

LOUISE: Your parents were never divorced.

MARIAN: No—but I picked one anyway. I loved my mother, of course—but I picked my father. I listened to him. I modeled myself after him. My poor mother had virtually nothing to do. She died quite young, you know. Some take it better, of course. But I should never have picked a parent. No child should be permitted to.

THE DAYS AND NIGHTS OF BEEBEE FENSTERMAKER

by William Snyder

ACT I

Beebe Fenstermaker is a young woman just out of college and living in an American city on her own in her first apartment. Her aspirations are to live a creative and independent life. She tries writing and then painting, but is forced to recognize both the limitations of her talents and that, at best, she is a dilettante. Further deterioration of her self-esteem and hopes are brought about by the realities of having to work at a mundane full-time job, and by unsuccessful relationships with men. One by one her romantic illusions crumble as she is forced to confront her unrealistic expectations about men, her career, and her own abilities.

Nettie Jo is an unambitious, but fun-loving young woman who is Beebe's neighbor and friend. In the following scenes Nettie Jo stops by Beebe's apartment on her way out on a date. She tells Beebe that she will soon be getting married and moving away. She expresses concern about Beebe's recent reclusiveness and tries to convince her to get out more often. During the conversation the two women begin to criticize each other's lifestyles and goals. Finally, Beebe confesses to herself that her approach to life is based on self-deception and her fear of failure.

NETTIE JO: Beebe?

BEEBEE: Hey, Nettie Jo. *Nettie Jo stands in front of armchair and takes a modeling pose. Beebe gets a sketchbook and pencil out of coffee-table drawer, sits on sofa, and begins to sketch Nettie Jo.*

NETTIE JO: You antsy about somethin'?

BEEBEE, *shakes her head*: Uh-uh.

NETTIE JO: Ever since you dropped your novel and took up art, you seem much more moody to me.

BEEBEE: I haven't dropped my novel. I put it aside to let the ideas solidify.

NETTIE JO: Since you put it aside then. You seem much more moody to me. *Crosses to kitchen, gets Coke out of refrigerator and opens it.*

BEEBEE: I don't think I am.

NETTIE JO: I do. I think you are.

BEEBEE: Hold still, Nettie Jo.

NETTIE JO, *returns to her position in front of armchair*: Don't you want me to be evanescent?

BEEBEE: Not tonight.

NETTIE JO: That's the way I feel tonight.

BEEBEE: You look very pretty.

NETTIE JO: Thank you. *She smiles.*

BEEBEE: Don't smile.

NETTIE JO: How's your new art teacher?

BEEBEE: I stopped goin to him.

NETTIE JO: Stopped goin to this one too? Why?

BEEBEE: He was talkin more than he was teachin.

NETTIE JO: Who will you go to now?

BEEBEE: Nobody for a while. I thought I'd work on my own. Hold still, Nettie Jo. I wish you'd have your hair cut. All I can see is hair.

NETTIE JO: Most people like it long. *Sits in armchair. Mother could sit on hers. I've got a picture of her doin it. Lookin up into a sterling silver handmirror. Poses like her mother.*

BEEBEE: Come on now, Nettie Jo.

NETTIE JO: How many teachers have you been to?

BEEBEE: What difference does it make?

NETTIE JO: Two or three anyway.

BEEBEE: What difference does it make? None of them fit the bill. I don't either, I guess. When I first go to them they all

think I'm wonderful. They say how expressive and sensitive and all that. *Nettie Jo pulls at her skirt to even the hem.* Nettie Jo will you hold still? *Nettie Jo resumes posing.* And the first few days I am good. Then I get so bugged I freeze up and I get just horrible. And I stay horrible. And I tell myself I'm not doin it for them. And all right so I'm horrible now, if I was good ones I'll be good again. But I'm not. Well, I'll have to work harder, that's all. Keep workin is the important thing. *Closes sketch book and puts it in coffee-table drawer.*

NETTIE JO, *sits in armchair*: I wish you'd date more.

BEEBEE: I've told you a thousand times those T. D. Hackmeyer boys don't interest me.

NETTIE JO: You don't give yourself a chance to meet anybody else. Then when you do you never will date em more than once. I wish I had a nickel for every boy I've had Tommy bring up here that you've turned thumbs down on.

BEEBEE: Nettie Jo, stop talkin like my mother.

NETTIE JO: I think you're workin too hard.

BEEBEE, *rises*: And I think you're just breezin along with the breeze, aren't you, Nettie Jo? Lettin the rest of the world go by.

NETTIE JO: I might as well. I certainly can't change it.

BEEBEE, *circling Nettie Jo*: You go right down the years sittin on your one spot. You sit on your one spot at the office. You sit on your one spot in your folks' split-level ranch house. You have no outside interests other than men. No hobbies, handicrafts or sports. No religious convictions or philosophical leanings. Just sittin. One spot Nettie Jo Reput. The girl who never gets off her behind. *Moves around in upstage right area.*

NETTIE JO: Correct, Beebee. And I'm havin a grand time doin it.

