

MISS FIRECRACKER CONTEST

By Beth Henley

Henley, Beth, 1952-, [The Miss Firecracker Contest](#) Electronic Edition by Alexander Street Press, L.L.C., 2012 . © Beth Henley, 1980. Also published in *Collected Plays, vol. 1: 1980-1989*, Smith and Kraus, Lyme, NH, 2000. [[Author Information](#)] [[Bibliographic Details](#)] [[View Production Details](#)] [[Character Information](#)] [1980] [PL007966]

Carnelle Scott, 24, the beauty contestant
Popeye Jackson, 23, Carnelle's seamstress
Elain Rutledge, 32, Carnelle's first cousin; a beauty
Delmount Williams, 28, Carnelle's first cousin; Elain's brother
Mac Sam, 36, the balloon man
Tessy Mahoney, 23, the beauty contest coordinator

THE SETTING

The action of the play takes place in Brookhaven, Mississippi; a small southern town.

THE TIME

The ending of June and the beginning of July.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

SCENE ONE: The living room of Ronelle William's house in Brookhaven, Mississippi – about five o'clock Monday afternoon on a hot day at the end of June. There is something dreary and suffocating and frightening about the room with its dark oak furniture, its heavy, bright curtains and the endless clutter of nicknacks. An old spinning wheel sits in a far corner of the room. There are three entrances and exits; a front door; a door leading to the kitchen; and a staircase leading to the upstairs rooms.

SCENE TWO: The same setting. About eight o'clock in the evening, on the following Saturday.

The Miss Firecracker Contest is a two-act play that was originally produced in Los Angeles in the spring of 1980. It was the first play that Beth Henley wrote after *Crimes of the Heart*, but it was already in production before *Crimes of the Heart* won the Pulitzer Prize. Eventually, both plays were produced on Broadway and made into movies with screenplays also written by Henley. Holly Hunter played the lead role in both the Broadway and movie versions of *The Miss Firecracker Contest*. It became available in book form in 1985 from the Dramatists Play Service.

This story belongs in the group of Southern Gothic comedies for which Henley is best known. Its heroine, Carnelle, is an irrepressible young woman who thinks that winning the local beauty contest will restore her soiled reputation and make her somebody in her small Mississippi community. The family and friends who help her along the way are a dysfunctional bunch who tackle life in their own peculiar ways. There is a former beauty queen cousin, Elain, who comes to offer advice and to run away from her husband and children. Elain's brother, Delmount, has come home from the mental institution to sell the family house and provide Carnelle

another way out. Wandering into the chaos as Carnelle's seamstress is sweet and strange Popeye, who falls in love with Delmount. The general conclusion the characters reach is that, even if the real you is not the fulfillment of your hopes, you will be more at peace if you learn to define and accept your own self.

The Miss Firecracker Contest Summary

Act 1, Scene 1

As *The Miss Firecracker Contest* opens, Carnelle Scott is practicing her talent routine for the upcoming Fourth of July beauty pageant in Brookhaven, Mississippi. A seamstress, Popeye Jackson, arrives and Carnelle hires her to make a pageant costume. As Popeye takes measurements, she tells Carnelle that she got her sewing start making outfits for bullfrogs. Popeye comments that the house is scary, and Carnelle explains that it belonged to her recently deceased Aunt Ronelle. Carnelle adds that her aunt's cancer treatment involved a pituitary gland transplant from a monkey that resulted in Ronelle "growing long, black hairs all over her body." The dialogue continues to reveal how Carnelle was orphaned and grew up with her aunt, uncle, and the two cousins she adores. Popeye notices a picture of Carnelle's cousin Delmount and falls in love immediately. Carnelle reveals that Delmount has recently been released from a mental institution.

Then Carnelle's other cousin, Elain, arrives unexpectedly. Elain won the town beauty contest fifteen years earlier. In discussions of the pageant, it is revealed that Carnelle has a promiscuous past that might keep her from winning. Elain admits that she has left her husband and two sons. Popeye comes back to find Delmount and explains to him how she got her nickname. Delmount tells Carnelle that he has returned to sell the house but will give her half of the proceeds to help her move away from Brookhaven. Carnelle gets the idea of winning the contest as a way to leave in a "blaze of glory."

Act 1, Scene 1

ACT I SCENE I

The lights go up onstage. Carnelle Scott, twenty-four, stands with her back to the audience looking into a mirror. Carnelle is tallish with an oddly attractive face, a nice figure, and very bright dyed red hair. She wears purple leotards, tights, and tap shoes. Carnelle turns away from the mirror with a glint in her eyes. She pushes the rolled up rug back even farther, then rushes to place the needle back on the record spinning on the record player. A sung version of "The Star Spangled Banner" begins playing loudly. Carnelle checks a notebook, then rushes madly back to the kitchen. She quickly returns with wooden spoons and stainless steel knives. She leaps into her talent routine that requires tap dancing, marching, and baton twirling, none of which she is extremely adept at. When the record comes to "And the rockets red glare. . .," she picks up a wooden spoon that she uses as an imaginary roman candle. She says, "Pow," each time she imagines it goes off. For the final "Oh, say does that. . .," she puts down the spoons and picks up two knives that she uses as imaginary sparklers. She twirls them about. When the record is over Carnelle goes to remove the needle, as she repeats part of her routine to herself.

SCOTT Let's see, that was, "And the rockets red glare --
(*Then as the imaginary Roman candle goes off.*) Boom! -- The bombs bursting in air -- Boom! -- gave proof -- Boom! -- through the night -- Boom! -- that our flag was -- Boom! -- there -- Boom! Boom! Boom!"
(*She goes to mark down the ideas in her notebook.*) Hmm. I don't know. I think that'll work. I think it will.
(*There is a knock on the door.*)

-- 3 --

SCOTT Coming. Coming --! Coming!
(*Before going to the door Carnelle shakes her head of red hair back and forth, takes a towel from a chair and slings it carelessly around her neck. She begins panting deeply as she goes to open the door for Popeye Jackson. Popeye, twenty-three, is a small, glowing person. She wears a homemade dress with many different size pockets and thick glasses with heavy black rims. She does not carry a purse.*)

SCOTT Oh, hello, Popeye. Come in. Come on in.

JACKSON Thanks.

SCOTT
(*Still breathing heavily.*) Wheew! Just make yourself at home. Oh, and please excuse the way I look, but I've been practicing my routine. It's something, I tell you, hard work. But it's coming along. It's coming right along.

JACKSON Good.

SCOTT
(*After an awkward moment.*) Well. I guess what I should do is show you the sketches so you'll have some idea of what I want.

JACKSON Alright.

SCOTT
(*Getting the sketches.*) They're right over here, I believe. Yes, here they are.
(*Turning around.*) What's that thing?

-- 4 --

JACKSON
(*Who has removed a magnifying glass from her pocket.*) It's my magnifying lens.

SCOTT A magnifying lens? You need that thing to see with?

JACKSON Well, up close I do.

SCOTT Goodness gracious. Well, here're the sketches. Of course, now, I'm not an artist or anything; so the drawings aren't much.
(*Pause.*) But I think you'll get the general idea.

JACKSON
(*Looking at the sketches through the lens.*) Oh, that's pretty.

SCOTT
(*As if someone has given her a gift.*) You think so?

JACKSON I like them stars.

SCOTT Well, I wanted to go with something really patriotic. Kinda traditional. You know, noble, in a sense.

JACKSON And this costume's for a dance contest?

SCOTT Well, no; it's not a dance contest; it's for the Miss Firecracker Contest.

JACKSON

(In the dark.) Huh?

-- 5 --

SCOTT The Miss Firecracker Contest?

(Popeye shakes her head.)

SCOTT It's the beauty contest. They have it in Brookhaven every Fourth of July. It's a tradition. It's a big event. It's famous. Why, Representative Louis Pooley's gonna be here this very year to put the crown on the winner's head. It's a famous contest.

JACKSON Well, I guess, I just don't know nothing about it.

SCOTT Well, it's odd to me. It's really odd to me.

JACKSON 'Course I haven't been here in town but a short while. Only 'bout three weeks.

SCOTT

(Relieved.) Oh! Oh, well, that explains it! That explains it all!

JACKSON Yeah.

SCOTT Anyway, this outfit is what I'm gonna be wearing in the talent section of the contest.

JACKSON Oh.

SCOTT What I do's kind of a tap-dance-march-type-a-thing. It's gonna be done to, "The Star Spangled Banner." I'm gonna end up spinning these lit up sparklers around and around -- one in each hand.

(She twirls the imaginary sparklers.)

-- 6 --

JACKSON Gosh!

SCOTT And before that Roman candles going off --

(As she shoots off imaginary roman candles.) Boom! Boom! Boom! Like that -- right out over the top a' the crowd!

JACKSON Really?

SCOTT Oh, sure.

JACKSON Boy.

SCOTT Well, so you think you'll be able to make up a pattern following these drawings?

JACKSON I expect so.

SCOTT Well, then. . .the job is yours.

JACKSON Thank you.

SCOTT You're welcome.

JACKSON Maybe I should go on and get your measurements off you right now if ya don't mind.

SCOTT Oh, no, no. Fine. Go ahead. Alright.

JACKSON

(Getting her measuring tape from her pocket.) I just need a few.

SCOTT Take all you want. I'll just stand right here.

(She strikes a dramatic pose.) Just natural. Is this okay with you? This stance right here?

-- 7 --

JACKSON Sure.

(She begins measuring, looking at the measurement through her glass, writing it down, then starting a new measurement.)

SCOTT My, I feel like a model or something. Very elegant. Of course, that's exactly what I should be doing. Modeling, that is. People have told me that. They say, "Carnelle, why do you keep slaving away at Slater's Jewelry Shop? You should be up in Memphis working as a model. You really should."

JACKSON

(Trying to get Carnelle to relax her tightly tucked in stomach.) You can just relax.

SCOTT What? Oh, I'm fine. Just fine.

JACKSON Alright.

(She finishes with the waist measurement, looks at it through the glass, writes it down, than goes on.)

SCOTT You know you do this very well. Expertly, in fact. Of course, you come highly recommended to me from Miss Celia Lily. She says you've done some really fine work in her shop. She says you seem really experienced to her.

JACKSON Well, I'm that for sure. See, I been making clothes practically all my life. Started out when I was four years old.

-- 8 --

SCOTT Oh, really?

JACKSON Used to make little outfits for the bullfrogs that lived out around our yard.

SCOTT Bullfrogs! Yuk!

JACKSON They was funny looking creatures.

SCOTT But why didn't you design clothes for your dolls?

JACKSON We din't have no dolls.

SCOTT Oh; how sad.

JACKSON Them frogs was okay.

SCOTT But what kind of clothes could you design for a frog? They'd look ugly in anything.

JACKSON Well. . .one thing was a nurse's suit. Oh, and I remember a queen's robe and a cape of leaves. Different things.

SCOTT

(With a giggle.) Well, I certainly hope you don't think of me as any bullfrog.

JACKSON Huh?

SCOTT I mean, think I'm ugly like one of those dumb bullfrogs of yours.

JACKSON Oh, I don't.

SCOTT Well, of course, you don't. I was just joking.

-- 9 --

JACKSON Oh.

SCOTT

(Suddenly very sad and uncomfortable.) Are you about done?

JACKSON Mostly. This here's all I need.

(Carnelle stares forlornly into space as Popeye measures her head.)

JACKSON There. Done.

SCOTT Well, I've got to stretch a minute.

(She stretches from her waist, then kicks her leg up high.) There! And, kick! And. . .kick!

JACKSON You sure do kick high!

SCOTT Well, I work at it daily.

JACKSON I could never kick like that.

SCOTT I don't know, maybe you could with practice. Want to try it? Come on and try it. Go ahead! And kick! And kick! And kick! And kick!
(*Popeye kicks feebly in the air.*)

SCOTT Not bad. Keep on working at it. That's the only way to improve. Listen, I have a snack made up for us in the kitchen. Would you like it now?

JACKSON Sure.

SCOTT I hope you don't mind, it's just ice tea and saltine crackers.

-- 10 --

JACKSON I love saltines.

SCOTT Alright then, I'll go get the snack.
(*Carnelle exits to the kitchen. Popeye looks around. She goes over to the spinning wheel and spins it around. She watches it. She pretends to prick her finger on the needle. Carnelle comes back in carrying the snack tray. She now has an apron on over her leotards. Popeye turns around startled.*)

JACKSON This sure is a scary house.

SCOTT You don't like it?

JACKSON It's scary.

SCOTT Well, it's just like my Aunt Ronelle fixed it up. It's got her special touch: this old spinning wheel; these lace doilies; these old pictures in frames here. I'd prefer something more modern and luxurious, but -- that's just me.

JACKSON You live here with your aunt?

SCOTT Oh, no. She died. She had cancer.

JACKSON I'm sorry.

SCOTT It happened just a few weeks before last Christmas. We were very close. It was a tragedy.

JACKSON I'm sorry.

SCOTT
(*As she pours Popeye's tea.*) You may of heard about her; Ronelle Williams? It was a famous medical case -- ran in all the newspapers.

-- 11 --

JACKSON No.

SCOTT Well, see what it was -- do you take lemon?

JACKSON Please.

SCOTT Anyway, she had this cancer of the pituitary gland, I believe it was; so what they did was they replaced her gland with the gland of a monkey to see if they could save her life -- just help yourself to the sugar --

JACKSON
(*Moving to sit on the floor.*) Thanks.

SCOTT And they did, in fact, keep her alive for a month or so longer than she was expected to live.

JACKSON Well, that's good.

SCOTT
(*Pouring herself some tea.*) Of course, there were such dreadful side effects.

JACKSON Mmm.

SCOTT She, well, she started growing long, black hairs all over her body just, well, just like an ape.

JACKSON Gracious, Lord.

SCOTT It was very trying. But she was so brave. She even let them take photographs of her. Everyone said she was just a saint. A saint or an angel; one or the other.

-- 12 --

JACKSON It gives me the shivers.

SCOTT It was awfully hard on me losing my Aunt Ronelle -- although I guess I should be used to it by now.

JACKSON What's that?

SCOTT People dying. It seems like people've been dying practically all my life, in one way or another. First my mother passed when I was barely a year old. Then my daddy kinda drug me around with him till I was about nine and he couldn't stand me any longer; so he dropped me off to live with my Aunt Ronelle and Uncle George and their own two children: Elain and Delmount. They're incredible those two. They're just my ideal. Anyhow, we're happy up until the time when Uncle George falls to his death trying to pull this bird's nest out from the chimney.

JACKSON He fall off from the roof?

SCOTT That's right. Tommy Turner was passing by throwing the evening paper and he caught sight of the whole event. Boom.

JACKSON How awful.

SCOTT Anyhow, my original daddy appears back here to live with us looking all kinda fat and swollen. And after staying on with us about two years, he suddenly drops dead in the summer's heat while running out to the Tropical Ice Cream truck. Heart failure, they said it was. Then this thing with Aunt Ronelle dying right before Christmas. It's been hard to bear.

-- 13 --

JACKSON

(After a moment.) I had a brother who was bit by a water moccasin down by the Pearl River, and he died.

SCOTT Well; you know, they say everyone's gonna be dying someday. I believe it too.

JACKSON Yeah. May as well.

(She finishes a cracker and wipes her lips with a napkin.) That sure was tasty.

SCOTT Well. . .thank you much. Would you like to see the material I've chosen to make my costume with?

JACKSON Why, yes.

SCOTT Good. Then I'll just run get it.

JACKSON Oh, Carnelle?

SCOTT Yes?

JACKSON Do you mind if I look at these pictures in frames here?

SCOTT Oh, no. That's what they're there for.

(Carnelle exits upstairs to the bedrooms. Popeye goes over and picks up her magnifying glass. She then goes and looks at the pictures. She looks at one, then another, then suddenly, at the third picture, she is struck. She picks it up and looks at it, studying it closely with her lens.)

-- 14 --

JACKSON My. Oh, my.

