

LAURIE. I wouldn't leave my mother anyway. Even when I'm older. Even if I get married. I'll never leave my mother.

EUGENE. Yeah? Mr. Murphy across the street never left his mother. And he ended up going to jail.

LAURIE. None of this would have happened if my father was alive.

EUGENE. How did you feel when he died?

LAURIE. I don't remember. I cried a lot because I saw my mother crying.

EUGENE. I would hate it if my father died. Especially with Stanley gone. We'd probably have to move out of this house.

LAURIE. Well . . . then you and your mother could come and live with us.

EUGENE. So if we all end up living together, what's the point in breaking up now?

LAURIE. I don't know. I have to finish reading. *(She goes back to her book. EUGENE gets up and looks at the audience.)*

EUGENE. You don't get too far talking to Laurie. Sometimes I think the flutter in her heart is really in her brain. *(He crosses out of room, closes door and heads down the stairs. To audience.)* . . . I went into their bedroom and broke the news about Stanley. The monumental news that their eldest son had run off, probably to get killed in France fighting for his country. My mother said, "Go to bed. He'll be home when it gets cold out" . . . I couldn't believe it. Their own son. It was then that I suspected that Stanley and I were adopted . . . They finally went to bed and I waited out on the front steps until it got cold . . . but Stanley never showed up.

(He goes out the front door. It is later that night, after

midnight. We see NORA enter the front yard. BLANCHE comes down the stairs in a nightgown and a robe. She waits at the foot of the stairs as NORA comes into the house and sees her.)

BLANCHE. I wanted to talk to you.

NORA. Now? It's late.

BLANCHE. I know it's late. We could have talked earlier if you didn't come home at twelve o'clock at night. *(BLANCHE crosses into the living room. NORA follows her in and stands in the doorway.)*

NORA. How was your dinner?

BLANCHE. I didn't go. Mr. Murphy was in an accident.

NORA. I'm sorry. Is he alright?

BLANCHE. He's got his problems, like the rest of us . . . I was very hurt that you left tonight without saying goodbye.

NORA. I was late. Someone was waiting for me.

BLANCHE. So was I. You knew it was important to me.

NORA. I'm not feeling very well.

BLANCHE. You purposely left without seeing me. You've never done that before.

NORA. Can we talk about this in the morning?

BLANCHE. I won't be here in the morning.

NORA. Then tomorrow night.

BLANCHE. I'm leaving, Nora. I'm moving out in the morning.

NORA. What are you talking about?

BLANCHE. Aunt Kate and I had a fight tonight. We said some terrible things to each other. Things that have been bottled up since we were children. I'm going to stay

with my friend Louise, in Manhattan Beach until I can find a job. Then I'll send for you and Laurie.

NORA. I can't believe it. You mean it's alright for you to leave *us* but it wasn't alright for me to leave *you*?

BLANCHE. I was never concerned about your leaving *me*. It was your future I was worrying about.

NORA. It was *my* future. Why couldn't I have something to say about it?

BLANCHE. Maybe I was wrong, I don't know. I never made the decisions for the family. Your father did. Everyone always took care of me. My mother, my sisters, your father, even you and Laurie. I've been a very dependent person all my life.

NORA. Maybe that's all I'm asking for. To be independent.

BLANCHE. (*sternly*) You *earn* your independence. You don't take it at the expense of others. Would that job even be offered to you if somebody in this family hadn't paid for those dancing lessons and kept a roof over your head and clothes on your back? If anyone's going to pay back Uncle Jack it'll be me—doing God knows what, I don't know—but one thing I'm sure of. I'll *steal* before I let my daughter show that man one ounce of ingratitude or disrespect.

NORA. So I have to give up the one chance I may never get again, is that it? I'm the one who has to pay for what you couldn't do with your own life.

BLANCHE. (*angrily*) What right do you have to judge me like that?

NORA. *Judge* you? I can't even talk to you. I don't exist to you. I have tried so hard to get close to you but there was never any room. Whatever you had to give went to Daddy, and when he died, whatever was left you

gave to—(*She turns away.*)

BLANCHE. What? Finish what you were going to say.

