THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL
BY HORTON FOOTE

★ Revised Edition

DRAMATISTS PLAY SERVICE INC.
A NOTE FROM THE DIRECTOR

The director tells the designer, “The sets should float on and off magically — no stagehands visible. We want to keep Mrs. Watts in view between the Houston apartment and the Houston bus station, between the Harrison bus station and Bountiful. The playwright has requested the play be done without intermission.”

Designs are presented to accommodate these decisions. Why the decisions are made is often discovered only later, upon reflection. As rehearsal progressed, the reasons for decisions made instinctually became clear: The movement of the sets and the lack of intermission were creating a feeling of constant movement, an uninterrupted journey, an inevitable odyssey. Mrs. Watts steps from the quotidian reality of the Houston apartment directly into the bus station. The bus set floats on stage out of the blackness, stars framing the scene. The Harrison bus station moves on stage, the agent asleep in his cubicle. The chivalrous Sheriff helps Mrs. Watts to her feet as the Harrison station disappears and Bountiful is revealed.

The play, one was discovering, had something of a dream about it — something mythic too: The Traveler meets archetypical figures on the way to his/her destiny. That would be simplistic and reductive as a description of the play, but it is a significant element within it. And the set changes seem to be very much in keeping.

The journey of The Trip to Bountiful ran about one hundred and five minutes. Although the playwright (and the director) prefer the play to be done without an intermission, should subsequent producers feel the need for a break, Mr. Foote (and the director) would have it placed after the Houston bus station and before the bus scene (between Scene 3 and Scene 4).

—Harris Yulin
CHARACTERS
CARRIE WATTS
LUDIE WATTS
JESSIE MAE WATTS
THELMA
HOUSTON TICKET MAN #1
HARRISON TICKET MAN
HOUSTON TICKET MAN #2
SHERIFF
THE TRIP TO BOUNTIFUL

SCENE ONE

The lights are slowly brought up, and we see the living room and bedroom of a small two-room apartment in 1953 in Houston, Texas. The two rooms have been furnished on very little money. The living room is downstage right. Upstage of the room is a door leading out to the hallway. At the other end of this hallway is a door leading to the bedroom which is downstage right. To get back and forth, then, between these two rooms it is necessary to go out into the hallway. Upstage right is an unseen door leading to the outside stairs. Upstage left from the hallway are the unseen kitchen and bathroom.

In the living room is a day bed that has been made up for the night. Center right, in the living room, is a window looking out on the street. Stage right is a wardrobe in which Mrs. Watts’ clothes and other belongings are kept. On top of the wardrobe are a suitcase and Mrs. Watts’ purse. A rocking chair is beside the window, and in the center of the room is a table with two chairs. Against the rear wall, stage left of the door, is a desk, and on the desk are a phone, a newspaper, a radio, and a movie magazine.

A full moon shines in the window. The two rooms are kept immaculately.

The bedroom is smaller than the living room. There is a bed with its headboard against the stage left wall. A small table stands by the bed. Right center is a chair for a vanity, and a dresser stands against the upstage wall, stage left of the door. Upstage left is a closet with dresses hanging in it.
In the living room Mrs. Watts is sitting in the rocking chair, rocking back and forth. She lives in the apartment with her son, Ludie, and her daughter-in-law, Jessie Mae.

The lights are out in the bedroom, and we can't see much. Jessie Mae is asleep in bed. Ludie sits on the edge of the bed. He slips out of the room.

Mrs. Watts continues to rock back and forth in the chair. She doesn't hear Ludie. She hums a hymn to herself, "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus." Then she hears Ludie.

Ludie has on pajamas and a robe. Ludie has had a difficult life. He had been employed as an accountant until his health broke down. He was unable to work for two years. His mother and his wife are both dependent on him, and their small savings were depleted during his illness. Now he has started working again but at a very small salary.

Ludie sneaks into the living room and picks up a book from the desk. He is about to sneak out.

MRS. WATTS. Don't be afraid of makin' noise, Sonny. I'm awake.
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. Pretty night.
LUDIE. Sure is.
MRS. WATTS. Couldn't you sleep?
LUDIE. No, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. Why couldn't you sleep?
LUDIE. I just couldn't. (Mrs. Watts turns away from Ludie to look out the window again. She starts her rocking once more and hums her hymn to herself. She is opening and closing her hands nervously.) Couldn't you sleep?
MRS. WATTS. No. I haven't been to bed at all. (Outside the window and in the street we hear a car's brakes grind to a sudden stop.)
LUDIE. There's going to be a bad accident at that corner one of these days.
MRS. WATTS. I wouldn't be surprised. I think the whole state of Texas is going to meet its death on the highways. (Pause.) I don't see what pleasure they get drivin' these cars as fast as they do. Do you?
LUDIE. No, Ma’am. *(A pause. Mrs. Watts goes back to her humming and her rocking.)* But there’s a lot of things I don’t understand. Never did and never will, I guess. *(A pause.)*

MRS. WATTS. Is Jessie Mae asleep?

LUDIE. Yes, Ma’am. That’s why I thought I’d better come out here. I got to tossin’ an’ turnin’ so I was afraid I was gonna wake up Jessie Mae. *(A pause.)*

MRS. WATTS. You’re not worryin’ about your job, are you, Sonny?

LUDIE. *(He takes a chair from the table and sits next to his mother.)* No, Ma’am. I don’t think so. Everybody seems to like me there. I’m thinking about askin’ for a raise.

MRS. WATTS. You should, hard as you work.

LUDIE. Why couldn’t you sleep, Mama?

MRS. WATTS. Because there’s a full moon. *(She rocks back and forth, opening and closing her hands.)* I never could sleep when there was a full moon. Even back in Bountiful when I’d been working out in the fields all day, and I’d be so tired I’d think my legs would give out on me, let there be a full moon and I’d just toss the night through. I’ve given up trying to sleep on nights like this. I just sit and watch out the window and think my thoughts. I used to love to look out the window back at Bountiful. Once when you were little and there was a full moon, I woke you up and dressed you and took you for a walk with me. Do you remember?

LUDIE. No, Ma’am.

MRS. WATTS. You don’t?

LUDIE. No, Ma’am.

MRS. WATTS. I do. I remember just like it was yesterday, I dressed you and took you outside and there was an old dog howlin’ away off somewhere and you got scared an’ started cryin’ an’ I said, “Son, why are you cryin’?” You said someone had told you that when a dog howled a person was dyin’ some place. I held you close to me, because you were tremblin’ with fear. An’ then you asked me to explain to you about dyin’, an’ I said you were too young to worry about things like that for a long time to come. *(A pause. She looks at Ludie. She sees he is lost in his own thoughts.)* A penny for your thoughts.

LUDIE. Ma’am?

MRS. WATTS. A penny for your thoughts.

LUDIE. I didn’t have any, Mama. *(She goes back to her rocking.)* I wish we had a yard here. Part of my trouble is that I get no exercise. *(A pause.)* Funny the things you think about when you can’t sleep. I was trying to think of the song I used to like to hear you
sing back home. I'd always laugh when you'd sing it.
MRS. WATTS. Which song was that, Son?
LUDIE. I don't remember the name. I just remember I'd always
laugh when you'd sing it. (A pause. Mrs. Watts thinks a moment.)
MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes. That old song. (She thinks for another
moment.) What was the name of it?
LUDIE. I don't know. (A pause.)
MRS. WATTS. Let's see. Oh, I hate not to be able to think of
something. It's on the tip of my tongue. (A pause. She thinks. She
sings the song.)
Hush little baby, don't say a word.
Mama's gonna buy you a mockin' bird.
And if that mockin' bird don't sing,
Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring.
I used to think I was gonna buy you the world back in those days.
I remember remarking that to my Papa. He said the world can't be
bought. I didn't rightly understand what he meant then. (She sud-
denly turns to him, taking his hand.) Ludie. (He looks at her, almost
afraid of the question she intends to ask. She sees his fear and decides
not to ask it. She lets go of his hand.) Nothin'. Nothin'. (A pause.)
Would you like me to get you some hot milk?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am. If you don't mind.
MRS. WATTS. I don't mind at all. (She gets up out of her chair and
starts to exit to the kitchen. She begins to sing.)
Hush little baby, don't say a word.
Mama's gonna buy you a mockin' bird.
And if that mockin' bird don't sing,
Mama's gonna buy you a diamond ring.
(Jessie Mae, in the bedroom, wakes up. She gets out of bed and puts on
a dressing gown.
JESSIE MAE. (From the bedroom.) Ludie! Ludie!
LUDIE. Come in, Jessie Mae. Mama's not asleep.
MRS. WATTS. You want butter and pepper and salt in it?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am, if it's not too much trouble.
MRS. WATTS. No trouble at all. (Exits to hallway.)
JESSIE MAE. (From the bedroom.) Ludie. (Jessie Mae comes out of
the bedroom into the living room. She immediately turns on the lights.)
Why don't you turn on the lights? What's the sense of sitting
around in the dark? I don't know what woke me up. I was sleeping
as sound as a log. All of a sudden I woke up and looked over in bed
and you weren't there. Where is your mama?
LUDIE. In the kitchen.
JESSIE MAE. What’s she doing out there?
LUDIE. Fixing some hot milk for me.
JESSIE MAE. (She glances out the hallway.) Putter, putter, putter. Honestly! Couldn’t you sleep?
LUDIE. Uh-uh.
JESSIE MAE. How do you expect to work tomorrow if you don’t get your sleep, Ludie?
LUDIE. I’m hopin’ the hot milk will make me sleepy. I slept last night. I don’t know what got into me tonight.
JESSIE MAE. You didn’t sleep the night before last.
LUDIE. I know. But I slept the night before that.
JESSIE MAE. I don’t think your mama has even been to bed. (Mrs. Watts comes in from the hallway with the milk.) What’s the matter with you that you can’t sleep, Mother Watts?
MRS. WATTS. It’s a full moon, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. What’s that got to do with it?
MRS. WATTS. I never could sleep when there’s a full moon.
JESSIE MAE. That’s just your imagination. (Mrs. Watts doesn’t answer. She hands Ludie the hot milk.) I don’t know what’s the matter with you all. I never had trouble sleepin’ in my life. I guess I have a clear conscience. (Jessie Mae picks up a movie magazine from the desk.) The only time that I remember having had any trouble sleeping was the night I spent out at Bountiful. The mosquitoes like to have chewed me up. I never saw such mosquitoes. Regular gallow nippers. Mother Watts, where did you put that recipe that Rosella gave me on the phone today?
MRS. WATTS. What recipe was that, Jessie Mae?
JESSIE MAE. What recipe was that? She only gave me one. The one I wrote down while I was talkin’ to Rosella this mornin’. You remember, I asked you to find me a pencil.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, I remember something about it.
JESSIE MAE. Then I handed it to you and asked you to put it away on the top of my dresser.
MRS. WATTS. Jessie Mae, I don’t remember you havin’ given me any recipe.
JESSIE MAE. Well, I did.
MRS. WATTS. I certainly have no recollection of it.
JESSIE MAE. You don’t?
MRS. WATTS. No, Ma’am.
JESSIE MAE. I swear, Mother Watts, you just don’t have any
memory at all anymore.
MRS. WATTS. Jessie Mae, I think I …
JESSIE MAE. I gave it to you this mornin’ in this very room and I said to please put it on my dresser and you said I will and went holding it in your hand.
MRS. WATTS. I did?
JESSIE MAE. Yes, you did.
MRS. WATTS. Did you look on your dresser?
JESSIE MAE. Yes, ma’am.
MRS. WATTS. And it wasn’t there?
JESSIE MAE. No, ma’am. I looked just before I went to bed.
MRS. WATTS. Oh. Well, let me look around. (She gets up and goes out the door into the hallway.)
JESSIE MAE. I swear. Have you noticed how forgetful she is getting? (Jessie Mae goes over to a small radio on the desk and turns it on. The radio plays a tune.) I think her memory is definitely going. Honestly, it just gets on my nerves. We’re just gonna have to get out a little more, Ludie. No wonder you can’t sleep. You get up in the morning, you go to work, you come home, you have your supper, read the paper, and then go right off to bed. Every couple I know goes out three to four times a week. I know we couldn’t afford it before, so I kept quiet about it. But now you are working again I don’t think a picture show once or twice a week would break us. We don’t have a car. We don’t go to nightclubs. We have to do something.
LUDIE. OK. Why don’t we go out one night this week?
JESSIE MAE. I mean, I think we have to. I was talkin’ to Rosella about it this morning on the phone and she said she just didn’t see how we stood it. Well, I said, Rosella, we have Mother Watts and it’s hard for us to leave her alone.
LUDIE. When did you and Rosella get friendly again?
JESSIE MAE. This morning. She just all of a sudden called me up on the telephone. She said she would quit being mad if I would. I said shucks, I wasn’t mad in the first place. She was the one that was mad. I told her I was plain-spoken and said exactly what I felt and people will just have to take me as I am or leave me alone. I said furthermore, I had told her the truth when I remarked that the beauty parlor must have seen her coming a long way down the road when they charged her good money for that last permanent they gave her. She said she agreed with me now entirely and had stopped patronizing that beauty shop. (A pause. She goes back to her movie
Rosella found out definitely that she can’t have any children. (Mrs. Watts comes into the living room. To Mrs. Watts:) Walk, don’t run. (Mrs. Watts looks around the room for the recipe. A pause.) You know your mother’s pension check didn’t come today. It’s the eighteenth. I swear it was due. I just can’t understand the government. Always late. (Looking up from her reading — then to Mrs. Watts:) Did you find it?

