

CAT ON A HOT TIN ROOF

ACT ONE

MAE:

It's a mighty dangerous thing to leave exposed round a house full of nawmal rid-blooded children attracted t'weapons.

MARGARET:

"Nawmal rid-blooded children attracted t'weapons" ought t'be taught to keep their hands off things that don't belong to them.

MAE:

Maggie, honey, if you had children of your own you'd know how funny that is. Will you please lock this up and put the key out of reach?

MAE:

Oh, my! Brick—Brick, you should've been downstairs after supper! Kiddies put on a show. Polly played the piano, Buster an' Sonny drums, an' then they turned out the lights an' Dixie an' Trixie puhfawmed a toe dance in fairy costume with *spabklubs!* Big Daddy just beamed! He just beamed!

MARGARET [*from the closet with a sharp laugh*]:

Oh, I bet. It breaks my heart that we missed it!

[*She reenters.*]

But Mae? Why did y'give dawgs' names to all your kiddies?

MAE:
Dogs' names?

MARGARET [*sweetly*]:
Dixie, Trixie, Buster, Sonny, Polly!—Sounds like four dogs
and a parrot . . .

MAE:
Maggie?

[*Margaret turns with a smile.*]

Why are you so catty?

MARGARET:
Cause I'm a cat! But why can't *you* take a joke, Sister
Woman?

MAE:
Nothin' pleases me more than a joke that's funny. You know
the real names of our kiddies. Buster's real name is Robert.
Sonny's real name is Saunders. Trixie's real name is Marlene
and Dixie's—

[*Gooper downstairs calls for her. "Hey, Mae! Sister Woman,
intermission is over!"—She rushes to door, saying:*]

Intermission is over! See ya later!

ACT TWO

MARGARET [*at door*]:
Here they come!

GOOPER:
I read in the *Register* that you're getting a new memorial window.

[Some of the people are approaching through the hall, others along the gallery: voices from both directions. Gooper and Reverend Tooker become visible outside gallery doors, and their voices come in clearly.]

[They pause outside as Gooper lights a cigar.]

REVEREND TOOKER [*vivaciously*]:
Oh, but St. Paul's in Grenada has three memorial windows, and the latest one is a Tiffany stained-glass window that cost twenty-five hundred dollars, a picture of Christ the Good Shepherd with a Lamb in His arms.

BIG DADDY:
Well, Brick.

BRICK:
Hello Big Daddy.—Congratulations!

BIG DADDY:
—Crap. . .

GOOPER:
Who give that window, Preach?

REVEREND TOOKER:
Clyde Fletcher's widow. Also presented St. Paul's with a baptismal font.

GOOPER:
Y'know what somebody ought t' give your church is a *coolin'* system, Preach.

MAE [*almost religiously*]:
—Let's see now, they've had their *tyyy*-phoid shots, and their tetanus shots, their diphtheria shots and their hepatitis shots and their polio shots, they got *those* shots every month from May through September, and—Gooper? Hey! Gooper!—What all have the kiddies been shot faw?

REVEREND TOOKER:
Yes, siree, Bob! And y'know what Gus Hamma's family gave in his memory to the church at Two Rivers? A complete new stone parish-house with a basketball court in the basement and a—

BIG DADDY [*uttering a loud barking laugh which is far from truly mirthful*]:

Hey, Preach! What's all this talk about memorials, Preach? Y' think somebody's about t' kick off around here? 'S that it?

[*Startled by this interjection, Reverend Tooker decides to laugh at the question almost as loud as he can.*

[*How he would answer the question we'll never know, as he's spared that embarrassment by the voice of Gooper's wife, Mae, rising high and clear as she appears with "Doc" Baugh, the family doctor, through the hall door.*]

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BIG MAMA:

Big Daddy, you don't mean that.

BIG DADDY:

Oh, yes, I do, oh, yes, I do, I mean it! I put up with a whole lot of crap around here because I thought I was dying. And you thought I was dying and you started taking over, well, you can stop taking over now, Ida, because I'm not gonna die, you can just stop now this business of taking over because you're not taking over because I'm not dying, I went through the laboratory and the goddam exploratory operation and there's nothing wrong with me but a spastic colon. And I'm not dying of cancer which you thought I was dying of. Ain't that so? Didn't you think that I was dying of cancer, Ida?

[Almost everybody is out on the gallery but the two old people glaring at each other across the blazing cake.]

[Big Mama's chest heaves and she presses a fat fist to her mouth.]

[Big Daddy continues, hoarsely:]

Ain't that so, Ida? Didn't you have an idea I was dying of cancer and now you could take control of this place and everything on it? I got that impression, I seemed to get that impression. Your loud voice everywhere, your fat old body butting in here and there!

BIG MAMA:

Hush! The Preacher!

BIG DADDY:

Fuck the goddam preacher!

[Big Mama gasps loudly and sits down on the sofa which is almost too small for her.]

ACT TWO

Did you hear what I said? I said fuck the goddam preacher!