(Carnelle comes back down carrying a sack.)

SCOTT Who are you looking at?

JACKSON A man. This man here.

SCOTT Oh, that's my cousin, Delmount.

JACKSON What eyes. Look at his hair -- it's wild, wouldn't you say? It's wild.

SCOTT Well, I suppose, Delmount is rather a romantic figure.

JACKSON Really?

SCOTT He was always writing sheets and sheets of poetry to the women he loved then he'd set them all afire and bury the ashes.

JACKSON
(*Swooning.*) How sad!

SCOTT Yes, Delmount's very odd. He can do this trick where he wiggles his ears.

JACKSON
(*Totally sold that this is the man for her.*) He can!?

SCOTT Sure.

JACKSON
(*Impulsively.*) Where's he live now?

SCOTT Well, it's strange. . .see, Delmount, he's had kind of a checkered past.

-- 15 --

JACKSON Checkered?

SCOTT Right. And about the first of the year a Louisiana judge sentenced him to a -- well, to a mental institution.

JACKSON Is he mad?

SCOTT No. Not really. He hit a man in the face with a bottle; so his lawyer got him put there instead of jail.

JACKSON Oh.

SCOTT
(*Upset.*) He was released in the spring, but he hasn't been home since. I don't know where he is now.

JACKSON I hope he's alright.

SCOTT Here, let's look at the material.

JACKSON Alright.

SCOTT
(*Taking the red material from the sack.*) Here's the red.

JACKSON Ooooh, that's pretty.
(*Touching it.*) Silky too.

SCOTT And, of course, the blue.

JACKSON
(*Looking at the material through her glass.*) It's just like a midnight sky. I love blue.

-- 16 --

SCOTT And then, the most expensive, the most elegant of all -- silver for the stars.

JACKSON Why, you went all out on this material -- I can see that.

SCOTT Well, yes. I hope it's gonna be okay. Not having any white. I mean, I hope red, blue, and silver will be patriotic enough.

JACKSON Well, I just can't wait to --

RUTLEDGE Carnelle! Carnelle, Honey!

(Elain Rutledge, thirty-two, enters through the front door. She is dressed in elegant pastels but appears somewhat wilted in the summer's heat. Elain could most definitely be described as beautiful, but her looks are now more strained and anxious than they once were. She carries expensive luggage, a cosmetic case, and a gift.)

SCOTT

(Running to hug her.) Elain!! It's Elain!!!

RUTLEDGE

(Hugging her.) Why, hello, my little Carnation! How are you doing?!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) Oh, Elain! Elain! I'm just fine!

RUTLEDGE Why, you really did dye your hair, didn't you?

-- 17 --

SCOTT Do you like it?

RUTLEDGE Well, it's just as red as it can be!

SCOTT That's what I wanted, crimson red.

RUTLEDGE Well, then, it couldn't be more perfect! Will you help me with these bags, here? My arms are just falling off!

SCOTT

(Taking the biggest bags.) Of course! I'm sorry! Goodness, I thought you weren't coming in till the weekend.

RUTLEDGE Oh, I know, I know. I suddenly decided to cut my stay off short with my mother-in-law. I decided just to drive by Hollybluff and beep twice.

SCOTT

(With a giggle.) Oh, you crazy thing!

RUTLEDGE No, really, I'm sorry, dar'lin, I should a' called you up but --

(Suddenly noticing Popeye.) Why, hello, Honey!

SCOTT Oh, this is my friend, Popeye Jackson. Popeye, this is my cousin, Elain Rutledge, the one I --

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) Why, hello, Popeye, so nice to meet you. What a smashing outfit!

-- 18 --

JACKSON Thank you.

SCOTT Elain knows everything about clothes. She just adores them.

RUTLEDGE Oh you crazy dear! Look, here's a little something I picked up for you at a shop in the Quarter.

(Handing Carnelle a gift.)

SCOTT What! Oh, you shouldn't have! Really, you shouldn't have.

(She opens the box and takes out a very strangely decorated Mardi Gras mask.) Why, look! It's beautiful! Isn't that beautiful!

RUTLEDGE I just thought of you when I saw it. You'll have to wear it to a masked ball.

SCOTT

(Holding the mask in front of her face.) How elegant! How simply elegant! Look, Popeye!

JACKSON May I hold it too?

SCOTT Why, of course.

(She hands Popeye the mask. Elain and Carnelle hug then turn back to Popeye. There is a moment of silence as Popeye holds the mask over her eyes and slowly moves her head from side to side. Perhaps she makes a strange sound.)

RUTLEDGE

(Taking off her dangling, shimmering earrings and handing them out to Popeye.) Oh, here, Popeye, these are for you.
-- 19 --

JACKSON What?

RUTLEDGE Please, they're a gift to you. Here, put them on.

JACKSON Oh, no.

SCOTT Oh, Elain! Elain!

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) Yes, yes! I insist! They're just right for you; they're just your color. Here, I'll put them on for you.
(She puts the earrings on Popeye.) Oh, stunning! They look just simply stunning!

JACKSON

(Slowly shaking her head back and forth.) Why, thank you.

SCOTT Isn't she wonderful, Popeye! Isn't she just perfectly perfect!

RUTLEDGE Oh, how I wish I were!

SCOTT Don't be silly; you are!

JACKSON

(Shaking her head.) I never had me no earbobs.

RUTLEDGE Well, I'm glad you have them, Popeye. They look dazzling on you.

JACKSON Well, I think I better be going. It's getting toward dark. Let me get all this rounded up.
(She starts getting the materials together.)

-- 20 --

SCOTT Popeye's going to be using this material to make my costume for the Miss Firecracker Contest.

RUTLEDGE You mean, you went on and signed up for that?

SCOTT Yes, I registered today.

RUTLEDGE I don't see why you're so interested in being Miss Firecracker; there's nothing to it.

SCOTT Well, not for you. See, Elain was Miss Firecracker way back when she was just eighteen.

RUTLEDGE Well, seventeen, actually.

SCOTT Anyway, it was way back that first year when I came to live with them. She was a vision of beauty riding on that float with a crown on her head waving to everyone. I thought I'd drop dead when she passed by me.

RUTLEDGE All that was ages ago. It's silly to think about.

SCOTT Anyway, I just thought I'd give it a whirl. I'm twenty-four. Twenty-five's the age limit. I just thought I'd give it a whirl while I still could.

RUTLEDGE

(Powdering her nose.) They ought to change that name to -- well, to something like, Miss Fourth of July. Miss Firecracker sounds so trashy.

-- 21 --

SCOTT 'Course, I don't expect to win -- that's crazy. I'm just in it for the experience -- that's the main thing.

JACKSON Well, I think you'd be perfect for a Miss Firecracker -- with your red hair and all.

SCOTT Oh, well, that's actually why I dyed my hair red; I thought it'd be more appropriate for the contest.

JACKSON It's a nice dye job too. I don't see no roots or nothing.

SCOTT I try to do a careful job on it.

JACKSON Well, I got it all together here.

SCOTT Good, well here're the sketches.

JACKSON And when will you be needing your costume by?

SCOTT Oh. Well, the audition'll be this very Saturday; so could you have it by Wednesday afternoon or Thursday at the latest?

JACKSON Tuesday's fine.

SCOTT Alright, I'll see you on Tuesday.
(*Carnelle and Popeye are at the front door now.*)

JACKSON Alright. 'Bye.

SCOTT 'Bye-'bye.

-- 22 --

JACKSON
(*To Elaine.*) And I love my earbobs!

RUTLEDGE
(*From the sofa.*) Oh, good!

JACKSON Well, alright, 'bye.
(*She exits.*)

SCOTT 'Bye-'bye.
(*Turning and coming back to Elaine.*) Oh, Elaine! That was so sweet what you did -- giving Popeye those earrings. It meant so much to her. You're so generous!

RUTLEDGE
(*Meaning it.*) Don't talk about it, please. It was nothing. Oh, mind if I have a glass of this delicious looking ice tea? I'm about ready to drop dead from the heat.

SCOTT Oh, of course! Please! Here, I'll run get you a fresh glass out from the kitchen.
(*Carnelle picks up the tray and exits. Elaine takes off her hat and fans herself. She looks sadly around the room. Carnelle returns with a glass with a small umbrella in it.*)

SCOTT Here, now --

RUTLEDGE Bless you.

SCOTT There you are.

RUTLEDGE Why, Carnation, you're saving my life. This is heaven. Sheer heaven!

-- 23 --

SCOTT
(*Running to Elaine's clothes bag.*) Oh, Elaine, did you bring that dress along with you that I asked about on the phone? You know, the beautiful red antebellum dress that you wore at the Natchez Pilgrimage the first year you got married. See, it's gonna be perfect for me to wear in the contest. I'm trying to make crimson red my thematic color.
(*Opening the bag: She discovers the dress is not there.*)

RUTLEDGE I see -- but I thought you said you weren't gonna be needing a formal dress for the audition this Saturday.

SCOTT I know, that's true. We'll just need them in the actual contest for the opening Parade of Firecrackers.

RUTLEDGE So, why don't we just wait till after the audition and see if you make it to the pageant.

SCOTT Why? Don't you think I'll make it?

RUTLEDGE Well, I hope so, Carnelle, but they only pick five girls.

SCOTT Well. . .I've thought about it, and I, frankly, can't think of five other girls in town that are prettier than me. I'm speaking honestly now. 'Course I know there's Caroline Jeffers, but she has those yellow teeth --

-- 24 --

RUTLEDGE

(Not wanting to get into it.) My, this mint is delicious! Did you grow it yourself?

SCOTT Aunt Ronelle planted it before she died.

RUTLEDGE Well, it's quite refreshing.

SCOTT I know why you're worried. You think I've ruined my chances, 'cause -- 'cause of my reputation.

RUTLEDGE I don't know what you mean -- you're perfectly sweet.

SCOTT Well, everyone knew I used to go out with lots of men and all that. Different ones. It's been a constant thing with me since I was young and --

RUTLEDGE Let's not discuss it in all a' this heat.

SCOTT I just mention it 'cause it's different now, since Aunt Ronelle died and since -- I got that disease.

RUTLEDGE Please, Carnelle, nobody's profiting by this information!

SCOTT Anyway, I go to church now and I'm signed up to where I take an orphan home to dinner once a week or to a movie; and -- and I work on the cancer drive here just like you do in Natchez.

RUTLEDGE That's all very admirable, I'm sure.

-- 25 --

SCOTT My life has meaning. People aren't calling me, Miss Hot Tamale anymore like they used to. Everything's changed. And being in that contest -- it would be such an honor to me. . .I can't explain the half of it.

RUTLEDGE Well, if you don't make it to the finals, just try to remember that Mama was at her most noblest when she was least attractive.

SCOTT I wish you had about a drop a' faith in me. I'm not all that ugly.

RUTLEDGE And I wish you would stop fishing for compliments -- 'cause I'm sick and worn out with giving people compliments about themselves!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, I make such stupid blunders. I know you don't think I'm ugly.

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) I'm not myself -- I'm just not myself.

(She begins brushing her hair. The phone rings. Elaine freezes. Carnelle goes to answer it.)

RUTLEDGE If it's for me -- say -- say, I'm resting.

SCOTT Hello. . .Oh, hello, Franklin. . .Yes, she's here. . .Well, I think she decided not to stop by there. . .No, she's asleep now. She's gone on to sleep. . .Well, wait just a minute, I'll go see.

(She puts her hand over the phone.) He wants me to go wake you up.

-- 26 --

RUTLEDGE

(In a whisper.) He what! Oh, how inconsiderate can he be! Why, I've been driving all day long in this blazing heat and he doesn't even care if I get my rest. You tell him I'm out dead with exhaustion and you absolutely cannot wake me.

SCOTT

(She waits a few beats and then says breathlessly into the phone.) Franklin. . .I absolutely cannot wake her. She's out dead with exhaustion. . . Alright, I'll tell her. 'Bye-'bye.

(She hangs up the phone.) He says for you to please call him when you wake up.

RUTLEDGE Oh, he does, does he? Well, he can just sit and wait, 'cause I'm not calling him -- not ever.

SCOTT Why not?

RUTLEDGE Listen, Carnation, I think you should know something -- I'm not just here on a visit.

SCOTT You're not?

RUTLEDGE No.

(Then after a moment.) I've left Franklin.

SCOTT What?!

RUTLEDGE Now, remember, it's a sworn secret and not a living soul is to find it out.

-- 27 --

SCOTT I won't say a word to anyone. I swear.

RUTLEDGE You see, I haven't told Franklin yet and he actually still believes everything is -- bearable between us.

SCOTT I just can't believe all this. You were so in love. It seemed like Franklin loved you so much. I thought I wanted a man to love me that much.

RUTLEDGE Yes; he did love me. But it just caused him to follow me around asking, "Do you love me? How much do you love me? Tell me how you love me," till I could shake him till he rattled.

SCOTT Then you don't love him anymore?

RUTLEDGE

(Taking off her jewelry.) No. He makes me ill.

SCOTT How awful.

RUTLEDGE Yes.

SCOTT But what about your two little boys. They need a mother.

RUTLEDGE Oh, children manage in this world. Don't ask me about them.

SCOTT Gosh, Aunt Ronelle said you had it all up there in Natchez; everything -- just like a queen in a castle.

RUTLEDGE I know. I did. I only hope I can stand to give it all up.

(Deeply moved.) We had such beautiful clocks. I must have a bath.

(She rises.)

-- 28 --

SCOTT Elain.

(Elain stops.)

SCOTT What was it like -- when you had it all?

RUTLEDGE Ah, Carnation! The abundance of treasures merely serves to underline the desperate futility of life.

(She exits upstairs to the bedrooms.)

SCOTT Oh -- tell me more -- please! Tell me more!

(She picks up all of the bags and follows Elain out of the room. The stage is empty for a few moments. Suddenly, the front door opens, Delmount Williams enters. Delmount, twenty-eight, is tall and thin with piercing blue eyes and a sallow complexion. He wears a white shirt and a pair of wornout pants. He carries a brown paper bag containing all of his belongings. Leaving the front door ajar, Delmount enters the room. He finds something about the atmosphere loathsome. He sits down and lights up a pipe. He sits smoking for a few moments, taking in the room. Popeye peeps in the front door.)

JACKSON

(As she enters.) Carnelle? Carnelle --

(Spotting Delmount.) Oh!

WILLIAMS Hello.

JACKSON Hi. Are you -- you're --

-- 29 --

WILLIAMS Delmount Williams. I'm Carnelle's cousin.

JACKSON Yeah.

WILLIAMS Well, I don't know where Carnelle is right now.

JACKSON Oh.

WILLIAMS You're a friend of hers, I suppose?

JACKSON Yes. I just met her recently. I'm Popeye Jackson.

WILLIAMS Popeye? That's an unusual name.

JACKSON Oh, well. . .It's not my original name. I wasn't born with it.

(Embarrassed she begins to run on.) See, what happened was my brother Lucky, he threw a handful a gravel in my eyes and they started stinging and then he give me this brown bottle a' drops t'put inside my eyes and telling me it's eye drops but, in fact, it's drops for the ears and then this burning sensation come into my eyes, causing me t'scream out and cry like the devil and after that I got me a pair a' glasses and my eyes was bulged out a bit; so folks was calling me Popeye and the name just stuck with me -- Popeye. That's how I got the name.

WILLIAMS

(After a moment.) Well, that's a mighty tragic tale.

-- 30 --

JACKSON Ah, no. Actually, the fortunate part is I can now hear voices through my eyes.

WILLIAMS Through your eyes.

JACKSON Well, now and then I hear 'em -- laughing and -- carrying on.

WILLIAMS Yeah. Well, I think I'll see if I can rustle up Carnelle for you. Carnelle! Honey! Are you home?! Carnelle! Carnelle!

JACKSON Oh, no! No! I just forgot these measurements and I see 'em right here on the side table!

(Carnelle enters from the bedrooms.)

