

# HERE WE ARE

by Dorothy Parker

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over the world, getting married just as if it was nothing. Chinese people and everybody. Just as if it wasn't anything.

HE. Well, let's not worry about people all over the world. Let's don't think about a lot of Chinese. We've got something better to think about, I mean. I mean—well, what do we care about them?

SHE. I know, but I just sort of got to thinking of them, all of them, all over everywhere, doing it all the time. At least, I mean—getting married, you know. And it's—well, it's sort of such a big thing to do, it makes you feel queer. You think of them, all of them, all doing it just like it wasn't anything. And how does anybody know what's going to happen next?

HE. Let them worry, we don't have to. We know darn well what's going to happen next. I mean—well, we know it's going to be great. Well, we know we're going to be happy. Don't we?

SHE. Oh, of course. Only you think of all the people, and you have to sort of keep thinking. It makes you feel funny. An awful lot of people that get married, it doesn't turn out so well. And I guess they all must have thought it was going to be great.

HE. Aw, come on, now, this is no way to start a honeymoon, with all this thinking going on. Look at us—all married and everything done. I mean. The wedding all done and all.

SHE. Ah, it was nice, wasn't it? Did you really like my veil?

HE. You looked great, just great.

SHE. Oh, I'm terribly glad. Ellie and Louise looked lovely, didn't they? I'm terribly glad they did finally decide on pink. They looked perfectly lovely.

HE. Listen, I want to tell you something. When I was standing up there in that old church waiting for you to come up, and I saw those two bridesmaids, I thought to myself, I thought, "Well, I never knew Louise could look

## HERE WE ARE

SCENE: A compartment in a Pullman car. He is storing the suitcases in the rack and hanging up coats. She is primpsing. He finishes disposing of the luggage and sits.

HE. Well

SHE. Well

HE. Well, here we are.

SHE. Here we are, aren't we?

HE. Eeyop. I should say we are. Here we are.

SHE. Well

HE. Well! Well! How does it feel to be an old married lady?

SHE. Oh, it's too soon to ask me that. At least—I mean. Well, I mean, goodness, we've only been married about three hours, haven't we?

HE. We have been married exactly two hours and twenty-six minutes.

SHE. My, it seems like longer.

HE. No, it isn't hardly half-past six yet.

SHE. It seems like later. I guess it's because it starts getting dark so early.

HE. It does, at that. The nights are going to be pretty long from now on. I mean. I mean—well, it starts getting dark early.

SHE. I didn't have any idea what time it was. Everything was so mixed up, I sort of don't know where I am, or what it's all about. Getting back from the church, and then all those people, and then changing all my clothes, and then everybody throwing things, and all. Goodness, I don't see how people do it every day.

HE. Do what?

SHE. Get married. When you think of all the people, all

like that!" I thought she'd have knocked anybody's eye out.

SHE. Oh, really? Funny. Of course, everybody thought her dress and hat were lovely, but a lot of people seemed to think she looked sort of tired. People have been saying that a lot, lately. I tell them I think it's awfully mean of them to go around saying that about her. I tell them they've got to remember that Louise isn't so terribly young any more, and they've got to expect her to look like that. Louise can say she's twenty-three all she wants to, but she's a good deal nearer twenty-seven.

HE. Well, she was certainly a knockout at the wedding. Boy!

SHE. I'm terribly glad you thought so. I'm glad someone did. How did you think Ellie looked?

HE. Why, I honestly didn't get a look at her.

SHE. Oh, really? Well, I certainly think that's too bad. I don't suppose I ought to say it about my own sister, but I never saw anybody look as beautiful as Ellie looked today. And always so sweet and unselfish, too. And you didn't even notice her. But you never pay attention to Ellie, anyway. Don't think I haven't noticed it. It makes me feel just terrible. It makes me feel just awful that you don't like my own sister.

HE. I do so like her! I'm crazy for Ellie. I think she's a great kid.

SHE. Don't think it makes any difference to Ellie! Ellie's got enough people crazy about her. It isn't anything to her whether you like her or not. Don't flatter yourself she cares! Only, the only thing is, it makes it awfully hard for me you don't like her, that's the only thing. I keep thinking, when we come back and get in the apartment and everything, it's going to be awfully hard for me that you won't want all my family around. I know how you feel about my family. Don't think I haven't seen it. Only, if you don't ever want to see them, that's your loss. Not theirs. Don't flatter yourself!

HE. Oh, now, come on! What's all this talk about not wanting your family around? Why, you know how I feel about your family. I think your old lady—I think your mother's swell. And Ellie. And your father. What's all this talk?

SHE. Well, I've seen it. Don't think I haven't. Lots of people they get married, and they think it's going to be great and everything, and then it all goes to pieces because people don't like people's families, or something like that. Don't tell me! I've seen it happen.

HE. Honey, what is all this? What are you getting all angry about? Hey, look, this is our honeymoon. What are you trying to start a fight for? Ah, I guess you're just feeling sort of nervous.

SHE. Me? What have I got to be nervous about? I mean, I mean, goodness, I'm not nervous.

HE. You know, lots of times, they say that girls get kind of nervous and yippy on account of thinking about—I mean. I mean—well, it's like you said, things are all so sort of mixed up and everything, right now. But afterwards, it'll be all right. I mean. I mean—well, look, honey, you don't look any too comfortable. Don't you want to take your hat off? And let's don't ever fight, ever. Will we?

SHE. Ah, I'm sorry I was cross. I guess I did feel a little bit funny. All mixed up, and then thinking of all those people all over everywhere, and then being sort of way off here, all alone with you. It's so sort of different. It's sort of such a big thing. You can't blame a person for thinking, can you? Yes, don't let's ever, ever fight. We won't be like a whole lot of them. We won't fight or be nasty or anything. Will we?

HE. You bet your life we won't.

SHE. I guess I will take this darned old hat off. It kind of presses. Just put it up on the rack, will you, dear? Do you like it, sweetheart?

HE. Looks good on you.

SHE. No, but I mean, do you really like it?

HE. Well, I'll tell you, I know this is the new style and everything like that, and it's probably great. I don't know anything about things like that. Only I like the kind of a hat like that blue hat you had. Gee, I like that hat.

SHE. Oh, really? Well, that's nice. That's lovely. The first thing you say to me, as soon as you get me off on a train away from my family and everything, is that you don't like my hat. The first thing you say to your wife is you think she has terrible taste in hats. That's nice, isn't it?

HE. Now, honey, I never said anything like that. I only said—

SHE. What you don't seem to realize is this hat cost twenty-two dollars. Twenty-two dollars. And that horrible old blue thing you think you're so crazy about, that cost three ninety-five.

HE. I don't give a darn what they cost. I only said—I said I liked that blue hat. I don't know anything about hats. I'll be crazy about this one as soon as I get used to it. Only it's kind of not like your other hats. I don't know about the new styles. What do I know about women's hats?