MRS. WATTS. Not yet.

JESSIE MAE. Well, then forget about it. Look for it in the morning.

MRS. WATTS. No, I am going to look for it until I find it. (Mrs. Watts goes out of the room.)

JESSIE MAE. Honestly, Ludie, she’s so stubborn. (The radio is playing a song like Johnny Ray’s version of “Cry.”*) I just love this song and this singer. I could just listen to him all day. (Jessie Mae turns up the radio. She begins to sing with the singer. There is an immediate knocking upstairs. She is very angry.) Now what are they knocking about? Do you consider this on too loud?

LUDIE. No sense in arguing with them, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. They’d like it if we didn’t breathe.

LUDIE. Well, it is kinda late. (Ludie turns the radio off. Jessie Mae sits at the table. Ludie goes to the rocking chair and sits.)

JESSIE MAE. Who played the captain in Mutiny on the Bounty?

LUDIE. Search me.

JESSIE MAE. They are running a contest in here but I never saw such hard questions. (A pause. She looks at Ludie.) Rosella said Jim used to have trouble sleepin’. She said a man told him to lie in bed and count backwards and that would cure him. He tried it and she said it did. She said you start with a hundred and instead of going forward you go backwards. One hundred, ninety-nine, ninety-eight, ninety-seven, ninetysix, ninety-five ... She said it would just knock him out.

LUDIE. Jessie Mae, maybe we can take in a baseball game one night this week. The series is getting exciting. I think Houston has the best team they’ve had in a long time. I’d sure like to be there when they play Shreveport. (Pause.) I used to play baseball back at Bountiful. I used to rather play baseball than eat, when I was a kid.

JESSIE MAE. Come on, let’s go to bed. (She stands next to Ludie still in the rocking chair.) Nope, they missed each other.

* See Special Note on Songs and Recordings on copyright page.
Six cars smashed up on the freeway to Galveston I read yesterday in the Chronicle. One right on top of another. I bet they were all drunk. Been down to Galveston. Gamblin’, likely. I think the whole of Houston goes to Galveston gambling and drinking. Everybody but us. I don’t see how some people hold down a job the ways they drink and gamble. Do you? (Ludie gets up from the rocking chair and replaces the chair he used to sit next to his mother earlier. Jessie Mae stands next to him at the table.)

LUDIE. No ... I don’t.

JESSIE MAE. That’s why I told Rosella I could hardly keep from callin’ up your boss and givin’ him a piece of my mind for payin’ you the salary he pays you. Like I said to Rosella, you’re so steady and so conscientious and they just take advantage of your good nature. Maybe you’re too steady, Ludie. (A pause, Mrs. Watts goes into the bedroom and begins a systematic search for the recipe. To Ludie:) Rosella was glad to hear you’re workin’ again. She said she was cleanin’ out some drawers night before last and had come across some pictures of you and me she’d taken when we started goin’ together. I said I don’t care to see them. No, thank you. (Mrs. Watts is looking, now, in Jessie Mae’s dresser drawer. She finds the recipe.) The passin’ of time makes me sad. That’s why I never want a house with the room to keep a lot of junk in to remind you of things you’re better off forgetting. If we ever get any money you wouldn’t catch me buying a house. I’d move into a hotel and have me room service. (Mrs. Watts comes into the living room, holding the recipe.)

MRS. WATTS. Here’s your recipe, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. Thank you, but I told you not to bother. Where did you find it? (She takes the recipe.)

MRS. WATTS. In your room.

JESSIE MAE. In my room?

MRS. WATTS. Yes, ma’am. (She sits in the rocking chair.)

JESSIE MAE. Where in my room?

MRS. WATTS. In your dresser drawer. Left-hand side.

JESSIE MAE. In my dresser drawer?

MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma’am. I looked on top of the dresser and it wasn’t there an’ something said to me ...

JESSIE MAE. Mother Watts.

MRS. WATTS. Ma’am.

JESSIE MAE. Ludie, how many times have I asked her never to go into my dresser drawer?

MRS. WATTS. I thought you wanted me to find your recipe?
JESSIE MAE. Well, I don't want you to go into my dresser drawers. I'd like a little privacy if you don't mind.
MRS. WATTS. Yes Ma'am.
JESSIE MAE. And just let me never catch you looking in them again. For anything. I can't stand people snoopin' in my dresser drawers. *(Mrs. Watts grabs the paper from Jessie Mae and throws it on the floor. She is hurt and angry.)*
MRS. WATTS. All right. Then the next time you find it yourself.
JESSIE MAE. Pick that recipe up, if you please.
MRS. WATTS. Pick it up yourself. I have no intention of picking it up.
JESSIE MAE. *(Shouting.)* You pick that up!
MRS. WATTS. *(Shouting back.)* I won't.
LUDIE. Mama.
JESSIE MAE. *(Shouting even louder.)* You will!
LUDIE. Jessie Mae. For god sakes! You're both acting like children. It's one-thirty in the morning.
JESSIE MAE. You tell her to pick that up.
MRS. WATTS. I won't.
JESSIE MAE. *(Screaming.)* You will! This is my house and you'll do as you're told. *(Ludie walks out of the room. He goes into his bedroom. Jessie Mae crosses to Mrs. Watts.)* Now, I hope you're satisfied. You've got Ludie good and upset. He won't sleep for the rest of the night. What do you want to do? Get him sick again? *(There is a knocking upstairs. Jessie Mae screams up at them.)* Shut up. *(To Mrs. Watts)* You're going to go too far with me one of these days, old lady. *(Jessie Mae walks out of the room. Mrs. Watts is ready to scream back at her, but she controls the impulse. She takes her anger out in rocking violently back and forth. Jessie Mae throws open the door to the bedroom and comes in. Ludie is sitting on the edge of the bed. She marches over to the vanity and sits.)* I just can't stand this, Ludie. I'm at the end of my rope. I won't take being insulted by your mother or anyone else. You hear that? *(Ludie rises and stands uncomfortably for a moment. He turns and goes out the bedroom door and into the living room. He stands by the living room door, looking at his mother. She stops her rocking. He picks up the recipe.)*
LUDIE. Mama. Will you give this recipe to Jessie Mae?
MRS. WATTS. All right, Ludie. *(She takes the recipe. She starts out of the living room and Ludie stops her. He obviously hates asking the next question.)*
LUDIE. Mama, will you please tell Jessie Mae you're sorry?
MRS. WATTS. Ludie...
LUDIE. Please, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. All right, Ludie.
LUDIE. Jessie Mae. *Mrs. Watts goes out of the room to the bedroom.*
JESSIE MAE. What do you want, Ludie?
LUDIE. Mama has something to say to you.
JESSIE MAE. What is it? *Mrs. Watts hands her the recipe. Ludie watches from the bedroom door.*
MRS. WATTS. I'm sorry, Jessie Mae, for throwing the recipe on the floor.
JESSIE MAE. I accept your apology. *Mrs. Watts goes out, reappears in living room. Calling:* Come on, Ludie. Let's all go to bed.
LUDIE. All right. *He starts for the living room door.*
JESSIE MAE. *Calling:* And you'd better go to bed too, Mother Watts. A woman your age ought to have better sense than to sit up half the night.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma'am.
LUDIE. Good night, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. Good night, Ludie. *He waits until his mother sits in the rocking chair and then he turns the lights off in the living room and goes into the bedroom, taking his book with him. Mrs. Watts buries her face in her hands. She is crying.*
LUDIE. *Now in bedroom.* Jessie Mae. I know it's hard and all, but for your own sake, I just think sometimes if you'd try to ignore certain things.
JESSIE MAE. Ignore? How can you ignore something when it's done right under your very nose?
LUDIE. Look, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. I know her, Ludie. She does things just to aggravate me. Well, I hope she's happy now. She aggravated me. Now you take her hymn singin'. She never starts until I come into a room. And her poutin'! Why sometimes she goes a whole day just sittin' and starin' out the window. How would you like to spend twenty-four hours a day shut up with a woman that either sang hymns or looked out the window and pouted? You couldn't ignore it and don't tell me you could. No. There's only one thing to do and that's to say quit it, every time she does something like that until she stops for good and all.
LUDIE. I'm not sayin' it's easy, Jessie Mae. I'm only sayin' ...
JESSIE MAE. Well, let's change the subject. I don't want to get mad all over again. She keeps me so nervous never knowing when I
leave whether she is going to try to run off to that old town or not.
LUDIE. Well, she's not going to run off again, Jessie Mae. She promised me she wouldn't
JESSIE MAE. What she promised and ...
LUDIE. Now, she can't run off. Her pension check hasn't come. You said yourself. *(Mrs. Watts hears them. She lifts up the mattress on the day bed and takes out the pension check. She sits for a moment, looking at it, trying to decide whether to take this in to Jessie Mae. She wraps it in a handkerchief.)*
JESSIE MAE. Well, I am not too sure that that check hasn't come. Sometimes I think she hides that check and I tell you right now if it's not here tomorrow I am going to search this house from top to bottom.
LUDIE. Well, I know the check will come tomorrow.
JESSIE MAE. I hope so. Rosella says she thinks it's terrible how close I have to stay here. Well, I told Rosella ever since your mother started that running off business I don't feel easy going. I used to love it when I could get up from the breakfast table with an easy mind and go downtown and shop all morning, then get a sandwich and a coke, or a salad at the cafeteria, see a picture show in the afternoon and then come home, that was fun. Shhh. I think I hear your mother still up. *(Mrs. Watts has decided not to give them the check. She is now sitting in her rocking chair, rocking and looking out the window. Ludie comes into the living room.)*
LUDIE. Mama. Are you still up?
MRS. WATTS. Yes. I don't feel like sleeping, Ludie. You go on back to bed and don't worry about me.
LUDIE. All right, Mama. *(He goes back to the bedroom. They are both on the bed.)*
JESSIE MAE. Was she still up?
LUDIE. Yes.
JESSIE MAE. I knew it. I never get to go out of the house except for the beauty parlor. I'm not giving that up for anyone. I told Rosella that. I said no one was more faithful to a husband than I was to Ludie, when he was sick, but even then I went out to the beauty parlor once a week. I mean, I had to.
LUDIE. I wanted you to.
JESSIE MAE. I know you did. *(A pause.)* That was a good supper we had tonight, wasn't it?
LUDIE. Uh. Huh. Mama is a good cook.
JESSIE MAE. Yes. She is. I'll have to hand that to her. And an eco-
nomical one. Well, she enjoys cooking. I guess you're born to enjoy it. I could never see how anyone could get any pleasure standing over a hot stove, but she seems to. (A pause.) Rosella asked me if I realized that it would be fifteen years this August since we were married. I hadn't realized it. Had you?

LUDIE. (Ludie thinks for a moment. He counts back over the years.) That's right, Jessie Mae. It'll be fifteen years this August.

JESSIE MAE. I hate to think of time going that fast. (A pause.) I never will forget the night I came home and told Rosella you had proposed. I thought you were the handsomest man alive.

LUDIE. And I thought you were the prettiest girl.

JESSIE MAE. Did you, Ludie? I guess I did have my good features. People used to tell me I looked like a cross between Joan Crawford and Clara Bow. And I thought you were the smartest man in the world. I still do. The thing that burns me up is that you don't let other people know it.

LUDIE. Jessie Mae, I've just got to start makin' some more money. I'm thinkin' about askin' for a raise. I'm entitled to it. I've been there six months now. I haven't been late or sick once. I've got to do it. I've got to ask for a raise tomorrow. I'm gonna walk into Mr. Douglas' office the first thing in the mornin' and I'm just gonna take the bull by the horns and I'm gonna say, Mr. Douglas, I've got to have a raise starting as of now. We can't live on what you pay us. We have mother's pension check to help us out and if we didn't have that I don't know what we'd do.

JESSIE MAE. Well, I would.

LUDIE. I don't understand it, Jessie Mae. I try not to be bitter. I try not to ... Oh, I don't know. All I know is that a man works eight years with a company. He saves a little money. He gets sick and has to spend two years in bed watching his savings all go. Then start all over again with a new company. Of course, the doctor says I shouldn't worry about it. He says I've got to take things like they come. Every day, and that's what I try to do. But how can you help worryin' when you end up every month holding your breath to see if you're gonna make ends meet.

JESSIE MAE. You can't help being nervous. A lot of people get nervous. (She picks up the book.) What's this book?

LUDIE. I bought it at the drugstore coming home from the office.

JESSIE MAE. How to Become an Executive. What's that about?

LUDIE. It tells you how to prepare yourself for an executive position. It looks like there might be some helpful things in it. (Ludie
takes the book and leans back against the headboard of the bed again. Jessie Mae restlessly looks around the room.)

