

A – Keller & Chris

KELLER. The only one still talks about it is my wife.

KATE. That's because you keep on playing policeman with the kids. All their parents hear out of you is jail, jail, jail.

KELLER. Actually what happened was that when I got home from the penitentiary the kids got very interested in me. You know kids. I was *(Laughs.)* like the expert on the jail situation. And as time passed they got it confused and...I ended up a detective. *(Laughs.)*

KATE. Except that *they* didn't get it confused. *(To Ann.)* He hands out police badges from the Post Toasties boxes. *(They laugh.)*

ANN. *(Wondrously at them, happily. She rises and comes to Keller, putting her arm around his shoulder.)* Gosh, it's wonderful to hear you laughing about it.

CHRIS. Why, what'd you expect?

ANN. The last thing I remember on this block was one word—"Murderers!" Remember that, Kate? ...Mrs. Hammond standing in front of our house and yelling that word... She's still around, I suppose?

KATE. They're all still around.

KELLER. Don't listen to her. Every Saturday night the whole gang is playin' poker in this arbor. All the ones who yelled murderer takin' my money now.

KATE. Don't, Joe, she's a sensitive girl, don't fool her. *(To Ann.)* They still remember about Dad. It's different with him— *(Indicates Joe.)*—he was exonerated, your father's still there. That's why I wasn't so enthusiastic about your coming. Honestly, I know how sensitive you are, and I told Chris, I said...

KELLER. Listen, you do like I did and you'll be all right. The day I come home, I got out of my car;—but not in front of the house... on the corner. You should've been here, Annie, and you too, Chris; you'd-a seen something. Everybody knew I was getting out that day; the porches were loaded. Picture it now; none of them believed I was innocent. The story was, I pulled a fast one getting myself exonerated. So I get out of my car, and I walk down the street. But very slow. And with a smile. The beast! I was the beast; the guy who sold cracked cylinder heads to the Army Air Force; the guy who made twenty-one P-40s crash in Australia. Kid, walkin'

down the street that day I was guilty as hell. Except I wasn't, and there was a court paper in my pocket to prove I wasn't, and I walked...past...the porches. Result? Fourteen months later I had one of the best shops in the state again, a respected man again; bigger than ever.

CHRIS. (*With admiration.*) Joe McGuts.

KELLER. (*Now with great force.*) That's the only way you lick 'em is guts! (*To Ann.*) The worst thing you did was to move away from here. You made it tough for your father when he gets out. That's why I tell you, I like to see him move back right on this block.

KATE. (*Pained.*) How could they move back?

KELLER. It ain't gonna end *till* they move back! (*To Ann.*) 'Till people play cards with him again, and talk with him, and smile with him—you play cards with a man you know he can't be a murderer. And the next time you write him I like you to tell him just what I said. (*Ann simply stares at him.*) You hear me?

ANN. (*Surprised.*) Don't you hold anything against him?

KELLER. Annie, I never believed in crucifying people.

ANN. (*Mystified.*) But he was your partner, he dragged you through the mud...

KELLER. Well, he ain't my sweetheart, but you gotta forgive, don't you?

ANN. You, either, Kate? Don't you feel any...?

KELLER. (*To Ann.*) The next time you write Dad...

ANN. I don't write him.

KELLER. (*Struck.*) Well every now and then you...

ANN. (*A little ashamed, but determined.*) No, I've *never* written to him. Neither has my brother. (*To Chris.*) Say, do you feel this way, too?

CHRIS. He murdered twenty-one pilots.

KELLER. What the hell kinda talk is that?

KATE. That's not a thing to say about a man.

ANN. What else can you say? When they took him away I followed him, went to him every visiting day. I was crying all the time. Until the news came about Larry. Then I realized. It's wrong to pity a man

B – Kate

KELLER. You don't sleep, that's why. She's wearing out more bedroom slippers than shoes.

KATE. I had a terrible night. *(She stops moving.)* I never had a night like that.

CHRIS. *(Looks at Keller.)* What was it, Mom? Did you dream?

KATE. More, more than a dream.

CHRIS. *(Hesitantly.)* About Larry?

KATE. I was fast asleep, and... *(Raising her arm over the audience.)* Remember the way he used to fly low past the house when he was in training? When we used to see his face in the cockpit going by? That's the way I saw him. Only high up. Way, way up, where the clouds are. He was so real I could reach out and touch him. And suddenly he started to fall. And crying, crying to me... "Mom, Mom!" I could hear him like he was in the room. "Mom!"...it was his voice! If I could touch him I knew I could stop him, if I could only... *(Breaks off, allowing her outstretched hand to fall.)* I woke up and it was so funny... The wind...it was like the roaring of his engine. I came out here...I must've still been half asleep. I could hear that roaring like he was going by. The tree snapped right in front of me...and I like...came awake. *(She is looking at tree. She suddenly realizes something, turns with a reprimanding finger shaking slightly at Keller.)* See? We should never have planted that tree. I said so in the first place: It was too soon to plant a tree for him.

