

LOUIE (*Rises*) Who wants to *start*? . . . Start *what*? . . . Momma, I haven't got time for this. Maybe when I was twelve years old, but not tonight. It's one of her games. Her crazy games, for crise sakes.

GERT Is this a game, Bella? Are you just playing—(*Sucks in*)—a game with us, darling?

BELLA It's not a game. It's very important . . . But I don't know how to start to say it. So somebody else has to help me and start first.

LOUIE (*To BELLA*) You have something important to tell us and you want *us* to start? (*He starts toward the front door*) Listen, Gert. You understand her better than I do. When you figure out what it is, let me know.

JAY (*To BELLA*) Aunt Bella, have you . . . (*LOUIE and everyone else stop and look at JAY*) . . . Have you been going to the movies lately, Aunt Bella?

BELLA (*She smiles*) Thank you, Jay . . . Yes. I have been going to the movies a lot lately . . . (*LOUIE looks at her in disbelief*) . . . Three times last week.

JAY Really? . . . Did you see anything good?

BELLA Oh, yes. I saw a picture with William Holden and Jean Arthur . . . I really liked it . . . That's why I saw it three times.

LOUIE This is what I stayed to dinner for? This is what I had to sit in the right seat to listen to? Jean Arthur and William Holden? Are they in the picture you pictured here?

GERT Is that what this is about, Bella? Is this all about what movies—(*Sucks in*)—you went to last week?

BELLA No, but I'm getting to it. Ask me more questions, Jay. You're good at this.

JAY Uh, let's see . . . Did you—go alone?

BELLA Oh, yes. I always go alone. But it's interesting you asked me that . . . Because I met a friend there . . . You can ask me questions too, Gert.

GERT I don't know what kind of questions—(*Sucks in*)—to ask you.

ARTY Ask her who the friend was.

GERT Who was the friend?

BELLA Well, his name is Johnny, I always see him there because he's the head usher. He's very nice.

JAY So you just saw him in the theater?

BELLA Well, once or twice we went out for coffee and once we took a walk in the park.

LOUIE . . . You went to the park with this guy?

BELLA Just to talk . . . You have to sit down if you're going to ask me questions, Louie. (*LOUIE comes back and sits down*) Now whose turn is it?

GRANDMA Dis is ven you came home at eleven o'clock?

BELLA Maybe. I think so. Was that it?

GERT What did you do until eleven—(*Sucks in*)—o'clock?

BELLA We walked and we talked . . . And we got to know each other . . . He doesn't want to be an usher forever. One day he wants to open up his own restaurant.

LOUIE His own restaurant? And he's an usher? What is he, fifteen, sixteen?

BELLA No. He's forty . . . And he wants to open up the restaurant with me.

*(There is silence. She has finally gotten their attention)*

LOUIE Why with you?

BELLA (*Starting to get nervous*) Because I can do all the cooking . . . and write out the menus . . . and keep the books.

GERT And what would he do?

BELLA He would be the manager.

*(She sees this isn't going too well)*

LOUIE If he's the manager, why doesn't *he* write out the menus and keep the books?

BELLA Well, he has a—(*She looks at ARTY and JAY*)—a reading handicap.

LOUIE A what?

BELLA A reading handicap.

LOUIE Okay, hold it. Wait a minute. (*He rises*) What do you mean? He can't read?

BELLA You're not supposed to get out of your chair. That's not how I pictured it.

LOUIE Yeah, well, now I'm getting my *own* picture . . . This guy is what? Illiterate?

BELLA He can read . . . a little.

LOUIE What's a little? His *name*? . . . This guy is either pulling your leg or he's after something, Bella . . . Is he after something?

BELLA Maybe this isn't a good time to talk about it.

LOUIE No, it's the *perfect* time to talk about it . . . What is this guy after, Bella? Has he touched you? . . . Has he fooled around with you?

BELLA NO!!! He's not that kind of person.

