

"PICTURE NIGHT"

John Maich

ED FULLER, a storekeeper.
SHIRLEY FULLER, his elder daughter.
HEATHER FULLER, his younger daughter.
BEN JENKINS, a bank clerk.
GEORGE RUDD, a police corporal.
ROD VAN ROMMANI, a showman.

Scene. Fuller's general store in Greenvale, a
decaying country town.

Time. About 7 p.m. on Saturday, picture
night.

1.

It is obviously a country store, for in front of the shelves full of provisions that line the rear wall is stacked merchandise one associates mainly with the outdoors: mattocks and spades, wheelbarrows, coils of fencing wire, rakes and brush hooks, watering cans, bags of fertiliser. Near the open street doorway right are several sacks of potatoes and onions, and several cartons of groceries ready for despatch. Centre is a rickety chair for elderly customers. We can see behind the shop counter running along the left wall which is also shelved to take groceries. There are several empty cartons and boxes under and on the counter. On the counter are also bottles of sweets, dried apples, dried apricots, scales, tins, drinking straws. There is a wall-telephone backstage. Downstage left are steps leading up to the living quarters of the house. Dusk is rapidly falling, and the lights are already on in the store.

At curtain-rise SHIRLEY and HEATHER FULLER are preparing the last of the customers' orders for the day. Heather is perched on a stool at the far end of the counter. She is an awkward twelve-year-old, anaemic, bespectacled, and not likely to become a beauty. One of her legs is still in leg-irons, but her deformity is no longer pronounced, and her affliction is not immediately obvious. Her saving grace is an impishness, a girlish enthusiasm in all she does. She is invoicing the goods as her sister prepares them. Shirley has the poise and beauty and assurance that could belong only to the local belle, sought after ardently for a full five years.

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She is now nineteen, blonde, and very attractive indeed. Leaning on the counter is GEORGE RUDD, a meaty young police corporal, also self-assured from habitually getting his way - except with Shirley Fuller. His manner is careless, good-humoured and provocative with her, suggesting that with men he is either well-liked ~~eror~~ hated. Chewing cow-like, he stretches out his hand and reaches into the bottle of dried apricots. Shirley gives his hand a sharp crack and he withdraws it.

.....

SHIRLEY (Crossly, as she strikes him.) Ask!

GEORGE (Turning his back on her, and blatantly handling other merchandise.) Cin yer broken-hearted ex boy-friend please have some dried apricots?

SHIRLEY (Crossly.) No you can't!

GEORGE (Taking some quickly and filling his mouth.) Still sour on me, eh Shirl.

SHIRLEY (Ignoring him, checking items.) One dripping. Seven spuds. Two onions. (Irritably.) Botheration, no more onions bagged! (She comes from behind the counter with a paper bag and goes right, fills it with onions.)

GEORGE Gee Shirl, yer prettier than ever when yer git onions! Yer show all yer attributes.

SHIRLEY (Crossly.) Oh, shut up!

(She fills the bag and crosses towards the scales. He tries to grab her round the waist, but she flings his arm away.)

Keep your hands to yourself!

GEORGE Just protectin' yer. Girl with a figure like yours needs protectin'. An' I'm the only joker in Greenvale cin do it! Ya know, Shirl, it ain't so long ago women really had to consider that angle - no use marryin' a weaklin' who couldn' look after 'em. You ever considered, Shirl, how downright

cosy and safe yer'd feel, married ter me?

SHIRLEY (Taking onions off scales.) I can look after myself! As if you didn't know! (Hitting his hand again as it reaches for the apricots.) Leave those alone!

GEORGE (Grinning, intimately.) Remember when it wasn't yer apricots? But yer garters?

HEATHER { (Hand over mouth, gurgling.) Oooh!

SHIRLEY { -Take your order and go! (To Heather.) What are you grinning about? Now: check Mrs Turner!

HEATHER (Immediately serious and in rapid monotone.) One powdered milk large two butter half tea four sugar two dozen eggs one flour two custard powder three jelly crystals one marmite large one bottle kerosene one bottle methylated spirit one dripping seven spuds two onions.

SHIRLEY (Putting them in a carton.) Right. Not many more, thank heavens!

GEORGE Workin' late on account of the train breakin' down?

(Shirley ignores him.)

HEATHER Yes, we didn't get our supplies till six. It's been an awful rush, daddy's still delivering. I hope Mr Jenkins gets the filum all right. Fancy not getting the filum until picture night! It's Errol Flynn.

GEORGE Aw, he's good! Ben takin' yer, Shirl?

SHIRLEY (Archly.) I don't know.

GEORGE He bin takin' yer all of two months. When a man takes a Greenvale girl to the Lyric every Saturday night fer two months people expect at least they'll git engaged or somethin' - Hey, let me take that!

SHIRLEY (Trying to lift the carton.) I can manage, thank you!

GEORGE (Holding it.) Lemme help yer!

SHIRLEY I can manage!

GEORGE Lemme help yer!

SHIRLEY (Letting it go, savagely.) Oh, all right! (To Heather.) Who's next, Mrs Hood?

HEATHER (Brightly.) Ye-hess! Two butter. Four sugar. Four flour ...

(As George is carrying the carton right to the others.)
One dozen eggs. One Rinso large. One marmalade ...

GEORGE Where do I put it? Here with the others?

SHIRLEY (Scathingly.) No, out in the middle of the road!

GEORGE (Straightening to read a notice at the doorway.) See Jimmy Coe won the pig then.

HEATHER Yes.

GEORGE Lucky stiff won the Easter raffle too.

HEATHER Yeah. One tomato sauce large. Two onions. Four spuds ...
(As Shirley goes right again with a bag.) Some people get all the luck. I wish I was lucky.

GEORGE You are. Having a sister like this! (As Shirley senses a movement behind her and straightens up sharply.) I didn't move an inch!

SHIRLEY (Bending again.) If you lay a finger on me, I warn you I'll tell Ben.

GEORGE Haw, Ben Jenkins, I'd be afraid of him now, wouldn't I? I'd be real afraid of a great big bank clerk, a penpusher, wouldn't I? (As she takes the onions to the scales.) What's the attraction there, anyway, Shirl? His dad ownin' the Lyric?

SHIRLEY Mind your own business!

GEORGE Of course, he's second-in-command at the bank. But then he'd have to be - there's only two of 'em there.

SHIRLEY And you'd be second in command at the police station if there was anyone else! I only hope no-one ever commits a crime here - a real crime! (To Heather.) Is that the lot?

HEATHER (Mm - hm.

GEORGE ((Going to the counter.) Aw, I know why you're sour on me! You're still sour on me because I roughed up that good-fer-nothin' little tramp down at the showground and -

SHIRLEY (Interrupting him, hotly.) He's not a tramp!