SHE. It's too bad you didn't marry somebody that would get the kind of hats you'd like. Hats that cost three ninety-five. Why didn't you marry Louise? You always think she looks so beautiful. You'd love her taste in hats. Why didn't you marry her?

HE. Ah, now, honey, for heaven's sakes!

SHE. Why didn't you marry her? All you've done, ever since we got on this train, is talk about her. Here I've sat and sat, and just listened to you saying how wonderful Louise is. I suppose that's nice, getting me off here all alone with you, and then raving about Louise right in front

of my face. Why didn't you ask her to marry you? I'm sure she would have jumped at the chance. There aren't so many people asking her to marry them. It's too bad you didn't marry her. I'm sure you'd have been much happier.

HE. Listen, baby, while you're talking about things like that, why didn't you marry Joe Brooks? I suppose he could have given you all the twenty-two-dollar hats you wanted, I suppose!

SHE. Well, I'm not so sure I'm not sorry I didn't. There! Joe Brooks wouldn't have waited until he got me all off alone and then sneered at my taste in clothes. Joe Brooks wouldn't ever hurt my feelings. Joe Brooks has always been fond of me.

HE. Yeah, he's fond of you. He was so fond of you he didn't even send a wedding present. That's how fond of you he was.

SHE. I happen to know for a fact that he was away on business, and as soon as he comes back he's going to give me anything I want for the apartment.

HE. Listen, I don't want anything he gives you in our apartment. Anything he gives you, I'll throw right out the window. That's what I think of your friend Joe Brooks. And how do you know where he is and what he's going to do, anyway? Has he been writing to you?

SHE. I suppose my friends can correspond with me. I didn't hear there was any law against that.

HE. Well, I suppose they can't! And what do you think of that? I'm not going to have my wife getting a lot of letters from cheap traveling salesmen!

SHE. Joe Brooks is not a cheap traveling salesman! He is not! He gets a wonderful salary.

HE. Oh yeah? Where did you hear that?

SHE. He told me so himself.

HE. Oh, he told you so himself. I see. He told you so himself.

SHE. You've got a lot of right to talk about Joe Brooks. You and your friend Louise. All you ever talk about is Louise.

HE. Oh, for heaven's sakes! What do I care about Louise? I just thought she was a friend of yours, that's all. That's why I ever noticed her.

SHE. Well, you certainly took an awful lot of notice of her today. On our wedding day! You said yourself when you were standing there in the church you just kept thinking of her. Right up at the altar. Oh, right in the presence of God! And all you thought about was Louise.

HE. Listen, honey, I never should have said that. How does anybody know what kind of crazy things come into their heads when they're standing there waiting to get married? I was just telling you that because it was so kind of crazy. I thought it would make you laugh.

SHE. I know, I've been all sort of mixed up today, too. I told you that. Everything so strange and everything. And me all the time thinking about all those people all over the world, and now us here all alone, and everything. I know you get all mixed up. Only I did think, when you kept talking about how beautiful Louise looked, you did it with malice and forethought.

HE. I never did anything with malice and forethought! I just told you that about Louise because I thought it would make you laugh.

SHE. Well, it didn't.

HE. No, I know it didn't. It certainly did not. Ah, baby, and we ought to be laughing, too. Hell, honey lamb, this is our honeymoon. What's the matter?

SHE. I don't know. We used to squabble a lot when we were going together and then engaged and everything, but I thought everything would be so different as soon as you were married. And now I feel so sort of strange and everything. I feel so sort of alone.

HE. Well, you see, sweetheart, we're not really married yet.

I mean. I mean--well, things will be different afterwards. Oh, hell. I mean, we haven't been married very long.

HE. No.

SHE. Well, we haven't got much longer to wait now. I mean--well, we'll be in New York in about twenty minutes. Then we can have dinner, and sort of see what we feel like doing. Or, I mean--is there anything special you want to do tonight?

HE. What?

SHE. What I mean to say, would you like to go to a show or something?

HE. Why, whatever you like. I sort of didn't think people went to theaters and things on their--I mean, I've got a couple of letters I simply must write. Don't let me forget.

SHE. Oh, you're going to write letters tonight?

HE. Well, you see, I've been perfectly terrible. What with all the excitement and everything. I never did thank poor Old Mrs. Sprague for her berry spoon, and I never did a thing about those book ends the McMasters sent. It's just too awful of me. I've got to write them this very night.

SHE. And when you've finished writing your letters, maybe I could get you a magazine or a bag of peanuts.

SHE. What?

HE. I mean, I wouldn't want you to be bored.

SHE. As if I could be bored with you! Silly! Aren't we married? Bored!

HE. What I thought, I thought when we got in, we could go right up to the Biltmore and anyway leave our bags, and maybe have a little dinner in the room, kind of quiet, and then do whatever we wanted. I mean. I mean--well, let's go right up there from the station.

SHE. Oh, yes, let's. I'm so glad we're going to the Biltmore. I just love it. The twice I've stayed in New York we've always stayed there, Papa and Mamma and Ellie and I,

and I was crazy about it. I always sleep so well there. I go right off to sleep the minute I put my head on the pillow.

HE. Oh, you do?

SHE. At least, I mean, way up high it's so quiet.

HE. We might go to some show or other tomorrow night instead of tonight. Don't you think that would be better?

SHE. Yes, I think it might.

HE. Do you really have to write those letters tonight?

SHE. Well, I don't suppose they'd get there any quicker than if I wrote them tomorrow.

HE. And we won't ever fight any more, will we?

SHE. Oh, no. Not ever! I don't know what made me do like that. It all got so sort of funny, sort of like a nightmare, the way I got thinking of all those people getting married all the time; and so many of them, everything spoils on account of fighting and everything. I got all mixed up thinking about them. Oh, I don't want to be like them. But we won't be, will we?

HE. Sure we won't.

SHE. We won't go all to pieces. We won't fight. It'll all be different, now we're married. It'll all be lovely. Reach me down my hat, will you, sweetheart? It's time I was putting it on. Thanks. Ah, I'm sorry you don't like it.

HE. I do so like it!

SHE. You said you didn't. You said you thought it was perfectly terrible.

HE. I never said any such thing. You're crazy.

SHE. All right, I may be crazy. Thank you very much. But that's what you said. Not that it matters—it's just a little thing. But it makes you feel pretty funny to think you've gone and married somebody that says you have perfectly terrible taste in hats. And then goes and says you're crazy, besides.

HE. Now, listen here, nobody said any such thing. Why, I

love that hat. The more I look at it the better I like it. I think it's great.

SHE. That isn't what you said before.

HE. Honey, stop it, will you? What do you want to start all this for? I love the damned hat. I mean, I love your hat. I love anything you wear. What more do you want me to say?

SHE. Well, I don't want you to say it like that.

HE. I said I think it's great. That's all I said.

SHE. Do you really? Do you honestly? Ah, I'm so glad. I'd hate you not to like my hat. It would be—I don't know, it would be sort of such a bad start.

