

Read

The lights go up on the empty kitchen. It is late afternoon. Lenny McGrath, a thirty-year-old woman with a round figure and face, enters from the back door carrying a white suitcase, a saxophone case, and a brown paper sack. She sets the suitcase and the sax case down and takes the brown sack to the kitchen table. After glancing quickly at the door, she gets the cookie jar from the kitchen counter, a box of matches from the stove, and then brings both objects back to the kitchen table. Excitedly, she reaches into the brown sack and pulls out a package of birthday candles. She quickly opens the package and removes a candle. She tries to stick the candle onto a cookie—it falls off. She sticks the candle in again, but the cookie is too hard and it crumbles. Frantically, she gets a second cookie from the jar. She strikes a match, lights the candle, and begins dripping wax onto the cookie. Just as she is beginning to smile we hear Chick's voice from offstage.

START

CHICK'S VOICE: Lenny! Oh, Lenny! Lenny quickly blows out the candle and stuffs the cookie and candle into her dress pocket. Chick, twenty-nine, enters from the back door. She is a brightly dressed matron with yellow hair and shiny red lips.

CHICK: Hi! I saw your car pull up.

LENNY: Hi.

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CHICK: Well, did you see today's paper?

Lenny nods.

CHICK: It's just too awful! It's just way too awful! How I'm gonna continue holding my head up high in this community, I do not know. Did you remember to pick up those pantyhose for me?

LENNY: They're in the sack.

CHICK: Well, thank goodness, at least I'm not gonna have to go into town wearing holes in my stockings. *She gets the package, tears it open, and proceeds to take off one pair of stockings and put on another throughout the following scene. There should be something slightly grotesque about this woman changing her stockings in the kitchen.*

LENNY: Did Uncle Watson call?

CHICK: Yes, Daddy has called me twice already. He said Babe's ready to come home. We've got to get right over and pick her up before they change their simple minds.

LENNY, *hesitantly*: Oh, I know, of course, it's just—

CHICK: What?

LENNY: Well, I was hoping Meg would call.

CHICK: Meg?

LENNY: Yes, I sent her a telegram: about Babe, and—

CHICK: A telegram?! Couldn't you just phone her up?

LENNY: Well, no, 'cause her phone's . . . out of order.

CHICK: Out of order?

LENNY: Disconnected. I don't know what.

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CHICK: Well, that sounds like Meg. My, these are snug. Are you sure you bought my right size?

LENNY, *looking at the box*: Size extra-petite.

CHICK: Well, they're skimping on the nylon material. *Struggling to pull up the stockings*: That's all there is to it. Skimping on the nylon. *She finishes one leg and starts the other*. Now, just what all did you say in this "telegram" to Meg?

LENNY: I don't recall exactly. I, well, I just told her to come on home.

CHICK: To come on home! Why, Lenora Josephine, have you lost your only brain, or what?

LENNY, *nervously, as she begins to pick up the mess of dirty stockings and plastic wrappings*: But Babe wants Meg home. She asked me to call her.

CHICK: I'm not talking about what Babe wants.

LENNY: Well, what then?

CHICK: Listen, Lenora, I think it's pretty accurate to assume that after this morning's paper, Babe's gonna be incurring some mighty negative publicity around this town. And Meg's appearance isn't gonna help out a bit.

LENNY: What's wrong with Meg?

CHICK: She had a loose reputation in high school.

LENNY, *weakly*: She was popular.

CHICK: She was known all over Copiah County as cheap Christmas trash, and that was the least of it. There was that whole sordid affair with Doc Porter, leaving him a cripple.

LENNY: A cripple—he's got a limp. Just kind of, barely a limp.

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CHICK: Well, his mother was going to keep *me* out of the Ladies' Social League because of it.

LENNY: What?

STOP

CHICK: That's right. I never told you, but I had to go plead with that mean old woman and convinced her that I was just as appalled with what Meg had done as she was, and that I was only a first cousin anyway and I could hardly be blamed for all the skeletons in the MaGraths' closet. It was humiliating. I tell you, she even brought up your mother's death. And that poor cat.

LENNY: Oh! Oh! Oh, please, Chick! I'm sorry. But you're in the Ladies' League now.

