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Commie Boots

A Dark Comedy in a Dark Tavern in Iowa

by
Gary Britson

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Commie Boots

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NOTE

“Commie Boots” is not intended for children. The “N” word and other derogatory terms appear in this play, although for no other purpose than to reflect the nature of certain characters and the times. Much alcohol is consumed throughout the course of the play and a gun, though never fired, is drawn in a threatening way.

CHARACTERS

PAUL: *A regular at Ed's Tavern; amiable yet plenty familiar with the local jail.*

MORT: *Another regular; a generally decent guy who has seen his share of prison time.*

ORVILLE: *The bartender, about 36. He moves very slowly, though he isn't particularly old. Everything he does is fairly slow, and he does whatever anyone tells him. If everyone were like Orville there would be no war. We'd all be living in caves, but there would be no more war.*

GRANT STANDARD: *50's; steely silver hair parted on the side, muscles in his ear lobes; a bulldog used to getting what he wants. He'd be a Senator or maybe President, but he never wanted power or wealth. He has always wanted only to be the toughest son-of-a-bitch in Holstein, Iowa, and that's what he is. Grant carries a little black book where he records the names of anyone he deems a Communist to report in his weekly letter to Joe McCarthy.*

HOMER GRUNDLE: *Late fifties. He is a nervous wreck, mostly because of the federal government, which he believes has been trying to wreck his life ever since the last war ended.*

DOLLY: *Ed's widow and the new owner of the tavern bent on shaking up the status quo even if it kills her (or someone else). She is strong and fierce and likes her whiskey. She's not very careful of what she says, though not trying to hurt anyone's feelings. She knows she could kick the daylight out of just about any man in town who might take umbrage at her words, which of course no one ever does.*

SETTING

A Harsh, Deliberately Uncomfortable Tavern in Holstein, Iowa; early 1950's

COMMIE BOOTS

by Gary Britson

ACT ONE

(AT RISE: Ed's Tavern in Holstein, Iowa; early 1950s. Beer and whiskey are served here. It is a harsh place, deliberately uncomfortable. This is a place where serious, marginally employable, amiably confused men gather to sop up the suds around-the-clock. No music, no plants, very little air. Few women have ever been here. This is not the place to take a date. Young people are likewise missing, for obvious reasons. It is never happy hour because no one is ever happy here. On the other hand, the patrons are usually relaxed around each other. Everyone has known everyone else for decades. ORVILLE the bartender is puttering around behind the bar. PAUL and MORT, two regulars, are at the bar. Both are serenely middle-aged.)

PAUL

So I told her, I says, look. You got your shot of whiskey, which is made from the grains of the field. Right?

MORT

Right.

PAUL

And you got your beer chaser, which is also made of grain.

MORT

Right.

PAUL

So you take and drink your whiskey in one swallow, like this.

(Demonstrates drinking a shot of whiskey.)

MORT

Yeah.

PAUL

And you chase it down with your beer chaser, like this. *(Demonstrates)* Grain and more grain, I told her. It's just like eating a big bowl of cereal.

MORT

Damn straight.

PAUL

She didn't buy it. She wanted me to eat shredded wheat for breakfast. With cold milk. Man alive. *(Shaking his head and shuddering)* That stuff'll kill you.

MORT

Right.

PAUL

I hated to see her die, though. She was a good wife to me. Just did not understand the concept of breakfast.

MORT

Set us up here again, Orville.

(ORVILLE serves the men two more boilermakers. He moves very slowly, though he isn't particularly old. Everything he does is fairly slow, and he does whatever anyone tells him. If everyone were like ORVILLE, there would be no war. We'd all be living in caves, but there would be no more war.)

ORVILLE

There you are, gents.

MORT

Thanks, Orville.

PAUL

(Toasting ORVILLE) You're a gentleman and a scholar and a judge of good whiskey.

ORVILLE

Thanks, Paul.

PAUL

What are you fixing to do now, Orville? Now that Ed's gone.

ORVILLE

Keep working, I guess.

MORT

How come I didn't see you at Ed's funeral, Orville? Ol' Ed give you this job. Didn't you want to pay your respects?

ORVILLE

I had to work here.

PAUL

But Orville, when your boss dies, the business always shuts down, for a few hours anyway, so's everyone can go to the funeral and do what's right.

ORVILLE

Old Ed caught me going to church when I'm supposed to be working, he'd skin me alive.

(PAUL patiently, slowly; explaining the facts to ORVILLE as if addressing a very slow child, which he believes Orville to be.)

PAUL

But Orville. Your boss is dead. He can't skin you if he's dead. He wouldn't know you was skipping work.

ORVILLE

(With un-amused laughter) He'd know. Old Ed knows everything.

MORT

(Toasting the late Ed) Damn straight. Here's to the old guy.

PAUL

(Toasting) Here's to Ed.

MORT

I hate funerals.

PAUL

My wife hated them too. That's why I didn't have one for her. Saved a lot of money that way.

MORT

What did you do?

PAUL

Called the Sheriff. He came and got her. Asked me a few questions. He took her away.
(Drinks) Last I heard of it.

MORT

Well, where is she now?

PAUL

Damned if I know.

(GRANT STANDARD enters. Fifties, steely silver hair parted on the side, muscles in his ear lobes: A bulldog, used to getting what he wants. He'd be a Senator or maybe President, but he never wanted power or wealth. He has always wanted only to be the toughest son-of-a-bitch in Holstein, Iowa, and that's what he is. GRANT sits at the bar, not minding if he gets in anyone's way or jostles anyone as he sits.)

GRANT

I don't understand anything anymore. The commies are breeding like rabbits and my best friend goes and dies. Orville. Serve it up, you damn *re-tard*.

(Pronounced "Re'-tard" by everyone throughout the play.)

PAUL

We was wondering if you was going to show up, Grant. You was pretty upset at the funeral and all. We didn't know if you'd make it.

GRANT

I'll make it. Grant Standard will always make it. It's this town I'm worried about. This town and this country. All the good men are dying. Pretty soon there won't be nobody left. Except maybe me and Orville. How come you wasn't at the funeral, Orville?

(GRANT reaches into his coat pocket and removes a little black book and a pencil. He consults it, jots down something. He does this occasionally throughout the play, glancing into the book and making notes.)

ORVILLE

I had to work.

PAUL

Oh, no. He's got the book out again. *(MORT shakes his head and mutters.)* It's a bad day for all of us, Grant. Can't you put the book away for once?

GRANT

I wish I could. But this kind of thing don't wait for no man.

PAUL

Take the day off.

GRANT

I'm just looking in the book. Making a list. Checking it twice, that's all. Hey, Orville, Ed would've given you the day off. It's his tavern and he hired you. He would have given you time to go to his funeral. He wouldn't have gone to his own funeral, but he'd have let you go.

ORVILLE

(Serving everyone drinks) Nope.