HE. Well, I'm crazy for it. Now we've got that settled, for heaven's sakes. Ah, baby. Baby lamb. We're not going to have any bad starts. Look at us—we're on our honeymoon. Pretty soon we'll be regular old married people. I mean, I mean, in a few minutes we'll be getting in to New York, and then we'll be going to the hotel, and then everything will be all right. I mean—well, look at us! Here we are married! Here we are!

SHE. Yes, here we are, aren't we?

CURTAIN

# 27 WAGONS FULL OF COTTON

by Tennessee Williams

## CHARACTERS

JAKE MEIGHAN, a cotton-gin owner.

FLORA MEIGHAN, his wife.

SILVA VICARRO, superintendent of the Syndicate Plantation.

*All of the action takes place on the front porch of the Meighans' residence near Blue Mountain, Mississippi.*

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## 27 WAGONS FULL OF COTTON

SCENE: *The front porch of the Meighans' cottage near Blue Mountain, Mississippi. The porch is narrow and rises into a single narrow gable. There are spindling white pillars on either side supporting the porch roof and a door of Gothic design and two Gothic windows on either side of it. The peaked door has an oval of richly stained glass, azure, crimson, emerald and gold. At the windows are fluffy white curtains gathered coquettishly in the middle by baby-blue satin bows. The effect is not unlike a doll's house.*

## SCENE I

*It is early evening and there is a faint rosy dusk in the sky. Shortly after the curtain rises, JAKE MEIGHAN, a fat man of sixty, scrambles out the front door and races around the corner of the house carrying a gallon can of coal-oil. A dog barks at him. A car is heard starting and receding rapidly in the distance. A moment later FLORA calls from inside the house.*

FLORA. *Jake! I've lost m' white kid purse! (closer to the door) Jake? Look'n see 'f uh laid it on th' swing. (There is a pause). Guess I could've left it in th' Chevy? (She comes up to screen door). Jake. Look'n see if uh left it in th' Chevy. Jake? (She steps outside in the fading rosy dusk. She switches on the porch light and stares about, slapping at gnats attracted by the light. Locusts provide the only answering voice. FLORA gives a long nasal call). Ja-ay--a-a-ake! (A cow moos in the distance with the same inflection. There is a muffled explosion somewhere about half a mile away. A strange flickering glow appears, the reflection of a burst of flame. Distant voices are heard exclaiming.)*

VOICES (*shrill, cackling like hens*).

You heah that noise?

Yeah! Sound like a bomb went off!  
Oh, look!

Why, it's a fire!

Where's it at? You tell!

Th' Syndicate Plantation!

Oh, my God! Let's go! (*A fire whistle sounds in the distance.*)

Henry! Start th' car! You all wanta go with us?

Yeah, we'll be right out!

Hurry, honey! (*A car can be heard starting up.*)

Be right there!

Well, hurry.

VOICE (*just across the dirt road*). Missus Meighan?

FLORA. Ye-ah?

VOICE. Ahn't you goin' th' fire?

FLORA. I wish I could but Jake's gone off in th' Chevy.

VOICE. Come awn an' go with us, honey!

FLORA. Oh, I can't an' leave th' house wide open Jake's gone off with th' keys. What do you all think it is on fire?

VOICE. Th' Syndicate Plantation!

FLORA. Th' Syndicate Plan-ta-tion? (*The car starts off and recedes*). Oh, my Go-od! (*She climbs laboriously back up on the porch and sits on the swing which faces the front. She speaks tragically to herself*). Nobody! Nobody! Never! Never! Nobody! (*Locusts can be heard. A car is heard approaching and stopping at a distance back of house. After a moment Jake ambles casually up around the side of the house.*)

FLORA (*in a petulant babyish tone*). Well

JAKE. Whatsamatter, Baby?

FLORA. I never known a human being could be that mean an' thoughtless!

JAKE. Aw, now, that's a mighty broad statement fo' you to make, Mrs. Meighan. What's the complaint this time?

FLORA. Just flew out of the house without even sayin' a word!

JAKE. What's so bad about that?

FLORA. I told you I had a headache comin' on an' had to have a dope, there wassen a single bottle lef' in th' house, an' you said, Yeah, get into yuh things 'n' we'll drive in town right away! So I get into m' things an' I can't find m' white kid purse. Then I remember I left it on th' front seat of th' Chevy. I come out here t' git it. Where are you? Gone off! Without a word! Then there's a big explosion! Feel my heart!

JAKE. Feel my baby's heart? (*He puts a hand on her huge bosom.*)

FLORA. Yeah, just you feel it, poundin' like a hammer! How'd I know what happened? You not here, just disappeared somewhere!

JAKE (*sharply*). Shut up! (*He pushes her head roughly.*)

FLORA. Jake! What did you do that fo'?

JAKE. I don't like how you holler! Holler ev'ry thing you say!

FLORA. What's the matter with you?

JAKE. Nothing's the matter with me.

FLORA. Well, why did you go off?

JAKE. I didn' go off!

FLORA. You certainly *did* go off! Try an' tell me that you never went off when I just now seen an' heard you drivin' back in th' car? What uh you take me faw? No sense a-tall!

JAKE. If you got sense you keep your big mouth shut!

FLORA. Don't talk to me like that!

JAKE. Come on inside.

FLORA. I won't. Selfish an' inconsiderate, that's what you are! I told you at supper, There's not a bottle of Coca-Cola left on th' place. You said, Okay, right after supper we'll drive on over to th' White Star drugstore

an' lay in a good supply. When I come out of th' house—  
JAKE (*he stands in front of her and grips her neck with both hands*). Look here! Listen to what I tell you!

FLORA. Jake!

JAKE. Shhh! Just listen, Baby.

FLORA. Lemme go! G'damn you, le' go my throat!

JAKE. Jus' try an' concentrate on what I tell yuh!

FLORA. Tell me what?

JAKE. I ain't been off th' po'ch.

FLORA. Huh!

JAKE. I ain't been off th' front po'ch! Not since supper! Understand that, now?

FLORA. Jake, honey, you've gone out of you' mind!

JAKE. Maybe so. Never you mind. Just get that straight an' keep it in your haid. I ain't been off the porch of this house since supper.

FLORA. But you sure as God *was* off it! (*He twists her wrist*). Ouuuul! Stop it, stop it!

JAKE. Where have I been since supper?

FLORA. Here, here! On th' porch! Fo' God's sake, quit that twistin'!

JAKE. Where have I been?

FLORA. Porch! Porch! Here!

JAKE. Doin' what?

FLORA. Jake!

JAKE. Doin' what?

FLORA. Lemme go! Christ, Jake! Let loose! Quit twisting, you'll break my wrist!

JAKE (*laughing between his teeth*). Doin' what? What doin'? Since supper?

FLORA (*crying out*). How in hell do I know!

JAKE. 'Cause you was right here with me, all the time, for every second! You an' me, sweetheart, was sittin' here together on th' swing, just swingin' back an' forth every

minute since supper! You got that in your haid good now?

FLORA (*whimpering*). Le'-go!

