VICKIE (*laughing*)

Hey!

STELLA

Better shave, dear, it's getting late.

VICKIE

Shave—? (*Presents his face for inspection.*) Look. Can't I get by if I powder?

STELLA

No, you can't. Your mother always thinks you look sick when you need a shave.

VICKIE

Oh hell, I suppose I must— You better get dressed too, Stel'—Jerry'll be along any minute.

STELLA

I am dressed.

VICKIE

If you keep that thing on, the folks'll think it's a nightgown— (*Bell rings.*) I told you so, there he is now, Jerry— You open— And listen, Stella, about this bug he's got to go abroad, I don't want you to encourage him.

STELLA (*incredulously*)

Vickie, are you really going to take that stand?

VICKIE

Listen, do you think I'm talking just to hear myself talk?

STELLA (*tensely*)

Oh but it's wrong—

VICKIE (*breaking in*)

Well you butt out of it.—You'd feel swell if the boat went down, or he got in some scrape with a woman over there or something—

STELLA (*hopelessly*)

Oh Vickie!

VICKIE

Well, I mean it!

[*Exits angrily to bedroom, destroying their moment utterly and leaving them, at* JERRY'S *entrance, farther apart than ever.*

STELLA

Hello, Jerry—

[JERRY *pauses on the threshold. He seems strained and inwardly excited.*

JERRY

Shall I put my things in the closet?

STELLA

You can just leave them—

[JERRY *throws his coat and hat over hall chair and enters room carrying a crisply wrapped package, which he keeps behind his back.*

JERRY (*looking around*)

Gosh. The room's beautiful at night. This is the first time I've ever seen it at night, you know. With the candles and everything lit—

STELLA

Well, you sit here and enjoy it. I'm going to change my dress—

JERRY (*quickly*)

No don't—I like it, what you've got on—it makes you look so much taller than you really are—

STELLA (*matter-of-factly*)

Oh I'm pretty husky—

JERRY (*with a small break*)

You're tiny. I could lift you up in one hand—

STELLA

Don't you believe it.

[*Puts her hand on bedroom door, meaning to go in.*

JERRY

Stella,—please—I want to show you something—

STELLA

Show me later—

JERRY

I—don't want to show you later. When everyone's around. I kept imagining on the way down, me walking in, and you here by yourself—I didn't think it would happen—but it has—so you can't just go in and change your dress—

[*His voice falters; he looks at her beseechingly.*

STELLA (*after an instant's hesitation*)

Well—what is it, Jerry?

JERRY (*fumbling awkwardly with the package in his hand*)

I feel like a fool now. You didn't act this way on Saturday.

STELLA

Saturday?

JERRY

Gosh—don't you even remember?

STELLA (*aware of his overwrought condition, and careful to keep the scene casual*)

I remember that we went to the exhibition—

JERRY

Is that all?

STELLA

Why yes—

JERRY

I remember more than that. I remember every word you said—and how you looked when you said it—

STELLA

Jerry this is dreadful, you sound like a detective!

JERRY

No, I'm not fooling. Being with you that day made everything different and wonderful—but all it meant to you was—going to an exhibition I guess.

STELLA

Oh no, it didn't, it meant more than that, Jerry. Because I enjoyed seeing the pictures with you—it was

nice being with someone for a change.—It was awfully nice.

[*There is wistful, unguarded note in her voice as she adds the last sentence.* JERRY *is arrested by it, he searches her eyes eagerly. But* STELLA'S *face has suddenly become a mask. She turns a friendly impersonal smile upon him. It quenches* JERRY'S *fire. When he speaks again, the timbre has gone from his voice.*

JERRY

Oh. Well. I see, sure. (*Turns away in disappointment.*) I'm just crazy, I guess. Forget it, will you, Stella? I came in here, just sort of crazy, that's all—

STELLA (*not disputing it*)

What was it you wanted to show me, Jerry?

JERRY (*very young, with his back to her*)

Nothing. It wouldn't mean anything to you. Never mind.

[*Turns half toward her, twanging the string of his package, as if he wishes she'd take it from him.*

STELLA (*smiling*)

Is this it?

[*Takes the package.*

JERRY (*in his throat*)

Umm.

STELLA (*uncertain*)

Shall I open it?

JERRY (*inarticulate*)

Sure. If—if you want.

