

BABE. But, I tell you, Lenny, after it happened, Meg started doing all sorts of these strange things.

LENNY. She did? Like what?

BABE. Like things I never wanted to tell you about.

LENNY. What sort of things?

BABE. Well, for instance, back when we used to go over to the library, Meg would spend all her time reading and looking through this old black book called Diseases of the Skin. It was full of the most sickening pictures you'd ever seen. Things like rotting-away noses and eyeballs drooping off down the sides of people's faces and scabs and sores and eaten-away places all over all parts of people's bodies.

LENNY. *(Trying to pour her coffee.)* Babe, please! That's enough.

BABE. Anyway, she'd spend hours and hours just forcing herself to look through this book. Why, it was the same way she'd force herself to look at the poster of crippled children stuck up in the window at Dixieland Drugs. You know, that one where they want you to give a dime. Meg would stand there and stare at their eyes and look at the braces on their little crippled-up legs—then she'd purposely go and spend her dime on a double-scoop ice cream cone and eat it all down. She'd say to me, "See, I can stand it. I can stand it. Just look how I'm gonna be able to stand it."

LENNY. That's awful.

BABE. She said she was afraid of being a weak person. I guess 'cause she cried in bed every night for such a long time.

LENNY. Goodness mercy. *(After a pause.)* Well, I suppose you'd have to be a pretty hard person to be able to do what she did to Doc Porter.

BABE. *(Exasperated.)* Oh, shoot! It wasn't Meg's fault that hurricane wiped Biloxi away. I never understood why people were blaming all that on Meg—just because that roof fell in and crunched Doc's leg. It wasn't her fault.

LENNY. Well, it was Meg who refused to evacuate. Jim Craig and some of Doc's other friends were all down there and they kept trying to get everyone to evacuate. But Meg refused. She wanted to stay on because she thought a hurricane would be—oh, I don't know—a lot

of fun. Then everyone says she baited Doc into staying with her. She said she'd marry him if he'd stay.

BABE. *(Taken aback by this new information.)* Well, he has a mind of his own. He could have gone.

LENNY. But he didn't. 'Cause... 'cause he loved her. And then after the roof caved, and they got Doc to the high school gym, Meg just left. She just left him there to leave for California—'cause of her career, she says. I think it was a shameful thing to do. It took almost a year for his leg to heal and after that he gave up his medical career altogether. He said he was tired of hospitals. It's such a sad thing. Everyone always knew he was gonna be a doctor. We've called him Doc for years.

BABE. I don't know. I guess, I don't have any room to talk; 'cause I just don't know.

*Pause.*

Gosh, you look so tired.

LENNY. I feel tired.

BABE. They say women need a lot of iron...so they won't feel tired.

LENNY. What's got iron in it? Liver?

BABE. Yeah, liver's got it. And vitamin pills.

*After a moment, Meg enters. She carries a bottle of bourbon that is already minus a few slugs and a newspaper. She is wearing black boots, a dark dress, and a hat. The room goes silent.*

MEG. Hello.

BABE. *(Fooling with her hair.)* Hi Meg.

*Lenny quietly sips her coffee.*

MEG. *(Handing the newspaper to Babe.)* Here's your paper.

BABE. Thanks.

*She opens it.*

Oh, here it is, right on the front page.

*Meg lights a cigarette.*

Where's the scissors, Lenny?

LENNY. Look in there in the ribbon drawer.



BABE. Okay.

*Babe gets the scissors and glue out of the drawer and slowly begins cutting out the newspaper article.*

MEG. (After a few moments filled only with the snipping of scissor.) All right—I lied! I lied! I couldn't help it...these stories just came pouring out of my mouth! When I saw how tired and sick Old Granddaddy'd gotten—they just flew out! All I wanted was to see him smiling and happy. I just wasn't going to sit there and look at him all miserable and sick and sad! I just wasn't!

BABE. Oh, Meg, he is sick, isn't he—

MEG. Why, he's gotten all white and milky—he's almost evaporated!

LENNY. (Gasping and turning to Meg.) But still you shouldn't have lied! It just was wrong for you to tell such lies—

MEG. Well, I know that! Don't you think I know that? I hate myself when I lie for that old man. I do. I feel so weak. And then I have to go and do at least three or four things that I know he'd despise just to get even with that miserable, old, bossy man!

LENNY. Oh, Meg, please, don't talk so about Old Granddaddy! It sounds so ungrateful. Why, he went out of his way to make a home for us; to treat us like we were his very own children. All he ever wanted was the best for us. That's all he ever wanted.

MEG. Well, I guess it was; but sometimes I wonder what we wanted.

BABE. (Taking the newspaper article and glue over to her suitcase.) Well, one thing I wanted was a team of white horses to ride Mama's coffin to her grave. That's one thing I wanted.

*Lenny and Meg exchange looks.*

LENNY, did you remember to pack my photo album?

