

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #1

Delmount Williams, Tessy Mahoney, & Popeye Jackson

WILLIAMS

(Turning to see her.) Popeye --

JACKSON Hi.

WILLIAMS Hello.

JACKSON Is Carnelle come back?

WILLIAMS No. I'm waiting here for her.

JACKSON Oh.

WILLIAMS I'd like to see her.

JACKSON Yeah.

WILLIAMS 'Course, I'm not even sure if she's coming back here or what.

JACKSON Oh.

(Uneasy, she starts to leave.)

WILLIAMS Would you like to wait here too?

JACKSON

(Stopping.) Sure. Alright. Peanut?

WILLIAMS Thanks.

(A pause.) So you'll be leaving Brookhaven?

JACKSON I reckon.

WILLIAMS It's funny 'cause I'm leaving here too.

JACKSON You is? Where was you planning to go?

WILLIAMS I thought I'd be going to New Orleans -- get back to the University and learn to be a philosopher. That way, after I have time to study and think it all through, I'll be able to let everyone know why we're living. It'll be a great relief. . . I believe. And where are you going to go?

JACKSON Well, I don't know the particulars. But I heard a' this place name of Elysian fields.

WILLIAMS Elysian fields?

JACKSON Right. See, they got this ambrosia t'eat and wine and honey t'drink and all sorts of people carrying on. Do you know what state it's located in?

WILLIAMS It -- isn't in a state.

JACKSON It ain't?

WILLIAMS No. It isn't even in the world. It's -- it's fictional. It's a made-up place. Why, it's only in books and stories.

JACKSON Oh. Well, shoot. Guess I won't be going there.

(Tessy enters left into the dressing room. She is wearing a big straw hat.)

MAHONEY Oh, Delmount!! Are you here? Delmount?!

(She steps from the dressing room to the outside area.) Oh, there you are!

(Looking at her watch.) Right on the nose! You punctual thing! Do you like this hat?

WILLIAMS It becomes you.

MAHONEY Isn't he sweet. Well, do come on. Well. Tell your friend good-bye and let's head to the fireworks.

WILLIAMS Ah, Tessy. . .

MAHONEY Yes?

WILLIAMS Well, I -- I can't go with you to the fireworks.

MAHONEY Oh, you can't?

WILLIAMS No, I -- I promised Popeye I'd go with her. I'm sorry. I tried to tell you this afternoon.

MAHONEY I see. I see. I try to turn the other cheek and you slap it too. You're ungrateful and unworthy and low and dirty and mean! Why, I'm never gonna forgive you again! Never! I hope you rot in H!!

(She exits down right.)

WILLIAMS Brother.

JACKSON Why did you lie t'her?

WILLIAMS Huh?

JACKSON You told her you was promised t'go t'the fireworks with me.

WILLIAMS Oh. Well, I just didn't want to go out to the fireworks with her and. . .And you can't go around obliging other people in this world.

JACKSON Oh.

WILLIAMS Of course I do want to go watch the fireworks. They always have a nice, colorful display. You weren't planning to -- I don't know, go to the fireworks yourself?

JACKSON Sure. It's why I brung my binoculars. Had me a place picked out and everything.

WILLIAMS Oh. Hmm. Well, I guess you. . .

JACKSON Huh?

WILLIAMS No, nothing. I'll be seeing you. 'Bye.

(He exits down right. Popeye sits on the bench and stares ahead. She reaches into her peanut bag. There are none left.)

JACKSON

(Miserably.) Guess that's the last of 'em.

(Delmount reappears abruptly from downstage right.)

WILLIAMS Popeye, would you mind going to watch the fireworks with me tonight?

JACKSON No. I wouldn't. Sure. Alright.

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Good. Good then. Good. Let's go!

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #2

Elain Rutledge & Delmount Williams

RUTLEDGE Thanks.

(Carnelle exits to the kitchen, stuffing the brownie into her mouth.)

RUTLEDGE Hello. . .Yes, Dear, I got them. . .Oh, they're beautiful; they're -- very fragrant; they're -- I-I don't want to come home. . .I mean not ever, or for awhile, or for not ever. . .I feel like I'm missing my life. . .I don't know about the children. They'll manage. . .Oh, for God's sake, Franklin, no one's going to bake them into a pie!. . .Oh, please! I don't want to discuss it anymore. I'm tired of it all, I'm through with it all. Good-bye!

