Two thirds of a ghost

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TWO THIRDS OF A GHOST

BY

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MONTANA STATE UNIVERSITY

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Approved by:

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Chairman, Board of Examiners

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Dean, Graduate School

Aug 15, 1955
TWO THIRDS OF A GHOST

CHARACTERS

John Lafitt
Ellen Lafitt
Marvin Newberry
Mamie
Pierre Bonheur
Eugenia Saxe
Gerald
Photographer

Scenes: The living room of the Lafitt house.
Eugenia's bar.
ACT ONE

Scene one

SCENE: The living room of the John Lafitts. This is a modest home in a southeast Texas town. The room is a mixture of ornate and obviously handed-down, late 19th century furniture and some modern do-it-yourself pieces. It is apparent that two schools of thought about home furnishing have been at work here. There is a desk, a sofa, record player and records, and over the fireplace hangs a portrait of John Lafit, Senior, middle-aged, with a face both arrogant and sensitive.

At the rise, John Lafitt, Junior sits at the desk working. He is about 35, tall, thin, moderately good looking, hair getting a little sparse. He is near-sighted and wears glasses, but vanity prompts him to remove them in company. His wife, Ellen, enters. She is small, compactly built, attractive, moves with restless energy. She comes to John carrying the evening paper.

ELLEN: Johnny, let's go to a show.

JOHN: Oh, honey, not tonight. I've got to get this speech in some kind of shape.

ELLEN: Tonight? The dedication is two weeks away. (She sits on the arm of his chair, inadvertently knocking papers on the floor.)

JOHN: Watch it; those are my notes.
ELLEN: I'm sorry. Johnny, it's Barbara Stanwyck. You know how you are about Stanwyck.

JOHN: Some other night, honey. See how this sounds.
(puts on glasses, reads) "As a member of the faculty and son of the man who was once your dean, it gives me profound pleasure."

ELLEN: You can't say "as a member, it gives me."

JOHN: Why not?

ELLEN: You have to say "as a member, I take profound pleasure."

JOHN: Same difference.

ELLEN: It's just the difference between right and wrong. Johnny, the second feature is a western.

JOHN: (reading) "As a member of the faculty and son of a man who was once your dean, I take profound pleasure in dedicating our new law building. We, the faculty of Westmore, felt, with the trustees, that this fine, well-equipped building..." (pauses to pencil in correction)

ELLEN: Johnny, it's in glorious technicolor.

JOHN: "...well-equipped edifice would prove an interesting experiment and a bracing challenge."

ELLEN: Why do faculty members always refer to everything as an interesting experiment and a bracing challenge?

JOHN: What do you suggest?

ELLEN: Why don't you just say that since that other damned old shack was falling down, we decided to build this monstrosity.

JOHN: You're a big help.
ELLEN: Well, it is a monstrosity. A Texas version of the Taj Mahal with air conditioning.

JOHN: The faculty think it's magnificent.

ELLEN: (acidly) Faculty! If all the faculty members in the world were laid end to end... (pauses, shudders) My God, what a revolting thought!

JOHN: (chuckles) They're not so bad.

ELLEN: Johnny, listen. I was talking to Janet Fisher today. Joe is leaving the college to go into private practice in Dallas.

JOHN: (returns to work) I know.

ELLEN: I wish it were you.

JOHN: With the possibility of the deanship coming my way? You're crazy.

ELLEN: You ought to be doing what you want to do. Day after day I see you coming home from the campus bored, tired, fed up. You used to have so much...so much...

(she pauses for the right word)  
JOHN: (kidding her) Oh, I've still got a little left.

ELLEN: Johnny, I'm serious.

JOHN: (working) Don't take life so hard, baby.  
(Ellen turns away disconsolately)  
JOHN: (anxiously) Did you have fun at the faculty bridge?

ELLEN: (with heavy irony) It was a ball.

JOHN: Good.

ELLEN: It was an international bridge. Have you ever been to an international bridge?

JOHN: (absently) Don't believe I have.
ELLEN: It's terribly jolly. Each table represents a different country, see?

JOHN: Mmm.

ELLEN: I was at the Irish table.

JOHN: Very appropriate.

ELLEN: Our table had a bowl of green shamrocks, and we wore terribly comic little hats and waved small flags. There was also a Scotch table, a Chinese table, a Mexican table, and a Czechoslovakian table, though that seemed to me to be slightly subversive. On each table...now listen, John...on each table were the words of that country's national anthem. When the hostess gave the signal we all waved our little flags like crazy and sang the songs at the top of our lungs.

JOHN: You mean all the songs at once?

ELLEN: Oh yes, that's the fun of it. In the directions it says "bedlam will result". It did.

JOHN: God, whose hideous idea was this?

ELLEN: Your sister's.

JOHN: Oh. Well, Miriam does get a little carried away sometimes. But I guess being the wife of the college president has its problems.

ELLEN: I should think so...yes sir, where can she go after an international bridge? How can she top that? Interplanetary bridge?

JOHN: (laughs) She'll think of something.

ELLEN: She told me to remind you to wear your heavy coat these chilly days.
JOHN: (indulgently) Miriam can't get used to the idea that I'm grown up.

ELLEN: Maybe she's got something there. (as he looks hurt, she goes to him, warmly) Oh, Johnny, I'm not trying to be bitchy. I'm just worried. About you, about us.

JOHN: What do you mean?

ELLEN: We've been married less than two years, and already we're bogged down in a rut so deep we can hardly see out of it.

JOHN: Oh, you're exaggerating.

ELLEN: I am not. You've let them push you into a career you never wanted. You always dreamed about a law practice of your own, and instead you're floundering around in an academic fog like a fish out of water.

JOHN: You're mixing your metaphors.

ELLEN: I don't care; it's true, and you know it. Everybody's put pressure on you all your life; your sister, your brother-in-law, your ten thousand cousins and aunts, the ghosts of your parents. 'Uphold the family tradition, John. Be like your father, John. Follow in his footsteps, John.' Why do you have to follow in anybody's footsteps? Be you.

JOHN: Don't you want a distinguished husband? (smiles at her)

ELLEN: No. I want you. The 'you' I married. When you were courting me my pop used to say 'what do you see in him, baby?' And I'd tell him, 'Pop, he's kind of a dedicated guy, and this I like. He's going to hang out his shingle
the minute he's out of the service, and why? Because he likes to help people out of the jams they get into. He won't set any worlds on fire," I said, 'but he'll kindle a very nice little glow.'

JOHN: And what did Pop say to that?
ELLEN: He said...in the words of the old philosopher, 'but where's the money?'

JOHN: Exactly. Now be a doll and let me finish my speech.
ELLEN: If it was money I wanted, I'd have married that Cadillac dealer from Glendale.

JOHN: It wasn't Cadillacs; it was Buicks.
ELLEN: Whatever it was, he was loaded.

JOHN: He was a pompous jackass. (reading his speech to himself) What's another word for tradition?

ELLEN: Pompous jackassery.

JOHN: Honey, what's the matter? Has your hay fever been bothering you?

ELLEN: No.

JOHN: Cheer up, spring vacation is only three weeks away.

ELLEN: Johnny, let's go somewhere. I mean really away.

JOHN: (dubiously) Well, I can't get too far away. There's an important meeting. And Miriam expects us at the ranch for a week. We've always gone.

ELLEN: (discouraged) Yes, we've always gone. (goes to record player, turns on a Beiderbecke record)

JOHN: Oh good God!

ELLEN: Oh, I forgot, you're creating. (shuts it off)

JOHN: What is this recent passion for deafening records?
ELLEN: Marvin has been teaching me to understand jazz.

JOHN: (lifts eyebrows) Marvin? You mean the poor man's Shakespeare has a taste for anything so common?

ELLEN: There's nothing common about Bix Beiderbecke.

JOHN: Is that a name? Sounds like a remedy for the common cold. (taps his chest gingerly) Which reminds me, I've got a cold coming on.

ELLEN: Again?

JOHN: Thanks for the sympathy.

(MAMIE enters. She is an unmarried aunt of Ellen's, independent, sharp-tongued, warm-hearted, with an American Gothic face.)

MAMIE: Do you mind if I read in here? There's a mouse in my room.

JOHN: Mamie, don't tell me you're afraid of a mouse?

MAMIE: 'Course not, but he's scared to death of me. It's inhuman to frighten animals. (she settles down with book)

ELLEN: What are you reading?

MAMIE: "Tom Swift and His Flying Machine."

ELLEN: (laughs) You used to read me those books.

MAMIE: Tom Swift is soothing to the nerves.

ELLEN: Maybe I should take him up. The spirit of adventure is going out of the world. No more Tom Swifts. Everybody's cautious now. Take it slow, take it cool. (Pauses) Today is our anniversary.

JOHN: (startled) What?

ELLEN: We've been married 21 months today.

JOHN: My God, I thought I'd forgotten something.
ELLEN: You have, me.

JOHN: (amused) Forget my wife?


JOHN: What a panic that was. You in that silly beauty contest...

ELLEN: Why was it so funny?

JOHN: I mean a girl with your brains...

ELLEN: I was not chosen Miss Pfeffer's Gold Coast Beer for my brains. I have a few other attributes.

JOHN: You can say that again.

ELLEN: Thank you...for the most gallant and completely unnerving speech of the week. (She sits on his lap) Oh, Johnny, if we can't go to a movie, let's at least go to bed.

JOHN: (indicates Mamie) Ellen!

ELLEN: She isn't listening. She's out with Tom Swift. Anyway, we are married, you know. Husband, pay some attention to me.

JOHN: Later, honey, later.

ELLEN: Later may be too late. (She exits)

JOHN: Now what did she mean by that?

MAMIE: My duties in this household do not include interpreting.

JOHN: Mamie, do you think it's true that the first couple of years of marriage are especially tough?

MAMIE: Definitely.

JOHN: Then it gets better?

MAMIE: Then it gets tougher.
JOHN: Mamie, were you ever married?

MAMIE: (witheringly) Are you nuts?

JOHN: (coughs) I'm catching a very bad cold. When you get to the end of your chapter, would you fix me a hot toddy?

MAMIE: (severely) If you don't quit catching cold, you're going to turn into an alcoholic.

JOHN: No hurry. Finish your chapter. (He goes to father's portrait) By the time he was my age, he had five degrees and was dean of the law school.

MAMIE: By the time he was fifty, he was dead.

JOHN: Fifty-one. I can hardly remember him. Except that Commencement just before he died...standing up there in his cap and gown giving out diplomas, like a high priest. (Reverently) Quite a guy.

MAMIE: 'Finish the chapter', he says. Yakkety yakety yak.

(Exits)

(Marvin Newberry enters. He is about 25, slender, intelligent)

MARVIN: Where's Ellen?

JOHN: (jumps) Don't you ever ring doorbells?

MARVIN: Then Mamie would have to let me in. Why should I put her to all that trouble just for a silly convention?

JOHN: It never occurred to you that people might not want you barging in unannounced?

MARVIN: Well, you never want me barging in anyway. But then I didn't come to see you. Where's Ellen?

JOHN: She's not feeling well.
MARVIN: Is she ill?

JOHN: No, no, it's just her hay fever.

MARVIN: Oh. Well, tell her I'm here, will you?

JOHN: (at door, calls) Ellen, Marvin is here.

(Marvin prowls restlessly around the room)

JOHN: (irritably) Why don't you light somewhere?

MARVIN: (examining a big carved chair) Where did you ever find this monstrosity?

JOHN: (injured) That was my father's.

MARVIN: Isn't it amazing what ugliness is created in the name of beauty.

JOHN: It's solid mahogany.

MARVIN: They always are. Solid as the heads that dream them up.

JOHN: My grandfather designed it and built it himself.

MARVIN: Was he a furniture maker?

JOHN: I have no idea.

MARVIN: Don't you remember him?

JOHN: He died before I was born. Why this passionate interest in my grandfather?

MARVIN: Oh, I just thought if he'd been an artisan of some kind, there might be some hope for you. One generation after another of pedantic legal minds, - that's a terrible handicap for a man. But a good earthy furniture builder...

JOHN: (sarcastic) I'm grateful for your concern.

MARVIN: It's Ellen I worry about.

JOHN: You feel she'd be better off with an English instructor
who writes unproduced plays.

MARVIN: Of course.

JOHN: If it's all the same to you, I'm probably a better judge of what's good for Ellen than you are.

ELLEN: (entering) If it's all the same to you, I'll do my own judging.

MARVIN: Ellen...hi!

ELLEN: You two are always disposing of me.

MARVIN: How do you feel?

ELLEN: Fine.

MARVIN: He said you were ill.

JOHN: I said she had hay fever.

ELLEN: It's the wrong season.

MARVIN: You couldn't have anything so prosaic.

JOHN: Ha!

ELLEN: Oh but I do. I sneeze, I wheeze, I get a red nose...

MARVIN: I don't believe it.

ELLEN: How ungallant. You should insist that even with a red, red nose, I love you still.

JOHN: In case you've forgotten, I'm still here.

MARVIN: Oh, that's all right.

ELLEN: How's your class?

MARVIN: I forgot to tell you; I've been fired.

ELLEN: Fired!

JOHN: (rather pleased) Fired?

MARVIN: Yes. I find it rather stimulating.

ELLEN: But why?
MARVIN: Oh, I gave the class a list of men who had given history a goose, so to speak. "Great Moulders of History." One of my students, whom I happened to be flunking, was the son of a trustee. So...Marvin Newberry is a communist; fire the bastard.

ELLEN: Surely not even Westmore is that backward.

MARVIN: It's probably a good thing for me. I'll have to make my writing pay off now. No more soft foam rubber pillow of security. If you can call $1500 a year foam rubber.

ELLEN: But you of all people...Who could be more harmless?

MARVIN: What a devastating thing to say about a man.

ELLEN: John, you explain it to Miriam. She can speak to George.

JOHN: It's none of my affair.

MARVIN: Of course not. John doesn't approve of me anyway,-thinks I'm a radical. And I am. But we non-conformists are useful. We are the gadflies of history.

JOHN: Gadflies are useful?

MARVIN: Sure. They sting the lumbering beast into action. (writes it down) That's a good line.

ELLEN: John, you should speak to Miriam.

JOHN: Why? He likes being fired.

