

No. You hide your light under a bushel. You stay home and play behind closed doors, where no one can hear you except your own family. All you do is *pity* yourself at the piano. That's all. You go in there and pity yourself, playing all those sad pieces.

(REENIE comes out of dining room, and calms herself by watering her plants)

REENIE Mom, I just couldn't get up before an audience and play. I just couldn't.

CORA Why couldn't you? What good is it for your father to have bought the piano? What use is it? (REENIE begins to sob) Now, don't cry, Reenie. I'm sorry. (REENIE goes into parlor and resumes her monotonous scales. CORA goes to telephone) Long distance? Give me three-six-oh-seven-J in Oklahoma City, please. (There is a wait of several moments) Hello, Lottie. . . . Lottie, can you and Morris come over to dinner Friday night? I haven't seen you for so long, I want to talk with you, Lottie. I've just got to see some of my own flesh and blood. (We hear RUBIN's car comes stomping up to the front porch) Reenie's going to a big party out at the country club, and I thought I'd have a nice dinner first. . . . Rubin won't be here and I'll want company. Please come. Oh, I'm so glad. I'll be looking forward to seeing you.

RUBIN (Bursting into the house) What the hell's been goin' on behind my back? (Sees the innocent dress lying on a chair) There it is!

CORA (Her phone call over) Rubin!

RUBIN (Displaying the dress as evidence) So this is what ya wanted the extra money for. Fine feathers! Fine feathers! And ya buy 'em when my back is turned.

CORA Rubin, we were going to tell you. . . .

RUBIN A man has t'go downtown and talk with some of his pals before he knows what's goin' on in his own family.

CORA Who told you?

RUBIN That's all right who told me. I got my own ways a findin' out what goes on when my back is turned.

CORA You didn't leave town at all. You've been down to that dirty old pool hall.

RUBIN I got a right to go to the pool hall whenever I damn please.

CORA I thought you were in such a hurry to get out of town. Oh, yes, you had to get to Muskogee tonight.

RUBIN I can still make it to Muskogee. (Finds the price tag on the dress) Nineteen seventy-five! Lord have mercy! Nineteen seventy-five.

CORA Did Loren Delman come into the pool hall while you were there? Did he? Did he tell you? If he did I'll never buy anything in that store again.

RUBIN That'd suit me just fine.

CORA Oh, why couldn't he have kept his mouth shut? I was going to pay for the dress a little at a time, and . . .

RUBIN "The finest dress I had in the store," he says, walkin' into the Arcade with a big cigar stuck in his mouth, wearin' a suit of fine tailored clothes. "I just sold your wife the finest dress I had in the store."

CORA Oh, that makes me furious.

RUBIN Jesus Christ, woman, whatta you take me for, one a those millionaire oil men? Is that what you think you're married to?

REENIE (Pokes her head in through parlor door, speaking with tears and anxiety) I told you he'd be mad, Mom. Let's take the dress back, Mom. I don't want to go to the party anyhow.

CORA (Angrily impatient) Get back in that parlor, Reenie, and don't come in here until I tell you to.  
(CORA slams the parlor doors shut)

RUBIN See there! That girl don't even want the dress. It's you, puttin' all these high-fallutin' ideas in her head about parties, and dresses and nonsense.

CORA Rubin, of course Reenie doesn't want to go to the party. She never wants to go any place. All she wants to do is lock herself in the parlor and practice at the piano, or go to the library and hide her nose in a book. After all, she's going to want to get married one of these days, isn't she? And where's she going to look for a husband? In the public library?

(RUBIN goes to his corner, sits in his big leather chair, and draws a pint of whiskey out of his desk drawer)

RUBIN I bought her a fine dress . . . just a little white back.

CORA Oh, you did?

RUBIN Yes, I did.

CORA That's news to me. When?

RUBIN Just a few months ago. Sure I did.

CORA I certainly never saw it. What'd it look like?

RUBIN It was white.

CORA Rubin Flood, that was the dress you bought her three years ago when she graduated from the eighth grade. And she hasn't had a new dress since then, except for a few school clothes.

RUBIN Why couldn't she wear the white dress to the party?

CORA Because she's grown three inches since you got her that dress, and besides I cut it up two years ago and dyed it black and made her a skirt out of it to wear with a middy.

RUBIN Just the same, I ain't got money to throw away on no party togs. I just ain't got it.

CORA Oh, no. You don't have money when we need something here at home, do you?