JESSIE MAE. You sleepy, Ludie?
LUDIE. No, not yet.
JESSIE MAE. I'm not either. I wish I had something good to eat. I wish the drugstore was open. We could get us some ice cream. I wish I had my movie magazine.
LUDIE. Where is it?
JESSIE MAE. In the living room.
LUDIE. I'll get it.
JESSIE MAE. No honey, I don't want to get your mother awake. You rest. Rosella cried like her heart would break when she told me she couldn't have children. (A pause.) She wanted to know how I stood it not havin' children. I said I don't know about Ludie 'cause you can't always tell what he feels, but I stand it by never thinking about it. I have my own philosophy about those things, anyway. I feel things like that are in the hands of the Lord. Don't you, Ludie?
LUDIE. I guess so.
JESSIE MAE. I've been as good a wife to you as I know how. But if the Lord doesn't want to give us children, all the worryin' in the world won't help. Do you think?
LUDIE. No, it won't.
JESSIE MAE. Anyway, like I told Rosella, I don't have the money to be runnin' around the doctors about it, even if I wanted to.
LUDIE. Jessie Mae, if I get a raise the first thing I want you to do is buy yourself a new dress.
JESSIE MAE. Well, thank you, Ludie. Besides, when you were sick what would I have done if I'd had a bunch of kids to worry me? What are you thinking about?
LUDIE. This book.
JESSIE MAE. Ludie, do you ever think back over the past?
LUDIE. No.
JESSIE MAE. I don't either. I started today a little when Rosella brought up that fifteen-year business. But I think it's morbid. Your mother does that all the time.
LUDIE. My boss likes me. Billy Davidson told me today he was positive he did. Billy has been there ten years now, you know. He said he thought he liked my work a lot. (A pause.) Feelin' sleepy now?
JESSIE MAE. Uh-huh. Are you?
LUDIE. (He gets off the bed.) Yes, I am. Good night.
JESSIE MAE. Good night. (Mrs. Watts is rocking back and forth in her rocker now, working her hands nervously. Ludie goes into the living room.)
LUDIE. Mama.
MRS. WATTS. I’m all right, Ludie. I’m just still not sleepy.
LUDIE. You’re sure you’re feelin’ all right?
MRS. WATTS. Yes, I am.
LUDIE. Good night. (He starts out of the room. She turns to him.)
MRS. WATTS. Ludie, please, I want to go home.
LUDIE. Mama, you know I can’t make a living there. We have to live in Houston.
MRS. WATTS. Ludie, son, I can’t stay here any longer. I want to go home.
LUDIE. I beg you not to ask me that again. There’s nothing I can do about it. (Ludie goes back to the bedroom. He gets into bed.)
JESSIE MAE. Was she still up?
LUDIE. Uh-huh. Good night.
JESSIE MAE. Good night. (Mrs. Watts quietly takes a suitcase down from the top of the wardrobe. She waits a moment, then takes some clothing from the drawer of the cupboard and puts them in the suitcase, and then she quietly closes it and puts the suitcase next to the wardrobe. She then goes back to her chair, sits, and is rocking back and forth as the lights fade.)
SCENE TWO

As the lights are brought up, Mrs. Watts is discovered sleeping in the rocker. Jessie Mae is sitting on the edge of the bed, putting on stockings. Ludie is offstage in the bathroom, washing. Mrs. Watts awakens, and hides the check under the rug. She looks out the window to see the time, runs over to Ludie's bedroom to see if he's awake, and runs into the kitchen to put some water on for coffee, calling as she goes.

MRS. WATTS. Ludie, it's eight-fifteen by the drugstore clock ...
LUDIE. (Calling back from offstage.) Yes'm. Good morning, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. Good morning, son. (Ludie enters with a cup of coffee. Mrs. Watts is back in the living room with a breakfast tray and dishes, singing a hymn to herself.)
LUDIE. Did you get any sleep at all last night?
MRS. WATTS. Yes. Don't worry about me. (She continues her hymn singing. Jessie Mae comes into the living room.)
JESSIE MAE. It's too early for hymn singing.
MRS. WATTS. Good morning, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. Good morning, Mother Watts. (Jessie Mae turns on the radio and we hear a popular song. She goes out to the bedroom. Calling:) Ludie, turn that radio down, please, before they start knocking again.
LUDIE. (At the radio.) Would you like me to turn it off?
JESSIE MAE. (Calling.) Oh you might as well.
MRS. WATTS. I'll have your toast ready for you in a minute. (Mrs. Watts goes running out to the kitchen.)
JESSIE MAE. Walk, don't run. I've just got to get me out of this house today, if no more than to ride downtown and back on the bus.
LUDIE. (Finishing dressing.) Why don't you?
JESSIE MAE. If Mother Watts' pension check comes I'll go to the beauty parlor. I'm just as tense. I think I've got a trip to the beauty parlor comin' to me.
LUDIE. You ought to go if the check comes or not. It doesn't cost that much. (Mrs. Watts comes in with the toast.)
JESSIE MAE. Mother Watts, will you skip down and see if the
mail has come yet? Your pension check ought to be here and I want to get me to that beauty parlor.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma'am. (Mrs. Watts goes out for the mail at outside door. Jessie Mae looks after her suspiciously.)
JESSIE MAE. Ludie, she's actin' silent again. Don't you think she's actin' silent again?
LUDIE. I hadn't noticed. (He take a last swig of his coffee.)
JESSIE MAE. Well, she definitely is. You can say what you please, but to me it's always a sure sign she's gonna try and run off when she starts actin' silent.
LUDIE. She's not going to run off again, Jessie Mae. She promised me last time she wouldn't. (He starts up from the table.)
JESSIE MAE. She just better not. What do you want, Ludie?
LUDIE. I want more coffee.
JESSIE MAE. Well, keep your seat. I'll get it.
LUDIE. No, I'll get it.
JESSIE MAE. No. I want to get it. You'll have a tiring day ahead of you. Now rest while you can. (She goes out to the hallway for coffee. Mrs. Watts enters.)
MRS. WATTS. Where's Jessie Mae?
LUDIE. In the kitchen.
MRS. WATTS. (Calling out.) There was no mail, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. (Answering back from the kitchen.) Had it been delivered yet?
MRS. WATTS. I don't know.
JESSIE MAE. Did you look in the other boxes to see if there was mail?
MRS. WATTS. No, Ma'am. I didn't think to. (Mrs. Watts goes to the bathroom.)
LUDIE. (Hollering as he goes to the bedroom for his coat and hat.) I'll look on my way out. Why don't we have an early supper tonight? Six-thirty if that's all right with you and Mama. After supper I'll take you both to the picture show. (Jessie Mae comes in the bedroom with coffee.)
JESSIE MAE. That's fine. What would you like to see, Ludie?
LUDIE. Whatever you want to see, Jessie Mae. You know best about picture shows. (Half to himself as he goes back to the living room followed by Jessie Mae.) I want to get to the office a little early this morning. Mr. Douglas is usually in by nine. I'd like a chance to talk to him before the others get there. I think I'm doin' the right thing, askin' for a raise. Don't you?
JESSIE MAE. Sure. I think I'll phone the beauty parlor for an appointment. I hope I can still get one. *(She goes to the phone on the desk. Mrs. Watts has been making up the bed.)* Hello, Rita. This is Jessie Mae Watts. Can I have an appointment for my hair? The usual. Uh-Huh. *(She laughs.)* Four o'clock. Nothin' earlier. All right. See you then. *(She hangs up the phone.)* Well, I can't get an appointment until four o'clock.

LUDIE. I'm ready to go. Wish me luck on my raise.

JESSIE MAE. Good luck, Ludie. *(He kisses her on the cheek. He calls into the bedroom.)*

LUDIE. Goodbye, Mama.

MRS. WATTS. Good-bye, son.

JESSIE MAE. Holler if there's any mail down there so we won't be runnin' up and down lookin' for mail that won't be there.

LUDIE. *(Calling back.)* All right. *(Exits outside door.)*

JESSIE MAE. *(Calling into the bedroom.)* That pension check should have been here yesterday, shouldn't it, Mother Watts?

MRS. WATTS. *(Calling back and trying to seem unconcerned.)* I reckon so.

LUDIE. *(Calling from offstage downstairs.)* No mail for us.

JESSIE MAE. All right! I can't understand about that pension check, can you?

MRS. WATTS. No, Ma'am. *(Jessie Mae casually takes Mrs. Watts' purse and looks inside. Finding nothing, she closes it and puts it back.)*

JESSIE MAE. I sure hope it isn't lost. You know you're so absent-minded, you don't think you put it around the room someplace by mistake and forgot all about it. *(Mrs. Watts comes into the living room.)*

MRS. WATTS. I don't believe so. *(Jessie Mae looks around the room. Mrs. Watts watches anxiously everything she does.)*

JESSIE MAE. You know you said you lost that check once before and it took us five days to find it. I came across it under this radio.

MRS. WATTS. I don't think I did that again, Jessie Mae. *(Jessie Mae begins a halfhearted search of the room, and when she gets to the corner of the rug where the check is hidden, she stoops as if to look under it, but it is only a strand of thread that has caught her attention. Jessie Mae gives up the search.)*

JESSIE MAE. What could I do 'til four o'clock? What are you gonna do today? *(Jessie Mae goes into the bedroom.)*

MRS. WATTS. Well, I'm going to give the kitchen a good cleaning and put fresh paper on the shelves and clean the icebox.
JESSIE MAE. Well, I have a lot of things I have to do. I got some
drawers I can straighten up. Or maybe I'll put some flowers on that
red dress of mine. If I wear the red dress tonight. I really don't know
yet which dress I'm going to wear. Well, if I wear my red dress
tonight, I'll wear this print one to the beauty parlor. *(She has taken
a dress out of her closet and puts it on. Mrs. Watts takes out the check
from under the rug and places it inside her dress, then starts into the
kitchen. Jessie Mae hears her running and calls to her.)* Mother Watts!
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma'am.
JESSIE MAE. There you go again. You never walk when you can
run. You know it's none of my business, and I know you don't like
me to suggest anything, but I don't think a woman your age should
run around a three-room apartment like a cyclone. It's rea-
really not necessary, Mother Watts. You never walk when you can run.
I wish for once you would listen to me.
MRS. WATTS. I'm listening, Jessie Mae. *(Jessie Mae comes into the
living room.)*
JESSIE MAE. You're not listening to a word. Mother Watts, are
you feeling all right? You look a little pale.
MRS. WATTS. I'm feeling fine, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. Do you need anything from the drugstore?
MRS. WATTS. Just let me think a moment, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. Because if you do, I'd walk over to the drugstore
and get me a coke. We don't need toothpaste. We don't need tooth-
brushes. I got a bottle of Listerine yesterday. Can you think of any-
thing we need from the drugstore?
MRS. WATTS. Did you get that nail polish you mentioned?
JESSIE MAE. Oh, yes I have that. I hate to wait around here until
four o'clock. I think I'm gonna call Rosella and tell her to meet me
at the drugstore for a coke. *(She goes to the phone and dials. Mrs.
Watts is humming to herself.)* Will you stop that hymn singing? Do
you want me to jump right out of my skin? You know what hymns
do to my nerves. *(Mrs. Watts stops her humming.)* And don't pout.
You know I can't stand pouting.
MRS. WATTS. I didn't mean to pout, Jessie Mae. I only meant to
be silent.
JESSIE MAE. *(Hangs up the phone.)* Wouldn't you know it. She's
not home. I bet she's at the drugstore right now. I think I'll go on
over to the drugstore and just take a chance on Rosella's being
there. *(Jessie Mae begins to put her hat on in the bedroom. Mrs.
Watts has gotten a hand sweeper from the kitchen and is sweeping*
around the room.) I can’t make up my mind what movie I want to see tonight. Well, I’ll ask Rosella. You know when I first came to Houston, I went to see three picture shows in one day. I went to the Kirby in the morning, and the Metropolitan in the afternoon, and the Majestic that night. People don’t go see picture shows the way they used to. (Jessie Mae comes back into the living room.) Well, I’m ready. Will you stop that noise for a minute. I’m nervous. I just want you to promise me one thing. That you won’t put a foot out of this house and start that Bountiful business again. You’ll kill Ludie if he has to chase all over Houston looking for you. And I’m warning you. The next time you run off I’m calling the police. I don’t care what Ludie says. (Jessie Mae starts out of the room.) If Rosella calls just tell her I’m at the drugstore. (Mrs. Watts has done her best to continue dusting the furniture during the latter speech, but she has been getting physically weaker and weaker. Finally, in a last desperate attempt to keep Jessie Mae from noticing her weakness, she grabs hold again of the chair, trying to support herself. She sways and falls onto the day bed, just as Jessie Mae is ready to leave the room.) Mother Watts … (Jessie Mae runs to her. She is very frightened.)

MRS. WATTS. (Trying desperately to control herself.) I’m all right, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. Is it your heart?

MRS. WATTS. No. Just a sinkin’ spell. Just let me sit down for a minute and I’ll be all right.

JESSIE MAE. Can I get you some water?

MRS. WATTS. Thank you. (Jessie Mae runs into the kitchen for water.)

JESSIE MAE. (Offstage, from the kitchen.) Do you want me to call a doctor?

MRS. WATTS. No, Ma’am.

JESSIE MAE. Do you want me to call Ludie?

MRS. WATTS. No, Ma’am. (Jessie Mae reenters the living room with a glass of water. Mrs. Watts drinks it.)