JAKE. Got it? In your haid good now?

FLORA. Yeh, yeh, yeh—leggol.

JAKE. What was I doin', then?

FLORA. Swingin'! For Christ's sake—swingin'! (*He releases her. She whimpers and rubs her wrist but the impression is that the experience was not without pleasure for both parties. She groans and whimpers. He grips her loose curls in his hand and bends her head back. He plants a long wet kiss on her mouth.*)

FLORA (*whimpering*). Mmmm-hummm! Mmmm! Mmmm!

JAKE (*huskily*). Tha's my sweet' baby girl.

FLORA. Mmmmm! Hurt! Hurt!

JAKE. Hurt?

FLORA. Mmmmm! Hurt!

JAKE. Kiss?

FLORA. Mmmmm!

JAKE. Good?

FLORA. Mmmmm . . .

JAKE. Good! Make little room.

FLORA. Too hot!

JAKE. Go on, make little room.

FLORA. Mmmmm . . .

JAKE. Cross patch?

FLORA. Mmmmm.

JAKE. Whose baby? Big? Sweet?

FLORA. Mmmmm! Hurt!

JAKE. Kiss! (*He lifts her wrist to his lips and makes gobbling sounds.*)

FLORA (*giggling*). Stop! Silly! Mmmmm!

JAKE. What would I do if you was a big piece of cake?

FLORA. Silly.

JAKE. Gobble! Gobble!

FLORA. Oh, you—

JAKE. What would I do if you was angel food cake? Big white piece with lots of nice thick icin'?

FLORA (*giggling*). Quit!

JAKE. Gobble, gobble, gobble!

FLORA (*squealing*). Jake!

JAKE. Huh?

FLORA. You tick-le!

JAKE. Answer little question!

FLORA. Wh-at?

JAKE. Where I been since supper?

FLORA. Off in the Chevy! (*He instantly seizes the wrist again. She shrieks.*)

JAKE. Where've I been since supper?

FLORA. Po'ch! Swing!

JAKE. Doin' what?

FLORA. *Swingin'!* Oh, Christ, Jake, let loose!

JAKE. Hurt?

FLORA. Mmmmm . . .

JAKE. Good?

FLORA (*whimpering*). Mmmmm . . .

JAKE. Now you know where I been an' what I been doin' since supper?

FLORA. Yeah . . .

JAKE. Case anybody should ask?

FLORA. Who's going to ast?

JAKE. Never mind who's goin' t' ast, just you know the answers! Uh-huh?

FLORA. Uh-huh. (*Lisping babyishly*). This is where you been. Settin' on th' swing since we had supper. Swingin'—back an' fo'th—back an' fo'th. . . . You didn' go off in

th' Chevy. (Slowly). An' you was awfly surprised w'en th' syndicate fire broke out! (JAKE slaps her). Jakel JAKE. Everything you said is awright. But don't you get ideas.

FLORA. Ideas?

JAKE. A woman like you's not made to have ideas. Made to be hugged an' squeezed!

FLORA (babyishly). Mmmm. . . .

JAKE. But not for ideas. So don't you have ideas. (He rises). Go out an' get in th' Chevy.

FLORA. We goin' to th' fire?

JAKE. No. We ain' goin' no fire. We goin' in town an' get us a case a dopes because we're hot an' thirsty.

FLORA (vaguely, as she rises). I lost m' white-kid-purse . . .

JAKE. It's on the seat of th' Chevy whe' you left it.

FLORA. Whe' you goin'?

JAKE. I'm goin' in t' th' toilet. I'll be right out. (He goes inside, letting the screen door slam. FLORA shuffles to the edge of the steps and stands there with a slight idiotic smile. She begins to descend, letting herself down each time with the same foot, like a child just learning to walk. She stops at the bottom of the steps and stares at the sky, vacantly and raptly, her fingers closing gently around the bruised wrist. JAKE can be heard singing inside.)

My baby don' care fo' rings  
or other expensive things—

My baby just cares-fo'-me!

CURTAIN

SCENE II

It is just after noon. The sky is the color of the satin bows on the window curtains—a translucent, innocent blue. Heat devils are shimmering over the flat Delta country and

the peaked white front of the house is like a shrill exclamation. JAKE's gin is busy; heard like a steady pulse across the road. A delicate lint of cotton is drifting about in the atmosphere.

JAKE appears, a large and purposeful man with arms like hams covered with a fuzz of fine blond hair. He is followed by SILVA VICARRO who is the Superintendent of the Syndicate Plantation where the fire occurred last night. VICARRO is a rather small and wry man of dark Latin looks and nature. He wears whipcord breeches, laced boots, and a white undershirt. He has a Roman Catholic medallion on a chain about his neck.

JAKE (with the good-natured condensation of a very large man for a small one). Well, suh, all I got to say is you're a mighty lucky little fellow.

VICARRO. Lucky? In what way?

JAKE. That I can take on a job like this right now! Twenty-seven wagons full of cotton's a pretty big piece of business, Mr. Vicarro. (Stopping at the steps). Baby! (He bites off a piece of tobacco plug). What's yuh fir's name?

VICARRO. Silva.

JAKE. How do you spell it?

VICARRO. S-I-L-V-A.

JAKE. Silva! Like a silver lining! Ev'ry cloud has got a silver lining. What does that come from? The Bible?

VICARRO (sitting on the steps). No. The Mother Goose Book.

JAKE. Well, suh, you sure are lucky that I can do it. If I'd been busy like I was two weeks ago I would've turned it down. BABY! COME OUT HERE A MINUTE! (There is a vague response from inside.)

VICARRO. Lucky. Very lucky. (He lights a cigarette. FLORA pushes open the screen door and comes out. She has on her watermelon pink silk dress and is clutching against

*her body the big white kid purse with her initials on it in big nickel plate.*)

JAKE (*proudly*). Mr. Vicarro—I want you to meet Mrs. Meighan. Baby, this is a very down-at-the-mouth young fellow I want you to cheer up fo' me. He thinks he's out of luck because his cotton gin burnt down. He's got twenty-seven wagons full of cotton to be ginned out on a hurry-up order from his most important customers in Mobile. Well, suh, I said to him, Mr. Vicarro, you're to be congratulated—not because it burnt down, but because I happen to be in a situation to take the business over. Now you tell him just how lucky he is!

FLORA (*nervously*). Well, I guess he don't see how it was lucky to have his gin burned down.

VICARRO (*acidly*). No, ma'am.

JAKE (*quickly*). Mr. Vicarro. Some fellows marry a girl when she's little an' tiny. They like a small figure. See? Then, when the girl gets comfo'tably settled down—what does she do? Puts on flesh—of cou'sel

FLORA (*bashfully*). Jakel

JAKE. Now then! How do they react? Accept it as a matter of cou'se, as something which 'as been ordained by nature? Nope! No, suh, not a bit! They sta't to feeling abused. They think that fate must have a grudge against them because the little woman is not so little as she used to be. Because she's gone an' put on a matronly figure. Well, suh, that's at the root of a lot of domestic trouble. However, Mr. Vicarro, I never made that mistake. When I fell in love with this baby-doll I've got here, she was just the same size then that you see her today.