PAUL

(Raising a glass and looking upwards) God bless you, Ed. Wherever you are.

MORT

Cheers, Ed.

GRANT

You missed a hell of a funeral, Orville, that's all I got to say. And we've all lost a hell of a man. Ed'll never be replaced. The good ones keep passing on, and look at what's left. I sat there at that funeral and I thought to myself: What's left? What's next? What has this town got any more? And I knew the answer before I was done asking the question: Nothing. There ain't nobody left. Except me. All the great ones are gone and there's no replacing greatness. I'm the last of the greats.

(Accustomed to these shameless displays of vanity, the others drink in silence and stare at the bar.)

PAUL

We're lucky you're still with us, Grant.

MORT

Damn straight. *(Toasts)* Say, Grant. Now that Ed's gone, why don't you buy this tavern, so's Orville can still have a job? This place closes, he'll be living out to the County Home again. *(Winces)* And you know what it's like out there.

ORVILLE

It's all right. Don't worry about me.

GRANT

Mort, the son-of-a-bitch ain't even cold yet, his funeral was today, and you're talking about Ed's real estate? Ain't you got no feelings? Besides, Orville don't care where he lives. He's a retard.

MORT

I'm worried about the boy. How's he supposed to pay for his room and board, he loses his job here?

GRANT

There's two kinds of people in this world you don't need to worry about. There's me, and I'm the only one of my kind left, now that Ed's gone. You don't need to worry about me because I may be getting old, but I'm still the toughest son-of-a-bitch in Holstein, and don't you forget it. And the second kind is retards, like Orville here. The Good Lord takes care of *retards*. And niggers too, long as they stay the hell out of my town and my tavern.

MORT

I don't know. It's one thing to call Orville names behind his back, but it's not right, calling a man a retard to his face, he's standing right here.

GRANT

It's all right. He don't mind. Do you, Orville? *(Reaches over the bar and pats ORVILLE on the shoulder)* Nah, he don't mind.

MORT

(Slightly bothered by the injustice of it all) I don't know.

ORVILLE

It's all right, Mort. I don't mind.

GRANT

See? He don't mind! He's a retard, ain't you, Orville?

MORT

Geez, Grant, it's—

ORVILLE

It's all right. I am a retard, I guess.

GRANT

(Laughing; giving ORVILLE another pat) See? It's okay. He's a *retard*. And God takes care of folks like that. Don't you worry.

MORT

But if Dolly closes the place and nobody buys it, what'll Orville do?

GRANT

That old broad ain't gonna close nothing. And so what if she does? Somebody'll buy it up, for sure. Nice place like this. It's a gold mine. Prime real estate. It won't be on the market more'n a day or two, three at the most, and somebody will snap it up. Make a fortune.

PAUL

How you figure that?

MORT

Yeah, how you figure?

GRANT

(Waving off their skepticism) Ah, you guys don't know nothing about business.

PAUL

We're the only ones who're ever in here. And we don't spend much. Place probably don't take in more'n five dollars a day, maybe not even that.

MORT

Nobody else ever comes in here.

GRANT

Of course nobody else ever comes in here. It's our place, isn't it? Nobody else is supposed to come here. I don't want anybody else in here.

PAUL

Yeah, but that's the problem. It's not your tavern. Ed owns it. Or he did, before he died. And you always scare everybody away. Everybody's afraid to come in here.

GRANT

(Chuckles with satisfaction, maybe pride) Yeah, I guess they are. Yeah. Everybody's afraid of old Grant. Old guy, old and gray. Everybody's afraid of him. What kind of people is this town full of, anyway?

PAUL

It's a town full of people who don't like getting their noses broken every time they disagree with you, that's what.

GRANT

Now, lookie here. When did I ever break anybody's nose? Name one.

PAUL

Lester Adams.

GRANT

Lester Adams is a communist. Thanks for remindin' me. I forgot to put his name on my list.

(GRANT removes black book from his pocket, writes something in it.)

MORT

There's that list again.

PAUL

That don't give you the right to go breaking a guy's nose. And it's not even your tavern.

GRANT

Yeah? Where's it say a man's gotta own a tavern if he wants to be a genuine American, huh? Where's it say that?

MORT

You think Joe McCarthy reads that stuff you send him?

GRANT

Damn straight.

PAUL

It's Ed's—was—Ed's place, and he didn't like it when you went around breaking everybody's face just because they didn't vote for Eisenhower. And Dolly's not going to like it either.

GRANT

Then why didn't Ed tell me he didn't like it? He never said anything to me. And what's Dolly got to do with it?

PAUL

Ed's been in the hospital so much lately, he probably never had the chance to tell you. Or maybe somebody told you but you didn't listen. You was punching Democrats in the face.

MORT

But Dolly'll tell you. She's different from Ed. She's the Mayor now, you know. Now that Ed died.

GRANT

Yeah, she's different from Ed, all right. Half as smart and ugly as a mud fence. When I heard Ed had appointed her Mayor in his place, right before he died, I couldn't believe it. He was probably out of his mind with fever. Maybe it was the morphine. Jesus, one thing I can't stand's an ugly broad. Bad enough we got a broad for a Mayor, but we got an ugly broad. Ugly broads should stay inside and cook and have babies. No, that wouldn't work. Ugly broads can't have babies, on account of no one wants to—you know. So they should stay inside and be—what's the word? What's that word for, you know, when a woman takes care of somebody else's kids on account of they're too fat and ugly to have kids of their own. What do they call that?

PAUL

Single. They call that single.

MORT

Happy's what I'd call it.

PAUL

Kids ain't so bad, if they ain't yours.

MORT

That's what I hear. Is that why you and your wife never had kids, Paul? You just don't like 'em?

PAUL

I never had kids, on account of I don't like my own vomit, and I don't want to spend eighteen years of my life looking at someone else's.

GRANT

Nanny, that's the word. They call them a nanny. Dolly ought to be a nanny. She'd be a good nanny. She's ugly enough. I don't know why Ed ever married her. Must have felt sorry for her. I don't know what she'll do, now that Ed's gone. One thing she ain't gonna be doing is running this here tavern. It's ours.

PAUL

Ed probably left it to her.

GRANT

(Impatiently waving him off) No, no, you don't get it. I don't care if he left it to her. The point is, we're the customers, and we say our watering hole ain't gonna be run by no woman, especially an ugly woman that we don't like and don't want her in here. And our word is final. We got rights.

MORT

I always kind of liked Dolly.

PAUL

What rights we got in somebody else's saloon?

GRANT

(Thinking hard) I'll think of it. I heard a lawyer talking about it once. It think it's...pre-emptive domain. Right of eminence...I don't know what the hell it is, but it's the law.

(Straining) Causeway. That's it. We got a causeway.

PAUL

I don't know.

MORT

(Profoundly lost in thought; far away) Easement? You talking about an easement?

GRANT

(Excited) Yes! That's it. We got ourselves an easement.