JESSIE MAE. Are you feelin’ better?

MRS. WATTS. Yes, I am, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. Do you think you ought to get up so soon?

MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma’am. I’m feeling much better already. I’ll just sit back down.

JESSIE MAE. All right. I’ll sit here for a while and keep you company. (Mrs. Watts sits on the day bed. Jessie Mae sits in a chair.) How
do you feel now?
MRS. WATTS. Better.
JESSIE MAE. That's good. It always scares the daylights out of me
when you get one of those sinkin' spells. Of course, like I told you
this morning, you wouldn't be having these sinkin' spells if you'd
stop this running around. Well, it's your heart. If you don't want to
take care of it no one can make you. But I tell you right now all I
need is to have an invalid on my hands. I wish you'd think of
Ludie. He's got enough to worry him without your gettin' down
flat on your back. (Phone rings. She goes to it.) Hello? Oh, hello,
Rosella. I tried to call you earlier. Oh. You're at the drugstore.
That's what I just figured. Well, I'd like to, Rosella, but Mother
Watts has had a sinking spell again and ...
MRS. WATTS. Jessie Mae!
JESSIE MAE. (To Rosella.) Hold on ...
MRS. WATTS. You go on, Jessie Mae. I'm gonna be all right. I'll
just rest here. There's nothing you can do for me.
JESSIE MAE. Are you sure.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Jessie Mae, I'm sure.
JESSIE MAE. Well, all right then. Rosella, Mother Watts says she
won't need me here. So I think I will come over for a little while.
All right. I'll see you in a few minutes. Good-bye. (She hangs up the
phone.) Now you're sure you'll be all right?
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma'am.
JESSIE MAE. Well, then I'll go on over. Now you call me at the
drugstore if you need me. You hear?
MRS. WATTS. Yes, Ma'am. (Jessie Mae goes out the entrance to the
stairs. Mrs. Watts sits for a moment. Then she slowly and weakly gets
up and goes to the door, listening. She is sure Jessie Mae has gone. She
gets her suitcase from beside the wardrobe. Then she remembers the
check, which she takes out, and sits at the table to endorse it. While
Mrs. Watts is endorsing the check, Jessie Mae comes running down the
hall to her bedroom.)
JESSIE MAE. I forgot to take any money along with me. (Jessie
Mae goes into the bedroom to get her money, which she takes from the
dresser. Mrs. Watts has just enough time to stuff the check inside her
dress, get the suitcase and put it back beside the wardrobe, and get
writing paper from the desk when Jessie Mae comes into the living
room again.) Who are you writing to?
MRS. WATTS. I thought I'd drop a line to Callie Davis, Jessie
Mae. Let her know I'm still alive.
JESSIE MAE. Why did you decide to do that all of a sudden?
MRS. WAITS. No reason. The notion just struck me.
JESSIE MAE. All right. (She starts out.) But just in case you're trying to put something over on me with that pension check, I've told Mr. Reynolds at the grocery store never to cash anything for you. (Jessie Mae exits. Mrs. Watts looks to see that Jessie Mae is gone. She picks up her purse, coat and suitcase, and puts on her hat. She looks out the window to see that Jessie Mae is on her way to the drugstore. She leans against the table, having put down her suitcase to rest. As she rests, music cue begins [choral rendition of the hymn, “There’s Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus”]. The Houston apartment begins to move Upstage, light is kept on Mrs. Watts leaning on the table. When the apartment, which is on a palette, reaches its position, a light comes up on the now bare downstage area. Mrs. Watts picks up her suitcase and heads for the light. As she steps off the palette, the music, now instrumental, goes to half-tempo. As Mrs. Watts reaches a downstage position, a bench is pushed on by an Old Man from stage right. He sets the bench in its proper position, tips his hat to Mrs. Watts and continues offstage left. As he passes, a ticket booth with the Ticket Agent inside, magically appears from stage left wing. Next, two benches and a trash can, all on a palette, slide from upstage right. All of this takes place to the music at half-tempo. Mrs. Watts stands watching. The Houston Bus Station is created around her. Walls have tracked in, hiding the Houston apartment, becoming the walls of the bus station; all somewhat miraculous — the beginning of an odyssey.)
SCENE THREE

The Old Man, who pushed on the bench, returns from Stage Left with a newspaper. He sits on the upstage bench. As he opens the newspaper, the music is replaced by the sounds of a mid-size city bus station. (The number of passengers entering and exiting throughout the scene depends on the resources of each particular production.) Full light bumps up and Thelma enters from Stage Right and crosses to the Ticket Agent.

TICKET AGENT. Yes?
THELMA. I want a ticket to Old Gulf, please.
TICKET AGENT. Yes, Ma’am. (He reaches for a ticket.) Here you are. You change busses at Harrison.
THELMA. I know. How much, please?
TICKET AGENT. Four eighty.
THELMA. Yes sir. (The Ticket Agent hands Thelma her ticket. Mrs. Watts is so busy watching the doors that she doesn’t notice it’s her turn.)
TICKET AGENT. Lady, it’s your turn. (A couple enters stage right and gets in line behind Mrs. Watts at the ticket booth.)
MRS. WATTS. Excuse me. I’d like a ticket to Bountiful, please.
TICKET AGENT. Where?
MRS. WATTS. Bountiful.
TICKET AGENT. What’s it near?
MRS. WATTS. It’s between Harrison and Cotton.
TICKET AGENT. Just a minute. (He takes a book from behind the window on a shelf. He looks inside it. A Woman enters stage left and crosses to the stage right bench. She sits down and starts reading a magazine. Mrs. Watts is again watching the doors. He looks up.) Lady.
MRS. WATTS. Oh. Yes sir.
TICKET AGENT. I can sell you a ticket to Harrison or to Cotton. But there’s no Bountiful.
MRS. WATTS Oh, yes there is, it’s between ...
TICKET AGENT. I’m sorry, lady. You say there is, but the book says there isn’t. And the book don’t lie.
MRS. WATTS. But ... I ...
TICKET AGENT. (Impatiently.) Make up your mind, lady. Cotton
or Harrison. There are other people waiting.

MRS. WATTS. Well ... Let me see ... How much is a ticket to Harrison?

TICKET AGENT. Three fifty ...

MRS. WATTS. Cotton?

TICKET AGENT. Four twenty.

MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes. Well, I'll have the one to Harrison, please.

TICKET AGENT. All right. That'll be three fifty, please.

MRS. WATTS. Yes sir. (She reaches for her pocketbook and is about to open it. She turns to the Ticket Agent.) Can you cash a pension check? You see I decided to come at the last minute and I didn't have time to stop by the grocery store.

TICKET AGENT. I'm sorry, lady. I can't cash any checks.

MRS. WATTS. It's perfectly good. It's a government check.

TICKET AGENT. I'm sorry. It's against the rules to cash checks.

MRS. WATTS. Oh, is that so? I understand. A rule is a rule. How much was that again?

TICKET AGENT. Three fifty.

MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes. Three fifty. Just a minute, sir. I've got it all here in nickels and dimes and quarters. (She opens her purse and takes a handkerchief out. The money is tied in the handkerchief. She unties it, places it on the counter, and begins to count out the amount for the ticket. She counts half aloud as she does it. She shoves a pile of silver toward the Ticket Agent.) Here. I think this is three fifty.

TICKET AGENT. Thank you. (He takes the money into his hand. She ties her handkerchief back up.)

MRS. WATTS. That's quite all right. I'm sorry to have taken up so much of your time. (She picks up her suitcase and starts off.)

TICKET AGENT. Here, lady. Don't forget your ticket. (She comes running back.)

MRS. WATTS. Oh, my heavens. Yes. I'd forget my head if it wasn't on my neck. (She takes the ticket and goes away. The couple next in line step up to the window. Mrs. Watts goes back to the entrance. She peeps out and then comes back into the bus station. She comes down to the bench. Thelma is seated there, reading. She looks up from her magazine. There is an empty space next to her. Mrs. Watts comes up to it.)

Good evening.

THELMA. Good evening.

MRS. WATTS. Is this seat taken?

THELMA. No, Ma'am.

MRS. WATTS. Are you expectin' anyone?
THELMA. No, ma'am
MRS. WATTS. May I sit here?
THELMA. Yes, ma'am. *(Mrs. Watts puts the suitcase down along the side of the bench. The couple has finished buying their tickets and the Woman exits stage left for the restroom. The Man stands stage left of the benches. Mrs. Watts looks nervously around the station. All of a sudden she jumps up.)*
MRS. WATTS. Would you watch my suitcase, honey?
THELMA. Yes, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. I'll be right back.
THELMA. Yes'm. *(Mrs. Watts goes running back towards the door to the street. Thelma watches her go for a minute and then goes back to reading her magazine. The Ticket Agent is joined by the man who is to relieve him for the night. They greet each other and the first Ticket Agent leaves the bus station. Mrs. Watts comes back to the bench. She sits down and takes a handkerchief out of her purse. She wipes her forehead.)*
MRS. WATTS. Little warm isn't it when you are rushing around?
THELMA. Yes'm.
MRS. WATTS. I had to get myself ready in the biggest kind of hurry.
THELMA. Are you going on a trip?
MRS. WATTS. Yes, I am. I'm trying to get to a town nobody ever heard of around here.
THELMA. What town is it?
MRS. WATTS. Bountiful.
THELMA. Oh.
MRS. WATTS. Did you ever hear of it?
THELMA. No.
MRS. WATTS. You see. Nobody has. Well, it's not much of a town now, I guess. I haven't seen it myself in twenty years. But it used to be quite prosperous. All they have left is a post office and a filling station and a general store. At least they did when I left.
THELMA. Do your people live there?
MRS. WATTS. No. My people are all dead except my son and his wife, Jessie Mae. They live here in the city. I'm hurrying to see Bountiful before I die. I had a sinking spell this morning. I had to climb up on the bed and rest. It was my heart.
THELMA. Do you have a bad heart?
MRS. WATTS. Well, it's not what you call a good one. Doctor says it would last as long as I needed it if I could just cut out worrying. But it seems I can't do that lately. *(She looks around the bus station again. She gets up out of her seat.)* Excuse me. Would you
keep your eye on that suitcase again?
THELMA. Yes, Ma’am. (Mrs. Watts hurries back to the entrance of
the bus station. Thelma picks up her magazine and goes back to reading. Mrs. Watts comes hurrying back to the seat. She doesn’t sit down,
but stands over by the side.) Lady. Is there anything wrong?
MRS. WATTS. No, honey. I’m just a little nervous. That’s all. (She
hurries back toward the door. This time she opens it and goes outside.
Thelma goes back to her reading. The Woman enters from stage left
and talks to the Man. Mrs. Watts comes running back in. She hurries
over to the seat and picks up the suitcase. The couple crosses stage right
to the bench and sit next to the Woman. In her confusion Mrs. Watts
drops her handkerchief on the floor. Neither she nor Thelma sees it
fall.) Say a prayer for me, honey. Good luck to you.
THELMA. Good luck to you. (Mrs. Watts goes running out toward
the restroom. Ludie and Jessie Mae come in the outside door to the bus
station. They stand a moment at the entrance, looking all around, and
Jessie Mae goes off toward the restroom. Ludie wanders slowly down
until he gets to the bench where Thelma is sitting. He pauses here, look-
ing out in front of him and to each side. Jessie Mae comes in. She walks
over to Ludie.)
LUDIE. You want to sit down, Jessie Mae?
JESSIE MAE. Yes, I do. If you want to continue looking around,
go ahead. I’ll just wait over there.
LUDIE. You checked the restroom carefully?
JESSIE MAE. Yes.
LUDIE. Want me to bring you a Coke?
JESSIE MAE. No.
LUDIE. Want me to buy you a movie magazine?
JESSIE MAE. Yes.
LUDIE. All right. I’ll be right back. (He goes back out the outside
door he came in, looking around as he goes. Jessie Mae sits down next
to Thelma. She turns to Thelma.)
JESSIE MAE. It’s warm isn’t it? (The Man crosses to the ticket booth
to talk to the Ticket Agent.) I hope you’re lucky enough not to have
to fool with any in-laws. I’ve got a mother-in-law about to drive me
crazy. At least twice a year we have to try and keep her from get-
ting on a train to go back to her hometown. Oh, she’s so stubborn.
I could just wring her neck. Her son spoils her that’s the whole
trouble. She’s just rotten spoiled. Do you live with your in-laws?
THELMA. No.
JESSIE MAE. Well, you’re lucky. They’re all stubborn. My husband
is as stubborn as she is. I told Ludie at breakfast she had that silent look, and I bet she tries to run away. But no, he said she wouldn’t, because she has promised she wouldn’t, and Ludie believes anything she says. I'm just worn out. *(The Man returns to the bench.)* I've had my fourth Coca-Cola today, just to keep my spirits up. People ask me why I don't have any children. Why? I say I've got Ludie and Mother Watts. That's all the children I need. *(Ludie comes in with a movie magazine. He comes up to Jessie Mae.)* What did you bring me? *(He shows her the magazine.)* Oh, I've seen that one. Personally, I think we're wastin' our time here. She always tries to go by train.

