from
PICNIC
by William Inge

Act III, scene 1
ROSEMARY, HOWARD

It is after midnight on the night of the Labor Day picnic (see introductory notes on page 336). A great harvest moon shines in the sky, a deep, murky blue. The moon is swollen and full and casts a pale light on the scene below—two porches and the yards between. The time for enjoying the picnic is over, the hangovers have not yet begun; it is an in-between, edgy time, a time for remembering the things that went wrong with a day that was meant to be so pleasant. There is silence, then offstage there is the sound of a not new Chevrolet chugging to a stop. Howard and Rosemary enter. He “is a small, thin man, rapidly approaching middle age. A small-town businessman, he wears a permanent smile of greeting which, most of the time, is pretty sincere.” She is nearly as old as he, but would never admit it. Rosemary teaches school, and her social life revolves around the group of unmarried teachers whom she always calls “the girls.” Usually her “tone of voice must tell a man that she is independent of him.” But not tonight. “Wearily, a groggy depression having set in, she makes her way to the doorstep and drops there, sitting lump.” She “seems preoccupied at first and her responses to Howard are mere grunts.”

How. Here we are, honey. Right back where we started from.
Rose. (Her mind elsewhere) Uhuh.
How. You were awful nice to me tonight, Rosemary.

Rosemary.
Uhuh.
How. Do you think Mrs. Owens suspects anything?
Rosemary.
I don’t care if she does.
How. A businessman’s gotta be careful of talk. And after all, you’re a schoolteacher. (Fumbling to get away) Well, I better be gettin’ back to Cherryvale. I gotta open up the store in the morning. Good night, Rosemary.
Rosemary.
Uhuh.
How. (He pecks at her cheek with a kiss) Good night. Maybe I should say, good morning. (He starts off)
Rosemary. (Just coming to) Where you goin’, Howard?
How. Honey, I gotta get home.
Rosemary. You can’t go off without me.
How. Honey, talk sense.
Rosemary. You can’t go off without me. Not after tonight. That’s sense.
How. (A little nervous) Honey, be reasonable.
Rosemary. Take me with you.
How. What’d people say?
Rosemary. (Almost vicious) To hell with what people’d say!
How. (Shocked) Honey!
Rosemary. What’d people say if I thumbed my nose at them? What’d people say if I walked down the street and showed ’em my pink panties? What do I care what people say?
How. Honey, you’re not yourself tonight.
Rosemary. Yes, I am. I’m more myself than I ever was. Take me
with you, Howard. If you don't I don't know what I'll do with myself. I mean it.

Howard.

Now look, honey, you better go upstairs and get some sleep. You gotta start school in the morning. We'll talk all this over Saturday.

Rosemary.

Maybe you won't be back Saturday. Maybe you won't be back ever again.

Howard.

Rosemary, you know better than that.

Rosemary.

Then what's the next thing in store for me? To be nice to the next man, then the next—till there's no one left to care whether I'm nice to him or not. Till I'm ready for the grave and don't have anyone to take me there.

Howard.

(In an attempt to be consoling) Now, Rosemary!

Rosemary.

You can't let that happen to me, Howard. I won't let you.

Howard.

I don't understand. When we first started going together, you were the best sport I ever saw, always good for a laugh.

Rosemary.

(In a hollow voice) I can't laugh any more.

Howard.

We'll talk it over Saturday.

Rosemary.

We'll talk it over now.

Howard.

(Squirming) Well—honey—I...

Rosemary.

You said you were gonna marry me, Howard. You said when I got back from my vacation, you'd be waitin' with the preacher.

Howard.

Honey, I've had an awful busy summer and...

Rosemary.

Where's the preacher, Howard? Where is he?

Howard.

(Walking away from her) Honey, I'm forty-two years old. A person forms certain ways of livin', then one day it's too late to change.

Rosemary.

(Grabbing his arm and holding him) Come back here, Howard. I'm no spring chicken either. Maybe I'm a little older than you think I am. I've formed my ways too. But they can be changed. They gotta be changed. It's no good livin' like this, in rented rooms, meetin' a bunch of old maids for supper every night, then comin' back home alone.

Howard.

I know how it is, Rosemary. My life's no bed of roses either.

Rosemary.

Then why don't you do something about it?

Howard.

I figure—there's some bad things about every life.

Rosemary.

There's too much bad about mine. Each year, I keep tellin' myself, is the last. Something'll happen. Then nothing ever does—except I get a little crazier all the time.

Howard.

(Hopelessly) Well...

Rosemary.

A well's a hole in the ground, Howard. Be careful you don't fall in.

Howard.

I wasn't tryin' to be funny.

Rosemary.

... and all this time you just been leadin' me on.

Howard.

(Defensive) Rosemary, that's not so! I've not been leadin' you on.

Rosemary.

I'd like to know what else you call it.

Howard.

Well—can't we talk about it Saturday? I'm dead tired and I got a busy week ahead, and...

Rosemary.

(She grips him by the arm and looks straight into his eyes) You gotta marry me, Howard.

Howard.

(Tortured) Well—honey, I can't marry you now.

Rosemary.

You can be over here in the morning.

Howard.

Sometimes you're unreasonable.
Howard.
Yah. I gotta go to the courthouse anyway. We'll talk it
over then.
Rosemary.
Oh, God, please marry me, Howard. Please.
Howard.
(Trying to get away) Go to bed, honey. I'll see you in
the morning.
Rosemary.
Please, Howard!
Howard.
I'll see you in the morning. Good night, Rosemary.
(Starting off)
Rosemary.
(In a meek voice) Please!
Howard.
Good night, Rosemary.
Rosemary.
(After he is gone) Please.