CHRIS. *(Alarmed.)* Too soon!

KATE. *(Angering.)* We rushed into it. Everybody was in such a hurry to bury him. I said not to plant it yet. *(To Keller.)* I told you to...!

CHRIS. Mother, Mother! *(She looks into his face.)* The wind blew it down. What significance has that got? What are you talking about? Mother, please... Don't go through it all again, will you? It's no good, it doesn't accomplish anything. I've been thinking, y'know?—maybe we ought to put our minds to forgetting him?

KATE. That's the third time you've said that this week.

CHRIS. Because it's not right; we never took up our lives again. We're like at a railroad station waiting for a train that never comes in.

KATE. *(Presses top of her head.)* Get me an aspirin, heh?

CHRIS. Sure, and let's break out of this, heh, Mom? I thought the four of us might go out to dinner a couple of nights, maybe go dancing out at the shore.

KATE. Fine. *(To Keller.)* We can do it tonight.

KELLER. Swell with me!

CHRIS. Sure, let's have some fun. *(To Mother.)* You'll start with this aspirin. *(He goes up and into house with new spirit. Her smile vanishes.)*

KATE. *(With an accusing undertone.)* Why did he invite her here?

KELLER. Why does that bother you?

KATE. She's been in New York three and a half years, why all of a sudden...?

KELLER. Well, maybe...maybe he just wanted to see her...

KATE. Nobody comes seven hundred miles "just to see."

KELLER. What do you mean? He lived next door to the girl all his life, why shouldn't he want to see her again? *(Kate looks at him critically.)* Don't look at me like that, he didn't tell me any more than he told you.

KATE. *(A warning and a question.)* He's not going to marry her.

KELLER. How do you know he's even thinking of it?

KATE. It's got that about it.

KELLER. *(Sharply watching her reaction.)* Well? So what?

KATE. *(Alarmed.)* What's going on here, Joe?

KELLER. Now listen, kid...

KATE. *(Avoiding contact with him.)* She's not his girl, Joe; she knows she's not.

KELLER. You can't read her mind.

KATE. Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why isn't she married? *(Pause.)* Probably a hundred people told her she's foolish, but she's waited.

KELLER. How do you know why she waited?

KATE. She knows what I know, that's why. She's faithful as a rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting, and I know again that I'm right.

KELLER. Look, it's a nice day. What are we arguing for?

C – Chris (& Keller)

don't know how to operate, your stuff is no good; they close you up, they tear up your contracts, what the hell's it to them? You lay forty years into a business and they knock you out in five minutes, what could I do, let them take forty years, let them take my life away? (*His voice cracking.*) I never thought they'd install them. I swear to God. I thought they'd stop 'em before anybody took off.

CHRIS. Then why'd you ship them out?

KELLER. By the time they could spot them I thought I'd have the process going again, and I could show them they needed me and they'd let it go by. But weeks passed and I got no kick-back, so I was going to tell them.

CHRIS. Then why didn't you tell them?

KELLER. It was too late. The paper, it was all over the front page, twenty-one went down, it was too late. They came with handcuffs into the shop, what could I do? (*He sits on bench at c.*) Chris... Chris, I did it for you, it was a chance and I took it for you. I'm sixty-one years old, when would I have another chance to make something for you? Sixty-one years old you don't get another chance, do ya?

CHRIS. You even knew they wouldn't hold up in the air.

KELLER. I didn't say that...

CHRIS. But you were going to warn them not to use them...

KELLER. But that don't mean...

CHRIS. It means you knew they'd crash.

KELLER. It don't mean that.

CHRIS. Then you *thought* they'd crash.

KELLER. I was afraid maybe...

CHRIS. You were afraid maybe! God in heaven, what kind of a man are you? Kids were hanging in the air by those heads. You knew that!

KELLER. For you, a business for you!

CHRIS. (*With burning fury.*) For me! Where do you live, where have you come from? For me!—I was dying every day and you were killing my boys and you did it for me? What the hell do you think I was thinking of, the Goddam business? Is that as far as your mind

D – Ann (w/Chris & Keller)

KELLER. You heard me. Now you know what to tell him. *(Pause. He moves from her—halts.)* But he wouldn't put me away though... He wouldn't do that... Would he?

KATE. He loved you, Joe, you broke his heart.

KELLER. But to put me away...

KATE. I don't know. I'm beginning to think we don't really know him. They say in the war he was such a killer. Here he was always afraid of mice. I don't know him. I don't know what he'll do.

KELLER. Goddam, if Larry was alive he wouldn't act like this. He understood the way the world is made. He listened to me. To him the world had a forty-foot front, it ended at the building line. This one, everything bothers him. You make a deal, overcharge two cents, and his hair falls out. He don't understand money. Too easy, it came too easy. Yes sir. Larry. That was a boy we lost. Larry. Larry. *(He slumps on chair in front of her.)* What am I gonna do, Kate...