**LUDIE.** But she can’t go by train, Jessie Mae.

**JESSIE MAE.** She doesn’t know that.

**LUDIE.** She's bound to by now.

**JESSIE MAE.** I tell you again I think we ought to just turn this whole thing over to the police. That would scare her once and for all.

**LUDIE.** Well, I'm not going to call any police.

**JESSIE MAE.** It's for her own good. She's crazy.

**LUDIE.** *(He is very angry with her.)* Now why do you talk like that? You know Mama isn't crazy. *(A pause.)* I just wish you wouldn't say things like that.

**JESSIE MAE.** Well you better do something. Let me tell you that, or she's gonna clonk out some place. She'll get to Bountiful and die from the excitement and then we'll have all kinds of expenses bringing her body back here. Do you know what a thing like that could cost? Do you realize she had a sinkin' spell this mornin'?

**LUDIE.** I know. You've told me a hundred times. What can I do about it, Jessie Mae?

**JESSIE MAE.** I'm trying to tell you what you can do about it. Call the police.

**LUDIE.** I'm not going to call the police.

**JESSIE MAE.** Oh, you're not.

**LUDIE.** No.

**JESSIE MAE.** Then I think I will. *(She goes outside. The couple exit stage left and the Woman crosses to the ticket booth. After a brief conversation, she exits stage left. Ludie looks around for a minute. Thelma has been watching the preceding scene. She has tried not to be seen by them, but the audience should know that she has taken in every single word. Ludie notices the magazine under his arm. He takes it in his hand and turns to Thelma.)*

**LUDIE.** Would you like this? I never read them, and my wife has seen it.
THELMA. Thank you. (She takes the magazine and puts it in her lap. She goes back to her reading. Ludie sits on the bench, looks on the floor, and sees the handkerchief that was dropped by Mrs. Watts. He reaches down and picks it up. He recognizes it. He gets up and goes running over to the ticket window.)
LUDIE. Excuse me. Did an old lady come here and buy a ticket to a town named Bountiful?
TICKET AGENT. Where?
LUDIE. Bountiful!
TICKET AGENT. Not since I’ve been on duty.
LUDIE. How long have you been on duty?
TICKET AGENT. About five minutes.
LUDIE. Where is the man that was on before?
TICKET AGENT. He’s gone home.
LUDIE. Oh. (He walks away, thinking what to do next. He sees Thelma and goes to her.) Excuse me, Miss.
THELMA. Yes?
LUDIE. I found this handkerchief here that belongs, I think, to my mother. She has a heart condition and it might be serious for her to be all alone. I don’t think she has much money, and I’d like to find her. Do you remember having seen her?
THELMA. Well ... I ...
LUDIE. She’d be on her way to a town called Bountiful.
THELMA. Yes, I did see her. She was here talkin’ to me. She left all of a sudden.
LUDIE. Thank you so much. (Jessie Mae has come back in. Ludie goes up to her.)
JESSIE MAE. Ludie.
LUDIE. I was right. She was here. The lady there said so.
JESSIE MAE. Well, it’s too late now.
LUDIE. But this lady was talking to her.
JESSIE MAE. We’re not going to wait. The police and I talked it over. (Thelma takes advantage of their argument to slip out of the station.)
LUDIE. (Turning on Jessie Mae.) You didn’t really call them!
JESSIE MAE. I did, and they said in their opinion she was just trying to get our attention this way and we should just go home and pay her no mind at all.
LUDIE. How can I go home without Mama ...
JESSIE MAE. The police tell me they have hundreds of cases like this every day. They say such things are very common among
young people and old people.
LUDIE. Jessie Mae …
JESSIE MAE. Now, we’re going to do what the police tell us to. They say she will come home when she’s tired and hungry enough and that makes a lot of sense to me. Now, Ludie, I wish you’d think of me for a change … I’m not going to spend the rest of my life running after your mother.
LUDIE. All right, Jessie Mae. (He stands there, thinking.)
JESSIE MAE. Now, come on, let’s go. Come on. (She starts out. Ludie pauses for a moment, thinking. He goes after her.)
LUDIE. All right. But if Mama is not home in an hour I’m going after her …
JESSIE MAE. Honestly, Ludie, you’re so stubborn. (As Jessie Mae and Ludie exit Stage Right, the Old Man, who has been sitting reading his newspaper, gets up and pushes the bench [the same one he has pushed on at the beginning of the scene] offstage left. Lights fade and the bus station disappears.)

SCENE FOUR

Out of the blackness, the bus seat, with Thelma and Mrs. Watts, floats downstage, stars appearing in the blackness framing the scene. Sounds of passing cars and trucks occur throughout the scene.

MRS. WATTS. Isn’t it a small world? I didn’t know we’d be on the same bus. Where do you go, honey?
THELMA. Harrison.
MRS. WATTS. Harrison!
THELMA. Yes. I change busses there.
MRS. WATTS. So do I go there. Isn’t that nice? Is that a moving picture magazine?
THELMA. Yes, Ma’am. Would you like to look at it?
MRS. WATTS. No, thank you. (She leans her head back on the seat and turns her head away.) The bus is nice to ride, isn’t it?
THELMA. Yes. It is.
MRS. WATTS. I’m sorry I couldn’t take a train, though.
THELMA. I tried to go by train, but you couldn’t get connections tonight.

MRS. WATTS. I know. When I was a girl I used to take excursions from Bountiful to Houston to Galveston. For the day, you know. Leave at five in the morning and return at ten that night. The whole town would come down to see you get off the train. I have such fond memories of those trips. (A pause. She looks over at Thelma.) Excuse me for getting personal, but what’s a pretty girl like you doing traveling alone?

THELMA. My husband has just been sent overseas.

MRS. WATTS. Oh, I’m sorry to hear that.

THELMA. I’m going to stay with my family.

MRS. WATTS. Just say the Ninety-first Psalm over and over to yourself. It will be a bower of strength and protection for him. (She begins to recite with closed eyes.) “He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most high, shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: My God; in Him will I trust. Surely He shall deliver thee from the fowler and the noisome pestilence. He shall cover thee with His feathers and under his wing shalt thou trust: His truth shall be thy shield and buckler.” (Thelma covers her face with her hands — she is crying. Mrs. Watts looks up and sees her.) Oh, I’m sorry. I’m sorry, honey.

THELMA. That’s all right. I’m just lonesome for him.

MRS. WATTS. Keep him under the Lord’s wing, honey, and he’ll be safe.

THELMA. Yes, Ma’am. (She dries her eyes.) I’m sorry. I don’t know what gets into me.

MRS. WATTS. Nobody needs be ashamed of crying. I guess we’ve all dampered our pillows sometime or other. I have, goodness knows.

THELMA. If I could only learn not to worry.

MRS. WATTS. I know. I guess we all ask that. Jessie Mae, my daughter-in-law, don’t worry. What for? she says. Well, like I tell her, that’s a fine attitude if you can cultivate it. Trouble is I can’t any longer.

THELMA. It is hard.

MRS. WATTS. I didn’t use to worry. I was so carefree as a girl. Had lots to worry me, too. Everybody was so poor back in Bountiful. But we got along. I said to Papa once after our third crop failure in a row, whoever gave this place the name of Bountiful? His Papa did, he said, because in those days it was a land of plenty. You just had to drop seeds in the ground and the crops would spring up. Cotton
and corn and sugar cane. I still think it's the prettiest place I know of. Jessie Mae says it's the ugliest. But she just says that I know to make me mad. She only saw it once, and then on a rainy day, at that. She says it's nothing but a swamp. That may be, I said, but it's a mighty pretty swamp to me. And then Sonny, that's my boy, Ludie, I call him Sonny, he said not to answer her back. He said it only caused arguments. And nobody ever won an argument with Jessie Mae, and I guess that's right. (A pause. She looks out into space.)

THELMA. Mrs. Watts ...
MRS. WATTS. Yes?
THELMA. I think I ought to tell you this ... I ... I don't want you to think I'm interfering in your business ... but ... well ... you see your son and your daughter-in-law came in just after you left ...
MRS. WATTS. I know. I saw them coming. That's why I left so fast.
THELMA. Your son seems very concerned.
MRS. WATTS. Bless his heart.
THELMA. He found a handkerchief that you had dropped.
MRS. WATTS. Oh, mercy. That's right, I did.
THELMA. He asked me if I had seen you. I felt I had to say yes. I wouldn't have said anything if he hadn't asked me.
MRS. WATTS. Oh, that's all right. I would have done the same thing in your place. Did you talk to Jessie Mae?
THELMA. Yes.
MRS. WATTS. Isn't she a sight? I bet she told you I was crazy ...
THELMA. Well ...
MRS. WATTS. Oh, don't be afraid of hurting my feelings. Poor Jessie Mae, she thinks everybody's crazy that don't want to sit in the beauty parlor all day and drink Coca-Colas. She tells me a million times a day I'm crazy. That's the only time Ludie will talk back to her. He gets real mad when she calls me crazy. I think Ludie knows how I feel about getting back to Bountiful. Once when I was talkin' about somethin' we did back there in the old days, he just broke out cryin'. He was so overcome he had to leave the room. (A pause. Mrs. Watts starts to hum "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus.")
THELMA. That's a pretty hymn. What is the name of it?
MRS. WATTS. "There's Not a Friend Like the Lowly Jesus." Do you like hymns?
THELMA. Yes, I do.
MRS. WATTS. So do I. Jessie Mae says they've gone out of style ... but I don't agree. I always sing one walking down the street or riding in the streetcar. Keeps my spirits up. What's your favorite hymn?
THELMA. Oh, I don't know.
MRS. WATTS. The one I was singin' is mine. I bet I sing it a hundred times a day. When Jessie Mae isn't home. Hymns make Jessie Mae nervous. (A pause.) Did Ludie mention my heart condition?
THELMA. Yes he did.
MRS. WATTS. Poor Ludie. He worries about it so. I hated to leave him. Well, I hope he'll forgive me in time. So many people are nervous today. Ludie wasn't nervous back in Bountiful. Neither was I. The breeze from the Gulf would always quiet your nerves. You could sit on your front gallery and smell the ocean blowing in around you. (A pause.) I regret the day I left. But I thought it was the best thing at the time. Farming was so hard to make a living by and I had to see to the farm myself; our house was old and there was no money to fix it with, nor send Ludie to school. So I sold off the land and gave Ludie an education. Callie said I could always come back and visit her. She meant it, too. That's who I'm going to stay with now. Callie Davis. I get a card from her every Christmas. I wrote her last week and told her to expect me. Told her not to answer though on account of Jessie Mae opens all my mail. I didn't want her to know I was going. She'd try to stop me. Jessie Mae hates me. I don't know why, but she hates me. (A pause.) Hate me or not. I gotta get back and smell that salt air and work that dirt. I'm gonna spend the whole first month of my visit workin' in Callie's garden. I haven't had my hands in dirt in twenty years. My hands feel the need of dirt. (A pause.) Do you like to work the ground?
THELMA. I never have.
MRS. WATTS. Try it sometimes. It'll do wonders for you. I bet I'll live to be a hundred once I can get outside again. It was being cooped up in those two rooms that was killing me. I used to work the land like a man. Had to when Papa died ... I got two little babies buried there. Renee Sue and Douglas. Diphtheria got Renee Sue, I never knew what carried Douglas away. He was just weak from the start. I know Callie's kept their graves weeded. Oh, if my heart just holds out until I get there. (A pause.) Where do you go from Harrison?
THELMA. Old Gulf. My family have just moved there from Louisiana. I'll stay there with them until my husband comes home again.
MRS. WATTS. That's nice.
THELMA. It'll be funny living at home again.
MRS. WATTS. How long have you been married?
THELMA. A year. My husband was anxious for me to go. He said
he'd worry about my being alone. I'm the only child and my parents and I are very close.

MRS. WATTS. That's nice.

THELMA. My father being in the oil business we've moved around a lot. I guess I went to school in fifteen different towns along the coast. I guess moving around like that made me and my mother and father even closer. I hoped so my mother and daddy would like my husband and he'd like them. I needn't have worried. They hit it off from the very first. Mother and Daddy say they feel like they have two children now. A son and a daughter.

MRS. WATTS. Isn't that nice? I've heard people say that when your son marries you lose a son, but when your daughter marries you get a son. (A pause.) What's your husband's name?

THELMA. Robert.

MRS. WATTS. That's a nice name.

THELMA. I think so. But I guess any name he had I would think was nice. I love my husband very much. Lots of girls I know think I'm silly about him, but I can't help it. (A pause.)

MRS. WATTS. I wasn't in love with my husband. (A pause.) Do you believe we are punished for what we do wrong? I sometimes think that's why I've had all my trouble. I've talked to many a preacher about it, all but one said they didn't think so. But I can't see any other reason. Of course, I didn't lie to my husband. I told him I didn't love him, that I admired him, which I did, but I didn't love him. That I'd never love anybody but Ray John Murray as long as I lived and I didn't, and I couldn't help it. Even after my husband died and I had to move back with Mama and Papa I used to sit on the front gallery every morning and every evening just to nod hello to Ray John Murray as he went by the house to work at the store. He went a block out of his way to pass the house. He never loved nobody but me.

THELMA. Why didn't you marry him?