ELLEN: But it's unjust. You were always...(Breaks off, worriedly)

MARVIN: He was always for the underdog. But now he's bucking for dean, and those things change a man. I remember
when John was a law student, he reviewed Owen Lattimore's book at English Club.

JOHN: I'm flattered that you remember.

MARVIN: It wasn't a brilliant review. No one in his right mind could call John brilliant, but he had a kind of dogged honesty.

JOHN: You're too kind.

MARVIN: You knew he didn't really approve of Lattimore, but still he conceded his right to believe as he chose and he deplored his persecution. It was rather courageous. What would you say now, John, if a student asked you about Lattimore?

ELLEN: Stop heckling him, Marvin. He would say whatever he felt.

MARVIN: Would he? Would you, John?

ELLEN: Marvin!

(Mamie sticks her head in doorway)

MAMIE: One hot toddy on tap.

JOHN: (goes to her). Thanks.

MARVIN: Saved by the Bellows.

JOHN: Mamie, what kept you?

MAMIE: I had to sample a few to make sure it was o.k. Anyone else for hot toddies?

ELLEN: (as Marvin indicates no) No, thanks, Mamie.

MAMIE: You're being very foolish.

(Mamie and John exit)

ELLEN: You shouldn't talk like that to John.

MARVIN: Why not? It's true.
ELLEN: You're old enough to know that the truth is not always a virtue.

MARVIN: You're beautiful when you scold me. Scold me some more.

ELLEN: You're impossible.

MARVIN: I know. I cultivate it.

ELLEN: I'm sorry that you were fired.

MARVIN: I'm not. Except for leaving you.

ELLEN: You're going away?

MARVIN: I can't stay here. It would be undignified somehow.

ELLEN: Where will you go?

MARVIN: Maybe New Orleans.

ELLEN: That's a place I've always wanted to see.

MARVIN: Come with me. No, don't smile.

ELLEN: Marvin, I'm old enough to be your mother.

MARVIN: Only if you were capable of giving birth at the age of six.

ELLEN: Why New Orleans?

MARVIN: Pierre Bonheur, the novelist, is in town. I was talking to him.

ELLEN: The historical novelist?

MARVIN: Yes. Romantic escape stuff, but good. He makes tons of money.

ELLEN: How pleasant.

MARVIN: He's here doing some research for a new book.

ELLEN: Why here?

MARVIN: I don't know. I was too busy talking about myself
to find out. We had a few drinks last night. I told him
about my play and he seemed interested. He suggested New
Orleans. He lives there.
ELLEN: Would he help you?
MARVIN: What writer can help another?
ELLEN: But did he offer?
MARVIN: Oh sure.
ELLEN: Then take him up on it. A successful man like that
would have valuable advice. He'd have...
MARVIN: You're going to say 'contacts'. I think it's the
nadir of vulgarity when an artist or writer starts concerning
himself with contacts.
ELLEN: I wasn't going to say it, but it is also the nadir of
waste when a man with talent buries it in false pride. You're
not so good...no one is...that the world will beat a path to
your door and demand to see your work. You have to make the
offer.
MARVIN: I'll make you my agent.
ELLEN: For ten per cent.
MARVIN: Ten per cent of my cash and all of my heart.
(Catches her hand) Each time you smile at me, I discover
you all over again. My heart soars right out of my body. I
overcome the power of gravity. I could walk on the ceiling,
float suspended, defy all the laws of the universe. I love
you.
ELLEN: You're very sweet
MARVIN: 'Sweet' is a word for children.
ELLEN: I know I disappoint you. I have nothing to give you, and I'm truly sorry.

MARVIN: Don't be. I resent pity. It's the bargain counter cape people wrap their conscience in. I won't have it. (He gets a far-away look, then writes in a small notebook, muttering 'bargain counter cape')

ELLEN: When you really court a girl, for heaven's sake leave your notebook at home.

MARVIN: Ellen, come to New Orleans with me. Leave this stuffy, wasteful life.

ELLEN: Shall we pause while you write that down?

MARVIN: No, it wasn't very good. Ellen, I mean every word I'm saying and you know it. Come with me.

ELLEN: How disconcerted you'd be if I did.

MARVIN: Ellen!

ELLEN: You wouldn't know what on earth to do with me. You'd have to start feeling responsible. You'd see me with my hair in pin curls, you'd see me sneezing... oh, Marvin, you'd hate me.

MARVIN: You insist on treating me like a child. I suppose it's easier for you.

ELLEN: Since you're going away, I'll say this: Though you'll deny it violently... You're not in love with me.

MARVIN: That's not a nice thing to say.

ELLEN: I'm a convenient symbol. As the cliche goes, you're in love with love.

MARVIN: (quietly) I think no one is qualified to say what
someone else's love is or is not. It's like telling a man what his soul is. (Glances at portrait of Lafitt) You find my love insubstantial. To me your's is futile. You're in love with a man who believes in himself so little that he is forever trying to talk himself out of existence, trying to convince the world that he is not really himself but his father. You're married to a man who doesn't exist. (Ellen and Marvin look at each other a moment; then Marvin exits. Ellen takes a deep breath, looks up at the portrait)

CURTAIN.
ACT ONE

Scene two

SCENE: The same, several days later. At the rise, Ellen and Mamie are on stage. Mamie is popping corn at the fireplace. Ellen puts down her book, sighs.

MAMIE: What's eatin' you lately? You're mopin' around like a spavined mule. That's a line I picked up in a Chill Wills movie. What is a spavined mule anyway?

ELLEN: (laughs) I have no idea.

MAMIE: Anyway what's wrong?

ELLEN: Oh, I don't know.

MAMIE: Stewing over that great career you might have had in Hollywood, being some starlet's stand-in?

ELLEN: No. I never had any career illusions.

MAMIE: Maybe you miss the California climate. I do.

ELLEN: Do you hate it here, Mamie?

MAMIE: Oh, Texas has its good points. Or so the Texans keep telling me.

ELLEN: I like it. I guess it's what's happening to John that upsets me.

MAMIE: Well, don't blame Texas. If a man's going to behave like a jackass, he'll do it anywhere.

ELLEN: I don't think he would if I could get him away from his family. Away from the odor of Lafitt sanctity. (recites) This is Wednesday night...and on Wednesday nights John plays
bridge at his sister's with her and her pompous presidential husband, and the pompous dean of the law school. And one of these Wednesday nights the dean will announce his retirement, and then...

MAMIE: And then all hell will break loose, in an academic kind of way.

ELLEN: Then Johnny will permit the dean to trump his ace without so much as a shudder, and the whole great dream will swim into the realm of probability. The new Dean Lafitt... not to be confused with the old Dean Lafitt.

MAMIE: 'Course you got to admit a dean at his age is something. What, I don't know... but something.

ELLEN: I think it's a big fat nothing. He doesn't want to be dean, he just thinks he's supposed to want to. He never wanted to teach at all. He's using the whole lousy pattern to escape from being himself.

MAMIE: But he must be kind of smart...

ELLEN: Sure he's smart. That's what's so awful. He's so damned smart they'll never fire him. He'll probably end up being president.

MAMIE: Do you mean of the United States?

ELLEN: I didn't, but you never know.

MAMIE: (examining pop corn) Look at all those old maids. This is miserable pop corn. Have some?

ELLEN: If John is made dean, I think I'll leave him.

MAMIE: (arrested in act of tossing popcorn into her mouth) You mean it?
ELLEN: I might.

MAMIE: Well, I'll be dogged. (She plows into the pop corn with enthusiasm, humming 'California, here I Come') No, I'd have to talk you out of it. John's the only nephew-in-law I got.

ELLEN: (morosely) He's the only husband I've got. (Smugly) But maybe I could find another.

MAMIE: Not that half-assed play writer!

ELLEN: Don't you like Marvin?

MAMIE: Well, sure, he's harmless enough. But to marry him...holy Toledo! Why, I bet that guy in bed would be...

ELLEN: Never mind.

(Doorbell rings. Mamie grumbles, puts down popcorn bowl, wipes her hands on her skirt, peers out the window)

ELLEN: You know, people can see you when you do that.

MAMIE: If you think I'm going to the door before I find out who it is, you're crazy. For all you know, it might be Jack the Ripper.

ELLEN: You hope.

MAMIE: Guess who.

ELLEN: Marvin?

MAMIE: Who else. It's enough to discourage a girl. Hey, he's got somebody with him.

ELLEN: Who?

MAMIE: Looks kind of like Tyrone Power. (She gives a wolf whistle, exits to front door. Sound of steps and voices, off)

(Mamie returns followed by Marvin and Pierre Bonheur, a
handsome, sophisticated man in his late 30's.)

MARVIN: Ellen, here he is!

ELLEN: (blankly) Oh, how do you do?

BONHEUR: Aren't you going to introduce us, Newberry?


ELLEN: Did you meet my aunt, Miss Blankenhorn?

BONHEUR: Indeed I did. It was a pleasure.

(Mamie, pink with pleasure, gives a wild guffaw, grabs here bowl of pop corn and retires to a corner. She keeps staring at Bonheur in fascination, especially at his unusual shoes... a fancy kind of sandals)

MARVIN: You'll never guess why Pierre wants to talk to you, Ellen.

BONHEUR: Now that I've met Mrs. Lafitt, I can think of many reasons.

ELLEN: Why, thank you.

MARVIN: Ellen, you'll never guess.

ELLEN: Then you'd better tell me.

MARVIN: Remember my saying he was here to do research on a book?

ELLEN: (enlightened) Oh, Mr. Bonheur! Of course! (to Bonheur) I'm so sorry. I never hear names when I'm introduced.

BONHEUR: I have a terrible name-block too. Sometimes I forget my own mother's name.

(Mamie bellows with laughter, cuts it off suddenly as they look at her)

MAMIE: (holding out the bowl) Pop corn anyone?
BONHEUR: I'm doing some research for a novel on Jean Lafitte.

ELLEN: The pirate?

BONHEUR: (smiles) Buccaneer. Jean didn't like the work 'pirate'. Anyway, I was interested in your husband's name.

ELLEN: But it's different. L-a-f-i-t-t.

BONHEUR: I know. But it might be a variation. You see, nothing is really known about where or when Lafitte died. It's known that he disappeared from history after living in Galveston awhile. My own theory is that he drifted inland to avoid arrest, changed his name and settled down to a quiet life. Your husband's name is the only one I can find with any similarity.

ELLEN: (amazed) John's family related to Lafitte? Why, it's fantastic.

BONHEUR: (smiles) I take it your in-laws are not the adventurous type.

MAMIE: You ain't just a-whistlin' Dixie.

MARVIN: Ellen, does John have any old family letters?

ELLEN: Why, yes. They're in a tin box in the attic...

MARVIN: May I get them?

ELLEN: I'd better ask John first. (Goes to phone, dials) He'll be awfully startled. I mean it's such a...revolutionary idea...

MAMIE: (to Bonheur) Those are the craziest mixed-up shoes I ever saw.

BONHEUR: Do you like them, Mrs. Blankenhorn?

MAMIE: Miss Blankenhorn.
BONHEUR: I'll have a pair made for you when I go back to New Orleans.

PAMIE: My feet aren't that big.

BONHEUR: They have them for ladies, too.

ELLEN: (on phone) Johnny, I'm sorry to interrupt, but there's a man here...Mr. Bonheur, the novelist. (pauses) He's very well known. B-o-n-... anyway, he wants to look at your family letters. It's very exciting; he...(pause).

Oh. That's too bad. (pause) Hush, he'll hear you.

Johnny, about Mr. Bonheur... Oh, all right. 'Bye. (Hangs up)

MARVIN: What did he say?

ELLEN: The dean bid five spades and they lost.

MARVIN: But about the letters...

ELLEN: It's all right. (to Marvin) He was really mad about those five spades...

MARVIN: (grins) You mean the worm has finally been turned by a spade? ...I'll run up to the attic and get the box.

PAMIE: I'll go with you, sonny.

MARVIN: I can manage.

PAMIE: Yeah, and tear the whole attic apart.

(Mamie and Marvin exit. Ellen feels suddenly shy)

ELLEN: It's really an astonishing idea. Lafitte, I mean.

BONHEUR: Does it appeal to you?

ELLEN: Yes, tremendously.

BONHEUR: Why?

ELLEN: Well; it's so unexpected...so romantic...
BONHEUR: Is life here pretty dull?
ELLEN: No, it's not that. It's just...
BONHEUR: Just what?
ELLEN: Aren't you asking rather personal questions?
BONHEUR: Forgive me, I am.
ELLEN: I guess novelists have to.
BONHEUR: That's the alibi we use.
ELLEN: Tell me about New Orleans. It's always fascinated me.
BONHEUR: Let's see...I guess it's the only city in the world where the three most famous characters were a voodoo queen, a madam, and a pirate. It's probably the dirtiest, most inefficient city in America, and the most fascinating. The French quarter is a health menace and a fire hazard, and completely charming.
ELLEN: Oh, I'd love to see it!
BONHEUR: Why don't you?
ELLEN: Someday we will. It's just that there's always something...
BONHEUR: Ah, yes. Marriage. Someday I'm going to write a book about marriage.
ELLEN: What will it say?
BONHEUR: That of all the unlikely notions ever dreamed up by man, marriage is the most unlikely, the most weird and unnatural arrangement that could possibly be devised.
ELLEN: People have been getting married for a long time.
BONHEUR: They have also been enduring other forms of mischief,
such as weather, sin, and the common cold...

ELLEN: You're a cynic.

BONHEUR: No, I'm a romantic. It pains me to see the joys
of love wrapped up in a marriage contract and thrown into
an old bureau drawer.

ELLEN: But in marriage love isn't lost; it's just...

BONHEUR: I know, it matures. 'Grow old along with me, the
best is yet to be.' Do you look forward to searching for
your husband's misplaced false teeth? Do you yearn for the
day when you're both so deaf you must bellow at each other?

ELLEN: I'd rather bellow at John than at nobody.

BONHEUR: (laughs) That's the most romantic speech I ever
heard. (Comes closer to her) Look at you... young, beautiful,
full of zest for life...and what must you do? Stay at home
and type your husband's briefs.

ELLEN: He doesn't have briefs.