GEORGE (Taking some apricots.) Aw, excuse me, er - showman, that good-fer-nothin' little showman.

HEATHER He was not good for nothing, he was marvellous! I'd like to see you eating fire and doing all them conjuring tricks. I bet you couldn't, I bet you're jealous!

GEORGE Some fire-eater, eh? Burns his throat and has to spend so long in hospital he misses his troupe. Gits left behind.

SHIRLEY At least if he committed some crime you might have charged him instead of beating him half to death!

GEORGE What? And him accostin' Rube! Accostin' my own sister! That's personal, Shirl, and when anyone gits personal, I use my mitts.

SHIRLEY Then you ought to take your uniform off first! (To Heather.) Check Mrs Hood.

HEATHER (As George chews and grins.) Two butter four sugar four flour one dozen eggs one Rinso large one marmalade one tomato sauce large two onions four spuds.

SHIRLEY Right. (Puts them in a smaller carton. Sarcastically.) Come on, he-man!

HEATHER (As George takes the carton right.) I think it must be exciting to be a fire-eater! It's - romantic!

GEORGE Haw!

SHIRLEY Fellers in this town are all jealous of somebody doing something a bit different - a bit adventurous.

GEORGE Listen: when show-people hit town, yer know who works the overtime? The Police Department. That light-fingered mob of swindlers would rob their own grandmothers. I won't be weeping any tears when this Rommani chap goes on his way. I might even help him along with a boot up his behind.

SHIRLEY You're nothing but a great fat Bully! Who's next?

HEATHER (Ol' Kev Charles.

GEORGE (By the way, they say you walked out of the dance with him last night.

SHIRLEY (Tartly.) Do they?

GEORGE Yeah. They reckon Ben was gnashin' his teeth there somethin' awful. Was he awful mad?

SHIRLEY You'd better ask the gossips!

GEORGE But old Ben took ya home, tho? Ah?

SHIRLEY Hurry up, Heather! We'll never get finished!

HEATHER { Half bacon rashers. Six eggs. One butter ...

GEORGE { (Leaning on the counter.) Ben 'ud be a bit stolid an' boring, wouldn't he? I mean, I like ol' Ben he's a nice feller, but wouldn't he be a bit - slow? Ah?

HEATHER One Toby's Oats. One Corn Flakes large. Six candles.

GEORGE (Gurgling, intimately.) Bet he's never kissed yer like me. Bet it's still a dry ol' respectable good-night peck. Bet he's never licked yer tongue or put his hand on yer -

(Sound of car stopping outside.)

SHIRLEY (Hissing.) Stop it, you hear! Heather's -

GEORGE (Withdrawing his hand.) - on yer apricots.

SHIRLEY (Hissing.) She's only twelve!

GEORGE (Glancing over his shoulder.) Hey, sounds like Ben. Before he comes, promise me I cin take yer to the Annual Races. I asked yer first. Okay?

SHIRLEY Oh, drop dead!

(BEN JENKINS enters right. He is in the late twenties, is homely rather than handsome, rather disappointed that he cannot see Shirley alone, for the previous evening ended on none too harmonious a note.)

BEN Good-evening, Shirl. Heather.

BOTH (Hushed, resuming their work.) Good-evening, Ben.

BEN Evening, George.

GEORGE Hi, Ben.

HEATHER Three matches. Two baked beans. Two herrings in tomato sauce.

BEN Pretty dry, huh? Do with some rain to freshen things up.

GEORGE Yeah, dry all right. How's yer dad?

BEN Had another turn. Old devil works too hard.

GEORGE What's the doc say?

BEN Aw, to take it easy. Not to overdo it. (Pause.) See Jimmy Coe won the raffle then.

GEORGE Yeah. (Pause.) Hear about Mrs Hodgekiss? Bust up the car again?

BEN Yeah. Hurt her arm, they say. Had to be admitted.

GEORGE Yeah. (Pause.)

BEN Train was pretty late.

GEORGE Yeah. Ed's still out doin' the deliveries.

HEATHER I hope you got the filum all right.

BEN Yeah. Got it in the truck.

HEATHER Errol Flynn?

BEN Naw, they sent the wrong one again. The Tarzan came but the other one's Wallace Beery.

HEATHER Better still! Four spuds and one bottle of kerosene.

GEORGE Should be all right, too. (Taking his groceries.) Well, better git back to the happy home. See yers all. Don't fergit them Annual Races, now Shirl!

(He goes, and when he disappears, Ben edges nearer.)

BEN Shirl!

SHIRLEY (Holding up a hand to silence him.) Check old Kev Charles!

HEATHER Half bacon rashers six eggs one butter one Toby's Oats one Corn Flakes large six candles three matches two baked beans two herrings in tomato sauce four spuds one bottle kerosene.

SHIRLEY Right. Who's next?

HEATHER Mrs Ogden.

BEN Shirl!

SHIRLEY (Lifting the carton.) Yes?

BEN Oh, allow me!

(She lets him carry the carton of goods right.)

HEATHER (Whispering.) Tell him!

SHIRLEY Ssssh!

BEN (Returning.) Shirl, I'm sorry about last night, I acted prett senseless.

SHIRLEY (Indifferently.) That's all right. Your order's being delivered.

BEN I know I - just called in to say I'm sorry. It was just the way that young whippersnapper whisked you away out of the hall. I felt like a -

SHIRLEY He didn't whisk me away! I'm fully capable of deciding where I go and when - and with whom!

BEN But I felt such a fool, you could have let me know if you -

SHIRLEY Ben, you don't own me!

BEN But where'd you go? What were you doing away a whole hour?

SHIRLEY Talking! Really talking! Only thing anyone talks about in this town is the weather and what's on at the pictures and who's won the raffle.

BEN (After a pause, quietly.) Hey, Shirl, you're still coming to the pictures with me aren't you?

SHIRLEY (Turning away.) Er - I don't know, Ben - I haven't been feeling well - and having to work late because of the train I - I'll see how I feel.

BEN Well, okay Shirl, I hope you feel better. I'll call later. (Confidently.) And you know what I'll be calling in?

SHIRLEY We - ell, the car, I suppose -

BEN The new car!

SHIRLEY No!

BEN Yes! Arrived this morning from Ocean City! Two thousand quids worth of sleek purring beauty! I want you to be the first to ride in it! Gee, it'll slay 'em - I want to swing her in here in front of the Lyric and open the doors and let out the loveliest, most sensational girl in town. In the district, in the whole shire. And you know what's on after the show?

SHIRLEY No.

BEN We're gonna see what she'll do! I'll put my foot down flat to the boards! I'll burn up the road to Ocean City and still have you home by midnight!