KATE. Joe, Joe, please...you'll be all right, nothing is going to happen...

KELLER. *(Desperately, lost.)* For you, Kate, for both of you, that's all I ever lived for...

KATE. I know, darling, I know... *(Ann enters from house. They say nothing, waiting for her to speak.)*

ANN. Why do you stay up? I'll tell you when he comes.

KELLER. *(Rises, goes to her.)* You didn't eat supper, did you? *(To Kate.)* Why don't you make her something?

KATE. Sure, I'll...

ANN. Never mind, Kate, I'm all right. *(They are unable to speak to each other.)* There's something I want to tell you. *(She starts, then halts.)* I'm not going to do anything about it...

KATE. She's a good girl! *(To Keller.)* You see? She's a...

ANN. I'll do nothing about Joe, but you're going to do something for me. *(Directly to Mother.)* You made Chris feel guilty with me. Whether you wanted to or not, you've crippled him in front of me. I'd like you to tell him that Larry is dead and that you know it. You understand me? I'm not going out of here alone. There's no life for me that way. I want you to set him free. And then I promise you,

everything, will end, and we'll go away, and that's all.

KELLER. You'll do that. You'll tell him.

ANN. I know what I'm asking, Kate. You had two sons. But you've only got one now.

KELLER. You'll tell him...

ANN. And you've got to say it to him so he knows you mean it.

~~KATE. My dear, if the boy was dead, it wouldn't depend on my words to make Chris know it. The night he gets into your bed, his heart will dry up. Because he knows and you know. To his dying day he'll wait for his brother! No, my dear, no such thing. You're going in the morning, and you're going alone. That's your life, that's your lonely life. (She goes to porch, and starts in.)~~

ANN. Larry is dead, Kate. *

KATE. (Stops.) Don't speak to me.

ANN. I said he's dead. I know! He crashed off the coast of China November 25th! His engine didn't fail him. But he died. I know...

KATE. How did he die? You're lying to me. If you know, how did he die?

ANN. I loved him. You know I loved him. Would I have looked at anyone else if I wasn't sure? That's enough for you.

KATE. (Moving on her.) What's enough for me? What're you talking about? (She grasps Ann's wrists.)

ANN. You're hurting my wrists.

KATE. What are you talking about!

(Pause. She stares at Ann a moment, then turns and goes to Keller.)

ANN. Joe, go in the house...

KELLER. Why should I...

ANN. Please go.

KELLER. Lemme know when he comes. (Keller goes into house.)

KATE. (Sees Ann take a letter from her pocket.) What's that?

ANN. Sit down... (Kate moves left to chair, but does not sit.) First you've got to understand. When I came, I didn't have any idea that Joe... I had nothing against him or you. I came to get married. I

E - George (w/Chris)

GEORGE. *(To Ann.)* You're not married yet, are you?

ANN. George, will you sit down and stop—?

GEORGE. Are you married yet?

ANN. No, I'm not married yet.

GEORGE. You're not going to marry him.

ANN. Why am I not going to marry him?

GEORGE. Because his father destroyed your family.

CHRIS. Now look, George...

GEORGE. Cut it short, Chris. Tell her to come home with me. Let's not argue, you know what I've got to say.

CHRIS. George, you don't want to be the voice of God, do you?

GEORGE. I'm...

CHRIS. That's been your trouble all your life, George, you dive into things. What kind of a statement is that to make? You're a big boy now.

GEORGE. I'm a big boy now.

CHRIS. Don't come bulling in here. If you've got something to say, be civilized about it.

GEORGE. Don't civilize me!

ANN. Shhh!

CHRIS. *(Ready to hit him.)* Are you going to talk like a grown man or aren't you?

ANN. *(Quickly, to forestall an outburst.)* Sit down, dear. Don't be angry, what's the matter? *(He allows her to seat him, looking at her.)* Now what happened? You kissed me when I left, now you...

GEORGE. *(Breathlessly.)* My life turned upside down since then. I couldn't go back to work when you left. I wanted to go to Dad and tell him you were going to be married. It seemed impossible not to tell him. He loved you so much... *(He pauses.)* Annie...we did a terrible thing. We can never be forgiven. Not even to send him a card at Christmas. I didn't see him once since I got home from the war! Annie, you don't know what was done to that man. You don't know what happened.

ANN. *(Afraid.)* Of course I know.

GEORGE. You can't know, you wouldn't be here. Dad came to work that day. The night foreman came to him and showed him the cylinder heads...they were coming out of the process with defects. There was something wrong with the process. So Dad went directly to the phone and called here and told Joe to come down right away. But the morning passed. No sign of Joe. So Dad called again. By this time he had over a hundred defectives. The Army was screaming for stuff and Dad didn't have anything to ship. So Joe told him...on the phone he told him to weld, cover up the cracks in any way he could, and ship them out.

CHRIS. Are you through now?