MRS. WATTS. His papa and my papa didn't speak. My papa forced me to write a letter saying I never wanted to see him again and he got drunk and married out of spite. I felt sorry for his wife. She knew he never loved her. (A pause.) I don't think about those things anymore. But they're all part of Bountiful and I guess that's why I'm starting to think of them again. You're lucky to be married to the man you love, honey.

THELMA. I know I am.

MRS. WATTS. Awfully lucky. (A pause. She looks out the window.)
Did you see that star fall over there?
THELMA. No.
MRS. WATTS. It was the prettiest thing I ever saw. You can make a wish on a falling star, honey.
THELMA. I know. It’s too bad I didn’t see it.
MRS. WATTS. You take my wish.
THELMA. Oh, no.
MRS. WATTS. Go on. I’ve gotten mine already. I’m on my way to Bountiful.
THELMA. Thank you. (A pause. Thelma closes her eyes. Mrs. Watts watches her for a moment.)
MRS. WATTS. Did you make your wish?
THELMA. Yes, I did. (Mrs. Watts leans her head back on the seat. She hums to herself. Thelma leans her head back, too. They close their eyes. The bus seat is pulled Upstage as lights fade, leaving an area Downstage Right in dim light as the Harrison Bus Station, with the Ticket Agent asleep in his cubicle, slides on.)

SCENE FIVE

The bus’ arrival is heard. Roy (the Ticket Agent) wakes up, turns on the overhead light and checks his watch as he exits Upstage left to meet the bus. We hear his first line to Thelma from offstage, to which she answers, “No, thank you!” as she enters.

ROY. (Offstage.) Want any help with those bags?
THELMA. (Entering.) No, thank you.
ROY. (Offstage.) Good evening.
MRS. WATTS. Good evening.
DRIVER. (Offstage.) Almost missed you.
ROY. (Offstage.) That’d be the first time for me.
DRIVER. (Offstage.) Take it easy.
ROY. (Offstage.) Alright, bye. (Thelma takes the bags and puts them down beside a bench. She goes over to Roy.)
THELMA. Excuse me.
ROY. Yes?
THELMA. Is the bus to Old Gulf going to be on time?
ROY. Always is. *(Thelma goes back to her seat near the suitcases.)*
MRS. WATTS. *(To Thelma.)* What time is it, honey?
THELMA. Twelve o'clock.
MRS. WATTS. Twelve o'clock. I bet Callie will be surprised to see me walk in at twelve o'clock.
THELMA. Did you tell her you were coming today?
MRS. WATTS. No. I couldn't. Because I didn't know. I had to wait until Jessie Mae went to the drugstore.
THELMA. My bus is leaving in half an hour.
MRS. WATTS. Oh, I see. I guess I'd better be finding out how I'm going to get on out to Bountiful.
THELMA. You sit down. I'll ask the man.
MRS. WATTS. Thank you. *(She sits on the bench. Thelma turns to Roy. He is busy bringing in boxes left by the bus.)*
THELMA. Excuse me again.
ROY. Yes?
THELMA. My friend here wants to know how she can get to Bountiful.
ROY. Bountiful?
THELMA. Yes.
ROY. What's she going there for?
MRS. WATTS. I'm going to visit my childhood friend.
ROY. I don't know who that's gonna be. The last person in Bountiful was Mrs. Callie Davis. She died day before yesterday. That is they found her day before yesterday. She lived all alone so they don't know exactly when she died.
MRS. WATTS. Callie Davis!
ROY. Yes, Ma'am. They had the funeral this morning. Was she the one you were going to visit?
MRS. WATTS. Yessir, she was the one. She was my friend. My childhood friend. *(Mrs. Watts seems very old and tired and defeated. Thelma crosses to Roy.)*
THELMA. Is there a hotel here?
ROY. Yes'm. The Riverview.
THELMA. How far is it?
ROY. About five blocks.
THELMA. Is there a taxi around?
ROY. No, ma'am. Not this time of night.
THELMA. Thank you. *(Roy goes back into the ticket window. Thelma goes over to Mrs. Watts at the bench. She speaks to her with great sympathy.)* What'll you do now, Mrs. Watts?
MRS. WATTS. I'm thinking, honey. I'm thinking. It's come as quite a blow.
THELMA. I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.
MRS. WATTS. I know. I know. (A pause. Her strength and her will reviving.) It's come to me what to do. I'll go on. That much has come to me. To go on. I feel my strength and my purpose strong within me. I'll go on to Bountiful. I'll walk those twelve miles if I have to.
THELMA. But if there's no one out there what'll you do this time of night?
MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes. I guess that's right.
THELMA. I think you should wait until morning.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, I guess I should. Then I can hire someone to drive me out. You know what I'll do. I'll stay at my own house, or what's left of it. Put me in a garden. I'll get along fine with the help of my government checks.
THELMA. Mrs. Watts, the man says there's a hotel not too far away. I think you'd better let me take you there.
MRS. WATTS. Oh, no thank you. I wouldn't want to waste my money on a hotel. They're high as cats' backs you know. I'll just sleep right here on this bench. Put my coat under my head, hold my purse under my arm. (She puts the coat down on the bench like a pillow. She begins to look around for her purse. She has lost it.) My purse! (She begins to search frantically.) Have you seen my purse, honey?
THELMA. Why, no. (They begin to look around for it.)
MRS. WATTS. Oh, good heavens. I remember now. I left my purse on the bus.
THELMA. You're sure you left it there?
MRS. WATTS. (Joining her.) Yes. I am. I remember now. I didn't have it when I got off the bus. I kept thinkin' something was missin', but then I decided it was my suitcase that you had brought in for me. What am I gonna do, honey? All I have in the world is in that purse. (Thelma goes back to the ticket window. Roy is drowsing.)
THELMA. Excuse me again.
ROY. Yeah?
THELMA. This lady left her purse on the bus.
ROY. All right. I'll call ahead. How can you identify it?
MRS. WATTS. It's a plain black purse.
ROY. How much money?
MRS. WATTS. Thirty-five cents and a pension check.
ROY. Who was the check made out to?
MRS. WATTS. To me, Mrs. Carrie Watts.
ROY. All right. I’ll call up about it.
MRS. WATTS. Oh, thank you. You’re most kind.
THELMA. How long will it take to get it back?
ROY. If I can get ahead of the bus at Don Tarle, I can get them to send it back on the Victoria bus and it should be here in a couple of hours.
MRS. WATTS. That’s awful kind of you. (Roy picks up the phone and dials.) I don’t know what I would have done without you.
THELMA. Try not to worry about the purse.
MRS. WATTS. I won’t. I’m too tired to worry. Be time enough to start worrying when I wake up in the morning.
THELMA. Why don’t you go on to sleep now if you can?
MRS. WATTS. Oh, I thought I’d stay up and see you off.
THELMA. No. You go on to sleep.
MRS. WATTS. I couldn’t go right off to sleep now. I’m too wound up. You know I don’t go on a trip every day of my life.
ROY. You’re lucky. Bus hadn’t gotten to Don Tarle yet. If they can find the purse it’ll be here around five.
MRS. WATTS. Thank you. Thank you so much.
THELMA. Make you feel better?
MRS. WATTS. Yes, it does. Of course, everything has seemed to work out today. Why is it some days everything works out, and some days nothing works out. What I mean is, I’ve been trying to get on that bus for Bountiful for over five years. Usually Jessie Mae and Ludie find me before I ever get inside the railroad station good. Today, I got inside both the railroad station and the bus station. Bought a ticket, seen Ludie and Jessie Mae before they saw me. Hid out. Met a pretty friend like you. Lost my purse, and now I’m having it found for me. I guess the good Lord is just with me today. (A pause.) I wonder why the Lord isn’t with us every day? It would be so nice if He was. Well, maybe then we wouldn’t appreciate so much the days when He’s on our side. Or maybe He’s always on our side and we don’t know it. Maybe I had to wait twenty years cooped up in a city before I could appreciate getting back here. (A pause. Thelma rests her head back on the bench. Mrs. Watts rests her head. She hums her hymn.) It’s so nice being able to sing a hymn when you want to. I’m a happy woman, young lady. A very happy woman.
THELMA. I still have a sandwich left. Will you have one? (Thelma gets the sandwich from her suitcase and unwraps it.)
MRS. WATTS. Sure you don’t want it?
THELMA. No, I’m full.

42
MRS. WATTs. Then I'll have a half, thank you.
THELMA. Take the whole sandwich. I'm not hungry.
MRS. WATTs. No, thank you. Just half. You know I don't eat much. Particularly if I'm excited. *(She rises, nibbling on the sandwich, and walks to just outside the door. Thelma follows.)* You know, I came to my first dance in this town.
THELMA. Did you?
MRS. WATTs. Yes. Ma'am. It was the summertime. My father couldn't decide if he thought dancin' was right or not. But my mother said she had danced when she was a girl and I was gonna dance. And so I went. The girls from all over the county came for this dance. It was at the Opera House. I forget what the occasion was. Somethin' special though. *(A pause. She looks at Thelma.)* Do you know something, young lady? If my daughter had lived I would have wanted her to be just like you.
THELMA. Oh, thank you.
MRS. WATTs. *(With great tenderness.)* Just like you. Sweet and considerate and thoughtful.
THELMA. Oh, no ... I'm ...
MRS. WATTs. Oh, yes. Sweet and considerate and thoughtful. And pretty.
THELMA. Well, thank you. *(A pause.)* Mrs. Watts ... I hope you don't mind my askin' this, but I worry about your son. Are you going to let him know where you are?
MRS. WATTs. Oh, yes, Ma'am. As soon as I get that check cashed I'm going to send him a telegram. *(To Roy.)* I was tellin' my little friend here that I came to my first dance in this town.
ROY. Is that so?
MRS. WATTs. Yes. And I've been to Harrison quite a few times in my life, shopping.
ROY. *(To Thelma.)* You'd better get outside, Miss. Bus will be up the road. It won't wait this time of night unless it sees we have a passenger.
THELMA. All right. *(She gets her suitcase.)* Goodbye, Mrs. Watts.
MRS. WATTs. *(Following her to the door.)* Goodbye, honey. Good luck to you. And thank you for everything.
THELMA. That's all right. Good luck to you.
MRS. WATTs. Thank you. *(Thelma kisses her. Thelma goes out into the night, followed by Roy. Mrs. Watts watches Thelma. We hear a bus pulling up.)*
DRIVER. *(Offstage.)* Everything alright?
ROY. (Offstage.) Everything's just fine.
DRIVER. (Offstage.) See ya tomorrow.
ROY. (Offstage.) Alright. Bye. (Mrs. Watts waves. We hear the bus leave. Roy and Mrs. Watts come back inside the bus station.) Are you gonna stay here all night?
MRS. WATTS. I have to. Everything I have is in that purse and we can't go anywhere without money.
ROY. I guess that's right. (He starts away.)
MRS. WATTS. Do they still have dances in Borden's Opera House?
ROY. No, Ma'am. It's torn down. They condemned it, you know. (He starts on. He pauses.) Did you ever know anybody in Harrison?
MRS. WATTS. I knew a few people when I was girl. Priscilla Nytle. Did you know her?
ROY. No, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. Nancy Lee Goodhue?
ROY. No, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. The Fay girls?
ROY. No, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. I used to trade in Mr. Ewing's store. I knew him to speak to.
ROY. Which Ewing was that?
MRS. WATTS. George White Ewing.
ROY. He's dead.
MRS. WATTS. Is that so?
ROY. Been dead for twelve years.
MRS. WATTS. Is that so?
ROY. He left quite a bit of money, but his son took over his store and lost it all. Drank.
MRS. WATTS. Is that so? One thing I can say about my boy is that he never gave me any worry that way.
ROY. Well, that's good. I've got one boy that drinks and one boy that doesn't. I can't understand it. I raised them the same way.
MRS. WATTS. I know. I've known of other cases like that. One drinks. The other doesn't.
ROY. A friend of mine has a girl that drinks. I think that's the saddest thing in the world.
MRS. WATTS. Isn't it? (A pause.)
ROY. Well. Good night.
MRS. WATTS. Good night. (Roy stands waiting to switch off the light while Mrs. Watts takes her suitcase and coat and makes a bed for herself on the bench. She lies down. He goes inside the ticket booth. He
sticks his head out the cage.)
ROY. Good night.
MRS. WATTS. Good night. (He turns the light inside the ticket
window out. Mrs. Watts is humming quietly to herself. Her humming
fades away as the lights are faded out.)

SCENE SIX

The lights are brought up. Roy is in his cubicle sound asleep
and snoring slightly. A man comes in. He is the Sheriff. He
stands by the door for a moment, looking around the bus sta-
tion. He sees Mrs. Watts lying on the bench asleep. He goes
over to her and looks down. He stands for a moment watch-
ing her sleep. He looks over at the ticket window and sees the
man is asleep. The Sheriff goes over to Roy. He shakes him.

