

sound again and the faunlike mocking laughter. She stops there and waits and listens—but the sound isn't immediately repeated, so she goes on up.

She goes into the bathroom and starts to bandage her cut finger.

79]

INTERIOR HALL OF MEIGHAN HOUSE.

VACARRO DISCOVERED. FULL SHOT.

VACARRO is grinning up at the staircase. He slaps the banisters viciously with his whip, then chuckles.

CAMERA PANS WITH VACARRO.

He strolls into the kitchen, sees ice-box door hanging open. Helps himself to the remains of a chicken, tearing it apart and gnawing the meat off it. He notices lemons and bloodspots—laughs.

SILVA:

Trail o' blood! Ha ha!

He empties the flooded ice-pan over dirty dishes in sink.

Filth! Disgusting!

He slaps the wall with whip and laughs.

80]

INTERIOR. THE MEIGHANS' BEDROOM. BABY DOLL WANDERS IN FROM BATHROOM.

The finger is clumsily bandaged now, and she wanders across the room and examines herself in the mirror.

BABY DOLL:

Look 'a' me! Big mess. . . .

There are dark stains of sweat on the watermelon pink dress. She lazily starts to remove it. Hears the slapping

sound and laugh closer. Pauses, her mouth hanging open. Fumbling attempt to lock door. Key slips from her weak, nerveless fingers. She stoops, grunting, to pick it up.

81]

INTERIOR KITCHEN. VACARRO SQUEEZING LEMONS AND HURLING THE RINDS SAVAGELY AWAY.

He finds gin bottle and sloshes gin into pitcher. Takes ice pick and chops off big hunk of ice. He seems to enjoy all these physical activities, grins tightly, exposing his teeth. Sticks ice pick into wall as if he were stabbing an enemy. Holds pitcher over his head whirling it rapidly so the drink sloshes over and ice rattles loudly, liquid running down his bare brown muscular arm. He drinks out of pitcher.

82]

INTERIOR BEDROOM. BABY DOLL IN DAMP SLIP ROOTING IN CLOSET FOR A FRESH DRESS.

She hears ice rattling in pitcher. Pauses. Cocks head, listening apprehensively. Makes sure door is locked.

83]

INTERIOR MEIGHANS' BEDROOM—
A DIFFERENT ANGLE. BABY DOLL.

Her slip hangs half off one great globular breast, gleaming with sweat. She listens intently.

84]

INTERIOR HALL AND STAIRWAY OF MEIGHAN HOUSE. VACARRO SOFTLY CLIMBING STAIRS. CAMERA FOLLOWS VACARRO INTO ROOMS ACROSS HALL FROM BEDROOM—THEN INTO CHILD'S NURSERY—

Never used. Hobby horse, small fenced bed, Mother Goose pictures on wall. He sits astride wooden horse, lashes its rump with the whip and rocks on it.

85]

INTERIOR MEIGHANS' BEDROOM. BABY DOLL SPRINGS UP FROM FLOOR.

BABY DOLL unlocks the door and peers anxiously into hall. The noise stops.

BABY DOLL:

Archie Lee! Is that you?

VACARRO (out of sight) gives a soft wolf-whistle.

BABY DOLL:

Who's that? Who's in there?

She crosses the hall into nursery.

86]

INTERIOR NURSERY. VACARRO SLIPPING INTO NEXT ROOM AS BABY DOLL ENTERS.

BABY DOLL:

(Nervously)

Hey! What's goin' on?

Whip slap and soft mocking laughter, barely audible.

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro? Are you in that room?

She crosses fearfully and enters next room, VACARRO slipping out just before her entrance. Now she is really frightened.

87]

INTERIOR EMPTY ROOM ADJOINING NURSERY
—FULL SHOT. BABY DOLL ENTERS FEAR-
FULLY.

BABY DOLL:

You! Git outa my house! You got no right to come in!
Where are you?

The door to the hall is locked. She hears the key turn in the lock. Gasps. Pounds door. Rushes back panting into nursery.

88]

INTERIOR NURSERY. BABY DOLL RUSHES IN.

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro, stop playing hide and seek!

The soft mocking laughter comes from the hall.

I know it's you! You're making me very nervous! Mr. Vacarro!! Mr. Vacarro. . . Mr. Vacarro. . .

With each call she creeps forward a few steps. All of a sudden he springs at her, shouting—

SILVA:

(Sudden shout)

BOO!

At this point the scene turns into a wild romp of chil-

dren. She shrieks with laughter. He howls, shouts. She shrieks with terror. She giggles hysterically, running into the hall and starting down steps.

He leaps upon banister and slides to foot of stairs. She turns on the stairs and runs through various rooms slamming doors, giggling hysterically as she runs. A spirit of abandon enters the flight and the pursuit. As he follows her into the bedroom, she throws a pillow at him. He does a comic pratfall, embracing the pillow. She shrieks with laughter. He lunges toward her, throwing the pillow at her fugitive figure.

She is about to run downstairs, but he blocks the way. She screams and takes the steps to the attic.

89]

INTERIOR ATTIC.

Dusty late afternoon beams of light through tiny peaked windows in gables and a jumble of discarded things that have the poetry of things once lived with by the no-longer living.

BABY DOLL doesn't stop to observe all this. She probably didn't even expect to find herself in an attic. She rushes in, slams the door, discovers a rusty bolt and bolts it just as VACARRO arrives at the door.

Her panting laughter expires as he pushes the door. She suddenly realizes the full import of her situation; gasps and backs away.

SILVA:

Open Sesame!!

BABY DOLL:

(In a low, serious voice)

The game is over. I've quit.

SILVA:

That's not fair, you've got to keep playing hide-and-seek till you're it.

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro, will you please go back downstairs so I can unlock the door of this attic and come out—because the floor is weak. . . . I don't want to fall through. It's crumbling under my feet. I had no idea—I never been up here before!—it was in such a weakened condition. *There is something appealing in her soft, pleasing voice.*

SILVA:

(Whispering, mouth to crack)

I wouldn't dream of leaving you alone in a falling-down attic any more than you'd dream of eatin' a nut a man had cracked in his mouth. Don't you realize that??