LOUIE Well, what kinda person *is* he? . . . He's forty years old, he takes you to the park at night. He wants to open up a restaurant with you and he can't read or write . . . How are you going to open up a restaurant? Who's going to put up the money?

BELLA It'll only cost five thousand dollars.

LOUIE (*Laughs*) Five thousand dollars? Why not five million? And who's got the five grand? Him?

BELLA I don't think so . . . He doesn't have any money.

LOUIE Oh. Too bad . . . Well, then who does that leave?

BELLA Don't yell at me, Louie.

LOUIE I'm not yelling at you, Bella. I'm just asking you a question. Who does that leave to put up the five thousand dollars?

GERT This is too terrible. Momma, please tell them— (*Sucks in*)—to stop this awful thing.

LOUIE Who does that leave, Bella?

BELLA I'll get the money somewhere.

LOUIE Where is somewhere, Bella? . . . There is no somewhere. You want Momma to sell the store? Is that what this guy asked you to do?

BELLA He didn't ask me anything.

LOUIE And he's either very smart or very dangerous. Well, he doesn't sound too smart to me. So that just leaves dangerous.

BELLA He's *not* dangerous.

LOUIE How do you know that?

BELLA Because they don't take you at the Home if you're dangerous.

LOUIE . . . The *Home*???

GRANDMA Oh, my Gott!!

GERT I don't understand this. Can somebody please— (*She sucks in*)—explain all this to me.

LOUIE (*To BELLA*) Bella, honey. This man sounds very troubled . . . Is he living at the Home now?

BELLA No. With his parents. He didn't like the Home. They weren't very nice to him there. (*She looks at GRANDMA, pointedly*) . . . It's *not a nice place*, Momma!

LOUIE Bella, sweetheart. Don't go to that movie anymore. Don't see that fella again. He may be very nice but he sounds like he's got a lot of whacky ideas, you know what I mean, sweetheart?

BELLA You promised you would support me . . . Jay! Arty! You said you would back me up. You promised.

LOUIE Back you up with what, Bella? . . . The restaurant? The money? Is that what this guy is after?

BELLA He wants *more* than that.

LOUIE What could possibly be more than that, Bella?

BELLA Me! He wants *me!* He wants to marry me! (*She starts to cry*) I want to marry *him* . . . I want to have his children . . . I want my own babies.

LOUIE (*Sits back*) Jesus Christ!

GRANDMA (*Shocked at this*) Dot's enough! . . . I don't want to hear dis anymore!

BELLA You think I can't have healthy babies, Momma? Well, I can . . . I'm as strong as an ox. I've worked in that store and taken care of you by myself since I'm twelve years old, that's how strong I am . . . Like *steel*, Momma. Isn't that how we're supposed to be? . . . But my babies won't die because I'll love them and take care of them . . . And they won't get sick like me or Gert or be weak like Eddie and Louie . . . My babies will be happier than we were because I'll teach them to be happy . . . Not to grow up and run away or never visit when they're older or not be able to breathe because they're so frightened . . . and never, *ever* to make them spend their lives rubbing my back and my legs because you never had anyone around who loved you enough to want to touch you because you made it so clear you never wanted to be touched with love . . . Do you know what it's like to touch steel, Momma? It's hard and it's cold and I want to be warm and soft with my children . . . Let me have my babies, Momma. Because I have to love somebody. I have to love someone who'll love me back before I die . . . Give me that, Momma, and I promise you, you'll never worry about being alone . . . Because you'll have us . . . Me and my husband and my babies . . . Louie, tell her how wonderful that would be . . . Gert, wouldn't that make her happy? . . . Momma? . . . Please say yes . . . I need you to say yes . . . Please?

*(It is deathly silent. No one has moved. Finally, GRANDMA gets up slowly, walks to her room, goes in, and quietly closes the door.)*

BELLA *looks at the others*)

Hold me . . . Somebody please hold me.

*(GERT gets up and puts her arms around BELLA and rocks her gently.)*

*We go to black)*