

GEORGE: I wasn't sure they'd seen me go in. I thought I'd stay there until they'd gone away—okay? I was in there for about a minute before I realized I'd—well—misjudged the situation. When I came out the three of them were just staring at me. All right, it was an embarrassing situation but I probably could have carried it off. Except for what Helen did. You know what she did?

DORIS: What?

GEORGE: She peed on the carpet.

DORIS: She did *what*?

GEORGE: Oh, not right away. First, she started to laugh. Tears started to roll down her face. She held her sides. Then she peed all over their Persian carpet.

KINGDOM OF EARTH

by Tennessee Williams

SCENE 6

The setting is a Mississippi Delta farmhouse. It "has the mood of a blues-song whose subject is loneliness." The levees are overflowing and a major flood is imminent. The residents of this house are two half-brothers filled with hate for each other. They are Chicken, in his thirties, strong and gruff; and Lot, "a frail, delicately—you might say exotically—pretty youth of about twenty." The house belongs to Lot, left to him by his mother.

Lot is dying of tuberculosis. He has been away, and at the beginning of the play he brings home his new wife, Myrtle. She "is a rather fleshy young woman, amiably loud-voiced," a former show girl with dyed blonde hair that "suggests an imitation of a Hollywood glamor-girl which doesn't succeed. . . ." She is robust, good natured, and, since her baptism, "scared to death of deep water."

Lot and Myrtle met and married on a TV show just days before. For her it was romance, somehow being affected by this strange, delicate young man, wanting to care for him and cure him of his illness. Lot's reason for marrying was not so benign. He regrets having signed a paper (a contract) that, upon his death, leaves the house and farm to Chicken. The house is filled with objects and furnishings that belonged to Lot's deceased mother. During the play we learn of Lot's strange relationship to her, and he explains that "it will haunt me to my grave and my mother in hers if this place went to Chicken."

His plan is to disinherit Chicken, and Myrtle is his ruse. Anticipating that his sex-starved brother will try to seduce Myrtle, Lot asks her to get Chicken drunk and try to steal the paper from his wallet—ostensibly to protect her own future in the house when she is left a widow.

As the following scene opens Chicken is alone in the kitchen. Myrtle enters with her marriage license, trying desperately (lying, in fact) to convince Chicken that her marriage to Lot was a fake. In the previous scene Chicken told her of his fear that, regardless of his contract, as Lot's wife, Myrtle, rather than he, will inherit the farm. He threatened to let her drown when the floodwaters fill the house. (He will perch on the roof with the chickens, as he has done before—earning him his nickname.)

MYRTLE: Here it is, this is it. *Hands him license:* You can see it's no good.

CHICKEN: —It's got signatures on it.

MYRTLE: Sure, they put signatures on 'em to make 'em look real, but—

CHICKEN: This looks like a genuine license to me.

MYRTLE: I give you my right hand to God!—That thing is fake!

CHICKEN: Don't give me your right hand to God. I don't want it and he don't want it neither. Nobody wants your right or left hand to nothing. However, I'll keep this thing. I'll put it with my legal agreement with Lot. *He folds the license into his wallet. Studies her somberly.* Are you able to write?

MYRTLE: Why, uh—yais!

CHICKEN: I don't mean just your name.

MYRTLE: No! Yais, I mean yais! —I been through four grades of school.

CHICKEN: Take a seat at this table. I'm gonna give you a little test in writing. *He tears a sheet from a writing tablet: sets it before her with a pen and ink bottle.* You say you are able to write and I am able to read. You see this pen an' paper I set befo' you?

MYRTLE: Yais! Perfectly! Plainly!

CHICKEN: Do you write standing up?

MYRTLE: Yais! No, I mean no! *Scrambles into chair.*

CHICKEN: Now take this pen and write out on this paper what I tell you to write.

MYRTLE: What do you—?

CHICKEN: Shut up. I'm gonna dictate to you a letter that you will write an' sign and this letter will be to me.

MYRTLE: Why should I write you a letter when, when—you're right here?

CHICKEN: You'll understand why when you write it and write it out plain enough so anybody can read it.

MYRTLE: —My hand is—

CHICKEN: What?

MYRTLE: Shakin'!

CHICKEN: Control it.

MYRTLE: It's hard to control it with my nerves so unstrung.

CHICKEN: Which hand do you write with, with the left or the right?

MYRTLE: Oh, with the right, I'm right-handed.

CHICKEN: Well, give me that shaky right hand.

MYRTLE: What do you want with my hand?

CHICKEN: Stop it shakin'. *He takes hold of her hand in both of his.*

MYRTLE: What big hands you got, Chicken.

CHICKEN: Feel the calluses on 'em? I got those calluses on my hands from a life of hard work on this fuckin' place, worked on it like a nigger and got nothin' for it but bed and board and the bed was a cot in the kitchen and the board was no better than slops in the trough of a sow. However, things do change, they do gradually change, you just got to wait and be patient till the time comes to strike and then strike hard. *He is rubbing her*

hand between his. Now it's comin', that time. This place is gonna be mine when the house is flooded an' I won't be unhappy sittin' on the roof of it till the flood goes down.