BONHEUR: And the really fiendish thing about marriage is the
way in which completely unsuited couples plunge into it.

ELLEN: Opposites attract.

BONHEUR: That means male and female. Now look at you,
for instance...

ELLEN: Must we keep on looking at me?

BONHEUR: You're intrigued by travel and romance while your
husband likes to stay at home.

ELLEN: It isn't that he likes to. He has obligations. He
used to be interested in travel.

BONHEUR: Did he ever go anywhere?
ELLEN: Well, he... he used to subscribe to HOLIDAY. (Defensively as he laughs) Your definition of love is unrealistic. It refuses to accept responsibility.

BONHEUR: Only Americans, with that infernal Puritan Heritage would think of love in terms of responsibility.

ELLEN: When you say love, you mean sex.

BONHEUR: Of course. (Leans toward her) What's wrong with sex?

ELLEN: (nervously) Well, nothing, of course... (She jumps up hastily, goes to record player) Would you like to hear some records?

BONHEUR: If you insist. (Comes to stand close behind her)

ELLEN: (nervously, reading titles) What do you like?

Bach? Monteverdi, Mozart? (Faster) Bloch? Aaron Copland? The Crew Cuts?

BONHEUR: Do you have George Lewis?

ELLEN: (triumphant) No, but I have Beiderbecke.

BONHEUR: (laughs, turns her toward him) Good for you. Forgive me for teasing you. I couldn't resist.

ELLEN: (uncertainly) Don't you want to hear a record?

BONHEUR: I'd rather talk to you. ...Are you angry?

ELLEN: Of course not. I was just thinking how I must seem to you... bogged down in middle class dullness.

BONHEUR: Do you know how you seem to me? Very sweet, thoroughly delightful, someone I want to know better.

ELLEN: (gives him a troubled look) Mamie and Marvin are taking a very long time.
BONHEUR: Probably snatching a moment of clandestine love.

ELLEN: (laughs, then goes toward door) Here they come.

(Marvin and Mamie enter carrying small tin trunk)

ELLEN: What in the world have you been doing?

MARVIN: It seems Mamie has been tidying up the attic lately. That consists of piling seventeen objects on top of anything you might conceivably want.

MAMIE: Mr. Muscles here was a big help. (She lets go of trunk, banging Marvin's shin. He yelps)

(Bonheur sits cross-legged on floor before trunk, takes out letters)

BONHEUR: Pitch in, everybody. Look for anything postmarked before 1875, and watch for Louisiana postmarks.

MAMIE: You'd probably enjoy this more if I had a drink.

ELLEN: Fix one for all of us, will you?


(Exits)

ELLEN: I don't know why I'm so excited about this. Even if it turns out to be true, what will it prove?

MARVIN: It would be quite a jolt to Miriam. And a jolt to Miriam might shock John out of his catalepsy. If that's what you want.

ELLEN: Two ancestors to live up to?

MARVIN: The dean and the pirate; it makes a nice schizophrenic heritage. But of course John is Schizo already.

ELLEN: He is not.

MARVIN: One foot in the present, one in the past...what does
this do to a guy? (shrugs) At the rate he's going he'll soon have both of 'em in the past. Then no problem.

ELLEN: (softly) For him.

(Mamie returns with bottle and glasses)

ELLEN: Is bourbon all right, Mr. Bonheur?

BONHEUR: Great.

MAMIE: It's a good thing, since that's all we got. (She gives them their drinks, sits on floor staring at Bonheur's shoes) I sure go for those shoes.

(Bonheur slips off the sandals, pushes them toward her. Mamie tries them on)

MAMIE: My God, they fit!

BONHEUR: Keep them.

MAMIE: You can't go home barefoot.

BONHEUR: For you, my dear Miss Blankenhorn, I'd go home stark naked.

MAMIE: (gulps) That won't hardly be necessary.

BONHEUR: (reading) Biloxi 1871. And it's addressed to Mrs. John Lafitt. (Opens it)

MAMIE: Can't a woman know somebody in Biloxi without being married to a pirate?

BONHEUR: I guess you're right, Mamie; it's nothing. That's the trouble with me, always letting my imagination run away with me.

ELLEN: You need a research assistant.

BONHEUR: Want a job?

MILL: Thanks, I'm not the type.
MAMIE: (pursing herself a new drink) Fresh one, anybody?
MARVIN: Listen to this. (Reads letter) "My dear husband: I was pleased to receive yours of the 18th, and to know you are in good health. All is well here. The cow had a calf on the 21st at 8 a.m. and I have sold her to Mr. Chathams for $5. Your loving wife." How's that for conjugal passion?
BONHEUR: (grins at Ellen) The blessed bonds of matrimony.
ELLEN: I don't think it's fair to make fun of someone's private letters.
MARVIN: Sorry.
ELLEN: (at sound of door off) John so early?
(John enters, looking unhappy)
ELLEN: Hi, dear.
JOHN: Hi.
(Ellen introduces him to Bonheur)
BONHEUR: Nice of you to let me plow through the family documents.
JOHN: (without interest) Looking for something special?
BONHEUR: Yes. I've got an idea your grandfather might be Jean LaFitte.
(John takes drink from Ellen, samples it)
JOHN: LaFitte? Pirate, wasn't he? (as Bonheur nods) I'm afraid you're on the wrong track. My grandfather was just an East Texas carpenter.
MARVIN: You told me you didn't know what he was.
JOHN: Well, I think he was. He died before I was born.
BONHEUR: Do you know anything about his early life?
JOHN: Never heard it mentioned. But a pirate! (laughs)
ELLEN: It is hard to imagine.
BONHEUR: Do you mind if I take some of these letters back to the hotel till tomorrow?
JOHN: Help yourself.
BONHEUR: (finishing his drink) I understand you teach law.
JOHN: Up to now.
(Ellen glances at him quickly)
BONHEUR: What's your field?
JOHN: I specialize in torts.
BONHEUR: I beg pardon?
JOHN: I teach suretyships, mortgages, and appellate practice, but torts are my specialty.
BONHEUR: Sounds like an interesting specialty. (to Ellen, taking her hand) Thank you for a delightful evening.
MAMIE: Thanks for the shoes.
BONHEUR: My pleasure, Miss Blankenhorn. (Mamie giggles)
ELLEN: Don't you want to borrow a pair of John's.
BONHEUR: Thanks, no. Though it would be pleasant to be in your husband's shoes.
(Ellen and Bonheur go toward door. Marvin pauses near John)
MARVIN: I understand the dean bid five spades.
JOHN: The man's an idiot.
MARVIN: May I quote you?
JOHN: Good God, no.
(Marvin follows Ellen and Bonheur out)
MAMIE: Well, I guess I'd better go to bed while I can still make it.
(Mamie starts toward door, bottle in hand. John takes it, pours himself a drink. Mamie exits. Ellen returns)

ELLEN: Wouldn't it be sort of exciting if it turns out to be true, - the Lafitte thing?

JOHN: The guy's nuts.

ELLEN: Did you have a nice evening?

JOHN: Would you say I was an impulsive, somewhat undisciplined young man?

ELLEN: Heavens, no. Why?

JOHN: That's what the dean said.

ELLEN: But why?

JOHN: It seems that I remarked he had made the silliest bid of the century.

ELLEN: You didn't!

JOHN: I did. And I was cold, cold sober. (Incredulously) What in the hell came over me? To the dean!

ELLEN: But if you felt that way...

JOHN: But to the dean! It must be this cold I have.

ELLEN: I'm glad you said it.

JOHN: That's a silly damn thing to say.

ELLEN: I don't think so.

JOHN: It's your fault anyway.

ELLEN: Oh?

JOHN: You needled me. You said I kowtowed to him.

ELLEN: I didn't say that, but it's interesting that your subconscious came up with that word.

JOHN: Don't mess around with my subconscious. It makes me
nervous.

ELLEN: I think it's exciting, your telling off the dean.
I'm proud of you.

JOHN: Proud of me? Are you crazy? I could lose the deanship. I could lose my job.

ELLEN: So what?

JOHN: So what?!

(Phone rings)

ELLEN: Yes. Who cares. If you got fired, you'd have to start your own law practice.

JOHN: You must be out of your mind.

(phone)

JOHN: It'll be Miriam, giving me hell.

ELLEN: Let it ring.

JOHN: Let Miriam ring?

ELLEN: Let Miriam ring, and your late father and mother ring. Your cousins and your aunts and the faculty and the trustees and the dean... let 'em all ring.

JOHN: You've had too much to drink. (goes to phone)

ELLEN: Your grandfather wouldn't have answered it.

JOHN: My grandfather? Are you falling for that crackpot notion?

ELLEN: He's not a crackpot; he's a very attractive man.

JOHN: Oh? (savagely to phone, as it rings) Wait a minute!

ELLEN: You may be the grandson of one of the most exciting men in history.

JOHN: (glances involuntarily at mirror) Bourbon isn't
good for you. (picks up phone)
ELLEN: It might change our whole lives.

JOHN: But damn it, I don't want mine changed. (on phone)
Hello? Yes, Miriam. Yeah, well, I was pretty teed off.
...Well, I have this cold... (he sneezes, looks at Ellen, sees her scorn, goes on with belligerence) Just the same, it was a damn silly way to play a card game. I think the old boy's losing his marbles. He's... (breaks off, trying to stop a sneeze) Yeah. (resolvedly) All right, tell him anything you want to. Tell him I just died of pneumonia. As a matter of fact, I'm considering it. (hangs up, gives Ellen a sheepish look)

ELLEN: You're right. You couldn't possibly be the grandson of Lafitte.

JOHN: (defensively) Now listen, I told the dean. I said to him... (sneezes explosively)

ELLEN: Good night. (she starts out)

JOHN: As far as that goes, I could be the guy as well as anybody.

( Ellen exits)

JOHN: As far as character goes, there's no reason...

( door slams offstage. John's voice trails off. He goes to mirror, looks at himself)

JOHN: ... just as well as anybody else, as far as that goes.

(He leans toward the mirror, frowning, looking at himself near-sightedly)

CURTAIN.
ACT ONE

Scene two

SCENE: The same. Two weeks later, about ten p.m.

AT THE RISE, Mamie, Marvin and Bonheur are on stage. They are sitting in relaxed attitudes, each with a drink. Bonheur has a letter in his hand.

BONHEUR: What's keeping them? No official function could last this long.

MARVIN: At this university it could.

MAMIE: Anything can happen. John forgot his glasses.

MARVIN: Oh, God. He'll probably recite the Gettysburg address.

BONHEUR: In Latin.

MAMIE: Wait till Ellen hears about that letter. She'll flip her wig.

MARVIN: Wait till John hears.

BONHEUR: He'll just ignore it, I suppose.

MARVIN: Who could ignore finding out he's Lafitte's grandson?

BONHEUR: A man with no imagination.

MARVIN: In spite of the fact that John seems like a clod, Ellen did marry him. Why would she marry a man with no imagination?

BONHEUR: My dear boy, haven't you heard of sex?

MARVIN: Ellen isn't that kind of girl.

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BONHEUR: Every girl is that kind of girl. True, Mamie?
MAMIE: (with reminiscent relish) You can say that again.
MARVIN: Ellen wouldn't marry a man just for sex. She
might sleep with him, but to marry him...that would be
indecent.
BONHEUR: All right, Galahad. But to get back to friend
John, what do you think he'll do?
MARVIN: God knows. The poor guy is already riding two horses
that are galloping in opposite directions.
MAMIE: Sounds like a neat trick.
BONHEUR: What's his problem?
MARVIN: Same as yours and mine - the schizophrenia of our
age. The struggle to get our scattered selves together.
BONHEUR: Not me, brother.
MARVIN: Then why are you writing historical novels?
BONHEUR: They amuse me.
MARVIN: Why?
MAMIE: Hey, is it true they drink absinthe for breakfast in
New Orleans?
BONHEUR: Mamie, it grieves me to say that some benighted
legislators outlawed absinthe.
MAMIE: I knew a character from New Orleans once... swore
he drank absinthe for breakfast.
BONHEUR: He lied. It was pernod.
MAMIE: Well, isn't that a hell of a note.
MARVIN: Poor Mamie...all these years she's nourished a
secret dream...absinthe for breakfast. And now...shattered.

MAMIE: Don't take it too hard. (to Bonheur) He takes things hard.

BONHEUR: What is your greatest dream, Mamie?

MAMIE: (embarrassed) Oh, shucks.

MARBIN: Mamie, sometimes you act like a woman practicing to be a character actress.

MAMIE: That's it.

MARBIN: That's what?

MAMIE: My secret ambition. Acting.

BONHEUR: why, Mamie! (looks at her) Mamie Bernhardt.

MAMIE: No, Blankenhorn.

BONHEUR: Ever done any acting?

MAMIE: Sure. On the coast.

MARBIN: Please note, she doesn't say Hollywood. She says on the coast. The true sophisticate.

BONHEUR: What did you do?

MAMIE: (proudly) I was an extra in "Birth of a Nation".

MARBIN: She was the fourth midwife from the left.

BONHEUR: Mamie, this opens up a whole new facet of your personality.

MAMIE: Facet?

MARBIN: Not the kind that drips.

BONHEUR: What school of acting did you subscribe to, Mamie?

MARBIN: Stanislavski would be good for Mamie.

BONHEUR: Or Boleslavski.

MARBIN: Boleslavski is just watered-down Stanislavski.
BOHNEUR: I'll take a small bowl.

MARVIN: With matzo balls.

BOHNEUR: And a small Caesar salad.

NAMIE: If I didn't know you boys, I'd say you were psycho.

MARVIN: (gets up restlessly) Why doesn't that lawyer come home? He's had time to dedicate a dozen buildings.

BOHNEUR: Are you familiar with the Sandburg poem, "why is there always a secret singing when a lawyer cashes in? Why does the hearse horse snicker Hauling a lawyer away?"

NAMIE: I don't think that's nice.

BOHNEUR: I make no claim to being nice. (glances at watch)

Forty eight hours from now, my boy, we'll be at Eugenia's

MARVIN: Who's she?

BOHNEUR: The most delightful woman in New Orleans?

NAMIE: Is she a madam?

BOHNEUR: Why, Namie!

NAMIE: I thought all the interesting women in New Orleans ran whore houses.

