

ELAIN. (*Finishing another glass of wine.*) Please! It was just some sort of degrading stage she was going through. I'm certain she's over it now.

DELMOUNT. Well, I wish she was back in it.

ELAIN. Delmount!

DELMOUNT. I do! Least then she wasn't putting herself into stupid, miserable contests and publicly getting kicked in the face. Least for the disease she just privately took some shots.

ELAIN. Don't talk about it! I can't bear that side of life! It's repulsive to me. So shut up your mouth for once!!

DELMOUNT. Well, don't have a hissy fit! (*The phone rings.*)

ELAIN. My, God.

DELMOUNT. You think it's them?

ELAIN. No. I don't know. (*Carnelle appears at the door with a brownie in her hand.*)

CARNELLE. Here, I'll get it. I'll go on and—get it. (*She picks up the phone.*) Hello? . . . Oh. Yes, just a minute. It's for you Elain. It's Franklin.

ELAIN. Thanks. (*Carnelle exits to the kitchen, stuffing the brownie into her mouth.*) Hello. . . . Yes, Dear, I got them. . . . Oh, they're beautiful; they're—very fragrant; they're—I-I don't want to come home. . . . I mean not ever, or for awhile, or for not ever. . . . I feel like I'm missing my life. . . . I don't know about the children. They'll manage. . . . Oh, for God's sake, Franklin, no one's going to bake them into a pie! . . . Oh, please! I don't want to discuss it anymore. I'm tired of it all, I'm through with it all. Good-bye! (*She hangs up the phone. She is stunned and shaken by what she has done.*)

DELMOUNT. (*Who has been listening to all of this while pretending to work with the price tags.*) Did you mean it? You're gonna leave him?

ELAIN. Yes.

DELMOUNT. By God, Swayne. By God. I love ya, Honey! How I do love ya! Now are you sure you meant it?

ELAIN. Uh huh.

DELMOUNT. Don't just tell me you meant it, then later take it all back. You've done that before, you know.

ELAIN. I haven't.

DELMOUNT. What do you mean you haven't?!? It's a personality trait with you. It's your trademark! You tell me you're

gonna do something one way and then you go back on it cause of what Mama said or what Franklin said or what some other fly-by-night-fool-idiot said!

ELAIN. Don't pick on me!

DELMOUNT. Ooh! I knew it! You didn't mean it! I knew it!

ELAIN. I meant it! I said it!

DELMOUNT. All you want is for everyone to think you're perfect. Well, perfect is dull!

ELAIN. Don't you dare call me dull. Just because I'm not insane and obsessed and possessed by dreams.

DELMOUNT. (*Overlapping.*) Shut up, Elain. Shut up your red blood lips!

ELAIN. You are a selfish human being! Mama always loved you ten times better than me.

DELMOUNT. Oh God.

ELAIN. I had to win contests and be in pageants before she'd give me any notice at all. When I graduated Jr. college she said, "You've had your spoonful of gravy now go out and get a rich husband;" so I did.

DELMOUNT. You're a fool to let Mama ramshackle your life. Mama was nothing but mean.

ELAIN. Not to you. She was sweet to you.

DELMOUNT. She pretended to be sweet.

ELAIN. Well, everyone always thought she was. Till the day she died, people were saying she was a blessed angel on earth.

DELMOUNT. Yeah, an angel in apes clothing.

ELAIN. You are so cruel.

DELMOUNT. Well, hell, she just turned herself into a monkey to get at us—just to be mean. I always knew Mama was mean.

ELAIN. No. She wasn't always. Things change. She wasn't always.

DELMOUNT. Why, I remember when I was a child a three how she tortured our favorite dog, White Face, right before my very eyes.

ELAIN. Wha'd she do to White Face?

DELMOUNT. Well, remember how White Face would always stand out by the back porch door hoping somebody would throw him some measly scraps?

ELAIN. I guess so.