(She hangs up the phone. She is stunned and shaken by what she has done.)

WILLIAMS

(Who has been listening to all of this while pretending to work with the price tags.) Did you mean it? You're gonna leave him?

RUTLEDGE Yes.

WILLIAMS By God, Swayne. By God. I love ya, Honey! How I do love ya! Now are you sure you meant it?

RUTLEDGE Uh huh.

WILLIAMS Don't just tell me you meant it, then later take it all back. You've done that before, you know.

RUTLEDGE I haven't.

WILLIAMS What do you mean you haven't?!? It's a personality trait with you. It's your trademark! You tell me you're gonna do something one way and then you go back on it 'cause of what Mama said or what Franklin said or what some other fly-by-night-fool-idiot said!

RUTLEDGE Don't pick on me!

WILLIAMS Ooh! I knew it! You didn't mean it! I knew it!

RUTLEDGE I meant it! I said it!

WILLIAMS All you want is for everyone to think you're perfect. Well, perfect is dull!

RUTLEDGE Don't you dare call me dull. Just because I'm not insane and obsessed and possessed by dreams.

WILLIAMS

(Overlapping.) Shut up, Elain. Shut up your red blood lips!

RUTLEDGE You are a selfish human being! Mama always loved you ten times better than me.

WILLIAMS Oh God.

RUTLEDGE I had to win contests and be in pageants before she'd give me any notice at all. When I graduated junior college she said, "You've had your spoonful of gravy now go out and get a rich husband"; so I did.

WILLIAMS You're a fool to let Mama ramshackle your life. Mama was nothing but mean.

RUTLEDGE Not to you. She was sweet to you.

WILLIAMS She pretended to be sweet.

RUTLEDGE Well, everyone always thought she was. Till the day she died, people were saying she was a blessed angel on earth.

WILLIAMS Yeah, an angel in ape's clothing.

RUTLEDGE You are so cruel.

WILLIAMS Well, hell, she just turned herself into a monkey to get at us -- just to be mean. I always knew Mama was mean.

RUTLEDGE No. She wasn't always. Things change. She wasn't always.

WILLIAMS Why, I remember when I was a child a' three how she tortured our favorite dog, White Face, right before my very eyes.

RUTLEDGE Wha'd she do to White Face?

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #3

Carnelle Scott & Elain Rutledge

RUTLEDGE So, why don't we just wait till after the audition and see if you make it to the pageant.

SCOTT Why? Don't you think I'll make it?

RUTLEDGE Well, I hope so, Carnelle, but they only pick five girls.

SCOTT Well. . .I've thought about it, and I, frankly, can't think of five other girls in town that are prettier than me. I'm speaking honestly now. 'Course I know there's Caroline Jeffers, but she has those yellow teeth --

RUTLEDGE

(Not wanting to get into it.) My, this mint is delicious! Did you grow it yourself?

SCOTT Aunt Ronelle planted it before she died.

RUTLEDGE Well, it's quite refreshing.

SCOTT I know why you're worried. You think I've ruined my chances, 'cause -- 'cause of my reputation.

RUTLEDGE I don't know what you mean -- you're perfectly sweet.

SCOTT Well, everyone knew I used to go out with lots of men and all that. Different ones. It's been a constant thing with me since I was young and --

RUTLEDGE Let's not discuss it in all a' this heat.

SCOTT I just mention it 'cause it's different now, since Aunt Ronelle died and since -- I got that disease.

RUTLEDGE Please, Carnelle, nobody's profiting by this information!

SCOTT Anyway, I go to church now and I'm signed up to where I take an orphan home to dinner once a week or to a movie; and -- and I work on the cancer drive here just like you do in Natchez.

RUTLEDGE That's all very admirable, I'm sure.

SCOTT My life has meaning. People aren't calling me, Miss Hot Tamale anymore like they used to. Everything's changed. And being in that contest -- it would be such an honor to me. . .I can't explain the half of it.

RUTLEDGE Well, if you don't make it to the finals, just try to remember that Mama was at her most noblest when she was least attractive.

SCOTT I wish you had about a drop a' faith in me. I'm not all that ugly.

RUTLEDGE And I wish you would stop fishing for compliments -- 'cause I'm sick and worn out with giving people compliments about themselves!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) I'm sorry. I'm so, so sorry, I make such stupid blunders. I know you don't think I'm ugly.

RUTLEDGE

(Overlapping.) I'm not myself -- I'm just not myself.