SHERIFF. Come on, Roy, wake up.
ROY. Yeah? (He opens his eyes. He sees the Sheriff. He comes out to
the Sheriff.) Oh, hello, Sheriff.
SHERIFF. How long has that old woman been here?
ROY. About four hours.
SHERIFF. Did she get off the bus from Houston?
ROY. Yessir. I know her name. It's Watts. She left her purse on the
bus and I had to call up to Don Tarle about it.
SHERIFF. Have you got her purse?
ROY. Yes, it just came.
SHERIFF. She's the one, all right. I've had a call from the Houston
police to hold her until her son can come for her.
ROY. She said she used to live in Bountiful.
SHERIFF. Yeah. I believe I remember some Watts a long time ago
over that way. I think that old ramshackly house about to fall into
the Brazos River belonged to them.
ROY. That right? They must have been before my time. What do
the police want her for?
SHERIFF. Police don't. It's her son. He wants to take her back
home. Claims she's not responsible. Did she act crazy to you?
ROY. Not that I noticed. Is she crazy?
SHERIFF. They say so. (He starts over to her to wake her up. He stands, looking at her for a moment. He comes back to Roy.) Poor old thing. She's sleeping so sound. I don't have the heart to wake her up. I'll tell you what, I'll go down and call Houston ... tell them she's here. Her son is coming in his car. He should be here around seven-thirty. I'll be back in ten minutes. If she gives you any trouble just call me. Keep your eye on her.

ROY. All right. (The Sheriff goes out. Mrs. Watts wakes up. She opens her eyes. She looks around, trying to remember where she is. Then she sees Roy.)

MRS. WATTS. Good morning.

ROY. Good morning.

MRS. WATTS. Could you tell me the time?

ROY. It's around four-thirty.

MRS. WATTS. Thank you. Did my purse arrive?

ROY. Yes, Ma'am. (He reaches under the ticket window to a ledge and gets the purse for her. He hands the purse to her.)

MRS. WATTS. Thank you so much. I wonder if you could cash a check for me?

ROY. I'm sorry. I can't.

MRS. WATTS. It's a government check and I have identification.

ROY. I'm sorry. I can't.

MRS. WATTS. Do you know where I could get a check cashed?

ROY. Why?

MRS. WATTS. I need money to get me started in Bountiful. I want to hire someone to drive me out there and look at my house and get a few groceries. Try to find a cot to sleep on.

ROY. I'm sorry, lady. You're not going to Bountiful.

MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes, I am. You see ....

ROY. I'm sorry, lady. You're not going any place right now. I have to hold you here for the sheriff.

MRS. WATTS. The sheriff?

ROY. Yes, Ma'am.

MRS. WATTS. You're joking with me!? Don't joke with me. I've come too far.

ROY. I'm sorry. That's how it is.

MRS. WATTS. What has the sheriff got to do with me?

ROY. He came a few minutes ago while you were asleep and said I was to keep you here until your son arrived in his car this morning.

MRS. WATTS. My son hasn't got a car, so I don't believe you. I don't believe you.
ROY. It's the truth. He'll be here in a little while, and you can ask him yourself. *(A pause.)*
MRS. WATTS. Then you're not joking?
ROY. No. *(She takes her coat and suitcase and runs for the entrance. He senses what she is going to do and gets there first — blocking her way.)*
MRS. WATTS. All right. But I'm going, do you understand? You'll see. This is a free country. And I'll tell him that. No sheriff or king or president will keep me from going back to Bountiful.
ROY. All right. You tell him that.
MRS. WATTS. What time is my son expected?
ROY. Sheriff says around seven-thirty.
MRS. WATTS. What time is it now?
ROY. I told you around four-thirty.
MRS. WATTS. Where can I get me a driver?
ROY. Ma'am?
MRS. WATTS. If you can get me a driver, I can make it to Bountiful and back before seven-thirty ...
ROY. Look, lady ...
MRS. WATTS. That's all I want. That's all I ask. Just to see it. To stand on the porch of my own house, once more. Walk under the trees. I swear I would come back then meek as a lamb.
ROY. Lady ...
MRS. WATTS. Last night, I thought I had to stay. I thought I'd die if I couldn't stay. But I'll settle for less now. Much, much less. An hour. A half-hour. Fifteen minutes.
ROY. Lady, it ain't up to me. I told you the sheriff.
MRS. WATTS. *(Screaming.)* Then get me the sheriff.
ROY. Look, lady ...
MRS. WATTS. Get me the sheriff. The time is going. They'll have me locked in those two rooms again soon. The time is going ... the time is ... *(The Sheriff comes in. The Sheriff goes over to Mrs. Watts.)*
SHERIFF. Mrs. Watts?
MRS. WATTS. Yessir. *(She looks up at him. She puts the coat and suitcase down.)* Are you the sheriff?
SHERIFF. Yes, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. I understand my son will be here at seven-thirty to take me back to Houston.
SHERIFF. Yes, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. Then listen to me, sir. I've waited a long time. Just to get to Bountiful. Twenty years I've been walkin' the streets of the city, lost and grieving. And as I've grown older and my time
approaches, I’ve made one promise to myself, to see my home again … before I die …
SHERIFF. Lady … I …
MRS. WATTS. I’m not asking that I not go back. I’m willing to go back. Only let me travel these twelve miles first. I have money. I can pay …
SHERIFF. I think that’s between you and your son.
MRS. WATTS. Ludie? Why, he’s got to do whatever Jessie Mae tells him to. I know why she wants me back. It’s for my government check.
SHERIFF. I don’t know anything about that. That’s between you and your son.
MRS. WATTS. Won’t you let me go?
SHERIFF. No. Not unless your son takes you.
MRS. WATTS. All right. Then I’ve lost. I’ve come all this way only to lose. I’ve kept thinking back there day and night in those two rooms, I kept thinkin’ … and it may mean nothin’ at all to you, but I kept thinkin’ … that if I could just set foot there for a minute … even … a second … I might get some understanding of why … why my life has grown so empty and meaningless. Why I’ve turned into a hateful, quarrelsome old woman. And before I leave this earth, I’d like to recover some of the dignity … The peace I used to know. For I’m going to die … and Jessie Mae knows that … and she’s willful and it’s her will I die in those two rooms. Well, she won’t have her way. It’s my will to die in Bountiful.
SHERIFF. Mrs. Watts.
MRS. WATTS. Let me go those twelve miles … before it’s too late. Understand me. Suffering I don’t mind. Suffering I understand. I never protested once. Though my heart was broken when those babies died. I could stand seeing the man I love walk through life with another woman. But this fifteen years of bickering. Endless, petty bickering … It’s made me like Jessie Mae sees me. It’s ugly, I won’t be that way. I want to go home. I want to go home. I want to go … (She is unable to speak any more. She is on the verge of collapse.)
SHERIFF. Roy, hurry. Call a doctor. (She summons up her last bit of strength to get free.)
MRS. WATTS. No. No doctor. Bountiful … Bountiful … Bountiful … (Mrs. Watts has collapsed on the leg of the kneeling Sheriff in a pool of light. A short pause. Then, music cue comes in and the Harrison Bus Station, with Roy in his cubicle, slides Stage Right.)
SCENE SEVEN

As the station goes offstage, Mrs. Watts starts to revive. The Sheriff stands and offers his hands, which Mrs. Watts takes, pulling herself to her feet. The Harrison set is now offstage and the back wall is ready to open and reveal Bountiful, bathed in early morning light and birdsong.

MRS. WATTS. I’m home, I’m home. I’m home. Thank you. I thank you. I thank you. I thank you. (They pause for a moment in the yard. Mrs. Watts is obviously still quite weak.)

SHERIFF. You’d better sit down and rest for a while. You don’t want to overdo it.

MRS. WATTS. Yessir. (She sits on a tree stump in the yard.)

SHERIFF. Feeling all right?

MRS. WATTS. Yes, I am. I feel ever so much better.

SHERIFF. You look better. I hope I’ve done the right thing in bringing you here. Well, I don’t see what harm it can do. As long as you mind the doctor and don’t get over excited.

MRS. WATTS. Yessir.

SHERIFF. Soon as you’ve rested for a little I’ll go on back to my car and leave you alone. You can call me if you need anything. I’ll stay out here until your son arrives.

MRS. WATTS. Thank you. You’ve been very kind. (A bird calls. She and the Sheriff sit listening to it. It whistles once again.) What kind of a bird was that?

SHERIFF. Redbird.

MRS. WATTS. I thought that was a redbird, but I hadn’t heard one in so long, I couldn’t be sure. (A pause.) Do they still have scissortails around here?

SHERIFF. Yes, Ma’am. I still see one every once in a while when I’m driving around the country.

MRS. WATTS. I don’t know of anything prettier than a scissortail flying around in the sky. (A pause.) My father was a good man in many ways, a peculiar man, but a good one. One of the things he couldn’t stand was to see a bird shot on his land. If men came here hunting, he’d take a gun and chase them away. I think the birds
knew they couldn’t be touched here. Our land was always a home to them. Ducks and geese and finches and blue jays. Bluebirds and redbirds. Wild canaries and blackbirds and mockers and doves and ricebirds ...