MORT

(Gravely) If you're talking about an easement...

GRANT

More beer, Orville.

MORT

(Very serious) An easement is a right of way on somebody else's land. Like, say, your customers have to walk across somebody else's property to get to your place of business. And this goes on for years and years, and the property owner don't say nothing about it. Then suddenly he says, wait a minute, I don't want your customers walking across my property no more. You can go to court, and get a judge to say, hey, this guy's customers have been walking across that property for twenty years, nobody never said nothing about it. So we're not going to let him say nothing about it now. They can keep walking across that property to go to your place of business. That's an easement.

GRANT

(Almost impressed) I didn't know you knew law.

MORT

I spent a lot of time in the law library last time I was in prison.

GRANT

Good for you.

MORT

I hardly ever got beat up in there.

GRANT

That's nice.

MORT

See, a lot of times, the kind of guys who want to beat you up, they can't read, so they don't go to the law library.

GRANT

(*Nervous*) Swell.

MORT

I hardly ever got beat up by somebody that could read.

GRANT

(*Trying to think of a way to change the subject*) Okay.

MORT

You go to prison, you stay away from the guys who can't read, you'll be okay.

GRANT

Give him another beer, Orville.

MORT

Unfortunately, there was a couple of guys who liked to beat me up, and they could read real good.

GRANT

Whatever.

MORT

But they didn't come into the law library much. They liked to read, but they didn't like to read the law. On account of they didn't like law, period. That's why they was in prison.

GRANT

Okay.

MORT

You take a guy who reads the law a lot, *and* likes to beat you up, you got problems.

GRANT

All right.

MORT

But I never met any of those.

GRANT

Good.

MORT

'Course, there was this one guy...

GRANT

Why don't you just shut the hell up? Now we was talking about easements.

MORT

Right. Easements. An easement is a property right by one party on the property of another party. Somebody else owns property, you're used to using it, you go to court, the judge says you can use it.

GRANT

So you're saying, that's what we got, an easement.

MORT

No, I'm saying that's what we don't got, an easement.

GRANT

(Angry) If we don't got it, what the hell are you talking about it for?

PAUL

Now, don't go getting mad. Mort here's just trying to teach you something about the law.

GRANT

Teach me? What does that skinny little farm hand got to teach me?

PAUL

He's trying to tell you that you don't have any rights in this saloon, just 'cause you been coming in here all these years. Hanging around a place don't mean you own it. That's what he's trying to tell you. You should listen to Mort. He had a lot of time to read the law when he was in prison.

GRANT

Well, you tell him, if he wants to tell me anything from now on, he can put a stamp on it and mail it, if he can afford to buy a stamp, which he probably can't.

PAUL

Come on. Settle down and have a beer. Don't go picking a fight with old Mort. We're all friends here.

MORT

The point is, the place belonged to Ed. It probably belongs to Dolly now, since she's his widow, and if she walks in someday and tells us to leave, we got to leave.

GRANT

(Genuinely puzzled) Why?

MORT

'Cause when you're on someone else's property and they tell you to leave, you got to leave.

PAUL

That's the whole point of property. I mean, what's the point of having the deed to a place if you can't kick out the people you don't like?

GRANT

(Still puzzled, almost on the verge of feeling hurt) Are you saying Dolly don't like me?

PAUL

Well... I never asked her.

GRANT

You don't know.

PAUL

Since you been going around town the last twenty years talking about how ugly she is, word's probably got back to her. I mean, if you was running for mayor, I wouldn't exactly count on her vote, I was you.

GRANT

Who said anything about mayor? I don't want to be no mayor. I just want to get drunk in this tavern. With my good friend Orville here. More beer, Orville.

ORVILLE

Yes, sir.

GRANT

(Watching him pour) Orville here may be a *retard*, but he can pour beer better'n any man in Holstein, and you can quote me on that. Orville's the only guy in town, I can be sure he ain't no commie. Except for me, of course. You ain't no commie, are you, Orville?

ORVILLE

I don't know.

GRANT

(Laughs) You hear that? He don't know. Hey, Orville, what do you think'll happen to this place, now that Ed's gone?

ORVILLE

I don't know.

GRANT

He don't know. You hear that? He don't know. That's what I like about Orville. He don't know something, he admits it. Right?

ORVILLE

I don't know.

GRANT

(Pause; sighs) It's hard to believe it when your best friend is gone. It seems only yesterday old Ed was sitting right here at this bar. We was talking. Just talking. He was telling me about how he was going into the hospital in a couple of days, and he was telling me about the nice pair of boots he was going to finish up for me when he got home. I ordered a new pair from him every couple of years, you know. Made the best damn boots in the county.

PAUL

Now that's something we can agree on.

MORT

Damn straight. Hand-tooled.

PAUL

Old Ed and his boots. Best boots I ever bought. Last a lifetime.

GRANT

That's right. I ordered me a new pair every couple years, just 'cause I like Ed. Not that he needed the business, but because I liked him. And I like the smell of new leather.

PAUL

He was what you call a craftsman.

GRANT

There's nothing I like better than the smell of new leather. And I always ordered my new pair right here at this bar, with Ed sitting right here and us drinking beer like we always did. I'd tell him exactly what I wanted and he delivered every time. It always made me feel life is good. I could be down in the dumps and feeling sorry for myself, and then I'd come into Ed's place here and talk to him about my new boots and he'd tell me how he was gonna make them, and pretty soon I'd feel just fine again.

MORT

(Deep in thought) There's six things I like better than the smell of new leather.

GRANT

What are you talking about?

MORT

You said there's nothing you like better than the smell of new leather, and I was just saying I can think of six things I like better.

GRANT

Who asked you? Nobody cares what you like. You drink too much. Anyone ever told you that? You got a wet brain.

MORT

I don't drink no more than you do.

PAUL

That's right. We all drink about the same.

GRANT

It's not what you drink or how much you drink. It's how your bloodstream handles it. How your brain handles it. Some people, see, their bloodstream is thin, so the alcohol shoots right to the brain and kills all the cells and leaves them stupid, like Mort here. Some people, like me, the bloodstream is thick, from eating lots of good beefsteak, and also from working hard, which as we all know thickens the blood. So most of the alcohol doesn't get to the brain. It just stays in the bloodstream a long time and makes you feel good, instead of going to your brain and killing the cells. So we could drink the exact same amount, Mort, and I'd still be feeling good and having a good time and be just as smart as ever, and you'd still be a damn fool. See?

PAUL

Aw, come on, Grant. You can't go calling a man names like that.

GRANT

Why can't I? There some law says I can't speak my opinion? What about that, Mr. Legal Expert, Mr. Lawyer? You and your easements. What does your law say about that?

PAUL

Nobody says you can't speak your mind, but there's no need to go calling people names. It's bad enough you call Orville here a *retard*. Now you're calling Mort here a fool. You can't go around doing that. It ain't right.