(She begins brushing her hair. The phone rings. Elaine freezes. Carnelle goes to answer it.)

RUTLEDGE If it's for me -- say -- say, I'm resting.

SCOTT Hello. . . Oh, hello, Franklin. . . Yes, she's here. . . Well, I think she decided not to stop by there. .

. No, she's asleep now. She's gone on to sleep. . . Well, wait just a minute, I'll go see.

(She puts her hand over the phone.) He wants me to go wake you up.

RUTLEDGE

(In a whisper.) He what! Oh, how inconsiderate can he be! Why, I've been driving all day long in this blazing heat and he doesn't even care if I get my rest. You tell him I'm out dead with exhaustion and you absolutely cannot wake me.

SCOTT

(She waits a few beats and then says breathlessly into the phone.) Franklin. . . I absolutely cannot wake her. She's out dead with exhaustion. . . Alright, I'll tell her. 'Bye-'bye.

(She hangs up the phone.) He says for you to please call him when you wake up.

RUTLEDGE Oh, he does, does he? Well, he can just sit and wait, 'cause I'm not calling him -- not ever.

SCOTT Why not?

RUTLEDGE Listen, Carnation, I think you should know something -- I'm not just here on a visit.

SCOTT You're not?

RUTLEDGE No.

(Then after a moment.) I've left Franklin.

SCOTT What?!

RUTLEDGE Now, remember, it's a sworn secret and not a living soul is to find it out.

SCOTT I won't say a word to anyone. I swear.

RUTLEDGE You see, I haven't told Franklin yet and he actually still believes everything is -- bearable between us.

SCOTT I just can't believe all this. You were so in love. It seemed like Franklin loved you so much. I thought I wanted a man to love me that much.

RUTLEDGE Yes; he did love me. But it just caused him to follow me around asking, "Do you love me? How much do you love me? Tell me how you love me," till I could shake him till he rattled.

SCOTT Then you don't love him anymore?

RUTLEDGE

(Taking off her jewelry.) No. He makes me ill.

SCOTT How awful.

RUTLEDGE Yes.

SCOTT But what about your two little boys. They need a mother.

RUTLEDGE Oh, children manage in this world. Don't ask me about them.

SCOTT Gosh, Aunt Ronelle said you had it all up there in Natchez; everything -- just like a queen in a castle.

RUTLEDGE I know. I did. I only hope I can stand to give it all up.

(Deeply moved.) We had such beautiful clocks. I must have a bath.

(She rises.)

SCOTT Elain.

(Elain stops.)

SCOTT What was it like -- when you had it all?

RUTLEDGE Ah, Carnation! The abundance of treasures merely serves to underline the desperate futility of life.

(She exits upstairs to the bedrooms.)

SCOTT Oh -- tell me more -- please! Tell me more!

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #4

Carnelle Scott & Popeye Jackson

JACKSON This sure is a scary house.

SCOTT You don't like it?

JACKSON It's scary.

SCOTT Well, it's just like my Aunt Ronelle fixed it up. It's got her special touch: this old spinning wheel; these lace doilies; these old pictures in frames here. I'd prefer something more modern and luxurious, but -- that's just me.

JACKSON You live here with your aunt?

SCOTT Oh, no. She died. She had cancer.

JACKSON I'm sorry.

SCOTT It happened just a few weeks before last Christmas. We were very close. It was a tragedy.

JACKSON I'm sorry.

SCOTT

(As she pours Popeye's tea.) You may of heard about her; Ronelle Williams? It was a famous medical case -- ran in all the newspapers.

JACKSON No.

SCOTT Well, see what it was -- do you take lemon?

JACKSON Please.

SCOTT Anyway, she had this cancer of the pituitary gland, I believe it was; so what they did was they replaced her gland with the gland of a monkey to see if they could save her life -- just help yourself to the sugar --

JACKSON

(Moving to sit on the floor.) Thanks.

SCOTT And they did, in fact, keep her alive for a month or so longer than she was expected to live.

JACKSON Well, that's good.

SCOTT

(Pouring herself some tea.) Of course, there were such dreadful side effects.

JACKSON Mmm.

SCOTT She, well, she started growing long, black hairs all over her body just, well, just like an ape.

JACKSON Gracious, Lord.

SCOTT It was very trying. But she was so brave. She even let them take photographs of her. Everyone said she was just a saint. A saint or an angel; one or the other.

JACKSON It gives me the shivers.