FLORA (*crossing shyly to porch rail*). Jake . . .

JAKE (*grinning*). A woman not large but tremendous! That's how I liked her—tremendous! I told her right off, when I slipped th' ring on her finger, one Satiddy night in a boathouse on Moon Lake—I said to her, Honey, if

you take off one single pound of that body—I'm going to quit yuh! I'm going to quit yuh, I said, the minute I notice you've started to take off weight!

FLORA. Aw, Jake—please!

JAKE. I don't want nothing little, not in a woman. I'm not after nothing *petite*, as the Frenchmen call it. This is what I wanted—and what I got! Look at her, Mr. Vicarro. Look at her blush! (*He grips the back of FLORA's neck and tries to turn her around.*)

FLORA. Aw, quit, Jakel Quit, will yuh?

JAKE. See what a doll she is? (*FLORA turns suddenly and spansk him with the kid purse. He cackles and runs down the steps. At the corner of the house, he stops and turns*). Baby, you keep Mr. Vicarro comfo'table while I'm ginnin' out that twenty-seven wagons full of cotton. Th' good-neighbor policy, Mr. Vicarro. You do me a good turn an' I'll do you a good one! Be see'n' yuh! So long, Baby! (*He walks away with an energetic stride.*)

VICARRO. The good-neighbor policy! (*He sits on the porch steps.*)

FLORA (*sitting on the swing*). Izzen he out-ray-juss! (*She laughs foolishly and puts the purse in her lap.* VICARRO *stares gloomily across the dancing brilliance of the fields. His lip sticks out like a pouting child's. A rooster crows in the distance.*)

FLORA. I would'n' dare to expose myself like that.

VICARRO. Expose? To what?

FLORA. The sun. I take a terrible burn. I'll never forget the burn I took one time. It was on Moon Lake one Sunday before I was married. I never did like t' go fishin' but this young fellow, one of the Peterson boys, insisted that we go fishin'. Well, he didn't catch nothin' but jus' kep' fishin' an' fishin' an' I set there in th' boat with all that hot sun on me. I said, Stay under the willows. But he would'n' lissen to me, an' sure enough I took such an

awful burn I had t' sleep on m' stummick th' nex' three nights.

VICARRO (*absently*). What did you say? You got sunburned?

FLORA. Yes. One time on Moon Lake.

VICARRO. That's too bad. You got over it all right?

FLORA. Oh, yes. Finally. Yes.

VICARRO. That must've been pretty bad.

FLORA. I fell in the lake once, too. Also with one of the Peterson boys. On another fishing trip. That was a wild bunch of boys, those Peterson boys. I never went out with 'em but something happened which made me wish I hadn't. One time, sunburned. One time, nearly drowned. One time—poison ivy! Well, lookin' back on it, now, we had a good deal of fun in spite of it, though.

VICARRO. The good-neighbor policy, huh? (*He slaps his boot with the riding crop. Then he rises from steps.*)

FLORA. You might as well come up on th' po'ch an' make you'self as comfortable as you can.

VICARRO. Uh-huh.

FLORA. I'm not much good at—makin' conversation.

VICARRO (*finally noticing her*). Now don't you bother to make conversation for my benefit, Mrs. Meighan. I'm the type that prefers a quiet understanding. (*FLORA laughs uncertainly*). One thing I always notice about you ladies . . .

FLORA. What's that, Mr. Vicarro?

VICARRO. You always have something in your hands—to hold onto. Now that kid purse . . .

FLORA. My purse?

VICARRO. You have no reason to keep that purse in your hands. You're certainly not afraid that I'm going to snatch it!

FLORA. Oh, God, no! I wassen afraid of that!

VICARRO. That wouldn't be the good-neighbor policy,

would it? But you hold onto that purse because it gives you something to get a grip on. Isn't that right?

FLORA. Yes. I always like to have something in my hands.

VICARRO. Sure you do. You feel what a lot of uncertain things there are. Gins burn down. The volunteer fire department don't have decent equipment! Nothing is any protection. The afternoon sun is hot. It's no protection. The trees are back of the house. They're no protection. The goods that dress is made of—is no protection. So what do you do, Mrs. Meighan? You pick up the white kid purse. It's solid. It's sure. It's certain. It's something to hold on to. You get what I mean?

FLORA. Yeah, I think I do.

VICARRO. It gives you a feeling of being attached to something. The mother protects the baby? No, no, no—the baby protects the mother! From being lost and empty and having nothing but lifeless things in her hands! Maybe you think there isn't much connection!

FLORA. You'll have to excuse me from thinking. I'm too lazy.

VICARRO. What's your name, Mrs. Meighan?

FLORA. Flora.

VICARRO. Mine is Silva. Something not gold but—Silva!

FLORA. Like a silver dollar?

VICARRO. No, like a silver dime! It's an Italian name. I'm a native of New Orleans.

FLORA. Then it's not sun-burn. You're natcherally dark.

VICARRO (*raising his undershirt from his belly*). Look at this!

FLORA. Mr. Vicarro!

VICARRO. Just as dark as my arm is!

FLORA. You don't have to show me! I'm not from Missouri!

VICARRO (*grinning*). Excuse me.

FLORA (*she laughs nervously*). Whew! I'm sorry to say we don't have a coke in the house. We meant to get a case

of cokes las' night, but what with all the excitement going on—

VICARRO. What excitement was that?

FLORA. Oh, the fire and all.

VICARRO (*lighting a cigarette*). I shouldn't think you all would of been excited about the fire.

FLORA. A fire is always exciting. After a fire, dogs an' chickens don't sleep. I don't think our chickens got to sleep all night.

VICARRO. No?

FLORA. They cackled an' fussed an' flopped around on the roost—took on something awful! Myself, I couldn't sleep neither. I jus' lay there an' sweated all night long.

VICARRO. On account of th' fire?

FLORA. An' the heat an' mosquitoes. And I was mad at Jake.

VICARRO. Mad at Mr. Meighan? What about?

FLORA. Oh, he went off an' left me settin' here on this ole po'ch last night without a Coca-Cola on the place.

VICARRO. Went off an' left you, did he?

FLORA. Yep. Right after supper. An' when he got back the fire 'd already broke out an' instead of drivin' in to town like he said, he decided to go an' take a look at your burnt-down cotton gin. I got smoke in my eyes an' my nose an' throat. It hurt my sinus an' I was in such a wo'n out, nervous condition, it made me cry. I cried like a baby. Finally took two teaspoons of paregoric. Enough to put an elephant to sleep. But still I stayed awake an' heard them chickens carryin' on out there!

VICARRO. It sounds like you passed a very uncomfortable night.

FLORA. Sounds like? Well, it *was*.

VICARRO. So Mr. Meighan—you say—disappeared after supper? (*There is a pause while FLORA looks at him blankly.*)

FLORA. Huh?