SHERIFF. Ricebirds are gettin’ thicker every year. They seem to thrive out here on the coast.
MRS. WATTS. I guess a mockin’ bird is my favorite of them all.
SHERIFF. I guess it’s mine, too.
MRS. WATTS. I don’t know, though. I’m mighty partial to a scissortail. I hope I get to see one soon.
SHERIFF. I hope you can.
MRS. WATTS. My father was born on this land and in this house. Did you know my father?
SHERIFF. No, Ma’am. Not that I can remember.
MRS. WATTS. I guess there are not many around here that remember my father. I do, of course, and my son. Maybe some old timers around Harrison. (A pause.) It’s funny, ever since I’ve been here I’ve been half expectin’ my father and my mother to walk out of the house and greet me and welcome me home. When you’ve lived longer than your house and your family, you’ve lived too long. (A pause.) Or maybe it’s just me. Maybe the need to belong to a house and a family and a town has gone from the rest of the world.
SHERIFF. How big was your farm, Mrs. Watts?
MRS. WATTS. Three hundred and seventy-five acres were left when my papa died and I sold off all but the house and the yard. (A pause.) You say the store burned down fifteen years ago?
SHERIFF. Yes, Ma’am. What was left of it. You see with the good roads we have now in the county, the little towns and their country stores are all disappearing. The farmers ride into Cotton or Harrison to trade ...
MRS. WATTS. But what’s happened to the farms? For the last five miles I’ve seen nothing but woods ...
SHERIFF. I know. The land around Bountiful just played out. People like you got discouraged and moved away, sold off the land for what they could get. H.T. Mavis bought most of it up. He let it go back into timber. He keeps a few head of cattle out here. That’s about all ...
MRS. WATTS. Callie Davis kept her farm going.
SHERIFF. Yes. She did. She learned how to treat her land right and it began paying off for her toward the end. I’ve heard she was out riding her tractor the day before she died. Lonely death she
had. All by herself in that big house.
MRS. WATTS. There are worse things.
SHERIFF. Looks to me like you’re going to have a pretty day.
MRS. WATTS. I hope so. My daughter-in-law has never seen our place in the sunshine. I expect my son will bring her along with him. I’d hate for her to have to see it again in the rain.
SHERIFF. Feeling more rested now?
MRS. WATTS. Oh, yes, I am.
SHERIFF. Good. Then I’ll be getting on back to my car. You just call me if you need anything.
MRS. WATTS. Thank you. You’ll never know what this has meant to me.
SHERIFF. Glad I could oblige. (He gets up and walks to the corner of the yard. Just before he goes out he turns and waves. Mrs. Watts waves back to him. When he is out of sight, she rises slowly, walks over to the house, and steps up onto the porch. She slowly walks along the porch and into the house. The sun comes up full now, filling the stage with light. Ludie enters. He goes towards the house, pauses, looks around.)
LUDIE. Mama, (Pause.) Mama. (Pause, he panics.) Mama! (Mrs. Watts comes out of the house.) Hello, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. Hello, son.
LUDIE. How do you feel?
MRS. WATTS. I’m feelin’ better, Ludie.
LUDIE. That’s good. They told me at the bus station you had another attack.
MRS. WATTS. Yes, I did. All the excitement, I guess. But I feel fine now.
LUDIE. Yes’m.
MRS. WATTS. I got my wish.
LUDIE. Yes’m. (Ludie walks away from the porch down to the corner of the yard. Mrs Watts follows him.)
MRS. WATTS. I hope I didn’t worry you too much, Ludie. But I just felt I had to ...
LUDIE. I know, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. You see, son, I know it’s hard for you to understand and Jessie Mae ... understand — But ...
LUDIE. Yes, Ma’am. I understand, Mama. It’s done now. So let’s forget about it.
MRS. WATTS. All right, Sonny. (A pause.) You did bring Jessie Mae, didn’t you?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma’am.
MRS. WATTS. Well, now she's here isn't she going to get out of the car and look around a little?
LUDIE. She didn't seem to want to, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. You asked her?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am. *(A pause.)* 
MRS. WATTS. Did you ask about your raise, son?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am, and Mr. Douglas told me he liked my work and he'd be glad to recommend a raise for me.
MRS. WATTS. Oh. *(A pause.)* The sky's so blue, Ludie. Did you ever see the sky so blue?
LUDIE. No, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. Callie Davis died.
LUDIE. Is that so? When did that happen?
MRS. WATTS. They don't rightly know. They found her dead. She'd been ridin' a tractor the day before they found her. Buried her yesterday. *(A pause.)*
LUDIE. Mama, I should have made myself bring you here before. I'm sorry but I thought it would be easier for both of us not to see the house again.
MRS. WATTS. I know, Ludie. *(A pause.)* Now you're here, wouldn't you like to come inside, son, and look around?
LUDIE. I don't think I'd better, Mama. I don't see any use in it. It would just make me feel bad. I'd rather remember it like it was. *(A pause. Mrs. Watts looks at the house. She smiles.)*
MRS. WATTS. The old house has gotten kind of run down, hasn't it?
LUDIE. Yes, it has. *(She starts back toward the house slowly.)*
MRS. WATTS. I don't think it'll last out the next Gulf storm.
LUDIE. It doesn't look like it would. *(She turns and looks at him standing in the yard.)*
MRS. WATTS. You know who you look like standing there, Ludie?
LUDIE. Who?
MRS. WATTS. My papa.
LUDIE. Do I?
MRS. WATTS. Just like him. Of course, I've been noticing as you grow older you look more and more like him. My papa was a good looking man.
LUDIE. Was he?
MRS. WATTS. You've seen his pictures. Didn't you think so?
LUDIE. I don't remember. It's been so long since I looked at his
picture.
MRS. WATTS. Well, he was always considered a very nice-looking man. (A pause.) Do you remember my papa at all, son?
LUDIE. No, Ma'am. Not too well. I was only ten when he died, Mama. I remember the day he died. I heard about it as I was coming home from school. Lee Weems told me. I thought he was joking and I called him a liar. I remember you takin’ me into the front room there the day of the funeral to say goodbye to him. I remember the coffin and the people sitting in the room. Old man Joe Weems took me up on his knee and told me that Grandpapa was his best friend and that his life was a real example for me to follow. I remember Grandmama sitting by the coffin crying and she made me promise that when I had a son of my own I’d name it after Grandpapa. I would have, too. I’ve never forgotten that promise. (A pause.) Well, I didn’t have a son. Or a daughter. (A pause.) Billy Davidson told me his wife is expecting her fourth child. They have two girls and a boy, now. Billy Davidson doesn’t make much more than I do and they certainly seem to get along. Own their own home and have a car. It does your heart good to hear them tell about how they all get along. Everybody has their own job, even the youngest child. She’s only three. She puts the napkins around the table at mealtimes. That’s her job. Billy said to me, Ludie, I don’t know how I’d keep going without my kids. He said, I don’t understand what keeps you going, Ludie. What you work for. I said, well, Billy ... Oh, Mama, I haven’t made any kind of life for you, either one of you and I try so hard. I try so hard. Oh, Mama. I lied to you. I do remember. I remember so much. This house. The life here. The night you woke me up and dressed me and took me for a walk when there was a full moon and I cried because I was afraid and you comforted me. Mama, I want to stop remembering ... It doesn’t do any good to remember. (A car horn is heard in the distance — loud and impatient. He looks in the direction of the horn.) That’s Jessie Mae.
MRS. WATTS. Whose car did you come in?
LUDIE. I borrowed Billy Davidson’s car. He didn’t want me to have it at first. You know people are funny about lending their car, but then I explained what happened and he was nice about it. (The car horn is heard again.) We have to start back now, Mama. Jessie Mae is nervous that I might lose my job.
MRS. WATTS. (Frantically trying to find an excuse not to leave.) Didn’t you ask for the day off?
LUDIE. No, Ma'am. I only asked for the morning off.
MRS. WATTS. What time is it now?
LUDIE. Must be after eight. We were a little late getting here.
MRS. WATTS. We can drive it in three hours, can't we, Ludie?
LUDIE. Yes, ma'am, but we might have a flat or run into traffic
or something. Besides, I promised Billy I'd get his car back to him
by twelve.
MRS. WATTS. Son, why am I going back at all? Why can't I stay?
LUDIE. Mama, you can't stay.
MRS. WATTS. Ludie.
LUDIE. You know that.
MRS. WATTS. Ludie.
LUDIE. Now come on. *(Mrs. Watts cries passionately, openly, bitterly.)*
MRS. WATTS. Ludie, Ludie. What's happened to us? Why have
we come to this?
LUDIE. I don't know, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. To have stayed and fought the land would have
been better than this.
LUDIE. Yes'm.
MRS. WATTS. Pretty soon it'll all be gone. Ten years ... twenty
... this house ... me ... You ...
LUDIE. I know, Mama. *(A pause. She looks into his suffering face.
She looks around. She speaks with great tenderness.)*
MRS. WATTS. But the river will be here. The fields. The woods.
The smell of the Gulf. That's what I always took my strength from,
Ludie. Not from houses, not from people. It's so quiet. It's so etern-
ally quiet. I had forgotten the peace. The quiet. And it's given me
strength once more, Ludie. To go on and do what I have to do. I've
found my dignity and my strength.
LUDIE. I'm glad, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. And I'll never fight with Jessie Mae again or com-
plain. Do you remember how my papa always had that field over
there planted in cotton?
LUDIE. Yes, Ma'am.
MRS. WATTS. See, it's all woods now. But I expect someday peo-
ple will come again and cut down the trees and plant the cotton
and maybe even wear out the land again and then their children
will sell it and go to the cities and then the trees will come up again.
LUDIE. I expect so, Mama.
MRS. WATTS. We're part of all this. We left it but we can never
lose what it has given us.
LUDIE. I expect so, Mama. *(Jessie Mae enters.)*

JESSIE MAE. Ludie. Are you coming or not?

LUDIE. We were just startin’, Jessie Mae.

MRS. WATTS. Hello, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. I’m not speakin’ to you. I guess you’re proud of the time you gave us. Dragging us all the way out here this time of the mornin’. If Ludie loses his job over this, I hope you’re satisfied.

LUDIE. I’m not goin’ to lose my job, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. Well, you could.

LUDIE. All right, Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. And she should realize that. Did you tell your Mama what we were discussing in the car?

LUDIE. No. We can talk it all over driving back to Houston.

JESSIE MAE. I think we should have it out right here. I’d like everything understood right now. *(Jessie Mae opens her purse and takes out a piece of paper.*) I’ve gotten everything written down. Do you want to read it or do you want me to read it to you, Mother Watts?

MRS. WATTS. What is it, Jessie Mae?

JESSIE MAE. It’s a few rules and regulations that are necessary to my peace of mind. And I think to Ludie’s. Ludie says you may have a few of your own to add and that may be and I’m perfectly willin’ to listen if you do … First of all, I’d like to ask you a question.

MRS. WATTS. Yes, ma’am.

JESSIE MAE. Just what possessed you to run away? Didn’t you know you’d be caught and have to come back?

MRS. WATTS. I had to come, Jessie Mae. Twenty years is a long time.

JESSIE MAE. But what if you had died from the excitement! Didn’t you know you could have died?

MRS. WATTS. I knew.

JESSIE MAE. And you didn’t care?

MRS. WATTS. *(With great dignity.)* I had to come Jessie Mae.

JESSIE MAE. Well, I hope it’s out of your system now.

MRS. WATTS. It is. I’ve had my trip. That’s more than enough to keep me happy the rest of my life.

JESSIE MAE. Well, I’m glad to hear that. That’s the first thing on my list. *(She reads from list.)* Number one. There’ll be no more running away.

MRS. WATTS. There’ll be no more running away.

JESSIE MAE. Good. *(She takes the list up again.)* Number two. No more hymn singing when I’m in the apartment. When I’m gone
you can sing your lungs out. Agreed?
MRS. WATTS. Agreed.
JESSIE MAE. Number three.
LUDIE. *(Interrupting.)* Jessie Mae, can't this wait till we get home?
JESSIE MAE. Now, honey, we agreed that I'm going to handle this! *(She goes back to the list.)* No more pouting. When I ask a question, I'd like an answer. Otherwise I'll consider it's pouting.
MRS. WATTS. All right.
JESSIE MAE. Fourth. With the condition that your heart is in I feel you should not run around the apartment when you can walk.
MRS. WATTS. All right, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. That's all. Is there anything you want to say to me?
MRS. WATTS. No, Jessie Mae.
JESSIE MAE. I might as well tell you now I'm not staying in the house and watching over you anymore. I am joinin' a bridge club and going to town at least twice a week. If you go now, it'll just be your funeral. You understand?
MRS. WATTS. I understand.
JESSIE MAE. All right. *(She puts the list away.)*
LUDIE. And, Mama, we also agreed that we're all gonna try our best to get along together. Jessie Mae also realizes that she gets upset sometimes when she shouldn't. Don't you, Jessie Mae?
JESSIE MAE. Uh-huh.
LUDIE. So let's start by trying to have a pleasant ride home.
JESSIE MAE. Alrightie. Is there any water around here? I'm thirsty.
LUDIE. I don't think so, Jessie Mae. Mama, is there any water around here?
MRS. WATTS. No. The cistern is gone.
LUDIE. *(Looking out in the distance.)* When I was a boy I used to drink in the creek over there, Jessie Mae. We had a cistern, but I always preferred to drink out of the creek. It seemed to me the water always tasted so much better.
JESSIE MAE. Well, you wouldn't catch me drinking out of any creek. I knew a man once that went on a huntin' trip and drank out of a creek and caught something and died.
MRS. WATTS. There's nothin' like cistern water for washin' your hair with. It is the softest water in the world. *(A bird calls in the distance.)* That's a redbird.
JESSIE MAE. A what?
MRS. WATTS. A redbird.
JESSIE MAE. Oh. I thought you said that. They all sound alike to me. Well, come on. Let's get going. Do we go back by the way of Harrison?
LUDIE. Yes.
JESSIE MAE. Good. Then we can stop at the drugstore. I'm so thirsty I could drink ten Coca-Colas. Are you all ready?
MRS. WATTS. Yes'm. (Jessie Mae looks at her.)
JESSIE MAE. Where's your purse?
MRS. WATTS. Are you talkin' to me, Jessie Mae?
JESSIE MAE. Who else would I be talkin' to? Since when did Ludie start walkin' around with a pocketbook under his arm? (Mrs. Watts looks around.)
MRS. WATTS. Oh, I guess I left it inside.
JESSIE MAE. Where? (She starts toward the door of the house.)
MRS. WATTS. I'll get it. (She turns to go into the house.)
JESSIE MAE. No. I want to go. You'll take all day. Where did you leave it?
MRS. WATTS. In the parlor. Right off the front hall.
JESSIE MAE. All right I'll get it. You wait here. (She starts into the house.) I don't want to be left alone in this ramshackly old house. (She goes into the house.)
LUDIE. Mama.
MRS. WATTS. It's all right, Ludie, son. (Jessie Mae comes back out with the purse.)
JESSIE MAE. Here's your purse. Now where's the money for that government check?
MRS. WATTS. I haven't cashiered it.
JESSIE MAE. Where is it?
MRS. WATTS. It's right inside the purse. (Jessie Mae opens the purse and begins to search again.)
JESSIE MAE. No. It isn't.
MRS. WATTS. Here let me look. (Jessie Mae hands her the purse and Mrs. Watts, too, begins to rummage around. All of a sudden she bursts out laughing.)
JESSIE MAE. What's the matter with you?
MRS. WATTS. That's a good joke on me.
JESSIE MAE. Well, what's so funny?
MRS. WATTS. I just remembered. I left this purse on the bus last night and caused a man a lot of trouble because I thought the check was in there. (She is overcome by laughter again.) And do you know that check wasn't in that purse all that time?
JESSIE MAE. Where was it?
MRS. WATTS. Right here. *(She reaches inside her dress and takes it out.)* Been here since yesterday afternoon. *(Jessie Mae reaches for the check.)*

JESSIE MAE. Give it to me before you go and lose it again.
MRS. WATTS. I won't lose it.
JESSIE MAE. Now don't start that business again. Just give it to me.
LUDIE. *(Interrupting angrily)* Jesse Mae.
JESSIE MAE. Well, I'm not going to —
LUDIE. We're going to stop this wrangling once and for all. You've given me your word and I expect you to keep your word. We have to live together and we're going to live together in peace.
MRS. WATTS. It's all right, Ludie. *(She gives the check to Jessie Mae.)* Let Jessie Mae take care of the check. *(Jessie Mae accepts the check. She looks at it for a moment and then grabs Mrs. Watts' purse. She opens it and puts the check inside.)*

JESSIE MAE. Oh, here. You keep the check. But don't go and lose it before you get home. *(She puts the purse back in Mrs. Watts' hand. She starts offstage.)* Well, come on. Let's go. *(She leaves. Ludie goes to his mother.)*

LUDIE. Mama, if I get a raise you won't —
MRS. WATTS. It's all right, Ludie. I've had my trip. You go ahead. I'll be right there. *(Ludie starts out. Mrs. Watts points up in the sky.)* Look, isn't that a scissortail?
LUDIE. I don't know. I didn't get to see it if it was. They fly so fast.
*(Ludie takes one last look at the house.)* The house used to look so big.
*(He goes out. Mrs. Watts stands for a moment, looking at the sky. She begins to walk. She pauses for a moment, taking one last look at the house, speaks quietly.)*

MRS. WATTS. Good bye, Bountiful, good bye. *(Mrs. Watts looks at the house. The redbird is heard. She moves closer to the house. The hymn is heard a capella very softly, then a little louder. Mrs. Watts moves off. She pauses to put her hand on the fencepost, then exits. The lights and sound fade.)*

End of Play