NORA. . . . I have been jealous my whole life of Laurie because she was lucky enough to be born sick. I could never turn a light on in my room at night or read in bed because Laurie always needed her precious sleep. I could never have a friend over on the weekends because Laurie was always resting. I used to pray I'd get some terrible disease or get hit by a car so I'd have a leg all twisted or crippled and then once, maybe just once, I'd get to crawl into bed next to you on a cold rainy night and talk to you and hold you until I fell asleep in your arms . . . just once . . . (*She is in tears.*)

BLANCHE. My God, Nora . . . is that what you think of me?

NORA. Is it any worse than what you think of me?

BLANCHE. (*hesitates, trying to recover*) . . . I'm not going to let you hurt me, Nora. I'm not going to let you tell me that I don't love you or that I haven't tried to give you as much as I gave Laurie . . . God knows I'm not perfect because enough angry people in this house told me so tonight . . . But I am *not* going to be a doormat for all the frustrations and unhappiness that you or Aunt Kate or anyone else wants to lay at my feet . . . I did *not* create this Universe. I do *not* decide who lives and dies, or who's rich or poor or who feels loved and who feels deprived. If you feel cheated that Laurie gets more than you, than I feel cheated that I had a husband who died at thirty-six. And if you keep on feeling that way, you'll end up like me . . . with something much worse than loneliness or helplessness and that's self-pity. Believe me, there is no leg that's twisted or bent that is more crippling than a human being who thrives on his

own misfortunes . . . I am sorry, Nora, that you feel unloved and I will do everything I can to change it except apologize for it. I am tired of apologizing. After a while it becomes your life's work and it doesn't bring any money into the house . . . If it's taken your pain and Aunt Kate's anger to get me to start living again, then God will give me the strength to make it up to you, but I will *not* go back to being that frightened, helpless woman that I created! . . . I've already buried someone I love. Now it's time to bury someone I hate.

NORA. . . . I didn't ask you to hate yourself. I just asked you to love me.

BLANCHE. I do, Nora. Oh, God, why can't I make that clear to you?

NORA. I feel so terrible.

BLANCHE. Why?

NORA. Because I think I hurt you and I still want that job with Mr. Beckman.

BLANCHE. I know you do.

NORA. But I can't have it, can I?

BLANCHE. How can I answer that without you thinking I'm still depriving you?

NORA. I don't know . . . Maybe you just did.

BLANCHE. I hope so, Nora. I pray to God it's so. (*KATE appears coming down the stairs.*)

KATE. I heard voices downstairs. I didn't know who it was.

BLANCHE. I'm sorry if we woke you . . . Go on up to bed, Nora. We'll talk again in the morning.

NORA. Alright . . . Goodnight, Aunt Kate. (*NORA goes upstairs.*)

KATE. Is she alright?

BLANCHE. Yes.

KATE. She's not angry anymore?

BLANCHE. No, Kate. No one's angry anymore. (*NORA goes into bedroom.*) I just explained everything to Nora. The girls will help you with all the housework while I'm gone. Laurie's strong enough to do her share. I've kept her being a baby long enough.

KATE. They've never been any trouble to me, those girls. Never.

BLANCHE. I'll try to take them on the weekends if I can . . . It's late. We could both use a good night's sleep. (*She starts out of the room.*)

KATE. Blanche! . . . Don't go! (*BLANCHE stops.*) I feel badly enough for what I said. Don't make me feel any worse.

BLANCHE. Everything you said to me tonight was true, Kate. I wish to God you said it years ago.

KATE. What would I do without you? Who else do I have to talk to all day? What friends do I have in this neighborhood? Even the Murphys across the street are leaving.

BLANCHE. You and I never had any troubles before tonight, Kate. . . . It's the girls I'm thinking of now. We have to be together. The three of us. It's what they want as much as I do.

KATE. Alright. I'm not saying you shouldn't have it. But you're not going to find a job overnight. Apartments are expensive. While you're looking, why do you have to live with strangers in Manhattan Beach?

BLANCHE. Louise isn't a stranger. She's a good friend.

KATE. To me good friends are strangers. But sisters are sisters.

BLANCHE. I'm afraid of becoming comfortable here. I don't get out now, when will I ever do it?