

Scene Eleven

It is some weeks later. STELLA is packing BLANCHE's things. Sounds of water can be heard running in the bathroom.

The portieres are partly open on the poker players—STANLEY, STEVE, MITCH and PABLO—who sit around the table in the kitchen. The atmosphere of the kitchen is now the same raw, lurid one of the disastrous poker night.

The building is framed by the sky of turquoise. STELLA has been crying as she arranges the flowery dresses in the open trunk.

EUNICE comes down the steps from her flat above and enters the kitchen. There is an outburst from the poker table.

STANLEY Drew to an inside straight and made it, by God.

PABLO *Maldita sea tu suerto!*

STANLEY Put it in English, greaseball.

PABLO I am cursing your rutting luck.

STANLEY [*prodigiously elated*] You know what luck is? Luck is believing you're lucky. Take at Salerno.³ I believed I was lucky. I figured that 4 ou'

3. Important beachhead in the Allied invasion of Italy in World War II.

of 5 would not come through but I would . . . and I did. I put that down as a rule. To hold front position in this rat-race you've got to believe you are lucky.

MITCH You . . . you . . . you . . . Brag . . . brag . . . bull . . . bull.

[STELLA goes into the bedroom and starts folding a dress.]

STANLEY What's the matter with him?

EUNICE [walking past the table] I always did say that men are callous things with no feelings, but this does beat anything. Making pigs of yourselves. [She comes through the portieres into the bedroom.]

STANLEY What's the matter with her?

STELLA How is my baby?

EUNICE Sleeping like a little angel. Brought you some grapes. [She puts them on a stool and lowers her voice.] Blanche?

STELLA Bathing.

EUNICE How is she?

STELLA She wouldn't eat anything but asked for a drink.

EUNICE What did you tell her?

STELLA I—just told her that—we'd made arrangements for her to rest in the country. She's got it mixed in her mind with Shep Huntleigh.

[BLANCHE opens the bathroom door slightly.]

BLANCHE Stella.

STELLA Yes, Blanche.

BLANCHE If anyone calls while I'm bathing take the number and tell them I'll call right back.

STELLA Yes.

BLANCHE That cool yellow silk—the bouclé. See if it's crushed. If it's not too crushed I'll wear it and on the lapel that silver and turquoise pin in the shape of a seahorse. You will find them in the heart-shaped box I keep my accessories in. And Stella . . . Try and locate a bunch of artificial violets in that box, too, to pin with the seahorse on the lapel of the jacket.

[She closes the door. STELLA turns to EUNICE.]

STELLA I don't know if I did the right thing.

EUNICE What else could you do?

STELLA I couldn't believe her story and go on living with Stanley.

EUNICE Don't ever believe it. Life has got to go on. No matter what happens, you've got to keep on going.

[The bathroom door opens a little.]

BLANCHE [looking out] Is the coast clear?

STELLA Yes, Blanche. [to EUNICE] Tell her how well she's looking.

BLANCHE Please close the curtains before I come out.

STELLA They're closed.

STANLEY —How many for you?

PABLO Two.

STEVE Three.

[BLANCHE appears in the amber light of the door. She has a tragic radiance in her red satin robe following the sculptural lines of her body. The "Varsouviana" rises audibly as BLANCHE enters the bedroom.]

BLANCHE [with faintly hysterical vivacity] I have just washed my hair.

STELLA Did you?

BLANCHE I'm not sure I got the soap out.

EUNICE Such fine hair!

BLANCHE [*accepting the compliment*] It's a problem. Didn't I get a call?

STELLA Who from, Blanche?

BLANCHE Shep Huntleigh . . .

STELLA Why, not yet, honey!

BLANCHE How strange! I—

[*At the sound of BLANCHE's voice MITCH's arm supporting his cards has sagged and his gaze is dissolved into space. STANLEY slaps him on the shoulder.*]

STANLEY Hey, Mitch, come to!

[*The sound of this new voice shocks BLANCHE. She makes a shocked gesture, forming his name with her lips. STELLA nods and looks quickly away. BLANCHE stands quite still for some moments—the silver-backed mirror in her hand and a look of sorrowful perplexity as though all human experience shows on her face. BLANCHE finally speaks but with sudden hysteria.*]

BLANCHE What's going on here?

[*She turns from STELLA to EUNICE and back to STELLA. Her rising voice penetrates the concentration of the game. MITCH ducks his head lower but STANLEY shoves back his chair as if about to rise. STEVE places a restraining hand on his arm.*]

BLANCHE [*continuing*] What's happened here? I want an explanation of what's happened here.

STELLA [*agonizingly*] Hush! Hush!

EUNICE Hush! Hush! Honey.

STELLA Please, Blanche.

BLANCHE Why are you looking at me like that? Is something wrong with me?

EUNICE You look wonderful, Blanche. Don't she look wonderful?

STELLA Yes.

EUNICE I understand you are going on a trip.

STELLA Yes, Blanche is. She's going on a vacation.

EUNICE I'm green with envy.

BLANCHE Help me, help me get dressed!