VICARRO. You say Mr. Meighan was out of the house for a while after supper? (*Something in his tone makes her aware of her indiscretion.*)

FLORA. Oh—uh—just for a moment.

VICARRO. Just for a moment, huh? How long a moment? (*He stares at her very hard.*)

FLORA. What are you driving at, Mr. Vicarro?

VICARRO. Driving at? Nothing.

FLORA. You're looking at me so funny.

VICARRO. He disappeared for a moment! Is that what he did? How long a moment did he disappear for? Can you remember, Mrs. Meighan?

FLORA. What difference does that make? What's it to you, anyhow?

VICARRO. Why should you mind me asking?

FLORA. You make this sound like I was on trial for something!

VICARRO. Don't you like to pretend like you're a witness?

FLORA. Witness of what, Mr. Vicarro?

VICARRO. Why—for instance—say—a case of arson!

FLORA (*wetting her lips*). Case of—? What is—arson?

VICARRO. The willful destruction of property by fire. (*He slaps his boots sharply with the riding crop.*)

FLORA (*startled*). Oh! (*She nervously fingers the purse.*)

Well, now, don't you go and be getting any—funny ideas.

VICARRO. Ideas about what, Mrs. Meighan?

FLORA. My husband's disappearin'—after supper. I can explain that.

VICARRO. Can you?

FLORA. Sure I can.

VICARRO. Good! How do you explain it? (*He stares at her. She looks down.*) What's the matter? Can't you collect your thoughts, Mrs. Meighan?

FLORA. No, but—

VICARRO. Your mind's a blank on the subject?

FLORA. Look here, now— (*She squirms on the swing.*)

VICARRO. You find it impossible to remember just what your husband disappeared for after supper? You can't imagine what kind of errand it was that he went out on, can you?

FLORA. Nol No, I can't!

VICARRO. But when he returned—let's see . . . The fire had just broken out at the Syndicate Plantation?

FLORA. Mr. Vicarro, I don't have the slightest idear what you could be driving at.

VICARRO. You're a very unsatisfactory witness, Mrs. Meighan.

FLORA. I never can think when people—stare straight at me.

VICARRO. Okay. I'll look away, then. (*He turns his back to her*). Now does that improve your memory any? Now are you able to concentrate on the question?

FLORA. Huh . . .

VICARRO. No? You're not? (*He turns around again, grinning evilly*). Well . . . shall we drop the subject?

FLORA. I sure do wish you would.

VICARRO. It's no use crying over a burnt-down gin. This world is built on the principle of tit for tat.

FLORA. What do you mean?

VICARRO. Nothing at all specific. Mind if I . . . ?

FLORA. What?

VICARRO. You want to move over a little an' make some room? (*FLORA edges aside on the swing. He sits down with her*). I like a swing. I've always liked to sit an' rock on a swing. Relaxes you . . . You relaxed?

FLORA. Sure.

VICARRO. No, you're not. Your nerves are all tied up.

FLORA. Well, you made me feel kind of nervous. All of them questions you ast me about the fire.

VICARRO. I didn' ask you questions about the fire. I only asked you about your husband's leaving the house after supper.

FLORA. I explained that to you.

VICARRO. Sure. That's right. You did. The good-neighbor policy. That was a lovely remark your husband made about the good-neighbor policy. I see what he means by that now.

FLORA. He was thinking about President Roosevelt's speech. We sat up an' lissened to it one night last week.

VICARRO. No, I think that he was talking about something closer to home, Mrs. Meighan. You do me a good turn and I'll do you one, that was the way that he put it. You have a piece of cotton on your face. Hold still—I'll pick it off. (*He delicately removes the lint*). There now.

FLORA (*nervously*). Thanks.

VICARRO. There's a lot of fine cotton lint floating round in the air.

FLORA. I know there is. It irritates my nose. I think it gets up in my sinus.

VICARRO. Well, you're a delicate woman.

FLORA. Delicate? Me? Oh, no. I'm too big for that.

VICARRO. Your size is part of your delicacy, Mrs. Meighan.

FLORA. How do you mean?

VICARRO. There's a lot of you, but every bit of you is delicate. Choice. Delectable, I might say.

FLORA. Huh?

VICARRO. I mean you're altogether lacking in any—coarseness. You're soft. Fine-fibered. And smooth.

FLORA. Our talk is certainly taking a personal turn.

VICARRO. Yes. You make me think of cotton.

FLORA. Huh?

VICARRO. Cotton!

FLORA. Well! Should I say thanks or something?

VICARRO. No, just smile, Mrs. Meighan. You have an attractive smile. Dimplest!

FLORA. No . . .

VICARRO. Yes, you have! Smile, Mrs. Meighan! Come on—smile! (FLORA averts her face, smiling helplessly). There now. See? You've got them! (He delicately touches one of the dimples.)

FLORA. Please don't touch me. I don't like to be touched.

VICARRO. Then why do you giggle?

FLORA. Can't help it. You make me feel kind of hysterical.

Mr. Vicarro. Mr. Vicarro—

VICARRO. Yes?

FLORA. I hope you don't think that Jake was mixed up in that fire. I swear to goodness he never left the front porch. I remember it perfectly now. We just set here on the swing till the fire broke out then we drove in town.

VICARRO. To celebrate?

FLORA. No, no, no.

VICARRO. Twenty-seven wagons full of cotton's a pretty big piece of business to fall in your lap like a gift from the gods, Mrs. Meighan.

FLORA. I thought you said that we would drop the subject.

VICARRO. You brought it up that time.

FLORA. Well, please don't try to mix me up any more. I swear to goodness the fire had already broke out when he got back.

VICARRO. That's not what you told me a moment ago.

FLORA. You got me all twisted up. We went in town. The fire broke out an' we didn't know about it.

VICARRO. I thought you said it irritated your sinus.

FLORA. Oh, my God, you sure put words in my mouth. Maybe I'd better make us some lemonade.

VICARRO. Don't go to the trouble.

FLORA. I'll go in an' fix it direckly, but right at this moment I'm too weak to get up. I don't know why, but I can't hardly hold my eyes open. They keep falling shut. . . . I think it's a little too crowded, two on a swing. Will you do me a favor an' set back down over there?

VICARRO. Why do you want me to move?

FLORA. It makes too much body heat when we're crowded together.

VICARRO. One body can borrow coolness from another.

FLORA. I always heard that bodies borrowed heat.

VICARRO. Not in this case. I'm cool.

FLORA. You don't seem like it to me.

VICARRO. I'm just as cool as a cucumber. If you don't believe it, touch me.

FLORA. Where?

VICARRO. Anywhere.

FLORA (rising with great effort). Excuse me. I got to go in. (He pulls her back down). What did you do that for?

VICARRO. I don't want to be deprived of your company yet.

FLORA. Mr. Vicarro, you're getting awfully familiar.

VICARRO. Haven't you got any fun-loving spirit about you?