GRANT

All right, all right, I won't do it again. It's just that Mort here is the big legal expert. He's so smart. I'd like to know where he went to law school.

MORT

I didn't go to law school.

GRANT

I'll say you didn't

MORT

I went to prison a couple times.

GRANT

Same thing, I guess.

PAUL

So it's all up to Dolly now, huh?

MORT

Damn straight.

GRANT

What's up to Dolly?

PAUL

This saloon. Your new boots.

GRANT

What about my new boots?

PAUL

Dolly'll be making them, I guess. Ed always said he was teaching Dolly the businesses. His saloon and his boots business, both of them. So's she'd have a means of support after he was gone. And now he's gone. So I guess—

GRANT

Stop right there. What about my new boots?

PAUL

Dolly'll be doing the boots business now. And I suppose she'll be running the saloon, even though from what I hear she don't take to other folks drinking too much. She wouldn't let Ed drink around the house. He had to come here.

GRANT

That don't make no sense at all. Women can't run no saloon. And no broad is sure as hell gonna make no boots. At least, she ain't gonna make my boots. And I gave Ed a down payment. Fifteen dollars I gave him right here. (*Slaps the bar*) He was sitting right here and I give it to him, a five and a ten. Orville's my witness. Didn't you see it, Orville?

ORVILLE

I don't know.

GRANT

Whaddya mean, you don't know? You *retard*. You was standing right there, just as retarded as the day you was born, when I give Ed there a five and a ten. You remember.

ORVILLE

I don't know.

PAUL

You can't expect Orville to remember everything that goes on in this place.

GRANT

Why can't I? Why do I have to do all the work all the time? What else has Orville got to do? Even a *retard* knows that a five and a ten add up to fifteen bucks. That ain't asking much. Orville, you get on the phone. Call up Ed's widow and tell her I want my fifteen bucks back. Tell her to forget about the boots. I'm canceling the order. Tell her to send it to me. I don't want to see her. But I want my fifteen bucks back by the end of the week. Call her now.

ORVILLE

I don't know.

GRANT

Whaddya mean, you don't know? Didn't they teach you how to use a phone when you was living out there at the county home? It's easy. Just pick up the phone behind the bar there and call Dolly and tell her, say, "Grant wants back the fifteen bucks he gave Ed as a down payment on a new pair of boots." You tell her that.

ORVILLE

I don't know.

PAUL

Whyn't you make your own call?

GRANT

I don't want to talk to her. She's too fat.

MORT

She's probably still at the church.

PAUL

It's the day of her husband's funeral. You don't want to be talking to somebody about boots and your fifteen dollars on the day of her husband's funeral. That ain't right.

MORT

That's right. It ain't right.

PAUL

What you ought to do is offer to buy the place from Dolly. Then you could come in here and carry on and what not and beat the snot out of anyone who doesn't like Ike.

GRANT

I don't need to buy me a saloon to do that. I do that now.

PAUL

Yeah, but this way it'd be legal and all.

GRANT

(Laughing with scorn) You don't see me getting arrested now, do you?

PAUL

Sometimes I think the Sheriff is afraid to come in here.

GRANT

Damn right he's scared. Sheriff Jackson is a communist.

MORT

That ain't what I heard. I heard he don't come in here on account he's afraid he'd have to kill you, and then *he'd* go to prison.

GRANT

He's a commie. All commies are cowards.

PAUL

You ought to buy the place, Grant. You could have your own little place and kick out the folks you don't like.

GRANT

This was my place, you two losers would be the first to go. I'd keep Orville though. Every good saloon needs its retard, but what it don't need is bums and losers like you. I'd make this a respectable place. No bums, no losers, and no commies. Maybe a nigger. Yeah. I'd get me a nigger with a little white uniform and a little white towel over his arm. You take a nigger, he'd know his place. That's the trouble with you two guys. You don't know your place.

MORT

Then you better buy this place. You're always talking about how much money you got. 'Cause one of these days, a colored fella who doesn't know his place is going to walk right through that door and you're going to call him a nigger, and before you know it, we'll be burying you right next to Ed. Some of those colored folks, they're mean. They're letting some of the coloreds play football now, down to the state college.

GRANT

The day I can't hold my own against a nigger is the day I deserve to die. A man can't defend himself against the subhuman races don't deserve to draw breath. Orville, call that fat broad and tell her to get my fifteen dollars over here before I get mad.

ORVILLE

Ed don't allow me to use the phone, Grant. He don't like personal calls neither. That phone is to call the Sheriff or the fire department. That's it.

PAUL

That's another reason you ought to buy the place. So's you could use the phone.

MORT

If you owned the place, you could make all the calls you wanted. And me and Paul here could drink for free once in a while, right?

GRANT

Wrong, jail-bird. Any man drinks in here, he pays. You want free drinks, go find yourself a commie bar. (*Snorts with disgust*) Free drinks. That's commie talk.

PAUL

I don't see how giving your best customers a free beer once in a while is commie talk.

GRANT

The commies think everything should be free, and that working men like ol' Grant here should foot the bills. In a pig's eye. Look, Orville, I'm not asking you. You with your retardation hanging out all over the place, you make me sick sometimes. I'm telling you: Get on the phone and tell that ugly, fat broad I want my dough by noon tomorrow or I'm going to get real mad, and she don't want that.

ORVILLE

Ed says I can't. I got orders.

GRANT

Look, you little *retard*. Ed happens to be dead. He ain't giving the orders around here no more. I am. Now pick up that phone, you don't want to get hurt.

ORVILLE

I got orders. Ed told me. Nobody told me different.

PAUL

Call her yourself, Grant. Call her tomorrow. She's probably not home from the funeral yet anyhow. She's a grieving widow.

GRANT

I'll tell you one thing: Wherever Ed is right now, he ain't grieving. He's kicking up his heels, he's so happy to be rid of that broad.

PAUL

The Bible says: Let the dead bury the dead.

MORT

What's that mean?

PAUL

I don't know.

GRANT

Yeah, you're right. She's still mourning. I ought to give her a few days to get over it. But I will get my fifteen bucks back, because I ain't paying good money for no boots made by no fat broad.

PAUL

Who cares who makes them? Ed probably taught her how to make boots just as good as he did. Probably better. Boots is boots.

GRANT

I ain't paying for no boots made by no commie.

MORT
That ain't right.

PAUL
Why do you think Dolly is a commie?

GRANT
I got my reasons.

PAUL
I'd like to hear them.

GRANT
People in hell would like a cold beer. Nobody cares what you'd like. I got my reasons. Just 'cause a guy gets a few years on him don't mean he goes deaf, you know. I still got ears. I hear things. People tell me things.

MORT
I know some folks who'd like to tell you a few things.

GRANT
Who cares?

MORT
You're always talking about how you got the right to say whatever you want, calling people names. Calling Orville here names.

GRANT
So what?