SHIRLEY Well, it sounds marvellous, Ben, I'll - I'll see how - how things work out.

(ROB VAN ROMMANI enters right, and comes to the counter. He is a likeable young man of twenty-four, dressed in T-shirt, jeans and sandals.)

BEN I'll call later then, Shirl, I'll let you get on with ...

(But he doesn't go, altogether.)

SHIRLEY Oh, I don't believe you've met, have you? Ben, this is Rob Van ^{Romany} I mentioned. This is my friend Ben Jenkins. He works at the bank.

ROB (Good-humouredly.) A place I never frequent. How d'you do?

(They shake hands.)

BEN How d'you do? I think I've seen you round the town.

ROB At the showground perhaps.

BEN No, I never go there. These things are all very well for the kids, but -

ROB Perhaps at last night's dance? You enjoyed the dance?

BEN Very much. Except when you borrowed my girl for an hour.

ROB Ten minutes, surely, wasn't it?

BEN No, a whole hour, I was getting worried.

ROB We walked and talked. Discussed the delights of Greenvale. And other places. We were carried away.

BEN Well, as long as restitution was made.

ROB I don't know that it was.

BEN Maybe I'm lucky the dances come along only once a month.

ROB Maybe. But as far as I'm concerned, the damage is done. (Smiling at Shirley.) I've fallen.

BEN Hey, we expect confidence from a confidence man, but don't overdo it now!

ROB I am confident.

BEN They tell me you do a bit of hypnotism, too, is that right?

ROB It is.

BEN Maybe that accounts for last night. Hypnotism is confidence too. Well, I bet you couldn't hypnotise me.

(Pause. They stare steadily at each other.)

ROB No. No, I bet I couldn't.

BEN (Foolishly, not knowing what to say.) No ... (To everyone.) Well, I'd better get this film up to dad. See you later, Shirl.

(He goes, and soon the car is heard going away.)

ROB That's what he thinks.

SHIRLEY What?

ROB That's what he thinks, he'll see you later. We've got a lot of things to discuss, a lot of arrangements to make. Have you told anyone?

SHIRLEY Well, no. Only Heather.

ROB Good, it's the only way, to turn your back on Greenvale suddenly, without telling anyone. Leave the old way of life behind you before it entangles you like a octopus - And what does Heather think about it all?

HEATHER Oo, I think it's exciting! I've decided to carry on helping daddy for a couple of years, and when I'm old enough, I'll run away too!

ROB With a circus or a show?

HEATHER Yes! And a man, I hope!

ROB (Laughing.) Listen to the infant - !

SHIRLEY Rob, I - I may have to see Ben tonight.

ROB What for? You've just seen him. (As she hesitates.) Hey, he is just a friend of the family like you said, isn't he? He sounded rather injured just now. You sure this isn't a romance I'm breaking up?

SHIRLEY Positive!

ROB Well? Why? How come?

SHIRLEY Well it - it is picture night and - and Ben and I usually go. Daddy would be very suspicious if suddenly, for no reason at all, I didn't go.

(Rob thinks about this, comically beats his brains as if he is not only puzzled but flabbergasted, sees reason, smiles.)

ROB Okay. Picture night. It'll be an awful rush tomorrow but we'll get away somehow. Nothing heavy now, for God's sake. Just the clothes you stand up in and you! (Grabbing her arms over the counter.) Give me just one kiss for my blood pressure

SHIRLEY Rob! Daddy'll be back at any moment! He'll be wild if the last batch of orders isn't ready! Please! (She is released To Heather.) Who's next?

HEATHER Mrs Ogden. And that's the lot.

SHIRLEY Just behave yourself while we do Mrs Ogden. Take a chair .. (As he is leaving the shop with it.) Hey!! (He turns back, nonplussed.) Sit on it! (Heather is highly amused.)

ROB I never sit on chairs.

(He proceeds to balance it on his hand and then his nose.)

SHIRLEY Heather, come on!

HEATHER Oh. Two butter. Four sugar. Half tea ... (To Rob.) Do you do balancing too?

ROB Professionally, no. As you can see. (He stops.) Never had the time.

HEATHER (As Shirley grimly taps her fingers.) Oh, sorry. One powdered milk large. One dozen eggs. One dripping ... (To Rob.) Did you remember to bring the book, the book on conjuring?

ROB I'm dreadfully sorry look, I forgot! I'll bring it down later this evening for certain. I'll run all the way to punish myself for forgetting.

HEATHER Gee, thanks, if I could only learn one or two tricks it would - well it would be -

ROB It might change your entire future!

HEATHER Yes! Oh - One Uncle Toby's Oats. Four flour. One Persil large ... (To Rob.) Did it hurt very much, the burning?

ROB (Wryly.) I won't do it again.

HEATHER (Holding her throat, agonised.) How did it happen?

ROB I swallowed the stuff.

HEATHER What stuff?

ROB Petrol.

HEATHER (Is that what you - ?

SHIRLEY (Come on!

HEATHER One packet Sunlight soap. Seven spuds. Two carrdts. Sorry

sorry sorry, three onions. And that's the lot.

(As Shirley goes right again, Heather brings her stool forward opposite Rob.)

And it really hurts fire-eaters if they get burnt?

ROB It's most unpleasant.

HEATHER Do you often get burnt?

ROB Not if I keep in practice. Most things you need practice.

HEATHER And could you teach me to be a fire-eater?

SHIRLEY (Weighing the onions.) Hey! Not so many questions, give the poor fellow some peace! Now: check Mrs Ogden!

HEATHER Two butter four sugar half tea one powdered milk large one dozen eggs one dripping one Uncle Toby's Oats four flour one Persil large one packet Sunlight soap seven spuds two carrots three onions.

SHIRLEY Well! At last! (To Rob.) And you'd better buy something. Daddy hates to see boys just - hanging about in here.

ROB (In mock protest.) Oh, look, I've been trying to give you my order! You've been too busy doing Mrs Ogden to take any notice. Allow me.

(He takes Mrs Ogden's carton right.)

SHIRLEY Well? And don't you dare ask for onions!

ROB Let's see. One packet of cotton wool. One box of matches. That's all, thank you.

HEATHER What a funny order! Don't you ever eat anything?

ROB I have a drum of petrol. Now I have something to go with it.

HEATHER Cor, don't you get thirsty?

ROB Well, come to think of it I'd like a bottle of milk and a glass in case your father comes back.

(They get him his things. Shirley pours his milk and he drinks.)

Here's to us! And you've made up your mind? No regrets?

SHIRLEY We - ell ...

ROB What's the matter?

