

Oh, excuse me, forgive me, but laws of silence don't work!
No, laws of silence don't work. . . .

[Brick crosses to the bar, takes a quick drink, and rubs his head with a towel.]

Laws of silence don't work. . . .

When something is festering in your memory or your imagination, laws of silence don't work, it's just like shutting a door and locking it on a house on fire in hope of forgetting that the house is burning. But not facing a fire doesn't put it out. Silence about a thing just magnifies it. It grows and festers in silence, becomes malignant. . . .

[He drops his crutch.]

BRICK:
Give me my crutch.

[He has stopped rubbing his hair dry but still stands hanging onto the towel rack in a white towel-cloth robe.]

MARGARET:
Lean on me.

BRICK:
No, just give me my crutch.

MARGARET:
Lean on my shoulder.

BRICK:
I don't want to lean on your shoulder, I want my crutch!

[This is spoken like sudden lightning.]

Are you going to give me my crutch or do I have to get down on my knees on the floor and—

MARGARET:
Here, here, take it, take it!

[She has thrust the crutch at him.]

BRICK [bobbling out]:
Thanks . . .

MARGARET:
We mustn't scream at each other, the walls in this house have ears. . . .

[He hobbles directly to liquor cabinet to get a new drink.]

—but that's the first time I've heard you raise your voice in a long time, Brick. A crack in the wall?—Of composure?

—I think that's a good sign. . . .

A sign of nerves in a player on the defensive!

[Brick turns and smiles at her coolly over his fresh drink.]

BRICK:
It just hasn't happened yet, Maggie.

MARGARET:
What?

BRICK:
The click I get in my head when I've had enough of this stuff to make me peaceful. . . .

Will you do me a favor?

MARGARET:
Maybe I will. What favor?

BRICK:
Just, just keep your voice down!

MARGARET [*in a hoarse whisper*]:
I'll do you that favor, I'll speak in a whisper, if not shut up completely, if *you* will do *me* a favor and make that drink your last one till after the party.

BRICK:
What party?

MARGARET:
Big Daddy's birthday party.

BRICK:
Is this Big Daddy's birthday?

MARGARET:
You know this is Big Daddy's birthday!

BRICK:
No, I don't, I forgot it.

MARGARET:
Well, I remembered it for you. . . .

[They are both speaking as breathlessly as a pair of kids after a fight, drawing deep exhausted breaths and looking at each other with faraway eyes, shaking and panting together as if they had broken apart from a violent struggle.]

BRICK:
Good for you, Maggie.

MARGARET:
You just have to scribble a few lines on this card.

BRICK:
You scribble something, Maggie.

MARGARET:
It's got to be your handwriting; it's your present, I've given him my present; it's got to be your handwriting!

[The tension between them is building again, the voices becoming shrill once more.]

BRICK:
I didn't get him a present.

MARGARET:
I got one for you.

BRICK:
All right. You write the card, then.

MARGARET:
And have him know you didn't remember his birthday?

BRICK:
I didn't remember his birthday.

MARGARET:
You don't have to prove you didn't!

BRICK:
I don't want to fool him about it.

MARGARET:
Just write "Love, Brick!" for God's—

BRICK:
No.

MARGARET:
You've got to!

BRICK:
I don't have to do anything I don't want to do. You keep forgetting the conditions on which I agreed to stay on living with you.

MARGARET [*out before she knows it*]:
I'm not living with you. We occupy the same cage.

BRICK:

You've got to remember the conditions agreed on.

SONNY [*off stage*]:

Mommy, give it to me. I had it first.

MAE:

Hush.

MARGARET:

They're impossible conditions!

BRICK:

Then why don't you—?

SONNY:

I want it, I want it!

MAE:

Get away!

MARGARET:

HUSH! Who is out there? Is somebody at the door?

[*There are footsteps in hall.*]

MAE [*outside*]:

May I enter a moment?

MARGARET:

Oh, *you!* Sure. Come in, Mae.

[*Mae enters bearing aloft the bow of a young lady's archery set.*]

MAE:

Brick, is this thing yours?

MARGARET:

Why, Sister Woman—that's my Diana Trophy. Won it at the intercollegiate archery contest on the Ole Miss campus.

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?

MARGARET:

Sister Woman, nobody is plotting the destruction of your kiddies. —Brick and I still have our special archers' license. We're goin' deer-huntin' on Moon Lake as soon as the season starts. I love to run with dogs through chilly woods, run, run leap over obstructions—

[*She goes into the closet carrying the bow.*]

MAE:

How's the injured ankle, Brick?

BRICK:

Doesn't hurt. Just itches.

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 *spahklubs!* 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 caty?

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—

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

Intermission is over! See ya later!

MARGARET:

I wonder what Dixie's real name is?

BRICK:

Maggie, being caty doesn't help things any

38

MARGARET:
I know! WHY?—Am I so caty?—Cause I'm consumed with
envy an' eaten up with longing?—Brick, I'm going to lay out
your beautiful Shantung silk suit from Rome and one of your
monogrammed silk shirts. I'll put your cuff links in it, those
lovely star sapphires I get you to wear so rarely . . .

BRICK:
I can't get trousers on over this plaster cast.

MARGARET:
Yes, you can, I'll help you.

BRICK:
I'm not going to get dressed, Maggie.

MARGARET:
Will you just put on a pair of white silk pajamas?

BRICK:
Yes, I'll do that, Maggie.

MARGARET:
Thank you, thank you so much!

BRICK:
Don't mention it.

MARGARET:
*Oh, Brick! How long does it have t' go on? This punishment?
Haven't I done time enough, haven't I served my term, can't I
apply for a—pardon?*

BRICK:
Maggie, you're spoiling my liquor. Lately your voice always
sounds like you'd been running upstairs to warn somebody
that the house was on fire!

39