MORT
You're not the only one that's got freedom of speech in this town.

GRANT
We all got freedom of speech, and I'm telling you to keep your mouth shut.

PAUL
Mort's right. It's one thing to call the guys in the saloon names. We're just a bunch of drunks anyway and it don't make no difference what anyone calls us, it's all the same. But you can't go around calling people a commie, 'cause that's serious. That kind of talk causes problems.

GRANT
Sure, it causes problems for the commies. It's supposed to. That's why we call 'em commies, to cause 'em problems. They deserve problems. *(Takes out little black book)*

MORT
Uh-oh. He's making the list again.

GRANT

That's right, boys. When I sit down to write my next Sunday night letter to Uncle Joe, you're going on the list. Both of you. Communist sympathizers. I can smell it a mile away.

PAUL

You're gonna tell Joe McCarthy me and Mort is communists?

GRANT

Damn straight.

PAUL

Again?

GRANT

Brother Joe's a busy man. Sometimes he needs reminding.

PAUL

Why would a United States Senator from Wisconsin care if a couple of drunks from Holstein, Iowa, is communists?

GRANT

Brother Joe cares if *anyone* is a communist. Brother Joe believes in democracy.

PAUL

That's nice to know.

GRANT

Joe McCarthy don't care if you're rich or poor, young or old, Republican or Democrat. If you're a commie, he'll see to it that your life is pure hell. You ought to be grateful there's a politician out there who treats everyone equal.

MORT

If you're a commie, he wants to kill you.

GRANT

Damn straight. Rich or poor.

PAUL

But Dolly's a woman.

GRANT

You coulda fooled me.

PAUL

And you can't go calling a woman no commie, especially when you don't know she is.

GRANT

That so.

MORT

And what's it mean anyway? When you say a guy's a commie. What's that mean?

GRANT

You're kidding.

PAUL

I'd like to know too, Grant. You're always calling people a commie. What's that mean?

GRANT

You don't know what a commie is?

PAUL

I know what I think a commie is, but what I'd like to know is what you think it is. What do you mean when you say ol' Dolly is a commie, which by the way me and Mort know she sure ain't one, on account of there ain't no commies in Holstein. There couldn't be. We're farmers.

GRANT

No, no, you got that wrong. *I'm* a farmer. What you guys is farm *hands*.

PAUL

What's the difference? When we're both up to our knees in cow shit, what difference does it make what you call us? Neither one of us smells like a dozen red roses.

GRANT

What's the difference? The difference is I'm a gentleman and you guys are a couple of drunks who don't even know what a commie is. The difference is I got class and you guys don't got nothin'. So why don't you shut up and drink your beer before I kick you out of my saloon.

PAUL

You're avoiding the issue. You were gonna tell us what a commie is. We want to know.

GRANT

Okay, I'll tell you. First off, a commie is someone who's in my book.

MORT

We know.

GRANT

Every day, I'm making my rounds, I listen closely. I hear any commie talk, it goes into my book. Every Sunday, right after church, I write me a little letter to one Senator Joseph McCarthy. I give him all the details on all the commie-pinko activity I heard about during the week. I give him all the names. He counts on good folks like me. I write to him every Sunday

GRANT, *Continued*

and mail it first thing every Monday. I been reporting directly to Brother Joe on who's a commie around here for three years, and he ain't never once complained.

PAUL

He ever write back to you?

GRANT

Shut up.

MORT

My sister Rose used to write letters to Clark Gable every Sunday. He never wrote back either.

GRANT

I told you to shut up.

MORT

Just 'cause you write someone a letter, don't mean they read the darn thing. I wrote me a letter to Carole Lombard once, first time I was in prison. Clark Gable wrote back, telling me to leave her the hell alone.

PAUL

You ain't telling us what you think a commie is, Grant. We want to know.

GRANT

Shut up. Like I was saying, the first thing is, if you're in my book, you're a commie and there ain't nothing you can do about it. Second thing: You just said "We want to know." That's commie talk. It shows you can't think for yourself. You notice, commies always talk about groups. Commies do everything in big groups. It's never "I" or "me" with the commies. It's always "we." "We're" gonna change the world, or "we're" gonna invade Washington, D.C. and burn down all them nice government buildings which our forefathers created, and tear down the schools and throw the old people out in the street just 'cause they're too old to work in the mines, and stuff like that. That's the first sign of communism: Talking about groups instead of talking about yourself. A real American don't care about no groups. A real American is only interested in himself. Like God. You read your Bible, Paul? Well, read it. And I'll give you two dollars every time God says "we." God never says "we." That's 'cause God knew how to fend for himself. God was a real man, and didn't need none of this "we" crap. That's why all commies hate God. 'Cause He likes to be alone. Kinda like me.

PAUL

I was in the army. That was one big damn group. No privacy at all. Couldn't turn around without bumping into somebody. I was bumping into everybody all the time.

MORT

That why they threw you out?

PAUL

Nah, they threw me out on account of I was drunk all the time.

MORT

That work?

PAUL

Worked for me.

MORT

My cousin Lloyd, he was drunk all the time. They made him fight anyway. Got his ass shot off over in Italy.

PAUL

Maybe if he'd been sober, he wouldn't have got his ass shot off.

MORT

Nah, he was sober before the war. Lived around here. People was always shooting him back then too. Some folks, it don't matter if they're drunk or not, they're gonna get their ass shot off. I got shot in prison once—

GRANT

(Irate) Will you shut up and let me talk? I'm trying to learn you something here.

MORT

Only time in prison history anybody ever got shot in the law library—

GRANT

(Loudly) Shut up!

(MORT and PAUL study their empty glasses, which ORVILLE refills.)

MORT

The funny thing was, the guy that shot me, he could read. Imagine that.

(GRANT glares at MORT until MORT is embarrassed into silence.)

GRANT

Like I was saying, commies love groups. A real American hates them. A real American stands alone.

PAUL

What about the Pilgrims? Didn't the Pilgrims come over in a big group? And stuff like that? Didn't they live together when they was founding the country?

MORT

Yeah, and like that first Thanksgiving with the Indians. Didn't they have Thanksgiving with the Indians in a big group?

GRANT

See? There you go. That's more commie talk. See, the commies is always using history and that historical stuff whenever they get in an argument. Somebody pins them down with good solid proof about something, the commies always start throwing those historical facts at you and covering everything up with information. I hate that.

PAUL

It's what they taught us in school.

GRANT

And where was you in school?

PAUL

What do you mean?

GRANT

You was in a class, which is just another kind of group. See, anytime you get in a group, you get all kinds of commie noise thrown at you. It's only when a man's alone that he can really see the light and the truth. That's why the commies never let nobody be alone. Commies can't stand the truth. Besides, all that stuff about Thanksgiving is commie propaganda. The Pilgrims may have hung around with the Indians for a while, to get something to eat when it was cold. But once they got their little log cabins built and everything, they didn't have nothing to do with no Indians. Besides, everyone knows that Indians are commies.