- SHIRLEY It's - it's been so sudden the - the change. As if I'd suddenly stopped being me and decided to be someone else.
- ROB And that's exactly what you are doing! And you're right to do it! People put up with things all their lives which they could so easily change. Their jobs, their companions, their looks, even their names!
- HEATHER I've always hated my name! Heather Fuller! Ugh!
- ROB I went to school with a boy named Silas Hogg, and Silas Hogg he'll probably be till the day he dies. I was Robert Perkins for nineteen years and hated it. Robert Perkins, shop assistant. And when I ran away as a putter-up of tents it was suddenly so obvious how easy it was to change. I was Rob Van Rommani! Magic entered my life! Freedom and travel and excitement entered my life like fresh blood. Show people were glad to teach me what they knew. There was no throat-cutting, no competition, no keep out sign. And soon I was Rob Van Rommani, showman! Travelling showman!
- SHIRLEY But I've - never been a showgirl .. Perhaps I'd be - unsuitable or -
- ROB Unsuitable! All you need is beauty and - life! Show people beauty and life and they'll watch and envy you!
- SHIRLEY All the showgirls I've seen look so painted up, so - cheap-looking.
- ROB They're beautiful! You can't be a showgirl without beauty! Of course they paint up and wear scanties, like beautiful young women have since before Cleopatra! That's what people want and you can't blame 'em. Half the dowdy catwomen of this town would give everything they own to be showgirls, but they can't be. So just to be a bit cattier, they treat showgirls as sluts. Well listen: I've worked among 'em for five years and they're good scouts, they're generous; they've got guts! They can swing a sledge-hammer as good as a man! And they're beautiful! (Lowering his voice.) But Shirley, you'll be the most beautiful one of all ...
- (His enthusiasm has won over most of Shirley's doubts; Heather has climbed up to sit on the counter between them agog with the excitement of it all.)
- HEATHER Yes! Won't it be wonderful! Shirl, you're the luckiest thing, I wish I was you!
- SHIRLEY (To Rob.) But don't you ever want a - a home? - I mean, I'm not saying I want to settle down or anything, but - well, do you really like the life, with its - ?
- ROB It's a great life! With it's ups and downs and discomforts

and tragedies, yes, it's a great life! To me it is life! The opposite is here - with the flour and butter and corn flakes and soap flakes. Busy-ness: it's inertia made to look busy. The people of this town would tell you life's 'so-so,' it's 'not too bad,' it's 'very well thank you' or that they 'can't complain'. And now and then an honest pessimist may admit it's downright horrible. How many of them can, like me, throw back their arms and say: 'It's a great life!'

(A truck has been heard to stop. ED FULLER enters to three more or less startled looks. He is a shabby sprawling middle-aged man, roughly dressed and aproned. He wears a patch over one eye, and his thinning hair is untidy. He sounds surly, oppressive, stubborn, but at the same time we feel it may only be the weight of years and pressure of business that clouds a genuine love of his daughters with a weary irritability.)

FULLER Git down off that counter, Heather! How many times I told you not to git on the counter? What sort of conference is going on there anyway?

SHIRLEY Nothing, daddy. This gentleman is telling us about his work.

FULLER (Snorting.) Gentleman! Ain't you the young show feller who bin round town lookin' fer a job?

ROB That's right.

FULLER Got in trouble with the Law didn't yer?

ROB (We-ell no, not really -

FULLER (There's no work in this town for strangers. Hardly enough jobs for the local men.

ROB So I found out.

FULLER What's the attraction in Greenvale, anyway?

ROB (Er -

FULLER (Nothin' here fer anyone who isn't prepared to do an honest day's work. Nothin' here for fly-by-nights.

(Short awkward pause.)

SHIRLEY Rob, you hadn't met my father, had you. Daddy, this is Rob Van Romany *Romani*.

FULLER (Bending for a carton, not seeing Rob's half-extended hand.) Oh, well I'm busy with these orders. Be lucky to get 'em out by dark. Come on, jump to it, girl, you paralysed?

(As Shirley lifts a carton and Rob goes to do the same.) She don't need your help. You can't load a provision truck by conjurin'. She knows what to do with 'em.

(As Fuller and Shirley carry cartons out, Rob goes back to his milk and watches them.)

HEATHER (In a venomous whisper.) Oooo, that man! After mummy died it was Alice! Since Alice went away he's treated Shirley like a dog! He's always got it in for someone! When Shirley goes it'll be me! I'll show him!

ROB You're very welcome. What's ~~the~~ trouble, his liver?

HEATHER It's him, his nature! He hasn't got any real trouble worth the name. He just got used to having three or four unpaid slaves round the place.

ROB He doesn't give you any money?

HEATHER No! Only what we need for clothes and things.

ROB Nice feller!

HEATHER And it isn't as if business was slack. He's making a fortune!

ROB That's probably half his trouble then.

(Pause. FULLER and SHIRLEY finish loading the cartons and enter again. Shirley goes towards the counter.)

FULLER You're takin' a long time to drink a glass of milk! My girls are busy, haven't got time to waste funnin' a - !

SHIRLEY (Plaintively.) Oh daddy, Rob's a friend of mine, he - !

FULLER I don't care who the hell he is! This is a grocery store not a milk bar. We don't cater for loungers and deadbeats, rouseabouts without a roof over their heads.

(Silence.)

ROB (Tensely.) Shall I tell him?

(Shirley nods, anxiously.)

Mr Fuller, the reason I - I stopped around and looked for a job ~~here~~ was - your daughter. I saw her when the show first came to town, and when I had my accident I - I hoped desperately to see her again. Well last night at the dance, we - we met -

FULLER (Grimly.) I heard about it.

ROB (Quietly.) We fell in love ... Fell in love and -

FULLER (Harshly, to Shirley.) Well?

SHIRLEY (Timidly.) Yes daddy, we - fell in love. (As her father gives an enraged grunt.) But not only that, Rob's offered me a chance to do something different, he's offered me employment -

FULLER Offered you WHAT?

SHIRLEY Employment. A job. Helping him with his show.

FULLER EMPLOYMENT!! With his SHOW!! So that's the game is it?

ROB { Mr Fuller, could I point out -

SHIRLEY { Please, daddy, don't make a scene or - !

FULLER Shut up, the pair of you!

SHIRLEY But daddy, let me explain - !

FULLER \$HUT UP!! (To Rob.) Now listen here, Mr So-called Showman! You're not the first tramp to come to this town: you dead-beats are ten a penny! And you're like the rest of 'em: you think we're all bewitched - poor slow country cousins who can't see you fer what you are - can't see anything beyond our noses -

ROB Mr Fuller, I don't think -

FULLER Shut up and listen!! I had one daughter already run off with a damn' good-fer-nothin' nomad who promised her the world! My Alice fell fer the whole damn glitterin' make-believe set-up. An' yer know what she is now? A harlot in Ocean City -

SHIRLEY { Daddy, she's not, she's - !