BABY DOLL:

(With sudden gathering panic)

Mr. Vacarro! I got to get out of here. Quick! Go! Go! —down! Quick, please!

SILVA:

I can hear that old floor giving away fast. . . .

BABY DOLL:

So can I, and I'm *on* it.

SILVA:

Shall I call the fire department to come here with a net to catch you when you fall through?

BABY DOLL:

Wouldn't be time. No! Go!—then I can unlock the—

SILVA:

No, I don't suppose they'd get here on time or if they

did the net would be rotten as those fire hoses last night when they came to put out the fire that burned down my gin!

Suddenly, a piece of plaster falls beneath her feet. The rotten laths are exposed. She scrambles to another place, which is—or seems—equally shaky. She screams.

SILVA:

Are you being attacked by a ghost in there?

BABY DOLL:

Please be kind! Go away!

SILVA:

Why don't you unlock the door so I can come to your rescue?

BABY DOLL:

I—can't because . . .

SILVA:

Huh? Huh?

BABY DOLL:

(Whisper)

YOU.

VACARRO shoves door just a little with his shoulder. The bolt is not strong.

You . . . so! Scare me!

SILVA:

Scared of *me*??

BABY DOLL:

Yeah, scared of you and your—*whip*.

SILVA:

Why're you scared of my whip? Huh? Do you think I might whip you? Huh? Scared I might whip you with it and

Slaps boots regularly with riding crop.

leave red marks on your—body, on your—creamy white silk—skin? Is that why're scared, Mrs. Meighan?

A murmur from her.

You want me to go away—with my whip??

Another murmur.

All right. Tell you what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna slip pencil and paper under this door and all I want is your signature on the paper. . . .

BABY DOLL:

What paper?

SILVA:

I guess that you would call it an affidavit, legally stating that Archie Lee Meighan burned down the Syndicate Gin. . . .

(Pause)

Okay?

BABY DOLL:

Mr. Vacarro, this whole floor's about to collapse under me!

SILVA:

What do you say?

BABY DOLL:

Just leave the paper, leave it right out there and I'll sign it and send it to you, I'll . . .

SILVA:

Mrs. Meighan, I am a Sicilian. They're an old race of people, an ancient race, and ancient races aren't trustful races by nature. I've got to have the signed paper now. Otherwise I'm going to break this door down. Do you hear me?

(A pause)

Do you hear me?

(Silence)

Whimpering, sobbing.

I gather you don't believe me.

Suddenly, with a single eloquent gesture of his whole body he has pushed the door open and on the other side BABY DOLL, in absolute panic, runs, runs away from the threatening man and whip and towards the darkest corner of the attic. A few steps, however, and the floor really gives way. There is a shower of plaster, a rising cloud of plaster dust.

VACARRO's face.

The dust settles to reveal her, precariously perched across a beam . . .

VACARRO calmly lights a cigarette.

SILVA:

Now you're either going to agree to sign this thing, or I'm going to come out there after you and my additional weight will make the whole floor you know what!

BABY DOLL:

OOOOOOH! What am I gonna do?

SILVA:

Do what I tell you.

(He gingerly steps on a place. . . . A trickle of plaster)

Awful bad shape.

He reaches and picks up a 1 x 3 about twelve feet long.

On the end of it he puts a pencil and piece of paper.

BABY DOLL:

O-o-o-o-o-h!

SILVA:

What?

Suddenly, he stamps on the plaster. There is a big fall of plaster; BABY DOLL screams.

BABY DOLL:

All right, all right. —All right. . . . Hurry! Hurry!

SILVA:

Hurry what?

BABY DOLL:

I'll do whatever you want—only hurry!!

SILVA:

Here it comes. . . .

He reaches out his little piece of paper and pencil, balanced on the 1 x 3. She grabs it, scribbles her name in frantic haste, panting, and puts the piece of paper back, fixing it on a nail on the end of the 1 x 3, and VACARRO pulls it back. He looks at her signature and throws back his head in a sudden wild laugh.

SILVA:

Thank you. You may come out now.

BABY DOLL:

Not till I hear you! Going down those stairs. . . .

SILVA:

(Grinning and starting down)

Hear me? Hear my descending footsteps on the stairs. . . .
VACARRO straddles the long spiraled banister and slides all the way down to the landing at the bottom with a leap that starts another minor cascade.

BABY DOLL utters a little cry and comes out of the attic door. Silence. Putt-putt-putt-putt of the gin. She leans over stair well and looks straight down into the grin-

ning face of VACARRO. He gives her a quick, grinning nod or salute.

SILVA:

Okay, you're "Home free"! And so am I! Bye-bye!

BABY DOLL:

Where are you going??

SILVA:

Back to my little gray Quonset home in the West! For a peaceful siesta. . . .

BABY DOLL:

Wait, please!—I want to——

She starts to come running down the stairs, her hair wild, panting, sweating, smeared with attic dust. Then halfway down she stops. . . .

BABY DOLL:

(Now stealing towards him)

I want to——

But she can't remember what she "wants to." He waits quizzically with his cocky grin for her to complete her sentence but she doesn't. Instead she looks up and down him and her eyelids flutter as if the image could not be quietly contained.

He nods as if in agreement to something stated. He chuckles and then turns on his heels and starts briskly for the porch. She calls after him . . .

BABY DOLL:

Was *that* all you wanted. . . ?

He turns and looks at her.

Me to confess that Archie Lee burnt down your gin?

SILVA:

What else did you imagine?

She turns away like a shy child, serious-faced; she sits down on the bottom step.

SILVA:

(Gently)

You're a child, Mrs. Meighan. That's why we played hide-and-seek, a game for children. . . .

BABY DOLL:

You don't have to go all the way to your place for a nap. You could take a nap here.

SILVA:

But all the furniture's been removed from the house.

BABY DOLL:

Not the nursery stuff. They's a small bed in there, a crib, you could curl up and—let the slats down. . . .