GEORGE. (*Surging up at him.*) I'm not through now! (*Back to Ann.*) Dad was afraid. He wanted Joe there if he was going to do it. But Joe can't come down...he's sick. Sick! He suddenly gets the flu! Suddenly! But he promised to take responsibility. Do you understand what I'm saying? On the telephone you can't have responsibility! In a court you can always deny a phone call and that's exactly what he did. They knew he was a liar the first time, but in the appeal they believed that rotten lie and now Joe is a big-shot and your father is the patsy. (*He gets up.*) Now what're you going to do? Eat his food, sleep in his bed? Answer me; what're you going to do?

CHRIS. What're you going to do, George?

GEORGE. He's too smart for me, I can't prove a phone call.

CHRIS. Then how dare you come in here with that rot?

ANN. George, the court...

GEORGE. The court didn't know your father! But you know him. You know in your heart Joe did it.

CHRIS. (*Whirling him around.*) Lower your voice or I'll throw you out of here!

GEORGE. She knows. She knows.

CHRIS. (*To Ann.*) Get him out of here, Ann. Get him out of here.

ANN. George, I know everything you've said. Dad told that whole thing in court, and they...

GEORGE. (*Almost a scream.*) The court did not know him, Annie!

F - Jim (& Kate)

ACT III

Two o'clock the following morning, Kate is discovered on the rise, rocking ceaselessly in a chair, staring at her thoughts. It is an intense, slight, sort of rocking. A light shows from upstairs bedroom, lower floor windows being dark. The moon is strong and casts its bluish light.

Presently Jim, dressed in jacket and hat, appears from the L., and seeing her, goes tip beside her.

JIM. Any news?

KATE. No news.

JIM. (*Gently.*) You can't sit up all night, dear, why don't you go to bed?

KATE. I'm waiting for Chris. Don't worry about me, Jim, I'm perfectly all right.

JIM. But it's almost two o'clock.

KATE. I can't sleep. (*Slight pause.*) You had an emergency?

JIM. (*Tiredly.*) Somebody had a headache and thought he was dying. (*Slight pause.*) Half of my patients are quite mad. Nobody realizes how many people are walking around loose, and they're cracked as coconuts. Money. Money-money-money-money. You say it long enough it doesn't mean anything. (*She smiles, makes a silent laugh.*) Oh, how I'd love to be around when that happens!

KATE. (*Shakes her head.*) You're so childish, Jim! Sometimes you are.

JIM. (*Looks at her a moment.*) Kate. (*Pause.*) What happened?

KATE. I told you. He had an argument with Joe. Then he got in the car and drove away.

JIM. What kind of an argument?

KATE. An argument, Joe...he was crying like a child, before.

JIM. They argued about Ann?

KATE. (*Slight hesitation.*) No, not Ann. Imagine? (*Indicates lighted*

window above.) She hasn't come out of that room since he left. All night in that room.

JIM. (*Looks at window, then at her.*) What'd Joe do, tell him?

KATE. (*Stops rocking.*) Tell him what?

JIM. Don't be afraid, Kate, I know. I've always known.

KATE. How?

JIM. It occurred to me a long time ago.

KATE. I always had the feeling that in the back of his head, Chris... almost knew. I didn't think it would be such a shock.

JIM. (*Gets up.*) Chris would never know how to live with a thing like that. It takes a certain talent...for lying. You have it, and I do. But not him.

KATE. What do you mean...he's not coming back?

JIM. Oh, no, he'll come back. We all come back, Kate. These private little revolutions always die. The compromise is always made. In a peculiar way, Frank is right—every man does have a star. The star of one's honesty. And you spend your life groping for it, but once it's out it never lights again. I don't think he went very far. He probably just wanted to be alone to watch his star go out.

KATE. Just as long as he comes back.

JIM. I wish he wouldn't, Kate. One year I simply took off, went to New Orleans; for two months I lived on bananas and milk, and studied a certain disease. It was beautiful. And then she came, and she cried. And I went back home with her. And now I live in the usual darkness; I can't find myself; it's even hard sometimes to remember the kind of man I wanted to be. I'm a good husband; Chris is a good son—he'll come back. (*Keller comes out on porch in dressing-gown and slippers. He goes upstage—to alley. Jim goes to him.*) I have a feeling he's in the park. I'll look around for him. Put her to bed, Joe; this is no good for what she's got. (*Jim exits up driveway.*)

KELLER. (*Coming down.*) What does he want here?

KATE. His friend is not home.

KELLER. (*His voice is husky. Comes down to her.*) I don't like him mixing in so much.

KATE. It's too late, Joe. He knows.

G - Sue (& Ann)

ANN. (*Turns, startled.*) Oh!

SUE. I'm terribly sorry.

ANN. It's all right, I...I'm a little silly about the dark.

SUE. (*Looks about.*) It is getting dark.

ANN. Are you looking for your husband?

SUE. As usual. (*Laughs tiredly.*) He spends so much time here, they'll be charging him rent.