FULLER { - tryin' to earn enough to keep her baby alive! And she hasn't seen her smart-Alec fresh-air husband in three years, an' it 'ud be bad luck if she ever did see him! ... So you can work out your chances with Shirley from that. You think I'd let a second daughter of mine go off with any riff-raff she's known for twenty-four hours? You haven't a chance in the world, young feller: it's time you grew up and realised there's two types on this earth, the decent steady people and the fly-by-nights.

ROB I've grown up, and I've been around! And Shirley's grown up, whether you like it or not. She's got a mind of her own.

FULLER (Sneeringly.) Oh? Has she? - Well, she's also got a good steady boyfriend who respects her and who'll look after her - a good steady local boy who'll be bank manager here some day

and do a lot of good for the town like his father before him. I'll not let a whippersnapper like you mess up her life.

ROB

Her life? She hasn't lived! Why, her so-called life consists of slaving away in a gloomy store six days out of seven, a monthly dance at the Lyric and a weekly film at the Lyric. She's never been out of this one-eyed town, this - !

(He breaks off, realising his blunder. Silence.)

FULLER

(Lowly, viciously.) One-eyed town! ... Smart-Alec! ... I'll show you how we deal with smart-Alecs!

SHIRLEY

Daddy, he didn't mean it, please don't - !

FULLER

Don't hurt him? No, I won't hurt him. (He goes to the telephone.) Give me the police-station. Now we'll see how smart you are!

SHIRLEY

Don't get George Rudd! Please don't get - !

FULLER

Git to yer room! Go on, git and change yer dress! - Hullo, that you George? (His tone becomes one of gloating triumph.) Ed Fuller. Hey, yer know that smart-Alec showman who molested your Rube? Well, it seems he's got the same ideas about my Shirl ... Yeah.

SHIRLEY

(Grabbing his arm.) Please, he hasn't done anything, neither of us has done -

FULLER

(Roaring at her, flinging her away.) I told you to git to yer room!! GIT AND CHANGE YER DRESS FER BEN!!

(Shirley bursts into tears, then runs off left.)

FULLER

Naw, only that loony kid of mine ... Yeah ... Naw, who wants a court case, it's just time he left town that's all ... Well, he's got a tent down at the showground, hasn't he? ... Yeah, I don't care what yer do with it, sling it in the gutter. All I want is some safety fer my kids ... Yeah, good George ... Yeah ...

(He hangs up.)

ROB

(Sipping his milk.) Thanks very much, Mr Fuller. Real pleasant of you.

FULLER

It's a pleasure. Leave things to the Law I say. Let them deal with smart-Alecs.

HEATHER

(Plaintively.) Daddy, you're the meanest thing, trying to get him arrested by that bully George Rudd!

FULLER

I don't want him arrested. I just want him out of town ...

(Sneeringly, to Rob.) Well, isn't it about time you started off to the showground to defend yer - property?

ROB I'd like to drink my milk first.

FULLER Heather, make sure he pays for it!

ROB (Whipping out a ten shilling note, savagely.) It's the same colour yours is!

FULLER It'd better be. (Pause while they glare at each other.) I've got some more deliveries to do. I don't want any funny business between you and Shirley while my back is turned. You'd do best to drink your milk and go before I git back.

(He goes off right, and soon the truck roars off.)

HEATHER I hate him!

ROB (Sitting.) I don't exactly love him.

HEATHER I'm going to sit on the counter and steal some chocolate! (She does so. Silence.) You want some?

ROB No, thank you. Hadn't you better see how your sister is?

HEATHER Oh, she's all right, he often makes her cry. Better tell her though. (Shouting.) SHIR-IRL! He's GAWN! (In a hoarse whisper to Rob.) Thank God!

ROB Think she'll still come with me?

HEATHER Course!

ROB Sure?

HEATHER Course!! Daddy acting mean like that 'ud make her more determined than ever to run away ... (Pause. Confidentially.) Forget about him, that's the best way ... (Silence.) Shall I call her again? SHIR-IRL! He's GAWN! ... I'll give her a couple of minutes. She hates me around when she's just had a cry. Then I'll go and get her. Daddy says one of us is always supposed to be in the shop, but I know you won't steal anything.

ROB (Rising, going to the counter.) Thanks. I'd better pay you ... (Ruefully.) It may be the same colour as your father's, but I'm afraid it's my last. Don't treat it too rough.

HEATHER (Taking the note to the till.) Isn't it awful being poor? You know, I've never owned ten shillings in my whole life, not all at the same time, anyway ... (Bringing him his change.) I did my best, but it looks like you'll be living on love for a while.

ROB (Laughing.) There's a show leaving Ocean City on Monday. Then our troubles will be over. (Leaning on the counter, confidentially.) Look, when you go and get Shirley, would you do something for me? Just, stay behind, or disappear for a moment or two?

HEATHER So that you can do a bit of smooging?

ROB (Innocently.) What's smooging?

HEATHER Aw, don't pretend you don't understand. Well, I'll leave you alone provided you do something for me first.

ROB What's that?

HEATHER Show me how to do a conjuring trick! Just one! Can you do that?

ROB (Drawling.) Aw - now that'd be awful difficult - you springin' it on me outa the blue, but - well, all right. You see that milk glass?

HEATHER (Already intent and excited) Ye - es!

ROB Fill it up. (When she has done so.) Now, could I borrow that cloth, please?

HEATHER (Getting him a cloth off the shelf behind her.) Ye - es.

ROB Thank you. Now! I hold the glass of milk tightly and cover it with the cloth. Feel it! (As she does so.) Careful not to spill it. Now you're sure it's there?

HEATHER Yes.

ROB You're quite sure?

HEATHER Yes.

ROB Hit it!

HEATHER Eh?

ROB Hit it hard!

HEATHER Oh no I - I don't want to make a mess!

ROB You Won't, I promise you. Just hit the glass hard!

(She hesitates, then strikes the cloth, which collapses on the counter.)

HEATHER But where is it?

ROB The glass of milk?

HEATHER Yes!

ROB Take a look behind the dried apricots.

HEATHER (Amazed.) But how did it get there?

ROB I put it there.

HEATHER But I felt it and saw it under the cloth.

ROB Felt it, yes, but you only thought you saw it. What you really saw was the round outline of - (producing it.) the top of a jam jar. Simple hah?

HEATHER Oooooo! Yeeeeees!

ROB You know why it works, and why all conjuring works?

HEATHER No.

ROB Because people live boring lives. What they expect to happen happens, day in day out, year in year out. Find a way, no matter how simple, to break that pattern and surprise them - and their minds can't cope with it. They dismiss it vaguely as illusion - conjuring - trickery.