An effect of two shy children trying to strike up a friendship. He continues to look at her. The windy afternoon has tossed a cloud over the sun, now declining. But it passes and his smile becomes as warm as sunlight. She isn't looking into his face but down at the scuffed kid slipper. Abruptly he gives a short quick nod and says simply . . .

SILVA:

I'm happy to accept the invitation.

(He starts up the stairs. When he gets to the point where she is sitting, he says)

Come up and sing me to sleep.

(Then he continues on up)

BABY DOLL is left alone, bewildered, sitting alone on the big staircase.

BABY DOLL:

(To herself)

My daddy would *turn* in his grave.
She starts up the stairs. . . .

90]

THE NURSERY.

VACARRO is on the crib, with the slats down. He is curled with his thumb in his mouth. She comes to view, stands in the doorway a moment, then goes and crouches beside the bed. Gently, she raises his head and bare throat, crooks an arm under and begins to sing: "Rock-a-Bye Baby."

He sighs contentedly, removes the signed paper from his shirt pocket and tucks it under his belt for safer keeping.

Then he appears to fall asleep.

DISSOLVE.

91]

IN A HOSPITAL ROOM.

AUNT ROSE COMFORT is sitting by a friend who is in her death coma. AUNT ROSE eating chocolate cherries.

DISSOLVE.

92]

SUPPLY STORE IN MEMPHIS. MEIGHAN AT COUNTER.

ARCHIE:

(To clerk)

Godamighty man, I'm good for it.

He reaches for the part he has come for. It's wrapped and ready to go.

CLERK:

We have orders. No credit. Cash basis. Everything.

ARCHIE:

I warn you. I'll never come in this store again.

CLERK:

Sorry.

ARCHIE:

Look, I just happened to leave the place in my work clothes. My wallet ain't on me!

CLERK:

Cash only.

MR. ARCHIE LEE MEIGHAN *suddenly turns and leaves in complete disgust.*

93]

FRONT. ARCHIE LEE'S GIN.

It is several hours later and he has driven back from Memphis. He halts his motor with an exhausted grunt. He appears to have shrunk in size. He carries a sweat-drenched coat over his arm and the sweaty shirt clings to him. His chest heaves with unhealthy fast respiration, and he fingers the unbuttoned collar, as he takes in the situation: The gin is running again!!!—and without his o.k.—and how did they get the damned thing going again!??

93A]

INTERIOR GIN.

He walks in and passes Rock.

ARCHIE:

Hahaha! Looks like we're back in business.

ROCK:

(Offers him only the most fleeting glance)

Does, doesn't it.

ARCHIE:

You all must have done some mighty fast repairs.

ROCK:

No repairs—put in a new saw-cylinder.

ARCHIE:

From where? Out of a cloud? Why, I checked every supply outfit between Memphis and Greenville and nobody's got a new saw-cylinder ready for installation before next Wednesday.

ROCK:

(Tersely)

Boss had one at our place. I put it in.

ARCHIE:

How do you like that? How come I wasn't let in on this piece of information before I lit out of here on the wild-goose chase that just about killed me? Where is that wop Vacarro? I want to get some explanation of this.

At this precise moment the whistle blows, announcing the end of the day and the gin machinery stops work. The Negroes, who have been working as porters and mechanics, line up for pay.

ROCK:

(Meantime)

You seen the boss-man, Norm?

A Negro shakes his head.

ROCK notices ARCHIE looking at the line a little worried.

ROCK:

(To Archie)

Don't worry. Vacarro is meeting the payroll for tonight.

ARCHIE:

Where is he?

ROCK:

(To another Negro)

Moose, you seen the boss?

MOOSE:

No time lately, Capt'n.

94]

THE GIN. (ANOTHER ANGLE)

MEIGHAN retreats from the gin uncertainly. Camera follows.

Halfway across the road he hears laughter, evidently directed at him. His back stiffens. Something has happened, he feels, that has somehow made him the patsy of whatever occasion this is.

95]

CLOSE SHOT. MEIGHAN.

Suspicious, angry, something violent and dangerous is growing up in his heart. He mutters to himself. Hears the laughter again. Curses to himself.

96]

MEIGHAN ENTERS THE BIG FRONT YARD AND STARES AT THE HOUSE.

97]

THE HOUSE.

Silent. Not a move. Not a sound.

98]

MEIGHAN NOTICES VACARRO'S DISCARDED SHIRT.

He picks it up and lifts his head and calls into the house.

ARCHIE:

Hey! Anybody living here? Anybody still living in this house?

99]

UPSTAIRS. THE NURSERY.

BABY DOLL, considerably disarrayed, has heard ARCHIE's shout from below and is just making her way on hands and knees to the window. Now she crawls on the floor over to the crib.

BABY DOLL:

It's Archie Lee.

Downstairs screen door slams. VACARRO gurgles, murmurs, whimpers, all of which mean 'don't bother me, I want to sleep.'

There is a sudden shout from downstairs as if a cry of pain.

100]

DOWNSTAIRS.

What MEIGHAN sees is the debris of the ceiling. He looks up at the gaping hole in the roof over his head at

the top of the stair well and then down the stairs. BABY DOLL appears on the staircase in a silken wrapper.

ARCHIE:

What happened here?

BABY DOLL doesn't answer. She stares at him with blank insolence.

ARCHIE:

Hunh? I said what the hell happened here?

BABY DOLL:

You mean that mess in the hall? The plaster broke in the attic.

ARCHIE:

How'd that—how'd that—happen?

BABY DOLL:

How does anything happen? It just happened.

She comes on lazily down, avoiding his look.

101]

INTERIOR NIGHT. DOWNSTAIRS. FRONT HALL.

ARCHIE:

Ain't I told you not to slop around here in a slip?

She gives a faint indifferent shrug which enrages him; he senses something openly contemptuous, a change in her attitude towards him. He grabs her bare shoulder.
What's the matter with your skin? It looks all broke out.

(Inspects the inflamed welts)

What's this?

