

BLANCHE. Yes, Stella.

*A train passes noisily along the L&N tracks outside. [There is no long pause in dialogue for train effect.] Blanche crosses into living room to her purse on table, gets out small bottle of cologne, dabs a bit of it behind her ears.*

STELLA. (Rising, crossing to above L. seat, looks at Blanche.) But how did it go? What happened?

BLANCHE. You're a fine one to ask me how it went!

STELLA. (A step nearer.) Blanche!

BLANCHE. You're a fine one to stand there *accusing me* of it!

STELLA. (Sitting on L. seat, facing Blanche.) Blanche!

BLANCHE. (Facing Stella.) I, I, I took the blows on my face and my body! All of those deaths! The long parade to the graveyard! Father, Mother! Margaret—that dreadful way! So big with it she couldn't be put in a coffin! But had to be burned like rubbish! You just came home in time for the funerals. And funerals are pretty compared to deaths. Funerals are quiet, but deaths—not always. Sometimes their breathing is hoarse, sometimes it rattles, sometimes they cry out to you, Don't let me go! Even the old sometimes say, Don't let me go! As if you were able to stop them! Funerals are quiet with pretty flowers. And oh, what gorgeous boxes they pack them away in! Unless you were there at the bed when they cried out, Hold me! You'd never suspect there was the struggle for breath and bleeding. You didn't dream, but I saw! *Saw! Saw!* And now you sit there telling me with your eyes that I let the place go.

*Stella crosses—Blanche follows, holds her.*

How in hell did you think all that sickness and dying was paid for?

*Blanche stands at Stella's shoulder.*

Death is expensive, Miss Stella! And old Cousin Jessie, right after Margaret's, hers! Why, the Grim Reaper had put up his tent on our doorstep!—Stella! Belle Reve was his headquarters! Honey, that's how it slipped through my fingers! Which of them left us a fortune? Which of them left us a cent of insurance, even? Only poor Jessie—one hundred to pay for her coffin! That was all, Stella! And I with my pitiful salary at the school!