STELLA [*handing her dress*] Is this what you—

BLANCHE Yes, it will do! I'm anxious to get out of here—this place is a trap!

EUNICE What a pretty blue jacket.

STELLA It's lilac colored.

BLANCHE You're both mistaken. It's Della Robbia blue.⁴ The blue of the robe in the old Madonna pictures. Are these grapes washed?

[*She fingers the bunch of grapes which EUNICE had brought in.*]

EUNICE Huh?

BLANCHE Washed, I said. Are they washed?

EUNICE They're from the French Market.

BLANCHE That doesn't mean they've been washed. [*The cathedral bells chime.*] Those cathedral bells—they're the only clean thing in the Quarter. Well, I'm going now. I'm ready to go.

EUNICE [*whispering*] She's going to walk out before they get here.

STELLA Wait, Blanche.

4. A shade of light blue seen in terra cottas made by the Della Robbia family in the Italian Renaissance.

BLANCHE I don't want to pass in front of those men.

EUNICE Then wait'll the game breaks up.

STELLA Sit down and . . .

[BLANCHE turns weakly, hesitantly about. She lets them push her into a chair.]

BLANCHE I can smell the sea air. The rest of my time I'm going to spend on the sea. And when I die, I'm going to die on the sea. You know what I shall die of [*She plucks a grape.*] I shall die of eating an unwashed grape one day out on the ocean. I will die—with my hand in the hand of some nice-looking ship's doctor, a very young one with a small blond mustache and a big silver watch. "Poor lady," they'll say, "the quinine did her no good. That unwashed grape has transported her soul to heaven." [*The cathedral chimes are heard.*] And I'll be buried at sea sewn up in a clean white sack and dropped overboard—at noon—in the blaze of summer—and into an ocean as blue as [*chimes again*] my first lover's eyes!

[A DOCTOR and a MATRON have appeared around the corner of the building and climbed the steps to the porch. The gravity of their profession is exaggerated—the unmistakable aura of the state institution with its cynical detachment. The DOCTOR rings the doorbell. The murmur of the game is interrupted.]

EUNICE [*whispering to STELLA*] That must be them.

[STELLA presses her fists to her lips.]

BLANCHE [*rising slowly*] What is it?

EUNICE [*affectedly casual*] Excuse me while I see who's at the door.

STELLA Yes.

[EUNICE goes into the kitchen.]

BLANCHE [*tensely*] I wonder if it's for me.

[A whispered colloquy takes place at the door.]

EUNICE [*returning, brightly*] Someone is calling for Blanche.

BLANCHE It is for me, then! [*She looks fearfully from one to the other and then to the portieres. The "Varsouviana" faintly plays.*] Is it the gentleman

I was expecting from Dallas?

EUNICE I think it is, Blanche.

BLANCHE I'm not quite ready.

STELLA Ask him to wait outside.

BLANCHE I . . .

[EUNICE goes back to the portieres. Drums sound very softly.]

STELLA Everything packed?

BLANCHE My silver toilet articles are still out.

STELLA Ah!

EUNICE [*returning*] They're waiting in front of the house.

BLANCHE They! Who's "they"?

EUNICE There's a lady with him.

BLANCHE I cannot imagine who this "lady" could be! How is she dressed?

EUNICE Just—just a sort of a—plain-tailored outfit.

BLANCHE Possibly she's— [*Her voice dies out nervously.*]

STELLA Shall we go, Blanche?

BLANCHE Must we go through that room?

STELLA I will go with you.

BLANCHE How do I look?

STELLA Lovely.

EUNICE [*echoing*] Lovely.

[*BLANCHE moves fearfully to the portieres. EUNICE draws them open for her. BLANCHE goes into the kitchen.*]

BLANCHE [*to the men*] Please don't get up. I'm only passing through.

[*She crosses quickly to outside door. STELLA and EUNICE follow. The poker players stand awkwardly at the table—all except MITCH who remains seated, looking down at the table. BLANCHE steps out on a small porch at the side of the door. She stops short and catches her breath.*]

DOCTOR How do you do?

BLANCHE You are not the gentleman I was expecting. [*She suddenly gasps and starts back up the steps. She stops by STELLA, who stands just outside the door, and speaks in a frightening whisper.*] That man isn't Shep Huntleigh.

[*The "Varsouviana" is playing distantly. STELLA stares back at BLANCHE. EUNICE is holding STELLA's arm. There is a moment of silence—no sound but that of STANLEY steadily shuffling the cards. BLANCHE catches her breath again and slips back into the flat. She enters the flat with a peculiar smile, her eyes wide and brilliant. As soon as her sister goes past her, STELLA closes her eyes and clenches her hands. EUNICE throws her arms comfortingly about her. Then she starts up to her flat. BLANCHE stops just inside the door. MITCH keeps staring down at his hands on the table, but the other men look at her curiously. At last she starts around the table toward the bedroom. As she does, STANLEY suddenly pushes back his chair and rises as if to block her way. The MATRON follows her into the flat.*]

STANLEY Did you forget something?

BLANCHE [*shrilly*] Yes! Yes, I forgot something!