BABY DOLL:

What's what?

ARCHIE:

These marks on you?

BABY DOLL:

Mosquito bites, I scratched them. . . . Lemme go.

ARCHIE:

(Bellowing)

Ain't I told you not to slop around here in a slip???!!!

AUNT ROSE COMFORT, *alarmed by the shout, appears in door to kitchen, crying out thin and high.*

AUNT ROSE:

Almost ready, now, folks, almost ready!!

She rushes back into the kitchen with her frightened cackle. There is a crash of china from the kitchen.

ARCHIE:

The breakage alone in that kitchen would ruin a well-to-do-man! Now you go up and git some decent clo'se on yuh an' come back down. Y'know they got a new bureau in Washington, D. C. It's called the U.W. Bureau. Y'know what U.W. stands for? It stands fo' useless women. They's secret plans on foot to round 'em all up and shoot 'em. Hahahaha!

BABY DOLL:

How about men that's destructive? Don't they have secret plans to round up men that's destructive and shoot them too?

ARCHIE:

What destructive men you talkin' about?

BABY DOLL:

Men that blow things up and burn things down because they're too evil and stupid to git along otherwise. Because fair competition is too much for 'em. So they turn

criminal. Do things like Arson. Willful destruction of property by fire. . . .

She steps out on the porch. Night sounds. A cool breeze tosses her damp curls. She sniffs the night air like a young horse. . . .

The porch light, a milky globe patterned with dead insects, turns on directly over her head and ARCHIE LEE comes up behind her and grips her bare shoulders, his face anxious, cunning.

ARCHIE:

Who said that to you? Where'd you git that from??

BABY DOLL:

Turn that porch light off. There's men on the road can see me.

ARCHIE:

Who said *arson* to you? Who spoke of willful destruction of . . . YOU never knew them words. Who SAID 'em to yuh?

BABY DOLL:

Sometimes, Big Shot, you don't seem t' give me credit for much intelligence! I've been to school, in my life, and I'm a—magazine reader!

She shakes off his grip and starts down porch steps. There is a group of men on Tiger Tail Road. One of them gives a wolf-whistle. At once, ARCHIE LEE charges down the steps and across the yard towards the road—crying out—

ARCHIE:

Who gave that whistle?? Which of you give a wolf-whistle at my wife?

The group ignores him except for a light mocking laugh as they continue down road. The Camera returns to BABY DOLL blandly smiling.

We hear the rattle of the cistern pump being vigorously exercised in the side yard. ARCHIE LEE stalks back up to porch, winded, like an old hound. . . .

ARCHIE:

Men from the Syndicate Plantation! White an' black mixed! Headed fo' Tiger Tail Bayou with frog gigs and rubber boots on! I just hope they turn downstream and trespass across my property! I just hope they dast to! I'll blast them out of the Bayou with a shotgun!

BABY DOLL:

Small dogs have a loud bark.

ARCHIE:

Nobody's gonna insult no woman of *mine*!!

BABY DOLL:

You take a lot for granted when you say *mine*. This afternoon I come to you for protection. What did I *git*? *Slapped!* And told to go home. . . . I, for one, have got no sympathy for you, now or ever. An' the rasslin' match between us is *over* so let me *go*!

ARCHIE:

You're darn tootin' it's over. In just three hours the terms of the agreement will be settled for good.

BABY DOLL:

Don't count on it. That agreement is canceled. Because it takes two sides to make an agreement, like an argument, and both sides got to live up to it completely. You didn't live up to yours. Stuck me in a house which

is haunted and five complete sets of unpaid-for furniture was removed from it las' night, OOH H I'm *free* from my side of that bargain!

ARCHIE:

Sharp at midnight! We'll find out about that.

BABY DOLL:

Too much has happened here lately. . . .

She descends into yard. ARCHIE LEE eyes her figure, sweating, licking his chops.

ARCHIE:

Well . . . my credit's wide open again!

BABY DOLL:

So is the jailhouse door wide open for you if the truth comes out.

ARCHIE:

You threatenin' me with—*blackmail*??

BABY DOLL:

Somebody's drawin' some cool well water from the pump back there.

She starts back. He follows. The full frog-gigging moon emerges from a mackerel sky, and we see VACARRO making his ablutions at the cistern pump with the zest and vigor of a man satisfied.

BABY DOLL:

(With unaccustomed hilarity)

HEIGH-HO SILVER . . . HaHa!!

ARCHIE LEE *stops dead in his tracks.*

ARCHIE:

Him?! Still on the place?

BABY DOLL:

Give me another drink of that sweet well water, will

yuh, Mistuh Vacarro? You're the first person could draw it.

ARCHIE:

(Advancing)

YOU STILL HERE?

BABY DOLL:

Archie Lee, Mr. Vacarro says he might not put up a new cotton gin, but let you gin cotton for him all the time, now. Ain't you pleased about that? Tomorrow he plans to come with lots more cotton, maybe another twenty-seven wagonloads. And while you're ginning it out, he'll have me entertain him, make lemonade for him. It's going to go on and on! Maybe even next fall.

SILVA:

(Through the water)

Good neighbor policy in practice.

(Having wetted himself down he now drinks from gourd)

I love well water. It tastes as fresh as if it never was tasted before. Mrs. Meighan, would you care for some, too?

BABY DOLL:

Why thank you, yes, I would.

There is a grace and sweetness and softness of speech about her, unknown before. . . .

SILVA:

Cooler nights have begun.

ARCHIE LEE *has been regarding the situation, with its various possibilities, and is far from content.*

ARCHIE:

How long you been on the place?

SILVA:

(Drawing sensuously with eyes on girl)

All this unusually long hot fall afternoon I've imposed on your hospitality. You want some of this well water?

ARCHIE:

(With a violent gesture of refusal)

Where you been here???

SILVA:

Taking a nap on your only remaining bed. The crib in the nursery with the slats let down. I had to curl up on it like a pretzel, but the fire last night deprived me of so much sleep that almost any flat surface was suitable for slumber.