SCOTT It was awfully hard on me losing my Aunt Ronelle -- although I guess I should be used to it by now.

JACKSON What's that?

SCOTT People dying. It seems like people've been dying practically all my life, in one way or another. First my mother passed when I was barely a year old. Then my daddy kinda drug me around with him till I was about nine and he couldn't stand me any longer; so he dropped me off to live with my Aunt Ronelle and Uncle George and their own two children: Elain and Delmount. They're incredible those two. They're just my ideal. Anyhow, we're happy up until the time when Uncle George falls to his death trying to pull this bird's nest out from the chimney.

JACKSON He fall off from the roof?

SCOTT That's right. Tommy Turner was passing by throwing the evening paper and he caught sight of the whole event. Boom.

JACKSON How awful.

SCOTT Anyhow, my original daddy appears back here to live with us looking all kinda fat and swollen. And after staying on with us about two years, he suddenly drops dead in the summer's heat while running out to the Tropical Ice Cream truck. Heart failure, they said it was. Then this thing with Aunt Ronelle dying right before Christmas. It's been hard to bear.

JACKSON

(After a moment.) I had a brother who was bit by a water moccasin down by the Pearl River, and he died.

SCOTT Well; you know, they say everyone's gonna be dying someday. I believe it too.

JACKSON Yeah. May as well.

(She finishes a cracker and wipes her lips with a napkin.) That sure was tasty.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #5

Carnelle Scott & Tessy Mahoney

MAHONEY

(As she enters the dressing room carrying only the tap shoes.) It's over here. It's this way. It's this way, here!

SCOTT Oh. Oh, I see. I see!

MAHONEY Can you make it?

SCOTT

(Making her way into the dressing room.) Yeah. I got it. Here, I got it.

(Dropping her belongings where she can.) Wheew! Brother. Thanks very much for the help.

MAHONEY Sure. It's what I'm here for.

SCOTT Oh, look! Is this my dressing room? Is this mine?

MAHONEY

(Picking up her clipboard and taking a pencil from behind her ear.) Uh huh. It's the only one left. The good ones have all been taken.

(Looking at her watch.) You're running late, you know.

SCOTT

(Struggling with her belongings.) Yes, I know. I was sewing on my dress. Things aren't going smoothly at all today. Oh, look! Now my hair piece is falling out. I worked all morning on that. So, is your sister nervous?

MAHONEY Not really. I guess she knows she doesn't have a chance.

SCOTT

(As she straightens up her things.) What makes you say that?

MAHONEY Well, she's not at all attractive. I'm amazed she ever got in the contest. I'm sure it's just 'cause the judges think she's some sort of concert pianist. But she just knows that one opus by Johann Sebastian Bach. I swear that's all she knows.

SCOTT Hmm, I suppose that talent part of the contest will count quite a bit.

MAHONEY Well, she looks like a tank in her swimsuit.

SCOTT She does?

MAHONEY She's hump shouldered from practicing that one Johann Sebastian Bach opus on our piano all day long.

SCOTT What a shame.

MAHONEY This is strictly confidential, but the word is out that the only real contenders for the Miss Firecracker crown are you and Caroline Jeffers.

SCOTT

(Overcome.) Oh, gosh, I don't know --

MAHONEY It's the truth. Everyone's saying it. We're all agreed.

SCOTT Of course Caroline's really a lovely girl. . .

MAHONEY Yeah, except for those yellow teeth.

SCOTT Well, I hear she took medicine for seizures that she had as a child and it scraped off most of her tooth enamel.

MAHONEY I heard that too, but it doesn't matter.

SCOTT It doesn't?

MAHONEY I really don't think the judges are interested in sentimentality -- just the teeth themselves.

(Referring to the red dress.) That's such a beautiful red dress. It's really very fine.

SCOTT Yes, it's beautiful. I'm just a little worried though. It just arrived from Natchez yesterday and, well, it didn't seem to fit me exactly right.

MAHONEY What's wrong with the fit?

SCOTT Well, the waist was a little snug. But I worked on it this morning and added in this extra bit of material.

(She shows that a large strip of pink material has been awkwardly added to the bodice of the red dress.)

MAHONEY

(Disdainfully.) Oh. Well.

SCOTT 'Course, I know it's not the exact matching color. Actually, my cousin Elain's gone to get my seamstress, Popeye Jackson, and see what she can do. We couldn't find her last night. She'll fix it right up. This is just temporary.