CHICK: Yes. That's true, I am. But frankly, if Mrs. Porter hadn't developed that tumor in her bladder, I wouldn't be in the club today, much less a committee head. *As she brushes her hair:* Anyway, you be a sweet potato and wait right here for Meg to call, so's you can convince her not to come back home. It would make things a whole lot easier on everybody. Don't you think it really would?

LENNY: Probably.

CHICK: Good, then suit yourself. How's my hair?

LENNY: Fine.

CHICK: Not pooching out in the back, is it?

LENNY: No.

CHICK, *cleaning the hair from her brush:* All right then, I'm on my way. I've got Annie May over there keeping an eye on Peekay and Buck Jr., but I don't trust her with them for long periods of time. *Dropping the ball of hair onto the floor:* Her mind is like a loose sieve. Honestly it is. *As she puts the brush back into her purse:* Oh! Oh! Oh! I almost forgot. Here's a present for you.

Read

The lights go up on the kitchen. It is evening of the same day. Meg's suitcase has been moved upstairs. Babe's saxophone has been taken out of the case and put together. Babe and Barnette are sitting at the kitchen table. Barnette is writing and rechecking notes with explosive intensity. Babe, who has changed into a casual shift, sits eating a bowl of oatmeal, slowly.

START

BARNETTE, *to himself*: Mmm huh! Yes! I see, I see! Well, we can work on that! And of course, this is mere conjecture! Difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Ha! Yes. Yes, indeed. Indeed—

BABE: Sure you don't want any oatmeal?

BARNETTE: What? Oh, no. No, thank you. Let's see; ah, where were we?

BABE: I just shot Zackery.

BARNETTE, *looking at his notes*: Right. Correct. You've just pulled the trigger.

BABE: Tell me, do you think Willie Jay can stay out of all this?

BARNETTE: Believe me, it is in our interest to keep him as far out of this as possible.

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BABE: Good.

BARNETTE, *throughout the following, Barnette stays glued to Babe's every word*: All right, you've just shot one Zackery Bortelle, as a result of his continual physical and mental abuse—what happens now?

BABE: Well, after I shot him, I put the gun down on the piano bench, and then I went out into the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade.

BARNETTE: Lemonade?

BABE: Yes, I was dying of thirst. My mouth was just as dry as a bone.

BARNETTE: So in order to quench this raging thirst that was choking you dry and preventing any possibility of you uttering intelligible sounds or phrases, you went out to the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade?

BABE: Right. I made it just the way I like it, with lots of sugar and lots of lemon—about ten lemons in all. Then I added two trays of ice and stirred it up with my wooden stirring spoon.

BARNETTE: Then what?

BABE: Then I drank three glasses, one right after the other. They were large glasses—about this tall. Then suddenly my stomach kind of swole all up. I guess what caused it was all that sour lemon.

BARNETTE: Could be.

BABE: Then what I did was . . . I wiped my mouth off with the back of my hand, like this . . . *She demonstrates.*

BARNETTE Hmmm.

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BABE: I did it to clear off all those little beads of water that had settled there.

BARNETTE: I see.

BABE: Then I called out to Zackery. I said, "Zackery, I've made some lemonade. Can you use a glass?"

BARNETTE: Did he answer? Did you hear an answer?

BABE: No. He didn't answer.

BARNETTE: So what'd you do?

BABE: I poured him a glass anyway and took it out to him.

BARNETTE: You took it out to the living room?

BABE: I did. And there he was, lying on the rug. He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said, "What? . . . Lemonade? . . . You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?" Then I got the idea—he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help. So I got on the phone and called up the hospital. I gave my name and address, and I told them my husband was shot and he was lying on the rug and there was plenty of blood. *She pauses a minute, as Barnette works frantically on his notes.* I guess that's gonna look kinda bad.

BARNETTE: What?

BABE: Me fixing that lemonade before I called the hospital.

BARNETTE: Well, not . . . necessarily.

STOP

BABE: I tell you, I think the reason I made up the lemonade, I mean besides the fact that my mouth was bone dry, was that I was afraid to call the authorities. I was afraid. I—I really think I was afraid they would see that I had tried to shoot Zackery, in

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MEG: Oh, come on now, Lenny, don't be so pathetic! God, you make me angry when you just stand there looking so pathetic! Just tell me, did you really ask the man from Memphis? Did you actually ask that man from Memphis all about it?

