WILLIAM SAROVAN

phone.) Hello, Ma? Is that you, Ma? Harry, I got the job.  
(He hangs up and walks around, smiling.)

Nick (watching the toy all this time): Say, that really is something. What is that, anyway?  (Mary L. comes in right.)

Joe (holding it toward Nick, and Mary L.): Nick, this is a toy. A contraption devised by the cunning of man to drive boredom, or grief, or anger out of children. A noble gadget. A gadget, I might say, infinitely nobler than any other I can think of at the moment. (Everybody gathers around Joe's table to look at the toy. The toy stops working. Joe winds the music box. Lifts a whistle: blows it, making a very strange, funny and sorrowful sound.) Delightful. Tragic, but delightful. (Wesley plays the music-box theme on the piano. Mary L. takes a table center.)

Nick: Joe. That girl, Kitty. What's she mean, calling me a dentist? I wouldn't hurt anybody, let alone a tooth. (Nick goes to Mary L.'s table. Harry imitates the toy. Dances. The piano music comes up, and the light dims slowly, while the piano solo continues.)

ACT II

Scene: Nick's, an hour later. All the people who were there when the curtain came down are still there. Dudley at table right, Arab seated in the rear at right. Harry and Wesley at piano. Joe at his table, quietly shuffling and turning a deck of cards, and at the same time watching the face of the woman, and looking at the initials on her handbag as though they were the symbols of the lost glory of the world. At center table, Woman, in turn, very casually regards Joe, occasionally—or rather senses him; has sensed him in fact the whole hour. She is mildly tight on beer, and Joe himself is tight, but as always, completely under control; simply sharper. The others are about, at tables, and so on.

Joe: Is it Madge—Laubowitz?
Mary: Is what what?
Joe: Is the name Mabel Lepesca?
Mary: What name?
Joe: The name the initials M. L. stand for. The initials on your bag.
Mary: No.
Joe (after a long pause, thinking deeply what the name might be, turning a card, looking into the beautiful face of the woman): Margie Longworthy?
Mary (all this is very natural and sincere, no comedy on the part of the people involved: they are both solemn, being drunk): No.
Joe (his voice higher-pitched, as though he were growing a
**WILLIAM SAROVAN**

little alarmed): Midge Laurie? (Mary shakes her head.)

My initials are J. T.

Mary (pause): John?

Joe: No. (Pause.) Martha Lancaster?

Mary: No. (Slight pause.) Joseph?

Joe: Well, not exactly. That’s my first name, but everybody calls me Joe. The last name is the tough one. I’ll help you a little. Irish. Is it just plain Mary?

Mary: Yes, it is. I’m Irish, too. At least on my father’s side, English on my mother’s side.

Joe: I’m Irish on both sides. Mary’s one of my favorite names. I guess that’s why I didn’t think of it. I met a girl in Mexico City named Mary once. She was an American from Philadelphia. She got married there. In Mexico City, I mean. While I was there. We were in love, too. At least I was. You never know about anyone else. They were engaged, you see, and her mother was with her, so they went through with it. Must have been six or seven years ago. She’s probably got three or four children by this time.

Mary: Are you still in love with her?

Joe: Well—no. To tell you the truth, I’m not sure. I guess I am. I didn’t even know she was engaged until a couple of days before they got married. I thought I was going to marry her. I kept thinking all the time about this kind of kids we would be likely to have. My favorite was the third one. The first two were fine. Handsome and fine and intelligent, but that third one was different. Dumb and goofy-looking. I liked him a lot. When she told me she was going to be married, I didn’t feel so bad about the first two, it was that dumb one.

Mary (after a pause of some few seconds): What do you do?

Joe: Do? To tell you the truth, nothing.

Mary: Do you always drink a great deal?

Joe (scientifically): Not always. Only when I’m awake. I sleep seven or eight hours every night, you know.

Mary: How nice. I mean to drink when you’re awake.

Joe (thoughtfully): It’s a privilege.

**The Time of Your Life**

Mary: Do you really like to drink?

Joe (positively): As much as I like to breathe.

Mary (beautifully): Why?

Joe (dramatically): Why do I like to drink? Because I don’t like to be gyped. Because I don’t like to be dead most of the time and just a little alive every once in a long while. (Pause.) If I don’t drink, I become fascinated by unimportant things—like everybody else. I get busy. Do things. All kinds of little stupid things, for all kinds of little stupid reasons. Proud, selfish, ordinary things. I’ve done them. Now I don’t do anything. I live all the time. Then I go to sleep.