BEEBEE: You live a day at a time with never a passin thought for tomorrow or the day after.

NETTIE JO: Correct, Beebee.

BEEBEE: And what beats me is you're satisfied.

NETTIE JO: I don't have any ambition, Beebee.

BEEBEE: That's the kind sails right to the top like a gas balloon.

NETTIE JO: What do you want me to do?

BEEBEE: I don't know. But there's somethin wrong about bein so satisfied with everything the way it is and goin along with the crowd. You have to gain special recognition in some way. In

some way, Nettie Jo. If you don't you end up nothin—a nonentity. Another face in the crowd. And that's like bein dead. Do you want to wind up dead without one person to remember your name?

NETTIE JO, *rises, crosses to bureau and gets nailfile*: If I'm dead, why should I care if people remember my name? *Crosses back to armchair, sits and files nails.* And I've got enough to keep in mind without worryin whether I'm leavin behind some mark that I won't even be able to look at. Anyway, what's wrong with bein another face in the crowd?

BEEBEE: It's death in life, that's what. It's walkin through the world without touchin a thing. It's blendin in instead of stickin out. And God knows folks try to push you into the wallpaper from the minute you're born. Startin with your family. She gets this from so and so. That from somebody else. Eyes, ears, character, bad habits, good habits. Just when you think you finally got somethin on your own, as sure as Christmas somebody comes along and says, "Isn't that exactly like Uncle Whatchamacallit." There you are locked tighter than a Chinese puzzle without knowin where one person ends and the other ones begin. *Sits on coffee table.* Then your mother starts sayin why aren't you more like people your own age? Why don't you join a sorority, a club, go to dances?

NETTIE JO: Did you ever do any of those things, Beebee?

BEEBEE: No.

NETTIE JO: Why?

BEEBEE: I didn't want to. *Pauses, then reflectively*: The funny thing is, if I had gone along with the rest, I would have been last in line.

NETTIE JO: Why?

BEEBEE: They weren't interested in me and I wasn't interested in them. It was like they had something extra. A gift I didn't have. And it made me feel cut off.

NETTIE JO: What gift was that?

BEEBEE, *absorbed in her words*: The gift of ease. Of comradeship. Of . . . belongin to somethin.

NETTIE JO: Beebee, I don't know if you realize it or not but you just contradicted yourself.

BEEBEE: How? I didn't.

NETTIE JO: You just finished sayin the last thing you wanted to be was part of a group.

BEEBEE: And I meant it. But a person can still be momentarily seduced by the *idea* of somethin they think is *wrong*.

NETTIE JO: Beebee, do you want to be like me?

BEEBEE: Like you! *Rises, crosses downstage left then circles around Nettie Jo.* Like you, Nettie Jo. Nettie Jo, like you! Why Nettie Jo, you're the last person to step on grass I'd want to be like. Why I'd take a flyin leap off anything high enough if I thought I was anything approachin bein like you.

NETTIE JO: If that's so, it makes me wonder sometimes why I'm your only friend.

BEEBEE, *holds upstage right above coffee table*: You're not.

NETTIE JO: Who else do you see?

BEEBEE: I live in the same apartment building with you. I couldn't get away from you if I tried.

NETTIE JO: You haven't tried very hard. In fact it's been just the opposite. You're always askin me up here every hour of the day or night on any pretext other than just to visit. I don't know why you can't admit sometimes you'd just like to visit.

BEEBEE, *crosses downstage right between coffee table and bed*: Well I'm admittin now that I'm gonna avoid you from now on like the bubonic plague!

NETTIE JO: O.K., Beebee, but I'll tell you this. For my money and for all your talkin—you're not much further along than me.

BEEBEE: I'm not huh? I'm not huh?

NETTIE JO: No.

BEEBEE: All that proves is that you're blind in one eye and can't see good out of the other.

NETTIE JO: And you can see out of both of yours I suppose.

BEEBEE: At least I use mine for somethin besides Maybelline!

NETTIE JO: Maybe so, but two years ago you said . . .

BEEBEE, *stunned*: Two years ago?

NETTIE JO: Yes, Beebee, two years ago. I met you two years ago.

BEEBEE: What month is this?

NETTIE JO: June.

BEEBEE: I thought it was the tag end of May.

NETTIE JO: No, it's the second of June. You were doin all that talk about love and a career bein God's answer to hundred-proof bourbon. And I thought it was a fine idea. Still do for that matter. But what have you done?

BEEBEE: What do you mean what have I done?

NETTIE JO: What have you got to show for your two years besides a stab at a novel and a few weeks of art school. What have you settled on?

BEEBEE: I've settled on paintin.

NETTIE JO: With writin on the side and music in the background. Well, I'm sorry, Beebee, but I don't see where all your "doin" gives you any right to criticize my "sittin"—cause from where I'm sittin, your doin don't look like much. *Beebe sits on coffee table.* *Pause.* Oh, Beebee, I didn't mean to say all that.