SCOTT Delmount! No! No, it isn't you! Why, I can't believe my eyes! Oh, Popeye, this is my cousin, Delmount! He's come back at last! How are you? Are you doing alright? You look tired.

WILLIAMS I'm fine. Is that a wig?

SCOTT What? Oh, no; it's real.

WILLIAMS My, God, Child, are you trying to look like a bareback rider in the Shooley Traveling Carnival Show?

SCOTT You don't like it?

WILLIAMS Hardly, Honey. Hardly.

SCOTT Maybe you'll grow accustomed to it. I have more and more myself. First I didn't like it at all -- thought it was loud, in fact. Ah, did you meet my friend, Popeye?

-- 31 --

WILLIAMS

(Sitting down to smoke his pipe.) We've spoken.

(Carnelle looks over to Popeye. Popeye manages to smile but stands frozen.)

SCOTT

(Turning back to Delmount.) Why, look at you! When did you start smoking a pipe?

WILLIAMS Don't be silly. I've *always* smoked a pipe. Good Lord and butter.

(After a moment to the women.) Why don't you sit down?

JACKSON

(Making her exit in a flurry.) No. I -- really have to be going. I just forgot these measurements here. Now I got 'em.

SCOTT Well, alright. I'll be seeing you. 'Bye!
(Popeye is gone. Carnelle turns back to Delmount.)

SCOTT So, what have you been doing?

WILLIAMS Not much. Had a job scraping up dead dogs from the road.

SCOTT We were -- concerned about you.

WILLIAMS I was alright. 'Course the dogs were a rotting mess.

SCOTT
(After a moment.) So, what brings you back home to Brookhaven?

-- 32 --

WILLIAMS Business.

SCOTT Oh.

WILLIAMS I don't know if you realized this but my mamma the monkey left the whole of this house to me.

SCOTT I realized it.

WILLIAMS Well, I'm going to sell it. I'm going to sell this house and every stick of furniture in it. And I don't want to hear anything from you about it. It's mine; it's been given to me. And I'm not going to feel sorry for you just 'cause you went and dyed your hair fire engine red!

SCOTT Well, alright, Delmount! You don't have to get mean about it! If you want to sell the house, it's your house to sell; so go on and sell it!

WILLIAMS I will! I'm through working at disgusting job after disgusting job. I hate working! I loathe it!
(Elain appears on the staircase in a flowing robe.)

RUTLEDGE Carnation, Honey, where'd you put the --

WILLIAMS Oh -- No!!

RUTLEDGE Delmount!

WILLIAMS You bitch! You!

RUTLEDGE What!?

-- 33 --

WILLIAMS How could you betray me like that!?! Your own flesh! Your own blood!

RUTLEDGE What's wrong with you? Are you still insane?

WILLIAMS Ooh! Ooh! I'm not speaking to you! I'm not speaking to you!!

SCOTT
(Overlapping.) What's going on? What is it?

RUTLEDGE Don't ask me! Don't ask me!

WILLIAMS No! No! Don't ask her! She could never tell. She could never tell that the beautiful, the sweet, the perfect, Elain Rutledge refused to help her own brother get out of a dirty lunatic asylum!

RUTLEDGE Why, it was clean, it was cheerful, it was the most expensive money could buy! Oh, but you've always lied -- even as a child we could never believe a word you said!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) Oh, what's wrong? What happened? Tell me! Please!!

WILLIAMS It's all quite simple, child a mine. They would have released me after two months time into Mrs. Rutledge's loving custody, 'cause, you see, she is my next a' kin, but she wouldn't have me. She wouldn't sign the papers.

-- 34 --

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) Please, Delmount. I'm sorry, but we thought you needed the professional help. You were so upset about Mama dying --

WILLIAMS Oh, Lord! She knows I wasn't upset 'cause of that! She knows that!

RUTLEDGE And Franklin just thought, 'cause of the children --

WILLIAMS

(Under his breath.) Franklin -- that sheep pussy.

RUTLEDGE

(Angry.) I mean, after all, Delmount, you did commit a violent act -- hitting that poor man in the face with a bottle --

WILLIAMS

(To Carnelle.) Do you actually think I'm of such base character? I challenged that man to a duel! A duel! I can't help it if the weapons he chose were broken bottles! It was an honorable act in defense of a woman with beautiful, warm, bronze skin. I do not regret it.

RUTLEDGE

(Trying to break in between Carnelle and Delmount.) Well, besides all of that, you know good and well, you've always had a checkered past!

WILLIAMS What checkered past?

-- 35 --

RUTLEDGE For one thing, you tried to choke Carnelle's poor father to death right in there at the dining room table!

WILLIAMS Why, I never!

RUTLEDGE You did! It was right on New Year's Day!

SCOTT That's right, 'cause I found the dime in the black-eyed peas --

WILLIAMS Alright, I did! I did it! But he was boring me to death! I just wanted to shut him up!

RUTLEDGE Now, see! See! That is not reasonable behavior! It's just not reasonable. And how you almost got run out of town on a rail 'cause of what happened with T. S. Mahoney's two young virgin daughters! It's no wonder you have bad dreams! It's no wonder!!

WILLIAMS Rub my face in it, why don't you! You're so damn perfect and I'm such a no-account failure! Rub my face in it!

RUTLEDGE I'm sorry, Delmount. I'm sorry. Oh, you bring out the worst in me. You always have. You always have!

(Elain exits in a flurry. Carnelle and Delmount look after her for a moment then Carnelle goes to pick up the crackers and Delmount goes back to his pipe.)

WILLIAMS The irony of it. The intense irony.

-- 36 --

SCOTT What irony?

WILLIAMS Mahoney's two ugly daughters. I went up there thinking all they wanted was for me to see their box of newborn kittens. Well, when we got up in the attic, I saw most all of the kittens had swollen heads and crippled bodies. It was nothing but a cardboard box full of deformed damn cats. That's all there was to it. Well, I felt sorry for those two ugly daughters with their deformed box of cats. And they were dying for it. Hell, I was doing them a favor. There's the irony. You just can't go around obliging other people in this world. That's one thing I've learned.

SCOTT

(Sticking a dirty cracker into her mouth.) I feel sorry for ugly girls. I really do.

WILLIAMS Yeah. Ah, listen, little child a mine. About selling the house and all, I was planning on giving you half of what I make. That way you can get out of this town for good and always. How about it?

SCOTT Well, Delmount. I don't know! I've never thought about leaving Brookhaven.

WILLIAMS Well, think about it. There's never been anything here for you but sorrow.

SCOTT Yes, that's true. Still. . . I don't know.

(After a moment.) Maybe if I could, if I could leave in a blaze of glory. Yes! That's what I'd like to do -- leave this town in a blaze of glory!

-- 37 --

WILLIAMS How do you mean?

SCOTT Well, if I won the Miss Firecracker Contest -- see, I'm a contestant in it and if I could just win first prize then I would be able to leave this town in a crimson blaze of glory!

WILLIAMS The Miss Firecracker Contest -- Hell and damnation!

(He gets up.)

SCOTT

(Following after him.) Where are you going?

WILLIAMS For a walk!

(He exits out the front door.)

SCOTT

(Yelling after him.) Delmount! Well, what in the world is eating you?!

(After a moment.) Hmm, yes. . . a crimson blaze of glory!

(She performs with solemn beauty as the lights begin to fade.)

SCOTT "And the rockets red glare -- Boom! -- the bombs bursting in air -- Boom! -- gave proof through the night -- that our flag was -- Boom! -- there!" Boom! Boom! Boom!

(Blackout.)

-- 38 --

Act 1, Scene 2

SCENE II

The lights go up on the living room. It is about eight o'clock in the evening on the following Saturday. Several cold, formal arrangements of long-stemmed roses have been placed around the room. Most pieces of furniture now have price tags tied onto them. Delmount stands smoking a pipe, and spinning the spinning wheel around as he listens to it creak.

WILLIAMS Hmm. . .

(He gives the spinning wheel a kick. It wobbles. He goes to the desk to fill out a price tag. Elaine enters carrying a silver tray with a decanter of wine and three glasses on it. One of the glasses has already been poured. Elaine is somewhat tipsy.)

RUTLEDGE Hello, Delly, I've brought you out a cool glass of Japanese plum wine.

WILLIAMS No, thank you.

RUTLEDGE

(Setting the tray down.) It's really exquisite wine. I just love things that are Japanese.

(He doesn't respond.)

RUTLEDGE Sure you don't want a glass?

WILLIAMS Yes.

(He goes to put a price tag on the spinning wheel.)

-- 39 --

RUTLEDGE How much are you asking for the spinning wheel?

WILLIAMS Five dollars.

RUTLEDGE Five dollars! Why, that is just wildly ridiculous! I mean, that's an actual antique you've got before you!

WILLIAMS If you don't mind, Miss Priss, this is all my affair!

RUTLEDGE Ooh. And I thought you weren't mad at me anymore.

WILLIAMS What made you think that?

RUTLEDGE Yesterday afternoon when we were sitting out back snapping green beans for supper you started laughing and telling your stories -- I thought we were friends again. Please, you know you're just being hard-hearted about the whole thing.

WILLIAMS I don't know what I'm being. I had bad dreams last night. I always have them. They never stop. Every night I have them.

RUTLEDGE

(Fanning herself.) Must a' been the heat.
(The phone rings. They look at each other.)

RUTLEDGE Get it!!

(Delmount dashes for the phone. Carnelle appears at the door with a dish rag in her hand. It is obvious that she has raced to get there.)

-- 40 --

WILLIAMS

(Answering the phone.) Hello? . . . This is he speaking. . . Yes. . . What? . . . No, I would not consider giving it away. . . I'm sorry but I happen to need the profit. . .

(Carnelle goes and picks up Delmount's dinner tray that is sitting on the desk.)

WILLIAMS Well, it'll be up for auction at the July Fourth Carnival, if you want it so badly you can bid for it there. . . Yes. . . Fine. Good-bye.

(He hangs up the phone.) That was Mrs. J. R. Biggs. Imagine! She wanted me to donate that old spinning wheel to the D. A. R. How ludicrous! As though that entire organization couldn't afford to bid five dollars for it! What presumption! It's most maddening!

SCOTT Well, I guess, I better go and finish up the dishes. That -- ah, that tuna nood'll really stick t'your plates.

(She exits to the kitchen, holding back tears.)

WILLIAMS Dammit! When were they supposed to have called by?

RUTLEDGE Six o'clock. It's after eight now.

WILLIAMS I hate this. So she didn't even make it to the stupid finals.

RUTLEDGE I guess not.

-- 41 --

WILLIAMS God.

RUTLEDGE Not only that -- Ruby Kay told me this year they had the worst turnout in history. Ever since they had to integrate the contest she says the turnout's been decreasing and the quality of the entire event has gone down, down, down.

WILLIAMS Oh, stop it, please! I don't want to hear about it. Jesus God.

RUTLEDGE I know, I know.

WILLIAMS

(Frantically.) I don't know what to do. I mean, she actually thinks she's tap-dancing.
(He imitates her.) She's moving around like this, or something and she thinks she's tap-dancing. Remember how Uncle Willie just dropped her off here and left her with nothing but a pillowcase full of dirty rags? I'd never seen anything so pathetic. Had ringworms in her head.

RUTLEDGE Uh. Mama had to shave off all of her hair and put ointment on those sores in her head -- I don't know, seemed like several times a day.

WILLIAMS God, she was an ugly sight.

RUTLEDGE Wasn't she though. She always went around wearing that yellow wool knit cap pulled down over her head even in the summer's heat. Mama told her people would just think she had short yellow hair.

-- 42 --

WILLIAMS Mama was such a brilliant woman.

RUTLEDGE Well, from a distance it kinda looked like that.

WILLIAMS I do doubt it. Anyway, she never did attain any self-esteem. Had to sleep with every worthless soul in Brookhaven trying to prove she was attractive.

RUTLEDGE

(Finishing another glass of wine.) Please! It was just some sort of degrading stage she was going through. I'm certain she's over it now.

WILLIAMS Well, I wish she was back in it.

RUTLEDGE Delmount!

WILLIAMS I do! Least then she wasn't putting herself into stupid, miserable contests and publicly getting kicked in the face. Least for the disease she just privately took some shots.

RUTLEDGE Don't talk about it! I can't bear that side of life! It's repulsive to me. So shut up your mouth for once!!

WILLIAMS Well, don't have a hissy fit!

(The phone rings.)

RUTLEDGE My, God.

WILLIAMS You think it's them?

-- 43 --

RUTLEDGE No. I don't know.

(Carnelle appears at the door with a brownie in her hand.)

SCOTT Here, I'll get it. I'll go on and -- get it.

(She picks up the phone.) Hello? . . . Oh. Yes, just a minute. It's for you Elain. It's Franklin.

RUTLEDGE Thanks.

(Carnelle exits to the kitchen, stuffing the brownie into her mouth.)

RUTLEDGE Hello. . . Yes, Dear, I got them. . . Oh, they're beautiful; they're -- very fragrant; they're -- I-I don't want to come home. . . I mean not ever, or for awhile, or for not ever. . . I feel like I'm missing my life. . . I don't know about the children. They'll manage. . . Oh, for God's sake, Franklin, no one's going to bake them into a pie!. . . Oh, please! I don't want to discuss it anymore. I'm tired of it all, I'm through with it all. Good-bye!

(She hangs up the phone. She is stunned and shaken by what she has done.)

WILLIAMS

(Who has been listening to all of this while pretending to work with the price tags.) Did you mean it? You're gonna leave him?

RUTLEDGE Yes.

-- 44 --

WILLIAMS By God, Swayne. By God. I love ya, Honey! How I do love ya! Now are you sure you meant it?

RUTLEDGE Uh huh.

WILLIAMS Don't just tell me you meant it, then later take it all back. You've done that before, you know.

RUTLEDGE I haven't.

WILLIAMS What do you mean you haven't?!? It's a personality trait with you. It's your trademark! You tell me you're gonna do something one way and then you go back on it 'cause of what Mama said or what Franklin said or what some other fly-by-night-fool-idiot said!

RUTLEDGE Don't pick on me!

WILLIAMS Ooh! I knew it! You didn't mean it! I knew it!

RUTLEDGE I meant it! I said it!

WILLIAMS All you want is for everyone to think you're perfect. Well, perfect is dull!

RUTLEDGE Don't you dare call me dull. Just because I'm not insane and obsessed and possessed by dreams.

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Shut up, Elain. Shut up your red blood lips!

RUTLEDGE You are a selfish human being! Mama always loved you ten times better than me.

-- 45 --

WILLIAMS Oh God.

RUTLEDGE I had to win contests and be in pageants before she'd give me any notice at all. When I graduated junior college she said, "You've had your spoonful of gravy now go out and get a rich husband"; so I did.

WILLIAMS You're a fool to let Mama ramshackle your life. Mama was nothing but mean.

RUTLEDGE Not to you. She was sweet to you.

WILLIAMS She pretended to be sweet.

RUTLEDGE Well, everyone always thought she was. Till the day she died, people were saying she was a blessed angel on earth.

WILLIAMS Yeah, an angel in ape's clothing.

RUTLEDGE You are so cruel.

WILLIAMS Well, hell, she just turned herself into a monkey to get at us -- just to be mean. I always knew Mama was mean.

RUTLEDGE No. She wasn't always. Things change. She wasn't always.

WILLIAMS Why, I remember when I was a child a' three how she tortured our favorite dog, White Face, right before my very eyes.

RUTLEDGE Wha'd she do to White Face?

-- 46 --

WILLIAMS Well, remember how White Face would always stand out by the back porch door hoping somebody would throw him some measly scraps?

RUTLEDGE I guess so.

WILLIAMS Well, one day she was making a lemon pie and she says to me, "Ha! Let's see how he likes *this!*" and she slings a lemon rind right out to White Face and he jumps up and bites into it then runs off howling. And she's just standing there -- laughing.

RUTLEDGE

(Stunned.) Oh my God. So, Mama's always been mean. G'me a drag off a' your pipe.
(He hands her the pipe. She takes a long drag.)