PAUL

That's a new one on me.

GRANT

Sure it is. That's 'cause when you was young, you was spending all that time in school, instead of out thinking on your own, like me. That's where I get all my best ideas: When I'm by myself.

MORT

If you'd quit punching people in the nose every time they say they didn't vote for Eisenhower, you wouldn't be alone so much.

GRANT

Yeah? And then where would I be? In here with you guys.

PAUL

Which is where you are right now.

MORT

So why don't you go have some good ideas outside, by yourself, and let us alone.

GRANT

Orville, pick up that phone. Call Dolly right now. Tell her I want that fifteen dollars by noon tomorrow.

PAUL

You shouldn't go bothering a widow.

MORT

Damn straight.

GRANT

And another thing: One sure-fire way of telling if a guy's a commie is if he goes around trying to get stuff for free. Anyone who takes free stuff is a commie. You go around giving stuff away, nobody's ever going to make any money. And speaking of making money, here's a dime, Orville. Give me another beer.

(GRANT slaps a dime on the bar. The PHONE RINGS. ORVILLE answers.)

ORVILLE

Ed's place. This here's Orville. How are you? Fine. *(Looks at each customer)* Yes. Yes. Yes. Okay. Thank you kindly. 'Bye. *(Hangs up)* That was Dolly. She says to say hello to you, Paul. She says to say hello to you, Mort. Grant, that was Dolly.

GRANT

So what?

ORVILLE

She left a message for you.

GRANT

Big deal.

ORVILLE

She said "Orville, give Mort a free beer." She said, "Orville, give Paul a free boilermaker." She said, "Orville, tell that fat son-of-a-bitch Grant Standard to get his ass the hell out of my saloon."

(Enter HOMER GRUNDLE. Homer is in his late fifties. He is a nervous wreck, mostly because of the federal government, which he believes has been trying to wreck his life ever since the last war ended. He carries a thick file stuffed with papers. The file does not appear to be particularly well organized, nor does he. He is not so much angry as nervous.)

HOMER

Hello, boys.

(ALL except GRANT greet HOMER. He puts his file on the bar. Since he's a regular, ORVILLE gives him a beer without being asked.)

HOMER, *Continued*

Hi, Grant.

GRANT

(Not at all interested) Yeah. Hi, Homer.

HOMER

(Timidly) Uh, Grant? Could I have a minute?

GRANT

(Long-suffering) What is it now?

HOMER

Could we talk in private?

GRANT

Whatever you got to say, you can say it in front of these guys. They're all losers, it don't matter what they think.

HOMER

I just wanted to remind you. I go to court today.

GRANT

Good luck.

HOMER

You sure you won't come with me?

GRANT

I'm busy.

HOMER

I see. The thing is. This case was kind of your idea. And I thought maybe you would like to come along. For moral support.

GRANT

Nah, my morals is fine. You'll do all right.

HOMER

I've been hearing a lot of talk about Judge Fragg lately. They say he can be pretty mean.

MORT

That ain't no lie. He ran my sorry ass up the flagpole, but good. And the whole world saluted.

GRANT

Homer, believe me. You'll do just fine. Did you read that speech I wrote for you?

HOMER

Yes.

GRANT

Did you read all that legal research I done for you?

HOMER

Yes, but...

GRANT

Then what you worried about? It's gonna be all right. Orville, give Homer here a shot of our best whiskey. For moral support.

HOMER

Oh, no thanks. I can't go into court with spirits on my breath.

MORT

I went into Judge Fragg's court with a load on one time. He'd like to have reamed me a new asshole.

GRANT

One shot won't hurt you.

HOMER

No, no. I can't. I just want to ask you one more time. Just so's I'm sure. Are you *sure* we don't have to pay income taxes?

GRANT

Sure I'm sure. Think I'd send you into Judge Fragg's court, a regular lion's den like that, if I wasn't sure? Relax. Just do what I told you. You'll be all right.

HOMER

I had a pre-trial conference with the prosecutor yesterday. He's pretty sure he'll get a conviction, and that I'll go to prison.

GRANT

Of course he says that. You gonna believe everything your enemy says? He hasn't got a chance. He's running scared. Just stand up when the Judge calls on you, hand him that thing I wrote for you, tell him that there ain't no law says a God-fearing, hard-working white Christian gentleman's got to pay income taxes to the International Jewish Cartel of Wall Street, and sit down. He'll not only find you not guilty, he'll give you a medal.

MORT

I got an uncle who's a Jew. He ain't so bad.

PAUL

That the guy what married your mother's sister Betty? That guy's always getting shot? What's his name?

MORT

I forgot. Some Jewish name. But he changed it to Joe. Figured that'd help him not get shot so much.

PAUL

How's he getting along?

MORT

Fine. Says he kind of likes Alcatraz. He told Betty it's pretty quiet and they get magazines and stuff. He says hardly anybody's tried to shoot him since he's been there.

HOMER

Both the prosecutor and Judge Fragg are a little bit upset with me, since I didn't get a lawyer. They don't think it's a good idea for me to represent myself. Maybe they're right. I was thinking—

GRANT

Will you stop thinking and do as I say? What do you need with a lawyer? You want some Jew-boy taking all the credit after you win? You want to pay some Hebe to do what you can do yourself? I don't want to hear no more about it. You get over to that courthouse, you tell Judge Fragg that you don't have to pay no more taxes to no more Jews, and furthermore, you don't give a rat's ass what he thinks, you ain't gonna pay no more taxes. You win your case, then come back here, and Mort here'll buy you a nice cold beer. How's that?

HOMER

(Very nervous) I don't know, Grant. I just don't know.

GRANT

(Angry) Well I do! Now quit your whining. Get over to that courthouse and stand up for yourself, and for all the rest of us hard-working guys who're sick and tired of forking over our hard-earned paychecks to a bunch of kykes and lawyers. Now get!

HOMER

(Pleading) But Grant. You say it a lot better than I do. Couldn't you come with me and maybe—

GRANT

(Exploding; pounding the bar) I said git!

(HOMER hurries out, clutching his file.)

PAUL

Found yourself another sucker to do your dirty work, huh Grant?

GRANT

He's doing *our* work.

MORT

Speak for yourself.

PAUL

You take the cake. You don't want to pay your income taxes, so you talk saps like old Homer there to go into court and get their tailbones kicked by Judge Fragg.

GRANT

You don't understand. There's a moral principle at stake here.

PAUL

Some principle. You're just too cheap to pay your taxes.

GRANT

Someone's got to go into court and fight the good fight. For the good of all of us.

PAUL

Why don't you go? Why don't you skip filing your income tax returns for a few years? Then, when the government accuses *you* of tax evasion, why don't you stand up in front of Judge Fragg and get *your* fanny thrown in jail?