ANN. Nobody was dressed so he drove over to the depot to pick up my brother.

SUE. Oh, your brother's in?

ANN. Yeah, they ought to be here any minute now. Will you have a cold drink?

SUE. I will, thanks. (*Ann goes to table and pours.*) My husband. Too hot to drive me to beach.—Men are like little boys; for the neighbors they'll always cut the grass.

ANN. People like to do things for the Kellers. Been that way since I can remember.

SUE. It's amazing. I guess your brother's coming to give you away, heh?

ANN. (*Giving her drink.*) I don't know. I suppose.

SUE. You must be all nerved up.

ANN. It's always a problem getting yourself married, isn't it?

SUE. That depends on your shape, of course. I don't see why you should have had a problem.

ANN. I've had chances—

SUE. I'll bet. It's romantic...it's very unusual to me, marrying the brother of your sweetheart.

ANN. I don't know. I think it's mostly that whenever I need somebody to tell me the truth I've always thought of Chris. When he tells you something you know it's so. He relaxes me.

SUE. And he's got money. That's important, you know.

ANN. It wouldn't matter to me.

SUE. You'd be surprised. It makes all the difference. I married an interne. On my salary. And that was bad, because as soon as a woman

supports a man he owes her something. You can never owe somebody without resenting them. (*Ann laughs.*) That's true, you know.

ANN. Underneath, I think the doctor is very devoted.

SUE. Oh, certainly. But it's bad when a man always sees the bars in front of him. Jim thinks he's in jail all the time.

ANN. Oh...

SUE. That's why I've been intending to ask you a small favor, Ann...it's something very important to me.

ANN. Certainly, if I can do it.

SUE. You can. When you take up housekeeping, try to find a place away from here.

ANN. Are you fooling?

SUE. I'm very serious. My husband is unhappy with Chris around.

ANN. How is that?

SUE. Jim's a successful doctor. But he's got an idea he'd like to do medical research. Discover things. You see?

ANN. Well, isn't that good?

SUE. Research pays twenty-five dollars a week minus laundering the hair shirt. You've got to give up your life to go into it.

ANN. How does Chris?

SUE. (*With growing feeling.*) Chris makes people want to be better than it's possible to be. He does that to people.

ANN. Is that bad?

SUE. My husband has a family, dear. Every time he has a session with Chris he feels as though he's compromising by not giving up everything for research. As though Chris or anybody else isn't compromising. It happens with Jim every couple of years. He meets a man and makes a statue out of him.

ANN. Maybe he's right. I don't mean that Chris is a statue, but...

SUE. Now darling, you know he's not right.

ANN. I don't agree with you. Chris...

SUE. Let's face it, dear. Chris is working with his father, isn't he? He's taking money out of that business every week in the year.

H - Chris & Ann

CHRIS. (*Hopefully.*) You're not sorry you came?

ANN. Not sorry, no. But I'm...not going to stay...

CHRIS. Why?

ANN. In the first place, your mother as much as told me to go.

CHRIS. Well...

ANN. You saw that...and then you...you've been kind of...

CHRIS. What?

ANN. Well...kind of embarrassed ever since I got here.

CHRIS. The trouble is I planned on kind of sneaking up on you over a period of a week or so. But they take it for granted that we're all set.

ANN. I knew they would. Your mother anyway.

CHRIS. How did you know?

ANN. From *her* point of view, why else would I come?

CHRIS. Well...would you want to? (*Ann studies him.*) I guess you know this is why I asked you to come.

ANN. I guess this is why I came.

CHRIS. Ann, I love you. I love you a great deal. (*Finally.*) I love you. (*Pause. She waits.*) I have no imagination...that's all I know to tell you. (*Ann, waiting, ready.*) I'm embarrassing you. I didn't want to tell it to you here. I wanted someplace we'd never been; a place where we'd be brand new to each other... You feel it's wrong here, don't you? This yard, this chair? I want you to be ready for me. I don't want to win you away from anything.

ANN. (*Putting her arms around him.*) Oh, Chris, I've been ready a long, long time!

CHRIS. Then he's gone forever. You're sure.

ANN. I almost got married two years ago.

CHRIS. ...why didn't you?

ANN. You started to write to me... (*Slight pause.*)

CHRIS. You felt something that far back?

ANN. Every day since!

CHRIS. Ann, why didn't you let me know?

ANN. I was waiting for you, Chris. Till then you never wrote. And when you did, what did you say? You sure can be ambiguous, you know.

CHRIS. (*Looks towards house, then at her, trembling.*) Give me a kiss, Ann. Give me a... (*They kiss.*) God, I kissed you, Annie, I kissed Annie. How long, how long I've been waiting to kiss you!

ANN. I'll never forgive you. Why did you wait all these years? All I've done is sit and wonder if I was crazy for thinking of you.

CHRIS. Annie, we're going to live now! I'm going to make you so happy. (*He kisses her, but without their bodies touching.*)

ANN. (*A little embarrassed.*) Not like that you're not.

