

looking decent. Then bring her down. The furniture is coming back today. . . .

*He exits . . .*

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FRONT YARD.

SILVA and ROCK are sitting there in the pickup truck. They sit a little formally and stiffly and wait for MEIGHAN, who comes barreling out of the house, and up to the pickup.

ARCHIE:

Don't say a word. A little bird already told me that you'd be bringing those twenty-seven wagons full of cotton straight to my door, and I want you to know that you're a very lucky fellow.

ROCK:

*(Dryly)*

How come?

ARCHIE:

I mean that I am in a position to hold back other orders and give you a priority. Well! Come on out of that truck and have some coffee.

SILVA:

What's your price?

ARCHIE:

You remember my price. It hasn't changed.

*Silence. The sense that SILVA is inspecting him.*

ARCHIE:

Hey, now looka here. Like you take shirts to a laundry. You take them Friday and you want them Saturday. That's special. You got to pay special.

SILVA:

How about your equipment? Hasn't changed either?

ARCHIE:

A-1 shape! Always was! You ought to remember.

SILVA:

I remember you needed a new saw-cylinder. You got one?

ARCHIE:

Can't find one on the market to equal the old one yet. Come on down and have a cup of coffee. We're all ready for you.

SILVA:

I guess when you saw my gin burning down last night you must've suspected that you might get a good deal of business thrown your way in the morning.

ARCHIE:

You want to know something?

SILVA:

I'm always glad to know something when there's something to know.

*Rock laughs wildly.*

ARCHIE:

I never seen that fire of yours last night! Now come on over to my house and have some coffee.

*The men get out of the truck. ARCHIE speaks to Rock.*

ARCHIE:

You come too, if you want to. . . . No, sir, I never seen that fire of yours last night. We hit the sack right after supper and didn't know until breakfast time this morning that your cotton gin had burned down.

*They go up on the porch.*

Yes sir, it's providential. That's the only word for it. Hey, Baby Doll! It's downright providential. Baby Doll! Come out here, Baby Doll!

*Enter* BABY DOLL.

You come right over here and meet Mr. Vacarro from the Syndicate Plantation.

BABY DOLL:

Oh hello. Has something gone wrong, Archie Lee?

ARCHIE:

What do you mean, Baby Doll?

BABY DOLL:

I just thought that maybe something went——

ARCHIE:

What is your first name, Vacarro?

SILVA:

Silva.

ARCHIE:

How do you spell it?

SILVA *spells it*. "*Capital S-I-L-V-A.*" Meantime, his eyes are on BABY DOLL.

ARCHIE:

Oh. Like a silver lining? Every cloud has got a silver lining.

BABY DOLL:

What is that from? The Bible?

SILVA:

No, the Mother Goose book.

BABY DOLL:

That name sounds foreign.

SILVA:

It is, Mrs. Meighan. I'm known as the wop that runs

the Syndicate Plantation.

ARCHIE LEE *claps him heartily on the back*. SILVA *stiffly withdraws from the contact*.

ARCHIE:

Don't call yourself names. Let other folks call you names! Well, you're a lucky little fellow, silver, gold, or even nickel-plated, you sure are lucky that I can take a job of this size right now. It means some cancellations, but you're my closest neighbor. I believe in the good neighbor policy, Mr. Vacarro. You do me a good turn and I'll do you a good turn. Tit for tat. Tat for tit is the policy we live on. *Aunt Rose Comfort!* Baby Doll, git your daddy's ole maid sister to break out a fresh pot of coffee for Mr. Vacarro.

BABY DOLL:

You get her.

ARCHIE:

And honey, I want you to entertain this gentleman. Ha! Ha! Look at her blush. Haha! This is my baby. This is my little girl, every precious ounce of her is mine, all mine.

*He exits—crazily elated, calling "Aunt Rose."*

CUT BACK to BABY DOLL. *She emits an enormous yawn.*

BABY DOLL:

Excuse my yawn. We went to bed kinda late last night.

CUT TO SILVA. *He notices the discrepancy. He looks at Rock, who also noticed.*

*As if she were talking of a title of great distinction.*

So. You're a wop?

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SILVA:

*(With ironic politeness)*

I'm a Sicilian, Mrs. Meighan. A very ancient people. . . .

BABY DOLL:

*(Trying out the word)*

Sish! Sish!

SILVA:

No ma'am. Siss! Sicilian.

BABY DOLL:

Oh, how unusual.

ARCHIE LEE *bursts back out on the porch.*

ARCHIE:

And honey, at noon, take Mr. Vacarro in town to the Kotton King Hotel for a chicken dinner. Sign my name! It's only when bad luck hits you, Mr. Vacarro, that you find out who your friends are. I mean to prove it. All right. Let's get GOING! Baby, knock me a kiss!

BABY DOLL:

What's the matter with you? Have you got drunk before breakfast?

ARCHIE:

Hahaha.

BABY DOLL:

Somebody say something funny?

ARCHIE:

Offer this young fellow here to a cup of coffee. I got to get busy ginning that cotton.

*He extends his great sweaty hand to VACARRO.*

Glad to be able to help you out of this bad situation. It's the good neighbor policy.

SILVA:

What is?

ARCHIE:

You do me a good turn and I'll do you a good turn sometime in the future.

SILVA:

I see.

ARCHIE:

Tit for tat, tat for tit, as they say. Hahaha! Well, make yourself at home here. Baby Doll, I want you to make this gentleman comfortable in the house.

BABY DOLL:

You can't make anyone comfortable in this house.

Lucky if you can find a chair to sit in.