BEEBEE: Never mind, Nettie Jo.

NETTIE JO: When you jumped on me with all fours you just got my back up.

BEEBEE: I don't blame you.

NETTIE JO, *rises and crosses to Beebe*: Beebee, I'm worried about you.

BEEBEE: Well don't be.

NETTIE JO, *kneels beside Beebe*: The thing of it is I'll be leavin pretty soon.

BEEBEE: Leavin?

NETTIE JO: See. Tommy's asked me to marry him. And I'm goin to.

BEEBEE: Married. *Moved*: Oh, Oh, Nettie Jo. How wonderful. *She hugs Nettie Jo.* When did it happen?

NETTIE JO: Last night. I was really bowled over. I've known for a long time he's been the one I wanted, but I didn't think I was the one he wanted.

BEEBEE: How wonderful. He's a very nice boy.

NETTIE JO: I think so.

BEEBEE: Where will you live?

NETTIE JO, *crosses to armchair*: He's had a real good job offered to him in L.A. so we'll be movin out there.

BEEBEE: Soon, you say.

NETTIE JO: In about a month. It'll take me that long to quit my job and give up this place and get ready.

BEEBEE: Well. Oh, Nettie Jo. It's wonderful.

NETTIE JO, *crosses to Beebe*: I wish you were comin to California with us.

BEEBEE, *crosses to bureau*: Nettie Jo stop.

NETTIE JO, *follows Beebe*: I do. We could all take an apartment together.

BEEBEE: Now wouldn't that be fun.

NETTIE JO: It would. I know Tommy wouldn't mind.

BEEBEE: You ought to try asking him.

NETTIE JO: I already have. And he thought it was a wonderful idea.

BEEBEE: Nettie Jo.

NETTIE JO: The thing of it is I think a change of scene might give you a fresh viewpoint.

BEEBEE: Well, thanks, Nettie Jo but . . .

NETTIE JO: My thought is a fresh scene and fresh faces might help you get settled on somethin. And I'd certainly feel better about you. Will you think about it?

BEEBEE, distracted: What?

NETTIE JO: I say will you think about it.

BEEBEE: Yes, I'll think about it.

NETTIE JO: Well. I'll see you later. I'll come up when I get home if it's not too late.

BEEBEE: Goodbye, Nettie Jo. *Nettie Jo exits. Beebee crosses upstage center. With emotion:* Two years! That's three hundred and sixty-odd days times two! And how many hours and how many minutes and how many seconds? God, what have I been doing all this time? *The sound of the ticking begins under and increases in volume as the speech progresses.* You must have put me in a trance. I'm so dogged by time all I been doing is lettin it go by. I been here two years! People ask me what are my interests, and I say I'm a writer/pianist or a pianist/writer or a pianist/painter or a writin piano-playin painter. When all I am is a nine-to-five worker at T. D. Hackameyer's with an unfinished novel, a grubby sketchbook, and an apartment that's drivin me stark starin crazy. I need somebody! Somebody for me! If I had somebody I'd know what to do and how to do it. Well, what do you want, Miss Beebee? *Fiercely:* I want a man in the image of God! Isn't that what you're supposed to be producin? Then do it goddamit! If I'm my own worst enemy make me not my own worst enemy. I've got strings attached and they're tying me in knots! *The ticking has become almost louder than her voice. It stops abruptly.*

THE BAD SEED

by Maxwell Anderson

ACT I, SCENE 4

Rhoda is as sweet, well behaved, and innocent-seeming as a young girl can be. Yet, as this play of intrigue and suspense unfolds, her mother, Christine, learns that Rhoda is a malevolent murderer, totally devoid of conscience. Christine also learns that she herself is an adopted child, and that her *own* mother was "the most amazing woman in all the annals of homicide." Rhoda has apparently inherited her grandmother's traits (thus the *bad seed*). Prior to the following scene Christine hears on the radio that one of Rhoda's classmates, a little boy, Claude Daigle, who had just won a penmanship medal that Rhoda wanted, was found drowned on a school picnic. (The medal was not found.) Rhoda's casual reaction toward the incident surprises her mother, but the event is soon forgotten. A few days later, Miss Fern, the school headmistress, arrives at the house seeking some information about the drowning. After Rhoda leaves the room the questions begin.

MISS FERN, she waits till Rhoda exits: It did occur to me that—that Rhoda might have told you a detail or two which she hadn't remembered when she talked with me. You see, she was the last to see the little Daigle boy alive—

CHRISTINE: Are you sure of that?

MISS FERN: Yes.

CHRISTINE: I hadn't realized— *(Christine rises, crosses, and sits left end of sofa.)*

MISS FERN: About an hour after we arrived at the estate one of our older pupils came on Rhoda and the Daigle boy at the far end of the grounds. The boy was upset and crying, and Rhoda was standing in front of him, blocking his path. The older girl was among the trees, and neither child saw her. She was just about to intervene when Rhoda shoved the boy and snatched at