CHRIS. I kissed you...

ANN. Like Larry's brother. Do it like you, Chris. (*He breaks away from her abruptly.*) What is it, Chris?

CHRIS. Let's drive someplace... I want to be alone with you.

ANN. No...what is it, Chris, your mother?

CHRIS. No...nothing like that...

ANN. Then what's wrong? ...Even in your letters, there was something ashamed.

CHRIS. Yes. I suppose I have been. But it's going from me.

ANN. You've got to tell me—

CHRIS. I don't know how to start. (*He takes her hand. He speaks quietly, factually at first.*)

ANN. It wouldn't work this way. (*Slight pause.*)

CHRIS. It's all mixed up with so many other things... You remember, overseas, I was in command of a company?

ANN. Yeah, sure.

CHRIS. Well, I lost them.

ANN. How many?

CHRIS. Just about all.

ANN. Oh, gee!

CHRIS. It takes a little time to toss that off. Because they weren't just men. For instance, one time it'd been raining several days and this kid came to me, and gave me his last pair of dry socks. Put

I – Kate (w/Chris & Ann)

anymore. In five minutes thirty-nine strange people are sitting at the table telling her their life story.

KATE. If I can't ask Annie a personal question...

KELLER. Askin' is all right, but don't beat her over the head. You're beatin' her, you're beatin' her. *(They are laughing.)*

ANN. *(To Mother. Takes pan of beans off stool, puts them on floor under chair and sits.)* Don't let them bulldoze you. Ask me anything you like. What do you want to know, Kate? Come on, let's gossip.

KATE. *(To Chris and Keller.)* She's the only one is got any sense. *(To Ann.)* Your mother...she's not getting a divorce, heh?

ANN. No, she's calmed down about it now. I think when he gets out they'll probably live together. In New York, of course.

KATE. That's fine. Because your father is still...I mean he's a decent man after all is said and done.

ANN. I don't care. She can take him back if she likes.

KATE. And you? You... *(Shakes her head negatively.)* ...go out much? *(Slight pause.)*

ANN. *(Delicately.)* You mean am I still waiting for him?

KATE. Well, no, I don't expect you to wait for him but...

ANN. *(Kindly.)* But that's what you mean, isn't it?

KATE. ...Well...yes.

ANN. Well, I'm not, Kate.

KATE. *(Faintly.)* You're not?

ANN. Isn't it ridiculous? You don't really imagine he's...?

KATE. I know, dear, but don't say it's ridiculous, because the papers were full of it; I don't know about New York, but there was half a page about a man missing even longer than Larry, and he turned up from Burma.

CHRIS. *(Coming to Ann.)* He couldn't have wanted to come home very badly, Mom.

KATE. Don't be so smart.

CHRIS. You can have a helluva time in Burma.

ANN. *(Rises and swings around in back of Chris.)* So I've heard.

CHRIS. Mother, I'll bet you money that you're the only woman in the country who after three years is still...

KATE. You're sure?

CHRIS. Yes, I am.

KATE. Well, if you're sure then you're sure. *(She turns her head away an instant.)* They don't say it on the radio but I'm sure that in the dark at night they're still waiting for their sons.

CHRIS. Mother, you're absolutely—

KATE. *(Waving him off.)* Don't be so damned smart! Now stop it! *(Slight pause.)* There are just a few things you *don't* know. All of you. And I'll tell you one of them, Annie. Deep, deep in your heart you've always been waiting for him.

ANN. *(Resolutely.)* No, Kate.

KATE. *(With increasing demand.)* But deep in your heart, Annie!

CHRIS. She ought to know, shouldn't she?

KATE. Don't let them tell you what to think. Listen to your heart. Only your heart.

ANN. Why does your heart tell you he's alive?

KATE. Because he has to be.

ANN. But why, Kate?

KATE. *(Going to her.)* Because certain things have to be, and certain things can never be. Like the sun has to rise, it has to be. That's why there's God. Otherwise anything could happen. But there's God, so certain things can never happen. I would know, Annie—just like I knew the day he *(Indicates Chris.)* went into that terrible battle. Did he write me? Was it in the papers? No, but that morning I couldn't raise my head off the pillow. Ask Joe. Suddenly, I knew. I knew! And he was nearly killed that day. Ann, you *know* I'm right!

(Ann stands there in silence, then turns trembling, going upstage.)

ANN. No, Kate.

KATE. I have to have some tea.

(Frank appears from L. carrying ladder.)

FRANK. Annie! *(Coming down.)* How are you, gee whiz!

ANN. *(Taking his hand.)* Why, Frank, you're losing your hair.

J - Chris & Keller

KELLER. What's she going to say? Maybe we ought to tell her before she sees it.

CHRIS. She saw it.

KELLER. How could she see it? I was the first one up. She was still in bed.

CHRIS. She was out here when it broke.

KELLER. When?