*But MEIGHAN is gone, calling out: "Move those wagons," etc., etc.*

BABY DOLL:

*(After a slight pause)*

Want some coffee?

SILVA:

No. Just a cool drink of water, thank you ma'am.

BABY DOLL:

The kitchen water runs warm, but if you got the energy to handle an old-fashioned pump, you can get you a real cool drink from that there cistern at the side of the house. . . .

SILVA:

I got energy to burn.

*VACARRO strides through the tall seeding grass to an old cistern with a hand pump, deep in the side yard. ROCK follows. OLD FUSSY goes "Squawk, Squawk," and AUNT*

ROSE COMFORT *is singing "Rock of Ages" in the kitchen.*

SILVA:

*(Looking about contemptuously as he crosses to the cistern)*

Dump their garbage in the yard, phew! *Ignorance and Indulgence and stink!*

ROCK:

I thought that young Mizz Meighan smelt pretty good.

SILVA:

You keep your nose with the cotton. And hold that dipper, I'll pump.

AUNT ROSE:

Sometimes water comes and sometimes it don't.

*The water comes pouring from the rusty spout.*

SILVA:

This time it did. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Bring me a dipper of that nice cool well water, please.

*Rock crosses immediately with the filled dipper.*

SILVA:

Hey!

OLD FUSSY:

Squawk, squawk!!

AUNT ROSE:

I don't have the strength anymore in my arm that I used to, to draw water out of that pump.

*She approaches, smoothing her ancient apron. VACARRO is touched by her aged grace.*

SILVA:

Would you care for a drink?

AUNT ROSE:

How do you do? I'm Aunt Rose Comfort McCorkle.  
My brother was Baby Doll's daddy, Mr. T. C. Carson.  
I've been visiting here since . . . since. . . .

*She knits her ancient brow, unable to recall precisely  
when the long visit started.*

SILVA:

I hope you don't mind drinking out of a gourd.  
*He hands her the gourd of well water. Rock returns,  
saying aloud . . .*

ROCK:

I could think of worse ways to spend a hot afternoon  
than delivering cool well water to Mrs. Meighan.

AUNT ROSE:

SCUSE ME PLEASE! That ole hen, Fussy, has just  
gone back in my kitchen!

*She runs crazily to the house. BABY DOLL has wandered  
back to the cistern as if unconsciously drawn by the  
magnetism of the two young males.*

BABY DOLL:

They's such a difference in water! You wouldn't think  
so, but there certainly is.

SILVA:

(To Rock)

Hold the dipper, I'll pump!

*He brings up more water; then strips off his shirt and  
empties the brimming dipper over his head and at the  
same time he says to Rock . . .*

SILVA:

Go stay with the cotton. Go on! Stay with the cotton.  
Rock goes.

BABY DOLL:

I wouldn't dare to expose myself like that. I take such terrible sunburn.

SILVA:

I like the feel of a hot sun on my body.

BABY DOLL:

That's not sunburn though. You're natcherally dark.

SILVA:

Yes. Don't you have garbage collectors on Tiger Tail Road?

BABY DOLL:

It cost a little bit extra to git them to come out here and Archie Lee Meighan claimed it was highway robbery! Refused to pay! Now the place is swarming with flies an' mosquitoes and—oh, I don't know, I almost give up sometimes.

SILVA:

And did I understand you to say that you've got a bunch of unfurnished rooms in the house?

BABY DOLL:

Five complete sets of furniture hauled away! By the Ideal Pay As You Go Plan Furniture Company.

SILVA:

When did this misfortune—fall upon you?

BABY DOLL:

Why yestiddy! Ain't that awful?

SILVA:

Both of us had misfortunes on the same day.

BABY DOLL:

Huh?

SILVA:

You lost your furniture. My cotton gin burned down.

BABY DOLL:

*(Not quite with it)*

Oh.

SILVA:

Quite a coincidence!

BABY DOLL:

Huh?

SILVA:

I said it was a coincidence of misfortune.

BABY DOLL:

Well, sure—after all what can you do with a bunch of unfurnished rooms.

SILVA:

Well, you could play hide-and-seek.

BABY DOLL:

Not me. I'm not athletic.

SILVA:

I take it you've not had this place long, Mrs. Meighan.

BABY DOLL:

No, we ain't had it long.

SILVA:

When I arrived in this county to take over the management of the Syndicate Plantation . . .

*(Chops at grass with crop)*

this place was empty. I was told it was haunted. Then you all moved in.

BABY DOLL:

Yes it was haunted, and that's why Archie Lee bought it for almost nothing.

*(She pauses in the sun as if dazed)*

Sometimes I don't know where to go, what to do.

SILVA:

That's not uncommon. People enter this world without instruction.

BABY DOLL:

*(She's lost him again)*

Huh?

SILVA:

I said people come into this world without instructions of where to go, what to do, so they wander a little and . . .

AUNT ROSE *sings rather sweetly from the kitchen, wind blows an Aeolian refrain.*

then go away. . . .

Now BABY DOLL *gives him a quick look, almost perceptive and then . . .*

BABY DOLL:

Yah, well . . .

SILVA:

*Drift—for a while and then . . . vanish.*

*(He stoops to pick a dandelion)*

And so make room for newcomers! Old goers, new comers! Back and forth, going and coming, rush, rush!!  
*Permanent? Nothing!*

*(Blows on the seeding dandelion)*

Anything living! . . . last long enough to take it serious.  
*They are walking together. There is the beginning of some weird understanding between them.*

*They have stopped strolling by a poetic wheelless chassis of an old Pierce-Arrow limousine in the side yard.*



BABY DOLL:

This is the old Pierce-Arrow car that belonged to the lady that used to own this place and haunts it now.