BOHNEUR: That was in another century. Who was this chum of yours who talked about absinthe and bordellos? Andrew Jackson?

MARVIN: So who is Eugenia?

BOHNEUR: The flower of New Orleans aristocracy...part French, part charming, predatory, and stony broke.

MARVIN: What does she do?

BOHNEUR: She bought an old building the Lafitte brothers are said to have lived in at one time. She fixed up half for an apartment, and the other half as a bar. All the most colorful
people in town hang out there.

MAMIE: Sounds great.

MAMIE: Sounds like a whore house.

(Footsteps, voices, off left)

MARVIN: At last.

(John enters, looking pleased with himself)

MARVIN: Where's Ellen?

JOHN: She's sneezing in the hall closet.

MARVIN: What?

JOHN: Hay fever.

marvin; I'll get her.

JOHN: Better not. She doesn't like to be interrupted when she's sneezing. How are you, Bonheur?

BONHEUR: Fine. How did the dedication go?

JOHN: Great.

MAMIE: You forgot your specs.

JOHN: Yes. I couldn't read my speech.

MAMIE: What'd you do, whistle a couple of selections?

JOHN: I used one of my father's. One I knew by heart.

MAMIE: I'll bet there wasn't a dry eye in the house.

MARVIN: What did Ellen think?

JOHN: Ellen was in the ladies' room sneezing.

(Ellen enters, wan and pink around the nose)

ELLEN: Hi.

MARVIN: Do you feel awful?

ELLEN: Not as awful as I look. Poor Johnny, I really let you down.
JOHN: That's all right, honey. Want me to get your pryabenzamine?

ELLEN: I'm all right now. I always fall apart when you make a speech.

MARVIN: It's psychological.

ELLEN: You must have been good. The applause was terrific. Only I wish you could have used your own speech.

JOHN: I thought you didn't like mine.

ELLEN: I didn't but it was yours,

JOHN: I'll never understand women.

BONHEUR: We have a bit of news...

MARVIN: Pierre has found the letter!

ELLEN: The letter?

BONHEUR: That proves the relationship with Lafitte. (Holds it out) Dated May 13, 1883, from Dominique You in New Orleans, to Jean.

(John puts on glasses, reads letter)

MAMIE: Dominique who?

BONHEUR: You.

MAMIE: Me?

BONHEUR: No. You.

MAMIE: Somebody's drunk. (Looks at her glass)

JOHN: Well, I'll be damned. (Gives letter to Ellen)

ELLEN: Johnny! Isn't it exciting!

JOHN: So the old boy really was a pirate. What do you know. (Grins) This is going to be quite a surprise to Miriam.

ELLEN: (hugs him) Now we've got to go to New Orleans in
spring vacation.

JOHN: Why?

ELLEN: Why? To see everything, find out all about him.

Oh, this happened just in time. If we leave right after your last class on Friday...

JOHN: Hey, wait a minute.

MARVIN: Pierre and I will be there ahead of you. We're leaving tomorrow. We'll throw a big whang ding...

BONHEUR: New Orleans will love you. They go for this kind of thing.

ELLEN: Oh, what fun!

JOHN: Just a minute...(no one hears him)

BONHEUR: Ellen, we'll go everywhere. I'll take you out to the little graveyard where Lafitte and Napoleon and John Paul Jones are supposed to be buried. Of course they aren't, but it's an enchanting spot...where the Bayou Carataria flows into the Bayou of the Goose...

ELLEN: How wonderful!

BONHEUR: We'll have coffee and doughnuts in the French Market as the sun comes up... We'll drive along the river past all the old plantation houses...

MAMIE: What about me?

MARVIN: I want to see Napoleon's death mask.

BONHEUR: We'll see everything.

MAMIE: I want to see the doughnuts and coffee and geese and Napoleon. If anybody thinks I'm going to stay home and look after the cat, they're crazy.
ELLEN: Mamie dear, you can go too.

JOHN: Don't worry about the cat, Mamie. I'll take care of it.

ELLEN: (after pause) What?

JOHN: I said I'd look after the cat.

ELLEN: You mean you won't go?

JOHN: Why should I? I have work to do right here. Besides, Miriam expects me at the ranch. Expects us.

ELLEN: But something has happened. Things are different.

JOHN: So my grandfather was a pirate. It's very interesting, but my grandfather was dead before I was born. What do I care what he did for a living?

MAMIE: Say, maybe there's buried treasure under the house.

JOHN: Sure it's a big surprise and someday I'd like to read up on him. Maybe we could to New Orleans this summer.

ELLEN: Aren't you even interested?

JOHN: Of course. It's a very interesting idea. I want to give it some thought. It may mean something. But right now, just when the appointment of a new dean can happen any day, I can't just say 'so long, I'm off to New Orleans to see my grandfather's ghost'.

ELLEN: Why not?

JOHN: It would be... damn it, it would be frivolous.

ELLEN: (despairing) Oh, dear God.

MARVIN: I find John's attitude rather magnificent. How many people could be so consistent? It has a certain grandeur.

JOHN: (drily) Thank you.
MARVIN: I mean it. When a man refuses to be deterred, no matter what the distraction, you have to admire him.

ELLEN: Well, that's one interpretation.

JOHN: It's a little disconcerting, Marvin, to find you on my side.

MARVIN: I wouldn't exactly say I'm on your side. It's just that you intrigue me as a character.

JOHN: Oh.

BONHEUR: Let's go out on the town and celebrate the new Lafitte.

MAMIE: This town won't take you far.

BONHEUR: Then we'll drive to Dallas and make it a big night. How about it?

JOHN: Not me, thanks. It's been a tiring day.

BONHEUR: It'll do you good, man.

JOHN: No, thanks. I'm expecting a call from my sister. We left early and I know she'll have some things to say.

MAMIE: In a few thousand well chosen words.

BONHEUR: Sorry you won't join us.

JOHN: We'll go next time.

ELLEN: I'm going this time.

(John gives her a startled look)

MARVIN: Wonderful. Let's get beautifully drunk.

BONHEUR: We'll make it a night to remember. (Grabs Ellen's hand, starts her toward door. She hesitates, returns to John)

ELLEN: Johnny, please come.

JOHN: I can't honey. Miriam would blow her stack if I
weren't here when she called.

ELLEN: Oh, damn Miriam.

JOHN: (stiffly) You're speaking of my only sister.

ELLEN: The hell with your only sister.

JOHN: Ellen!

ELLEN: You can tell your only sister I won't be able to come to the ranch next week. I'll be in New Orleans.

JOHN: (incredulous) Without me?

ELLEN: With you, if you'll come. Without you if you won't.

JOHN: (pause) O.K. Then without me.

ELLEN: (close to tears) O.K. (to Bonheur) Let's go tear up the town.

(Bonheur, Marvin and Ellen exit. John goes to window)

JOHN: She should have taken her pyrabenzamine.

MAMIE: In my experience a good stiff drink beats any medicine.

JOHN: (pours one) I hope you're right. (sits beside her)

Mamie...

MAMIE: If you're going to say what I think you are, remember my name's Blankenhorn, not Dorothy Dix.

JOHN: What's wrong with Ellen?

MAMIE: Like I said, I'm no Dix. But I guess it's you letting your family tell you what to do.

JOHN: That's absurd. Only a spineless fool would do that.

MAMIE: (cheerfully) That's right.

JOHN: Just because a man happens to follow in his father's footsteps. Look at Lowell Thomas, Jr. Look at Edsel Ford. Look at Alexandre Dumas, Fils.
MAMIE: You look at 'em. I'm sleepy.

JOHN: I'm hungry. Ellen knows giving a speech always makes me hungry.

MAMIE: Why don't you whip up one of those egg deals you're so good at? I could use a little nourishment myself.

JOHN: O.K. We'll have a celebration all our own. We'll have more fun than the whole city of Dallas.

MAMIE: (without enthusiasm) Yippee.

JOHN: We'll break out that champagne that's in the refrigerator.

MAMIE: (with new zeal) Yippee! But Ellen's been saving it.

JOHN: Well, she went off and left us. (He exits, returns with bottle, opens it)

MAMIE: (at sound of cork) There's a sound that beats the hell out of Beethoven.

JOHN: I've been thinking... maybe it's household drudgery that's got Ellen down.

MAMIE: (lifting glass) Mud in your eye.

JOHN: Skol.

MAMIE: What kind of eggs you going to make?

JOHN: What do you want?

MAMIE: What's that crazy name that sounds like a nun?

JOHN: Eggs benedict?

MAMIE: That's her.

JOHN: Yes sir, housework could sure get a girl down.

MAMIE: You can say that again.

JOHN: Now would you like to wash dishes day after day, clean
the same old house, slave for some jerk who just takes it for granted?

MAMIE: I do, and I'm not even married.

JOHN: It's enough to give any girl hay fever.

MAMIE: Callouses, too.

JOHN: Frustration, that's what it is. A woman needs attention, flowers, flattery... (pause) Flowers! I'll get her a bunch of violets. (starts toward phone)

MAMIE: Got news for you, buddy. It's eleven p.m. Little old violets all locked up in bed.

JOHN: Oh. Well, tomorrow then. (sits) There's one thing a man should remember. Women are only human.

MAMIE: Now let's don't go overboard. (She refills their glasses)

JOHN: Maybe I could manage a weekend in New Orleans.

MAMIE: Sure. Live dangerously.

JOHN: Frankly, Mamie, do I look like a pirate to you?

MAMIE: Frankly, no.

JOHN: You can't tell though, what a man's got hidden in his depths.

(Mamie, now feeling gay, leaps up, pulls John up, ties her red apron around his waist like a scarf)

MAMIE: See what this'll do for your depths.

(John, joining in, removes necktie, opens collar, attempts to pencil on a mustache.)

JOHN: If she wants a swashbuckler, by God, we'll swash a buckle or two. (strikes fierce pose) How do I look?
MAMIE: Avast! (Seizes him by the waist and they do a brief wild dance. Phone rings)

JOHN: Oh, God. Miriam.

MAMIE: Remember the Spanish Main.

JOHN: (on phone, irritably) Hello?

MAMIE: Remember the Alamo.

JOHN: Yes, Miriam.

MAMIE: Remember Mama.

JOHN: As a matter of fact, Miriam, I was just going to bed.

MAMIE: Please!

JOHN: Glad you approved, Miriam. ...Yeah, Ellen didn't feel well... What? (perks up) You mean he finally...? ...Well, I'll be darned. ...Well, what do you know?

MAMIE: Well, what?

JOHN: I'll see you tomorrow. O.K., thanks for calling.

(hangs up) Well, what do you know.

MAMIE: What is this, 20 questions?

JOHN: That was Miriam.

MAMIE: (irony) No!

JOHN: She had a confidential chat with the dean...

MAMIE: I'll bet it was spicy.

JOHN: Mamie, don't repeat this but...

MAMIE: Don't tell me...let me guess. The dean's going to have a baby.

JOHN: He's going to retire at the end of spring quarter.

MAMIE: Farewell, Jean Lafitte. (Tragically removes John's scarf)
JOHN: Miriam says I'll probably get the job. (weakly) Isn't it great?

MAMIE: You look as happy as a Basset hound with a toothache. It's what you wanted, isn't it?

JOHN: (forced) Sure. Of course. (picks up champagne bottle) It's empty.

MAMIE: Then we might as well kill ourselves.

JOHN: What will Ellen say?

MAMIE: What can she say? Looks like you're stuck with it now.

JOHN: Stuck with it. That's a fine way to put it. Being a dean is a great honor. You should congratulate me.

MAMIE: Congratulations.

JOHN: I'll be one of the youngest law school deans in the country. What do you say to that?

MAMIE: I'm hungry.

JOHN: (goes to window, looks out, with sudden anger) I don't like that damned Franchman she's out with.

MAMIE: He's only half French. You want me to get the eggs ready?

JOHN: All right.

MAMIE: Cheer up, Junior, you're a wheel now. (starts for door)

JOHN: Ellen will be mad. How crazy can things get? A guy's wife is mad at him because he's successful.

MAMIE: Depends on what the guy does. Now you take a safe cracker's wife...

JOHN: I'm not a safe cracker.
MAMIE: If I was you, I'd go to New Orleans Friday. They say love blooms in those tropical cities.

JOHN: I can't. The trustees meet next week.

MAMIE: That's my advice. Take it or leave it. (exits to kitchen)

(John goes to phone impulsively, dials)

MAMIE: (offstage) What do you need besides eggs?

JOHN: Canadian bacon, English muffins, Hollandaise sauce...

(on phone) Hello, Allen? ...Say, Allen, this is John Lafitt. I want to order some violets. ...I'm sorry I got you out of bed, but it's important.

MAMIE: (off) No Canadian bacon.

JOHN: Ham then. ... No, no, Allen, I was talking to Mamie. Listen, I want to order the biggest bunch of violets you've got. ...Bigger than that. Enormous. ...O.K., fine.

MAMIE: (Off) No English muffins.

JOHN: Enclose a card. Say, "To my,.." (pauses) Let's see...

"From your..." "With deepest..."

MAMIE: (off) How many eggs?

JOHN: Oh hell, just say Ellen from John. (hangs up)

MAMIE: (off, bellowing) How many damned eggs?

JOHN: (irritably) As many as you want. (goes to father's portrait and looks up at it belligerantly) Well, I made it. (He smooths down his hair, reties his tie. Then he starts out of the room, pauses at mirror, stares at himself. Wipes off the pencilled mustache. Leans closer to mirror, savagely addressing himself) Shut up! (starts for kitchen door)

CURTAIN
ACT TWO

Scene two

SCENE: Eugenia's bar, in New Orleans' French Quarter, ten days later. There are a few small tables with big dripping candles, and a small and battered bar. The place looks old. Behind the bar is hung a copy of the Jarvis painting of Lafitte and his friends singing. A 19th century duelling sword and a set of duelling pistols are hung on the wall. Behind the bar is an absinthe-dripping contrivance.

AT THE RISE, The only person on stage is Gerald, the middle-aged Negro bartender, a man with a pleasant, intelligent face. He is polishing glasses as Ellen, Bonheur, Marvin and Eugenia Saxe enter. Eugenia is a beautiful and sophisticated young woman, about 30, with a Latin charm and a predatory attitude toward attractive men. In the background, from time to time, can be heard a burst of Dixieland jazz as one or another of the combos in the crowded little Bourbon Street bars becomes particularly inspired.