CHRIS. About four this morning. *(Indicating window above them.)* I heard it cracking and I woke up and looked out. She was standing right here when it cracked.

KELLER. What was she doing out here four in the morning?

CHRIS. I don't know. When it cracked she ran back into the house and cried in the kitchen.

KELLER. Did you talk to her?

CHRIS. No, I...I figured the best thing was to leave her alone. *(Pause.)*

KELLER. *(Deeply touched.)* She cried hard?

CHRIS. I could hear her right through the floor of my room.

KELLER. *(Slight pause.)* What was she doing out here at that hour? *(Chris silent. An undertone of anger showing.)* She's dreaming about him again. She's walking around at night.

CHRIS. I guess she is.

KELLER. She's getting just like after he died. *(Slight pause.)* What's the meaning of that?

CHRIS. I don't know the meaning of it. *(Slight pause.)* But I know one thing, Dad. We've made a terrible mistake with Mother.

KELLER. What?

CHRIS. Being dishonest with her. That kind of thing always pays off, and now it's paying off.

KELLER. What do you mean, dishonest?

CHRIS. You know Larry's not coming back and I know it. Why do we allow her to go on thinking that we believe with her?

KELLER. What do you want to do, argue with her?

CHRIS. I don't want to argue with her, but it's time she realized that nobody believes Larry is alive anymore. *(Keller simply moves away, thinking, looking at the ground.)* Why shouldn't she dream of him, walk the nights waiting for him? Do we contradict her? Do we say straight out that we have no hope anymore? That we haven't had any hope for years now?

KELLER. *(Frightened at the thought.)* You can't say that to her.

CHRIS. We've got to say it to her.

KELLER. How're you going to prove it? Can you prove it?

CHRIS. For God's sake, three years! Nobody comes back after three years. It's insane.

KELLER. To you it is, and to me. But not to her. You can talk yourself blue in the face, but there's no body and there's no grave, so where are you?

CHRIS. Sit down, Dad. I want to talk to you.

KELLER. *(Looks at him searchingly a moment, and sitting...)* The trouble is the Goddam newspapers. Every month some boy turns up from nowhere, so the next one is going to be Larry, so...

CHRIS. All right, all right, listen to me. *(Slight pause. Keller sits on settee.)* You know why I asked Annie here, don't you?

KELLER. *(He knows, but...)* Why?

CHRIS. You know.

KELLER. Well, I got an idea, but... What's the story?

CHRIS. I'm going to ask her to marry me. *(Slight pause.)*

KELLER. *(Nods.)* Well, that's only your business, Chris.

CHRIS. You know it's not only my business.

KELLER. What do you want me to do? You're old enough to know your own mind.

CHRIS. *(Asking, annoyed.)* Then it's all right, I'll go ahead with it?

KELLER. Well, you want to be sure Mother isn't going to...

CHRIS. Then it isn't just my business.

KELLER. I'm just sayin'...

CHRIS. Sometimes you infuriate me, you know that? Isn't it your

K – Kate & Keller

CHRIS. Sure, and let's break out of this, heh, Mom? I thought the four of us might go out to dinner a couple of nights, maybe go dancing out at the shore.

KATE. Fine. *(To Keller.)* We can do it tonight.

KELLER. Swell with me!

CHRIS. Sure, let's have some fun. *(To Mother.)* You'll start with this aspirin. *(He goes up and into house with new spirit. Her smile vanishes.)*

KATE. *(With an accusing undertone.)* Why did he invite her here?

KELLER. Why does that bother you?

KATE. She's been in New York three and a half years, why all of a sudden...?

KELLER. Well, maybe...maybe he just wanted to see her...

KATE. Nobody comes seven hundred miles "just to see."

KELLER. What do you mean? He lived next door to the girl all his life, why shouldn't he want to see her again? *(Kate looks at him critically.)* Don't look at me like that, he didn't tell me any more than he told you.

KATE. *(A warning and a question.)* He's not going to marry her.

KELLER. How do you know he's even thinking of it?

KATE. It's got that about it.

KELLER. *(Sharply watching her reaction.)* Well? So what?

KATE. *(Alarmed.)* What's going on here, Joe?

KELLER. Now listen, kid...

KATE. *(Avoiding contact with him.)* She's not his girl, Joe; she knows she's not.

KELLER. You can't read her mind.

KATE. Then why is she still single? New York is full of men, why isn't she married? *(Pause.)* Probably a hundred people told her she's foolish, but she's waited.

KELLER. How do you know why she waited?

KATE. She knows what I know, that's why. She's faithful as a rock. In my worst moments, I think of her waiting, and I know again that I'm right.

KELLER. Look, it's a nice day. What are we arguing for?

KATE. (*Warningly.*) Nobody in this house dast take her faith away, Joe. Strangers might. But not his father, not his brother.

KELLER. (*Exasperated.*) What do you want me to do? What do you want?