Mary: Do you sleep well?

Joe (taking it for granted): Of course.

Mary (quietly, almost with tenderness): What are your plans?

Joe (loudly, but also tenderly): Plans? I haven’t got any. I just get up.

Mary (beginning to understand everything): Oh, of course. (Dudley puts a nickel in the phonograph.)

Joe (thoughtfully): Why do I drink? (Pause, while he thinks about it. The thinking appears to be profound and complex, and has the effect of giving his face a very comical and naif expression.) That question calls for a pretty complicated answer. (He smiles abstractly.)

Mary: Oh, I didn’t mean—


Mary: It really doesn’t matter.

Joe (seriously): Oh, yes, it does. (Clinically.) Now, why do I drink? (Scientifically.) No. Why does anybody drink? (Working it out.) Every day has twenty-four hours.

Mary (sadly, but brightly): Yes, that’s true.

Joe: Twenty-four hours. Out of the twenty-four hours at least twenty-three and a half are—my God, I don’t know why—dull, dead, boring, empty, and murderous. Minutes on the clock, not time of living. It doesn’t make any difference who you are or what you do, twenty-three and a half hours of the twenty-four are spent waiting.
MARY: Waiting?

Joe (gesturing, loudly): And the more you wait, the less there is to wait for.

MARY (attentively, beautifully his student): Oh?

Joe (continuing): That goes on for days and days, and weeks and months and years, and years, and the first thing you know all the years are dead. All the minutes are dead. You yourself are dead. There's nothing to wait for any more. Nothing except minutes on the clock. No time of life. Nothing but minutes, and idiocy. Beautiful, bright, intelligent idiocy. (Pause.) Does that answer your question?

MARY (earnestly): I'm afraid it does. Thank you. You shouldn't have gone to all the trouble.

Joe: No trouble at all. (Pause.) You have children?

MARY: Yes. Two. A son and a daughter.

Joe (delighted): How swell. Do they look like you?

MARY: Yes.

Joe: Then why are you sad?

MARY: I was always sad. It's just that after I was married I was allowed to drink.

Joe (eagerly): Who are you waiting for?

MARY: No one.

Joe (smiling): I'm not waiting for anybody, either.

MARY: My husband, of course.

Joe: Oh, sure.

MARY: He's a lawyer.

Joe (standing, leaning on the table): He's a great guy. I like him. I'm very fond of him.

MARY (listening): You have responsibilities?

Joe (loudly; rises): One, and thousands. As a matter of fact, I feel responsible to everybody. At least to everybody I meet. I've been trying for three years to find out if it's possible to live what I think is a civilized life. I mean a life that can't hurt any other life.

MARY: You're famous?

Joe: Very. Utterly unknown, but very famous. Would you like to dance?

MARY: All right.

Joe (loudly): I'm sorry. I don't dance. I didn't think you'd like to.

MARY: To tell you the truth, I don't like to dance at all.

Joe (proudly; commentator): I can hardly walk.

MARY: You mean you're tight?

Joe (smiling): No. I mean all the time.

MARY (sitting forward): Were you ever in Paris?

Joe: In 1929, and again in 1934.

MARY: What month of 1934?

Joe: Most of April, all of May and a little of June.

MARY: I was here in November and December that year.

Joe: We were there almost at the same time. You were married?

MARY: Engaged. (They are silent a moment, looking at one another. Quietly and with great charm.) Are you really in love with me?

Joe: Yes.

MARY: Is it the champagne?

Joe: Yes. Partly, at least. (He sits down.)

MARY: If you don't see me again, will you be very unhappy?

Joe: Very.

MARY (getting up): I'm so pleased. (Joe is deeply grieved that she is going. In fact, he is almost panic-stricken about it, getting up in a way that is full of furious sorrow and regret.) I must go now. Please don't get up. (Joe is up, staring at her with amazement.) Good-bye.

Joe (simply): Good-bye. (Music ends. The Woman stands looking at him a moment, then turns and goes slowly out right. Joe stands staring after her for a long time. Just as he is slowly sitting down again, the Newsboy enters right, and goes to Joe's table.)

Newsboy: Paper, Mister?

Joe: How many you got this time?

Newsboy: Eleven. (Joe buys them all, looks at all, throws them away. The crowd, pick up one and returns to his