MYRTLE: No. Me neither. I'll be—pleased and—relieved!

CHICKEN: You mean if you are still in the land of the livin'.

MYRTLE: Don't make my hand shake again.

CHICKEN: I guess you think that I'm hard.

MYRTLE: I don't think a man should be soft.

CHICKEN: You know what life is made out of?

MYRTLE: Evil, I think it's evil.

CHICKEN: I think that life just plain don't care for the weak. Or the soft. A man and his life. A man and his life both got to be made out of the same stuff or one or the other will break and the one that breaks won't be life. Because life's rock. Man's got to be rock, too. Life, rock. Man, rock. Both rock. Because if they both ain't rock the one that's not rock won't be life. Life's always rock. The one that's not rock will be man so man's got to be rock, too. Because the soft one is broke when the two things come together, the soft one breaks. And life is never the soft one. IS it? NEVER!—If one is soft the one that is soft will be man. Not life, no, not life ever! Now then. Your hand ain't shakin'.

MYRTLE: No. My hand has stopped shaking because.

CHICKEN: —What?

MYRTLE: I know in my heart that you don't hate Myrtle.

CHICKEN: I hate nobody and I love nobody. Now pick up that pen, hold it steady, and write down what I tell you. *She picks up the pen, grips it.* Dip it in the ink, it don't write dry. *She wets the pen.* Ready?

MYRTLE: Ready, my hand is steady.

CHICKEN: I got to be careful how I word this thing, it's too important for me to bugger it up.

MYRTLE: Let's make two copies of it, one for, for—practice and the other—final.

CHICKEN: Won't be necessary. I got it now. Now write down what I tell you in big letters or print. "Me, Mrs. Lot Ravenstock, if I had a claim on this place called Raven Roost or anything on this place, give up and deny all claims when my husband is dead. Because this place goes to Chicken. I known about this setup before my TV marriage and the paper which

Chicken holds with notary seal, two names of witnesses on it, still holds good. I declare this. The place and all on it will be Chicken's, all Chicken's, when Lot Ravenstock dies and also if I die too because of river in flood, a natural act of God."

MYRTLE, *who has been scribbling frantically*: "All Chicken's when Lot dies."

CHICKEN: Now put in the punctuation and dot all the i's an' cross all the t's and sign your name plain at the bottom.

MYRTLE: Yais, yais, I did, I already did that, Chicken.

CHICKEN: Give it here. *He takes the paper from her*. Huh. I bet they never give you no spelling or handwriting prize when you went to school, but anyhow it's possible to read it if the question comes up in case of you being alive when the flood goes down. There's still one question, though. Where's the witnesses and the notary seal so this would hold up in court?

MYRTLE: Oh, we could get them later, we—!

CHICKEN: You wrote this thing because you're scared of drowning. How do I know you wouldn't back out of it when the flood's over with?

MYRTLE: I swear I wouldn't.

CHICKEN: Well, anyhow it's something and somethin's better than nothing. It's worth putting in my wallet with Lot's witnessed letter and the true or false license.

MYRTLE: Chicken, trust my word. I've given you my word and never gone back on my word in all my life.

CHICKEN: I'm not counting on your word, but something else about you.

MYRTLE: What? Else? About me?

CHICKEN: —You're weak.

MYRTLE: I've always been weak compared to men, to a man. I think that's natural, don't you? *They have been sitting in chairs on opposite sides of the small, square kitchen table, chairs angled toward the audience. Now Chicken rises and crosses close to her.*

CHICKEN: Look me straight in the eyes and answer a question.

MYRTLE: What? Question?

CHICKEN: Can you kiss and like kissin' a man that's been accused of having some black blood in him?

MYRTLE: No! Yes! It would make no difference to me.

CHICKEN: Let's try it out. Put your arms about me an' give me a kiss on the mouth. Mouth open. *She complies nervously, gingerly to this request. During the kiss, he puts a hand on her hips. Releasing her*: —Well? How did it feel? Disgusting?

MYRTLE: No, not a bit. I was pleased an' relieved that you wanted to kiss me, Chicken.

CHICKEN: That kiss was just a beginning. You know that. Does that please and relieve you?

MYRTLE: I'm a warm-natured woman. You might say passionate, even. A Memphis doctor prescribed me a bottle of pills to keep down the heat of my nature, but those pills are worthless. Have no effect, I'm through with them. —Don't you know I would never back down on that letter you dictated to me? Not if I could, never would!

CHICKEN: No, I reckon you wouldn't. *Chicken hoists himself onto the kitchen table, directly in front of her, legs spread wide.*

MYRTLE: Wouldn't you be more comfortable in a chair?

CHICKEN: I wouldn't be as close to you. —I'm right in front of you now.

MYRTLE: That's a —high—table. I have to strain my neck to look in your face.

CHICKEN, *with a slow, savage grin*: You don't have to look in my face, my face ain't all they is to me, not by a long shot, honey. . . . *She begins suddenly to cry like a child. Why're you cryin'?* You don't have to cry fo' it, it's what you want and it's yours! *He snatches up the lamp and blows it out.*