[*She rushes past him into the bedroom. Lurid reflections appear on the walls in odd, sinuous shapes. The "Varsouviana" is filtered into a weird distortion, accompanied by the cries and noises of the jungle. BLANCHE seizes the back of a chair as if to defend herself.*]

STANLEY [*sotto voce*]⁵ Doc, you better go in.

DOCTOR [*sotto voce, motioning to the MATRON*] Nurse, bring her out.

[*The MATRON advances on one side, STANLEY on the other. Divested of all the softer properties of womanhood, the MATRON is a peculiarly sinister figure in her severe dress. Her voice is bold and toneless as a firebell.*]

MATRON Hello, Blanche.

[*The greeting is echoed and re-echoed by other mysterious voices behind the walls, as if reverberated through a canyon of rock.*]

STANLEY She says that she forgot something.

[*The echo sounds in threatening whispers.*]

MATRON That's all right.

STANLEY What did you forget, Blanche?

BLANCHE I—I—

MATRON It don't matter. We can pick it up later.

STANLEY Sure. We can send it along with the trunk.

BLANCHE [*retreating in panic*] I don't know you—I don't know you. I want to be—left alone—please!

MATRON Now, Blanche!

ECHOES [*rising and falling*] Now, Blanche—now, Blanche—now, Blanche!

STANLEY You left nothing here but spilt talcum and old empty perfume

bottles—unless it's the paper lantern you want to take with you. You want the lantern?

[He crosses to dressing table and seizes the paper lantern, tearing it off the light bulb, and extends it toward her. She cries out as if the lantern was herself. The MATRON steps boldly toward her. She screams and tries to break past the MATRON. All the men spring to their feet. STELLA runs out to the porch, with EUNICE following to comfort her, simultaneously with the confused voices of the men in the kitchen. STELLA rushes into EUNICE's embrace on the porch.]

STELLA Oh, my God, Eunice help me! Don't let them do that to her, don't let them hurt her! Oh, God, oh, please God, don't hurt her! What are they doing to her? What are they doing? *[She tries to break from EUNICE's arms.]*

EUNICE No, honey, no, no, honey. Stay here. Don't go back in there. Stay with me and don't look.

STELLA What have I done to my sister? Oh, God, what have I done to my sister?

EUNICE You done the right thing, the only thing you could do. She couldn't stay here; there wasn't no other place for her to go.

[While STELLA and EUNICE are speaking on the porch the voices of the men in the kitchen overlap them. MITCH has started toward the bedroom. STANLEY crosses to block him. STANLEY pushes him aside. MITCH lunges and strikes at STANLEY. STANLEY pushes MITCH back. MITCH collapses at the table, sobbing. During the preceding scenes, the MATRON catches hold of BLANCHE's arm and prevents her flight. BLANCHE turns wildly and scratches at the MATRON. The heavy woman pinions her arms. BLANCHE cries out hoarsely and slips to her knees.]

MATRON These fingernails have to be trimmed. *[The DOCTOR comes into the room and she looks at him.]* Jacket, Doctor?

DOCTOR Not unless necessary.

[He takes off his hat and now he becomes personalized. The unhuman quality goes. His voice is gentle and reassuring as he crosses to BLANCHE and crouches in front of her. As he speaks her name, her terror subsides a little. The lurid reflections fade from the walls, the inhuman cries and noises die out and her own hoarse crying is calmed.]

DOCTOR Miss DuBois.

[She turns her face to him and stares at him with desperate pleading. He smiles; then he speaks to the MATRON.]

It won't be necessary.

BLANCHE *[faintly]* Ask her to let go of me.

DOCTOR *[to the MATRON]* Let go.

[The MATRON releases her. BLANCHE extends her hands toward the DOCTOR. He draws her up gently and supports her with his arm and leads her through the portieres.]

BLANCHE *[holding tight to his arm]* Whoever you are—I have always depended on the kindness of strangers.

[The poker players stand back as BLANCHE and the DOCTOR cross the kitchen to the front door. She allows him to lead her as if she were blind. As they go out on the porch, STELLA cries out her sister's name from where she is crouched a few steps up on the stairs.]

STELLA Blanche! Blanche, Blanche!

[BLANCHE walks on without turning, followed by the DOCTOR and the MATRON. They go around the corner of the building. EUNICE descends to

STELLA *and places the child in her arms. It is wrapped in a pale blue blanket. STELLA accepts the child, sobbingly. EUNICE continues downstairs and enters the kitchen where the men, except for STANLEY, are returning silently to their places about the table. STANLEY has gone out on the porch and stands at the foot of the steps looking at STELLA.*

STANLEY [*a bit uncertainly*] Stella?

[She sobs with inhuman abandon. There is something luxurious in her complete surrender to crying now that her sister is gone.]

STANLEY [*voluptuously, soothingly*] Now, honey. Now, love. Now, now, love.

[He kneels beside her and his fingers find the opening of her blouse.] Now, now, love, Now, love. . . .

[The luxurious sobbing, the sensual murmur fade away under the swelling music of the "Blue Piano" and the muted trumpet.]

STEVE This game is seven-card stud.

CURTAIN

1947