

See, 'cause he's gonna be on your side.

BABE. No! Stop, Meg, stop! Don't call him up! Please don't call him up! You can't! It's too awful.

She runs over and jerks the bottom half of the phone away from Meg. Meg stands holding the receiver.

MEG. Babe!

Babe slams her half of the phone into the refrigerator.

BABE. I just can't tell some stranger all about my personal life. I just can't.

MEG. Well, hell, Babe; you're the one who said you wanted to live.

BABE. That's right. I did.

She takes the phone out of the refrigerator and hands it to Meg.

Here's the other part of the phone.

Babe moves to sit at the kitchen table. Meg takes the phone back to the counter. Babe, as she fishes a lemon out of her glass and begins sucking on it.

Meg.

MEG. What?

BABE. I called the bakery. They're gonna have Lenny's cake ready first thing tomorrow morning. That's the earliest they can get it.

MEG. All right.

BABE. I told them to write on it, "Happy Birthday Lenny—A Day Late." That sound okay?

MEG. *(At the phone.)* It sounds nice.

BABE. I ordered up the very largest size cake they have. I told them chocolate cake with white icing and red trim. Think she'll like that?

MEG. *(Dialing on the phone.)* Yeah, I'm sure she will. She'll like it.

BABE. I'm hoping. *(Blackout.)*

End of Act I

ACT II

The lights go up on the kitchen. It is later that evening on the same day. Meg's suitcase has been moved upstairs. Babe's saxophone has been taken out of the case and put together. Babe and Barnette are sitting at the kitchen table. Barnette is writing and re-checking notes with explosive intensity. Babe, who has changed into a casual shift, sits eating a bowl of oatmeal, slowly.

BARNETTE. *(To himself.)* Mmm-huh! Yes! I see, I see! Well, we can work on that! And of course, this is mere conjecture! Difficult, if not impossible, to prove. Ha! Yes. Yes, indeed. Indeed—

BABE. Sure you don't want any oatmeal?

BARNETTE. What? Oh, no. No, thank you. Let's see, ah, where were we?

BABE. I just shot Zackery.

BARNETTE. *(Looking at his notes.)* Right. Correct. You've just pulled the trigger.

BABE. Tell me, do you think Willie Jay can stay out of all this?

BARNETTE. Believe me, it is in our interest to keep him as far out of this as possible.

BABE. Good.

Throughout the following, Barnette stays glued to Babe's every word.

BARNETTE. All right, you've just shot one Zackery Botrelle, as a result of his continual physical and mental abuse—what happens now?

BABE. Well, after I shot him, I put the gun down on the piano bench and then I went out into the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade.

BARNETTE. Lemonade?

BABE. Yes, I was dying of thirst. My mouth was just as dry as a bone.

BARNETTE. So in order to quench this raging thirst that was choking you dry and preventing any possibility of you uttering intelligible sounds or phrases, you went out to the kitchen and made up a pitcher of lemonade?

BABE. Right. I made it just the way I like it with lots of sugar and lots of lemon—about ten lemons in all. Then I added two trays of ice and stirred it up with my wooden stirring spoon.

BARNETTE. Then what?

BABE. Then I drank three glasses, one right after the other. They were large glasses, about this tall. Then suddenly, my stomach kind of swoll all up. I guess what caused it was all that sour lemon.

BARNETTE. Could be.

BABE. Then what I did was... I wiped my mouth off with the back of my hand, like this...

She demonstrates.

BARNETTE. Hmmm.

BABE. I did it to clear off all those little beads of water that had settled there.

BARNETTE. I see.

BABE. Then I called out to Zackery. I said, "Zackery, I've made some lemonade. Can you use a glass?"

BARNETTE. Did he answer? Did you hear an answer?

BABE. No. He didn't answer.

BARNETTE. So, what'd you do?

BABE. I poured him a glass anyway and took it out to him.

BARNETTE. You took it out to the living room?

BABE. I did. And there he was; lying on the rug. He was looking up at me trying to speak words. I said, "What?... Lemonade?... You don't want it? Would you like a Coke instead?" Then I got the idea, he was telling me to call on the phone for medical help. So I got on the phone and called up the hospital. I gave my name and address and I told them my husband was shot and he was lying on the rug and there was plenty of blood.

Babe pauses a minute, as Barnette works frantically on his notes.

I guess that's gonna look kinda bad.

BARNETTE. What?

BABE. Me fixing that lemonade, before I called the hospital.

BARNETTE. Well, not...necessarily.