(Winks impertinently at ARCHIE LEE, then turns to grin sweetly at BABY DOLL, wiping the drippings of well water from his throat. Then turns back to ARCHIE)

But there's something sad about it. Know what I mean?

ARCHIE:

Sad about what??

SILVA:

An unoccupied nursery in a house, and all the other rooms empty. . . .

ARCHIE:

That's no problem of yours!

SILVA:

The good neighbor policy makes your problems mine—and vice versa. . . .

AUNT ROSE:

(Violent and high and shrill, from the back steps)

SUPPER! READY! CHILDREN. . . .

She staggers back in.

Now there's a pause in which all three stand tense and silent about the water pump. BABY DOLL with her slow, new smile speaks up first. . . .

BABY DOLL:

You all didn't hear us called in to supper?

ARCHIE:

You gonna eat here tonight?

SILVA:

Mrs. Meighan asked me to stay for supper but I told her I'd better get to hear the invitation from the head of the house before I'd feel free to accept it. So . . . What do you say?

A tense pause . . . then, with great difficulty . . .

ARCHIE:

Stay! . . . fo' supper.

BABY DOLL:

You'll have to take potluck.

SILVA:

I wouldn't be putting your out?

This is addressed to BABY DOLL, who smiles vaguely and starts toward the house, saying . . .

BABY DOLL:

I better get into mu' clo'se. . . .

ARCHIE:

Yeah . . . hunh. . . .

They follow her sensuous departure with their eyes till she fades into the dusk.

ARCHIE:

Did I understand you to say you wouldn't build a new gin but would leave your business to me?

SILVA:

If that's agreeable with you. . . .

ARCHIE:

(Turning from his wife's back to VACARRO's face)

I don't know yet, I'll have to consider the matter. . . .

Financing is involved such as—new equipment. . . .

Let's go in and eat now. I got a pain in my belly, I got a sort of heartburn. . . .

102]

INTERIOR HOUSE.

They enter the kitchen and then to the dining room.

ARCHIE LEE's condition is almost shock. He can't quite get with the situation. He numbly figures that he'd better play it cool till the inner fog clears. But his instinct is murder. His cowardly caution focuses his malice on the old woman and the unsatisfactory supper she's prepared.

ARCHIE:

Hey! Hey! One more place at the table! Mr. Vacarro from the Syndicate Plantation is stayin' to supper.

AUNT ROSE:

(With a startled outcry, clutching her chest)

Oh—I had no idea that company was expected. Just let me—change the silver and . . .

ARCHIE:

Another place is all that's called for. Have you been here all day?

AUNT ROSE:

What was that, Archie Lee?

ARCHIE:

HAVE YOU BEEN IN THE HOUSE ALL AFTER-
NOON OR DID YOU LIGHT OUT TO THE
COUNTY HOSPITAL TO EAT SOME CHOCO-
LATE CANDY????

AUNT ROSE *gasps as if struck, then she cackles . . .*

AUNT ROSE:

I—I—visited!—an old friend in a—coma!

ARCHIE:

Then you was out while I was——.

(Turns to VACARRO—fiercely)

I work like the hammers of hell! I come home to find
the attic floor has fell through, my wife bad-tempered,
insulting! and a supper of hog slops—. Sit down, eat.
I got to make a phone call.

*He crosses somewhat unsteadily into the hall and picks
up the telephone as BABY DOLL descends the grand
staircase and goes past him with face austerely averted.
She is clad in a fresh silk sheath and is adjusting an
earring as she passes through the hall. We go with her
into dining room.*

BABY DOLL:

He's at the phone about something and if I was you, I
wouldn't hang around long.

SILVA:

I think I've got the ace of spades in my pocket.

*He pats where he's stashed the confession signed by
BABY DOLL.*

BABY DOLL:

Don't count on a law court. Justice is deaf and blind
as that old woman!

AUNT ROSE COMFORT *rushes out to cut roses for a vase to set on table.*

BABY DOLL:

I'm advising you, go!—while he's on the phone.

SILVA:

I find you different this evening in some way.

BABY DOLL:

Never mind, just go! Before he gits off the phone.

SILVA:

Suddenly grown up!

BABY DOLL:

(Looking at him gratefully)

I feel cool and rested, for the first time in my life. I feel that way, rested and cool.

(A pause)

Are you going or staying???

They are close together by table. Suddenly she catches her breath and flattens her body to his. The embrace is active. She reaches above her and pulls the beaded chain of the light bulb, plunging the room in dark. We hear two things: The breath of the embracing couple and the voice of ARCHIE LEE on the phone.

ARCHIE:

A bunch of men from the Syndicate Plantation are out frog-giggin' on Tiger Tail Bayou and I thought we all might join the party. How's about meeting at the Brite Spot in halfn hour? With full equipment.

A few more indistinct words, he hangs up. The light is switched back on in the dining room. AUNT ROSE rushes in.

AUNT ROSE:

Roses! Poems of nature . . .

ARCHIE LEE *enters from the hall. His agitation is steadily mounting.*

ARCHIE:

Never mind poems of nature, just put food on th' table!

AUNT ROSE:

If I'd only known that company was expected, I'd . . .

Her breathless voice expires as she scuttles about putting roses in a vase.

AUNT ROSE:

Only take a minute.

ARCHIE:

We ain't waitin' no minute. Bring out the food. . . .

BABY DOLL *smiles, rather scornfully, at ARCHIE LEE bullying the old woman.*

ARCHIE:

Is that what they call a Mona Lisa smile you got on your puss?

BABY DOLL:

Don't pick on Aunt Rose. . . .

ARCHIE:

(Shouting)

Put some food on the table!!

(Then muttering dangerously)

I'm going to have a talk with that old woman, right here tonight. She's outstayed her welcome.

SILVA:

What a pretty blue wrapper you're wearing tonight, Mrs. Meighan.

BABY DOLL:

(Coyly)

Thank you, Mr. Vacarro.

SILVA:

There's so many shades of blue. Which shade is that?

BABY DOLL:

Just baby blue.