LENNY, *breaking apart*: No, I didn't. I didn't. Because I just didn't want him not to want me—

MEG: Lenny—

LENNY, *furious*: Don't talk to me anymore! Don't talk to me! I think I'm gonna vomit— I just hope all this doesn't cause me to vomit! *She exits up the stairs sobbing.*

MEG: See! See! She didn't even ask him about her stupid ovary! She just broke it all off 'cause of Old Granddaddy! What a jack-ass fool!

BABE: Oh, Meg, shut up! Why do you have to make Lenny cry? I just hate it when you make Lenny cry! *She runs up the stairs.* Lenny! Oh, Lenny—

Meg gives a long sigh and goes to get a cigarette and a drink.

START

MEG: I feel like hell. *She sits in despair, smoking and drinking bourbon. There is a knock at the back door. She starts. She brushes her hair out of her face and goes to answer the door. It is Doc.*

Doc: Hello, Meggy.

MEG: Well, Doc. Well, it's Doc.

Doc, *after a pause*: You're home, Meggy.

MEG: Yeah, I've come home. I've come on home to see about Babe.

Doc: And how's Babe?

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MEG: Oh, fine. Well, fair. She's fair.

Doc nods.

MEG: Hey, do you want a drink?

Doc: Whatcha got?

MEG: Bourbon.

Doc: Oh, don't tell me Lenny's stocking bourbon.

MEG: Well, no. I've been to the store. *She gets him a glass and pours them each a drink. They click glasses.*

MEG: So, how's your wife?

Doc: She's fine.

MEG: I hear ya got two kids.

Doc: Yeah. Yeah, I got two kids.

MEG: A boy and a girl.

Doc: That's right, Meggy, a boy and a girl.

MEG: That's what you always said you wanted, wasn't it? A boy and a girl.

Doc: Is that what I said?

MEG: I don't know. I thought it's what you said.

They finish their drinks in silence.

Doc: Whose cot?

MEG: Lenny's. She's taken to sleeping in the kitchen.

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Doc: Ah. Where is Lenny?

MEG: She's in the upstairs room. I made her cry. Babe's up there seeing to her.

Doc: How'd you make her cry?

MEG: I don't know. Eating her birthday candy; talking on about her boyfriend from Memphis. I don't know. I'm upset about it. She's got a lot on her. Why can't I keep my mouth shut?

Doc: I don't know, Meggy. Maybe it's because you don't want to.

MEG: Maybe.

They smile at each other. Meg pours each of them another drink.

Doc: Well, it's been a long time.

MEG: It has been a long time.

Doc: Let's see—when was the last time we saw each other?

MEG: I can't quite recall.

Doc: Wasn't it in Biloxi?

MEG: Ah, Biloxi. I believe so.

Doc: And wasn't there a—a hurricane going on at the time?

MEG: Was there?

Doc: Yes, there was; one hell of a hurricane. Camille, I believe they called it. Hurricane Camille.

MEG: Yes, now I remember. It was a beautiful hurricane.

Doc: We had a time down there. We had quite a time. Drinking

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vodka, eating oysters on the half shell, dancing all night long.
And the wind was blowing.

MEG: Oh, God, was it blowing.

Doc: Goddamn, was it blowing.

MEG: There never has been such a wind blowing.

Doc: Oh, God, Meggy. Oh, God.

MEG: I know, Doc. It was my fault to leave you. I was crazy. I thought I was choking. I felt choked!

Doc: I felt like a fool.

MEG: No.

Doc: I just kept on wondering why.

MEG: I don't know why . . . 'Cause I didn't want to care. I don't know. I did care, though. I did.

Doc, *after a pause*: Ah, hell—~~He pours them both another drink.~~
Are you still singing those sad songs?

MEG: No.

Doc: Why not?

MEG: I don't know, Doc. Things got worse for me. After a while, I just couldn't sing anymore. I tell you, I had one hell of a time over Christmas.

Doc: What do you mean?

MEG: I went nuts. I went insane. Ended up in L.A. County Hospital. Psychiatric ward.

Doc: Hell. Ah, hell, Meggy. What happened?