[Somebody closes the gallery doors from outside just as there is a burst of fireworks and excited cries from the children.]

BIG MAMA:

I never seen you act like this before and I can't think what's got in you!

BIG DADDY:

I went through all that laboratory and operation and all just so I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it turns out that I am and you ain't—and that's my birthday present—and my cake and champagne!—because for three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made! I made this place! I was overseer on it! I was the overseer on the old Straw and Ochello plantation. I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! I did all that myself with no goddam help from you, and now you think you're just about to take over. Well, I am just about to tell you that you are not just about to take over, you are not just about to take over a God damn thing. Is that clear to you, Ida? Is that very plain to you, now? Is that understood completely? I been through the laboratory from A to Z. I've had the goddam exploratory operation, and nothing is wrong with me but a spastic colon—made spastic, I guess, by *disgust!* By all the goddam lies and liars that I have had to put up with, and all the goddam hypocrisy that I lived with all these forty years that we been livin' together!

Hey! Ida!! Blow out the candles on the birthday cake! Purse

...

BIG DADDY:

BRICK! HEY, BRICK!

[He stands over his blazing birthday cake.

[After some moments, Brick hobbles in on his crutch, holding his glass.

[Margaret follows him with a bright, anxious smile.]

I didn't call you, Maggie. I called Brick.

MARGARET:

I'm just delivering him to you.

ACT TWO

[She kisses Brick on the mouth which he immediately wipes with the back of his hand. She flies girlishly back out. Brick and his father are alone.]

BIG DADDY:

Why did you do that?

BRICK:

Do what, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:

Wipe her kiss off your mouth like she'd spit on you.

BRICK:

I don't know. I wasn't conscious of it.

BIG DADDY:

That woman of yours has a better shape on her than Gooper's but somehow or other they got the same look about them.

BRICK:

What sort of look is that, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:

I don't know how to describe it but it's the same look.

BRICK:

They don't look peaceful, do they?

BIG DADDY:

No, they sure in hell don't.

BRICK:

They look nervous as cats?

BIG DADDY:

That's right, they look nervous as cats.

BRICK:

Nervous as a couple of cats on a hot tin roof?

BIG DADDY:

That's right, boy, they look like a couple of cats on a hot tin roof. It's funny that you and Gooper being so different would pick out the same type of woman.

BRICK:

Both of us married into society, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:

Crap . . . I wonder what gives them both that look?

BRICK:

Well. They're sittin' in the middle of a big piece of land, Big Daddy, twenty-eight thousand acres is a pretty big piece of land and so they're squaring off on it, each determined to knock off a bigger piece of it than the other whenever you let it go.

BIG DADDY:

I got a surprise for those women. I'm not gonna let it go for a long time yet if that's what they're waiting for.

BRICK:

That's right, Big Daddy. You just sit tight and let them scratch each other's eyes out. . . .

BIG DADDY:

You bet your life I'm going to sit tight on it and let those sons of bitches scratch their eyes out, ha ha ha. . . .

But Gooper's wife's a good breeder, you got to admit she's fertile. Hell, at supper tonight she had them all at the table and they had to put a couple of extra leafs in the table to make room for them, she's got five head of them, now, and another one's comin'.

BIG DADDY:

WAIT!—Brick. . . .

[His voice drops. Suddenly there is something shy, almost tender, in his restraining gesture.]

Don't let's—leave it like this, like them other talks we've had, we've always—talked around things, we've—just talked around things for some fuckin' reason, I don't know what, it's always like something was left not spoken, something avoided because neither of us was honest enough with the—other. . . .

BRICK:

I never lied to you, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:

Did I ever to *you*?

BRICK:

No, sir. . . .

BIG DADDY:

Then there is at least two people that never lied to each other.

BRICK:

But we've never *talked* to each other.

BIG DADDY:
We can *now*.

BRICK:
Big Daddy, there don't seem to be anything much to say.

BIG DADDY:
You say that you drink to kill your disgust with lying.

BRICK:
You said to give you a reason.

BIG DADDY:
Is liquor the only thing that'll kill this disgust?

BRICK:
Now. Yes.

BIG DADDY:
But not once, huh?

BRICK:
Not when I was still young an' believing. A drinking man's someone who wants to forget he isn't still young an' believing.

BIG DADDY:
Believing what?

BRICK:
Believing. . . .

BIG DADDY:
Believing *what?*

BRICK [*stubbornly evasive*]:
Believing. . . .

BIG DADDY:
I don't know what the hell you mean by believing and I don't

think you know what you mean by believing, but if you still got sports in your blood, go back to sports announcing and—

BRICK:
Sit in a glass box watching games I can't play? Describing what I can't do while players do it? Sweating out their disgust and confusion in contests I'm not fit for? Drinkin' a coke, half bourbon, so I can stand it? That's no goddam good any more, no help—time just outran me, Big Daddy—got there first. . . .

BIG DADDY:
I think you're passing the buck.

BRICK:
You know many drinkin' men?

