



~~What 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, fire 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. *(Casting to the business end 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 an attempt to keep him from the shirt)* There was a man here today from Leffertsville.

VAL. *(Busy at the counter)* 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)* ~~Cassess 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. (~~Concerned to understand. He looks fierce~~) 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. (~~Caring about the economy~~) 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. (~~Scuffs face prior to showing~~) What are you talking about? Why some of them have—~~(He breathes off and looks at her happily)~~ Oh, you mean they're all alike in feeling. ~~(He smirks at her)~~ I'm always surprised when you throw me a curve. You're usually pretty literal-minded.

LILY. What does that mean?

VAL. (~~Metaphorizing 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. (~~Shooting a hint impatient though still good-natured~~) 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 awhile. What happens. She looks down to the floor. She is not in tonight. Looking down at the ratty old dress she wears. She remembers 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. (~~Smiling~~) 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. (~~Smiling~~) I guess I'd live through it.

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

VAL. (~~Leaving~~) 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 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 the question~~) 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 a word~~) Val, remember how you used to argue with Dr. Harmon over all kinds of deep things like—like—~~(She looks at him)~~  
VAL. Yes, I remember.

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

VAL. (~~He is angry~~) 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 book 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 Leftfertsville, Val—there is a little white house goes with it.

VAL. (~~Stops and looks at her and walks away with his book toward her and gets the shirt~~) We've had those little white houses before.

LILY. We never had a white house.

VAL. (~~He looks at her~~) All right. So it was yellow and the roof leaked and the parlor stove didn't work. (~~Turns and looks at her and picks up a book from the floor~~) Are you coming over to the theatre?

LILY. No.

VAL. (~~He looks at her~~) 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 the book~~) 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 Lenoirs.

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 and looks at Lily~~) 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 move~~)  
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. ~~(Sings) I left to mirror whatever we in you~~ 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. ~~(Repeats her name)~~

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 reversal 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 gives 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. ~~(Frowning the head.)~~ 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 chore 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 Carl's 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 third-in-command 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 grateful.) 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 waltz 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 steps 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—