EUGENIA: ...oh, Pierre, you're a purist.

BONHEUR: But Eugenia, George Lewis is nationally acknowledged to be one of the greatest living clarinetists.

EUGENIA: What do I care what is nationally acknowledged? I'll take Papa Celestin any day.

MARVIN: I'm a Basin Street Six man, myself.

EUGENIA: (teasing him possessively) Oh, Marvin, you're
just being independent because you had your play accepted. Gerald, Mr. Newbery's play is going to be done by LePetit Theatre.

GERALD: Fine, fine.

EUGENIA: He hardly gets his feet off the plane, and already he's one of us.

ELLEN: Marvin is wonderful. He always knows just what he wants, and simply goes after it, while the rest of us stew around in our indecisions.

MARVIN: (ironically, to Ellen) Simple as a child.

EUGENIA: No business, Gerald?

GERALD: There were a few folks in a while ago, Miss Eugenia, but it's pretty quiet.

EUGENIA: Oh, well, the night's young.

GERALD: That's right.

EUGENIA: What will you have, Ellen dear?

ELLEN: I'd better stick to eazeracs.

MARVIN: Bourbon for me.

EUGENIA: Pierre, your usual?

BONHEUR: Please. (puts his hand gently on Ellen's cheek) Tired, little one?

ELLEN: (smiles) I suppose so, but I'm having so much fun, I can't tell.

EUGENIA: Did you hear from your husband today?

ELLEN: (frowns) No. I can't understand it. I haven't heard for three days.

BONHEUR: Well, at least it gives the local florists a chance
to replenish their stock of violets.

EUGENIA: I think it's charming. A husband who deluges his wife with flowers. Only darling, why violets? They always remind me of old ladies in bonnets.

ELLEN: (defensively) I've always loved violets.

BONHEUR: For you I would choose some rare exotic orchid.

MARVIN: Nonsense! Ellen isn't exotic.

BONHEUR: She is exotic in spirit. Delicate, exquisite, exotic.

EUGENIA: (piqued at losing their attention) And for me, what? A handful of old dandelions?

BONHEUR: For you, dear, a night-blooming cereus.

EUGENIA: Aren't they deadly?

MARVIN: You're thinking of night-shade.

EUGENIA: To get back to Ellen's husband...

MARVIN: Must we?

EUGENIA: I do wish you could get him down here, Ellen. It would be much fun to break the story. We could have a press interview right here with John posed under the painting. 'Grandson of Jean Lafitte discovered in Eugenia Saxe's bar.' Marvelous publicity.

BONHEUR: Darling, you have the soul of a merchant.

EUGENIA: I don't suppose the publicity would hurt your forthcoming book either, my love.

BONHEUR: The hell with that. I don't want him here.

EUGENIA: (glances at Ellen) No, I suppose not. (briskly) Well, drink up, angels. Let's hear Papa blow that horn.

MARVIN: When are we going to take Ellen to Arneud's?
EUGENIA: Tomorrow. Did you make the reservations, Gerald?
GERALD: Yes, Miss Eugenia. Shrimp Arnaud, court bouillon, and pompance en papillottes.
EUGENIA: And cafe brulot.
BONHEUR: Brulot? How flamboyant of you, darling.
EUGENIA: Ellen must see everything.
ELLEN: What is it?
EUGENIA: Coffee brewed with orange and lemon peel and spices, doused in brandy and set on fire. The waiter turns out all the lights in the restaurant, and brings you this vast flaming silver bowl like a witch's cauldron. It's quite spectacular.
ELLEN: (laughs) Oh, I love New Orleans. I never want to leave.
BONHEUR: (softly) Then don't. (Bonheur brings her coat, helps her with it as they all prepare to leave. He holds her for an added moment.
ELLEN: Don't?
BONHEUR: Stay here with us.
BONHEUR holds her back as Marvin and Eugenia go to the door.
BONHEUR: (cont.) With me. Stay...be happy...live while you're young.
ELLEN: (disturbed) Pierre...
BONHEUR: (more lightly) 'Man whose young passion sets the spindrift flying, is soon too lame to march, too cold for loving.'
(Troubled, Ellen breaks away from him. Marvin manages to
hang back for a word with Ellen, as Bonheur and Eugenia exit.)

MARVIN: Ellen, I never see you alone. I want to talk to you...

ELLEN: Oh, please. I don't want to be talked to. Let's just enjoy New Orleans.

MARVIN: Are you enjoying it?

ELLEN: (almost too emphatically) Yes!

MARVIN: (gently) All right. Then that's enough for now.

(Marvin opens the door for her and they exit.)

GERALD: (shakes his head) People!

(Gerald picks up the dirty glasses, washes them, humming to himself. After a moment John enters, looking tired, bewildered, and slightly drunk.

JOHN: Is this the bar owned by somebody named Eugenia?

GERALD: Yes, sir. She just left, but she'll be poppin' in.

JOHN: I'll wait. Double bourbon, please.

GERALD: Yes, sir.

John puts on his glasses, looks around.

JOHN: So this is Eugenia's joint.

GERALD: You a friend of Miss Eugenia's?

JOHN: Never laid eyes on her.

GERALD: (politely) I see.

JOHN: Where are all the gay intellectuals?

GERALD: Sir?

JOHN: I thought Eugenia's was always swarming with fascinating characters. Pirates and voodoo queens and things.
GERALD: The people mostly don't come til later. One or two o'clock.

JOHN: Oh, they aren't gay and intellectual till after midnight. Like Cinderella.

GERALD: (smiles) I think Cinderella was the other way round.

JOHN: That's right, she was. You're a well-read man.

(drinks) Well, if New Orleanians aren't gay and intellectual until midnight, what are they the rest of the time?

GERALD: (amused) Just colorful, sir.

JOHN: Colorful. Hmm. (holds out his glass for a refill)

What's that thing down there?

GERALD: That's what they dripped absinthe on, sir.

JOHN: Thought you couldn't get absinthe.

GERALD: Not any more. It's pernod now.

JOHN: Substitute. Everything's a substitute nowadays.

(dramatically) I'm a substitute.

GERALD: Is that so?

JOHN: (broodingly) That's so. Dean-elect substitute Lafitt. (lifts his glass) Here's mud in your eye.

GERALD: Thank you kindly.

JOHN: And here's to me. All six of me. (drinks) Do you know who you are?

GERALD: I'm Gerald, sir.

JOHN: (sticks out his hand) Glad to know you, Gerald. I'm John. (they shake hands solemnly) Gerald, do you know who you are? If you bumped into your immortal soul out here on
Bourbon Street, would you recognize it?

GERALD: Don't reckon it would get that far away from me, sir.

JOHN: Then you're a lucky man. Mine's a far piece from me.

One hell of a far piece. I chased it all the way down here from Texas this afternoon, and I haven't caught up with it yet.

GERALD: You from Texas, sir?

JOHN: Geographically I'm from Texas. Spiritually I'm from the 18th century. Psychologically I'm from hunger.

GERALD: (indulgently) Yes sir.

JOHN: If I seem to you to be a little drunk, it's quite possibly because of the inescapable fact that I am a little drunk. I've had a hard day.

GERALD: I'm sorry to hear it.

JOHN: Air-sick every mile of the way. And Mamie sitting there having the time of her life. Air-sickness and sea-sickness, Gerald, are great levelers. All humanity is reduced to the same humiliating level.

GERALD: I guess it does that, all right.

JOHN: Yes, I guess it does that, all right. I can see you're a thinking man, Gerald.

GERALD: Thank you.

JOHN: I wonder if old Jean Lafitte ever got seasick.

GERALD: Oh, I doubt it.

JOHN: I suppose he met every situation with arms skimbo.

GERALD: (indicating the painting) There's one time he didn't. John puts his glasses on again, peers at the picture.

JOHN: Is that him?
GERALD: This one here.

JOHN: What in the hell is he doing with his mouth hanging open? He looks half-witted.

GERALD: They were singing. Having a little fun, I guess. And Mr. Jarvis painted 'em like that.

JOHN: He doesn't look like much of a glamour boy there.

GERALD: (with local pride) Oh, he was a fine-looking man, they say.

(John takes off his glasses, straightens up unconsciously)

JOHN: Yeah, I've been reading that book of Saxon's. (a little apologetically) Dipping into it. Must have been quite a life, lying back in that red hammock looking through a spyglass at all your ships coming in loaded with loot. Not bad.

GERALD: All the ladies were in love with him, they say.

JOHN: Not bad at all.

(Sound of a sudden load burst of music offstage as a nearby band hits an inspired crescendo.)

GERALD: (listening, appreciatively) Old Sharkey Bonene.

JOHN: (talking more to himself than to Gerald) Ellen wasn't at the hotel. Probably out on the town. (bitterly) With that Frenchman. (now to Gerald, with sudden alarm) I left Mamie at the hotel to get some sleep. I mean that's what she said. What if she decided to go out on her own?

GERALD: A lady is safe in the Quarter.

JOHN: But you don't know Mamie. It's the Quarter that won't be safe.
GERALD: Many odd characters hit this town. We're used to it.

JOHN: (drains his glass) I am getting polluted and polluted.

GERALD: Do you want to have me shut you off?

JOHN: Hell, no. I'm here to live a little, so let's live a little. Fill 'er up, friend.

(phone rings. Gerald goes to it.)

JOHN: (cont.) If that's Miriam, tell her to drop dead.

GERALD: (on phone) Hello? ...Yes, Miss Eugenia. ...Only one so far. ...Yes, Ma'am, it's early yet. ...All right, fine. (hangs up) She'll be here directly.

JOHN: Who?

GERALD: Miss Eugenia.

JOHN: Three cheers for Miss Eugenia. (pause) By this time, Miriam will have my message. 'Gone to New Orleans', it said. Just 'gone to New Orleans'. I thought it was rather masterful.

GERALD: Very masterful, sir.

JOHN: (chuckles) She'll scream till she can't get her breath. Once when I was four and she was thirteen, I hid her dancing school pumps. She screamed till she lost her breath and they had to call the doctor.

GERALD: Children do that sometimes.

JOHN: (with a kind of family pride) But not usually at thirteen. (sadly) My mother told me I was a disgrace to my father. I was only four, but I remember it. Gerald, never make your children feel responsible for an adult.

GERALD: (chuckles) Mine don't.
JOHN: Yes sir, Miriam will really scream. I was supposed to meet with the trustees on Tuesday. (bangs his fist on the bar) A man has to consider first things. First things come first, Gerald.

GERALD: Every blessed time, sir.

JOHN: Let the god damned trustees wait.

GERALD: That's the spirit.

JOHN: Yes sir, that's the spirit. Let 'em wait...(slight pause) ...till Wednesday. (points at Lafitte painting) He didn't come running every time a damned trustee whistled.

GERALD: If there was any running done, I guess it's have been the other folks that scampered.

JOHN: That would be kind of fun, wouldn't it, making folks scamper.

GERALD: There are times when it would be.

JOHN: Yeah, times when it would be, all right,... Say, you seem to know quite a lot about him.

GERALD: Everybody in New Orleans does.

JOHN: (thoughtfully) It probably would make quite a stir...

GERALD: What's that?

JOHN: If a man suddenly turned up who could prove he was Lafitte's grandson.

GERALD: Oh, that wouldn't be possible. At least not a legitimate grandson.

JOHN: (gulps) Why not legitimate?

GERALD: Jean never married.

JOHN: He never married here. But after he left...
GERALD: Then he sailed to Yucatón and died there, still mighty young.

JOHN: That was just a theory. Completely unsub...(he stops, tries again carefully) unsub...stated.

GERALD: Is that a fact?

JOHN: Oh, yes.

(Eugenia enters)

EUGENIA: Oh, haven't the others got back yet? They left me to go hear George Lewis.

GERALD: Not yet. This gentleman was lookin' for you.

(signals to her that John is loaded)

EUGENIA: Oh. Did you want to see me? I'm Miss Saxe.

(John turns slowly, puts on his glasses, looks at her)

JOHN: What was that name again?

EUGENIA: Saxe. (dryly) S-a-x-e.

JOHN: Oh, I thought you said...

EUGENIA: But I didn't. (sits beside John) Gerald you're the only man in this town who can make a decentasserac.

Make me one, will you?

GERALD: (pleased) Thank you, Miss Eugenia.

EUGENIA: (politely, to John) Have we met somewhere?

JOHN: (giggles) Oh, come now, you can do better than that.

EUGENIA: (half amused, half annoyed) Since you seemed to be waiting for me...

JOHN: You're famous. I'm here to meet famous people.

EUGENIA: Oh. A tourist. Let me guess...from Texas?

JOHN: You're amazing. As a matter of fact, I'm rather
a famous person myself. I mean, I'm about to be.

EUGENIA: (bored, but aware that he is a customer) That's nice.

JOHN: You'd be kind of surprised if you knew who I am. Want to guess? Go ahead, guess.

EUGENIA: Glenn McCarthy?

JOHN: (laughs uproariously) Hell, no. Try again.

EUGENIA: (throwing resigned glance at Gerald) Sam Houston?

JOHN: No, no, no, you're not even warm. One more guess now.

EUGENIA: Something staggering in cattle.

JOHN: No!

(John rises, holding on the bar to steady himself. He makes a heroic attempt to pull himself up to his greatest height. Just as he attains it, Ellen enters, followed by Marvin and Bonheur. Ellen gives a small shriek, stares at John. He looks at her as if not recognizing her.

JOHN: (triumphantly) Ladies and Gentlemen, I am Jean Lafitte!

(John staggers, almost falls.)

ELLEN: Johnny! Don't you know me?

JOHN: Shirtenly I know you. I married you.

ELLEN: Johnny, you're drunk!

JOHN: Shirtenly I'm drunk. I've been drinking. (looks around proudly, as if at a crowd) I am Jean Lafitte and I am drunk as a skunk. Anybody who thinks otherwise is shingularly self-deluded. (dreamily) I didn't know there was a 'shing' in that word.

(John falls flat on his face. Eugenia springs into action, leaps for the phone. Ellen and Marvin try to lift John up.