WILLIAMS Are you really gonna leave him?

RUTLEDGE

(Handing back the pipe.) I said I would.
(The phone rings. They look at each other.)

WILLIAMS I can't stand it.

(He grabs the phone angrily.) Yeah!?. . . Oh. Yes, just a minute. Carnelle? Carnelle, telephone!! Carnelle!

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) Carnelle! Honey! Phone!
(Carnelle appears. Her face is beet red.)

-- 47 --

SCOTT For me?

WILLIAMS Uh huh.

(He hands her the phone.)

SCOTT

(Into the phone.) Hello. . . Oh, Ronnie. . . No, I don't think so. . . 'Cause, I don't go out riding around like that anymore. I got other interests now. . . You just don't understand anything about me. . . Now don't you call me that. . . I said don't call me that. So long.
(She hangs up the phone and stands totally still.)

RUTLEDGE Who was it?

SCOTT Nobody. Just that creep Ronnie Wayne I used to date. He's calling me Miss Hot Tamale. Listen, I guess, I won't be needing that red dress of yours. It looks like I didn't make the Miss Firecracker Contest after all.

WILLIAMS Ah well. . .count yourself lucky -- that type a' false pageantry; it's way beneath you.

RUTLEDGE Yes, it is. Why-why since it's been integrated the quality of the contest has really gone down, down, down.

WILLIAMS Why, it's nothing but a garish display of painted-up-prancing pigs! That's all there is to it.

SCOTT Well, the main thing is -- it was gonna be -- I don't know -- visible proof. And I would a' liked to ride on a float and wave out to people.

-- 48 --

RUTLEDGE Why, all this is gonna help build up your character! Remember, the more Mama suffered the more divine she became.
(There is a knock at the door.)

SCOTT That must be Popeye. I told her I'd pay her tonight for sewing my costume. Tell her I'll be right back with the money.
(She exits up the stairs, holding back tears.)

WILLIAMS Popeye -- that's all we need. Did she lose her brains or what?

RUTLEDGE I like Popeye. She's a nice girl.

WILLIAMS Then you talk to her. I'm gonna go get my dessert.
(He exits to the kitchen, mumbling to himself.) So, it's over. It's finished. She lost. Good. I'm glad!

RUTLEDGE
(As she opens the door for Popeye.) Hello, Honey. Come on in.
(Popeye enters. She is wearing the earrings.)

JACKSON Hi.

RUTLEDGE Well, it looks like our little Carnation didn't make the beauty pageant after all.

JACKSON
(Shocked.) She didn't?

-- 49 --

RUTLEDGE No.

JACKSON I can't believe it.

RUTLEDGE Well, here, Honey, let me get you a glass of cool, plum wine.

JACKSON I just knew she was gonna make it -- with her red hair and her dancing and those roman candles shooting off right up into the sky.

RUTLEDGE
(Handing her some wine.) I know. She put a lot of work into it. It's a disappointment. But life is hard and it's never easy to lose anything.

JACKSON No, I suppose not.
(After a moment.) I once knew these two midgets by the names of Sweet Pea and Willas. I went to their wedding and they was the only midgets there. Rest a' their family was regular-size people. But they was so happy together and they moved into a little midget house where everything was mite size like this little old desk they had and this little ole stool. Then Sweet Pea got pregnant and later on she had what they called this Cesarean birth where they slice open your stomach and pull the baby out from the slice. Well, come to find out, the baby's a regular-size child and soon that baby is just too large for Sweet Pea to carry around and too large for all a' that mite-sized furniture. So Sweet Pea has to give up her own baby for her Mama to raise. I thought she'd die to lose that child. It about crushed her heart.

-- 50 --

RUTLEDGE
(Finishing off her glass of wine.) I don't feel that way about my two boys. I don't want to spend time teaching them manners. I don't like them.

JACKSON Y'don't?

RUTLEDGE No. My husband either.

JACKSON What's wrong with him?

RUTLEDGE

(Gaily, as she pours herself some more wine.) He smells of sweet cologne and wears three rings on every finger.

JACKSON

(Pretending she has three rings on every finger.) Gosh. They must feel heavy.

RUTLEDGE It's such a burden trying to live up to a beautiful face. I'm afraid I'm missing everything in the world.

(Delmount enters from the kitchen.)

WILLIAMS What happened to all of those brownies?

RUTLEDGE They're right in there on that blue china tray.

WILLIAMS All of them?

RUTLEDGE Yes, Delly, the whole batch.

(Delmount exits to the kitchen.)

-- 51 --

JACKSON

(Whispering hoarsely.) What's the matter? He can't find the brownies?

RUTLEDGE I'm sure they're right under his nose.

(Delmount enters, carrying an empty tray.)

WILLIAMS They're all gone! The whole batch!

RUTLEDGE My, goodness! Well, I guess Carnelle ate them up. She's a compulsive eater when she's unhappy.

WILLIAMS Dammit! I wanted a brownie!

(Then he stops, embarrassed.) Ah, hello, Popeye. How're you?

JACKSON Fine.

WILLIAMS

(Smoothing down his wild hair.) Well. . .good. Ah, lovely earrings you're wearing.

JACKSON Thank you. They was a present t'me from Elain. She give 'em to me.

WILLIAMS Oh, right. Carnelle mentioned it. . .Well, maybe we -- have some ice cream in the freezer.

(He exits to the kitchen.)

JACKSON

(Weakly.) Oh. Oh. Oh.

(She begins fanning her heart and blowing air onto it.)

-- 52 --

RUTLEDGE What's the matter? Are you alright?

JACKSON My heart -- it's -- hot. It's hot. It's burning.

(Blowing air onto her heart.) Puff, puff, puff.

(She puts the wineglass against her heart.) There. Ah. It's better now. It's better.

RUTLEDGE My word, you look faint.

JACKSON Tell me, when your heart gets hot, does that mean you're in love?

RUTLEDGE Dar'lin, are you in love?

JACKSON I reckon.

RUTLEDGE Not -- not with Delmount?!

JACKSON Yes.
(*Puff puff.*) Yes.

RUTLEDGE How astonishing! Why, his complexion's so sallow -- and he's got a rude, irritable disposition.

JACKSON It does seem like it.

RUTLEDGE How utterly odd. Tell me, Popeye, have you ever been in love before?

JACKSON Well, my heart's never been hot or nothing, but I did have me a boyfriend once.
-- 53 --

RUTLEDGE And what was he like?

JACKSON Not much. He like t'pet me like I was a cat or something. He's asking me to purr and meow. Like, "meow, meow, purr, purr, purr." I don't know, he's crazy. I's expecting him t'give me a box a' cat nips for Christmas.

RUTLEDGE What did he give you?

JACKSON . . .Nothing.

RUTLEDGE
(*Pouring them both more wine.*) Well, if you want my opinion, that is just about what Delmount will give you. He's an unstable character and he's had a very checkered past.

JACKSON I know 'bout that.

RUTLEDGE Well, did you know about his strange, obsessive eye for beauty?
(*Popeye shakes her head.*)

RUTLEDGE How he's been known to follow a normal-looking woman through the streets all day and all night because he finds the mere shape of her nose exotic or beautiful; or perhaps he finds the texture of her lips to be unusually soft and smooth. You don't want anything to do with him. I worry about him. He's not right. He's obsessed.
(*She finishes her drink. She is uncomfortable and upset.*) What in the world is keeping Carnelle? She must be up in her room crying. I'd better go get her.
(*Elain exits up the stairs. Popeye sits alone sipping wine. She begins shaking her head back and forth. After a moment she makes a solemn toast to the voices inside her eyes.*)

-- 54 --

JACKSON Cheers.
(*Delmount enters from the kitchen. He is eating a dish of vanilla ice cream.*)

WILLIAMS Oh. Hello. Where's Elain?

JACKSON She's getting Carnelle.

WILLIAMS
(*Smoothing down his hair.*) Oh.
(*He sits at the desk and begins writing.*)

JACKSON Are you writing poems?

WILLIAMS What?

JACKSON Carnelle said you write poems.

WILLIAMS Oh. Well, on occasion I have.

JACKSON I'd like to read 'em.

WILLIAMS

(Embarrassed.) They're personal.

JACKSON Oh.

(She starts to run on.) 'Course, I never read many poems before. There weren't all that many poem books you could get off a' the traveling bookmobile. Most books I got was about animals. Farm animals, jungle animals, Arctic animals and such. 'Course they was informative, I learned some things; they's called: a gaggle a' geese, a pride a' lions, a warren a' rabbits, a host a' whales. That's my personal favorite one: a host a' whales!

(They look at each other.)

-- 55 --

JACKSON Carnelle says you can wiggle your ears.

WILLIAMS Does she?

JACKSON Yes.

WILLIAMS

(Straightening his hair.) It's an old trick.

JACKSON I would liked t'have seen it.

WILLIAMS I don't do it anymore.

(He straightens his hair again.)

JACKSON What d'ya dream about at nights?

WILLIAMS

(Taken aback.) Why do you ask?

JACKSON I don't know, your face looks tired. I thought maybe you was having bad dreams.

WILLIAMS What are you saying? You make me uncomfortable. A gaggle of geese! What's that?! What are you talking about? This whole night has been unbearable! Ooooh! Now the ice cream has given me a headache. Lord Jesus! A gaggle of geese! Oh, my head! My head!

(He exits to the bedroom, holding his head. Popeye watches him leave then she puts both of her hands over her heart and starts to sob.)

JACKSON Oh. Oh. Oh. I must be stupid. I must be.

(Carnelle enters from the bedrooms. Her nose is red. She carries a wad of Kleenexes and a change purse. She spots Popeye crying.)

-- 56 --

SCOTT Popeye! What is it? What's the matter?

JACKSON

(Sobbing.) Oh, I'm stupid. I'm stupid.

SCOTT Why? What happened? What?

JACKSON It seems -- it seems I love him.

(Pointing to the door.) I love Delmount.

SCOTT Oh, no! I knew it. I knew it.

JACKSON But I don't know what to say. I don't know how to come to say it. I just say, "Carnelle says you can wiggle your ears." He doesn't love me. I've lost him!

SCOTT

(Starting to cry.) Oh, oh. Dear, little Popeye. I've lost too. I've lost too.

JACKSON What?

SCOTT The contest! I lost the Miss Firecracker Contest!

JACKSON Oh, right.

SCOTT I didn't even make the finals! They don't want me. I'm a failure!

JACKSON Oh! There, there.

SCOTT I'm ugly, Popeye! My thighs are fat! No one loves me!

-- 57 --

JACKSON

(Overlapping.) Oh, he'll never love me! Never! Never!! Oh, I hope I don't scream out -- aaahh!!!

SCOTT

(Overlapping as she pulls at her hair.) I hate my hair! I hate it!
(Elain enters from the bedroom. She spots them crying.)

RUTLEDGE My, God! What is it? What's wrong?! Did someone die?!

SCOTT

(Falling across the couch.) Oh, don't ask! Don't ask!

RUTLEDGE What happened?! Please! What?!

JACKSON

(Wiping away tears.) Well. . . well, she's crying 'cause she lost the beauty contest -- and, and I'm crying 'cause he -- he -- he doesn't care about me!
(Popeye breaks down crying.)

RUTLEDGE Oh, I see. You poor dears. You poor dears. There, there now. Here, here, now. There, there.
(Popeye and Carnelle whimper softly.)

RUTLEDGE You don't have to worry anymore. Things'll get better. Your lives aren't over, not like mine is. No, neither of you have to face the sort of tragedy I'm facing. Neither of you is starting life all over again, feeling nothing but terror and fear and loneliness!
(Popeye and Carnelle sob loudly.)

-- 58 --

RUTLEDGE Oh, God. Oh, God. I can't believe I've left him. I've left him! Oh, my, dear God! There'll be no more roses! No more!
(She caresses an armful of roses.)

SCOTT What? You've really left Franklin?

RUTLEDGE Yes!

(Weeping as she throws a handful of roses.) Good-bye!

SCOTT You've told him?

RUTLEDGE

(Throwing another handful of roses.) Yes! Farewell!

SCOTT Oh, Elain! Elain!

RUTLEDGE

(Throwing roses.) No more! No more!!

JACKSON Roses! Look! Roses!

RUTLEDGE

(Throwing roses.) I don't know what to do! I don't know what I can do!

SCOTT Me neither; me neither. Oh, life!

JACKSON

(Holding roses.) Roses! Roses! Roses!
(Pause. The phone rings. All throw roses at the phone as they continue weeping.)

-- 59 --

JACKSON

(Pointing to the phone with a rose.) It rings!

RUTLEDGE Oh, let it ring! Just let it ring!

JACKSON Yes, ring!
(*The phone rings four more times.*)

SCOTT
(*Suddenly alive.*) Wait. I'll get it. Quick! Here, I'll get it!
(*She grabs the receiver.*) Hello. . .Yes, this is she. . .What?. . .Oh, I'm so sorry. . .Oh, no. How sad. How tragic. . .What?. . .Yes, alright. .
.Thank you. 'Bye-'bye.
(*She puts down the phone.*) That -- That was Miss Blue and, well, do you remember her little dog, Turnip?

RUTLEDGE The brown and white one --

SCOTT
(*Breathlessly.*) Yes, well, Turnip was hit by a van and he died; so Miss Blue was late in notifying the five finalists but -- oh my God.

JACKSON Huh?

SCOTT Oh my God.

RUTLEDGE What?

SCOTT I made. I made it! By God I made the pageant!!! I did! I did! I made it! AAAHHH!!!!
-- 60 --

RUTLEDGE
(*Overlapping.*) Praise God! Praise God! Some victory!

JACKSON
(*Overlapping.*) Oh you made it! You made it! Hurray!

RUTLEDGE
(*Running on.*) Oh, Carnation! Carnation, what a triumph for you! Of course, I always knew you'd make the pageant! I never doubted it for one minute!

SCOTT They're -- they're gonna be taking my picture for the newspaper at ten o'clock in the morning at the Courthouse square. I'll be famous!

RUTLEDGE It's just stupendous! Here; here let's have a toast!

SCOTT A toast for *me*? Make a toast for *me*?

RUTLEDGE Yes! Yes!
(*She starts to pour the glasses.*)

JACKSON Yes, a toast! A toast!

RUTLEDGE Quick, call Delmount! I'll pour out these glasses.

SCOTT Delmount! Delmount, come quick! We're having a toast! We're having a toast to me!

RUTLEDGE
(*Overlapping.*) Here you go, Popeye. And for our Carnation.
(*Delmount enters from the bathroom. He is in his bathrobe and wears a towel wrapped around his head.*)
-- 61 --

WILLIAMS What is it? What? I'm right in the middle of my hot oil treatment!

RUTLEDGE
(*Handing him a glass.*) Here, Delmount, we're having a toast!

WILLIAMS Huh?

RUTLEDGE Well, no more glasses. I'll just have to drink from the bottle. A toast, everyone! To Carnation! May she win first prize in the Miss Firecracker Contest!

WILLIAMS What?!

RUTLEDGE

(She raises the bottle.) Cheers!

JACKSON

(Raising her glass.) Cheers!

SCOTT

(Raising her glass.) Cheers!

WILLIAMS

(As he clinks each of their glasses.) Oh -- my -- miserable -- God!

(They go about clinking each other's glasses as Delmount downs his drink and the lights black out.)

END OF ACT I

Act 2, Scene 1

ACT II SCENE I

The lights go up on an empty stage. Mac Sam, the balloon man, enters up right carrying a bunch of colored balloons, and coughing painfully. Mac Sam is in his mid-thirties. He is amazingly thin, stooped shouldered, and in drastically poor health. Yet there is something extraordinarily sensual about him. His eyes manage to be magnetic and bloodshot at the same time. He walks slowly over to the doorway of the dressing room.

MAG SAM Hey, Carnelle. Hey, beautiful.

(He sees that no one is inside.) Hmm.

