

PLAY. *The MAN has his ear to one of the walls. The WOMAN is still doing her crossword.*)

MAN. I'm sure of it. A man. And a woman. The man is giving a tip to the bellboy.

WOMAN. What do they look like?

MAN. *(Concentrates awhile.)* I can't tell.

WOMAN. I wonder if there's a corpse in their room, too.

MAN. They haven't mentioned one.

WOMAN. Do you suppose they'll charge us for our corpse, even though we didn't order it?

MAN. It's best not to get into arguments with the staff. That was mentioned several times in the hotel information. *(A pause.)* She's commenting on the lovely view. They look out on the lake.

WOMAN. *(Speaking with emotion for the first time.)* But there is no lake here. Not in any direction.

MAN. The man is eating the mints off the pillow.

WOMAN. We never had any mints on ours.

MAN. He says they're quite good.

WOMAN. Make him stop! Pound on the wall!

MAN. Apparently, they've brought their Chihuahua.

WOMAN. But you read that pets weren't allowed! The hotel brochure specifically mentioned that!

MAN. The dog's name is Gringo.

WOMAN. That's not fair! We were going to name *our* Chihuahua Gringo, if we ever got one. They get to have everything!

*(A woman's scream is heard through the wall.)*

MAN. Wait. *(Pause.)* They have a corpse.

WOMAN. *(Composed again.)* Well. That's a relief.

*(Zap sound. Blackout. Lights come up on the SOUTHERN*

*PLAY. A dummy of a female corpse, wearing a white dress like GRANDMAMMY's and clearly distinguishable from the male corpse in black, lies face-down on the floor in front of the chair GRANDMAMMY last occupied. REGINALD and CAROLINE are gathered around, while LUKE bounces around the room. He uses a southern accent.)*

LUKE. —all scrambled up about her great-great-grandfather's family comin' over in 1780 and how they left England so they'd be free to cook their meat according to how the Bible teaches, which is barbecue, and how iced tea's mentioned in Scripture, too, only by a different name, and when I come back from getting her more tea in the kitchen, there she was, dead on the floor.

REGINALD. (*He stares down at the corpse.*) Grandmammy!

CAROLINE. (*Heads toward whiskey bottle.*) Lord! I need a—(*She picks up the empty bottle, looks toward the wings, then improvises.*)—a chance to . . . reflect on . . . the subject of . . . this startling development.

REGINALD. (*Stares suspiciously at LUKE.*) And you two were alone?

LUKE. Yup. Just us.

REGINALD. (*Looks around.*) Where's Aaron?

CAROLINE. Didn't you know? Packed his paints and walked to the station. Moving to New York City.

LUKE. (*To CAROLINE, without accent.*) You want to go to my place after we're done?

58

(CAROLINE pushes away LUKE, who bustles around the room as before.)

REGINALD. Wonder what she died of?

CAROLINE. Maybe one of them Yankee shells hung up in the air for seventy years and finally hit her on the head.

REGINALD. That, or one of her own relations. Someone who'd had a look at her will—and didn't want no more changes bein' made.

(REGINALD and CAROLINE exchange glances. AARON walks in, carrying a suitcase, and approaches the corpse. REGINALD directs his words to him.)

REGINALD. Someone who'd have an alibi tighter than a preacher's collar. (*Pause.*) Thought you were on your way to New York City.

AARON. Missed the train. What happened to Grandmammy? Is she—is she dead?

REGINALD. As dead as you are dumb, boy. How many times have you missed that train goin' north?

AARON. Hmmm. Well, once—today.

59

REGINALD. And?

AARON. Twice yesterday.

REGINALD. And?

AARON. Twice on Friday. Once on Thursday. Three times on Wednesday.

CAROLINE. Same as last week.

REGINALD. And every time, we gotta have the same long-winded argument before you go. It's your way of trying to kill me, ain't it? You're aimin' to drive up my blood pressure and put me in the grave!

CAROLINE. With all those trains you missed, Aaron, some people might be entertaining doubts that you're ready to leave Catfish Crossing and become one of the world's great watercolorists.

REGINALD. And others might be entertaining thoughts that with your knowledge of paints, it wouldn't be hard for you to slip something fatal into Grandmammy's iced tea.

AARON. *(He drops his suitcase with a thud and faces REGINALD.)* You would accuse your own son—of the crime of murdering your own mother?

60

REGINALD. *(Pause. He looks at the others for support, swelling with exasperation, then shouts.)* And what's the matter with that?!

CAROLINE. Nothing, Pappy. Calm yourself. Nothing at all. *(She looks up.)* And nothing at all is what we might be getting in the will. Reckon we better go find it.

*(ALL scatter offstage. Zap sound. Blackout. Lights come up on the ENGLISH MYSTERY. The dummy of the female corpse remains where it is. LADY DENSLow and REV. SMYTHE are looking down at it. CLIFFORD enters.)*

CLIFFORD. Good God—not Mrs. Hardwicke!

REV. SMYTHE. It happened when the storm knocked out the lights.

LADY DENSLow. Strangled.

REV. SMYTHE. There can be no doubt now that there's a murderer among us.

LADY DENSLow. *(Heavily, to CLIFFORD.)* Someone whose surface appearance is a sham.

CLIFFORD. Don't be daft. I could hardly have strangled her with this arm of mine.

61