her*) All right. So it was yellow and the roof leaked and the parlor stove didn't work. (*Turning back to face her. He picks up a necktie from the bureau*) Are you coming over to the theatre?

LILY. No.

VAL. (*Putting on his tie*) Well, I guess that answers my question. I'll take the baby.

LILY. You can't leave her alone out there in the audience while you're up on the stage. Anything could—

VAL. (*Slipping on his coat*) I wish this suit was in press. What? Oh, she won't be alone. I'll find somebody I know to sit with her. Why don't you call the baby and give her the sandwich?

LILY. She ate already. She ate with the Lenors.

VAL. That makes two sandwiches for you then.

LILY. I'm not hungry.

VAL. Stop brooding. You act as though I'd taken to a life of crime. Lily, can't you trust me a little?

LILY. I trust you, Val, but—

VAL. But not entirely. You worry about the future. So do I. Only the things we want in that future are different. You'd settle for a little house somewhere that we can't even afford to buy, a house that the School Board lets us live in till they decide they want to change teachers.

LILY. Nobody ever fired you. You went of your own accord and people were always sorry to see you go.

VAL. I can't think of a better epitaph. He went of his own accord and people were sorry to see him go. Have that carved on my tombstone, Lily.

LILY. Don't talk of such things.

VAL. Oh, I was being facetious. I really feel very cheerful. Tonight we're off on a journey. God alone knows where it will end. (*VAL pauses in his primping*) I want to tell you something. All day long I've had a feeling of excitement. Oh, I know it's childish and all that but I couldn't help it. I had a presentiment—a hunch—that something would happen today that would change our whole lives.

(*LILY gives him a long, steady look. He doesn't notice it.*)

I had a tingling sensation, a feeling that this was sort of a stepping off place into brighter days, the definite impression that something big and important was shaping up. And when Bill told me that his mother had forbidden Johnny to go on tonight, I knew that must be it.

LILY. It could have been something else, Val. I had some funny thoughts today, too. After the Reverend left I just broke down and cried like a baby. I—

VAL. Cried? About what?

LILY. I felt that everything had gone wrong but later I felt better and that's when the funny thoughts came. They were almost like dreams. I could see that little white house and Carlo's jumping rope lying in

the grass near the rose bush and I could smell dinner cooking in the kitchen. Oh, Val, just like you I had a feeling that something wonderful was going to happen.

VAL. It will. I'll make it happen.

LILY. Tomorrow I think the Reverend will let us know whether or not—

VAL. *(Crosses Left to mirror—rehearses act in pantomime)* About that, Lily, I'm not making any promises.

LILY. He was a very nice man.

VAL. Who?

LILY. The Reverend. Dr. Emsley his name was. He was quite taken with Carlo.

VAL. You'd better call her. *(Replaces act notes in pocket and adjusts handkerchief.)*

LILY. I called her before, but she didn't come and I hate screaming across the lobby. *(She gets up and goes out.)*

(The moment she is gone VAL starts a quick rehearsal with himself. His lips move swiftly as he runs through a line of dialogue. Then his lips are quiet for a second, allowing for BILL'S line, which he greets with an expression of great incredulity. He then goes into his dance routine. VAL goes on until CARLO and LILY enter.)

CARLO. Hello, Daddy. What are you doing?

VAL. *(Caught off guard)* Hello, Princess. I'm going to take you to the theatre tonight.

CARLO. *(Finding the handkerchief)* To the Washington to see Bill Moore and his brother?

VAL. No, to the Washington to see Bill Moore and your father.

CARLO. You're fooling. Really?

VAL. Really. I want you to applaud a whole lot for Bill and me.

CARLO. I'll applaud and I'll tell everybody that you're my father if I like the act.

(VAL is a little surprised by this evidence of cool calculation. LILY glancing at him sees that he is.)

LILY. Carlo, you'll applaud like mad for Daddy whether anyone else does or not. I know you and your teasing.