(He finishes his cigarette and tosses it to the ground and spits up a lot of blood. He wanders off up right, coughing and whistling a tune. Carnelle enters left into the dressing room with Tessy Mahoney. Tessy is the uglier of T. S. Mahoney's two ugly daughters. She has a large nose, a weak chin, tiny eyes, and bad posture. She covers up her bitterness by being as sweet as she can be. Carnelle is wearing a simple button-down shift but she has applied lavish makeup and elaborately styled her hair in preparation for the contest. Both women are carrying armloads of beauty contest paraphernalia: the red antebellum dress; a hoop for the skirt; pantaloons; the red, silver, and blue costume; a robe, a makeup case; shoes; stockings; roman candles; etc.)

-- 63 --

MAHONEY

(As she enters the dressing room carrying only the tap shoes.) It's over here. It's this way. It's this way, here!

SCOTT Oh. Oh, I see. I see!

MAHONEY Can you make it?

SCOTT

(Making her way into the dressing room.) Yeah. I got it. Here, I got it.

(Dropping her belongings where she can.) Wheew! Brother. Thanks very much for the help.

MAHONEY Sure. It's what I'm here for.

SCOTT Oh, look! Is this my dressing room? Is this mine?

MAHONEY

(Picking up her clipboard and taking a pencil from behind her ear.) Uh huh. It's the only one left. The good ones have all been taken.

(Looking at her watch.) You're running late, you know.

SCOTT

(Struggling with her belongings.) Yes, I know. I was sewing on my dress. Things aren't going smoothly at all today. Oh, look! Now my hair piece is falling out. I worked all morning on that. So, is your sister nervous?

MAHONEY Not really. I guess she knows she doesn't have a chance.

-- 64 --

SCOTT

(As she straightens up her things.) What makes you say that?

MAHONEY Well, she's not at all attractive. I'm amazed she ever got in the contest. I'm sure it's just 'cause the judges think she's some sort of concert pianist. But she just knows that one opus by Johann Sebastian Bach. I swear that's all she knows.

SCOTT Hmm, I suppose that talent part of the contest will count quite a bit.

MAHONEY Well, she looks like a tank in her swimsuit.

SCOTT She does?

MAHONEY She's hump shouldered from practicing that one Johann Sebastian Bach opus on our piano all day long.

SCOTT What a shame.

MAHONEY This is strictly confidential, but the word is out that the only real contenders for the Miss Firecracker crown are you and Caroline Jeffers.

SCOTT

(Overcome.) Oh, gosh, I don't know --

MAHONEY It's the truth. Everyone's saying it. We're all agreed.

SCOTT Of course Caroline's really a lovely girl. . .

-- 65 --

MAHONEY Yeah, except for those yellow teeth.

SCOTT Well, I hear she took medicine for seizures that she had as a child and it scraped off most of her tooth enamel.

MAHONEY I heard that too, but it doesn't matter.

SCOTT It doesn't?

MAHONEY I really don't think the judges are interested in sentimentality -- just the teeth themselves.
(*Referring to the red dress.*) That's such a beautiful red dress. It's really very fine.

SCOTT Yes, it's beautiful. I'm just a little worried though. It just arrived from Natchez yesterday and, well, it didn't seem to fit me exactly right.

MAHONEY What's wrong with the fit?

SCOTT Well, the waist was a little snug. But I worked on it this morning and added in this extra bit of material.
(*She shows that a large strip of pink material has been awkwardly added to the bodice of the red dress.*)

MAHONEY
(*Disdainfully.*) Oh. Well.

SCOTT 'Course, I know it's not the exact matching color. Actually, my cousin Elain's gone to get my seamstress, Popeye Jackson, and see what she can do. We couldn't find her last night. She'll fix it right up. This is just temporary.

-- 66 --

MAHONEY Well, I hope so. It looks a little funny.

SCOTT
(*Looking outside.*) Oh, I know Elain'll bring Popeye; she promised she would. She's never let me down in her life. Gosh, I think I'm starting t'sweat. My makeup is melting right down my face.
(*She starts fixing her face.*)

MAHONEY
(*Looking at her watch.*) Hmm. Actually, you don't have much time. It's only twenty-eight minutes till the opening Parade of Firecrackers.
(*Tessy blows her whistle.*)

SCOTT Oh, my word! Well, I'm ready except for my dress. I mean, my head is ready.

MAHONEY
(*Removing schedule from her clipboard.*) Well, anyway, here's your schedule.

SCOTT Thanks.

MAHONEY Oh and have you seen the Grand Float they've made for Miss Firecracker to ride at the head of the Independence Day Parade?

SCOTT Oh, yes, I saw it -- it's. . .beautiful.

MAHONEY Why, yes, it's very fine. Well, I'd better go let Miss Blue know you're checked in.
(*After glancing at herself in the mirror.*) Oh. Mind if I borrow some of your hairspray?

-- 67 --

SCOTT No, go ahead.

MAHONEY Thanks.
(*As she sprays her already rock hard hair.*) I, ah, hear your cousin Delmount's back in town.

SCOTT Yes, he's back.

MAHONEY

(Still spraying.) Well, you can tell him for me that I've forgiven him. I understand now that some men just don't have any self-control. Just none at all. Think that'll hold?

SCOTT Uh huh.

MAHONEY Anyway, tell him my Uncle Ferd's given us a new litter of Siamese kittens if he wants to drop by and see them. I know he always enjoyed animals.

SCOTT I'll tell him.

MAHONEY Well, good luck. I'll be standing by backstage running the contest. Let me know if any emergencies arrive.

SCOTT Alright.

MAHONEY Give 'em H.

SCOTT I'll try.

(Tessy exits left. Carnelle turns back and looks in the mirror. She stares at herself as she wipes sweat off the back of her neck.)

SCOTT Oh, Lord.

(She tries a big friendly smirk. It falters.) Oh, Lord.

(She begins fooling with her hair and makeup. Mac Sam enters from the carnival grounds upstage right. He stops, looks at the dressing room, ties his balloons to the bench, and goes toward the dressing room.)

-- 68 --

MAG SAM

(Looking inside the dressing room.) Hi, ya!

SCOTT AAH!

MAG SAM Admiring y'physiognomy?

SCOTT

(Catching her breath.) Mac Sam. What are you doing here?

MAG SAM Just came t'wish you well. Heard you were in the beauty contest and came by t'wish you well.

SCOTT

(Breathlessly.) Thanks. I'm nervous.

MAG SAM Sure y'are. Well, good luck. I wish y'well.

(He leaves the dressing room. She follows.)

SCOTT I -- didn't think I'd be seeing you again.

MAG SAM Yeah, well, wonders never do quite cease.

(He looks at her with his magnetic eyes then starts to leave again.)

SCOTT I tried to notify you. After I found out. Couldn't. . .locate you though.

MAG SAM Oh, "that." Yeah, well, I'm enjoying -- "that." Find it most fascinating.

SCOTT But didn't you get the shots?

-- 69 --

MAG SAM Nah.

SCOTT But all you do is -- they give you these shots and you're cured. It cures you.

MAG SAM I don't care t'be cured.

SCOTT What do you mean? You've got to be.

MAG SAM

(Taking out a cigarette.) Listen, Honey, this life a' mine is strictly on the house. Strictly a free roll a' the eternal dice. I was almost choked to death by my mama's umbilical cord at birth. Spent three days purple and gasping for breath. I'm tired out of gasping.

(He lights his cigarette and blows out the match.) Mmm. Your hair looks really nice. I like that color. It looks good on you.

SCOTT It doesn't seem too loud?

MAG SAM

(Smelling her hair.) Not a bit. No, Sugar, not a bit.

WILLIAMS Carnelle!? Carnelle, are you about?!

SCOTT

(Yelling.) Delmount! Is that you?

(To Mac Sam.) It's my cousin, Delmount.

WILLIAMS Carnelle!!

-- 70 --

SCOTT I'm over here!

MAG SAM Well, I'll be ambling along. It was good seeing you.

SCOTT

(Impulsively.) Will ya come back by?

MAG SAM

(His eyes becoming magnetic.) Oh, yeah.

(He exits right.)

WILLIAMS Carnelle!

SCOTT I'm over here!!!

(Delmount enters excitedly from the carnival grounds downstage right. His hair is wild; he carries a stuffed dog.)

WILLIAMS Oh! Well, there you are! Sounded like your voice was coming from over there by the snow cone stand.

SCOTT No, I'm here.

WILLIAMS Well. . .well, look, here's an artificial dog I won pitching dimes onto plates. Take it; it's for you if you want it.

SCOTT Why, thank you, Delmount.

(She kisses him.) Oh my lips.

(Carnelle hurries into the dressing room to fix her lips. Delmount follows.)

WILLIAMS Things are going very good over at the auction. I mean, the furniture, it all seems to be selling like hot cakes. Why, it looks to me, child a mine, that our lives may actually be on the verge of being fine.

-- 71 --

SCOTT Gosh, everything feels so all of a sudden. Selling the house and all of the belongings and. . .leaving. . .It makes it much more important that I win the contest. I mean, the main thing is I gotta leave in the blaze of glory.

(She leaves the dressing room and starts pacing back and forth.) Let's see, I know I'll beat Sapphire Mendoza just 'cause she's the token Negro and Mexican. I'm not trying to be mean about it, but it's the truth. Then there's Joe Anne Jacobs.

WILLIAMS Frank Jacob's sister's in the pageant?

SCOTT Uh huh.

WILLIAMS She's a shrimp.

SCOTT Well, sorta. Then there's Missy Mahoney --

WILLIAMS Oh, my God! Is she in the pageant?

SCOTT Yeah.

WILLIAMS Why, next to her sister Tessy, Missy's the ugliest girl in the whole town!

SCOTT Sssh! Sssh!

(Pointing to the dressing room.) Tessy's in charge of the pageant coordination. She may hear you.

WILLIAMS Oh, Jesus. Keep me away from those two. They are trouble.

-- 72 --

SCOTT Well, Tessy was asking about you just now.

WILLIAMS She was? Holy cow; holy cow. Where's my pipe? I've got to lay low; that's all. Lay low till I can get out of this town for good and always.

SCOTT Let's see, then there's Caroline Jeffers. She is awfully pretty except. . .Oh, I don't know! I don't know!
(She begins chewing her nails.) Have you seen Elaine?

WILLIAMS Not since this morning.

SCOTT She was gonna go find Popeye to help sew up that red dress. It looks funny the way it is.

WILLIAMS Well, I haven't seen Popeye since that night you got into this blessed contest.

SCOTT

(Biting her nails.) Oh, shoot! I said I wasn't gonna chew on my nails!
(She takes a nail file from her dress pocket and begins filing.)

WILLIAMS She's strange anyway. . .that Popeye. She's very strange. A strange bird.

SCOTT

(Working on her nails.) I guess so. I guess she is. Still. . .well, I guess, I shouldn't tell you. No, never mind.

-- 73 --

WILLIAMS Oh, that's fine. That's just fine. You start to say something and then you don't. Very nice, Carnelle, very nice.

SCOTT Well, it's just. . .it's just, well, she said she liked your hair and --

WILLIAMS What? My hair? She said she likes my hair?!

SCOTT Yes, and how you can wiggle your ears and write poetry.

WILLIAMS Wiggle my ears!? Good Lord and butter.

SCOTT Oh, I may as well tell you. . .she's in love with you.

WILLIAMS What!?! No, she's not. I don't believe that. Who told you that?

SCOTT Well, she said it. And she was crying over you. It's the truth, Delmount. She was in the living room crying over you.

WILLIAMS No, I don't believe it. Crying?

SCOTT I know. But I didn't have the heart to tell her about your obsessive eye for beauty. You know; that one you have.

WILLIAMS Oh. Yes, I have acquired a weakness for the classical, exotic beauty in a woman. I've been a fool for it. It's my romantic nature.

SCOTT And I guess you don't think that Popeye's exactly classical?
(Delmount looks forlornly at her.)

-- 74 --

SCOTT Well, I've got to at least go put on my pantaloons and hoop. I've got to at least do that.

WILLIAMS This tobacco is too sweet. It's making my head spin. Anyway, my hair's an unruly mess!

RUTLEDGE Carnelle! Carnation, Honey!?!

SCOTT

(Stopping.) Elaine --
(Elaine enters right in a flowing summer dress. She looks radiant and fresh. She carries the Mardi Gras mask in a paper sack.)

RUTLEDGE Oh, Da'lin, there you are!

SCOTT Oh, Elain, I knew you'd come!

RUTLEDGE Why, hello, Delly!

WILLIAMS Hello, Swaney.

RUTLEDGE Will you just look up at that sky! It's as blue as the mighty sea! Oh, I feel like a child today! I swear, I do! You'll never believe it, but Miss Blue has asked me to come up and give a speech before the contest starts. She wants me to talk on, "My Life as a Beauty." Isn't it too exciting!

SCOTT Oh, yes, yes. But -- but where's Popeye? The dress -- I couldn't make it look right.

-- 75 --

RUTLEDGE Oh, Carnation, I went over to Miss Lily's Dress Shop and heard the most disheartening news: poor, little Popeye was fired yesterday afternoon. They said she was giving away the merchandise.

SCOTT Oh, no!

WILLIAMS Well, where'd she go?

RUTLEDGE No one knows. They haven't seen her. But anyway, I came up with the most creative idea to save the day. You can wear this lovely Mardi Gras mask in the opening parade. That way you can just hold it up to your face like this, covering the side of your dress where the extra material is with your arm and elbows, plus adding some mystery and elegance to -- well, to your total look. Just walk around like this.

(She moves around making dips and swirls, alternately moving the mask from in front of her face to the side of it with flip of her wrist, as she makes her dips.) And scoop! And scoop! And scoop! You think you can manage it?

SCOTT

(Taking the mask.) I'll try. I'll really try.

(She begins practicing.) And scoop! And scoop. And scoop, etc.

RUTLEDGE That's it. Now just flip out your wrist. Make it crisp! That's good. Just keep at it. That's the only way to improve.

(Turning to Delmount.) It's amazing but everyone recognizes me. They say I'm still exactly the same as I was. "Just in full bloom like a rose!" That's what one dear man said. I wish Mama were here. She'd love all of this!

-- 76 --

SCOTT

(Still practicing.) I know. She'd be so surprised if she could see me. I'm totally changed from when she knew me. Totally new. I think I got it.

(Tessy sticks her head into the left side of the dressing room.)

MAHONEY Carnelle?

SCOTT Out here, Tessy! I'm here!

CARNELLE AND ELAIN Tessy!

WILLIAMS Tessy!

(He leaps under the tent.)

MAHONEY

(Entering the dressing room left carrying a shoe box with a rubber band around it and holes punched in it.) Carnelle?!

SCOTT I'm over here!

MAHONEY Oh!

(As she steps out of the dressing room to the outside area.) Why, Elain! Hello! How're you doing?

RUTLEDGE Why, if it isn't Tessy Mahoney! I'm doing fine. Just fine.

MAHONEY Will you look at you. If you aren't the most beautiful thing in the whole wide world!

RUTLEDGE Oh, you silly, dear!

-- 77 --

MAHONEY

(Handing Carnelle the shoe box.) Here, Carnelle. Some man brought this as a gift to you.

SCOTT Why, thank you. Who could have sent it?

MAHONEY I just can't get over how beautiful you are. I just can't.

RUTLEDGE Why, how sweet can you be?

SCOTT

(Reading the scrawled message.) "Thought you'd enjoy this. Good luck always. Mac Sam."

RUTLEDGE So, what's in the box?

SCOTT I don't know. But I -- I think it's alive.

RUTLEDGE What? Let me see --

(She opens the box.) AAH!!!

(She slams the top back on the box and drops it to the ground.)

SCOTT What is it?

RUTLEDGE It's a horrible little frog in a pink outfit!

SCOTT Oh, my lord.

(She picks up the box and looks inside.) Oh, lord.

(To Tessy.) Where'd he go? Where'd the man go?

