

it back in! Ooh! That's just like her! That is just like her!

BABE. Lenny, please—

LENNY. I can't help it! It gets me mad! It gets me upset! Why, Meg's always run wild—she started smoking and drinking when she was fourteen years old, she never made good grades—never made her own bed! But somehow she always seemed to get what she wanted. She's the one who got singing and dancing lessons; and a store-bought dress to wear to her senior prom. Why do you remember how Meg always got to wear twelve jingle bells on her petticoats, while we were only allowed to wear three apiece? Why?! Why should Old Grandmama let her sew twelve golden jingle bells on her petticoats and us only three!!!

BABE. (*Who has heard all this before.*) I don't know!! Maybe she didn't jingle them as much!

LENNY. I can't help it! It gets me mad! I resent it. I do.

BABE. Oh, don't resent Meg. Things have been hard for Meg. After all, she was the one who found Mama.

LENNY. Oh, I know; she's the one who found Mama. But that's always been the excuse.

BABE. But, I tell you, Lenny, after it happened, Meg started doing all sorts of these strange things.

LENNY. She did? Like what?

BABE. Like things I never wanted to tell you about.

LENNY. What sort of things?

BABE. Well, for instance, back when we used to go over to the library, Meg would spend all her time reading and looking through this old, black book called *Diseases of the Skin*. It was full of the most sickening pictures you'd ever seen. Things like rotting-away noses and eyeballs drooping off down the sides of people's faces and scabs and sores and eaten-away places all over *all* parts of people's bodies.

LENNY. (*Trying to pour her coffee.*) Babe, please! That's enough.

BABE. Anyway, she'd spend hours and hours just forcing herself to look through this book. Why, it was the same way she'd force herself to look at the poster of crippled children stuck up in the window at Dixieland Drugs. You know, that one where

they want you to give a dime. Meg would stand there and stare at their eyes and look at the braces on their little crippled-up legs—then she'd purposely go and spend her dime on a double scoop ice cream cone and eat it all down. She'd say to me, "See, I can stand it. I can stand it. Just look how I'm gonna be able to stand it."

LENNY. That's awful.

BABE. She said she was afraid of being a weak person. I guess 'cause she cried in bed every night for such a long time.

LENNY. Goodness mercy. *(After a pause.)* Well, I suppose you'd have to be a pretty hard person to be able to do what she did to Doc Porter.

BABE. *(Exasperated.)* Oh, shoot! It wasn't Meg's fault that hurricane wiped Biloxi away. I never understood why people were blaming all that on Meg—just because that roof fell in and crunched Doc's leg. It wasn't her fault.

LENNY. Well, it was Meg who refused to evacuate. Jim Craig and some of Doc's other friends were all down there and they kept trying to get everyone to evacuate. But Meg refused. She wanted to stay on because she thought a hurricane would be—oh, I don't know—a lot of fun. Then everyone says she baited Doc into staying with her. She said she'd marry him if he'd stay.

BABE. *(Taken aback by this new information.)* Well, he has a mind of his own. He could have gone.

LENNY. But he didn't. 'Cause . . . 'cause he loved her. And then after the roof caved, and they got Doc to the high school gym, Meg just left. She just left him there to leave for California—'cause of her career, she says. I think it was a shameful thing to do. It took almost a year for his leg to heal and after that he gave up his medical career altogether. He said he was tired of hospitals. It's such a sad thing. Everyone always knew he was gonna be a doctor. We've called him Doc for years.

BABE. I don't know. I guess, I don't have any room to talk; 'cause I just don't know. *(Pause.)* Gosh, you look so tired.

LENNY. I feel tired.

BABE. They say women need a lot of iron . . . so they won't feel tired.

LENNY. What's got iron in it? Liver?

BABE. Yeah, liver's got it. And vitamin pills. (After a moment, Meg enters. She carries a bottle of bourbon that is already minus a few slugs and a newspaper. She is wearing black boots, a dark dress, and a hat. The room goes silent.)

BABE (Fooling with her hair.) Hi, Meg. (Lenny quietly sips his coffee.)

MEG (Handing the newspaper to Babe.) Here's your paper.

BABE Thanks. (She opens it.) Oh, here it is, right on the fifth page. (She looks at the picture.) Where's the ribbon drawer?

LENNY Look in there in the ribbon drawer.

BABE Oh. (She gets the scissors and gives one of the drawers and slowly begins cutting out the newspaper articles.)

MEG (After a few moments, filled only with the remains of a crossword.) All right—I had! I had! I couldn't help it. Those stories just came pouring out of my mouth! When I saw how sick and sick Old Granddaddy got—they just flew out. I wanted was to see him smiling and happy. I just wasn't going to sit there and look at him all miserable and sick and sad. I just wasn't.

BABE Oh, Meg, he is sick, isn't he—

MEG Why, he's gotten all white and milky—his stomach evaporated!

LENNY (Gulping and looking at Meg.) But still you shouldn't have had it just was wrong for you to tell such lies—

MEG Well, I know that. Don't say that! I know that! I hate myself when I lie for the old man. I do. I feel so weak. And then I have to go and do or hear about three or four things that I know he'd never just to get even with that miserable, old, boy man!

LENNY Oh, Meg, please, don't talk to them! Old Granddaddy is worried as ever. Why, he walk out of his way to make a home for us, to make us feel we were his very own children. All he ever wanted was the best for us. That's all he ever wanted.

MEG Well, I guess it was the best thing he wanted when he wanted.

BABE (Taking the newspaper articles and giving one of her own.