CARLO. I wasn't teasing. If I don't like the act, I don't like it, that's all. I have to be honest, don't I?

VAL. Not with actors. At no time is honesty a greater drug on the market than in talking to actors. Always remember that, my child, in case sometime long about this evening you should discover you have an actor in your own family. *(He turns to LILY)* Is she ready to go?

LILY. I would imagine so. People don't really dress to go to the Washington, do they?

VAL. No, I guess not. *(He looks regretful)* Well, we might as well be going then. I ought to get over there early and run through the act again a couple of times with Bill.

(LILY gets CARLO'S hat. Says nothing.)

The hour has struck.

CARLO. The time has come the walrus said.

VAL. Yes, I guess it has. *(He waits but LILY says nothing)* I should have given myself a party so there'd be someone here to wish me good luck.

CARLO. Why don't you say good luck, Mama? *(Pause)* Say it, Mama!

VAL. *(He looks at LILY)* Come on, Carlo.

(CARLO exits. LILY stops VAL at the door.)

LILY. Val. Val, don't go.

VAL. Don't be insane. I couldn't leave Bill—

LILY. Maybe it's best for you not to go. Val, do you remember what you said about having a hunch that something was going to happen that would change our lives? Maybe—well, maybe it's not a good change, Val. Maybe it's something we wouldn't like. We ought to just wait and see what— *(WARN Curtain.)*

VAL. I haven't time to go over all that now.

LILY. It could be important.

VAL. Yes, and going to the Washington with me could be important, too.

LILY. You know why I'm not going.

VAL. I don't know anything except that you should be with me tonight, rooting hard for me, hoping hard for me, There are times when a fellow expects his wife to be on his side.

LILY. I'm always on your side.

VAL. Well, you have damned peculiar ways of showing it. It'll be a long time before I forget that you weren't with me tonight.

LILY. And it will be a long time before I forget that you went on at the Washington Theatre and acted as though you were only good enough for bums to throw things at.

(*SOUND. Faintly Hurdy-Gurdy is heard. Builds gradually, reaches peak at VAL's exit. Sustains through curtain.*)

VAL. Are you going to start that again?

LILY. No, I'm through talking about it. It's what you want to do so do it.

VAL. Oh, I'm going all right and while I'm gone you can sit here hoping that I'll fail, that I'll come home beaten, that I'll—

LILY. I'll do nothing of the kind.

VAL. I don't give a damn what you do.

(*He goes out banging the door behind him. LILY is left alone in the room and the business that follows leads to her decision and the bringing out of the red dress. She has definitely decided to accept Mr. Richards' invitation! She is hurt and angry, and she moves swiftly to the wardrobe for the red dress, which she flings on the bed as—*)

THE CURTAIN FALLS SWIFTLY

ACT THREE

SCENE: *It is ten o'clock the next morning. LILY is seated on the old brass bed, putting on her stockings. She is alone. CARLO'S crib has not been slept in. There is a KNOCK on the door.*

LILY. (*Awakening*) Who is it?

JULIA. (*From outside*) It's me, Julia!

LILY. Oh, come in, Julia.

(*The door opens and JULIA enters. As usual she is a model of high fashion. Her hat is a mass of flowers, maline and ribbons. Her dress is polka dot.*)

JULIA. Well, hello.

LILY. (*Yawning*) Hello. What are you doing up so early?

JULIA. It's not so early. It's ten o'clock. Besides I had a good night's rest. I was asleep by the time dessert was served. What time did you get home?

LILY. (*A little ashamed*) It was after one. Mr. Richards brought me home—in a carriage. He was awfully nice.

JULIA. Even in the carriage?

LILY. Julia! He was telling me a story about when he was a little boy. He was raised very strict, you know, by his old grandfather and—

JULIA. I have a feeling that's not the story I pranced down here to listen to. Did you have any breakfast?

LILY. I had breakfast in bed. Mr. Richards had it sent in from Bristol's.

JULIA. (*Glances over at the crib*) Did Richards do away with Val and Carlo?