MAHONEY Well, I hope so. It looks a little funny.

SCOTT

(Looking outside.) Oh, I know Elain'll bring Popeye; she promised she would. She's never let me down in her life. Gosh, I think I'm starting t'sweat. My makeup is melting right down my face.

(She starts fixing her face.)

MAHONEY

(Looking at her watch.) Hmm. Actually, you don't have much time. It's only twenty-eight minutes till the opening Parade of Firecrackers.

(Tessy blows her whistle.)

SCOTT Oh, my word! Well, I'm ready except for my dress. I mean, my head is ready.

MAHONEY

(Removing schedule from her clipboard.) Well, anyway, here's your schedule.

SCOTT Thanks.

MAHONEY Oh and have you seen the Grand Float they've made for Miss Firecracker to ride at the head of the Independence Day Parade?

SCOTT Oh, yes, I saw it -- it's. . . beautiful.

MAHONEY Why, yes, it's very fine. Well, I'd better go let Miss Blue know you're checked in.

(After glancing at herself in the mirror.) Oh. Mind if I borrow some of your hairspray?

SCOTT No, go ahead.

MAHONEY Thanks.

(As she sprays her already rock hard hair.) I, ah, hear your cousin Delmount's back in town.

SCOTT Yes, he's back.

MAHONEY *(Still spraying.)* Well, you can tell him for me that I've forgiven him. I understand now that some men just don't have any self-control. Just none at all. Think that'll hold?

SCOTT Uh huh.

MAHONEY Anyway, tell him my Uncle Ferd's given us a new litter of Siamese kittens if he wants to drop by and see them. I know he always enjoyed animals.

SCOTT I'll tell him.

MAHONEY Well, good luck. I'll be standing by backstage running the contest. Let me know if any emergencies arrive.

SCOTT Alright.

MAHONEY Give 'em H.

SCOTT I'll try.

(Tessy exits left. Carnelle turns back and looks in the mirror. She stares at herself as she wipes sweat off the back of her neck.)

SCOTT Oh, Lord.

(She tries a big friendly smirk. It falters.) Oh, Lord.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #6

Carnelle Scott, Delmount Williams, & Mac Sam

MAG SAM

(Looking inside the dressing room.) Hi, ya!

SCOTT AAH!

MAG SAM Admiring y'physiognomy?

SCOTT

(Catching her breath.) Mac Sam. What are you doing here?

MAG SAM Just came t'wish you well. Heard you were in the beauty contest and came by t'wish you well.

SCOTT

(Breathlessly.) Thanks. I'm nervous.

MAG SAM Sure y'are. Well, good luck. I wish y'well.

(He leaves the dressing room. She follows.)

SCOTT I -- didn't think I'd be seeing you again.

MAG SAM Yeah, well, wonders never do quite cease.

(He looks at her with his magnetic eyes then starts to leave again.)

SCOTT I tried to notify you. After I found out. Couldn't. . .locate you though.

MAG SAM Oh, "that." Yeah, well, I'm enjoying -- "that." Find it most fascinating.

SCOTT But didn't you get the shots?

MAG SAM Nah.

SCOTT But all you do is -- they give you these shots and you're cured. It cures you.

MAG SAM I don't care t'be cured.

SCOTT What do you mean? You've got to be.

MAG SAM

(Taking out a cigarette.) Listen, Honey, this life a' mine is strictly on the house. Strictly a free roll a' the eternal dice. I was almost choked to death by my mama's umbilical cord at birth. Spent three days purple and gasping for breath. I'm tired out of gasping. *(He lights his cigarette and blows out the match.)* Mmm. Your hair looks really nice. I like that color. It looks good on you.

SCOTT It doesn't seem too loud?

MAG SAM *(Smelling her hair.)* Not a bit. No, Sugar, not a bit.

WILLIAMS Carnelle!? Carnelle, are you about?!

SCOTT

(Yelling.) Delmount! Is that you?

(To Mac Sam.) It's my cousin, Delmount.

WILLIAMS Carnelle!!

SCOTT I'm over here!

MAG SAM Well, I'll be ambling along. It was good seeing you.

SCOTT

(Impulsively.) Will ya come back by?

MAG SAM

(His eyes becoming magnetic.) Oh, yeah.

(He exits right.)

WILLIAMS Carnelle!

SCOTT I'm over here!!!

(Delmount enters excitedly from the carnival grounds downstage right. His hair is wild; he carries a stuffed dog.)