STELLA

It's—soft!

[*A beautiful little grin comes over* JERRY'S *tense young features.*

JERRY

Go ahead. See what it is.

[STELLA *unwraps it, and brings to light an enchanting English puppy made of plush. It is at once nonsensical and appealing.*

STELLA (*taken unawares*)

Oh!

JERRY (*his face transfigured*)

Do you remember it?

STELLA

Of course I remember it— (*She has forgotten* JERRY, *forgotten the dog; her mind is in some hinterland of space.*) We were walking over Fifty-seventh Street —after the exhibition—it was in a shop window—

JERRY (*taking it swiftly, and with laughter*)

And you were like a little kid, the way you stopped and laughed at it—

STELLA

I've always had a weakness for toy-stores—

JERRY (*his voice trembling with happiness*)

And you said—"Oh, Jerry, Look! Isn't it adorable!" —and I knew right away that I'd have to surprise you with it!

STELLA (*turning her eyes upon him as if she has come back from a long distance; speaking slowly*)
But you shouldn't have done it, Jerry—

JERRY
D-don't you like it?

STELLA
I love it. It's one of the sweetest things that ever happened to me, your surprising me this way. But it won't do, you see. (*She tries to smile.*) It just won't do.

JERRY
Why you're crying!

STELLA
Nonsense! Why should I cry—over a funny little dog?

JERRY (*at a loss; his eyes wide*)
I don't *know!*

STELLA (*starting to wrap it up again*)
Neither do I.

JERRY
Do you really mean you won't keep it—Stella, you're not *angry?*

STELLA
Jerry—no dear— Only I don't want you to spend your money on me. It must have been expensive.

JERRY
That's not the reason. You're just making that up . . .

STELLA
Well then—I'm your aunt—little boys oughtn't to buy things for their aunts. It ought to be the other way around, if anything!

JERRY
But you're not my aunt. I mean, not *really* you're not! There's no relationship between us, I mean!

STELLA (*achieving an impersonal note*)
Oh, but there is! I have a lot of interest in you, Jerry. I'm just rooting for you to go abroad—with the whole family glaring at me to mind my own business.

JERRY (*impulsively*)
Well, I wish you would—I mean—I don't want to go—

STELLA
Why Jerry!

JERRY (*blurting it out defiantly*)
If I went it would mean I couldn't see you any more.

STELLA
Well, you're a fine one— You decide to be a big fat business man with a tummy and a radio—and you blame it on me.

JERRY (*in agony*)
You're making fun of me—you're treating me like a child.

STELLA (*sternly*)
You're acting like a child, Jerry—

JERRY (*turning away*)

Gosh, I didn't know I was going to feel this way about you. Even when I bought the dog, it was only fun, surprising you— And then I went into a phone booth to see if I could come right over with it. It must have happened then—because—when I heard your voice—such a funny feeling came over me that—that I couldn't talk—I lost my breath sort of—so I said, "Is Mr. Jones there—"

VICKIE (*off-stage. Loudly and sharply*)

Stella!

STELLA (*after a moment*)

What is it, dear—

[VICKIE, *in shirt sleeves, appears upon the threshold. He is in one of his irrational rages over nothing.*

VICKIE

Where the devil's my clothes-brush— Oh hello, Jerry— I left it in my closet on the nail, what'd you do with it?

STELLA

I didn't take it, it must still be there—

VICKIE

Well it's not I tell you— Damn it I bet anything you swept the furniture with it—

STELLA (*hiding the fact that he is hurting her*)

I bet anything I didn't. I bet anything it's right where you left it—

VICKIE

Don't tell *me*. I've been looking high and low!

STELLA

Wait a minute.

[*Goes into bedroom.*

[JERRY's *agitation is increased by a smouldering anger toward* VICKIE. *He presents an outward appearance that more than justifies* VICKIE's *impression that he has come over to "belly-ache."*

VICKIE (*to* JERRY)

Well, *you* look like a ray of sunshine to come to a party—(JERRY *makes no reply, moves away.* VICKIE *follows him up, and lays a not unkindly hand on his shoulder.*) Matter Kid? (*Still* JERRY *makes no reply;* VICKIE *continues.*) Find it a little hard to get accustomed to business, eh?

