

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 dessert. (*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.

ELAIN. (*Finishing off her glass of wine.*) I don't feel that way about my two boys. I don't want to spend time teaching them manners. I don't like them.

POPEYE. Y'don't?

ELAIN. No. My husband either.

POPEYE. What's wrong with him?

ELAIN. (*Gayly, as she pours herself some more wine.*) He smells of sweet cologne and wears three rings on every finger.

POPEYE. (*Pretending she has three rings on every finger.*) Gosh. They must feel heavy.

ELAIN. It's such a burden trying to live up to a beautiful face. I'm afraid I'm missing everything in the world. (*Delmount enters from the kitchen.*)

DELMOUNT. What happened to all of those brownies?

ELAIN. They're right in there on that blue china tray.

DELMOUNT. All of them?

ELAIN. Yes, Delly, the whole batch. (*Delmount exits to the kitchen.*)

POPEYE. (*Whispering hoarsely.*) What's the matter? He can't find the brownies?

ELAIN. I'm sure they're right under his nose. (*Delmount enters, carrying an empty tray.*)

DELMOUNT. They're all gone! The whole batch!

ELAIN. My, goodness! Well, I guess Carnelle ate them up. She's a compulsive eater when she's unhappy.

DELMOUNT. Dammit! I wanted a brownie! (*Then he stops, embarrassed.*) Ah, hello, Popeye. How're you?

POPEYE. Fine.

DELMOUNT. (*Smoothing down his wild hair.*) Well. . . . good. Ah, lovely earrings you're wearing.

POPEYE. Thank you. They was a present t'me from Elain. She give em to me.

DELMOUNT. Oh, right. Carnelle mentioned it. . . . Well, maybe we—have some ice cream in the freezer. (*He exits to the kitchen.*)

POPEYE. (*Weakly.*) Oh. Oh. Oh. (*She begins fanning her heart and blowing air onto it.*)

ELAIN. What's the matter? Are you alright?

POPEYE. My heart—it's—hot. It's hot. It's burning. (*Blowing*

air onto her heart.) Puff, puff, puff. (*She puts the wine glass against her heart.*) There. Ah. It's better now. It's better.

ELAIN. My word, you look faint.

POPEYE. Tell me, when your heart gets hot, does that mean you're in love?

ELAIN. Dar'lin, are you in love?

POPEYE. I reckon.

ELAIN. Not—not with Delmount?!

POPEYE. Yes. (*Puff, puff.*) Yes.

ELAIN. How astonishing! Why, his complexion's so sallow—and he's got a rude, irritable disposition.

POPEYE. It does seem like it.

ELAIN. How utterly odd. Tell me, Popeye, have you ever been in love before?

POPEYE. Well, my heart's never been hot or nothing, but I did have me a boyfriend once.

ELAIN. And what was he like?

POPEYE. Not much. He like t'pet me like I was a cat or something. He's asking me to purr and meow. Like, "meow, meow, purr, purr, purr." I don't know, he's crazy. I's expecting him t'give me a box a cat nips for Christmas.

ELAIN. What did he give you?

POPEYE. . . . Nothing.

ELAIN. (*Pouring them both more wine.*) Well, if you want my opinion, that is just about what Delmount will give you. He's an unstable character and he's had a very checkered past.

POPEYE. I know bout that.

ELAIN. Well, did you know about his strange, obsessive eye for beauty? (*Popeye shakes her head.*) How he's been known to follow a normal looking woman through the streets all day and all night because he finds the mere shape of her nose exotic or beautiful; or perhaps he finds the texture of her lips to be unusually soft and smooth. You don't want anything to do with him. I worry about him. He's not right. He's obsessed. (*She finishes her drink. She is uncomfortable and upset.*) What in the world is keeping Carnelle? She must be up in her room crying. I'd better go get her. (*Elain exits up the stairs. Popeye sits alone sipping wine. She begins shaking her head back and forth. After a moment she makes a solemn toast to the voices inside her eyes.*)

POPEYE. Cheers. (*Delmount enters from the kitchen. He is eating a dish of vanilla ice cream.*)

DELMOUNT. Oh. Hello. Where's Elain?