-- 78 --

MAHONEY I don't know. He gave me the box up front.

SCOTT Show me. Quick! Show me!

MAHONEY

(As she hurries back through the dressing room and runs off left.) Well, it's this way. But you better hurry up; it's only seventeen minutes till the opening Parade of Firecrackers --

SCOTT

(Overlapping as she follows Tessy out.) Come on, Elain! Come on! He'll know where Popeye is! He'll know!

RUTLEDGE

(Following Carnelle off left, overlapping.) But why? What do you mean? What's all this about? What an awful gift! Some friend you must have!

(They all exit left. Delmount comes out from under the tent. He is dusting off his pants when Popeye suddenly enters from down right dancing, humming, and eating blue cotton candy. She is wearing her earbobs and a pretty summer dress.)

WILLIAMS Popeye.

JACKSON

(Stopping her dancing.) Hello.

(She fans herself with the blue cotton candy as they stare at each other for a moment.) I was looking for Carnelle.

-- 79 --

WILLIAMS Oh. Well. I don't know. I think she went looking for you. Found some sort of frog in a suit.

JACKSON Was it a pink suit?

WILLIAMS I think it was.

JACKSON Oh, well, I sold me about ten different outfits out at a booth this morning. But I only had me that one frog in the pink suit, kinda there on display; case you didn't have no dolls.

WILLIAMS I see.

JACKSON Well. So why was Carnelle a'hunting for me?

WILLIAMS Oh. Well, she, ah, she needed you to help sew on this red dress she has for the contest. She's been looking for you since last night.

JACKSON Oh. Well, I rode the bus up to Jackson last night. Went to visit the observatory. They had the telescope aimed up on the moon. Thought I'd take a look.

WILLIAMS How'd it look?

JACKSON Big. Orange. Kinda shiney and sparkley.

WILLIAMS Sounds nice.

JACKSON It was.

WILLIAMS

(There is an awkward pause. He begins smoothing down his hair.) Hmm. Gosh.

(He stops smoothing. Looks at her.) Oh.

(Suddenly messing his hair all up.) I prefer it unruly. Don't you?

-- 80 --

JACKSON I don't much know.

(A pause.) Ah, where's the dress? Maybe I should go take a look at it.

WILLIAMS Oh, well, it's in here. It's right in here.

(They go inside the dressing room. He shows her the dress.)

WILLIAMS It's ah, too small right here in the waist.

JACKSON Hmm. Let me take a look.

WILLIAMS Well, here, I'll hold your cotton candy.

JACKSON Thanks. You can finish it, if you want.

(At that moment Carnelle, Mac Sam, and Elain are heard coming from the carnival from down right. They are in an uproar.)

MAG SAM But I told you, I took the thing from some small kid who was tired of it! How do I know where he got it?!

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) Well, in my opinion, it's a tasteless sort of gift!

(By now they are all on stage.)

MAG SAM I thought it was festive!! A unique gift for a unique girl! Who are you anyway?!

RUTLEDGE Who are you???

-- 81 --

WILLIAMS Wait! It's them!

(Stepping outside the dressing room.) She's here! She's inside! Popeye! She's looking at the dress!

SCOTT She is?!

RUTLEDGE She's here!?

MAG SAM Who is this Popeyed anyway?

(They all rush into the dressing room. The following dialogue goes at a rapid pace.)

SCOTT Popeye! You're here!

JACKSON Hello. I need scissors.

ALL Scissors. Scissors.

SCOTT Scissors. Scissors. Let me look. Let me look!

(She begins searching through her makeup case.)

WILLIAMS Listen, Bub, those balloons don't fit in here.

MAG SAM Is that Popeyed?

RUTLEDGE Popeye! It's Popeye!

SCOTT Oh, I don't think I have any scissors! They're none here!

MAHONEY

(Coming from off left.) Elain! Oh, Miss Elain!

DELMOUNT, ELAIN, CARNELLE Tessy!

-- 82 --

WILLIAMS Quick! Hide me behind those balloons.

(Delmount jumps behind Mac Sam's balloons.)

MAG SAM Watch it, Sonny!

MAHONEY

(As she enters from the left side of the dressing room.) Miss Blue says it's only five minutes till she introduces you for your speech on beauty.

RUTLEDGE Oh, thank you, Darlin. Thank you.

(Looking in the mirror.) For heaven's sake, my face isn't even on!

MAG SAM Her face?

MAHONEY Why, Carnelle, you'd better hurry and get dressed! All the other beauty contestants are already in their gowns and ready to go!

(She exits left, blowing her whistle. All scream. Delmount reappears.)

SCOTT What can I do? There're no scissors. What can I do?!

RUTLEDGE

(Sitting at the dressing table, putting on her makeup.) Just wear the mask; you'll be fine, really.

SCOTT Oh, will somebody, please, take this frog!?

MAG SAM Here, Honey, Mac Sam'll take care of it.

(He takes the box from her.)

-- 83 --

SCOTT Quick, now my pantaloons! Oh, God, I'm hot. I'm sweating. I stink.

(Someone throws her the pantaloons.)

WILLIAMS I believe I mentioned your balloons don't fit!

MAG SAM I'm holding the frog!

SCOTT

(Struggling with her pantaloons.) Oh! Oh, which is the right end?! Look, I can't even find the right end of my pantaloons! It's hopeless!! It's hopeless!! It's utterly hopeless!!

(She throws the pantaloons into the air, collapses on the floor then starts crawling around on the floor searching for her pantaloons.)

RUTLEDGE Now just try to be calm, Carnation, Honey. Try to enjoy yourself; it's all going to go as smooth as silk! I promise you -- I give you my word of honor!

WILLIAMS You'll do alright, child a mine -- it's a stupid, idiotic contest, you'll do fine!

MAG SAM You're beautiful, Baby -- just beautiful!

JACKSON

(About the pantaloons.) Here. Here, now. You step in 'em like this.

MAG SAM Yeah, put your foot in there.

-- 84 --

SCOTT

(Trembling.) In there? Right in there?

JACKSON Uh huh.

WILLIAMS Come on, child, you can do it.

SCOTT

(Gritting her teeth.) Well, alright.
(She grabs the pantaloons and furiously starts to put them on.)

MAG SAM That's it!

RUTLEDGE Good. Good.

WILLIAMS You've got it now!

SCOTT Hey! Hey, look, they're on me! My pantaloons are on!!

(General applause, sighs of relief, etc. Mac Sam raises Carnelle's hand in victory. Fast blackout.)

-- 85 --

Act 2, Scene 2

SCENE II

The setting is the same. Several minutes have passed. The red dress, the hoop, the pantaloons, and the Mardi Gras mask are gone. Mac Sam sits on the bench smoking a cigarette and drinking whiskey from a flask. His balloons are tied to the bench. Delmount is pacing back and forth in front of the bench.

WILLIAMS Wonder how it's going?

MAG SAM Why don't ya take a look?

WILLIAMS Not interested.

MAG SAM Oh.

WILLIAMS She look alright to you in that big, red thing?

MAG SAM Oh, yeah.

WILLIAMS God. How she can put herself through this I'll never understand. Never.

MAG SAM Well, women are funny about their looks. My granpapa used to say to me, "Sammy, all ya have to do is tell a woman she's beautiful and she goes like that!"

(He makes a horizontal victory sign with his fingers.)

WILLIAMS How pithy.

MAG SAM Well, of course I try not to abuse the knowledge but it has come in handy in some borderline cases.

-- 86 --

WILLIAMS Well, fortunately, I have yet to make advances to any woman who did not possess at least one classically, beautiful characteristic. It's sort of a romantic notion I've had. I don't know. Perhaps, it's caused me to be fragmented in love. Perhaps, it's been obsessive. What do you think?

MAG SAM Well, what I like is a woman who can take it right slap on the chin. That's what I like.

(He begins to cough, spreading germs all over his flask. He takes a slug, relieving his cough, then he says.) Care for a slug?

WILLIAMS

(Aghast.) No, thank you.

(Popeye and Elaine enter in a flurry from up right. Popeye carries a half-eaten hot dog.)

JACKSON Ooh! Ooh, me! Ooh!

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) It's a travesty! A travesty! An utter Godforsaken travesty!

WILLIAMS What's going on? Is it going alright? How's it going?

RUTLEDGE Air! Air! I must have some air!

(She falls back onto the bench as Delmount and Mac Sam fan her furiously.)

JACKSON

(Acting it out.) See, see, she tripped on that big ole red skirt and fell down flat on her face! Whoops!

(She falls to the ground.) And people was laughing. "Ha, ha, ha, ha, ha!"

-- 87 --

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Laughing! Oh, my God! Laughing!

JACKSON They was laughing out loud!

RUTLEDGE

(Coming out of her faint.) There -- there's a group of hoodlums out there yelling, "Miss Hot Tamale! Miss Hot Tamale!!" It's a disgrace. It's a humiliation! And that horrible Ronnie Wayne is actually throwing peanuts and trash and ice right up there on the stage in front of everyone!

WILLIAMS At her? Is he throwing them at her?

RUTLEDGE Well, a peanut caught her right between the eyes!

WILLIAMS What? What! He dies!! DIES!!!! Ronnie Wayne! Ronnie Wayne!!

(Delmount exits upstage right. as Carnelle enters left into her dressing room. The red dress, which was quite lovely and seductive when Elaine wore it eleven years ago, now looks like a whore's gown on Carnelle. It is faded and ill-fitted and totally askew. She slings down the torn and broken Mardi Gras mask furiously. There are peanuts and trash on her dress and in her hair.)

SCOTT AAAAH! OOH! It's awful! It's so awful! They never forget! They never do!

(Elain and Popeye start for the dressing room. Mac Sam stays on the bench. He lights up another cigarette.)

-- 88 --

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) It's her! She's there!!

(Stepping inside the dressing room.) Carnation --

JACKSON

(Stepping inside.) Hi.

SCOTT Did you hear them? Oh, did you hear them? They were laughing and calling me, "Miss Hot Tamale." Did you hear it?

RUTLEDGE Why, look at you, you're dripping wet. . .let me help you out of this gown before you perish.

(She starts to unbutton the gown.)

SCOTT Oh, if only the dress had come sooner. I could have fixed it right. I wouldn't of needed that fancy mask. I felt so foolish wearing it.

RUTLEDGE

(Defensively, as she tries to get the dress over Carnelle's head.) I'm sorry, but I thought it would do -- I just didn't realize that, well, that you were so big boned! Anyway, the color's all wrong -- it was just too loud.

SCOTT But I love the color red. I love how it blazes!! Oh, I've got a pushing sensation right between my eyes as though it like to crack open my brains! Ooh!!

RUTLEDGE Now, listen, Carnation, if you don't calm down, you're headed for a clear-cut nervous breakdown! Just try to remember how Mama was enlightened by her affliction. Why, remember what she was always telling you, "Pretty is as pretty does."

(Carnelle collapses in despair.)

-- 89 --

JACKSON You want this hot dog? I ain't enjoying it.

SCOTT Thanks.

(Carnelle takes the hot dog and stuffs it into her mouth, as Tessy enters left. She is in an uproar.)

MAHONEY Will you stop him! Will you please try and stop him!! He's messing up Missy's whole opus. He's out there in the audience causing a horrible, horrible scene!!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) Who? What? Stop who?!

MAHONEY Delmount, that's who! He's smashing Ronnie Wayne's head into the dirt! And everyone's hollering!

SCOTT Oh, Lord, I've got to stop him --

(She starts to leave left.)

MAHONEY No! Don't go through the stage!

SCOTT Oh --

(She turns and runs out the right side of the dressing room.)

RUTLEDGE Wait! Carnelle! You're in your hoop!

SCOTT

(Who is now in the outside area.) Oh, no! I'm in my hoop!

MAG SAM Well, you don't have to tell me!

-- 90 --

SCOTT

(Covering herself.) Oh, please, run around there and stop Delmount! He's out there in a fight -- he's stirring up trouble!

MAG SAM Alright, Baby. I'm going.

(About his balloons.) Hey, see that no one steals my capital!

(He exits up right.)

SCOTT Thanks, Mac Sam! Thanks a lot!

(She goes back into the dressing room.) It's alright. It'll be fine. Mac Sam's gone to stop him.

MAHONEY That Delmount is just wild. He is just recklessly wild!

RUTLEDGE

(Sitting down on a stool, fanning herself.) Well, as we all know, he's had a very checkered past.

(Tessy looks to Elain who turns away with a grimace.)

MAHONEY I suppose, Missy's whole opus is just ruined. Well, be that as it may, the show must go on.

(Looking at her clipboard.) Let's see. . .let me get this straight. Joe Anne Jacobs follows Missy with her comedy pantomime to, "Take Me Out to the Ball Game," then there'll be Caroline Jeffers' dramatic interpretation from, *Gone With the Wind*. Then, of course, there's Sapphire's hula hoop act and finally, last but not least, is your tap dance routine to, "The Star Spangled Banner." Alright, do you have that order?

-- 91 --

SCOTT

(Who has removed her hoop and put on a robe.) Uh huh.

MAHONEY Since you go on last, it looks like you'll have to really rush to get into that bathing suit for the final crowning.

SCOTT It doesn't matter. It's all over. It's all ruined.

RUTLEDGE Don't worry, we'll help her out. It won't be a problem.

MAHONEY Why, thank you, Elain. You're probably the most admirable person I've ever met. Truly you are! Oh my!

(She exits left.)

RUTLEDGE It's sweltering in here. Let's get some air.

(She steps from the dressing room to the outside area.)

SCOTT

(Following her.) Alright.

JACKSON Good. Maybe we can catch a breeze.
(*She steps outside the dressing room.*)

SCOTT I hope so, Popeye. Oh Lord, I do.

WILLIAMS I showed them! I showed them all!! Those cold-blooded swine!!
(*Mac Sam and Delmount appear from upstage right. Mac Sam is supporting Delmount who is dragging his leg and has blood on his face.*)

-- 92 --

JACKSON Oh!!

SCOTT Delmount!

RUTLEDGE Delly, are you alright?!

SCOTT What's happened?

MAG SAM They started throwing rocks at him. They hit him there on the leg.

SCOTT Oh, Lord, are you hurt? You're not hurt are you?!

WILLIAMS They don't make um hard enough.

RUTLEDGE Well, you look dreadful. I'll run get that disinfectant from the car!
(*She exits downstage right.*)

JACKSON Well, I'll -- I'll get ya some ice. You can put it on your swolled up leg!
(*She exits down right.*)

SCOTT
(*Sinking to the ground.*) This is awful. Throwing rocks. They were throwing rocks. I'm about to cry.

WILLIAMS It's alright, child a mine. Nobody's hurt. We enjoyed it.

MAG SAM Yeah.
(*Cough, cough.*) Yeah.
(*Cough, cough, cough, cough, cough. He spits up blood.*)

-- 93 --

SCOTT Mac Sam, what's wrong? Are you choking?

MAG SAM Nah. I'm just spitting up clots of blood.

SCOTT What?

MAG SAM It's nothing. Happens all the time. Look at that clot there; it's a nice pinkish-reddish sorta color.

SCOTT You're making me sick, here. Sick.
(*Tessy enters left into the dressing room. She is holding a record.*)

MAHONEY Carnelle?! Oh Carnelle!

SCOTT It's Tessy.

WILLIAMS Christ, I'm too weak to move.

MAHONEY
(*Stepping outside, spotting Delmount.*) Why, will you look at you! I just hope you're proud of yourself. Causing all of that racket! Here, Carnelle, Tommy Turner wants you to show him which song on this record you want played for your routine.

SCOTT Alright.
(*She takes the record, goes through the dressing room, and exits left.*)

MAHONEY So how's life been treating you?

WILLIAMS Oh, fair.

-- 94 --

MAHONEY Well, I just thought you should know that I'm still bearing emotional scars because of the time you took unfair advantage of me up in the attic. They're deep scars, Delmount. They hurt.