ELLEN: (bending over the limp John) Johnny...Johnny...

EUGENIA: (briskly) Quick, Pierre, get him on his feet. Walk him around. Gerald, lots of very black coffee. Quick, quick, quick. (ecstatically) Oh, the beautiful publicity! With a Herculean effort, Bonheur and Marvin get John to his feet as the

CURTAIN FALLS.
ACT THREE

Scene one

SCENE: Eugenia's bar.

TIME: A week later, late afternoon.

AT THE RISE, a flash bulb pops. A photographer is facing John, who is quite a different-looking young man. He is wearing a smart pair of grey slacks, a red sport shirt, open at the neck, and an ascot tied with careful casulness. His hair is at that picturesque length that stops just short of being badly in need of a haircut. He is leaning against the bar, a cigarette between his fingers, the picture of studied grace. He has a new assurance. Eugenia, hovering near him, is watching him with proprietary interest. Allen stands in the background, frowning a little. Pierre and Marvin are sitting on barstools. Everyone's attention is focussed on John as the photographer prepares to take one more picture.

EUGENIA: Hold it, Tommy; just a second.

PHOTOGRAPHER: O. K.

(Photographer waits as Eugenia comes to John, tilts his head back slightly. He submits with no self-consciousness, like an actor who takes it for granted as a part of his business.)

EUGENIA: (inspects him critically) There, that's better. It's more...what's that lovely word? Insouciant.

JOHN: O. K.?
EUGENIA: Great. You're beautiful.

(Eugenia kisses him on the cheek, gets out of the way.)

ELLEN: (carefully) There's lipstick on your face.

JOHN: (embarrassed) Where?

EUGENIA: Don't lose the pose. I'll fix it.

(Eugenia goes to him, carefully removes lipstick with her handkerchief.)

EUGENIA: (to Ellen) Does he look all right now?

ELLEN: (drily) Divinely insouciant.

(Photographer takes the picture.)

JOHN: (relaxes) Thank God that's over.

EUGENIA: One more, with the rapier.

(Eugenia gets the rapier that hangs on the wall, poses him with it.)

ELLEN: (under her breath) Oh, dear God.

BONHEUR: (amused) Fame has its vexations.

(Photographer takes the picture.)

PHOTOGRAPHER: Well, that's it, Mr. Lafitte. Thanks a lot.

JOHN: (with a faintly grandiloquent gesture) That's all right.

EUGENIA: Shoot the prints back to me as fast as you can, will you, Tommy?

PHOTOGRAPHER: Pronto, honey.

EUGENIA: Maybe we'll all make ourselves a jolly sockful.

LIFE is interested, you know.

PHOTOGRAPHER: I could use it, doll, I could use it.

(Photographer exits.)
JOHN: You really think LIFE will go for it, Eugenia?
EUGENIA: Why not? Especially with Pierre's byline. (looks at her watch) We should be getting the return call pretty soon.
BONHEUR: Don't count on it. Editors take their damn good time.
EUGENIA: We'll sit it out.
ELLEN: (to John) This is the afternoon you were going to take me out to Chalmette.
JOHN: Oh...that's right...
EUGENIA: Ellen, darling, I don't know why in the world you want to see that moldy old battlefield.
ELLEN: But I do.
JOHN: Ellen gets a big charge out of history.
ELLEN: You don't have to apologize for me, dear. History is quite respectable.
EUGENIA: (laughing) But I mean monuments and things...
BONHEUR: I'd be delighted to take you to Chalmette.
ELLEN: John promised.
JOHN: Sure, honey, I'll take you.
EUGENIA: But not today, darling. We have to wait for that call from LIFE.
JOHN: (explaining to Ellen) This LIFE thing...it's kind of a big deal.
ELLEN: Indeed, yes. Your picture in LIFE...you'll be a household word.
MARVIN: Like TIDE.
JOHN: (uncertainly) Maybe we would have time to drive out to Chalmette though...

EUGENIA: (impatiently) Oh, my God, it takes forever.

(Knock on door) (Eugenia answers.)

EUGENIA: (off) Well, I'm not sure. I'll see if he's busy.

(Eugenia comes back in, holding door closed behind her.)

EUGENIA: Are you in the need for your adoring public?

JOHN: (groans) Oh, lord, not now.

EUGENIA: I'll fix it. (she opens door, speaks off) Mr. Lafitte is napping just now. (pause) Really? Why, that's fascinating. Yes, indeed, I'll tell him. Thank you so much.

EUGENIA closes door, brings in an old photograph, laughing.)

JOHN: Bobby shorts?

EUGENIA: Vintage 1890. (shows him the picture) Her mother danced with Lafitte.

BONHEUR: The thought of what you are doing to the hormones of New Orleans' elderly ladies makes me shudder.

EUGENIA: Not just elderly, dear.

ELLEN: Indeed not.

(Eugenia looks at her sharply.)

JOHN: (yawns) What's on the fire for tonight? I feel as if I haven't slept for a month.

EUGENIA: No sleeping tonight, dear boy. It's the Fremonts' dinner, in your honor.

JOHN: Swant?

EUGENIA: Incredibly swank.

MARVIN: Did Mrs. Fremont dance with Lafitte?
EUGENIA: My darling, she probably led him around on a solid gold leash.

JOHN: (smugly) Nobody led that boy around on a leash.

MARVIN: I wonder if there's any possibility that my grandfather was Napoleon. (He strikes Napoleonic pose) Sometimes I get that feeling...

JOHN: (amused) Now that you mention it, there is a resemblance.

MARVIN: John, you really have changed. It's no fun needling you any more.

(Phone rings. Eugenia answers.)

EUGENIA: Hello? Yes, darling, how are you? ...I'm sure he would. I'll ask him. John, will you speak at the Garden Club luncheon tomorrow?

JOHN: (hesitates) I was going to drive Ellen down to Barsteris.

EUGENIA: You can do that later. (into phone) Yes, dear, he'd adore to come. Do you have a topic for him? ...'My Grandfather and I.' ...Fine, darling. One O'clock. (hangs up)

MARVIN: Shouldn't that read 'I and My Grandfather'?

JOHN: (goes to Ellen) I'm sorry about Barsteris...

ELLEN: It's all right. (smiles at him) Some other day.

JOHN: I hate to disappoint you...

ELLEN: Really, it's all right.

( Ellen approaches him, and there is a moment of incipient closeness between them, but it is broken off by a faint thud onstage.)

JOHN: (forgetting Ellen) The evening paper!
MARVIN: Allow me.

(Marvin goes to the door ahead of John, comes back with the paper. Madeningly he opens it, holding it out of John's reach.)

MARVIN: Hmm... very interesting.

JOHN: (reaches for it, but Marvin eludes him) May I see it?

MARVIN: Sure. Just a minute... (studies John, then looks at paper) Hmm...

EUGENIA: My God, Marvin, stop the Chinese torture.

MARVIN: Is it true, Mr. Lafitte, that you have a widow's peak exactly like your grandfather's?

(Marvin reaches over, touches John's forehead.)

JOHN: (jerks away) Quit it.

EUGENIA: What page is it on?

MARVIN: Three. He's slipping. Mr. Lafitte, you are losing your grip on the great American public.

(Phone rings.)

BONHEUR: The hell he is.

EUGENIA: (on phone) Hello?

(John snatches the paper from Marvin, looks at it, smiles with satisfaction.)

JOHN: Not bad at all. Four-column spread.

EUGENIA: Who is it, operator? ...Oh. Just a minute. I'll see if he's here. (to John) Your sister is on the phone.

JOHN: (absorbed in paper) 'there wasn't a belle in New Orleans whose heart didn't beat faster...'

EUGENIA: (louder) Your sister is on the phone.

JOHN: (not looking up) Tell her I'm out. (reading aloud)
...and there was a strong resemblance...

**EUGENIA:** (on phone) He isn't here now, Operator.

**JOHN:** (looks up at Ellen sheepishly, but loving it) Boy, these writers really get carried away, don't they!

**MARVIN:** Not at home to Miriam? (to Ellen) Once that would have been a cause for rejoicing.

**ELLEN:** We've only swapped Miriam for all the females in New Orleans.

**BONHEUR:** Cheer up, my sweet. All the men are at your disposal.

**ELLEN:** (smiles a little sadly) Are they?

**BONHEUR:** (softly) I know of one.

**ELLEN:** Thank you.

**EUGENIA:** John, you're going to have to talk to your sister sooner or later.

**JOHN:** Later. Look, Eugenia, it's quite a good picture.

(John and Eugenia put their heads together over the paper.)

**ELLEN:** (abruptly) I'm hungry.

**BONHEUR:** Let's drive out to Bilori for some fried shrimp.

**EUGENIA:** You all go. John and I will wait for the call from LIFE.

**ELLEN:** My dear Eugenia, it's seven o'clock in New York.

**EUGENIA:** Oh, editors don't pay any attention to time. We'll wait, but the rest of you run along.

**BONHEUR:** O.K., we'll meet you later at the Fremonts'. Ten o'clock, isn't it?
ELLEN: John loves fried shrimp.

EUGENIA: He can eat shrimp any time. This LIFE thing is important.

JOHN: I guess we'd better wait for the call.

ELLEN: I suppose LIFE can't go on without you.

JOHN: Look, it was you who got all hopped up on this Lafitte thing in the first place. Be consistent.

ELLEN: I didn't expect you to get so carried away with it.

JOHN: Who's carried away?

ELLEN: You even talked French in your sleep last night.

JOHN: (startled) What??

MARVIN: What did he say?

JOHN: (hastily) Never mind.

BONHEUR: (possessively takes Ellen's arm) Let's go, my sweet. It's a long drive.

JOHN: Maybe we could join you after the call comes in.

ELLEN: (too sweetly) No. You'd better rest up for the Fremont dinner. You'll have to be debonair again, and you know how that fatigues you.

(Ellen exits, followed by bonheur.)

MARVIN: Mamie was going to meet us here. If you go out, better leave her a note.

(Marvin goes to door, looks back.)

MARVIN: And Eugenia, love, I do wish you'd stop acting like a character in one of my plays.

(Marvin exits)

JOHN: Do you think Ellen was sore?

EUGENIA: She's all right; she's got her boy
EUGENIA: She's all right; she's got her boy scout troop.
(Eugenia comes close to John.)
EUGENIA: I thought we'd never get rid of them.
JOHN: Were we getting rid of them?
EUGENIA: But of course. It's unlikely that LIFE will call so late.
JOHN: Then we'd better join them.
(John moves away nervously. Eugenia follows him, lifts her face to his.)
EUGENIA: Do you think I'm going to let you go now? I've been trying for a whole week to get you to myself.
JOHN: (apprehensively) You have?
EUGENIA: Of course.
JOHN: Uh...what did you have in mind?
EUGENIA: This
(Eugenia kisses him. He starts to pull back, she is insistent. After a long moment she tilts her head back, smiling at him.)
EUGENIA: Well, my beautiful buccaneer?
JOHN: Wow.
EUGENIA: (laughs) Is that the most gallant speech you can make? New Orleans' most dashing lover?
(Eugenia kisses him again. This time he returns it. When she moves away, he lets his arms drop limply.)
EUGENIA: What do you say this time?
JOHN: (weakly) Double wow.
EUGENIA: (in a low passionate voice) I intend to keep you, you know, all for myself.
JOHN: (alarmed) But Ellen... I mean, I'm married.

EUGENIA: my darling, you can't be married; not Jean Lafitte. It's absurd.

JOHN: But I am, though Ellen is...

EUGENIA: (covers his mouth with her hand) Ellen is a dear child, but you need a woman. (kisses him)

(In the midst of the embrace there is a clatter outside, and they break apart just as the door is hurled open. There stands Mamie, dressed to the teeth, beaming with delight. She has a camera in her hand.)

MAMIE: Johnny! Good thing you're here.

JOHN: (disconcerted) Mamie...

MAMIE: Got a friend with me wants to meet you. Says she's been madly in love with your grandfather for years. (calling off) Come on in, honey, don't be bashful. ...Found her in Pop Potter's Mecca of Mirth. She does the most artistic strip-tease in town. ...Folks, meet Cup-Cake Patty McPhail.

(Dramatically Mamie ushers in Patty, a middle-aged, buxom burlesque queen. Patty gazes with speechless adoration at John. Mamie pokes her.)

MAMIE: Say something, honey; there's your pirate, in the flesh...such as it is.

PATTY: Jean!

(Patty rushes to John, throws her arms around him. John slumps back against the bar, quite unstrung. Mamie aims her camera, takes a picture. She slaps her thigh and yells with laughter at John's look of horror.)
MAMIE: Cupcake, honey, you can frame this one.

JOHN: (disentangling himself) Good God!

EUGENIA: 'Frame' is right. (she reaches for the camera)
Let me get it developed for you, Namie. I know a marvelous man.

MAMIE: (avoiding her) I'll bet you do. But I know a man or two myself. Come on, Cupcake, let's blow.
(Mamie takes the reluctant Patty by the arm.)

PATTY: (dreamily) I kissed him. I'll never be the same again.

MAMIE: (chuckles) Neither will he. (slaps John on the back)
Well, see you later, Johnny. Don't take any wooden pieces of eight.
(Guffawing at her own wit, Mamie exits, followed by Patty.)

EUGENIA: I underestimated Ellen.

JOHN: What do you mean?

EUGENIA: That was a smart maneuver.

JOHN: I don't get it.

EUGENIA: She doesn't want to have you be dean...

JOHN: So?

EUGENIA: So she arranges this crazy scene with her aunt. A print of that picture mailed to your trustees would really cook your academic goose, wouldn't it?

JOHN: You're crazy. Ellen wouldn't do a thing like that. Mamie always behaves like this.

EUGENIA: bless you, you are naive.

JOHN: Ellen isn't devious.
EUGENIA: my dear, all women are devious.

(Eugenia embraces him.)

EUGENIA: But it suits me fine. I don't want to have you be dean either. I just want you...period.

JOHN: (frowning) Ellen would never pull a thing like that.

EUGENIA: Even a masterful man like Lafitte can be made a puppet by a persistent woman.

JOHN: Jean Lafitte was no puppet.

EUGENIA: (murmurs) Of course not, sweet. I just said 'could be'.

JOHN: And I'm no puppet either.