GRANT

(*With severe dignity*) I'm too valuable to the community. I can't be sacrificed. It's got to be someone we can live without. Like Homer there.

MORT

How'd you talk Homer into cheating on his taxes? I didn't know the guy was that dumb.

GRANT

I didn't say nothing about cheating. All I told him was that it's a shame, since his daddy died and left him that farm and all that money, that he's got to give half of it to the government. I showed him some laws I found. That's all. I told him it's high time someone stood up for us little guys and fought the government. Today's his day in court. If he wins, none of us has ever got to pay taxes ever again. If he wins, you guys will be thanking me for the rest of your life. I've done a lot for him.

PAUL

And when he loses, are you going to prison for him?

MORT

We ain't talking about no drunken driving case here. They got him on tax evasion. They're gonna take everything he's got.

GRANT

You're talking about one little guy. I'm talking about a movement. The fight against taxes is a movement. Sometimes, if everyone is going to win, a few sacrifices have to be made. I'm willing to sacrifice Homer. It's not easy, but like my grand-daddy used to say, if you're gonna make an omelet, you gotta break some eggs. And Homer's one of the eggs that's got to be broken.

PAUL

Your grand-daddy said that?

GRANT

Yeah. You want to make something of it?

PAUL

No. I just...

GRANT

You just what?

PAUL

How well did you know your grand-daddy?

GRANT

I knew him a damn sight better than you did.

PAUL

I knew him, and I never heard him talk like that.

MORT

Somebody's got to pay their taxes. We've all got to pay. So we can have an army, and highways, and Yellowstone National Park. I was there once. I like them bears. Can't say they thought the world of me.

PAUL

Yellowstone's a nice place.

MORT

Damn straight.

GRANT

See, there you go. "We've all got to pay." You ever listen to yourself when you talk? "We've *all* got to pay?" That's the thing about communism. Everybody has to do everything together. You want a highway, so old Grant's got to pay for it. You want a highway? Make it yourself. Me, I want to go somewhere, I'll go there, and I don't need no damn highway, and if some tree or someone gets in my way, I'll cut 'em down. I don't need no highway. That's what's wrong with you guys. That's what's wrong with communism. There's no room for the

GRANT, *Continued*

individual. That's why you see them pictures of May Day parades, with everyone marching around Red Square in a big group.

PAUL

I hear it's pretty cold in Russia, Grant. Maybe they march around together to keep warm.

GRANT

You got all the average Joes down there marching around, and then up on top of the wall, you got all the big shots who give all the orders. The big shots tell everyone what to think. If you don't think like they tell you, they shoot you.

MORT

(Yawning) Speaking of getting shot, I got to go home. I'm late for supper. Loretta's apt to be cranky.

PAUL

She come after you with her aught-twelve lately?

MORT

Just that once.

GRANT

Shut up and sit down. I'm talking about freedom here: I want you to leave, I'll let you know. Orville, give him another beer.

MORT

I got to go home.

GRANT

You'll go when I say you can go. No one leaves the room while I'm talking about freedom.

PAUL

What about me? Can I go home?

GRANT

Not until I teach you a thing or two about democracy. You guys don't understand what it's like in Russia. Take their hospitals. You get sick in Russia, they got social medicine. That means, when you get sick, you got to go to the hospital and they make you stay there until you get well. They buy your medicine, they give you a doctor whether you can pay him or not, they tell you what's wrong with you and they don't let you leave until it's fixed. How would you like to live in a place like that?

(MORT and PAUL exchange a long look.)

PAUL

Where do I sign up?

GRANT

Shut up. You don't want any of that.

PAUL

Why the heck not? I know lots of people who get sick and die or darn near die because they ain't got any money. Russia would sound pretty good to them.

MORT

My uncle Wilson had throat cancer for seventeen years and suffered every day. Weren't no hospital nor doctor would touch him on account of he was a poor man. I thought that was a damn shame.

GRANT

Your uncle Wilson died because he was immoral. His throat cancer was a judgment from God and you know it.

MORT

Where in the hell do you get that? Uncle Wilson never hurt a soul a day in his life.

GRANT

Spent half his time talking about what a great guy Roosevelt was, so God got him in the throat, good and proper. Everybody knows what Roosevelt was.

PAUL

Let me guess. A communist.

GRANT

He wasn't no girl scout. All that talk about helping poor people. With my money. Hand-outs. Telling people to take free stuff. That W.P.A. malarkey, the government paying people to build roads and hospitals. That's what they do in Russia. The government builds roads and hospitals. And look at how their people turn out.

PAUL

How do their people turn out?

MORT

Sounds like they spend all their time driving home from the hospital.

GRANT

Point is: The government took away their initiative, their fighting spirit. They don't have to fight to survive over there. Nobody fights. I'll bet years go by in Russia without one guy beating the bejesus out of another guy. Hell of a way to run a country.

MORT

Orville, hand me the phone book. I want to see if there's a travel agent in town.

PAUL

What you're saying, Grant, is that the people would be better off if they got sick and nobody would take care of them, if they didn't have no hospitals and the government didn't build no roads?

GRANT

I'm saying that a real man don't take hand-outs. You got to struggle to stay alive. If there's no struggle, there's no life. You get soft. Now here in America, you get sick, you gotta stand up on your own two feet and pay your doctor so's he can make you get well.

PAUL

You get a broken leg, you got to stand on your own two feet?

GRANT

Hell, yes. It all ties in with your backbone, which you'd better have a strong one, 'cause it's a jungle out there.

PAUL

And if you got no money...

GRANT

Then that's tough. You should have worked and saved. And if you don't, God punishes you. If God don't punish you, then you don't know He's around. Then you become godless. Like the commies.

PAUL

I don't know. I'd kind of like to live in a country where if you're sick and broke, somebody'll take care of you anyway. I don't see nothing wrong with that.

GRANT

You wouldn't, on account of you've got no character. But the ones who have saved, who have the money to get into the hospital and pay for their medicine, they got character, like me.

PAUL

And if they're broke?

GRANT

Then that's the way God wants it and they'll just have to live with it and die.

PAUL

I think I've had enough to drink.

GRANT

A man's gotta be free to die, or what's the point in living?

MORT

I'd love to go for a year without someone beating the bejesus out of me. (*Finishes his drink*)
I'm going home.

GRANT

You ain't going nowhere.

(*The TELEPHONE RINGS. ORVILLE answers, listens, then hangs up.*)

ORVILLE

Dolly's coming over. Says you got to go.

GRANT

Nobody tells Grant Standard where to go.

ORVILLE

She says get your big fat tail-bone out of her saloon. She's coming down and she don't want to see you.

GRANT

See what I mean? Now what kind of woman is that? Her husband dies, the funeral just now ends, and she's going to a tavern when she should be going home to cry her eyes out like ol' Ed deserved.

(*ORVILLE has been filling a tall glass with whiskey.*)

GRANT

What are you doing there? Nobody's going to drink that. A drink like that would kill a man.