HEATHER And could I do that trick?

ROB If you practise, yes, of course you could. Anyone could.

HEATHER Well! I'll practise it tomorrow and try it out on Susy Macdonald! Won't she be surprised!

ROB Now, don't forget your part of the bargain.

HEATHER What?

ROB To um - you know (a gesture of disappearance) - when Shirley comes back.

HEATHER Oh, yes of coooooourse! But first tell me about hypnotism! Were Susy Macdonald and them really hypnotised - I mean, right under your control?

ROB Yes.

HEATHER Oo, that's exciting! And when a girl is like that could you - could you take her clothes off and - (She sees his look of comic censorship, and breaks off.)

ROB I - could - but, um ...

HEATHER Oooo ... And is it hard to do - hypnotise people I mean?

ROB (Leaning confidentially on the counter and gradually speaking slower and slower until she is entranced.) No. It's not hard to do at all. Actually it's quite easy, most of the time. You see ... you come to a place like Greenvale ... nice name, by the way, Greenvale - peaceful, you know? ... You come to a town like Greenvale and you watch the people ... moooooving from their houses ... moooooving along the street ... moooooving into the butcher's the baker's the stores ... you gaze into their faces and they gaze back ... and you know ... you find they're half hypnotised all the time ... (He suddenly flickers his fingers in front of her face, and they both straighten up.) No, it's not difficult at all!

HEATHER (Suddenly.) Hypnotise me! Now!

ROB Oh, no I -

HEATHER Come on! Please, I've always wanted to -

ROB Here in the store? No, I couldn't do that, honestly, I -

HEATHER Just for a minute!

ROB Suppose somebody came and -

HEATHER Nobody'll come! They're all getting ready for the pictures! Come on!

ROB Aw ... well ... all right, just for a minute. Relax your body ...

HEATHER Oo, this is exciting! My body's relaxed.

ROB Don't be bothered thinking of anything ... You're too tired to think ... You're just gonna have a little sleep ... You're not afraid ... just gonna have forty winks ... after a busy ol' day ... a nice deep sleep ... deep sleep ... sleep ...

(Silence.)

Heather Fuller, you're a nice kid, I'm fond of you. You're like my kid sister.

HEATHER Thank you Mr Van Romanni.

ROB Oh, you can call me Rob. You've got sisters too, haven't you Heather?

HEATHER Oh yes, Alice and Shirley ...

ROB Rob.

HEATHER Rob.

ROB Tell me about Alice.

HEATHER She lives in Ocean City and has a baby boy named Paul and she works in a pub.

ROB Oh, I see. And is she pretty?

HEATHER Oh yes, she is, she's pretty, but she used to be prettier still.

ROB Did she? But I bet she was never as pretty as Shirley.

HEATHER Oh no!

ROB Shirley's beautiful, isn't she?

HEATHER Yes!

ROB Too bad she has such a weakness for boys - always falling in love all the time.

HEATHER (Smilingly.) Oh, she's not like that!

ROB Doesn't she fall in love all the time - every couple of months?

HEATHER Naw!! It's the boys - they all fall in love with her.

ROB Oh, yes, of course. But this chap Ben from the bank, isn't she in love with him?

HEATHER No! He's nice - been taking her to the pictures for a while but - well, she doesn't love him, you know that! Oh come off it, you know who she's fallen for, head over heels!

ROB (Timidly.) Me?

HEATHER Of course!

ROB She said that?

HEATHER Ye-e-e-es!

ROB She said she loves me?

HEATHER Ye-e-e-es! You know what she said? (She gives a delighted and impish giggle.) She said that for sheer body - for sheer attractiveness! - you know, sheer sex-appeal! - you're better than Victor Mature even. (Whispering.) Was she jealous of those showgirls! Boy, was she glad you got left

behind! She said she didn't think she'd get a decent night's sleep until you - gobbled her up for supper! (Confidentially) I think she's sex-starved, she might even be a bit over-se - !

ROB Oh - oo, p-perhaps it's time you woke up, little girl. Heather, you're going to wake up now and feel pretty good, pretty rested ... Wake up, Heather ... Hullo ...

HEATHER Ooooo! ... Did I ... did I go off?

ROB Yes, you went off. I put you to sleep.

HEATHER (Sharply.) Did I say anything!?

ROB No, at least not that I -

HEATHER (Turning quickly to it.) Did you rob the till!?

ROB (Laughing.) Naw!

HEATHER What'd I say!?

ROB You just said - some very nice things about your sisters.

HEATHER Oh. Thank goodness. I don't always, you know. Depends what sort of mood I'm in.

ROB Oh, I see. Well, now you've been hypnotised, and you know how to do a conjuring trick. How about - seeing how your sister is?

SHIRLEY (Appearing at the top of the steps, with a grace and beauty that seem deeper, more fragile, yet calmer, than before.) I'm all right now.

ROB Shirley, what a dress! And what a girl - ! Shirley, you're the most breath-taking sight I've seen in five years continuous travel! (As she descends and goes behind the counter, and Heather tries to escape up the stairs.) Why you're - you're edible, you're - nice enough to gobble up for supper!

SHIRLEY (Seeing Heather's foot on the bottom step.) Where are you going?

HEATHER To change my dress.

SHIRLEY You've changed it! You stay here!

HEATHER (Limping to the right doorway at a great pace.) All right, I'll keep a lookout for you! ... Go ahead!

(Rob is moving round to Shirley.)

SHIRLEY No, Rob! Please! Not behind the counter!

HEATHER There's nobody coming.

SHIRLEY (As he embraces her.) Rob - not behind the counter!

(By the time she responds it is quite a long kiss.)

HEATHER (Looking out.) There's nobody coming. Can't see a soul.
(Looking back again.) ... There's nobody coming ... (It is
such a long kiss she has to look out again.) Nobody about
at all - oh!

(She sees they have finished, and her vigil ceases. She
sits on the onion bags, hugging her knees.)

ROB (Leading Shirley to the near end of the counter.) Now here's
the plan of campaign. Make some excuse to meet me at the
station tomorrow afternoon 4.15. We'll take the train to
Ocean City. There's a show doing the coastal circuit and
coming back through the west. When that's over we'll have a
let-up in Ocean City - you can visit your sister. Then maybe
next time we'll do the southern circuit. And by that time
I'll be almost nutty because I love you twice as desperately
every time I set eyes on you! - What's the matter?

SHIRLEY Nothing.

ROB Yes, there is. What's the trouble?

SHIRLEY I - Rob, did you - did you really - accost Ruby Rudd?