EUGENIA: Of course not, darling.

JOHN: If somebody pulls a trick on me, I can see through it. After all, I wasn't born yesterday.

EUGENIA: That's right, darling; you were born more than a century ago.

JOHN: Well, O.K.

(John kisses Eugenia emphatically.)

EUGENIA: (coming up for air) My God, darling, you are impetuous.

(John, having proved his point, puts his hands in his pockets and swaggerers to the other side of the room, smiling smugly. Eugenia, wanting more, follows.)

EUGENIA: You kiss divinely.

JOHN: (complacently) Oh I guess the Lafittes have always been known as pretty good lovers.

(Eugenia puts her arms around him coaxingly.)
EUGENIA: Come into the apartment. It's nicer there.

JOHN: (apprehensively) We'd better stay here. There's that phone call...

EUGENIA: There's an extension in the apartment. It's much more comfortable in there...

JOHN: (very nervous now) I'm very comfortable. Really.

EUGENIA: Not as comfortable as I can make you.

JOHN: (with a forced laugh) I don't want to get too comfortable. I might fall asleep... (his voice trails off as he decides this was the wrong thing to say)...or something.

(Eugenia turns him toward her.)

EUGENIA: I need you. Don't disappoint me.

(John's arms hang limply at his sides as she embraces him.)

JOHN: Look, Eugenia... I mean... we've got to keep things under control.

EUGENIA: Why?

JOHN: Well, I mean... we can't let things get out of hand.

EUGENIA: Why not?

JOHN: Well, after all...

EUGENIA: (losing patience) What in hell is the matter with you?

JOHN: (defensively) Damn it, I'm a married man.

EUGENIA: Dear God! So what? Are you Lafitte or are you one of the Rover boys?

JOHN: (stung) Not going to bed with everybody does not necessarily make a man a Rover boy.

EUGENIA: How dare you call me everybody!
JOHN: I didn't mention you. I said...

EUGENIA: I heard what you said!

(Eugenia slaps him resoundingly.)

JOHN: (gasp) Hey! I could have you arrested for assault!

EUGENIA: Try it! I'll have you arrested for attempted rape.

JOHN: Rape! If there's any raping going on around here...

EUGENIA: (interrupts) In New Orleans virtuous women are still protected.

JOHN: Listen, Jezebel...

(Phone rings. Eugenia whirs around, goes to answer it.)

EUGENIA: Hello? ...All right. (sourly to John) Long distance, probably your god damned sister. (on phone)

Hello? ...Yes, this is she. ...who? (with sudden excitement) Oh, yes! This is Miss Saxe. You got my wire?

(excitedly to John) It's LIFE!

JOHN: LIFE?

(John comes closer, both of them quite forgetting their rage in this new development.)

EUGENIA: (on phone) Yes, indeed, that would be fine...

Yes, I can get hold of a pirogue, yes indeed. ...You just send him on down and we'll have everything ready. ...Yes, some shots on the bayou... And I thought perhaps a shot or two in my little bar; it's an old Lafitte hangout, you know.

(jubilantly) Good! Wonderful! Thank you so much.

(Eugenia hangs up, executes a brief whirl of sheer joy.)

JOHN: (eagerly) What'd he say?

EUGENIA: They're sending their own photographer; he'll be
here day after tomorrow. They want Pierre to do the text.
Oh, how utterly divine!

JOHN: (his complacency restored) They think I'm worth a
story, do they?

EUGENIA: They want some shots on the bayou, in a pirogue.

JOHN: a which?

EUGENIA: a pirogue...a dugout canoe like Lafitte used.

JOHN: (aghast) a boat?

EUGENIA: And some pictures here. (ecstatically) Eugenia
Saxe's bar will be nationally famous.

JOHN: I've never been in a boat in my life, except a ferry.

EUGENIA: LIFZ's circulation must be astronomical.

JOHN: And even then I was seasick.

EUGENIA: (impatiently) Not even you could get seasick on
a bayou, unless a storm comes up.

JOHN: (gulps) Who's going to row the thing?

EUGENIA: It isn't rowed; it's paddled.

JOHN: Who's going to paddle?

EUGENIA: You, of course. You'll be the only one in it.

(Eugenia moves around the bar, humming happily, touching
and rearranging things.)

EUGENIA: Gerald must wear his earring... The mirror frame
needs polishing.

JOHN: I can't even swim.

EUGENIA: Johnny, we'll be famous! Isn't it thrilling?
Look, I'll get dressed and we'll have a few drinks around
town, to celebrate, before the Fremont dinner. (exultantly)
Oh, what fun it's going to be to spring this at the dinner!
I can see Amelie Fremont's face now!

(Eugenia goes to the door leading to her apartment.)

EUGENIA: I won't be long.

(Eugenia exits. John sits down heavily, head on his hands. After a moment he looks up at the portrait of Lafitte.

JOHN: What in hell did you get me into? There I was, minding my own business, and you had to come along...

(Ellen enters, tentatively.)

ELLEN: Johnny?

(John starts, turns his head toward her.)

ELLEN: Hi.

JOHN: I thought you went to Biloxi.

ELLEN: (remorsefully) I was worried about you. I made Pierre turn back. (giggles) He was furious.

JOHN: Gee, honey, I'm glad to see you...

ELLEN: Marvin had a wonderful idea. If LIFE should call, we can arrange with the operator to put the call through to the place we're going to Biloxi. I'm so glad he thought of it. Fried shrimp is no fun without you.

JOHN: LIFE already called.

ELLEN: They did?

JOHN: Yeah. The guy's coming day after tomorrow to take pictures.

ELLEN: That's wonderful. Isn't it?

JOHN: (gloomily) In a boat.

ELLEN: Johnny, I really came back to tell you...I didn't
mean to be nasty. I hated myself as soon as we left...

( Ellen comes toward him.)

JOHN: ( reproachfully) You shouldn't go off and leave me. I get into things.

ELLEN: I won't again. Come on, we'll go to Biloxi.

JOHN: ( soothed) O. K. ( impulsively) It's fun, all this Lafitte stuff. But nothing really is any fun without you, baby...

( John rises, turns toward Ellen to kiss her. As they are about to embrace, she recoils in horror, seeing the lipstick Eugenia has left on his face.)

ELLEN: John Lafitte! How could you?

JOHN: How could I what?

ELLEN: The minute my back is turned!

JOHN: What's the matter with you?

ELLEN: You are a perfidious two-timing New Orleans rake!

JOHN: Listen!

ELLEN: 'Listen'! All I need to do is look!

JOHN: What are you talking about?

ELLEN: I can't even trust you out of my sight.

JOHN: ( angrily) Listen!

ELLEN: Stop saying 'listen'!

JOHN: Listen, what about you and Cup-Cake Patty McPhail?

ELLEN: ( blankly) What?

JOHN: Yeah! Sure! 'What', she says. Let me tell you, I won't be blackmailed. Especially by my own wife. There are laws about these things.
ELLEN: What on earth are you talking about?

JOHN: I'm no puppet, you know.

ELLEN: You must be drunk.

JOHN: I am cold stone sober.

ELLEN: Then so much the worse for you.

JOHN: Meaning what?

ELLEN: (close to tears) Meaning you are smeared from head to foot with lipstick. You...you pirate!

(Ellen bursts into tears, exits left. John, horror-stricken, clasps his hand to his face. Eugenia enters right, looking beautiful, cool, and composed.)

EUGENIA: Ready, darling?

CURTAIN
ACT THREE
Scene two

SCENE: Eugenia's bar. Two days later; afternoon.

AT THE RISE, Marvin, Bonheur and Ellen are discovered. Marvin picks up a used flash bulb.

MARVIN: Well, Eugenia's bar will be famous. She can relax now.
ELLEN: (drily) Relax? One begins to wonder if LIFE is doing a story on John or on Eugenia.
BONHEUR: You can't blame her. She's in business, after all.
MARVIN: At least she won't be paddling the pirogue. (chuckles) That delight will be all John's.
ELLEN: I hope he's all right. Are they very tippy, those boats?
MARVIN: I understand there's nothing tippier.
ELLEN: (anxiously) I hope nothing happens.
BONHEUR: Good God, darling, if a man can't step into a boat, lift a paddle, get his picture taken, and get out again, without people carrying on as if his life were in peril...
ELLEN: I'm not carrying on. It's nothing to do with me. (pause) Are there alligators in the bayou?
BONHEUR: (laughs) Thousands of them. Tremendous man-eating monsters just waiting for a juicy morsel of warmed-over pirate.

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MARVIN: That's the trouble with the world; this is why we no longer have men of derring-do like old Lafitte. The women have smothered us. Society has become a matriarchy.
ELLEN: That's absurd.
MARVIN: No, it's true. We've become a nation of mothers and small boys.
BONHEUR: Speak for yourself, small boy.
MARVIN: You, of course, think of yourself as the great independent, the free man of the world...which is the smallest boy of all.
BONHEUR: Newberry, the old philosopher.
MARVIN: Otherwise you would not be working on a historical novel about a romantic man of action.
ELLEN: Poor Pierre hasn't had much time to work on anything since we descended on him.
BONHEUR: One of the legends that 'poor Pierre' fosters is that he never does any work. Since you've been here, I've finished an outline, sent it to my publisher, and had a return wire. Today, as a matter of fact.
ELLEN: How wonderful. Does he like your outline?
BONHEUR: (a bit smugly) But of course, dear. My last book sold two hundred thousand copies; he can't afford not to like it.
ELLEN: What are you going to call it?
BONHEUR: I don't know yet.
MARVIN: Why do non-writers always ask that: As if some great secret knowledge were contained in a title... The
same impulse that makes people insist on knowing one's name, I suppose...as if this would tell them everything.

BONHEUR: It's the urge for identity.

MARVIN: What is identity? A man goes to church to try and lose it; he falls in love to try and lose it; and yet he lies and murders and creates and procreates trying to keep it. My name is Marvin Newberry...my name is legion. What is identity?

BONHEUR: Please. It's so early in the day.

MARVIN: Is there a time of day for thinking?

BONHEUR: Of course. I can't possibly be abstract before my third martini.

ELLEN: I wonder what's happened to Mamie.

MARVIN: Speaking of abstractions.

ELLEN: She didn't come back to the hotel last night.

BONHEUR: Why, Mamie!

ELLEN: She left a message before dinner that she was going to visit Cupcake.

MARVIN: I am thinking of changing my name to Blueberry Muffin Marvin Newberry. Then when you know me really well, you can call me Blueberry Newberry.

BONHEUR: (sarcastically) Hysterically funny.

MARVIN: Pierre doesn't like me today.

BONHEUR: Sorry, I'm slightly hung over.

ELLEN: She hasn't phoned all day. Mamie, I mean.

MARVIN: She's probably taking lessons from Cupcake. I can see it now... flaming Mamie Blankenhorn. The most
to say the least, of any strip tease artist on Bourbon Street. (looks at Ellen) I'll go hunt for her if you're worried.

ELLEN: Oh, Marvin, would you?

MARVIN: I don't know why I volunteer for these boy scout chores.

ELLEN: It's sweet of you. I don't know where Cupcake lives but I suppose they could tell you at Potter's.

BONHEUR: If not, try the station house.

MARVIN: Thanks. If I run into trouble, I'll send up a rocket.

(Marvin exits.)

BONHEUR: Thank God, he's gone.

ELLEN: Why?

BONHEUR: I've been trying all day to talk to you alone. Ellen, I have to fly to New York tomorrow to see my publisher.

ELLEN: Oh!

BONHEUR: Come with me.

ELLEN: To New York?

BONHEUR: Get away from all this nonsense.

ELLEN: (smiles ruefully) That's what you said in Texas. And I came. But it doesn't seem to have solved anything.

BONHEUR: You came...but not with me. (ardently) I'm asking more of you this time. Please, Ellen; I love you.

ELLEN: (knowing the answer) Are you proposing to me, Pierre?

BONHEUR: (impatiently) You know how I feel about all that. I should think you'd have had enough of it by now. It isn't
what I'd call a glowing success, your marriage.

ELLEN: (thoughtfully) John hasn't spoken to me for two days.

BONHEUR: John is a child playing at charades.

ELLEN: (sighs) I don't know what John is. Things have happened too fast; I keep losing track.

BONHEUR: He's missed the whole essence of what Lafitte really was; he's just fastened onto the glamorous trappings.

ELLEN: What was the essence of Lafitte? Perhaps I've missed it, too.

BONHEUR: There was much more than dash and romance. The guy had a genius for organization, for detail, for plain hard work. If he'd turned his hand to business, he'd have been a great success. But most of all, he was a man of action, a man of courage.

ELLEN: There are different ways of having courage, I suppose.

BONHEUR: Of course.

ELLEN: Inside and outside kinds. I guess the inside is most important in our time.

BONHEUR: And speaking of courage...will you come to New York?

ELLEN: Pierre, I can't. Not now.

BONHEUR: What are you waiting for?

ELLEN: I guess I'm waiting to find out who John is. Who this man is that I loved and married. Or waiting for him to find out.
BONHEUR: What if you find out he isn't anyone at all?

ELLEN: (pause) Then I'll come to New York.

BONHEUR: (jubilantly) Then all I have to do is wait a little.

ELLEN: Are you so sure?

BONHEUR: I am.

(Bonheur kisses her.)

BONHEUR: I've got to go and pick up my ticket. I'll get two.

ELLEN: (alarmed) No... I just said...

BONHEUR: I know. But I have a hunch things will come to a head today, and I want to be sure of that extra ticket. I can always turn it back. Wait for me here; I won't be long.

(Bonheur puts his hands on her shoulders, looking down at her.)

ELLEN: Please...don't count on anything.

BONHEUR: (softly) I love you. I count on that.

(Bonheur kisses her again, lightly, then exits. Ellen stands still for a moment, troubled. She goes behind the bar, tries to pour herself a drink, but her hands are trembling so much that she spills it. She tries again, knocks over the glass.)

ELLEN: Oh, the hell with it.

(Ellen puts the bottle back, leans her elbows on the bar, chin on hands, looking utterly dejected. Phone rings. Ellen answers.)