FLORA. This isn't fun.

VICARRO. Then why do you giggle?

FLORA. I'm ticklish! Quit switching me, will yuh?

VICARRO. I'm just shooing the flies off.

FLORA. Leave 'em be, then, please. They don't hurt nothin'.

VICARRO. I think you like to be switched.

FLORA. I don't. I wish you'd quit.

VICARRO. You'd like to be switched harder.

FLORA. No, I wouldn't.

VICARRO. That blue mark on your wrist—

FLORA. What about it?  
 VICARRO. I've got a suspicion.  
 FLORA. Of what?  
 VICARRO. It was twisted. By your husband.  
 FLORA. You're crazy.  
 VICARRO. Yes, it was. And you liked it.  
 FLORA. I certainly didn't. Would you mind moving your arm?  
 VICARRO. Don't be so skittish.  
 FLORA. Awright. I'll get up then.  
 VICARRO. Go on.  
 FLORA. I feel so weak.  
 VICARRO. Dizzy?  
 FLORA. A little bit. Yeah. My head's spinning round. I wish you would stop the swing.  
 VICARRO. It's not swinging much.  
 FLORA. But even a little's too much.  
 VICARRO. You're a delicate woman. A pretty big woman, too.  
 FLORA. So is America. Big.  
 VICARRO. That's a funny remark.  
 FLORA. Yeah. I don't know why I made it. My head's so buzzy.  
 VICARRO. Fuzzy?  
 FLORA. Fuzzy an'-buzzy . . . Is something on my arm?  
 VICARRO. No.  
 FLORA. Then what're you brushing?  
 VICARRO. Sweat off.  
 FLORA. Leave it alone.  
 VICARRO. Let me wipe it. (He brushes her arm with a handkerchief.)  
 FLORA (laughing weakly). No, please, don't. It feels funny.  
 VICARRO. How does it feel?

FLORA. It tickles me. All up an' down. You cut it out now. If you don't cut it out I'm going to call.  
 VICARRO. Call who?  
 FLORA. I'm going to call that nigger. The nigger that's cutting the grass across the road.  
 VICARRO. Go on. Call, then.  
 FLORA (weakly). Hey! Hey, boy!  
 VICARRO. Can't you call any louder?  
 FLORA. I feel so funny. What is the matter with me?  
 VICARRO. You're just relaxing. You're big. A big type of woman. I like you. Don't get so excited.  
 FLORA. I'm not, but you—  
 VICARRO. What am I doing?  
 FLORA. Suspensions. About my husband and ideas you have about me.  
 VICARRO. Such as what?  
 FLORA. He burnt your gin down. He didn't. And I'm not a big piece of cotton. (She pulls herself up). I'm going inside.  
 VICARRO (rising). I think that's a good idea.  
 FLORA. I said I was. Not you.  
 VICARRO. Why not me?  
 FLORA. Inside it might be crowded, with you an' me.  
 VICARRO. Three's a crowd. We're two.  
 FLORA. You stay out. Wait here.  
 VICARRO. What'll you do?  
 FLORA. I'll make us a pitcher of nice cold lemonade.  
 VICARRO. Okay. You go on in.  
 FLORA. What'll you do?  
 VICARRO. I'll follow.  
 FLORA. That's what I figured you might be aiming to do. We'll both stay out.  
 VICARRO. In the sun?

FLORA. We'll sit back down in th' shade, (He blocks her).

Don't stand in my way.

VICARRO. You're standing in mine.

FLORA. I'm dizzy.

VICARRO. You ought to lie down.

FLORA. How can I?

VICARRO. Go in.

FLORA. You'd follow me.

VICARRO. What if I did?

FLORA. I'm afraid.

VICARRO. You're starting to cry.

FLORA. I'm afraid!

VICARRO. What off?

FLORA. Of you.

VICARRO. I'm little.

FLORA. I'm dizzy. My knees are so weak they're like water. I've got to sit down.

VICARRO. Go in.

FLORA. I can't.

VICARRO. Why not?

FLORA. You'd follow.

VICARRO. Would that be so awful?

FLORA. You've got a mean look in your eyes and I don't like the whip. Honest to God he never. He didn't, I swear!

VICARRO. Do what?

FLORA. The fire . . .

VICARRO. Go on.

FLORA. Please don't!

VICARRO. Don't what?

FLORA. Put it down. The whip, please put it down. Leave it out here on the porch.

VICARRO. What are you scared off

FLORA. You.

VICARRO. Go on. (She turns helplessly and moves to the screen. He pulls it open.)

FLORA. Don't follow. Please don't follow! (She sways uncertainly. He presses his hand against her. She moves inside. He follows. The door is shut quietly. The gin pumps slowly and steadily across the road. From inside the house there is a wild and despairing cry. A door is slammed. The cry is repeated more faintly.)

## CURTAIN

## SCENE III

*It is about nine o'clock the same evening. Although the sky behind the house is a dusky rose color, a full September moon of almost garish intensity gives the front of the house a ghostly brilliance. Dogs are howling like demons across the prostrate fields of the Delta.*

The front porch of the MEIGHANS is empty.

After a moment the screen door is pushed slowly open and FLORA MEIGHAN emerges gradually. Her appearance is ravaged. Her eyes have a vacant limpidity in the moonlight, her lips are slightly apart. She moves with her hands stretched gropingly before her till she has reached a pillar of the porch. There she stops and stands moaning a little. Her hair hangs loose and disordered. The upper part of her body is unclothed except for a torn pink band about her breasts. Dark streaks are visible on the bare shoulders and arms and there is a large discoloration along one cheek. A dark trickle, now congealed, descends from one corner of her mouth. These more apparent tokens she covers with one hand when JAKE comes up on the porch. He is now heard approaching, singing to himself.

JAKE. By the light—by the light—by the light—Of the silvery mo-o-on! (Instinctively FLORA draws back into the sharply etched shadow from the porch roof. JAKE is too tired and triumphant to notice her appearance). How's a baby? (FLORA utters a moaning grunt). Tired? Too

tired t' talk? Well, that's how I feel. Too tired t' talk. Too goddam tired t' speak a friggin' word! (He lets himself down on the steps, groaning and without giving FLORA more than a glance). Twenty-seven wagons full of cotton. That's how much I've ginned since ten this mawnin'. A man-size job.

FLORA (huskily). Uh-huh. . . . A man-size-job. . . .

JAKE. *Twenty sev-en wa-gons full of cot-ton!*

FLORA (senselessly repeating). *Twen-ty sev-en wa-gons full of cot-ton!* (A dog howls. FLORA utters a breathless laugh.)

JAKE. What're you laughin' at, honey? Not at me, I hope. FLORA. No. . . .

JAKE. That's good. The job that I've turned out is nothing to laugh at. I drove that pack of niggers like a mule-skinner. They don't have a brain in their bodies. All they got is bodies. You got to drive, drive, drive. I don't even see how niggers eat without somebody to tell them to put the food in their mouf! (She laughs again, like water spilling out of her mouth). Huh! You got a laugh like a—Christ. A terrific day's work I finished.