ROB The policeman's sister? Why, no! Listen, I tell you what
happened. She accosted me. She was watering the garden
right near the roadway and must have recognised me. She
asked if I was the fire-eater from the show. I said yes.
And then she said that ever since she'd seen a travelling
troupe as a girl she'd toyed with the idea of joining a show,
and asked me the best way. Well, I said, there's one way to
do it: just pack your bag and join. And the next thing you
know, her brother was roughing me up.

SHIRLEY You weren't - asking her to go away with you?

ROB Why no! I'd seen you, and was determined to get to know you,
and was looking for work. (Touching the counter.) As true
as I'm touching wood!

(Silence.)

HEATHER I believe you!

SHIRLEY (More doubtfully.) So do I.

ROB You still sound worried.

- SHIRLEY Well, I'm -- I was thinking about George Rudd and your tent. Won't he -- ?
- ROB Aw, don't worry about that! It'll take him longer to sling it in the gutter than it will me to put it up again! That's the least of my worries. Finance is my headache. Shirley, I might have to ask you for a quid or two, just till we --
- SHIRLEY Oh, I haven't any money.
- ROB Haven't any! Not even a few shillings to -- make up our fares to Ocean City?
- SHIRLEY No, not even that.
- HEATHER I told you -- daddy never gives us a bean!
- ROB (Scratching his head.) We-e-ell! ... Lemme see! ... That makes a bit of difference, doesn't it ... See, if we walk to Ocean City, we'd have to leave tonight to be on the safe side.
- HEATHER Walk? Don't be silly! I've got a brilliant idea! Daddy's always saying how a pound won't go very far. Why don't you sort of borrow one from the till and show him how wrong he is?
- SHIRLEY (Steal? Why Heather, how can you make such a -- !
- HEATHER (He's got hundreds! Thousands! A pound to him is -- !
- ROB No, wait! It's all right, I've found the answer.
- SHIRLEY What's that?
- ROB I'll do a show tonight!
- HEATHER (Do a show?
- SHIRLEY (Tonight? ... But tonight's picture night!
- HEATHER Yes, it's -- picture night.
- ROB Now listen! I hate to compete with dear old Ben and his dad. But there's nothing else I can do! Saturday night may have been picture night in Greenvale for a hundred years, but tonight it's gonna be show night! I'll set up slap bang next to the Lyric and people can take their pick: good old Wallace and Tarzan -- or me!
- SHIRLEY (But, Rob, don't you see, it's --
- ROB (Now you two can help me! Can you play a musical instrument?

SHIRLEY { No, I -

HEATHER { Yes, she can! She takes violin lessons.

ROB Can you play 'In a Persian Market'?

SHIRLEY Yes, I think so.

ROB (Demonstrating quickly.) And do a bit of a belly dance - ?

SHIRLEY We-e-ell, I -

ROB Good! Look I've gotta rush to fix things up, move the tent! Don't go away, I'll be back about 7.15! (Rushing back from the door, dragging out some money.) Oh, I nearly forgot! Gimme three or four eggs suitable for conjuring! (Plonking down some money, stuffing the eggs in his pockets.) Keep the change!

(He tears to the door again, gives an exclamation as he remembers something, turns, blows Shirley three quick kisses and Heather one, and rushes off.)

HEATHER (Standing on the potato bag, excitedly.) Oh Shirl, isn't it exciting!

SHIRLEY (Collapsing in the chair, anxiously.) It's - overwhelming! (Looking at her watch.) Oh god, Ben'll be here any minute and now I've let myself in for - ! Heath, what have I done - ?

(She stands again.)

HEATHER (Excitedly.) Keep calm! You haven't done anything that -

SHIRLEY What will daddy say when he - ?

HEATHER Shirl, you must keep calm, this is the - (with great drama.) the Crisis of your Life! Sit down!

SHIRLEY Sit down yourself!

(A momentary pause. They both sit. Silence.)

HEATHER Well: what's the trouble?

SHIRLEY Men. Oh, how they mess up your life! Ever since I was sixteen and daddy gave me that tanning for going out with Freddy Coe, they've brought me nothing but trouble, and now - this! Why has my life always been such a horrible mess?

HEATHER (Limping slowly to the door, sadly.) Because you're so beautiful, I suppose. Always had lots of boys in love with you. I'll never be like that, with my ugly teeth and glasses and leg. (Looking out of the door.) I'll never have lots

of boys to choose from, because there won't be any at all.

SHIRLEY Yes, there will be, there'll be someone! And you'll be lucky if there's only one: having to choose is a curse!

HEATHER Huh! A curse like having too much money! Can't you see how lucky you are?

SHIRLEY No.

(Silence. Shirley sits guiltily wringing her hands, head lowered. Heather is looking down the street.)

HEATHER Daddy's coming. The truck is just leaving Mrs Turner's. That will be the last delivery....

(She limps slowly back and sits near her sister. Lovingly.)

Shirl ... Shirl, what's wrong?

SHIRLEY (Desperately.) Choice - everything - is so - difficult! Ditching someone seems so - horrible!

HEATHER But you've ditched boys before. Haven't you, without any -

SHIRLEY Yes, I know - the likes of Freddy Coe and George Rudd. Ben's different. He's nice, he's been so good to me.

HEATHER Oh, he'll find somebody else. There's quite a few girls who would take Ben off your hands. Both the Hodgekiss girls and -

SHIRLEY I know! That's half the trouble!

(Pause. The roaring of Mr Fuller's truck in it's garage stops, and the truck door is slammed.)

HEATHER (In a hoarse whisper, hurriedly.) But if you love Rob, really love him, your choice is so obvious, so easy - !

(She breaks off as MR FULLER enters from the street.)

FULLER Heather, git off them spuds! How many times have I told you not ter sit on them spuds! An' one of you git behind the counter: it gives a bad impression both of you out here natterin' instead of doin' yer job!

HEATHER I'll go, Shirl.

SHIRLEY (Going behind the counter.) No, I'll go.

FULLER Wish ter hell that train'd be late on a Wednesday instead of always the weekend! You girls had yer tea?

BOTH Yes, daddy.

FULLER You all ready fer the pitchers, then?

HEATHER Yes.

FULLER An' look, you girls gotta be more careful! Yer sent Mrs Turner small Corn Flakes last week an' charged her fer large! For Pete's sake keep yer minds on yer work, an' off - (Seeing Ben enter right.) Oh, good evening, Ben, I'm just gittn' back from deliverin'. Shirl's all ready. Don't she look somethin' in the new dress?

BEN Certainly does. Evening Shirl, Heather. Certainly is a fine night for the pictures.

FULLER Yeah. Farmers could do with some rain though.

BEN Yeah, it's dry all right.

FULLER (Moving to steps.) Well, git me a bite to eat, I suppose ...

BEN Yeah. You all set then Shirl?