WILLIAMS Oh! Well, there you are! Sounded like your voice was coming from over there by the snow cone stand.

SCOTT No, I'm here.

WILLIAMS Well. . .well, look, here's an artificial dog I won pitching dimes onto plates. Take it; it's for you if you want it.

SCOTT Why, thank you, Delmount.

(She kisses him.) Oh my lips.

(Carnelle hurries into the dressing room to fix her lips. Delmount follows.)

WILLIAMS Things are going very good over at the auction. I mean, the furniture, it all seems to be selling like hot cakes. Why, it looks to me, child a mine, that our lives may actually be on the verge of being fine.

SCOTT Gosh, everything feels so all of a sudden. Selling the house and all of the belongings and. . .leaving. . .It makes it much more important that I win the contest. I mean, the main thing is I gotta leave in the blaze of glory.

(She leaves the dressing room and starts pacing back and forth.) Let's see, I know I'll beat Sapphire Mendoza just 'cause she's the token Negro and Mexican. I'm not trying to be mean about it, but it's the truth. Then there's Joe Anne Jacobs.

WILLIAMS Frank Jacob's sister's in the pageant?

SCOTT Uh huh.

WILLIAMS She's a shrimp.

SCOTT Well, sorta. Then there's Missy Mahoney --

WILLIAMS Oh, my God! Is she in the pageant?

SCOTT Yeah.

WILLIAMS Why, next to her sister Tessy, Missy's the ugliest girl in the whole town!

SCOTT Sssh! Sssh! *(Pointing to the dressing room.)* Tessy's in charge of the pageant coordination. She may hear you.

WILLIAMS Oh, Jesus. Keep me away from those two. They are trouble.

SCOTT Well, Tessy was asking about you just now.

WILLIAMS She was? Holy cow; holy cow. Where's my pipe? I've got to lay low; that's all. Lay low till I can get out of this town for good and always.

SCOTT Let's see, then there's Caroline Jeffers. She is awfully pretty except. . . Oh, I don't know! I don't know!

(She begins chewing her nails.) Have you seen Elaine?

WILLIAMS Not since this morning.

SCOTT She was gonna go find Popeye to help sew up that red dress. It looks funny the way it is.

WILLIAMS Well, I haven't seen Popeye since that night you got into this blessed contest.

SCOTT

(Biting her nails.) Oh, shoot! I said I wasn't gonna chew on my nails!

(She takes a nail file from her dress pocket and begins filing.)

WILLIAMS She's strange anyway. . . that Popeye. She's very strange. A strange bird.

SCOTT

(Working on her nails.) I guess so. I guess she is. Still. . . well, I guess, I shouldn't tell you. No, never mind.

WILLIAMS Oh, that's fine. That's just fine. You start to say something and then you don't. Very nice, Carnelle, very nice.

SCOTT Well, it's just. . . it's just, well, she said she liked your hair and --

WILLIAMS What? My hair? She said she likes my hair?!

SCOTT Yes, and how you can wiggle your ears and write poetry.

WILLIAMS Wiggle my ears!? Good Lord and butter.

SCOTT Oh, I may as well tell you. . .she's in love with you.

WILLIAMS What!?! No, she's not. I don't believe that. Who told you that?

SCOTT Well, she said it. And she was crying over you. It's the truth, Delmount. She was in the living room crying over you.

WILLIAMS No, I don't believe it. Crying?

SCOTT I know. But I didn't have the heart to tell her about your obsessive eye for beauty. You know; that one you have.

WILLIAMS Oh. Yes, I have acquired a weakness for the classical, exotic beauty in a woman. I've been a fool for it. It's my romantic nature.

SCOTT And I guess you don't think that Popeye's exactly classical?

(Delmount looks forlornly at her.)

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #7

Mac Sam & Carnelle Scott

SCOTT Oh, I don't know. I better get my stuff out of here.

MAG SAM You know, I went looking for you after the parade. Where'd you get off to?

SCOTT Oh, nowhere. Just out walking by the railroad tracks.

MAG SAM What were you doing down there?

SCOTT

(As she gathers up her belongings.) Kicking rocks. Thinking. I thought maybe I was a victim of broken dreams but then I thought maybe I wasn't. I was trying so hard t'belong all my life and. . . I don't know. Oh, looks like Elain came for her red dress. Anyway, I just don't know what you can, well, reasonably hope for in life.