KATE. I want you to act like he's coming back. Both of you. Don't think I haven't noticed you since Chris invited her. I won't stand for any nonsense.

KELLER. But, Kate...

KATE. Because if he's not coming back, then I'll kill myself! Laugh. Laugh at me. (*She points to tree.*) But why did that happen the very night she came back? Laugh, but there are meanings in such things. She goes to sleep in his room and his memorial breaks in pieces. Look at it; look. (*She sits on bench at his L.*) Joe...

KELLER. Calm yourself.

KATE. Believe with me, Joe. I can't stand all alone.

KELLER. Calm yourself.

KATE. Only last week a man turned up in Detroit, missing longer than Larry. You read it yourself.

KELLER. All right, all right, calm yourself.

KATE. You above all have got to believe, you...

KELLER. (*Rises.*) Why me above all?

KATE. ...Just don't stop believing...

KELLER. What does that mean, me above all?

(*Bert comes rushing on from L.*)

BERT. Mr. Keller! Say, Mr. Keller... (*Pointing up driveway.*) Tommy just said it again!

KELLER. (*Not remembering any of it.*) Said what?... Who?...

BERT. The dirty word.

KELLER. Oh. Well...

BERT. Gee, aren't you going to arrest him? I warned him.

KATE. (*With suddenness.*) Stop that, Bert. Go home. (*Bert backs up, as she advances.*) There's no jail here.

KELLER. (*As though to say, "Oh-what-the-hell-let-him-believe there*

L – Bert & Keller

CHRIS. Lot of new books.

KELLER. All different.

CHRIS. All different.

KELLER. (*Shakes his head, puts knife down on bench, takes oil stone up to the cabinet.*) Psss! Annie up yet?

CHRIS. Mother's giving her breakfast in the dining room.

KELLER. (*Crosses D.S. of stool, looking at broken tree.*) See what happened to the tree?

CHRIS. (*Without looking up.*) Yeah.

KELLER. What's Mother going to say? (*Bert runs on from driveway. He is about eight. He jumps on stool, then on Keller's back.*)

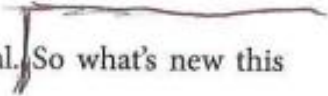
BERT. You're finally up.

KELLER. (*Swinging him around and putting him down.*) Ha! Bert's here! Where's Tommy? He's got his father's thermometer again.

BERT. He's taking a reading.

CHRIS. What!

BERT. But it's only oral.

KELLER. Oh, well, there's no harm in oral.  So what's new this morning, Bert?

BERT. Nothin'. (*He goes to broken tree, walks around it.*)

KELLER. Then you couldn't've made a complete inspection of the block. In the beginning, when I first made you a policeman, you used to come in every morning with something new. Now, nothin's ever new.

BERT. Except some kids from Thirtieth Street. They started kicking a can down the block, and I made them go away because you were sleeping.

KELLER. Now you're talkin', Bert. Now you're on the ball. First thing you know I'm liable to make you a detective.

BERT. (*Pulls him down by the lapel and whispers in his ear.*) Can I see the jail now?

KELLER. Seein' the jail ain't allowed, Bert. You know that.

BERT. Aw, I betcha there isn't even a jail. I don't see any bars on the

cellar windows.

KELLER. Bert, on my word of honor, there's a jail in the basement. I showed you my gun, didn't I?

BERT. But that's a hunting gun.

KELLER. That's an arresting gun!

BERT. Then why don't you ever arrest anybody? Tommy said another dirty word to Doris yesterday, and you didn't even demote him.

KELLER. *(He chuckles and winks at Chris, who is enjoying all this.)* Yeah, that's a dangerous character, that Tommy. *(Beckons him closer.)* What word does he say?

BERT. *(Backing away quickly in great embarrassment.)* Oh, I can't say that.

KELLER. *(Grabs him by the shirt and pulls him back.)* Well, gimme an idea.

BERT. I can't. It's not a nice word.

KELLER. Just whisper it in my ear. I'll close my eyes. Maybe I won't even hear it.

BERT. *(On tiptoe, puts his lips to Keller's ear, then in unbearable embarrassment steps back.)* I can't Mr. Keller.

CHRIS. *(Laughing.)* Don't make him do that.

KELLER. Okay, Bert. I take your word. Now go out, and keep both eyes peeled.

BERT. *(Interested.)* For what?

KELLER. For what! Bert, the whole neighborhood is depending on you. A policeman don't ask questions. Now peel them eyes!

BERT. *(Mystified, but willing.)* Okay. *(He runs off R. back of arbor.)*

KELLER. *(Calling after him.)* And mum's the word, Bert.

BERT. *(Stops and sticks his head thru the arbor.)* About what?

KELLER. Just in general. Be v-e-r-y careful.

BERT. *(Nods in bewilderment.)* Okay. *(Bert exits D. R.)*

KELLER. *(Laughs.)* I got all the kids crazy!

CHRIS. One of these days, they'll all come in here and beat your brains out.