*VACARRO steps gravely forward and opens the back door for her.*

SILVA:

Where to, madam?

BABY DOLL:

Oh, you're playing *show-fer*! It's a good place to sit when the house isn't furnished. . . .

*She enters and sinks on the ruptured upholstery. He gravely puts the remnant of the dandelion in the cone-shaped cut-glass vase in a bracket by the back seat of the old limousine.*

BABY DOLL:

*(Laughing with sudden, childish laughter)*

Drive me along the river as fast as you can with all the windows open to cool me off.

SILVA:

Fine, Madam!

BABY DOLL:

*(Suddenly aware of his body near her)*

Showfers sit in the front seat.

SILVA:

Front seat's got no cushion.

BABY DOLL:

It's hard to find a place to sit around here since the Ideal Pay As You Go Plan people lost patience. To sit in comfort, I mean. . . .

SILVA:

It's hard to sit in comfort when the Ideal Pay As You

Go Plan people lose their patience and your gin burns down.

BABY DOLL:

Oh! But . . .

SILVA:

Huh?

BABY DOLL:

You said that like you thought there was . . .

SILVA:

What?

BABY DOLL:

Some connection! Excuse me, I want to get out and I can't get over your legs. . . .

*Her apathy is visited by a sudden inexplicable flurry of panic. He has his boots propped against the back of the front seat.*

SILVA:

You can't get over my legs?

BABY DOLL:

No. I'm not athletic.

*She tries to open door on other side, but it is blocked by the trunk of a pecan tree.*

SILVA:

But it's cool here and comfortable to sit in. What's this here??

*He has seized her wrist on which hangs a bracelet of many little gold charms. She sinks somewhat uneasily in beside him.*

BABY DOLL:

It's a, it's a . . . charm bracelet.

*He begins to finger the many little gold charms attached.*

BABY DOLL:

My daddy gave it to me. Them there's the ten commandments.

SILVA:

And these?

BABY DOLL:

My birthdays. It's stretchable. One for each birthday.

SILVA:

How many charming birthdays have you had?

BABY DOLL:

As many as I got charms hanging on that bracelet.

SILVA:

Mind if I count 'em?

*They are close.*

Fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, seventeen, eighteen, nineteen, and . . .

BABY DOLL:

That's all. I'll be twenty tomorrow. Tomorrow is Election Day and Election Day is my birthday. I was born on the day that Frank Delano Roosevelt was elected for his first term.

SILVA:

A great day for the country for both reasons.

BABY DOLL:

He was a man to respect.

SILVA:

And you're a lady to respect, Mrs. Meighan.

BABY DOLL:

*(Sadly and rather touchingly)*

Me? Oh, no—I never got past the fourth grade.

SILVA:

Why'd you quit?

BABY DOLL:

I had a great deal of trouble with long division. . . .

SILVA:

Yeah?

BABY DOLL:

The teacher would tell me to go to the blackboard and work out a problem in long division and I would go to the blackboard and lean my head against it and cry and cry and—cry. . . .

Whew! I think the porch would be cooler. Mr. Vacarro, I can't get over your legs.

SILVA:

You want to move my legs.

BABY DOLL:

Yes, otherwise, I can't get out of the car. . . .

SILVA:

Okay.

*He raises his legs so she can get out. Which she does, and continues . . .*

BABY DOLL:

YES, I would cry and cry. . . . Well . . . soon after that I left school. A girl without education is—without education. . . .

Whew. . . . Feel kind of dizzy. Hope I'm not gettin' a sun stroke. —I better sit in the shade. . . .

*VACARRO follows her casually into the shade of the pecan tree where there's a decrepit old swing. Suddenly, he leaps into branches and then down with a pecan. He*

*cracks it in his mouth and hands her the kernels. . . .*

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro! I wouldn't dream!—excuse me, but I just wouldn't dream! of eating a nut that a man had cracked in his mouth. . . .

SILVA:

You've got many refinements. I don't think you need to worry about your failure at long division. I mean, after all, you got through short division, and short division is all that a lady ought to be called on to cope with. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Well, I—ought to go in, but I get depressed when I pass through those empty rooms. . . .

SILVA:

All the rooms empty?

BABY DOLL:

All but the nursery. And the kitchen. The stuff in those rooms was paid for. . . .

SILVA:

You have a child in the nursery?

BABY DOLL:

Me? No. I sleep in the nursery myself. Let down the slats on the crib. . . .

SILVA:

Why do you sleep in the nursery?

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro, that's a *personal* question.

*There is a pause.*

BABY DOLL:

I ought to go in . . . but . . . you know there are places

in that house which I never been in. I mean the attic for instance. Most of the time I'm afraid to go into that house by myself. Last night when the fire broke out I sat here on this swing for hours and hours till Archie Lee got home, because I was scared to enter this old place by myself.

*VACARRO has caught this discrepancy too.*

SILVA:

It musta been scary here without your husband to look after you.

BABY DOLL:

I'm tellin' you! The fire lit up the whole countryside and it made big crazy shadows and we didn't have a coke in the house and the heat and the mosquitoes and—I was mad at Archie Lee.

SILVA:

Mad at Mr. Meighan? What about?

BABY DOLL:

Oh, he went off and left me settin' here without a coke in the place.

SILVA:

Went off and left you, did he??!!