ELLEN: Hello? ...Yes, Marvin. Did you find her? (startled)

In jail? For heaven's sake, what for? ...Oh, good heavens!
Do you have enough to bail her out? ...Should I come down? ...All right. Thanks, Marvin. Tell her not to worry. (she hangs up) My God!

(Ellen grabs the bottle, pours herself a slug, drinks it in one gulp. In a moment, the door opens and John enters, quietly and tentatively. He is dressed like Lafitte, even to the rapier in his hand, which he carries as if it were a baseball bat. He stops when he sees Ellen, looks at her sheepishly.)

ELLEN: Johnny...

JOHN: Hi.

ELLEN: Have they taken the pictures already?

JOHN: Well, you see...something happened.

ELLEN: You didn't get hurt?

JOHN: No, no, I'm all right. At least, technically speaking.

ELLEN: What happened?

JOHN: Well, you see... He didn't take any pictures.

ELLEN: Why not?

JOHN: He's mad. He's flying back to New York tonight.

ELLEN: But how can he do that? LIFE assigned him.

JOHN: He says he would rather be fired. He says no job is worth what he went through today.

ELLEN: Well, tell me.

JOHN: (takes a deep breath) It was like this. I took one look at that piroque, and I knew I'd never make it.
(plaintively) Ellen, I was never even in a rowboat!

ELLEN: I know.

JOHN: They argued and pleaded and raged. But there are some things a man can't do. It just goes against his nature. (pauses) Doesn't it?

ELLEN: I guess so.

JOHN: So finally they decided they would go out in the boat - Eugenia and the LIFE man - and he'd get a shot of me on shore, just as if I was about to get into the piroque, see? One foot in the stern or whatever you call it.

ELLEN: I think it's the bow.

JOHN: Whatever it is. So they got into a boat...(with a held-over sense of astonishment) It wasn't even a piroque, just a plain old boat!

ELLEN: Then what?

JOHN: They seemed to be having a little trouble getting launched - they were sort of stuck on the bank, see? So I thought I'd give them a little push, you know? I just wanted to be helpful.

ELLEN: And?

JOHN: And so I did. And...

(He is interrupted by the entrance of EUGENIA. She storms in, in a very literal sense. Her smart suit, her hair, in fact, every bit of Eugenia, is soaking wet. Little rivlets of water drip from her. A bedraggled water lily hangs from the belted back of her jacket.)

JOHN: (weakly) ...the boat tipped over.
EUGENIA: (beside herself with rage) The boat was turned over. Deliberately!

JOHN: Eugenia, I swear...

EUGENIA: You swear!

(Eugenia crosses toward the door to her apartment.)

JOHN: Is the photographer...uh...all right?

EUGENIA: (witheringly) He even survived that artificial respiration you insisted on giving him.

ELLEN: (trying to be helpful) Anyway, he has all those nice pictures of the bar, Eugenia.

EUGENIA: The pictures of the bar are at the bottom of the bayou. I only wish Jean Lafitte were there too. Both of them!

(Eugenia flings open the door to her apartment.)

JOHN: Uh...Eugenia... (as she turns fiercely toward him) Your water lily is showing.

(Eugenia exits, slamming the door. John begins to laugh, at first quietly, then with growing hysteria until he is leaning weakly against the bar.)

ELLEN: Was it that funny?

JOHN: It was the funniest thing I've ever seen. Those two grown people, thrashing around in the water lilies with all their clothes on. The photographer's hat went sailing across the water like a little boat.

ELLEN: But Johnny...

JOHN: It was a very good Mallory hat.

ELLEN: Johnny, don't you think...
JOHN: with a colored band and a small feather.

ELLEN: But you wanted the story in LIFE. It meant a lot to you.

JOHN: Did it? I don't know. (he sobers) Ellen, I guess I've got to sit down somewhere and figure out what means a lot to me. One thing I know for sure, I'm no pirate.

ELLEN: (smiles) I don't think there'd be much future in it.

JOHN: (suddenly) Hey, we're speaking to each other again!

ELLEN: Shock therapy.

JOHN: God, I felt terrible not talking to you.

ELLEN: So did I.

JOHN: Why do people behave like such idiots?

(John embraces her. She lifts her face to be kissed. After a moment he moves away, gloomy now.)

JOHN: I don't know what I'm feeling so good about. I suppose I've lost the deanship by now.

ELLEN: Why?

JOHN: The trustees met yesterday. I never even returned Miriam's call. I was too busy being a big shot.

ELLEN: The trustees will meet again.

JOHN: By now the stories about me must have hit the local papers anyway. I can imagine the reaction. 'Such loss of dignity! We can't have a dean who gets such undignified publicity.'

ELLEN: (watching him tensely) And if you have lost it?

JOHN: (troubled) What have I swapped it for? A big bunch of nothing. A guy's Mallory hat floating down the bayou.
ELLEN: I'll tell you something you've swapped it for. This was the first time I've heard you laugh in that released way since before we were married.

JOHN: You can't live on a laugh.

ELLEN: It's a beginning. I thought so then and I think so now.

(The phone rings.)

JOHN: Let it ring.

ELLEN: Oh Lord, I forgot about Mamie!

JOHN: What about her?

ELLEN: She's in the clink.

JOHN: Good God! What for?

ELLEN: She spent the night at Cupcake's house, and the place was raided.

(Phone rings.)

JOHN: Oh, no!

ELLEN: Marvin's bailing her out. Better answer the phone.

JOHN: (on phone) Hello? ...Yes, this is he. ...Uh, hi, Miriam. (looks at Ellen) Yeah, I'm fine. Say, I meant to call you, Miriam, but I've been so busy. ....what? Listens intently, frowning) Would you say that again? The connection is lousy. ...(incredulously) The trustees were impressed ...They what? ...(weakly) That's great. So much has happened, I'm kind of... Look, Miriam, could I call you back in half an hour? ...(fine... Goodbye.

(John hangs up, looks at Ellen.)

JOHN: The trustees were impressed. impressed!
ELLEN: With what?

JOHN: Mr. Lafitte. Seems I've turned over a new page in history. Some graduate student is writing his thesis on me.

ELLEN: Did she say anything about the deanship?

JOHN: I've got it.

ELLEN: Oh.

(They look at each other uncertainly. Marvin and Mamie enter. Mamie grins at them.)

MAMIE: Hiya.

ELLEN: Mamie, are you all right?

MAMIE: In the pink.

ELLEN: Did they treat you all right?

MAMIE: Sure. One of the boys taught me to play stud poker.

JOHN: What charge did they pick you up on?

MAMIE: 'Sleepin' in a whore house. Never knew it was against the law to sleep in a whore house. I mean alone.

JOHN: What the hell were you doing there?

MARVIN: She was just visiting Cupcake. Don't yell at her. She's had a rought time.

JOHN: Who's yelling?

ELLEN: Mamie, what on earth did you go there for?

MAMIE: I was just a teensy bit loaded, just a teensy bit. And she said 'home', I thought she meant home. How was I to know it was a house?

MARVIN: As Polly Adler so poignantly puts it, a house ain't necessarily a home.

MAMIE: It was real cozy though. Wall-to-wall carpeting.
ELLEN: Cupcake should have known better

KAMIE: Well she was a little teensy bit loaded too, and she forgot I was a virtuous girl. Unfortunately.

JOHN: (to Marvin) Couldn't you get the charge dismissed?

MARVIN: No. I had hell's own time even getting the bail down to a reasonable amount.

JOHN: When does the case come up?

MARVIN: A week from tomorrow.

JOHN: (frowns) Damn. I'm supposed to be back at the university.

ELLEN: Miriam called. John is dean.

MARVIN: Condolences.

MAMIE: (wails) You mean we got to leave New Orleans?

JOHN: It gripes me, this kind of a deal; the cops probably sprung a raid because they didn't get enough protection money.

MAMIE: That's what Cupcake said.

JOHN: Has cupcake got a good lawyer?

MAMIE: her lawyer's in jail. I thought maybe you could take care of both of us, Johnny.

JOHN: I don't have a Louisiana licence.

MARVIN: You could get one.

ELLEN: (watching him carefully) John has to get back to school. He's dean now. We'll just have to find the best lawyer we can, and leave mamie here.

JOHN: (after a pause) The hell we will.

ELLEN: (catching her breath) what did you say?

JOHN: I said the hell we will. I don't like this kind of
business, shoving people around. arresting mamie, of all people!
mamie: (ducks her head coyly) i guess i have that wicked look.

(john goes to the phone, looks up a number, dials.)
elleen: but johnny, what can you do? you do have to get back. i mean if you're dean...

john: it makes me mad when cops pull stuff like this. with all the real crime there is, you'd think innocent people could.. (on phone) chief of police, please.
mamie: say, this is as good as a show!

john: (on phone) tell him it's jean lafitte calling.
(grins at ellen) that'll rock him.

marvin: (to ellen) who is this guy you're married to? i'm not sure i've met him.
elleen: (smiles happily) he was out of town for awhile.

john: (on phone) hello? ...this is jean lafitte. ...no, i'm not drunk, if you ever read the papers... now just a minute. i have a complaint. a relative of mine from out of state was arrested in error last night. i'd like to have the charges dismissed. ...the name is mamie blankenhorn.
mamie: starring miss mamie blankenhorn.

marvin: shall i write the script, mamie?
elleen: who needs it?
mamie: are you mad at me, ellen?
elleen: no. but i was worried.
mamie: i guess i'm just a foolish head-strong girl.
JOHN: (on phone) Hello? ...Did you find it? ...Why not? Miss Blankenhorn was simply spending the night with an acquaintance. A female acquaintance. Miss Blankenhorn is a stranger here. She happened to meet this Miss...

MAMIE: Cupcake.

JOHN: It was a perfectly innocent adventure. She just...

(to Mamie) What were you doing, Mamie?

MAMIE: Well, after my seventh Ramos gin fizz, I got sleepy.

JOHN: (on phone) After her seventh...uh...second gin fizz, Miss Blankenhorn got sleepy. You will agree, Chief, that anyone can get sleepy...though perhaps Miss Blankenhorn in her innocence picked an unfortunate place...

MAMIE: I'm just a kid from the country.

JOHN: (on phone, angrily) Now look here, Chief, this is miscarriage of justice. ...Uh, is that so. Well, it just so happens that I am an attorney myself, and I know a thing or two about... I would just like to inform you that..... You refuse to dismiss the charge? Then I'll have to take the case myself. (momentarily deflated) Well, no, I don't practice in Louisiana...

MARVIN: But you could.

JOHN: But I could. And by God, I will! (hangs up with a bang) Damned pompous fool.

(Mamie gives John a big hug.)

MAMIE: Baby, you were fabulous! There wasn't a dry eye in the house.
MARVIN: It has just occurred to me that the pirate and the man who built your father's chair were one and the same guy. I think this must have some profound meaning...though I haven't the faintest idea what it is.

JOHN: Mamie, don't you worry about a thing. I'll take care of the whole deal.

ELLEN: But Johnny, what about the university?

JOHN: (ignoring her) Mamie, what about Cupcake? Was she minding her own business?

MAMIE: I don't know what Cupcake does on other nights, but I swear, she was sleeping like a baby, right in the next bed.

JOHN: Good. Tell her I'll represent her too, if she wants me to.

ELLEN: You haven't got a license.

JOHN: I'll find out how long it will take. We can always get the case postponed. Cupcake was in love with Lafitte, you know.

MAMIE: 'Was' hell; is.

JOHN: (suddenly smiles at Ellen) You don't mind the competition.

ELLEN: I have a very sisterly feeling for Cupcake.

JOHN: Let's don't get too sisterly. (looks at his watch) Wonder if there's time to drive up to Baton Rouge and find out about bar exams.

MARVIN: I'll drive you.

JOHN: Thanks, Marvin.
MARVIN: That's all right. I like a neat third act.
(looks at Ellen wistfully) And a happy heroine.
ELLEN: (touched) You're very sweet.
MARVIN: (grins ruefully) And you love me like a brother.
MAMIE: Can I come, too?
JOHN: Sure. Everybody come.
ELLEN: Johnny, shouldn't we wait till tomorrow? You've
got to think... you've got to be sure...
JOHN: Look, don't try to make my mind up for me. A guy
has to make his own decisions.
ELLEN: (happily) All right, all right. But you did promise
Miriam you'd call her back.
JOHN: I'll send her a wire.
ELLEN: What will you say?
JOHN: (grins) "Sorry, wrong dean."
(Ellen hugs him.)
MARVIN: Mamie, would you mind if I folded you in a mad,
wild embrace?
MAMIE: You want me to get arrested again?
JOHN: (to Ellen) Maybe another New Orleans lawyer would
starve to death.
ELLEN: It would be such pleasant starvation.
JOHN: Chickory coffee and doughnut balls?
MAMIE: You mean we're really going to stick around?
JOHN: Looks like it, Mamie.
MAMIE: Praise Allah! I'll open me a place.
JOHN: Mamie!
NAMIE: I mean an eating place

MARVIN: We'd better get going if we're off to Baton Rouge.

(Marvin exits, followed by Namie. John holds Ellen back for a moment.)

JOHN: Everything all right?

ELLEN: (kisses him) Everything's wonderful.

(John and Ellen exit. After a moment Eugenia enters from her apartment, her usual well-dressed self again.)

EUGENIA: John, we'll have to hurry to make the Morelli's dinner. I've decided to forgive you...

(Eugenia stops, seeing that John has gone. She frowns, goes to the bar, fixes herself a drink, looks at her watch impatiently. After a moment Bonheur bursts in.)

BONHEUR: Ellen, I...Oh, Eugenia it's you.

EUGENIA: (grimly) And it's equally you.

BONHEUR: Where's Ellen?

EUGENIA: Where's John?

BONHEUR: I have two plane tickets for New York. We leave in half an hour. Ellen was to wait here...

EUGENIA: I'm afraid your bird has flown. And mine too.

BONHEUR: But I have two tickets...

EUGENIA: I'd go with you if I didn't know you'd charge me for it, right down to the last tip.

BONHEUR: Gone back to Texas, I suppose.

EUGENIA: I suppose

BONHEUR: Oh well. C'est la vie.

EUGENIA: You should be able to think of a better line than
that.

BONHEUR: You think of one.

EUGENIA: All right. (lifts her glass) here's to............

(She is overtaken by a tremendous sneeze)

CURTAIN