ARCHIE:

Baby blue, huh!

SILVA:

It brings out the blue of your eyes.

ARCHIE:

(Screaming)

Food! Food!

• AUNT ROSE:

Immediately! This instant!

She comes through door from the kitchen, holding a big plate of greens, which she sets on the table with great apprehension. They are not really cooked. ARCHIE stares at them.

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CLOSE SHOT OF GREENS, WHICH ARE ALMOST RAW.

104]

CLOSE SHOT OF ARCHIE SWEARING UNDER HIS BREATH.

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GROUP SCENE.

BABY DOLL:

This wrapper was part of my trousseau, as a matter of fact. I got all my trousseau at Memphis at various departments where my daddy was known. Big department stores on Main Street.

ARCHIE:

WHAT IS THIS STUFF??!! GRASS??!!

BABY DOLL:

Greens! Don't you know greens when you see them?

ARCHIE:

This stuff is greens??!!

AUNT ROSE *comes nervously from pantry.*

AUNT ROSE:

Archie Lee dotes on greens, don't you, Archie Lee?

ARCHIE:

No, I don't.

AUNT ROSE:

You don't? You don't dote on greens?

ARCHIE:

I don't think I ever declared any terrible fondness for greens in your presence.

AUNT ROSE:

Well, somebody did.

ARCHIE:

Somebody probably did—sometime, somewhere, but that don't mean it was me!

Lurches back in his chair and half rises, swinging to

face VACARRO—who had taken BABY DOLL's hand under the table.

VACARRO smiles blandly.

BABY DOLL:

Sit back down, Big Shot, an' eat your greens. Greens puts iron in the system.

AUNT ROSE:

I thought that Archie Lee doted on greens! —All those likes an' dislikes are hard to keep straight in your head. But Archie Lee's easy to cook for. Jim's a complainer, oh, my, what a complainer Jim is, and Susie's household, they're nothing but complainers.

ARCHIE:

Take this slop off th' table!!

AUNT ROSE:

(Terrified)

I'll—cook you some—eggs Birmingham! —These greens didn' cook long enough. I played a fool trick with my stove. I forgot to light it! Ha ha! When I went out to the store—I had my greens on the stove. I thought I'd left 'em boilin'. But when I got home I discovered that my stove wasn't lighted.

ARCHIE:

Why do you say "my" stove? Why is everything "my"?

BABY DOLL:

Archie Lee, I believe you been drinkin'!

ARCHIE:

You keep out of this! Set down, Aunt Rose.

AUNT ROSE:

—Do what, Archie Lee?

ARCHIE:

Set down here. I want to ask you a question.

AUNT ROSE *sits down slowly and stiffly, all atremble.*

What sort of—plans have you made?

AUNT ROSE:

Plans, Archie Lee? What sort of plans do you mean?

ARCHIE:

Plans for the future!

BABY DOLL:

I don't think this kind of discussion is necessary in front of company.

SILVA:

Mr. Meighan, when a man is feeling uncomfortable over something, it often happens that he takes out his annoyance on some completely innocent person just because he has to make somebody suffer.

ARCHIE:

You keep outa this, too. I'm askin' Aunt Rose a perfectly sensible question. Now, Aunt Rose. You been here since August and that's a mighty long stay. Now, it's my honest opinion that you're in need of a rest. You been cookin' around here and cookin' around there for how long now? How long have you been cookin' around people's houses?

AUNT ROSE:

(Barely able to speak)

I've helped out my—relatives, my—folks—whenever they—*needed me to!* I was always—*invited!* Sometimes—*begged* to come! When *babies* were expected or when somebody was *sick*, they called for Aunt Rose, and

Aunt Rose was always—ready. . . . Nobody *ever* had to—*put me—out!* —If you—gentlemen will excuse me from the table—I will pack my things! If I hurry I'll catch the nine o'clock bus to—

She can't think 'where to.' VACARRO *seizes her hand, pushing back from table.*

SILVA:

Miss Rose Comfort. Wait. I'll drive you home.

AUNT ROSE:

—I don't!—have nowhere to!—go. . . .

SILVA:

Yes, you do. I need someone to cook for me at my place. I'm tired of my own cooking and I am anxious to try those eggs Birmingham you mentioned. Is it a deal?

AUNT ROSE:

—Why, I—

BABY DOLL:

Sure it's a deal. Mr. Vacarro will be good to you, Aunt Rose Comfort, and he will even *pay* you, and maybe—well—y'never can tell about things in the future. . . .

AUNT ROSE:

I'll run pack my things!

She resumes reedy hymn in a breathless, cracked voice as she goes upstairs.

ARCHIE:

Anything else around here you wanta take with yuh, Vacarro?

SILVA:

(Looks around coolly as if considering the question)

BABY DOLL:

(Utters a high, childish giggle)

ARCHIE:

Well, *is* they? Anything else around here you wanta take away with yuh?

BABY DOLL:

(Rising gaily)

Why, yaiss, Archie Lee. Mr. Vacarro noticed the house was overloaded with furniture and he would like us to loan him five complete sets of it to——

ARCHIE:

(Seizing neck of whiskey bottle)

YOU SHUDDUP! I will git to you later.

BABY DOLL:

If you ever git to me it sure is going to be *later*, ha ha, *much* later, ha ha!

She crosses to kitchen sink, arranging her kiss-me-quick's in the soap-splashed mirror, also regarding the two men behind her with bland satisfaction: her childish face, beaming, is distorted by the flawed glass.

She sings or hums "Sweet and Lovely." ARCHIE LEE stands by table, breathing heavy as a walrus in labor. He looks from one to the other. SILVA coolly picks up a big kitchen knife and lops off a hunk of bread, then tosses kitchen knife out of ARCHIE LEE's reach and then he dips bread in pot of greens.

SILVA:

Colored folks call this pot liquor.

BABY DOLL:

I love pot liquor.

SILVA:

Me, too.

BABY DOLL:

(*Dreamily*)

—Crazy 'bout pot liquor. . . .

