

[Blanche sits in a chair very stiffly with her shoulders slightly hunched and her legs pressed close together and her hands tightly clutching her purse as if she were quite cold. After a while the blind look goes out of her eyes and she begins to look slowly around. A cat screeches. She catches her breath with a startled gesture. Suddenly she notices something in a half-opened closet. She springs up and crosses to it, and removes a whiskey bottle. She pours a half tumbler of whiskey and tosses it down. She carefully replaces the bottle and washes out the tumbler at the sink. Then she resumes her seat in front of the table.]

BLANCHE [faintly to herself]:

I've got to keep hold of myself!

[Stella comes quickly around the corner of the building and runs to the door of the downstairs flat.]

STELLA [calling out joyfully]:

Blanche!

[For a moment they stare at each other. Then Blanche springs up and runs to her with a wild cry.]

BLANCHE:

Stella, oh, Stella, Stella! Stella for Star!

[She begins to speak with feverish vivacity as if she feared for either of them to stop and think. They catch each other in a spasmodic embrace.]

BLANCHE:

Now, then, let me look at you. But don't you look at me, Stella, no, no, no, not till later, not till I've bathed and rested! And turn that over-light off! Turn that off! I won't be looked at in this merciless glare!

[Stella laughs and complies]

Come back here now! Oh, my baby! Stella! Stella for Star!

[She embraces her again]

I thought you would never come back to this horrible place! What am I saying? I didn't mean to say that. I meant to be nice about it and say--Oh, what a convenient location and such--Haa-ha! Precious lamb! You haven't said a word to me.

STELLA:

You haven't given me a chance to, honey!

[She laughs, but her glance at Blanche is a little anxious.]

BLANCHE:

Well, now you talk. Open your pretty mouth and talk while I look around for some liquor! I know you must have some liquor on the place! Where could it be, I wonder? Oh, I spy, I spy!

[She rushes to the closet and removes the bottle; she is shaking all over and panting for breath as she tries to laugh. The bottle nearly slips from her grasp.]

STELLA [noticing]:

Blanche, you sit down and let me pour the drinks. I don't know what we've got to mix with. Maybe a coke's in the icebox. Look'n see, honey, while I'm--

BLANCHE:

No coke, honey, not with my nerves tonight! Where--where--where is--?

STELLA:

Stanley? Bowling! He loves it. They're having a--found some soda!--tournament...

BLANCHE:

Just water, baby, to chase it! Now don't get worried, your sister hasn't turned into a drunkard, she's just all shaken up and hot and tired and dirty! You sit down, now, and explain this place to me! What are you doing in a place like this?

STELLA:

Now, Blanche--

BLANCHE:

Oh, I'm not going to be hypocritical, I'm going to be honestly critical about it! Never, never, never in my worst dreams could I picture--Only Poe! Only Mr. Edgar Allan Poe!--could do it justice! Out there I suppose is the ghoul-haunted woodland of Weir!

[She laughs.]

STELLA:

No, honey, those are the L & N tracks.

BLANCHE:

No, now seriously, putting joking aside. Why didn't you tell me, why didn't you write me, honey, why didn't you let me know?

STELLA [carefully, pouring herself a drink]:

Tell you what, Blanche?

BLANCHE:

Why, that you had to live in these conditions!

STELLA:

Aren't you being a little intense about it? It's not that bad at all! New Orleans isn't like other cities.

BLANCHE:

This has got nothing to do with New Orleans. You might as well say--forgive me, blessed baby!

[She suddenly stops short]

The subject is closed!

STELLA [a little drily]:

Thanks.

[During the pause, Blanche stares at her. She smiles at Blanche.]

BLANCHE [looking down at her glass, which shakes in her hand]:

You're all I've got in the world, and you're not glad to see me!

STELLA [sincerely]:

Why, Blanche, you know that's not true.

BLANCHE:

No?--I'd forgotten how quiet you were.

STELLA:

You never did give me a chance to say much, Blanche. So I just got in the habit of being quiet around you.

BLANCHE [vaguely]:

A good habit to get into...

[then, abruptly]

You haven't asked me how I happened to get away from the school before the spring term ended.

STELLA:

Well, I thought you'd volunteer that information--if you wanted to tell me.

BLANCHE:

You thought I'd been fired?

STELLA:

No, I--thought you might have--resigned...

BLANCHE:

I was so exhausted by all I'd been through my--nerves broke.

[Nervously tamping cigarette]

I was on the verge of--lunacy, almost! So Mr. Graves--Mr. Graves is the high school superintendent--he suggested I take a leave of absence. I couldn't put all of those details into the wire...

[She drinks quickly]

Oh, this buzzes right through me and feels so good!

STELLA:

Won't you have another?

BLANCHE:

No, one's my limit.

STELLA:

Sure?

BLANCHE:

You haven't said a word about my appearance.

STELLA:

You look just fine.

BLANCHE:

God love you for a liar! Daylight never exposed so total a ruin! But you--you've put on some weight, yes, you're just as plump as a little partridge! And it's so becoming to you!

STELLA:

Now, Blanche--

BLANCHE:

Yes, it is, it is or I wouldn't say it! You just have to watch around the hips a little. Stand up.

STELLA:

Not now.

BLANCHE:

You hear me? I said stand up!

[Stella complies reluctantly]

You messy child, you, you've spilt something on the pretty white lace collar! About your hair-- you ought to have it cut in a feather bob with your dainty features. Stella, you have a maid, don't you?

STELLA:

No. With only two rooms it's--

BLANCHE:

What? Two rooms, did you say?

STELLA:

This one and--

[She is embarrassed.]

BLANCHE:

The other one?

[She laughs sharply. There is an embarrassed silence.]