BABE. I tell you, I think the reason I made up the lemonade, I mean besides the fact that my mouth was bone dry, was that I was afraid to call the authorities. I was afraid. I—I really think I was afraid they would see that I had tried to shoot Zackery, in fact, that I had shot him, and they would accuse me of possible murder and send me away to jail.

BARNETTE. Well, that's understandable.

BABE. I think so. I mean, in fact, that's what did happen. That's what is happening—'cause here I am just about ready to go right off to the Parchment Prison Farm. Yes, here I am just practically on the brink of utter doom. Why, I feel so all alone.

BARNETTE. Now, now, look—Why, there's no reason for you to get yourself so all upset and worried. Please, don't. Please.

They look at each other for a moment.

You just keep filling in as much detailed information as you can about those incidents on the medical reports. That's all you need to think about. Don't you worry, Mrs. Botrelle, we're going to have a solid defense.

BABE. Please, don't call me Mrs. Botrelle.

BARNETTE. All right.

BABE. My name's Becky. People in the family call me Babe; but my real name's Becky.

BARNETTE. All right, Becky.

Barnette and Babe stare at each other for a long moment.

BABE. Are you sure you didn't go to Hazlehurst High?

BARNETTE. No, I went away to a boarding school.

BABE. Gosh, you sure do look familiar. You sure do.

BARNETTE. Well, I—I doubt you'll remember, but I did meet you once.

BABE. You did? When?

BARNETTE. At the Christmas bazaar, year before last. You were selling cakes and cookies and...candy.

BABE. Oh, yes! You bought the orange pound cake!

BARNETTE. Right.

BABE. Of course, and then we talked for a while. We talked about the Christmas angel.

BARNETTE. You do remember.

BABE. I remember it very well. You were even thinner then than you are now.

BARNETTE. Well, I'm surprised. I'm certainly...surprised.

The phone begins to ring.

BABE. *(As she goes to answer the phone.)* This is quite a coincidence! Don't you think it is? Why, it's almost a fluke.

She answers the phone.

Hello—Oh, hello, Lucille... Oh, he is?... Oh, he does?... Okay. Oh, Lucille, wait! Has Dog come back to the house?... Oh, I see... Okay.

Okay. *(After a brief pause.)* Hello, Zackery? How are you doing?...

Uh huh... uh huh... oh, I'm sorry... Please, don't scream... uh huh... uh huh... You want what?... No, I can't come up there now...

Well, for one thing, I don't even have the car. Lenny and Meg are up at the hospital right now, visiting with Old Granddaddy... What?...

Oh, really?... Oh, really?... Well, I've got me a lawyer that's over here right now, and he's building me up a solid defense!... Wait just a minute, I'll see. *(To Barnette.)* He wants to talk to you. He says he's

got some blackening evidence that's gonna convict me of attempting to murder him on the first degree!

BARNETTE. *(Disgustedly.)* Oh, bluff! He's bluffing! Here, hand me the phone.

He takes the phone and becomes suddenly cool and suave.

Hello, this is Mr. Barnette Lloyd speaking. I'm Mrs....ah, Becky's attorney... Why, certainly, Mr. Botrelle, I'd be more than glad to check out any pertinent information that you may have... Fine, then I'll be right on over. Goodbye.

He hangs up the phone.

BABE. What did he say?

BARNETTE. He wants me to come see him at the hospital this evening. Says he's got some sort of evidence. Sounds highly suspect to me.

BABE. Oooh! Didn't you just hate his voice? Doesn't he have the most awful voice! I just hate! I can't bear to hear it!

BARNETTE. Well, now—now, wait. Wait just a minute.

BABE. What?

BARNETTE. I have a solution. From now on I'll handle all communications between you two. You can simply refuse to speak with him.

BABE. All right—I will. I'll do that.

BARNETTE. *(Starting to pack his briefcase.)* Well, I'd better get over there and see just what he's got up his sleeve.

BABE. *(After a pause.)* Barnette.

BARNETTE. Yes?

BABE. What's the personal vendetta about? You know, the one you have to settle with Zackery.

BARNETTE. Oh, it's—it's complicated. It's a very complicated matter.

BABE. I see.

BARNETTE. The major thing he did was to ruin my father's life. He took away his job, his home, his health, his respectability. I don't like to talk about it.

BABE. I'm sorry. I just wanted to say—I hope you win it. I hope you win your vendetta.

BARNETTE. Thank you.

BABE. I think it's an important thing that a person could win a lifelong vendetta.

BARNETTE. Yes. Well, I'd better be going.

BABE. All right. Let me know what happens.

BARNETTE. I will. I'll get back to you right away.

BABE. Thanks.

BARNETTE. Goodbye, Becky.

BABE. Goodbye, Barnette.