

LAURA & Jim

Amanda is pouring wine into a glass—hands it to Jim.

AMANDA. I'd like Laura to have a little dandelion wine. Do you think you can hold them both?

JIM. I can try, ma'am.

AMANDA. (*Exiting U. R. into kitchen.*) Now, Tom, you get into your apron.

~~TOM. Yes, Mother.~~

Tom follows Amanda. Jim looks around, puts wine glass down, takes swig from wine decanter, replaces it with thud, takes wine glass and candelabrum—enters living-room. Inner curtains close as dining-room dims out.

Laura sits up nervously as Jim enters. In her speeches in this scene, before Jim's warmth overcomes her paralyzing shyness, Laura's voice is thin and breathless, as though she has just run up a steep flight of stairs, from the almost intolerable strain of being alone with a stranger.

START → JIM. How are you feeling now? Any better?

Jim's attitude is gently humorous. In playing this scene it should be stressed that while the incident is apparently unimportant, it is to Laura the climax of her secret life.

LAURA. Yes, thank you.

JIM. (*Gives her glass of wine.*) Oh, here, this is for you. It's a little dandelion wine.

LAURA. Thank you.

JIM. Well, drink it—but don't get drunk.

He laughs heartily.

Say, where'll I put the candles?

LAURA. Oh, anywhere...

JIM. Oh, how about right here on the floor? You got any objections?

LAURA. No.

JIM. I'll just spread a newspaper under it to catch the drippings.

Jim gets newspaper from armchair. Puts candelabrum down on floor C.

I like to sit on the floor.

He sits on floor.

Mind if I do?

LAURA. Oh, no.

JIM. Would you give me a pillow?

LAURA. What?

JIM. A pillow!

LAURA. Oh...

Laura puts wine glass on telephone table, hands him pillow, sits L. on day-bed.

JIM. How about you? Don't you like to sit on the floor?

LAURA. Oh, yes.

JIM. Well, why don't you?

LAURA. I—will.

JIM. Take a pillow!

He throws her a pillow as she sits on floor.

I can't see you sitting way over there.

LAURA. I can—see you.

JIM. Yeah, but that's not fair. I'm right here in the limelight.

Laura moves a little closer to him.

Good! Now I can see you! Are you comfortable?

LAURA. Yes. Thank you.

JIM. So am I. I'm comfortable as a cow! Say, would you care for a piece of chewing-gum? (*Offers gum.*)

LAURA. No, thank you.

JIM. I think that I will indulge.

He musingly unwraps it and holds it up.

Gee, think of the fortune made by the guy that invented the first piece of chewing-gum! It's amazing, huh? Do you know that the Wrigley Building is one of the sights of Chicago?—I saw it summer before last at the Century of Progress.—Did you take in the Century of Progress?

LAURA. No, I didn't.

JIM. Well, it was a wonderful exposition, believe me. You know what impressed me most? The Hall of Science. Gives you an idea of what the future will be like in America. Oh, it's more wonderful than the present time is! Say, your brother tells me you're shy. Is that right, Laura?

LAURA. I—don't know.

JIM. I judge you to be an old-fashioned type of girl. Oh, I think that's a wonderful type to be. I hope you don't think I'm being too personal—do you?

LAURA. Mr. O'Connor?

JIM. Huh?

LAURA. I believe I *will* take a piece of gum, if you don't mind.

Jim peels gum—gets on knees, hands it to Laura. She breaks off a tiny piece. Jim looks at what remains, puts it in his mouth, and sits again.

Mr. O'Connor, have you—kept up with your singing?

JIM. Singing? Me?

LAURA. Yes. I remember what a beautiful voice you had.

JIM. You heard me sing?

LAURA. Oh, yes! Very often... I—don't suppose—you remember me—at all?

JIM. (*Smiling doubtfully.*) You know, as a matter of fact I did have an idea I'd seen you before. Do you know it seemed almost like I was about to remember your name. But the name I was about to remember—wasn't a name! So I stopped myself before I said it.

LAURA. Wasn't it—Blue Roses?

JIM. (*Grinning.*) Blue Roses! Oh, my gosh, yes—Blue Roses! You know, I didn't connect you with high school somehow or other. But that's where it was, it was high school. Gosh, I didn't even know you were Shakespeare's sister! Gee, I'm sorry.