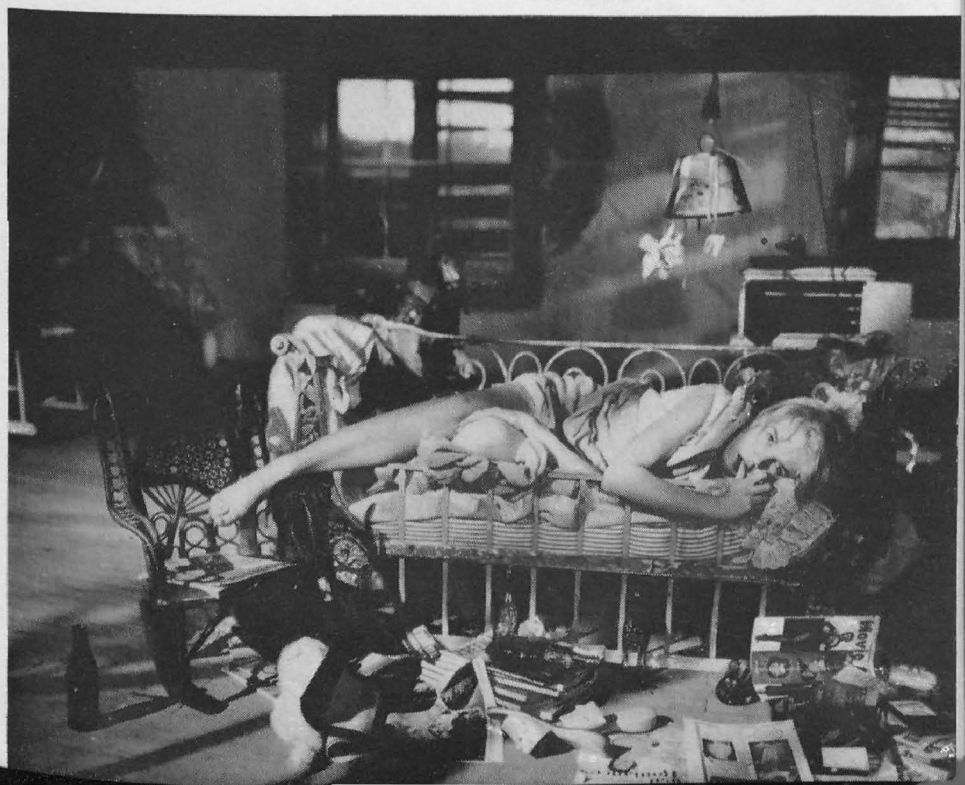
BABY DOLL:

Well, he certainly did. Right after supper and when he got back, the fire'd already broke out. I got smoke in my eyes and my nose and throat. I was in such a worn-out nervous condition it made me cry. Finally I took two teaspoons of paregoric.

SILVA:

Sounds like you passed a very uncomfortable night.









BABY DOLL:

Sounds like? Well it was!

SILVA:

So Mr. Meighan—you say—disappeared after supper.

BABY DOLL:

*(After a pause)*

Huh?

SILVA:

You say Mr. Meighan left the house for a while after supper?

*Something in his tone makes her aware that she has spoken indiscreetly.*

BABY DOLL:

Oh—uh—just for a moment.

SILVA:

Just for a moment, huh? How long a moment?

BABY DOLL:

What are you driving at, Mr. Vacarro?

SILVA:

Driving at? Nothing.

BABY DOLL:

You're looking at me so funny.

SILVA:

How long a moment did he disappear for? Can you remember, Mrs. Meighan?

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

Why should you mind my asking?

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

Witness of what, Mr. Vacarro?

SILVA:

Why—for instance—say—a case of arson!

BABY DOLL:

Case of——? What is—arson?

SILVA:

The willful destruction of property by fire.

*(Slaps his boots sharply with the riding crop)*

BABY DOLL:

Oh!

*(She nervously fingers her purse)*

SILVA:

There's one thing I always notice about you ladies.

BABY DOLL:

What's that?

SILVA:

Whenever you get nervous, you always like to have something in your hands to hold on to—like that big white purse.

BABY DOLL:

This purse?

SILVA:

Yes, it gives you something to hold on to, isn't that right?

BABY DOLL:

Well, I do always like to have something in my hands.

SILVA:

Sure you do. You feel what a lot of uncertain things there are. Gins burn down. No one know how or why. Volunteer fire departments don't have decent equipment. They're no protection. The afternoon sun is too hot. The trees! They're no protection! The house—it's haunted! It's no protection. Your husband. He's across the road and busy. He's no protection! The goods that dress is made of—it's light and thin—it's no protection. So what do you do, Mrs. Meighan? You pick up that white kid purse. It's something to hold on to.

BABY DOLL:

Now, Mr. Silva. Don't you go and be getting any—funny ideas.

SILVA:

Ideas about what?

BABY DOLL:

My husband disappearing—after supper. I can explain that.

SILVA:

Can you?

BABY DOLL:

Sure I can.

SILVA:

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?

*(Pause)*

Your mind's a blank on the subject??

BABY DOLL:

Look here, now. . . .

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

No! No! I can't!

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro, I don't have the slightest idea what you could be driving at.

SILVA:

You're a very unsatisfactory witness, Mrs. Mcighan.

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

Okay, I'll look away then.

*(Turns his back to her)*

Now, does that improve your memory any? Now are you able to concentrate on the question?

BABY DOLL:

Huh?

SILVA:

No? You're not?

*(Grins evilly)*

Well—should we drop the subject??

BABY DOLL:

I sure do wish you would!

SILVA:

Sure, there's no use crying over a burnt-down gin. And besides, like your husband says—this world is built on the principle of tit for tat.

