

here? Verne said there was a private investigator in town, and the Boss. Want to look?

KATE. I'm game. I won the treasure hunt at our Sunday School picnic when I was fourteen.

CRANE. What was the prize?

KATE. Oh, I didn't win that, but Chet Martin and I got lost in the woods and that was prize enough for me.

CRANE. (*Moves below sofa.*) Kate, you're incorrigible. KATE. Didn't you ever go to Sunday School?

CRANE. Of course, but I spent the whole time thinking of different ways to murder the teacher. You know, I'd make a damn good murderer. (*Sits on sofa.*)

KATE. Uh-uh. You never commit the perfect crime. You always have the murderer caught.

CRANE. All my writing career, I've wanted to have the usual party at the end—you know, where they invite all the suspects. Then I'd have the detective say, (*In a deep voice.*) "I know who the murderer is." Then you'd turn the page and it'd say, (*In a cute, little girl voice.*) "Guess who?" But I don't think it would sell.

KATE. Put enough sex in any story and it'll sell. Look at "Forever Amber," "Peyton Place," "The Yearling."

CRANE. What's sexy about "The Yearling"?

KATE. (*With a wicked leer.*) A little boy who falls in love with a deer?

CRANE. (*Rises.*) Let's look for the diamonds. (*Puts her glass on the table by the Center chair.*) The trouble is as soon as we really start searching, someone will come in, won't he?

KATE. This quiet, hidden-away nook is like Macy's at Christmas.

CRANE. So the sensible thing is to wait until we're sure we won't be interrupted.

KATE. A good thought for one of your height and weight.

CRANE. But when?

KATE. (*Takes both glasses to bar.*) Later tonight when the milking is done, the quilts have been patched and the Late Show is finished.

CRANE. Pick a time.

KATE. One—two—three?

CRANE. Two sounds safe enough.

KATE. It's a deal. Two A.M. and we ransack the joint. (*They shake hands.*)

CRANE. Didn't I have one of these scenes in "The Case of the Bloody but Unbowed Head"?

KATE. Sure you did.

CRANE. That's right. They spent the night looking for the stolen money and in the morning they were found all walled up with a cask of Amontillado.

KATE. You're confusing yourself with Poe. (*PHONE RINGS.*) You take it. I can't face Mabel again.

CRANE. (*Crossing to phone below KATE.*) Hello. Oh, yes. (*To KATE.*) You're clairvoyant. (*In phone.*) I'm sorry, Mabel, but Sheriff Cookley left a few minutes ago. He took Jenny home. Maybe you can catch him there. Is it anything serious?—In that case I wouldn't think of letting you tell me. (*Hangs up.*) It seems telephone operators take an oath like doctors. They can't reveal secrets. KATE. Maybe they've caught someone.

CRANE. Who?

KATE. Oh, anyone. The Boss, the fence, the private operator.

CRANE. Maybe Verne's term of office has expired.

KATE. Another drink? (*Crosses to bar and makes two drinks.*)

CRANE. We need fortitude for the search.

KATE. I'll never sleep a wink anyway.

CRANE. Why not?

KATE. Listen. Could you sleep with all that going on? Just listen. (*Cups hand to ear.*) Not a damn thing. Oh, for one car or one good street brawl.

CRANE. (*Crosses above sofa to doors.*) The country is full of the most fascinating sounds, Kate. You're just not attuned to them—little crickets rubbing their legs together, owls hooting at the moon, little bobolinks linking.

KATE. (*Moves to above sofa with CRANE'S drink.*) I don't hear a damn thing.

CRANE. (*Moving KATE above sofa, both facing front.*) Concentrate. Listen to nature, Kate. It's magnificent. (*After a slight pause comes the sound of HELEN's "Yoo Hoo."*)

KATE. (*Handing CRANE her drink.*) The Audubon Society should get that one.

HELEN. (*Offstage.*) Yoo hoo. (*And in she bounces dressed as before.*) Guess who?

KATE. Would you repeat the question, please?

HELEN. Guess who?

CRANE. Why, Miss O'Toole, what a pleasant surprise. I was just saying I bet someone would drop in.

KATE. And here you are. Would you like a drink?

HELEN. No, thank you. Mrs. Hammond, I feel awful.

CRANE. Kate, get an aspirin.

HELEN. I don't mean physically. I mean I feel awful about what's happened to you today. (*KATE goes to the bar for her drink.*)

CRANE. Nothing at all has happened to me. (*Puts her glass on table by chair.*)

HELEN. (*Moves in below sofa.*) Here you move in all exhausted from your writing and what happens? Bodies hanging in closets, police in and out, missing diamonds. You mustn't think Birchville a very friendly place.

CRANE. On the contrary. (*Indicates for HELEN to sit on sofa, which she does, placing her purse on the table to the right.* CRANE sits beside her.)

HELEN. As a matter of fact, I brought this very matter up at the Maple Products committee meeting tonight. To make amends, we'd like you to accept the honor of being our Sap Queen.

CRANE. Sap Queen?

KATE. Don't question it. (*Sits in Center chair.*)

HELEN. Yes. Every spring when the syrup is running, we always have an honorary Sap Queen at the square dance. Even if you can't be here in person, it doesn't matter. We'll put your picture on every can of sap that is made in town. That's how we feel about you, Mrs. Hammond.

CRANE. I'm deeply touched, really I am. Isn't it sweet, Kate?

KATE. Sweet—and sticky.

HELEN. Last year's Sap Queen was a great disappointment. She ran off with a married man and the committee had to spend the summer pasting another face over hers on the can.

KATE. Who did they pick?

HELEN. What could they do? It was an emergency. They just glued on Mary Pickford and hoped for the best.

CRANE. I hope you won't have to glue anyone over me.

HELEN. Have no fear, I know a lady when I meet one. You're not the type to run away with a married man.

CRANE. No, I'd stay home with him, wouldn't I, Kate? KATE. Only with your best friend's husband.

(*They both laugh. HELEN, not understanding joins them, turns toward doors to pick up her purse, sees something outside, screams and rises, pointing out doors. The OTHER TWO rise also.*)

CRANE. What is it? KATE. Miss O'Toole!

HELEN. Out there. I saw him.

CRANE. Who?

HELEN. A man. I'm sure of it. A prowler.

KATE. In our garden?

HELEN. Yes. I just caught a glimpse of him but I think he was wearing pajamas. (*HELEN looks out doors, CRANE and KATE face each other and make turning gesture and water-coming-down gesture.*)

CRANE. It's just your mind playing tricks. Auto-suggestion and all that sort of thing.

HELEN. I saw him!

CRANE. (*As she sits HELEN on the sofa and sits beside her.*) You think you saw him, that's all. You're just nervous because of all that's happened. Isn't that right, Kate? (*KATE nods and moves above them. To HELEN.*) Miss Bixley majored in psychology in Princeton.