

KELLER [*sharply watching her reaction*]: Well? So what?

MOTHER [*alarmed*]: What's going on here, Joe?

KELLER: Now listen, kid . . .

MOTHER [*avoiding contact with him*]: She's not his girl, Joe; she knows she's not.

KELLER: You can't read her mind.

MOTHER: Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why isn't she married? [*Pause*] Probably a hundred people told her she's foolish, but she's waited.

KELLER: How do you know why she waited?

MOTHER: She knows what I know, that's why. She's faithful as a rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting, and I know again that I'm right.

KELLER: Look, it's a nice day. What are we arguing for?

MOTHER [*warningly*]: Nobody in this house dast take her faith away, Joe. Strangers might. But not his father, not his brother.

KELLER [*exasperated*]: What do you want me to do? What do you want?

MOTHER: I want you to act like he's coming back. Both of you. Don't think I haven't noticed you since Chris invited her. I won't stand for any nonsense.

KELLER: But, Kate . . .

MOTHER: Because if he's not coming back, then I'll kill myself! Laugh. Laugh at me. [*She points to tree*] But why did that happen the very night she came back? Laugh, but there are meanings in such things. She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it; look. [*She sits on bench at his L.*] Joe . . .

KELLER: Calm yourself.

MOTHER: Believe with me, Joe. I can't stand all alone.

KELLER: Calm yourself.

MOTHER: Only last week a man turned up in Detroit, missing longer than Larry. You read it yourself.

KELLER: All right, all right, calm yourself.

MOTHER: You above all have got to believe, you . . .

KELLER [*rises*]: Why me above all?

MOTHER: . . . Just don't stop believing . . .

KELLER: What does that mean, me above all? [*BERT comes rushing on from L.*]

BERT: Mr. Keller! Say, Mr. Keller . . . [*Pointing up driveway*] Tommy just said it again!

KELLER [*not remembering any of it*]: Said what? . . . Who? . . .

BERT: The dirty word.

KELLER: Oh. Well . . .

BERT: Gee, aren't you going to arrest him? I warned him.

MOTHER [*with suddenness*]: Stop that, Bert. Go home. [*BERT backs up, as she advances.*] There's no jail here.

KELLER [*As though to say, "Oh-what-the-hell-let-him-believe-there-is"*]: Kate . . .

MOTHER [*turning on KELLER, furiously*]: There's no jail here! I want you to stop that jail business! [*He turns, shamed, but peeved.*]

BERT [*past her to KELLER*]: He's right across the street . . .

MOTHER: Go home, Bert. [*BERT turns around and goes up driveway. She is shaken. Her speech is bitten off, extremely urgent.*] I want you to stop that, Joe. That whole jail business!

KELLER [*alarmed, therefore angered*]: Look at you, look at you shaking.

MOTHER [*trying to control herself, moving about clasping her hands*]: I can't help it.

KELLER: What have I got to hide? What the hell is the matter with you, Kate?

MOTHER: I didn't say you had anything to hide, I'm just telling you to stop it! Now stop it! [*As ANN and CHRIS appear on porch. ANN is twenty-six, gentle but despite herself capable of holding fast to what she knows. CHRIS opens door for her.*]

ANN: Hya, Joe! [*She leads off a general laugh that is not self-conscious because they know one another too well.*]

CHRIS [*bringing ANN down, with an outstretched, chivalric arm*]:

Take a breath of that air, kid. You never get air like that in New York.

MOTHER [*genuinely overcome with it*]: Annie, where did you get that dress!

ANN: I couldn't resist. I'm taking it right off before I ruin it. [*Swings around*] How's that for three weeks' salary?

MOTHER [*to KELLER*]: Isn't she the most . . . ? [*To ANN*] It's gorgeous, simply gor . . .

CHRIS [*to MOTHER*]: No kidding, now, isn't she the prettiest gal you ever saw?

MOTHER [*caught short by his obvious admiration, she finds herself reaching out for a glass of water and aspirin in his hand, and . . .*]: You gained a little weight, didn't you, darling? [*She gulps pill and drinks.*]

ANN: It comes and goes.

KELLER: Look how nice her legs turned out!

ANN [*She runs to fence, L.*]: Boy, the poplars got thick, didn't they?

KELLER [*moves U. to settee and sits*]: Well, it's three years, Annie. We're gettin' old, kid.

MOTHER: How does Mom like New York? [*ANN keeps looking through trees.*]

ANN [*a little hurt*]: Why'd they take our hammock away?

KELLER: Oh, no, it broke. Couple of years ago.

MOTHER: What broke? He had one of his light lunches and flopped into it.

ANN [*she laughs and turns back toward JIM'S yard. . .*]: Oh, excuse me! [*JIM has come to fence and is looking over it. He is smoking a cigar. As she cries out, he comes on around on stage.*]

JIM: How do you do. [*To CHRIS*] She looks very intelligent!

CHRIS: Ann, this is Jim . . . Doctor Bayliss.

ANN [*shaking JIM'S hand*]: Oh sure, he writes a lot about you.

JIM: Don't believe it. He likes everybody. In the Battalion he was known as Mother McKeller.

ANN: I can believe it . . . You know——? [*To MOTHER*] It's so strange seeing him come out of that yard. [*To CHRIS*] I guess I never grew up. It almost seems that Mom and Pop are in there now. And you and my brother doing Algebra, and Larry trying to copy my home-work. Gosh, those dear dead days beyond recall.

JIM: Well, I hope that doesn't mean you want me to move out?

SUE [*calling from off L.*]: Jim, come in here! Mr. Hubbard is on the phone!

JIM: I told you I don't want . . .

SUE [*commandingly sweet*]: Please, dear! Please!!

JIM [*resigned*]: All right, Susie, [*Trailing off*] all right, all right. . . [*To ANN*] I've only met you, Ann, but if I may offer you a piece of advice—When you marry, never—even in your mind—never count your husband's money.

SUE [*from off*]: Jim?!

JIM: At once! [*Turns and goes L.*] At once. [*He exits L.*]

MOTHER [*ANN is looking at her. She speaks meaningfully*]: I told her to take up the guitar. It'd be a common interest for them. [*They laugh.*] Well, he loves the guitar!

ANN [*as though to overcome MOTHER, she becomes suddenly lively, crosses to KELLER on settee, sits on his lap*]: Let's eat at the shore tonight! Raise some hell around here, like we used to before Larry went!

MOTHER [*emotionally*]: You think of him! You see? [*Triumphantly*] She thinks of him!

ANN [*with an uncomprehending smile*]: What do you mean, Kate?

MOTHER: Nothing. Just that you . . . remember him, he's in your thoughts.

ANN: That's a funny thing to say; how could I help remembering him?

MOTHER [*it is drawing to a head the wrong way for her; she starts anew. She rises and comes to ANN*]: Did you hang up your things?

ANN: Yeah . . . [*To CHRIS*] Say, you've sure gone in for clothes. I could hardly find room in the closet.