(Pause.)

SHIRLEY I - I'm not going, Ben. I - I don't feel well.

(Silence. Mr Fuller swings round on the steps. Pause.)

BEN Oh I'm - sorry Shirl.

FULLER Don't feel well? What's wrong with yer? Bin nothin' wrong with yah all day.

SHIRLEY I've - got a headache.

FULLER Then take an aspirin an' git along with Ben!

HEATHER Oh daddy, can't you see she doesn't want to go, that she's -

FULLER Be quiet!! Let her speak fer herself!! (Silence.) Well? (Silence. Moving down the steps and behind the counter.) It's that rotten little good-fer-nothin' smart-Alec showman, isn't it? Buttn' in here an' messin' things up! ISN'T IT?

SHIRLEY (Screaming, rushing past him to the steps, almost in tears.) Yes, it's that rotten little good-fer-nothin' smart-Alec showman! (Turning, at the steps.) And I'm going away with him, you hear! I'm going away with him tomorrow! To a new world! To a new life!

FULLER (Grabbing her, as she goes to run off and speaking with genuine worry and affection.) Now wait, Shirley girl! Wait

wait wait! Just listen to what I gotta say, I'm tellin' yer fer yer own good! Yer can't live on fresh air, yer can't live on love! Alice yer sister tried! This boy who wants ter take yer away maybe isn't a thief or a rascal maybe is a decent kid fer all I know but he's a rollin' stone tryin' ter live a life that na-one can live no more, a life that ain't practical and secure. Apart from the road and the life of a begger he's got nothin' ter offer yer, nothin' at all!

(ROB has come in, passed Ben, and stood listening, centre, to Mr Fuller's last words. His face and clothes show a sign or two of ashes: his former confident air has become instead an air of wounded bitterness, as if he had been thrashed.)

ROB He's right, Shirl. I've nothing to offer you now except myself. ... Not even a tent ...

SHIRLEY Rob, what's happened?

ROB They burned it down. Poured petrol on it and burned it down, there's nothing left. Not a costume, not a prop. I'm out of business.

(Silence.)

HEATHER I didn't think even George Rudd - could do such a horrible horrible thing!

BEN It was a mean thing to do all right. I'm surprised to see it happen in this town.

ROB (Bitterly.) This is a dirty town - a gaol town run like a gaol! First thing you see are it's drunks and idiots and hairlips! Then it's one-eyed business beasts, it's a one-eyed town! Greenvale, it sounds so clean so healthy, but it's - ! (He breaks off as Heather limps miserably to the chair and sits. Ashamedly.) I'm sorry, I -

(Pause.)

FULLER (Who has been strangely stunned by the news of the fire.) And - what are you going to do?

ROB I'm going to ask your daughter to walk with me, now, out of this town, and walk with me to Ocean City and be my wife.

(Pause as Fuller turns to Shirley, and gently takes her arm. He talks with surprising tenderness and sincerity.)

FULLER Well, Shirley it's up ter you. I'm only yer old dad an' all I want is ter see yer happy. But I know you'll listen careful ter what I have fer say. This is the choice that girls have had ter make fer thousands of years - between the

hard life and security. With this kid yer'll be in fer the hard life. It's not so bad until yer own kids start ter come, but is that how yer want ter raise yer family - on the cinders of a showground? ... You go on now, remember what happened ter yer sister Alice ... (Very gently.) You go off with yer good man Ben who loves yer ... an' who cin look after yer, give yer the care a girl needs ...

(She leaves him and walks slowly and in complete silence across the store, past the uplifted gaze of Heather and the downward gaze of Rob, to Ben. He nervously takes her hands as if afraid to hurt her.)

BEN Gee Shirl I - I like your dress ... (Noting her silence, her averted gaze, but taking her arm.) ... Gee Shirl, I - I hope your head gets better ...

SHIRLEY (Turning back at the door.) Rob, I - I - after all, it is picture night ...

(She allows Ben to lead her out.)

FULLER Ben's a good steady feller. I hope they'll git engaged pretty soon. A gracery store is no place fer a bright young girl of nineteen. She'll make him a good wife.

(He goes up the steps and off left. Silence.)

HEATHER But Rob, she loves you!

ROB (Dully.) It makes no difference.

HEATHER But - why?

ROB (Wretchedly.) Because for the first time in five years I'm ... Robert Perkins ... Down and out. Dead-beat ... (Pause. Going to her.) Oh, here's the book. It's a bit scorched, but ...

HEATHER What?

ROB The book on conjuring.

HEATHER You remembered? Oh Rob you're simply - ! I don't know what to say, I - !

ROB I hope you find it useful.

HEATHER Oh I will, I will! (Shyly.) Rob, if I was five years older - I'd walk with you to Ocean City.

ROB (Kindly.) No, you wouldn't. For in five years you'll be ... grown up ... Good-bye, Heather.

HEATHER ... Good-bye, Rob.

(On an impulse he stoops to kiss her forehead. MR FULLER stops dead on the top of the stairs. Rob senses his presence, straightens, stares at the father. Then he turns and goes. Fuller descends the steps chewing a piece of pie. He goes right and sits on the potato bags, munching. GEORGE RUDD strolls in, looking back at Rob, crosses, helps himself to apricots.)

GEORGE Finished, eh Ed?

FULLER Yeah. Just havin' a bite ter eat.

GEORGE And how's my little chickalillylambkin?

HEATHER Keep your hands off me, George Rudd!

FULLER Hey Heather, that's not the way ter talk ter George.

HEATHER Isn't it? Well let me tell you George Rudd is a great fat dirty dog!

FULLER (Hey, now!

GEORGE (Haw!

HEATHER An' when I get the irons off my leg next year, first thing I'll do will be to run away! To Ocean City! Like Alice! So there!

(She turns her back on the^w, and goes rapidly up the steps and off. Chuckling, George goes right and sprawls on the sacks. Both men sit munching, looking out of the door.)

FULLER Bit of a fire, then. Up at the showground.

GEORGE Yeah. Someone careless with petrol ... Nothin' much there yer know - a few costumes, knick-knacks ...

FULLER That so. Just like I thought ... Nice night fer the pitchers.

GEORGE Yeah. Could do with a drop of rain, though. Corn's lookin' poor.

FULLER Yeah ...

GEORGE See Jimmy Coe won the raffle.

FULLER Yeah, lucky stiff.

(George throws a piece of apricot through the doorway. The curtains start to close.)

GEORGE Seen Ben Jenkins' new car?

FULLER Yeah, seen her this morning.

GEORGE Eighteen hundred quid's worth, Kev Charles was sayin'. Looks like a palace inside.

FULLER Yeah, ain't she a beauty?

CURTAIN

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