WILLIAMS

(Quietly as he squirms.) Have a little mercy. I'm bleeding here. Look: blood.
(He mops off his head with a handkerchief.)

MAHONEY Well, you don't have to worry. I've already forgiven you. It's my religion: First Presbyterian. And to show you I mean it, tonight I'll let you take me to watch the fireworks.

WILLIAMS What --

MAHONEY

(She starts to leave.) I'll even trust you to sit by me all alone in the dark! See you back here at 7:45 P. M. on the nose!

WILLIAMS No, wait --

(He tries to get up but flinches in pain.)

MAHONEY

(As she exits through the dressing room and out left.) I've got to run now! There's a show on!

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping, he crawls after her.) Please -- don't forgive me! Don't forgive me! Don't! It was rotten behavior! I stink, I tell ya! I stink!
(Dropping to the ground.) Christ.

-- 95 --

MAG SAM

(After a moment.) Classically -- beautiful -- characteristics?

WILLIAMS She was an exception.

MAG SAM I'll say.

WILLIAMS It was a long time ago.

MAG SAM You don't have to make excuses to me. I've done nearly as bad myself. 'Course, now, Alligator Woman did have a way with her tongue.

(He helps Delmount to the bench as Popeye enters from downstage right. She carries a purple snow cone.)

WILLIAMS Alright! Alright! So I'm confused about women. I'm an idiot! A fool!

MAG SAM Relax, chump. I'm just enjoying the day.

JACKSON Here! Here, I got ya some ice. It oughta help take down that swelling.

WILLIAMS But that's purple ice!

JACKSON Well, they was out a' cherry.

MAG SAM Hmm. That's pretty good, Popeye! Pretty good! Here, pull up the pants.

(He jerks up Delmount's pants leg.)

WILLIAMS AAH!

-- 96 --

MAG SAM

(Taking the snow cone and dumps it down on Delmount's leg.) Now slap down that ice!

WILLIAMS Jesus Christ, Man!!

MAG SAM Feel better?

(Elain enters from downstage right. She carries a can of medicated spray.)

RUTLEDGE I'm back, Delly! I'm back! You can just relax now! You're gonna be fine! Let me just put on this medicated spray --

WILLIAMS Look, it's alright. I'm fine. I don't need anything *else*.

RUTLEDGE Oh, my God! Your leg's turned purple! I think I'm gonna faint!

WILLIAMS No, it's ice! Purple ice!

(Holding up the paper cone.) Ice!

RUTLEDGE Oh! Well, you had me going. For awhile there, you did have me going. Now let me just apply this spray --

WILLIAMS Look, I'm fine! I don't need anything else; so just leave me alone. Okay?

RUTLEDGE Well, alright. Alright. You can't do anything with him when he gets like this.

(Her eyes meet Mac Sam's.) Hello.

-- 97 --

MAG SAM

(Saying everything with his magnetic eyes.) Hello.

RUTLEDGE

(Nervously.) So, Popeye, we hear you, ah, lost your job.

JACKSON Well, I was fired from it.

RUTLEDGE It's such a shame.

WILLIAMS Yeah. It is.

RUTLEDGE

(Primarily for Mac Sam's benefit.) So, what transpired? I mean, what all happened? Do tell!

JACKSON Oh, well, I reckon what it was was when I was sewing up there in the front a' the big store. This little child walked in and she started looking in at all that shiny jewelry behind the glass counter. I saw her looking and I said, "My, what lovely eyes you have. Them's pretty eyes. What color are them eyes?" And she looks up at me and says, "I don't know. I don't have no idea."

RUTLEDGE Imagine, not knowing the color of your own eyes. Amazing. Continue, please.

JACKSON Well, I gets out this compact case from behind the glass counter. It's covered with the most beautiful colored sea shells in all the world. And I give it to her and says, "Look in there and tell me what color your eyes is." She takes a long look and says, "Them's blue eyes." And that was the truth, she was right about it. So I give her the sea-shelled compact case to take on with her, just by chance she forgets what color her eyes is and needs to take a look. Well, Miss Celia Lilly comes looking for that compact case later on in the day. I told her what happened and that's when she give me the news, "Popeye, you're fired."

-- 98 --

MAG SAM Hey. I like this Popeye character. She's hep.

WILLIAMS Hep? She isn't hep.

RUTLEDGE Well, it's a shame, Popeye. They should have given you a second chance.

JACKSON Oh, I don't mind it. I like traveling.

(About Mac Sam who is casually blowing out smoke rings.)

JACKSON Hey, look! He's blowing smoke rings out from his mouth! Watch him! Wooh! What a trick!

MAG SAM

(Taking the cigarette out of his mouth.) Oh, that -- that's nothing. Here, take a look at this!

(As he sticks the lit part of his cigarette into his mouth.) Enter the infernal jaws of hell!

(With the backwards cigarette in his mouth, he blows out smoke.)

JACKSON Oh, look! Smoke! He's blowing out smoke! He's gonna burn up his throat!!!

MAG SAM

(Taking out the cigarette. To Popeye.) Ta-da! How'd ya like that, Beautiful?

(Delmount's eyes go crazy.)

JACKSON It was wonderful! It was!! Do you know any more?

-- 99 --

WILLIAMS Here! I know one! I can do one. Just watch! Now I'm going to wiggle my ears!

RUTLEDGE Oh, that's right! Delmount can do the most stupendous trick where he wiggles his ears!

JACKSON Oh, let's see it!

(They all watch as Delmount makes a facial grimace, while trying to wiggle his ears.)

MAG SAM

(After a moment.) I don't see 'em wiggling.

RUTLEDGE No, they're not wiggling.

JACKSON Nah, they ain't.

WILLIAMS Well, I -- guess I'm out of practice.

(Mac Sam laughs cheerfully.)

JACKSON

(Disappointed.) Ooh.

WILLIAMS But here, I can do this trick where my thumb comes off. Like this!

(He does the trick where his thumb comes off.)

JACKSON Oh, I know that one too!

(She takes off her thumb.)

RUTLEDGE That's an old one.

(She takes off her thumb.)

-- 100 --

MAG SAM Yeah.

(He takes off his.)

WILLIAMS Well, perhaps I should just go! . . . I don't know. I don't know.

(He wanders away from the group. Carnelle enters left into the dressing room.)

SCOTT

(Mumbling to herself, as she sinks down at the dressing table.) "I'll never be hungry again. I'll never be hungry again. As God is my witness . . . As God is my witness. . ."

JACKSON

(Spotting Carnelle through the doorway.) Carnelle! Is it time for your act to go on?

(Running inside the dressing room.) Do you need some help?

SCOTT Oh, Popeye, I was just watching Caroline Jeffers do that heart-breaking speech from *Gone With the Wind* -- I tell you, that's what I should have done: a dramatic interpretation piece. See, because I could break down and cry real tears right now if I wanted to. It's acting like I was laughing or happy or something -- that's what'd be hard.

JACKSON I like your act. It's beautiful. Them roman candles shooting off. Here, put on your suit.

(She hands Carnelle the red, blue, and silver costume.)

-- 101 --

RUTLEDGE

(To Mac Sam.) So, Mr. Mac Sam, what sort of day have you been having?

MAG SAM Oh, not bad. Just been sitting here rotting away in the July sun.

WILLIAMS

(Walking up to them.) Excuse me. I believe I need to apply some medical spray to my wounds.

(He takes the spray and moves away.)

JACKSON

(About Carnelle's costume.) Oh, that looks so good. Them silver stars really shine.

SCOTT I don't know, Popeye. I'm afraid it's a lost cause.

JACKSON But I love it when you twirl them sparklers all around. I practically lose my breath. Here're your tap shoes.

RUTLEDGE Nice assortment of balloons you've got -- and in a variety of colors.

MAG SAM And which, may I ask, is your favorite color?

RUTLEDGE Pink. I adore pink.

MAG SAM Ah, pink. I once knew a woman whose skin was awfully pink and pretty looking.

WILLIAMS

(Sticking his head into the dressing room.) Hey, what does that guy do? He looks like a corpse. How does he look like that?

-- 102 --

SCOTT He's sick.

WILLIAMS I'll buy that.

(He leaves.)

JACKSON Gosh. I've been trying so hard t'forget him.

SCOTT You mean Delmount?

JACKSON Uh huh.

SCOTT How's it going?

JACKSON Well, today I found out he'd forgotten how t'wiggle his ears. But it don't matter.

MAHONEY Carnelle!

(Tessy enters the dressing room left.) They're voting on Sapphire's hula hoop act right now! You better get out there. You're on next!
(She blows her whistle and exits left.)

SCOTT Oh, my God, I'm on next. I'm next.

JACKSON

(Running outside.) Hey, everyone! Carnelle's on next! She's gonna be doing her dancing routine to "The Star Spangled Banner!"

MAG SAM

(Getting up and making his exit upstage right.) I'm on my way!

SCOTT I don't know if I can go back out there.

-- 103 --

JACKSON Here's your sparklers and your roman candle.

SCOTT Do I look okay?

JACKSON Just right.

SCOTT Let's go.

(They exit left.)

RUTLEDGE Well, aren't you going?

WILLIAMS I don't think I can watch it. I mean, she thinks she's tap-dancing and she's just clomping her feet around. It makes me very anxious.

RUTLEDGE Poor Carnation. She wants to be beautiful without understanding the limitations it brings.

WILLIAMS Well, it'll all be over soon. Carnelle will go up to Memphis; I'll start my life in New Orleans and you'll go -- wherever the winds take you.

(He looks over at Elain who seems somber.) Hey, don't worry, Swayne. You're free. You're finally gonna find out just why you're alive.
(Tessy enters left. She carries a box of long-stemmed roses and brings them out to Elain.)

MAHONEY Elain! Oh, Elain! Look, here's a box of flowers that were sent to you. Isn't it exciting! Oh, here's the card; it dropped off.
(She hands the card to Delmount because Elain is holding the box.) Well, I've got to rush back! Got a show on! Don't forget the fireworks!
(She exits through the dressing room and off left.)

-- 104 --

WILLIAMS I thought he stopped sending the roses.

RUTLEDGE He did.

WILLIAMS Mind if I take a look at this card?

RUTLEDGE Go ahead.

WILLIAMS "My Dear Elain, I've been very, very happy since your phone call this morning. How I do need to hear how much you love me. I'll be by for you tomorrow morning at eleven A. M. You're adoring husband, Franklin."
(After a moment.) What kind of idiot am I? What kind of dupe? You would think that after you left me in that lunatic asylum I would know not to trust you.

RUTLEDGE Be fair! You always had everything! Mama left the whole of the house to you and all of the furniture and all of the silver and even the handmade quilts! She left nothing to me! Nothing at all!

WILLIAMS You can have it. You can have all of the money that's made! Just leave him.

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) I don't want it. Stop planning my life! I'm used to better things now. . .my face cream. . .my clocks. And he adores me. I need someone who adores me.
(Mac Sam enters upstage right, in excitement.)

-- 105 --

MAG SAM

(Throwing a handful of confetti.) Stupendous! Ravishing! A little bit of sheer heaven!

RUTLEDGE What --

(Carnelle and Popeye enter the dressing room left. They are elated. Carnelle twirls a burning sparkler.)

SCOTT I don't believe it! I don't believe it! They were all clapping! It was a hit!

JACKSON

(Overlapping, as she shoots off imaginary Roman candles.) Pow! Pow! Pow!

MAG SAM She was out there just dancing and marching and the music was swelling --

JACKSON

(Overlapping.) She was so beautiful!

SCOTT

(Overlapping as she tap dances and twirls her baton.) Yes sir! Yes sir!

MAG SAM

(Running on.) And everyone started cheering when the Roman candles went off --

JACKSON Pow! Pow! Zoweey!

SCOTT They were cheering for me!

MAG SAM Brilliant performance! And can she dance!

(Delmount looks dumbfounded.)

-- 106 --

RUTLEDGE

(Running to join Carnelle and Popeye in the dressing room.) Did it really go well? Did it really?

JACKSON Oh brother! I about died!

SCOTT Quick! Let's go, girls! I gotta change into my bathing suit! I don't have much time.

MAG SAM

(Sitting down.) Boy,
(Cough, cough.) so beautiful,
(Cough, cough, cough.) so fine!

WILLIAMS

(Accusingly.) Tell me, just exactly what do you mean when you're telling Carnelle how beautiful she is?

MAG SAM I mean she's. . .beautiful.

WILLIAMS You're a liar.

MAG SAM Yeah, well, I do work the carnivals.

(He spits up a clot of blood.)

SCOTT

(Pulling up her bathing suit.) Lord, is this tight! Come on. There! There, I got it. I hope this French bra'll help. How do my thighs look?

MAHONEY

(Sticking her head into the room left.) Quick! Get out there! They're starting the lineup!
(She exits left blowing her whistle.)

-- 107 --

SCOTT Oh, my God. It's time for the final crowning. It's time! Hey, let me wave good-bye to the boys.

(Carnelle waves good-bye.) Good-bye, boys! I'm going. I'm going out to the final crowning!

MAG SAM Hey -- good luck! We'll be right there cheering!

WILLIAMS You look good, Child!

RUTLEDGE Do your best.

SCOTT

(Hugging them.) Oh, Elaine! Oh, Popeye!

MAHONEY

(Sticking her head in.) Come on! They're moving out on the stage!

SCOTT Farewell, Everyone! Farewell!

(Carnelle exits left.)

JACKSON Quick! We've got t'run around and see her!

(She starts out.)

MAG SAM I'm moving out!

(Elain pauses a moment to exchange a look with Delmount. She then turns and exits. Delmount looks after them. He paces around for several moments. He glances into the empty dressing room.)

WILLIAMS I'll never understand it. Never. It lacks sense. It makes me ill. I mean, for Christ's sake, who would want to ride in a parade? It's so pitiful. Man parading his ridiculous pomposity down his pathetic little streets, cheering at his own inane self-grandeur.

(He looks at himself in the dressing room mirror.) Oh, God, I hope she comes in first! I hope she does. I do. I do. I swear I hope she beats them all!

(Mac Sam enters upstage right.)

-- 108 --

MAG SAM Wooh. Amazing. Unbelievable.

(Delmount looks at him.)

MAG SAM She lost. I don't know what for.

WILLIAMS Holy cow. Holy cow.

(Elain and Popeye enter upstage right.)

RUTLEDGE Oh! I just don't understand it. She tries so hard. I guess, they really just took those "Miss Hot Tamales" to heart.

(To Delmount.) Did you hear the results?

WILLIAMS I heard.

RUTLEDGE 'Course everyone knew Caroline Jeffers would come in first. And I suppose, in a way, it's understandable that Joe Anne came in second.

WILLIAMS The shrimp?

RUTLEDGE But, I mean, when Missy Mahoney came in third!

WILLIAMS Third!

RUTLEDGE Well, I nearly died! But to me the crowning blow was having Sapphire Mendoza come in ahead of our Carnation! That was the crowning blow!

WILLIAMS Holy cow. What are we gonna say to her? What are we gonna say?

(Carnelle enters the dressing room left. They all stare at her. She wears a fifth place banner. She looks at herself in the mirror, then she bravely turns to face her family and friends, hoping for acceptance.)

-- 109 --

WILLIAMS Well, it was a stupid meaningless contest.

MAG SAM Completely laughable.

RUTLEDGE Mama always said that what's really important in life is --

SCOTT I -- don't -- want -- to -- hear -- it!! I wanted to win that contest. I cared about it. It was important to me.

(To Delmount.) And I don't care how stupid and meaningless you think it was!!

(To Elaine.) And what are you looking at?! You never wanted me to win! You think I'm ugly, that's why you told me to wear that stupid mask over my face! I can't believe I ever wanted to be like you or that mean old monkey either!

(Mac Sam starts to cough. Carnelle turns to him.)

SCOTT And why don't you get well!?! You make me *sick* you're so *sick*!! You look like shit!!! I tell you, I'm so mad I could spit!

(Spit.) There!

(Spit, spit.) There, I spit!

(Spit.) Die you monkey! Die!