She turns about and rests her hips against sink. ARCHIE LEE's breathing is loud as a cotton gin, his face fiery. He takes swallow after swallow from bottle.

VACARRO devours bread.

SILVA:

Mm-UMMM!

BABY DOLL:

Good?

SILVA:

Yes!—Good!

BABY DOLL:

—That's good. . . .

OLD FUSSY makes a slow stately entrance, pushing the door open wider with her fat hips and squawking peevishly at this slight inconvenience.

MEIGHAN wheels about violently and hurls empty bottle at her. She flaps and squawks back out. Her distressed outcries are taken up by her sisters, who are sensibly roosting.

BABY DOLL:

(*Giggling*)

Law! Ole Fussy mighty near made it that time! Why, that old hen was comin' in like she'd been invited t'supper.

Her giggly voice expires as MEIGHAN wheels back around and bellows.

ARCHIE LEE explodes volcanically. His violence should give him almost a Dostoevskian stature.

It builds steadily through scene as a virtual lunacy possesses him with realization of his hopeless position.

ARCHIE:

OH HO HO HO HO!

(Kicks kitchen door shut)

Now you all listen to me! Quit giving looks back an' forth an' listen to me! Y'think I'm deaf, dumb an' blind or somethin', do yuh? You're *mistook*, Oh, brother, but you're much, much—*mistook*! Ohhhh, I knoooow!—I guess I look like a—I guess I look like a—
Panting, puffing pause; he reels a little, clutching chair back.

BABY DOLL:

(Insolently childish lisp)

What d'you guess you look like, Archie Lee? Y'was about t' tell us an' then yuh quit fo' some—

ARCHIE:

Yeah, yeah, yeah! Some little innocent Baby Doll of a wife not ready fo' marriage, oh, no, not yet ready for marriage but plenty ready t'— Oh, I see how it's funny, I can see how it's funny, I see the funny side of it. *Oh ho ho ho ho!* Yes, it sure is comic, comic as hell! But there's one little *teensy-eensy* little—thing that you—*overlooked!* I! Got *position!* Yeah, yeah, I got *position!* Here in this county! Where I was bo'n an' brought up! I hold a respected position, lifelong!—member of— Wait! Wait!—Baby Doll. . . .

She had started to cross past him; he seizes her wrist. She wrenches free. VACARRO stirs and tenses slightly but doesn't rise or change his cool smile.

On my side 're friends, long-standin' *bus'ness* associates, an' *social*! See what I mean? You ain't got that advantage, have you, mister? Huh, mister? Ain't you a dago, or something, excuse me, I mean Eyetalian or something, here in Tiger Tail County?

SILVA:

Meighan, I'm not a doctor, but I was a medical corpsman in the Navy and you've got a very unhealthy looking flush on your face right now which is almost purple as a——

He was going to say 'baboon's behind.'

ARCHIE:

(Bellowing out)

ALL I GOT TO DO IS GIT ON THAT PHONE
IN THE HALL!

SILVA:

And call an ambulance from the county hospital?

ARCHIE:

Hell, I don't even need t' make a phone call! I can handle this situation *m'self*!—with legal protection that no one could——

SILVA:

(Still coolly)

What situation do you mean, Meighan?

ARCHIE:

Situation which I come home to find here under my roof! Oh, I'm not such a marble-missing old fool!—I

couldn't size it up!—I sized it up the moment I seen you was still on this place and *her!*—with that *sly smile on her!*

(Takes a great swallow of liquor from the fresh bottle)

And you with yours on you! I know how to wipe off both of those sly——!

Crosses to closet door. BABY DOLL utters a gasp and signals VACARRO to watch out.

VACARRO rises calmly.

SILVA:

Meighan?

(He speaks coolly, almost with a note of sympathy)

You know, and I know, and I *know* that you *know* that I *know!*—That you set fire to my cotton gin last night. You burnt down the Syndicate Gin and I got in my pocket a signed affidavit, a paper, signed by a witness, whose testimony will even hold up in the law courts of Tiger Tail County!—That's all I come here for and that's all I got . . . whatever else you suspect—well!—you're mistaken. . . . Isn't that so, Mrs. Meighan? Isn't your husband mistaken in thinking that I got anything out of this place but this signed affidavit which was the purpose of my all-afternoon call?

She looks at him, angry, hurt.

MEIGHAN wheels about, panting.

SILVA:

(Continuing)

Yes, I'm foreign but I'm not revengeful, Meighan, at least not more than is rightful.

(Smiles sweetly)

—I think we got a workable good neighbor policy be-

tween us. It might work out, anyhow I think it deserves a try. Now as to the other side of the situation, which I don't have to mention. Well, all I can say is, a certain attraction—exists! Mutually, I believe! But nothing's been rushed. I needed a little shut-eye after last night's—excitement. I took a nap upstairs in the nursery crib with the slats let down to accommodate my fairly small frame, and I have faint recollection of being sung to by someone—a lullaby song that was—sweet . . .

(His voice is low, caressing)

—and the touch of—cool fingers, but that's all, absolutely!

ARCHIE:

Y'think I'm gonna put up with this——?

SILVA:

Situation? You went to a whole lot of risk an' trouble to get my business back. Now don't you want it? It's up to you, Archie Lee, it's——

ARCHIE:

COOL! Yeah, cool, very cool!

SILVA:

—The heat of the fire's died down. . . .

ARCHIE:

UH—HUH! YOU'VE FIXED YOUR WAGON!
WITH THIS SMART TALK, YOU JUST NOW
FIXED YOUR WAGON! I'M GONNA MAKE A
PHONE CALL THAT'LL WIPE THE GRIN OFF
YOUR GREASY WOP FACE FOR GOOD!

He charges into hall and seizes phone.

SILVA:

(Crossing to BABY DOLL at kitchen sink)

Is my wop face greasy, Mrs. Meighan?

She remains at mirror but her childish smile fades: her face goes vacant and blind: she suddenly tilts her head back against the bare throat of the man standing behind her. Her eyes clenched shut. . . .