RUBIN I'm tellin' ya, right now I don't.

CORA But you always have money for a bottle of bootleg whiskey when you want it, don't you? And I daresay you've got money for a few other things, too, that I needn't mention just at present.

RUBIN What're ya talkin' about?

CORA You know what I'm talking about.

RUBIN The hell I do.

CORA I know what goes on when you go out on the road. You may tell me you spruce up for your customers, but I happen to know better. Do you think I'm a fool?

RUBIN I don't know what you're talkin' about.

CORA I happen to have friends, decent, self-respecting people, who tell me a few things that happen when you visit Ponca City.

RUBIN You mean the Werpel sisters!

CORA It's all right, who I mean. I have friends over there. That's all I need to say.

RUBIN Those nosy old maids, the Werpel sisters! God damn! Have they been runnin' to you with stories?

CORA Maybe you don't have money to buy your daughter a new dress, but it seems you have money to take Mavis Pruitt to dinner whenever you're over there, and to a movie afterwards, and give her presents.

RUBIN I've known Mavis . . . Pruitt ever since I was a boy! What harm is there if I take her to a movie?

CORA You're always too tired to take me to a movie when you come home.

RUBIN Life's different out on the road.

CORA I bet it is.

RUBIN Besides, I din ask her. She come into the Gibson House one night when I was havin' my dinner. What could I do but let her join me?

CORA She went to the Gibson House because she knew you were there. I know what kind of woman she is.

RUBIN She's not as bad as she's painted. That poor woman's had a hard time of it, too.

CORA Oh, she has!

RUBIN Yes, she has. I feel sorry for her.

CORA Oh, you do!

RUBIN Yes, I do. Is there any law that says I can't feel sorry for Mavis Pruitt?

CORA She's had her eye on you ever since I can remember.

RUBIN Oh, shoot!

CORA What happened to the man she left town with after we were married?

RUBIN He run off and left her.

CORA For good reason, too, I bet. I also heard that she was seen sporting a pair of black-bottom hose shortly after you left town, and that you were seen buying such a pair of hose at the Globe Dry Goods Store.

RUBIN By God, you got yourself a real detective service goin', haven't you?

CORA I don't ask people to tell me these things. I wish to God they didn't.

RUBIN All right. I bought her a pair of hose. I admit it. It was her birthday. The hose cost me sixty-eight cents. They made that poor woman happy. After all, I've known her ever since I was a boy. Besides, I was a li'l more flush then.

CORA How do you think it makes me feel when people tell me things like that?

RUBIN Ya oughtn'ta listen.

CORA How can I help it?

RUBIN (*He has to stop to remember to call Mavis Pruitt by her full name, to keep CORA from suspecting too much familiarity between them*) There's nothin' 'tween me and Mavis . . . Pruitt . . . Mavis Pruitt, nothin' for you to worry about.

CORA There's probably a woman like her in every town you visit. That's why you want to get out of town, to go frisking over the country like a young stallion.

RUBIN You just hush your mouth. The daughter'll hear you.

CORA (*Indulging in a little self-pity*) A lot you care about your daughter. A lot you care about any of us.

RUBIN You don't think I care for ya unless I set ya on my knee and nuzzle ya.

CORA What you need for a wife is a squaw. Why didn't you marry one of those Indian women out on the reservation? Yes. She'd make you rich now, too, wouldn't she? And you wouldn't have to pay any attention to her at all.  
(*SONNY is seen coming onto porch*)

RUBIN All right. Maybe that's what I *shoulda* done.

CORA Oh. So you want to throw it up to me!

RUBIN Throw what?

(*SONNY quietly enters the room, carrying a sack of groceries. CORA and RUBIN are too far into battle to notice him*)

CORA You know what, Rubin Flood.

RUBIN I don't know nothin'.

CORA You never wanted to marry me.

RUBIN I never said that.

CORA It's true, isn't it?

RUBIN I'm tellin' ya, it ain't.

CORA It is. I've felt it all these years.

(*SONNY crosses and goes through the parlor into the dining room, still unobserved by RUBIN and CORA*)

RUBIN All right. If you're so determined to think it, then go ahead. I admit, in some ways I din wanna marry nobody. Can't ya understand how a man feels, givin' up his freedom?

CORA And how does a woman feel, knowing her husband married her only because . . . because he . . . (*CORA now spots REENIE spying between the parlor doors. She screams at her*) Reenie, get away from there!