BABY DOLL:

What do you mean?

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

What?

SILVA *approaches the swing where she sits.*

SILVA:

You want to move over a little and make some room?

BABY DOLL:

*(Shifts slightly)*

Is that room enough for you?

SILVA:

Enough for me. How about you?

BABY DOLL:

Is it strong enough to support us both?

SILVA:

I hope. Let's swing a little. You seem all tense. Motion relaxes people. It's like a cradle. A cradle relaxes a baby. They call you "Baby," don't they?

BABY DOLL:

That's sort of a pet name.

SILVA:

Well in the swing you can relax like a cradle. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Not if you swing it so high. It shakes me up.

SILVA:

Well, I'll swing it low then. Are you relaxed?

BABY DOLL:

I'm relaxed enough. As much as necessary.

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

You make me nervous.

SILVA:

Just swinging with you?

BABY DOLL:

Not just that.

SILVA:

What else then?

BABY DOLL:

All them questions you asked me about the fire.

SILVA:

I only inquired about your husband—about his leaving the house after supper.

BABY DOLL:

Why should I have to explain why he left the house?  
Besides, I did. I think I explained that to you.

SILVA:

You said that he left the house before the fire broke out.

BABY DOLL:

What about it?

SILVA:

Why did he leave the house?

BABY DOLL:

I explained that to you. I explained that to you.



SILVA:

What was the explanation? I forgot it.

*Baby Doll's face is beaded with sweat. To save her life she can't think, can't think at all.*

BABY DOLL:

*(Just to gain a moment)*

Oh, you're talking about my husband?

SILVA:

That's who I'm talking about.

BABY DOLL:

How should I know!!!

SILVA:

You mean where he went after supper.

BABY DOLL:

Yes!! How should I know where he went.

SILVA:

I thought you said you explained that to me.

BABY DOLL:

I did! I explained it to you!

SILVA:

Well, if you don't know, how could you explain it to me?

BABY DOLL:

*(Turning)*

There's no reason why I should explain things to you.

SILVA:

Then just relax.

*They swing.*

As I was saying, that was a lovely remark your husband made.

BABY DOLL:

What remark did he make?

SILVA:

The good neighbor policy. I see what he means by that now.

BABY DOLL:

He was talking about the President's speech.

SILVA:

I think he was talking about something closer to home. *You do me* a good turn and *I'll do you* one. That was the way he put it.

*Delicately he removes a little piece of lint from her arm.*

SILVA:

There now!

BABY DOLL:

*(Nervously)*

Thanks.

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

I know there is. It irritates my sinus.

SILVA:

Well, you're a delicate woman.

BABY DOLL:

Delicate? Me? Oh no. I'm a good-size woman.

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

Huh?

SILVA:

*(Running his finger lightly over her skin)*

You're fine fibered. And smooth. And soft.

BABY DOLL:

Our conversation is certainly taking a personal turn!

SILVA:

Yes! You make me think of cotton.

*(Still caressing her arm another moment)*

No! No fabric, no kind of cloth, not even satin or silk cloth, or no kind of fiber, not even cotton fiber has the ab-so-lute delicacy of your skin!

BABY DOLL:

Well! Should I say thanks or something?

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

No . . .

SILVA:

Yes, you have! Smile, Mrs. Meighan! Come on! Smile!

BABY DOLL *averts her face, smiles helplessly.*

There now. See? You've got them!

*Delicately, he touches one of the indentations in her cheek.*

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

Then why do you giggle?

BABY DOLL:

Can't help it. You make me feel kind of hysterical, Mr. Vacarro . . . Mr. Vacarro . . .

SILVA:

Yes?

BABY DOLL:

*(A different attack, more feminine, pleading)*

I hope you don't think that Archie Lee 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 and then we drove into town.

SILVA:

To celebrate!

BABY DOLL:

No, no, no!

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

I thought you said we would drop the subject.

SILVA:

You brought it up that time.

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

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

SILVA:

I thought you said it irritated your sinus.

BABY DOLL:

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

*She starts to get up. Silva pulls her down.*

What did you do that for?

SILVA:

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

*He lightly switches her legs with his crop.*

BABY DOLL:

*(Twisting)*

Mr. Vacarro, you're getting awfully familiar.

SILVA:

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

BABY DOLL:

This isn't fun.

SILVA:

Then why do you giggle?

BABY DOLL:

I'm ticklish!

SILVA:

Ticklish!

BABY DOLL:

Yes, quit switching me, will you?

SILVA:

I'm just shooing the flies off.

BABY DOLL:

They don't hurt nothing. And would you mind moving your arm?

SILVA:

Don't be so skittish!

BABY DOLL:

All right! I'll get up then.

SILVA:

Go on.

BABY DOLL:

*(Trying)*

I feel so weak.

*(She pulls herself away from him)*

Oh! My head's so buzzy.

SILVA:

Fuzzy?

BABY DOLL:

Fuzzy and buzzy. My head's swinging around. It's that swinging. . . . Is something on my arm?

SILVA:

No.

BABY DOLL:

Then what are you brushing?

SILVA:

Sweat off. Let me wipe it. . . .

*He brushes her arm with his handkerchief.*

BABY DOLL:

*(Laughing weakly)*

No, please don't. It feels funny.

SILVA:

How does it feel?

BABY DOLL:

Funny! All up and down. You cut it out now. If you don't cut it out I'm going to call.

SILVA:

Call who?

BABY DOLL:

That nigger who's cuttin' the grass across the road.

SILVA:

Go on. Call then.