LAURA. I didn't expect you to.—You—barely knew me!

JIM. But, we did have a speaking acquaintance.

LAURA. Yes, we—spoke to each other.

JIM. Say, didn't we have a class in something together?

LAURA. Yes, we did.

JIM. What class was that?

LAURA. It was—singing—chorus!

JIM. Aw!

LAURA. I sat across the aisle from you in the auditorium. Mondays, Wednesdays, and Fridays.

JIM. Oh, yeah! I remember now—you're the one who always came in late.

LAURA. Yes, it was so hard for me, getting upstairs. I had that brace on my leg then—it clumped so loud!

JIM. I never heard any clumping.

LAURA. (*Winning at recollection.*) To me it sounded like—thunder!

JIM. I never even noticed.

LAURA. Everybody was seated before I came in. I had to walk in front of all those people. My seat was in the back row. I had to go clumping up the aisle with everyone watching!

JIM. Oh, gee, you shouldn't have been self-conscious.

LAURA. I know, but I was. It was always such a relief when the singing started.

JIM. I remember now. And I used to call you Blue Roses. How did I ever get started calling you a name like that?

LAURA. I was out of school a little while with pleurosis. When I came back you asked me what was the matter. I said I had pleurosis and you thought I said Blue Roses. So that's what you always called me after that!

JIM. I hope you didn't mind?

LAURA. Oh, no—I liked it. You see, I wasn't acquainted with many—people...

JIM. Yeah. I remember you sort of stuck by yourself.

LAURA. I never did have much luck at making friends.

JIM. Well, I don't see why you wouldn't.

LAURA. Well, I started out badly.

JIM. You mean being—?

LAURA. Well, yes, it—sort of—stood between me...

JIM. You shouldn't have let it!

LAURA. I know, but it did, and I—

JIM. You mean you were shy with people!

LAURA. I tried not to be but never could—

JIM. Overcome it?

LAURA. No, I—never could!

JIM. Yeah. I guess being shy is something you have to work out of kind of gradually.

LAURA. Yes—I guess it—

JIM. Takes time!

LAURA. Yes...

JIM. Say, you know something, Laura?

He rises to sit on day-bed R.

People are not so dreadful when you know them. That's what you have to remember! And everybody has problems, not just you but practically everybody has problems. You think of yourself as being the only one who is disappointed. But just look around you and what do you see—a lot of people just as disappointed as you are. You take me, for instance. Boy, when I left high school I thought I'd be a lot further along at this time than I am now. Say, you remember that wonderful write-up I had in *The Torch*?

LAURA. Yes, I do!

She gets yearbook from under pillow L. of day-bed.

JIM. Said I was bound to succeed in anything I went into! Holy geez! *The Torch*!

She opens book, shows it to him and sits next to him on day-bed.

LAURA. Here you are in *The Pirates of Penzance*!

JIM. *The Pirates*! "Oh, better far to live and die under the brave black flag I fly!" I sang the lead in that operetta.

LAURA. So beautifully!

JIM. Aw...

LAURA. Yes, yes—beautifully—beautifully!

JIM. You heard me then, huh?

LAURA. I heard you all three times!

JIM. No!

LAURA. Yes.

JIM. You mean all three performances?

LAURA. Yes!

JIM. What for?

LAURA. I—wanted to ask you to—autograph my program.

She takes program from book.

JIM. Why didn't you ask me?

LAURA. You were always surrounded by your own friends so much that I never had a chance.

JIM. Aw, you should have just come right up and said, Here is my—

LAURA. Well, I—thought you might think I was—

JIM. Thought I might think you was—what?

LAURA. Oh—

JIM. *(With reflective relish.)* Oh! Yeah, I was beleaguered by females in those days.

LAURA. You were terribly popular!

JIM. Yeah...

LAURA. You had such a—friendly way—

JIM. Oh, I was spoiled in high school.

LAURA. Everybody liked you!

JIM. Including you?

LAURA. I—why, yes, I—I did, too...

JIM. Give me that program, Laura.

She does so, and he signs it.

There you are—better late than never! * END

~~LAURA. My—what a—surprise!~~

JIM. My signature's not worth very much right now. But maybe someday—it will increase in value! You know, being disappointed is