His eyelids flutter as his body presses against all the mindless virgin softness of her abundant young flesh. We can't see their hands, but hers are stretched behind her, his before him.

106]

HALL.

ARCHIE:

(Bellowing like a steer)

I WANT SPOT, MIZZ HOPKINS, WHE' IS SPOT!?

107]

BABY DOLL WITH VACARRO.

BABY DOLL:

I think you better go 'way. . . .

SILVA:

I'm just waiting to take you girls away with me. . . .

BABY DOLL:

(Softly as in a dream)

Yeah. I'm goin' too. I'll check in at the Kotton King Hotel and— Now I better go up an'—he'p Aunt Rose Comfo't pack. . . .

Releases herself regretfully from the embrace and crosses into hall.

HALL. CLOSE SHOT OF SILVA LOOKING AFTER HER. IN THE HALL SHE UTTERS A SHARP OUTCRY AS MEIGHAN STRIKES AT HER.

BABY DOLL:

YOU GONNA BE SORRY FOR EV'RY TIME YOU LAID YOUR UGLY OLE HANDS ON ME, YOU STINKER, YOU! YOU STINKING STINKER, STINKERRR!

Her footsteps running upstairs. VACARRO chuckles almost silently and goes quietly out the back door.

THE YARD.

VACARRO crosses through a yard littered with uncollected garbage, tin cans, refuse. . . .

HALL. MEIGHAN REMOVES SHOTGUN FROM CLOSET.

YARD. CUT BACK TO EXTERIOR.

Crooked moon beams fitfully through a racing mackerel sky, the airs full of motion.

VACARRO picks his way fastidiously among the refuse, wades through the tall seeding grass, into the front yard. Clutches the lower branch of a pecan tree and swings up into it. Cracks a nut between his teeth as—

ARCHIE:

(Shouting and blundering through the house)

HEY! WHERE YOU HIDING? WHERE YOU
HIDING, WOP?!

112]

HOUSE. CLOSE SHOT OF MEIGHAN WITH
SHOTGUN AND LIQUOR BOTTLE, ALREADY
STUMBLING DRUNK. . . .

113]

YARD. EXTERIOR NIGHT. VACARRO IN TREE.
VOICE OF BABY DOLL AT PHONE.

BABY DOLL:

I want the Police Chief. Yes, the Chief, not just the
police, the Chief. This is Baby Doll McCorkle speak-
ing, the ex-Mrs. Meighan on Tiger Tail Road! My hus-
band has got a shotgun and is threat'nin' to——

*Her voice turns into a scream. She comes running out
front door followed by MEIGHAN. She darts around side
of house. MEIGHAN is very drunk now. He goes the
opposite way around the house. VACARRO drops out of
tree and gives BABY DOLL a low whistle. She rushes
back to front yard.*

BABY DOLL:

*Oh, Gah, Gah, watch out, he's got a shotgun. He's—
crazy! I callt th' Chief of——*

VACARRO leaps into tree again.

SILVA:

Grab my hand! Quick! Now *up! Up*, now Baby Doll!

He hoists her into tree with him as the wild-eyed old bull comes charging back around house with his weapon. He blasts away at a shadow. (Yard is full of windy shadows.) He is sobbing.

ARCHIE:

BABY DOLL! BABY! BABY! BABY DOLL! MY BABY!

Goes stumbling around back of house, great wind in the trees. BABY DOLL rests in the arms of VACARRO.

MEIGHAN in back yard. Storm cellar door bangs open. Meighan fires through it. Then at chicken coop. Then into wheelless limousine chassis in side yard, etc., etc.

Shot of VACARRO and BABY DOLL in fork of pecan tree.

SILVA:

(Grinning)

We're still playing hide-and-seek!

BABY DOLL:

(Excitedly, almost giggling)

How long you guess we gonna be up this tree?

SILVA:

I don't care. I'm comfortable—Are you?

Her answer is a sigh. He cracks a nut in his mouth and divides it with her. She giggles and whispers: "Shhhhh!"

ARCHIE:

(Raving, sobbing, stumbling)

Baby, my baby, oh, Baby Doll, my baby. . . .

Silence.

HEY! WOP! YELLOWBELLY! WHERE ARE YUH?

AUNT ROSE COMFORT comes forlornly out on the porch,
weighed down by ancient suitcase, roped together.

AUNT ROSE:

(Fearfully, her hair blown wild by the wind)

Baby Doll, honey? Honey? Baby Doll, honey?

ARCHIE:

(In back yard)

I SEE YOU! COME OUT OF THERE, YOU YEL-
LOWBELLY WOP, YOU!

*Shotgun blasts away behind house. AUNT ROSE COM-
FORT on front porch utters a low cry and drops her
suitcase. Backs against wall, hand to chest.*

Fade in police siren approaching down Tiger Tail Road.

BABY DOLL:

(Nestling in VACARRO's arms in tree)

I feel sorry for poor old AUNT ROSE COMFORT. She
doesn't know where to go or what to do. . . .

*Moon comes briefly out and shines on their crouched
figures in fork on tree.*

SILVA:

(Gently)

Does anyone know where to go, or what to do?

114]

THE YARD. ANOTHER ANGLE. POLICE CAR
STOPPING BEFORE THE HOUSE AND MEN
JUMPING OUT.

*Shot of MEIGHAN staggering and sobbing among the
litter of uncollected garbage.*

ARCHIE:

Baby Doll, my baby! Yellow son of a——

115]

THE YARD. ANOTHER ANGLE. SHOT OF AUNT ROSE COMFORT RETREATING INTO SHADOW AS POLICE COME AROUND THE HOUSE SUPPORTING ARCHIE LEE'S LIMP FIGURE. SHOT OF COUPLE IN TREE AS MOON GOES BACK OF CLOUDS.

Stillness. Dark. AUNT ROSE COMFORT begins to sing a hymn: "Rock of Ages."

AUNT ROSE:

Rock of ages, cleft for me,
Let me hide myself in Theel

VACARRO drops out of tree and stands with arms lifted for BABY DOLL.

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