BABY DOLL:

Hey!

*(Her voice is faint, weak)*

Hey, boy, boy!

SILVA:

Can't you call any louder?

BABY DOLL:

I feel so funny! What's the matter with me?

SILVA:

You're just relaxing. You're big. There's a lot of you and it's all relaxing! So give in. Stop getting yourself all excited.

BABY DOLL:

I'm not—but you. . . .

SILVA:

II???

BABY DOLL:

Yes. You. Suspensions. The ideas you have about my husband . . . suspicions.



SILVA:

Suspensions? Such as . . .

BABY DOLL:

Such as he burnt your gin down.

SILVA:

Well?

BABY DOLL:

He didn't.

SILVA:

Didn't he?

BABY DOLL:

I'm going inside. I'm going in the house.

*She starts in. He follows close beside her.*

SILVA:

But you're afraid of the house! Do you believe in ghosts, Mrs. Meighan? I do. I believe in the presence of evil spirits.

BABY DOLL:

What evil spirits you talking about now?

SILVA:

Spirits of violence—and cunning—malevolence—cruelty—treachery—destruction. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Oh, them's just human characteristics.

SILVA:

They're evil spirits that haunt the human heart and take possession of it, and spread from one human heart to another human heart the way that a fire goes springing from leaf to leaf and branch to branch in a tree till a forest is all aflame with it—the birds take flight—the

wild things are suffocated . . . everything green and beautiful is destroyed. . . .

BABY DOLL:

You have got fire on the brain.

SILVA:

I see it as more than it seems to be on the surface. I saw it last night as an explosion of those evil spirits that haunt the human heart—I fought it! I ran into it, beating it, stamping it, shouting the curse of God at it! They dragged me out, suffocating. I was defeated! When I came to, lying on the ground—the fire had won the battle, and all around was a ring of human figures! The fire lit their faces! I looked up. And they were illuminated! Their eyes, their teeth were SHINING!! SEE! LIKE THIS!

*He twists his face into a grotesque grimace of pleasure. He holds her. They have arrived at the door to the interior of the house.*

Yeah! Like this! Like this!!

*He thrusts his grimacing face at her. She springs back, frightened.*

BABY DOLL:

Hey! Please! Don't do that! Don't scare me!

SILVA:

The faces I saw—were grinning! Then I knew! I knew the fire was not accidental!

*He holds her fast at the door.*

BABY DOLL:

*(Weakly)*

Not accidental?

SILVA:

No, it was not accidental! It was an expression, a manifestation of the human will to *destroy*.

BABY DOLL:

I wouldn't—feel that way—about it. . . .

SILVA:

I do! I do! And so I say I believe in ghosts, in haunted places, places haunted by the people that occupy them with hearts overrun by demons of hate and destruction. I believe his place, this house is haunted. . . . What's the matter?

BABY DOLL:

*(Now thoroughly shaken)*

I don't know. . . .

SILVA:

You're scared to enter the house, is that the trouble?

BABY DOLL:

*(Calling)*

Aunt Rose. Aunt Rose!!

*(No answer)*

That old woman can't hear a thing.

SILVA:

There's no question about it. This place is haunted.

BABY DOLL:

I'm getting—I'm getting so thirsty, so hot and thirsty!

SILVA:

Then why don't you treat yourself to a drink of cold water?

BABY DOLL:

I—I thought I might make us a—pitcher of—cold lemonade.





*For some reason, BABY DOLL doesn't want to enter the front door and she starts around the porch away from him. A board cracks under her weight. She screams, staggers. SILVA rushes to her and seizes her plump arm, placing an arm behind her. She giggles weakly, but for the first time accepting his help.*

BABY DOLL:

The place is—collapsing right underneath me!

SILVA:

You're trembling, Mrs. Meighan, shaking all over!

BABY DOLL:

Your—your hands are so—hot—I don't think I ever felt hands as hot as your hands, they're—why they're like a couple of plates—took right out of—the oven!

SILVA:

Burn, do they?

BABY DOLL:

Yeah, they—*do*, they *burn*—me. . . .

SILVA:

The idea of lemonade is very attractive. I would be glad to help you squeeze the lemons.

*(Tightens the pressure of his hands)*

BABY DOLL:

I know you would! I mean I—thanks, but—I can do it myself.

SILVA:

You don't want my assistance, Mrs. Meighan?

BABY DOLL:

Naw, it ain't necessary. . . .



SILVA:

But then you would have to go into the house alone  
and the house is haunted! I better go in with you!

BABY DOLL:

. . . No, it ain't necessary!

*(She is panting)*

SILVA:

You want me to stay on the porch?

BABY DOLL:

Yeh, you stay on the porch!

SILVA:

Why *shouldn't* I come inside?

BABY DOLL:

No reason, just—just . . . !

*(She giggles weakly)*

You stay out here while I make the lemonade and . . .

SILVA:

All right. Go on, Mrs. Meighan. . . .

BABY DOLL:

You stay out here. . . .

*He doesn't answer. She stares at him, not moving.*

SILVA:

Now what's the matter now? Why don't you go in?

BABY DOLL:

I don't think I better. I think I will go across the road  
to the gin. They got a water cooler. . . .

SILVA:

The water cooler's for colored. A lady, a white lady  
like you, the wife of the big white boss, would place  
herself in an undignified position if she went over the



road to drink with the hands! They might get notions about her! Unwholesome ideas! The sight of her soft white flesh, so smooth and abundant, might inflame their—natures . . .

*Suddenly, BABY DOLL sees something off and . . .*

66]

NEGRO BOY COMING DOWN THE ROAD.