FLORA (slowly). I would'n' brag—about it. . . .

JAKE. I'm not braggin' about it, I'm just sayin' I done a big day's work, I'm all wo'n out an' I want a little appreciation, not cross speeches. Honey. . . .

FLORA. I'm not—(she laughs again)—makin' cross speeches. JAKE. To take on a big piece of work an' finish it up an' mention the fact that it's finished I wouldn't call braggin'.

FLORA. You're not the only one's—done a big day's—work.

JAKE. Who else that you know off? (There is a pause.)

FLORA. Maybe you think that I had an easy time. (Her laughter spills out again.)

JAKE. You're laughin' like you been on a goddam jag. (FLORA laughs). What did you get pissed on? Roach

poison or citronella? I think I make it pretty easy for you, workin' like a mule-skinner so you can hire you a nigger to do the wash an' take the house-work on. An elephant woman who acks as frail as a kitten, that's the kind of a woman I got on m' hands.

FLORA. Sure. . . . (She laughs). You make it easy!

JAKE. I've yet t' see you lift a little finger. Even gotten too lazy t' put you' things on. Round the house ha'f naked all th' time. Y' live in a cloud. All you can think of is "Give me a Coca-Cola!" Well, you better look out. They got a new bureau in the guvament files. It's called U.W. Stands for Useless Wimmen. Tha's secret plans on shoot t' have 'em shot! (He laughs at his joke.)

FLORA. Secret—plans—on foot?

JAKE. T' have 'em shot.

FLORA. That's good. I'm glad t' hear it. (She laughs again.)

JAKE. I come home tired an' you can't wait t' peck at me. What're you cross about now?

FLORA. I think it was a mistake.

JAKE. What was a mistake?

FLORA. Fo' you t' fool with th' Syndicate—Plantation. . . .

JAKE. I don't know about that. We wuh kind of up-against it, honey. Th' Syndicate buyin' up all th' lan' aroun' here an' turmin' the ole croppers off it without their wages—mighty near busted ev'ry mercantile store in Two Rivers County! An' then they build their own gin to gin their own cotton. It looked for a while like I was stuck up high an' dry. But when the gin burnt down an' Mr. Vicarro decided he'd better throw a little business my way—I'd say the situation was much improved!

FLORA (she laughs weakly). Then maybe you don't understand th' good-neighbor—policy.

JAKE. Don't understand it? Why, I'm the boy that invented it.

FLORA. Huh-huh! What an—intention! All I can say is—

I hope you're satisfied now that you've ginned out—  
twenty-seven wagons full of—cotton.

JAKE. Vicarro was pretty well pleased w'en he dropped  
over.

FLORA. Yeah. He was—pretty well—pleased.

JAKE. How did you all get along?

FLORA. We got along jus' fine. Jus' fine an'—dandy.

JAKE. He didn't seem like a such a bad little guy. He takes  
a sensible attitude.

FLORA (*laughing helplessly*). He—sure—does!

JAKE. I hope you made him comfortable in the house?

FLORA (*giggling*). I made him a pitcher—of nice cold  
—lemonade!

JAKE. With a little gin in it, huh? That's how you got  
pissed. A nice cool drink don't sound bad to me right  
now. Got any left?

FLORA. Not a bit, Mr. Meighan. We drank it *a-a-ll* up!  
(*She flops onto the swing.*)

JAKE. So you didn't have such a tiresome time after all?

FLORA. No. Not tiresome a bit. I had a nice conversation  
with Mistuh—Vicarro. . . .

JAKE. What did you all talk about?

FLORA. Th' good-neighbor policy.

JAKE. (*chuckling*). How does he feel about th' good-  
neighbor policy?

FLORA. Oh—(*She giggles*).—He thinks it's a—good ideal  
He says—

JAKE. Huh? (*FLORA laughs weakly*). Says what?

FLORA. Says—(*She goes off into another spasm of laugh-  
ter.*)

JAKE. What ever he said must've been a panic!

FLORA. He says—(*controlling her spasm*)—he don't think  
he'll build him a new cotton gin any more. He's gonna  
let you do a-a-ll his ginnin'—fo' him!

JAKE. I told you he'd take a sensible attitude.

FLORA. Yeah. Tomorrow he plans t' come back—with lots  
more cotton. Maybe another twenty-seven wagons.

JAKE. Yeah?

FLORA. An' while you're ginnin' it out—he'll have me en-  
ertain him with—nice lemonade! (*She has another fit of  
giggles.*)

JAKE. The more I hear about that lemonade the better I  
like it. Lemonade highballs, huh? Mr. Thomas Collins?

FLORA. I guess it's—gonna go on fo'—th' rest of th'—  
summer. . . .

JAKE (*rising and stretching happily*). Well, it'll . . . it'll  
soon be fall. Cooler nights comin' on.

FLORA. I don't know that that will put a—stop to it—  
though. . . .

JAKE (*obliviously*). The air feels cooler already. You  
shouldn't be settin' out here without you' shirt on, honey.

A change in the air can give you a mighty bad cold.

FLORA. I couldn't stan' nothin' on me—nex' to my—skin.

JAKE. It ain't the heat that gives you all them hives, it's  
too much liquor. Grog-blossoms, that's what you got!

I'm goin' inside to the toilet. When I come out—(*He  
opens the screen door and goes in*).—we'll drive in town

an' see what's at th' movies. You go hop in the Chevy!  
(*FLORA laughs to herself. She slowly opens the huge kid  
purse and removes a wad of Kleenex. She touches her-  
self tenderly here and there, giggling breathlessly.*)

FLORA (*aloud*). I really oughtn't have a white kid purse.  
It's wadded full of—Kleenex—to make it big—like a baby!

Big—in my arms—like a baby!

JAKE (*from inside*). What did you say, Baby?

FLORA (*dragging herself up by the chain of the swing*).  
I'm not—Baby. Mamal Mal That's—me. . . . (*Cradling  
the big white purse in her arms, she advances slowly  
and tenderly to the edge of the porch. The moon shines*

*full on her smiling and ravaged face. She begins to rock and sway gently, rocking the purse in her arms and crooning.)*

*Rock-a-bye Baby—in uh treetops!*

*If a wind blows—a cradle will rock! (She descends a step).*

*If a bough bends—a baby will fall! (She descends another step).*

*Down will come Baby—cradle—an'—all! (She laughs and stares raptly and vacantly up at the moon.)*

CURTAIN

# SORRY, WRONG NUMBER

by Lucille Fletcher

## CHARACTERS

MRS. STEVENSON

1ST OPERATOR

1ST MAN

2ND MAN

CHIEF OPERATOR

2ND OPERATOR

3RD OPERATOR

4TH OPERATOR

5TH OPERATOR

INFORMATION

HOSPITAL RECEPTIONIST

WESTERN UNION

SERGEANT DUFFY

A LUNCH ROOM COUNTER ATTENDANT

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