MAHONEY Carnelle!!

(She enters the dressing room left carrying a large American flag on a pole.) Carnelle, come on! You and Sapphire are gonna follow along behind the Grand Float carrying these American flags. You better get out there; everyone's waiting.

(She holds out the large American flag.)

-- 110 --

SCOTT

(Grabbing the flag.) Thanks!

WILLIAMS Wait. You don't have to do that. You don't have to follow that float.

SCOTT Look, if you come in last, you follow that float. I took a chance and I came in last; so, by God, I'm gonna follow that float!!

(She exits right carrying the American flag.)

MAG SAM Hey! You're beautiful when you're mad. Beautiful, Baby!

WILLIAMS She's gonna fall flat on her face carrying that big ole flag.

RUTLEDGE

(Straight front.) I'm not like Mama. I'm not.

MAHONEY

(Checking her stopwatch.) Only four hours and forty-nine minutes till tonight's colorful display of fireworks.

(She hurries back into the dressing room and exits left. Delmount looks after her, then looks forlornly to Mac Sam. Mac Sam offers his flask -- Delmount takes a long slug. Meanwhile, Popeye slowly turns her head upward to look toward the coming fireworks.)

(Quick fade to blackout.)

-- 111 --

Act 2, Scene 3

SCENE III

The setting is the same. It is now early evening and darkness is beginning to fall. The stage is empty for a moment then Elaine enters the dressing room left. She carries her purse and a half-empty bottle of red wine. She is weary and a bit drunk.

RUTLEDGE Carnelle? Good; not here.

(She looks around the empty dressing room then goes and sits down at the dressing table. She gazes at her face in the mirror. She straightens her hair.) You're not yourself today. Not yourself.

WILLIAMS Carnelle! Carnelle, you here? Honey?

(He enters left and spots Elaine.) Oh. Has Carnelle come back yet?

RUTLEDGE I don't know. I haven't seen her since she ran off and hid after the parade.

WILLIAMS Think she'll be alright?

RUTLEDGE I doubt it.

WILLIAMS Lord, you waiting here for her?

RUTLEDGE No. I just came by to get my dress.

(She rises and starts gathering up the red dress.) I don't think she's that interested in seeing me. Looks like she doesn't admire me so much anymore.

-- 112 --

WILLIAMS I don't understand you. I know you're probably a kind person. You gave Popeye your earrings; you have a need to be excited by life. So why do you go back to being what Mama wanted? You know she was mean!

RUTLEDGE

(Turning to him angrily.) Yes, I know she was mean and you know it too. So why do you straighten your wild hair? Why do you have horrible, sickening dreams about pieces of women's bodies? Some all beautiful; some all mutilated and bloody! I hate those dreams. I wish you didn't tell me about them. They scare me.

WILLIAMS I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

RUTLEDGE It's okay.

WILLIAMS I -- I don't have those dreams anymore. I've stopped having them.

RUTLEDGE You have?

WILLIAMS Yes.

RUTLEDGE Well, good. That's good. Do you want some wine?

WILLIAMS Sure. Give me some wine.

(She hands him the bottle -- he takes a drink. He hands the bottle back to her -- she takes a long drink.)

RUTLEDGE You know about those earrings I gave Popeye. . .

-- 113 --

WILLIAMS Yeah?

RUTLEDGE I hated the damn things. They pinched my ears. I was glad to get rid of them.

WILLIAMS

(After a moment.) Swayne.

RUTLEDGE What?

WILLIAMS You're incredible.

RUTLEDGE Well, you've always forgiven me.

WILLIAMS Yeah. I always have.

RUTLEDGE So I better be going.

WILLIAMS Where're you going?

RUTLEDGE

(Referring to the red dress.) To take this out to the car. Then on out to have some real fun before I drop dead off this planet. I've got myself a date for the fireworks. I'm meeting him in the grove down under the wisteria trees.

WILLIAMS Well, Honey, I hope you have yourself a real good ole time.

RUTLEDGE Don't you worry. I'm gonna be a reckless girl at least once in my dreary, dreary life. 'Bye-'bye now.

(She leaves the dressing room. He follows her to the doorway.)

-- 114 --

WILLIAMS 'Bye.

RUTLEDGE

(As she exits down right, carrying the red dress.) Be seeing you!

WILLIAMS 'Bye.

(He stands looking after her.)

(Popeye enters left from the dressing room. She wears binoculars around her neck and is eating peanuts from a sack.)

WILLIAMS

(Turning to see her.) Popeye --

JACKSON Hi.

WILLIAMS Hello.

JACKSON Is Carnelle come back?

WILLIAMS No. I'm waiting here for her.

JACKSON Oh.

WILLIAMS I'd like to see her.

JACKSON Yeah.

WILLIAMS 'Course, I'm not even sure if she's coming back here or what.

JACKSON Oh.

(Uneasy, she starts to leave.)

WILLIAMS Would you like to wait here too?

JACKSON

(Stopping.) Sure. Alright. Peanut?

-- 115 --

WILLIAMS Thanks.

(A pause.) So you'll be leaving Brookhaven?

JACKSON I reckon.

WILLIAMS It's funny 'cause I'm leaving here too.

JACKSON You is? Where was you planning to go?

WILLIAMS I thought I'd be going to New Orleans -- get back to the University and learn to be a philosopher. That way, after I have time to study and think it all through, I'll be able to let everyone know why we're living. It'll be a great relief. . . I believe. And where are you going to go?

JACKSON Well, I don't know the particulars. But I heard a' this place name of Elysian fields.

WILLIAMS Elysian fields?

JACKSON Right. See, they got this ambrosia t'eat and wine and honey t'drink and all sorts of people carrying on. Do you know what state it's located in?

WILLIAMS It -- isn't in a state.

JACKSON It ain't?

WILLIAMS No. It isn't even in the world. It's -- it's fictional. It's a made-up place. Why, it's only in books and stories.
-- 116 --

JACKSON Oh. Well, shoot. Guess I won't be going there.
(*Tessy enters left into the dressing room. She is wearing a big straw hat.*)

MAHONEY Oh, Delmount!! Are you here? Delmount?!
(*She steps from the dressing room to the outside area.*) Oh, there you are!
(*Looking at her watch.*) Right on the nose! You punctual thing! Do you like this hat?

WILLIAMS It becomes you.

MAHONEY Isn't he sweet. Well, do come on. Well. Tell your friend good-bye and let's head to the fireworks.

WILLIAMS Ah, Tessy. . .

MAHONEY Yes?

WILLIAMS Well, I -- I can't go with you to the fireworks.

MAHONEY Oh, you can't?

WILLIAMS No, I -- I promised Popeye I'd go with her. I'm sorry. I tried to tell you this afternoon.

MAHONEY I see. I see. I try to turn the other cheek and you slap it too. You're ungrateful and unworthy and low and dirty and mean! Why, I'm never gonna forgive you again! Never! I hope you rot in H!
(*She exits down right.*)

-- 117 --

WILLIAMS Brother.

JACKSON Why did you lie t'her?

WILLIAMS Huh?

JACKSON You told her you was promised t'go t'the fireworks with me.

WILLIAMS Oh. Well, I just didn't want to go out to the fireworks with her and. . . And you can't go around obliging other people in this world.

JACKSON Oh.

WILLIAMS Of course I do want to go watch the fireworks. They always have a nice, colorful display. You weren't planning to -- I don't know, go to the fireworks yourself?

JACKSON Sure. It's why I brung my binoculars. Had me a place picked out and everything.

WILLIAMS Oh. Hmm. Well, I guess you. . .

JACKSON Huh?

WILLIAMS No, nothing. I'll be seeing you. 'Bye.
(*He exits down right. Popeye sits on the bench and stares ahead. She reaches into her peanut bag. There are none left.*)

JACKSON
(*Miserably.*) Guess that's the last of 'em.
(*Delmount reappears abruptly from downstage right.*)

-- 118 --

WILLIAMS Popeye, would you mind going to watch the fireworks with me tonight?

JACKSON No. I wouldn't. Sure. Alright.

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Good. Good then. Good. Let's go!

(They exit downstage right. The stage is empty for a moment before Carnelle sneaks on from under the tent. She is wearing a short trench coat over her red bathing suit. She looks around, sees no one, and heads into the dressing room. Mac Sam suddenly appears out of the darkness.)

MAG SAM Hey! Red! Where ya going?

SCOTT Mac Sam! Dammit! I didn't want anyone to see me.

MAG SAM Well, I saw ya. How ya been?

SCOTT Oh, alright.

MAG SAM Hey, you sure blew up this afternoon.

SCOTT I know it.

MAG SAM Well, you really did explode.

SCOTT I know. I'd never been so mad as I was. And I spit out at everyone. I just spit at them. Oh! That's so awful it's almost funny!

MAG SAM Hell, it was the best part of it!

-- 119 --

SCOTT Oh, I don't know. I better get my stuff out of here.

MAG SAM You know, I went looking for you after the parade. Where'd you get off to?

SCOTT Oh, nowhere. Just out walking by the railroad tracks.

MAG SAM What were you doing down there?

SCOTT

(As she gathers up her belongings.) Kicking rocks. Thinking. I thought maybe I was a victim of broken dreams but then I thought maybe I wasn't. I was trying so hard t'belong all my life and. . . I don't know. Oh, looks like Elaine came for her red dress. Anyway, I just don't know what you can, well, reasonably hope for in life.

MAG SAM Not much, Baby, not too damn much.

SCOTT But something --

MAG SAM Sure. There's always eternal grace.

SCOTT It'd be nice.

(Holding up the shoe box.) Look, here, my frog's gone.

MAG SAM Yeah. That Popeye set it loose.

SCOTT Oh, well, I still have the suit.

(She holds up the pink suit. They look at each other and smile.)

-- 120 --

MAG SAM God, you're beautiful. I wouldn't trade those times we had together not for anything.

SCOTT

(Throwing her arms around him.) Really?

MAG SAM Not for a golden monkey.

SCOTT But how about -- I mean I gave you --

MAG SAM Oh, the syph. Hell, I've got TB, alcoholics disease, rotting gut. I tell ya, I'm having fun taking bets on which part of me'll decay first: the liver, the lungs, the stomach, or the brain.

SCOTT

(Suddenly uneasy.) It's getting late. I gotta go.
(Carnelle leaves the dressing room carrying all of her belongings. He follows.)

MAG SAM Hey, listen, you want to go to the fireworks with ole Mac Sam? We could spend a fine night together.

SCOTT No. I -- I just need some rest. You'd be tiring me out awful fast.

MAG SAM Yeah.

SCOTT I gotta get this out to the car. Good-bye, Mac Sam. Good night.
(He doffs his cap to her. She exits downstage right.)

-- 121 --

MAG SAM Good-bye, Baby. I'll always remember you as the one who could take it on the chin.
(He looks after her a moment, spits up a clot of blood, wipes off his mouth, and starts to exit upstage right.) Ah, well, on to the wisteria trees.
(He is gone. Suddenly Popeye and Delmount appear climbing out onto the roof of the tent from off right. Popeye is leading, she carries a box of popcorn. Delmount follows nervously.)

JACKSON This way. That's right. Hold on, now.

WILLIAMS Holy Christ.

JACKSON There. Aren't these seats great?

WILLIAMS Oh, yeah, wonderful.

JACKSON And we can keep an eye out for Carnelle -- case she comes back by.

WILLIAMS Yeah. Great.

JACKSON Here. Take a look through the binoculars. See how the sky looks.
(Delmount looks through the binoculars.)

JACKSON Well, how's it look?

WILLIAMS

(Becoming interested.) Hmm. Not bad.

-- 122 --

JACKSON

(As she throws handfuls of popcorn in front of the binoculars.) Watch out! It's snowing! Look! It's snowing! See it! See it snowing!

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Oh, great! Snow flakes! Yeah! I see it!
(Impulsively, as he takes the binoculars from in front of his eyes.) Oh, Popeye, I just have to tell you about these beautiful dreams -- I just have to -- No, it's absurd!
(He turns away in anguish and spots Carnelle who has entered downstage right.)

WILLIAMS Why, Carnelle!

JACKSON Oh, Carnelle! Hi!

SCOTT

(Taken aback.) Why, look at you two! What in the world are you doing way up there?!

JACKSON We're gonna watch the fireworks! Come on up!

WILLIAMS Yeah, come on! Please, we've been missing you. It's great up here!

SCOTT No, I really don't care about the fireworks. I think I'm gonna just go on home.

JACKSON Oh, please, they's so beautiful to see!

-- 123 --

WILLIAMS Come on, Child! Just for awhile. You can come up for awhile.

SCOTT No, really, I just left something in the dressing room; I'm gonna get it and go on home.
(*She enters the dressing room.*)

WILLIAMS Lord, I hope she's alright. She didn't even mention the contest. God, I wish she'd come watch the fireworks with us.

JACKSON Me too.
(*Carnelle pulls the artificial dog out from under the dressing table. She pats it.*)

WILLIAMS Here, you want to look through the binoculars for awhile?

JACKSON Okay.
(*Popeye takes the binoculars and looks through them. Carnelle sits at the dressing table and looks at herself in the mirror.*)

JACKSON Ooh, I love the heavens. I'd love to live up there. Do you think it's cold or warm up there?

WILLIAMS Hmmm. I don't know. Cold maybe? Warm? I don't know.

SCOTT
(*Looking at herself in the mirror.*) It used to be brown. I had brown hair. Brown.

JACKSON The man at the observatory he's talking about things such as black holes in space, globular clusters, blue giant stars and other galaxies, he says, "If you can think of it; you've got it." My mind's about to burst just trying.

-- 124 --

SCOTT
(*Looking around the room.*) Grace. Eternal grace. Grace. Hey, hey. I wanna watch the fireworks.
(*She picks up the dog and runs out of the dressing room ablaze with excitement.*) Hey! Hey, how do I get up there? I wanna come up!

WILLIAMS
(*Overlapping.*) Oh child, you're coming up?!

SCOTT Yes! Yes! I wanna come up! I've changed my mind! I'm coming up. How do I get up?!

JACKSON
(*Overlapping.*) Hurray! Hurray! It's easy! You just run around there and jump off of them piled up boxes and climb up the pole!

SCOTT Great! I'm on my way! I'm coming up!
(*She exits upstage right.*)

JACKSON WOW! She's coming up! I'm so happy! I'm happy!

WILLIAMS Oh, Popeye!
(*He grabs her and kisses her full on the mouth.*) I've been dreaming about you at night. I see you riding across the sea with a host of green whales. Popeye, I love you.

JACKSON
(*Past ecstasy.*) I feel like m'teeth is gonna fall out a' my head.
(*Carnelle appears on the roof; she is carrying the dog.*)

-- 125 --

SCOTT Hey! I'm up here! I made it! I'm up.

WILLIAMS That's right! Now just slide on out here. That's it. Good. You made it.

SCOTT Oh, will you look at all those stars in the sky.

JACKSON Yeah.

WILLIAMS Oh, yeah.

SCOTT Listen, I -- I don't know what I was thinking about this afternoon -- when I was screaming and all.

WILLIAMS Please, it's alright. You don't have to say anything. Everything's alright.

SCOTT It's just I was upset about not being able to leave in the blaze of glory. Of course, I know it doesn't matter. I mean, the main thing is -- well, the main thing is. . .Gosh; I don't know what the main thing is. I don't have the vaguest idea.
(Carnelle is laughing when the first firecracker explodes in the sky.)

WILLIAMS Wait! It's started!

JACKSON

(As gold light floods their faces.) A gold one! Look, it's a gold one!

SCOTT

(Now red light.) Why, it's bursting into red! Red! Crimson red!

-- 126 --

JACKSON Pow!! Pow! pow.

(And then silently mouthing it.) Pow. . .

(The explosion is over. They sit in silence for a moment.)

SCOTT Gosh, it's a nice night.

WILLIAMS As nice as they come.

(Hold a moment. Blackout.)

END OF PLAY

(END OF PLAY)