POPEYE. She's getting Carnelle.

DELMOUNT. (*Smoothing down his hair.*) Oh. (*He sits at the desk and begins writing.*)

POPEYE. Are you writing poems?

DELMOUNT. What?

POPEYE. Carnelle said you write poems.

DELMOUNT. Oh. Well, on occasion I have.

POPEYE. I'd like to read em.

DELMOUNT. (*Embarrassed.*) They're personal.

POPEYE. Oh. (*She starts to run on.*) Course, I never read many poems before. There weren't all that many poem books you could get off a the traveling book mobil. Most books I got was about animals. Farm animals, jungle animals, arctic animals and such. Course they was informative, I learned some things; they's called: a gaggle a geese; a pride a lions; a warren a rabbits; a host a whales. That's my personal favorite one: a host a whales! (*They look at each other.*) Carnelle says you can wiggle your ears.

DELMOUNT. Does she?

POPEYE. Yes.

DELMOUNT. (*Straightening his hair.*) It's an old trick.

POPEYE. I would liked t'have seen it.

DELMOUNT. I don't do it anymore. (*He straightens his hair again.*)

POPEYE. What d'ya dream about at nights?

DELMOUNT. (*Taken aback.*) Why do you ask?

POPEYE. I don't know, you're face looks tired. I thought maybe you was having bad dreams.

DELMOUNT. What are you saying? You make me uncomfortable. A gaggle of geese! What's that?! What are you talking about? This whole night has been unbearable! Ooooh! Now the ice cream has given me a headache. Lord Jesus! A gaggle of geese! Oh, my head! My, head! (*He exits to the bedroom, holding his head. Popeye watches him leave then she puts both of her hands over her heart and starts to sob.*)

POPEYE. Oh. Oh. Oh. I must be stupid. I must be. (*CAR-*

NELLE enters from the bedrooms. Her nose is red. She carries a wad of kleenexes and a change purse. She spots Popeye crying.)

CARNELLE. Popeye! What is it? What's the matter?

POPEYE. (*Sobbing.*) Oh, I'm stupid. I'm stupid.

CARNELLE. Why? What happened? What?

POPEYE. It seems — It seems I love him. (*Pointing to the door.*) I love Delmount.

CARNELLE. Oh, no! I knew it. I knew it.

POPEYE. But I don't know what to say. I don't know how to come to say it. I just say, "Carnelle says you can wiggle your ears." He doesn't love me. I've lost him!

CARNELLE. (*Starting to cry.*) Oh, oh. Dear, little Popeye. I've lost too. I've lost too.

POPEYE. What?

CARNELLE. The contest! I lost the Miss Firecracker Contest!

POPEYE. Oh, right.

CARNELLE. I didn't even make the finals! They don't want me. I'm a failure!

POPEYE. Oh! There, there.

CARNELLE. I'm ugly, Popeye! My thighs are fat! No one loves me!

POPEYE. (*Overlapping.*) Oh, he'll never love me! Never! Never!! Oh, I hope I don't scream out — aaahh!!!

CARNELLE. (*Overlapping as she pulls at her hair.*) I hate my hair! I hate it! (*Elain enters from the bedroom. She spots them crying.*)

ELAIN. My, God! What is it? What's wrong?! Did someone die?!

CARNELLE. (*Falling across the couch.*) Oh, don't ask! Don't ask!

ELAIN. What happened?! Please! What?!

POPEYE. (*Wiping away tears.*) Well . . . well, she's crying cause she lost the beauty contest — and, and I'm crying cause he — he — he doesn't care about me! (*Popeye breaks down crying.*)

ELAIN. Oh, I see. You poor dears. You poor dears. There, there now. Here, here, now. There, there. (*Popeye and Carnelle whimper softly.*) You don't have to worry anymore. Things'll get better. Your lives aren't over, not like mine is. No neither of you have to face the sort of tragedy I'm facing. Neither of you is starting life all over again, feeling nothing but terror and fear and loneliness! (*Popeye and Carnelle sob loudly.*) Oh, God. Oh,