MAG SAM Not much, Baby, not too damn much.

SCOTT But something --

MAG SAM Sure. There's always eternal grace.

SCOTT It'd be nice.

(Holding up the shoe box.) Look, here, my frog's gone.

MAG SAM Yeah. That Popeye set it loose.

SCOTT Oh, well, I still have the suit.

(She holds up the pink suit. They look at each other and smile.)

MAG SAM God, you're beautiful. I wouldn't trade those times we had together not for anything.

SCOTT

(Throwing her arms around him.) Really?

MAG SAM Not for a golden monkey.

SCOTT But how about -- I mean I gave you --

MAG SAM Oh, the syph. Hell, I've got TB, alcoholics disease, rotting gut. I tell ya, I'm having fun taking bets on which part of me'll decay first: the liver, the lungs, the stomach, or the brain.

SCOTT

(Suddenly uneasy.) It's getting late. I gotta go.

(Carnelle leaves the dressing room carrying all of her belongings. He follows.)

MAG SAM Hey, listen, you want to go to the fireworks with ole Mac Sam? We could spend a fine night together.

SCOTT No. I -- I just need some rest. You'd be tiring me out awful fast.

MAG SAM Yeah.

SCOTT I gotta get this out to the car. Good-bye, Mac Sam. Good night.

(He doffs his cap to her. She exits downstage right.)

MAG SAM Good-bye, Baby. I'll always remember you as the one who could take it on the chin.

(He looks after her a moment, spits up a clot of blood, wipes off his mouth, and starts to exit upstage right.) Ah, well, on to the wisteria trees.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #8

Popeye Jackson & Delmount Williams

JACKSON Carnelle says you can wiggle your ears.

WILLIAMS Does she?

JACKSON Yes.

WILLIAMS

(Straightening his hair.) It's an old trick.

JACKSON I would liked t'have seen it.

WILLIAMS I don't do it anymore.

(He straightens his hair again.)

JACKSON What d'ya dream about at nights?

WILLIAMS

(Taken aback.) Why do you ask?

JACKSON I don't know, your face looks tired. I thought maybe you was having bad dreams.

WILLIAMS What are you saying? You make me uncomfortable. A gaggle of geese! What's that?! What are you talking about? This whole night has been unbearable! Ooooh! Now the ice cream has given me a headache. Lord Jesus! A gaggle of geese! Oh, my head! My head!

(He exits to the bedroom, holding his head. Popeye watches him leave then she puts both of her hands over her heart and starts to sob.)

JACKSON Oh. Oh. Oh. I must be stupid. I must be.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #9

Delmount Williams, Carnelle Scott, & Elain Rutledge

SCOTT So, what have you been doing?

WILLIAMS Not much. Had a job scraping up dead dogs from the road.

SCOTT We were -- concerned about you.

WILLIAMS I was alright. 'Course the dogs were a rotting mess.

SCOTT

(After a moment.) So, what brings you back home to Brookhaven?

WILLIAMS Business.

SCOTT Oh.

WILLIAMS I don't know if you realized this but my mamma the monkey left the whole of this house to me.

SCOTT I realized it.

WILLIAMS Well, I'm going to sell it. I'm going to sell this house and every stick of furniture in it. And I don't want to hear anything from you about it. It's mine; it's been given to me. And I'm not going to feel sorry for you just 'cause you went and dyed your hair fire engine red!

SCOTT Well, alright, Delmount! You don't have to get mean about it! If you want to sell the house, it's your house to sell; so go on and sell it!

WILLIAMS I will! I'm through working at disgusting job after disgusting job. I hate working! I loathe it!

(Elain appears on the staircase in a flowing robe.)

RUTLEDGE Carnation, Honey, where'd you put the --

WILLIAMS Oh -- No!!

RUTLEDGE Delmount!

WILLIAMS You bitch! You!

RUTLEDGE What!?

WILLIAMS How could you betray me like that!?! Your own flesh! Your own blood!

RUTLEDGE What's wrong with you? Are you still insane?

WILLIAMS Ooh! Ooh! I'm not speaking to you! I'm not speaking to you!!

SCOTT

(Overlapping.) What's going on? What is it?

RUTLEDGE Don't ask me! Don't ask me!

WILLIAMS No! No! Don't ask her! She could never tell. She could never tell that the beautiful, the sweet, the perfect, Elain Rutledge refused to help her own brother get out of a dirty lunatic asylum!