RUBIN None of this is what we was arguin' about in the first place. We was arguin' about the dress. Ya gotta take it back.

CORA I won't.

RUBIN Ya will.

CORA Reenie's going to wear her new dress to the party, or you'll have to bury me.

RUBIN You'll take that dress back to Loren Delman, or I'm leavin' this house for good and never comin' back.

CORA Go on. You're only home half the time as it is. We can get along without you the rest of the time.

RUBIN Then that's what you're gonna do. There'll be ice-cream parlors in hell before I come back to this place and listen to your jaw.  
(*He bolts into the hallway*)

CORA Get out! Get out and go to Ponca City. Mavis Pruitt is waiting. She's probably getting lonesome without you.

(*SONNY quietly enters from the dining room, and watches*)

RUBIN By God, Cora, it's all I can do to keep from hittin' you when you talk like that.

CORA (*Following him into hallway, taunting him. Here they are both unseen by audience*) Go on and hit me! You wouldn't dare! (*But he does dare. We hear the sound of his blow, which sends CORA reeling back into parlor*) Rubin!

(REENIE watches from the parlor. SONNY is still in the living room)

RUBIN I'll go to Ponca City, and drink booze and take Mavis to the movies, and raise every kind of hell I can think of. The hell with you!  
(He bolts outside)

CORA (Running to the door) Don't you ever set foot in this house again, Rubin Flood. I'll never forget what you've said. Never! Don't you ever come back inside this house again!

(We hear RUBIN'S car drive off now. CORA returns to the living room, still too dazed to be sure what has happened)

SONNY Gee, Mom. That was the worst fight you ever had, wasn't it?

CORA How long have you been standing there, Sonny?

SONNY Since he hit you.

REENIE (Coming forth) Did he mean it about not coming back? Oh, Mom, why did you have to say all those things? I love Daddy. Why do you say those things to him?

CORA Oh, God, I hate for you kids to see us fight this way.

SONNY What did he mean, he didn't want to marry you?

CORA You're not old enough to understand these things, Sonny.

SONNY Did he hurt you, Mom. Did he?

CORA I'm still too mad to know whether he did or not.

REENIE I don't think he'll ever come back. What'll we do, Mom?

CORA Now, don't worry, Reenie.

REENIE Will we have to go to the poorhouse?

CORA No, of course not. Now, quit worrying.

REENIE But if Daddy doesn't come back?

CORA I still have the money my mother left me, haven't I? And if worst comes to worst we can always go to Oklahoma City and move in with your Aunt Lottie and Uncle Morris.

SONNY (Jumping up and down in glee) Goody, goody, goody. I wanna move to Oklahoma City.

REENIE Listen to him, Mom. He's glad Daddy's gone. He's glad.

SONNY I don't care. I wanna move to Oklahoma City.  
REENIE I don't. This is home. This is. And I don't want to move.

CORA Now, children!

REENIE I hate you.

SONNY I hate you, too. So there! Oklahoma City! Oklahoma City! I wanna move to Oklahoma City!

CORA Stop it! There's been enough fighting in this house for one night. Reenie, take your dress upstairs and hang it in the closet.

REENIE I hate the old dress now. It's the cause of all the trouble. I hate it.

CORA You do what I tell you. You take that dress upstairs and hang it in the closet. You're going to go to that party if I have to take you there myself. (REENIE starts upstairs) The next time you're invited to a party, I'll let you go in a hand-me-down.

SONNY (With the joy of discovering a new continent) Oklahoma City.

CORA (Wearily) I'll go out and fix supper, although I don't imagine any of us will feel like eating.

SONNY I do. I'm hungry.

CORA (A little amused) Are you? Good. Come to me, Sonny! (With a sudden need for affection) Do you love me, boy? Do you love your old mom?

SONNY More than all the world with a fence around it.

CORA (Clasping him to her) Oh, God, what would I do without you kids? I hope you'll always love me, Sonny. I hope you always will. (REENIE comes downstairs) Where are you going, daughter?

(REENIE looks disdainfully at them, and marches into the parlor, where, in a moment, we hear her playing a lovely Chopin nocturne)

SONNY Mom, I'm going to sell my autographed photograph of Fatty Arbuckle. Millicent Dalrymple said she'd give me fifteen cents for it. And Fatty Arbuckle isn't one of my favorites any more. If I sold the photograph, I'd