

## Cast

Nancy, a woman of 23

Jill, a woman of 40

Patricia, a woman of 35

Nancy's Mother

Nancy's Father

Man with a Cigar

Shackelton

*A bare stage, except for two benches of the kind used in bus and railway stations. Lights up slowly: harsh intense day. Seated on the bench at right, Patricia; on the bench at left, Jill. Jill looking through a newspaper; Patricia has a magazine in her lap. Jill looks appraisingly at Patricia; goes back to her paper. Patricia looks curiously at Jill as Nancy enters. Nancy carries a book and a balloon on a stick. She starts over to the bench on which Jill is sitting, but Jill looks up suddenly and gives her a look that intimidates her. Nancy sits down on the bench with Patricia, who looks curiously at the balloon.*

NANCY: I got it for my little boy. He and his father are meeting me here.

JILL: *(Feels her face; reads from the paper)* "Dear Alice Hooper Maxwell: I have been going with a man for twenty-two years. I am fifty and he is ten years older than I am, and he has a wife and five children. They live in another city, but he is on the road a lot — a traveling man. For twenty-two years he has been promising me that he'll divorce his wife and marry me. What would you do, Mrs. Maxwell, in my position?" *(Looks up, exasperated)* Oh, for — *(Lights a cigarette nervously; to Patricia)* Do you have the time?

PATRICIA: Sorry.

JILL: *(To Nancy)*: Do you know what time it is?

NANCY: Why, it's — why, look, my watch has stopped. (*Shakes her wrist*)

JILL: I wish I knew what time it was. (*To herself while other girls read*) Did I leave that oven on? I'm always leaving that oven on. It went out that time when I went to see *Carmen Jones*<sup>2</sup> with Philip and when we got home the parakeets were dead . . . I must have turned it out, though . . . I remember . . . I keep remembering how they looked, with their claws, there at the bottom of their cage, and the newspaper at the bottom of the cage had part of a headline: Foresees Prosperous Future For . . .

PATRICIA: (*Reading from magazine, satirically*) “The all-in-one suit, in both tweed and flannel. Once it's unjacketed you see its core (*Lifts eyebrows in mock astonishment*) — a bare, squared camisole in the same fabric. From Carol Mahon.” Why didn't someone think of this sooner?

JILL: People are dense.

NANCY: There are some poems that always make me want to cry. Do either of you care for poetry?

JILL: Oh, if there's anything I hate, it's waiting. Waiting for people, waiting for something to happen, waiting for something not to happen . . .

NANCY: Listen.

*I have lost my way in the forest, O my beloved,  
Mist has obscured your face.  
The trees waver like weeds that are seen through water;  
There is fear in this place.*

*I have forgotten the dark paths of the mind  
And the terrible red canopy of the heart;  
I am a child or the pale ghost of a child,  
Strangely withdrawn and apart.*

*If I should touch your lips in this dim forest,  
I should perish of cold and fall down slain.  
Here there is no sound but fungus dripping  
Through fog, like a slow rain.*

*Somewhere there are bells drowned in a pool;  
They ring when the pool is stirred.  
Let the woods close in upon me and the night fall.  
Leave me without a word.<sup>3</sup>*

Isn't that beautiful?

JILL: We came in the door and all the lights were out and Phillip said, "Oh, my God you've left the oven on again!" As if he never made a mistake in his life. What about the time he got the case of Scotch from a client of his in the South and left it out there in the hallway? I always thought those two boys who live across the hall are the ones who stole it. Twelve quarts of Dewar's White Label . . . "Oh my God you've left the oven on!" he said. As if . . .

PATRICIA: (*Sliding down in the bench*) I always have trouble staying on these things.

NANCY: Have you been waiting long?

PATRICIA: I dunno. It just seems long. I liked the way you read that poem. I never read poetry, but it sounded good — the way you read it.

(*A man with a cigar approaches the women, pauses, sits down on bench by Nancy, looks her over. He leans down toward her and whispers in her ear. Nancy draws away from him; he persists.*)

NANCY: Go away! Go away! Leave me alone.

(*He is unruffled and whispers some more*)

PATRICIA: Leave the kid alone! (*Stands up*) She doesn't have to listen to you if she doesn't want to! (*He grins and blows smoke in her face, looks back at Nancy and walks away*)

NANCY: Thank you.

PATRICIA: What a nerve. When I was in the nightclub circuit —

NANCY: You were on the stage?

PATRICIA: For fifteen years.

NANCY: Isn't that wonderful! I don't think . . . I know — I've never met an actress before in my life. When I was in high school . . . I wanted to be an actress. I saw Ingrid Bergman in a picture.

JILL: With Humphrey Bogart.

NANCY: She was so beautiful . . . (To *Patricia*) Were you really on the stage'?

PATRICIA: Stock, musicals in New York, vaudeville, nightclubs, road companies . . . the works.

NANCY: How did you get started?

PATRICIA: Well, there was this man — (*Does a double take; laughs*) Talent, naturally, talent! No, honestly, it was my dear old mother. Dear old mother, my foot. She was one of those real shoving, pushing, ruthless ambitious women that missed the boat and wanted to get their daughters on another one. She started me on ballet the minute I was able to stand without holding on to something. You know. (*Patricia gets up and imitates a little girl learning ballet steps*) And then — swiftly up the ladder of success!

JILL: (*Looking away from the other two*) It's stuffy in here. (*The other two look at her*) Oh, I beg your pardon.

PATRICIA: Oh, that's all right. Ladder of success, my foot. My first big performance after Mother got me to New York was putting pieces of huckleberry pie in the compartments at Horn and Hardart's.

NANCY: Horn and Hardart's?

PATRICIA: You know, the automat. Oh, you don't know? Mother left my father, who drank, and, boy, did he have reasons to.

NANCY: I had a wonderful father.

*(Dissolve to NANCY'S FATHER in a white surgeon's coat. He stands rigidly for a moment, then shakes a thermometer.)*

NANCY: Daddy was a doctor. *(Very confidentially)* He specialized in female complaints.

PATRICIA: I've had a couple of 'em in my day.

NANCY: We lived in Santa Barbara. But . . . it was like your father: he drank, too.

*(NANCY'S FATHER takes a flask from his hip pocket, drinks, looks warily around.)*

NANCY: Mother was always calling him up on the phone.

*(FATHER picks up phone)*

NANCY: "What are you doing now, Charlie?" she'd say — my father's name was Charlie — "What are you doing now? Did you get rid of that secretary of yours like I told you to? I'm positive you're drinking again, in spite of everything I've told you. What are you doing, Charlie, what are you doing?"

*(FATHER hangs up, has another drink)*

PATRICIA: Poor man.

NANCY: He's dead now. *(Dissolve out on Father)*

PATRICIA: *(Touched)* Oh, I'm sorry.