*He pushes a lawnmower. Behind him can be seen ARCHIE LEE's gin, working.*

67]

BABY DOLL.

*She rushes past SILVA in the direction of the Negro boy, runs unsteadily as if she were drunk, across the unkempt lawn and out into the shimmering brilliance of the road.*

BABY DOLL:

Boy! Boy! I want you to cut my grass.

BOY:

Can't now, ma'am.

BABY DOLL:

Yes, you can.

BOY:

I got a job cuttin' grass across Tiger Tail Bayou.

BABY DOLL:

You cut grass here.

*Her intensity frightens the boy.*

BOY:

Yes, ma'am, later.

BABY DOLL:

NO! NOW! RIGHT NOW! I—I'll pay you five dollars. . . .

BOY:

Yes, ma'am.

BABY DOLL:

I'll pay you five dollars . . . but *now*.

BOY:

*(Scared to death)*

Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

BABY DOLL:

And work close to the house. Hear! Speak up. Do you hear. . . ?

BOY:

Yes ma'am. Yes ma'am.

BABY DOLL *sees* . . .

68]

SILVA.

*As he comes into the picture, she retreats, walking backwards. Then there is a hoot from the gin. The sound from the gin suddenly stops. This calls her attention to the gin and she starts in that direction.*

SILVA:

Boy.

BOY:

Yes, sir.

SILVA:

Here's that five dollars the lady was mentioning.

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BOY:

Yes, sir.

SILVA:

Only she don't want you to cut the grass.

BOY:

Yes, sir.

SILVA:

So you go on like you were. Understand?

BOY:

Oh, yes, sir. Thank you, sir.

*The boy, now completely bewildered, goes on, as he was.*

69]

#### INTERIOR. COTTON GIN.

*Something is wrong. The men, including Rock, are gathered around a large piece of machinery. There is the characteristic debate as to what is wrong, opinions differing.*

*Onto this rather hectic group runs BABY DOLL. ARCHIE turns on her viciously.*

ARCHIE:

What're you doin' here, have you gone crazy??

BABY DOLL:

I want to tell you something! You big slob.

*This is just a little more than a desperate and harassed ARCHIE can bear. He suddenly comes across and smacks BABY DOLL. Good and hard!*

ARCHIE:

I told you never, never, never, to cross that road to this cotton gin——

70]

CLOSE SHOT. SILVA.

*He has entered and seen the action.*

71]

ARCHIE.

*He notices SILVA.*

ARCHIE:

. . . this cotton gin when niggers are working here.

BABY DOLL:

You left me . . . you know what you left with me over there. . . .

*ARCHIE's eye wanders over to SILVA, and BABY DOLL sees him and clams up.*

72]

SILVA.

*He now officially enters the scene.*

SILVA:

How's progress, Mr. Meighan?

ARCHIE:

Finel Great!

SILVA:

Personally, I can't hear the gin at all.

BABY DOLL:

*(Full of disgust)*

Big Shot!

*And she exits.*

SILVA:

What's holding up?

ARCHIE:

Nothing. . . .

SILVA:

Rock!

*Silva's own foreman steps forward.*

ROCK:

His saw-cylinder is busted.

SILVA:

It figures. I inspected your equipment, Meighan, before I put in my own and I put up my own cotton gin because this equipment was rotten, was rotten, and still is rotten. Now it's quarter past two by my watch and I counted twenty-three fully loaded wagons still out on your runway. And if you can't move those wagons any faster . . .

ARCHIE:

Now don't go into any hysterics. You Italians are prone to get too excited. . . .

SILVA:

Never mind about we Italians. You better get yourself a new saw-cylinder and get this contraption running again. And if you can't get one in Clarksdale, you better go to Tunica, and if you can't get one in Tunica, you better go to Memphis, and if you can't get one in Memphis, keep going to St. Louis. Now get on your horse.

ARCHIE:

Now listen to me, Silva—

SILVA:

One more crack out of you, I'm going to haul across the river. I said get on your horse.

MEIGHAN *hesitates. Then decides he must swallow this humiliation. There's nothing else for him to do under the circumstances. He exits.*

SILVA *calls ROCK over close.*

SILVA:

*(Sotto voce)*

I got a saw-cylinder in our commissary. Go get it and bring Hank over to help you put it in. Get this thing running. He ain't gonna get one in Clarksdale and if he goes to Memphis—well, don't wait for him.

*And he exits.*

73]

ARCHIE LEE IN HIS CHEVY.

*He nearly runs BABY DOLL over.*

BABY DOLL:

Archie Lee! Archie Lee! Archie Lee!

*She stumbles to her knees. She's sobbing. She rests a moment in the tall grass.*

74]

SILVA.

*He runs up to her and stoops down to help her.*

BABY DOLL:

Le' me go. Le' me go.

*She gets up and moves away from him towards her house.*

AUNT ROSE COMFORT, AND BABY DOLL.

AUNT ROSE *comes out of the house all dressed up.*

BABY DOLL:

Aunt Rose Comfort.

AUNT ROSE COMFORT *rushes past her.*

BABY DOLL:

Aunt Rose Comfort!! Where are you going?

AUNT ROSE:

I have to see a sick friend at the county hospital.

*And she is gone. SILVA has caught up to BABY DOLL again.*

BABY DOLL:

You might as well shout at the moon as that old woman.

SILVA:

You didn't want her to go??

BABY DOLL:

She's got no business leaving me here alone.

SILVA:

It makes you uneasy to be alone here with me.