RUTLEDGE Why, it was clean, it was cheerful, it was the most expensive money could buy! Oh, but you've always lied -- even as a child we could never believe a word you said!

SCOTT (*Overlapping.*) Oh, what's wrong? What happened? Tell me! Please!!

WILLIAMS It's all quite simple, child a mine. They would have released me after two months time into Mrs. Rutledge's loving custody, 'cause, you see, she is my next a' kin, but she wouldn't have me. She wouldn't sign the papers.

RUTLEDGE

(*Overlapping.*) Please, Delmount. I'm sorry, but we thought you needed the professional help. You were so upset about Mama dying --

WILLIAMS Oh, Lord! She knows I wasn't upset 'cause of that! She knows that!

RUTLEDGE And Franklin just thought, 'cause of the children --

WILLIAMS

(*Under his breath.*) Franklin -- that sheep pussy.

RUTLEDGE

(*Angry.*) I mean, after all, Delmount, you did commit a violent act -- hitting that poor man in the face with a bottle --

WILLIAMS

(*To Carnelle.*) Do you actually think I'm of such base character? I challenged that man to a duel! A duel! I can't help it if the weapons he chose were broken bottles! It was an honorable act in defense of a woman with beautiful, warm, bronze skin. I do not regret it.

RUTLEDGE

(*Trying to break in between Carnelle and Delmount.*) Well, besides all of that, you know good and well, you've always had a checkered past!

WILLIAMS What checkered past?

RUTLEDGE For one thing, you tried to choke Carnelle's poor father to death right in there at the dining room table!

WILLIAMS Why, I never!

RUTLEDGE You did! It was right on New Year's Day!

SCOTT That's right, 'cause I found the dime in the black-eyed peas --

WILLIAMS Alright, I did! I did it! But he was boring me to death! I just wanted to shut him up!

RUTLEDGE Now, see! See! That is not reasonable behavior! It's just not reasonable. And how you almost got run out of town on a rail 'cause of what happened with T. S. Mahoney's two young virgin daughters! It's no wonder you have bad dreams! It's no wonder!!

WILLIAMS Rub my face in it, why don't you! You're so damn perfect and I'm such a no-account failure! Rub my face in it!

RUTLEDGE I'm sorry, Delmount. I'm sorry. Oh, you bring out the worst in me. You always have. You always have!

(Elain exits in a flurry. Carnelle and Delmount look after her for a moment then Carnelle goes to pick up the crackers and Delmount goes back to his pipe.)

WILLIAMS The irony of it. The intense irony.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #10

Carnelle Scott

SCOTT I -- don't -- want -- to -- hear -- it!! I wanted to win that contest. I cared about it. It was important to me.

(To Delmount.) And I don't care how stupid and meaningless you think it was!!

(To Elain.) And what are you looking at?! You never wanted me to win! You think I'm ugly, that's why you told me to wear that stupid mask over my face! I can't believe I ever wanted to be like you or that mean old monkey either!

(Mac Sam starts to cough. Carnelle turns to him.)

SCOTT And why don't you get well!?! You make me *sick* you're so *sick*!! You look like shit!!! I tell you, I'm so mad I could spit!

(Spit.) There!

(Spit, spit.) There, I spit!

(Spit.) Die you monkey! Die!

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #11

Popeye Jackson

JACKSON Oh, well. . .It's not my original name. I wasn't born with it.

(Embarrassed she begins to run on.) See, what happened was my brother Lucky, he threw a handful a gravel in my eyes and they started stinging and then he give me this brown bottle a' drops t'put inside my eyes and telling me it's eye drops but, in fact, it's drops for the ears and then this burning sensation come into my eyes, causing me t'scream out and cry like the devil and after that I got me a pair a' glasses and my eyes was bulged out a bit; so folks was calling me Popeye and the name just stuck with me -- Popeye. That's how I got the name.

Miss Firecracker Contest Sides #12

Delmount Williams

WILLIAMS Mahoney's two ugly daughters. I went up there thinking all they wanted was for me to see their box of newborn kittens. Well, when we got up in the attic, I saw most all of the kittens had swollen heads and crippled bodies. It was nothing but a cardboard box full of deformed damn cats. That's all there was to it. Well, I felt sorry for those two ugly daughters with their deformed box of cats. And they were dying for it. Hell, I was doing them a favor. There's the irony. You just can't go around obliging other people in this world. That's one thing I've learned.