BIG DADDY [*with a slight, charming smile*]:
I have known a fair number of that species.

BRICK:
Could any of them tell you why he drank?

BIG DADDY:
Yep, you're passin' the buck to things like time and disgust with "mendacity" and—crap!—if you got to use that kind of language about a thing, it's ninety-proof bull, and I'm not buying any.

BRICK:
I had to give you a reason to get a drink!

BIG DADDY:
You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died.

[*Silence for five beats. Then Brick makes a startled movement, reaching for his crutch.*]

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BIG MAMA:

Brick is Big Daddy's boy, but he drinks too much and it worries me and Big Daddy, and it will break Big Daddy's heart if Brick don't pull himself together and take hold of things.

MAE:

Take hold of *what* things, Big Mama?

BIG MAMA:

The place.

[There is a quick violent look between Mae and Gooper.]

GOOPER:

Big Mama, you've had a shock.

MAE:

Yais, we've all had a shock, but . . .

GOOPER:

Let's be realistic—

MAE:

—Big Daddy would never, would *never*, be foolish enough to—

GOOPER:

—put this place in irresponsible hands!

ACT THREE

BIG MAMA:

Big Daddy ain't going to leave the place in anybody's hands; Big Daddy is *not* going to die. I want you to get that in your heads, all of you!

MAE:

Mommy, Mommy, Big Mama, we're just as hopeful an' optimistic as you are about Big Daddy's prospects, we have faith in *prayer*—but nevertheless there are certain matters that have to be discussed an' dealt with, because otherwise—

GOOPER:

Eventualities have to be considered and now's the time . . . Mae, will you please get my brief case out of our room?

MAE:

Yes, honey.

[She rises and goes out through the hall door.]

GOOPER *[standing over Big Mama]*:

Now, Big Mom. What you said just now was not at all true and you know it. I've always loved Big Daddy in my own quiet way. I never made a show of it, and I know that Big Daddy has always been fond of me in a quiet way, too, and he never made a show of it neither.

[Mae returns with Gooper's brief case.]

MAE:

Here's your brief case, Gooper, honey.

GOOPER *[handing the brief case back to her]*:

Thank you . . . Of cou'se, my relationship with Big Daddy is different from Brick's.

MAE:

You're eight years older'n Brick an' always had t' carry a bigger load of th' responsibilities than Brick ever had t' carry.

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He never carried a thing in his life but a football or a high-ball.

GOOPER:
Mae, will y' let me talk, please?

MAE:
Yes, honey.

GOOPER:
Now, a twenty-eight-thousand-acre plantation's a mighty big thing t' run.

MAE:
Almost singlehanded.

[Margaret has gone out onto the gallery and can be heard calling softly to Brick.]

BIG MAMA:
You never had to run this place! What are you talking about? As if Big Daddy was dead and in his grave, you had to run it? Why, you just helped him out with a few business details and had your law practice at the same time in Memphis!

MAE:
Oh, Mommy, Mommy, Big Mommy! Let's be fair!

MARGARET:
Brick!

MAE:
Why, Gooper has given himself body and soul to keeping this place up for the past five years since Big Daddy's health started failing.

MARGARET:
Brick!

ACT THREE

MAE:
Gooper won't say it, Gooper never thought of it as a duty, he just did it. And what did Brick do? Brick kept living in his past glory at college! Still a football player at twenty-seven!

MARGARET [*returning alone*]:
Who are you talking about now? Brick? A football player? He isn't a football player and you know it. Brick is a sports announcer on T.V. and one of the best-known ones in the country!

MAE:
I'm talking about what he was.

MARGARET:
Well, I wish you would just stop talking about my husband.

GOOPER:
I've got a right to discuss my brother with other members of MY OWN family, which don't include *you*. Why don't you go out there and drink with Brick?

MAE.

How beautiful, how touching, this display of devotion! Do you know why she's childless? She's childless because that big beautiful athlete husband of hers won't go to bed with her!

GOOPER:

You jest won't let me do this in a nice way, will yah? Aw right—I don't give a goddam if Big Daddy likes me or don't like me or did or never did or will or will never! I'm just appealing to a sense of common decency and fair play. I'll tell you the truth. I've resented Big Daddy's partiality to Brick ever since Brick was born, and the way I've been treated like I was just barely good enough to spit on and sometimes not even good enough for that. Big Daddy is dying of cancer, and it's spread all through him and it's attacked all his vital organs including the kidneys and right now he is sinking into uremia, and you all know what uremia is, it's poisoning of the whole system due to the failure of the body to eliminate its poisons.

MARGARET [*to herself, downstage, hissingly*]:
Poisons, poisons! Venomous thoughts and words! In hearts and minds!—That's poisons!

GOOPER [*overlapping her*]:
I am asking for a square deal, and, by God, I expect to get one. But if I don't get one, if there's any peculiar shenanigans going on around here behind my back, well, I'm not a corpo-

ration lawyer for nothing, I know how to protect my own interests.