JERRY (*forcing himself*)

A little—

VICKIE

Grouching about it's not going to get you any place—

JERRY (*feeling* VICKIE's *touch intolerable*)

Oh you don't know anything about it—

[*Jerks away from him.*

VICKIE

Oh go on. I was young once too—

[STELLA *returns.*

STELLA (*holding out the whisk-broom to* VICKIE)

Here, Helpless.

VICKIE (*suspiciously*)

Where'd you find it—

STELLA

In your closet, just where you'd left it.—You'd hung your vest over it—

VICKIE

Tell me I'm blind—

[*Exits—slamming bedroom door.*

JERRY

I'd like to kill him, treating you like that!

STELLA (*with an effort*)

Jerry don't be silly. (*Pause.*) Uncle Vickie and I love each other very dearly— We—we're not romantic any more—(*She stops, then goes on bravely, repeating* VICKIE's *words of earlier in the evening.*) But romance doesn't mean anything. It wears off and something much better comes in its place—

JERRY

I don't believe that. And you don't believe it either! It's just that he doesn't understand things about you —he doesn't know how to make you happy.

STELLA (*with finality*)

I am very happy—

JERRY (*gropingly*)

Then—Saturday was all a dream—I mean I only imagined that—

STELLA (*her feelings get the better of her*)

No, you didn't imagine it, Jerry. It was wonderful. I

did love it. Oh, but I must have been mad—I was under a spell, as if Time had gone back seven years— It wasn't *you* I was happy with, Jerry, it was Uncle Vickie—don't you see?

JERRY (*trying to take it all in*)

Then there isn't any place for me at all—

STELLA

No, Jerry. (*There is a deep silence, while* JERRY *turns away, struggling with his heart-break.* STELLA *goes to him.*) Jerry. Listen to me. You're not in love with me the way you think. (*He wheels in denial.*) Oh no you're not! I'm just taking the place of the girl you will love some day. Now you're—lonely I guess—and you're dazzled by the experience of talking to someone who understands the things you want to say—

JERRY

Would that make me suffer the way I'm suffering now?

STELLA (*simply*)

I think so—

JERRY (*with sudden overwhelming penetration*)

Would it make *you* suffer the way you're suffering—?

STELLA

Jerry! Stop it!

JERRY (*wildly, triumphantly*)

I won't stop it! I know what you're doing! You're treating me like a child because you're afraid! You're afraid of yourself, and you're afraid of me!

End

STELLA (*struggling against him*)

Jerry—

JERRY (*pleading*)

Ah Stella, there's nothing wrong about it, Stella—we didn't ask it to come—it just happened—like something natural and beautiful—

STELLA (*hoarsely*)

Jerry, don't—leave me alone—please—

End

[*She realizes that his touch spells peril for her. Blindly, she picks up a book, and puts it in book-case, trying to conquer herself.* VICKIE *enters from bedroom, drawing on his coat. He is fresh, and spruce and satisfied with himself.*

VICKIE (*smugly*)

Here we are—

STELLA (*with too much composure in her voice*)

Did you leave the room tidy, Vickie—in case the folks go in there—?

VICKIE

It's all right— (*Catches sight of the partially wrapped dog on the chair. Picks it up, looks at it, and chuckles.*) They certainly can make stuff these days—where'd it come from?

[*He looks from* JERRY *to* STELLA. JERRY *doesn't answer.*

STELLA

Jerry bought it for his girl. He opened it for me to see.

[*Takes the dog from* VICKIE, *and wraps it up, tying string around it.*

VICKIE (*with a broad wink*)

Oh *ho!* So there's a girl in this, too! Well, women like this kind of nonsense— Didn't I once buy you something like that when we were first married, Stella?

STELLA (*her eyes on the package she is wrapping; in a still voice*)

Yes. I think you did, Vickie.

VICKIE

It was some kind of a stuffed animal, a pig or a rabbit—

STELLA

It was a kitten with a blue ribbon round its neck—

VICKIE

That's right! I threw away five bucks on it without batting an eye-lash.

STELLA (*quietly*)

You didn't throw it away, Vickie, because I still have the kitten. On a top shelf in a box.

VICKIE

You still got it? Women are nuts, all right! Careful, Jerry, better go easy!—What's her name?

JERRY (*choked*)

There isn't any girl—the way you mean—

STELLA

Don't tease him, Vickie, please!