DELMOUNT. Well, one day she was making a lemon pie and she says to me, "Ha! Let's see how he likes *this!*" and she slings a lemon rind right out to White Face and he jumps up and bites into it then runs off howling. And she's just standing there—laughing.

ELAIN. (*Stunned.*) Oh my God. So, Mama's always been mean. G'me a drag off a your pipe. (*He hands her the pipe. She takes a long drag.*)

DELMOUNT. Are you really gonna leave him?

ELAIN. (*Handing back the pipe.*) I said I would. (*The phone rings. They look at each other.*)

DELMOUNT. I can't stand it. (*He grabs the phone angrily.*) Yeah!? . . . Oh. Yes, just a minute. Carnelle? Carnelle, telephone!! Carnelle!

ELAIN. (*Overlapping.*) Carnelle! Honey! Phone! (*Carnelle appears. Her face is beet red.*)

CARNELLE. For me?

DELMOUNT. Uh huh. (*He hands her the phone.*)

CARNELLE. (*Into the phone.*) Hello. . . . Oh, Ronnie. . . . No, I don't think so. . . . Cause, I don't go out riding around like that anymore. I got other interests now. . . . You just don't understand anything about me. . . . Now don't you call me that. . . . I said don't call me that. So long. (*She hangs up the phone and stands totally still.*)

ELAIN. Who was it?

CARNELLE. Nobody. Just that creep Ronnie Wayne I used to date. He's calling me Miss Hot Tamale. Listen, I guess, I won't be needing that red dress of yours. It looks like I didn't make the Miss Firecracker Contest after all.

DELMOUNT. Ah well . . . count yourself lucky — that type a false pageantry; it's way beneath you.

ELAIN. Yes, it is. Why-why since it's been integrated the quality of the contest has really gone down, down, down.

DELMOUNT. Why, it's nothing but a garish display of painted up prancing pigs! That's all there is to it.

CARNELLE. Well, the main thing is—it was gonna be—I don't know—visible proof. And I would a liked to ride on a float and wave out to people.

ELAIN. Why, all this is gonna help build up your character! Remember, the more Mama suffered the more divine she be-

came. (*There is a knock at the door.*)

CARNELLE. That must be Popeye. I told her I'd pay her tonight for sewing my costume. Tell her I'll be right back with the money. (*She exits up the stairs, holding back tears.*)

DELMOUNT. Popeye—that's all we need. Did she lose her brains or what?

ELAIN. I like Popeye. She's a nice girl.

DELMOUNT. Then you talk to her. I'm gonna go get my desert. (*He exits to the kitchen, mumbling to himself.*) So, it's over. It's finished. She lost. Good. I'm glad!

ELAIN. (*As she opens the door for Popeye.*) Hello, Honey. Come on in. (*Popeye enters. She is wearing the earrings.*)

POPEYE. Hi.

ELAIN. Well, it looks like our little Carnation didn't make the beauty pageant after all.

POPEYE. (*Shocked.*) She didn't?

ELAIN. No.

POPEYE. I can't believe it.

ELAIN. Well, here, Honey, let me get you a glass of cool, plum wine.

POPEYE. I just knew she was gonna make it—with her red hair and her dancing and those roman candles shooting off right up into the sky.

ELAIN. (*Handing her some wine.*) I know. She put a lot of work into it. It's a disappointment. But life is hard and it's never easy to lose anything.

POPEYE. No, I suppose not. (*After a moment.*) I once knew these two midgets by the names of Sweet Pea and Willas. I went to their wedding and they was the only midgets there. Rest a their family was regular size people. But they was so happy together and they moved into a little midget house where everything was mite size like this little old desk they had and this little ole stool. Then Sweet Pea got pregnant and later on she had what they called this Caesarean birth where they slice open your stomach and pull the baby out from the slice. Well, come to find out, the babies a regular size child and soon that baby is just too large for Sweet Pea to carry around and too large for all a that mite sized furniture. So Sweet Pea has to give up her own baby for her Mama to raise. I thought she'd die to lose that child. It about crushed her heart.