BABY DOLL:

I think she just pretended not to hear me. She has a passion for chocolate candy and she watches the newspapers like a hawk to see if anybody she knows is registered at the county hospital.

SILVA:

Hospital . . . ?

BABY DOLL:

They give candy to patients at the county hospital,



friends and relations send them flowers and candy and Aunt Rose Comfort calls on them and eats up their chocolate candy.

*SILVA explodes with laughter.*

**BABY DOLL:**

One time an old lady friend of Aunt Rose Comfort was dying at the county hospital and Aunt Rose Comfort went over and ate up a two-pound box of chocolate cherries while the old lady was dying, finished it all, hahahaha, while the old lady was dying.

*They're both laughing together.*

I like ole people—they're crazy. . . .

*They both laugh together. . . .*

**SILVA:**

Mrs. Meighan. . . . May I ask you something? Of a personal nature?

**BABY DOLL:**

What?

**SILVA:**

Are you really married to Mr. Meighan?

**BABY DOLL:**

Mr. Vacarro, that's a personal question.

**SILVA:**

All questions are more or less personal, Mrs. Meighan.

**BABY DOLL:**

Well, when I married I wasn't ready for marriage. I was still eighteen, but my daddy was practically on his death bed and wanted to see me took care of before he died. Well, ole Archie Lee had been hanging around like a sick dog for quite some time and . . . the boys

are a sorry lot around here. Ask you to the movies and take you to the old rock quarry instead. You have to get out of the car and throw rocks at 'em, oh, I've had some experiences with boys that would curl your hair if I told you—some—experiences which I've had with boys!! But Archie Lee Meighan was an older fellow and in those days, well, his business was better. You hadn't put up that cotton gin of yours and Archie Lee was ginning out a lot of cotton. You remember?

SILVA:

Yes, I remember. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Well, I told my daddy I wasn't ready for marriage and my daddy told Archie Lee that I wasn't ready for it and he promised my daddy he'd wait till I was ready.

SILVA:

Then the marriage was postponed?

BABY DOLL:

Not the wedding, no, we had the wedding, my daddy gave me away. . . .

SILVA:

But you said that Archie Lee waited?

BABY DOLL:

Yes, *after* the wedding . . . he waited.

SILVA:

For what?

BABY DOLL:

For me to be ready for marriage.

SILVA:

How long did he have to wait?

BABY DOLL:

Oh, he's still waiting! Of course, we had an agreement that . . . well . . . I mean I told him that I'd be ready on my twentieth birthday—I mean ready or *not*. . .

SILVA:

And that's tomorrow?

BABY DOLL:

Uh-huh.

SILVA:

And are you . . . will you—be ready?

BABY DOLL:

That all depends.

SILVA:

What on?

BABY DOLL:

Whether or not the furniture comes back—I guess. . .

SILVA:

Your husband sweats more than any man I know and now I understand why!!

*There is a pause. They look at each other. Then BABY DOLL looks away. Then with a sudden access of energy she enters the house, slams the screen door in his face and latches it.*

BABY DOLL:

*There now! You wait out here! You just wait out here!*

SILVA:

*(Grinning at the screen door)*

Yes, ma'am. I will wait.

76]

INTERIOR. DIMLY LIT ENTRANCE HALL OF  
MEIGHAN HOUSE.

BABY DOLL *turns from screen door to porch and stumbles along the vast and shadowy hall towards the dim light of the kitchen. As soon as she disappears, VACARRO is seen through screen door. He jerks out a pocketknife and rips a hole in the screen.*

BABY DOLL *calls anxiously, out of sight.*

BABY DOLL:

*(From kitchen)*

*What's that?*

77]

THE PORCH.

VACARRO *whistles loudly and casually on the porch. He now slips his fingers through the hole and lifts the latch.*

78]

INTERIOR. KITCHEN OF MEIGHAN HOUSE.  
FULL SHOT.

*Large, old-fashioned room with antiquated, but very capacious, equipment—large ice-box, large sinks and draining boards, large stove converted to gas.*

BABY DOLL *stands in the middle of the floor with an apprehensive expression, but as VACARRO continues whistling on the porch, her usual placidity returns. She notices kettle of greens on the stove.*

BABY DOLL:

*Stupid old thing—forgot to light the stove.*

*She opens the ice-box for lemons.*

*Git me a Frigidaire one of these days.*

*The pan under the ice-box has overflowed and is swamping the floor.*

*Got to empty that pan.*

*Pulls it from under refrigerator with a grunt. A sound catches her ear, a sharp, slapping sound. She looks up anxiously, but the sound is not repeated. She takes out lemons, leaves ice-box door hanging open. All her movements are fumbling and weak. She keeps rubbing her perspiring hands on her hips. She starts to cut lemon, the knife slips and cuts her finger. She looks at the finger. It looks all right at first, then a drop of blood appears. She whimpers a little. The blood increases. She begins to cry like a baby.*

*She makes a vague, anxious movement. Again the slapping sound followed by a soft human sound like a chuckle. She looks that way. Cocks her head. But the sound is not repeated. Still squeezing the cut finger she begins to wander toward the front of the house.*

**CAMERA PANS WITH BABY DOLL AS SHE WANDERS THROUGH HOUSE.**

*She passes through a bare huge room with a dusty chandelier. It was the dining room when the house belonged to the old plantation owners. She whimpers under her breath, squeezing the bleeding finger. Now the blood is running down the hand to the wrist and down the wrist to the forearm and trickling into the soft hollow of her elbow. She groans and whimpers at the sight of the great flight of stairs, but starts up them.*

*Halfway up, at the landing, she hears the slapping*