LENNY. It's down there at the bottom, under all that night stuff.

BABE. Oh, I found it.

LENNY. Really, Babe, I don't understand why you have to put in the articles that are about the unhappy things in your life. Why would you want to remember them?

BABE. (Pasting the article in.) I don't know. I just like to keep an accurate record, I suppose. There.

*She begins flipping through the book.*

Look, here's a picture of me when I got married.

MEG. Let's see.

*Babe brings the photo album over to the table. They all look at it.*

LENNY. My word, you look about twelve years old.

BABE. I was just eighteen.

MEG. You're smiling, Babe. Were you happy then?

BABE. (Laughing.) Well, I was drunk on champagne punch. I remember that!

*They turn the page.*

LENNY. Oh, there's Meg singing at Greeny's!

BABE. Oooh, I wish you were still singing at Greeny's! I wish you were!

LENNY. You're so beautiful!

BABE. Yes, you are. You're beautiful.

MEG. Oh, stop! I'm not—

LENNY. Look, Meg's starting to cry.

BABE. Oh, Meg—

MEG. I'm not—

BABE. Quick, better turn the page; we don't want Meg crying—

*She flips the pages.*

LENNY. Why, it's Daddy.

MEG. Where'd you get that picture, Babe? I thought she burned them all.

BABE. Ah, I just found it around.

LENNY. What does it say here? What's that inscription?

BABE. It says "Jimmy—clowning at the beach—1952."

LENNY. Well, will you look at that smile.

MEG. Jesus, those white teeth—turn the page, will you; we can't do any worse than this!

*They turn the page. The room goes silent.*



BABE. It's Mama and the cat.  
LENNY. Oh, turn the page—  
BABE. That old yellow cat. You know, I bet if she hadn't of hung that old cat along with her, she wouldn't have gotten all that national coverage.  
MEG. *(After a moment, hopelessly.)* Why are we talking about this?  
LENNY. Meg's right. It was so sad. It was awfully sad. I remember how we all three just sat up on that bed the day of the service all dressed up in our black velveteen suits crying the whole morning long.  
BABE. We used up one whole big box of Kleenexes.  
MEG. And then Old Granddaddy came in and said he was gonna take us out to breakfast. Remember, he told us not to cry anymore 'cause he was gonna take us out to get banana splits for breakfast.  
BABE. That's right—banana splits for breakfast!  
MEG. Why, Lenny was fourteen years old and he thought that would make it all better—  
BABE. Oh, I remember he said for us to eat all we wanted. I think I ate about five! He kept shoving them down us!  
MEG. God, we were so sick!  
LENNY. Oh, we were!  
MEG. *(Laughing.)* Lenny's face turned green—  
LENNY. I was just as sick as a dog!  
BABE. Old Grandmama was furious!  
LENNY. Oh, she was!  
MEG. The thing about Old Granddaddy is he keeps trying to make us happy and we end up getting stomach aches and turning green and throwing up in the flower arrangements.  
BABE. Oh, that was me! I threw up in the flowers! Oh, no! How embarrassing!  
LENNY. *(Laughing.)* Oh, Babe—  
BABE. *(Hugging her sisters.)* Oh, Lenny! Oh, Meg!  
MEG. Oh, Babe! Oh, Lenny! It's so good to be home!  
LENNY. Hey, I have an idea—

BABE. What?  
LENNY. Let's play cards!!  
BABE. Oh, let's do!  
MEG. All right!  
LENNY. Oh, good! It'll be just like when we used to sit around the table playing hearts all night long.  
BABE. I know! *(Getting up.)* I'll fix us up some popcorn and hot chocolate—  
MEG. *(Getting up.)* Here, let me get out that old black popcorn pot.  
LENNY. *(Getting up.)* Oh, yes! Now, let's see, I think I have a deck of cards around here somewhere.  
BABE. Gosh, I hope I remember all the rules—Are hearts good or bad?  
MEG. Bad, I think. Aren't they, Lenny?  
LENNY. That's right. Hearts are bad, but the Black Sister is the worst of all—  
MEG. Oh, that's right! And the Black Sister is the Queen of Spades.  
BABE. *(Figuring it out.)* And spades are the black cards that aren't the puppy dog feet?  
MEG. *(Thinking a moment.)* Right. And she counts a lot of points.  
BABE. And points are bad?  
MEG. Right. Here, I'll get some paper so we can keep score.  
*The phone begins to ring.*  
LENNY. Oh, here they are!  
MEG. I'll get it—  
LENNY. Why, look at these cards! They're years old!  
BABE. Oh, let me see!  
MEG. Hello... No, this is Meg Magrath... Doc. How are you?... Well, good... You're where?... Well, sure. Come on over... Sure, I'm sure. Yeah, come right on over... All right. 'Bye.  
*She hangs up.*  
That was Doc Porter. He's down the street at Al's Grill. He's gonna come on over.  
LENNY. He is?