ORVILLE

Ain't for a man. This here's for Dolly.

GRANT

Old broad likes her booze. Hey, how come you know what she likes to drink? She never comes in here.

ORVILLE

(*Looks at GRANT*) I know what she likes.

GRANT

That's nice. I hope she drinks it all and dies. Far as I'm concerned, she's the one that killed old Ed.

PAUL

How do you figure that? I been to their house. She's got it all fixed up and there ain't a speck of dust in the whole place. Ed said she was a good cook, too. Everyone seems to like her. Except you.

GRANT

She ruined him. He was my best friend until she showed up ten years ago and made him marry her.

PAUL

She didn't make him do nothing. Ol' Ed liked Dolly. He was tired of living alone.

GRANT

Everything was fine, nice and peaceful. Then my best friend marries a battle-axe. As I recall, Orville started workin' here about that time. One day I got a friend and a tavern with a decent bartender. Next day, my best friend's married and I got a *retard* tending my saloon.

MORT

Can I go home?

GRANT

No. She gave him grief about drinking, so he had to quit drinking. She gave him grief about his smoking, too. He quit that. I heard she even gave away some of the boots he made. Guy'd order a pair of boots, Ed'd work and slave on them—Ed always took his time, you couldn't hurry him, a true craftsman—and sometimes Dolly'd give 'em away. She'd give 'em away to poor people, trash who had no intention of ever paying for them. That proves she's a commie right there.

MORT

Ed was a fine Christian man. Him and Dolly belonged to the Presbyterian Church ever since they got married. Dolly probably give them boots away on account of it's more blessed to give than to receive.

GRANT

You're a fool. What that proverb means is, it's more blessed to give money to the guy what made you a pair of boots than it is to receive the things without paying for them. That's what it means. Jesus Christ, am I the only man in this town who understands the goddamn Bible?

PAUL

Ever heard of Christian charity, Grant?

GRANT

See, that's what the commies want you to do. Give all your valuable goods away. Then, when you got nothing, you got to rely on the government to give you everything you need. Your boots, your medicine, your house, everything. They take away a man's initiative, so he doesn't have the get-up-and-go to get to work and make his way in the world. I tell you, communism's a disease.

PAUL

So's being sick when you're broke. That's a disease, and it sounds to me like your communists do a pretty darn good job of taking care of people with diseases.

GRANT

Quit twisting everything I say.

(The door opens and DOLLY enters. She has shed her funeral garb and is now wearing work clothes, something you'd wear if you were planning to spend the rest of the day cleaning, refurbishing and redecorating a tavern, which is what she intends to do. She is a bulldog, but doesn't usually bite unless riled. She is strong and fierce and likes her whiskey. Probably not related to anyone you've seen in a movie in the last thirty or forty years. She has a potted plant in one hand. She has a pair of leather boots in the other hand. Some new curtains, pastel colors, are draped over one arm. She drinks, but it never shows. When she insults Paul and Mort, she does it with a friendly ease, a condescension she has developed over years of acquaintance. She's not trying to hurt their feelings. She's simply not very careful of what she says, since she knows she could kick the daylights out of just about any man in town who might take umbrage at her words, which of course no one ever does.)

DOLLY

(Surveys the room, looks disgusted) Whiskey.

(ORVILLE puts her tumbler of whiskey on the bar.)

DOLLY, *Continued*

Evening Paul, Mort.

(PAUL and MORT mumble greetings. She drains the glass in one long pull, wipes her mouth with the back of her hand, and shivers with pleasure.)

DOLLY, *Continued*

And, now that I'm fortified against the evils of the world, good evening, Grant.

GRANT

Dolly.

DOLLY

I sent orders that you were supposed to be gone by the time I got here.

GRANT

What's the matter? Can't a man enjoy a cold one? I been drinking at this saloon since I was too young to buy myself a drink.

DOLLY

You were never that young. Finish your beer. Then you can help me carry in the plants. Then you can get yourself out of my saloon.

(DOLLY drops the boots by GRANT.)

GRANT

What am I? Your nigger?

DOLLY

With you, Grant, nigger'd be an improvement. You're not much of a white man.

GRANT

You're not much of a broad.

DOLLY

I've never had any complaints. Boys, the rest of the ferns are out in the truck, along with paint and curtains and kitchen stuff and all kinds of happy horseshit. When you're done with that, Paul, I want you and Mort to build me a nice new sign for out front. You fellas still do some sign painting, don't you, when you're not drunk or in jail?

MORT

I think it'll be all right, but I'll have to clear it with my parole officer.

PAUL

You ain't thinking of changing the name of the place, are you, Dolly?

DOLLY

I'm thinking of all kinds of things. I'll explain it later. Now, get moving. It won't kill you to do a little work for a change. Help me bring the rest of the plants in. Grant, pick up your boots there. You owe me thirty-five dollars.

PAUL

Where'd you get the ditchweed, Dolly?

DOLLY

These are ferns, dick-head. Green plants emit valuable oxygen, which as we all know, your brain has never had enough of.

PAUL

I was sorry about Ed, Dolly. *(Raises his glass)* Here's to Ed.

DOLLY

I know you're sorry. Sorry you won't be cadging any more free suds from my late lamented and not-too-bright husband. That's okay. I ain't gonna make you pay neither.

PAUL

That's not what I meant. I'd have said I was sorry even if Ed didn't let me have a little credit now and then.

DOLLY

I'm touched. Very touched. Thanks for coming to the funeral.

PAUL

Least I could do.

DOLLY

Least you could do is all you've ever done, right? Still shoveling shit for your old man at that cesspool he calls a farm? Why ain't you working today? What's today's excuse?

PAUL

I got Arthur-itis in my left knee.

DOLLY

That ain't arthritis. You were doing the cha-cha with old man Dawson's daughter Louise. The old man caught you and like to have shot your face clean off, only he was too drunk on his own hooch to aim right and you got off with a knee-cap full of shot.

PAUL

Darn it all now, Dolly, don't go getting me mad.

DOLLY

Why not? What you gonna do? Hurt me? (*Laughs*) That's funny. Go ahead. Get mad. You're kinda cute that way.

MORT

(*Laughing; slapping PAUL on the shoulder*) She sure got your number.

DOLLY

What are you laughing about, shit-for-brains? What's your excuse? You could be working today. Lots of places hire convicts.

MORT

You know I can hardly walk. Old war wounds.

DOLLY

I'm glad you brought yourself and your "war wounds" to Ed's funeral, Mort.

MORT

That's okay.

DOLLY

Only, one thing.

MORT

What's that?

DOLLY

(*Gently, patiently, as if instructing a very slow child*) Next time you go to a funeral, and you get in line to pay your respects to the minister, don't go up to him and ask him if he really believes in God.

MORT

I didn't mean no harm. But funerals is the only time I get to ask about things like that. The important things in life. Nobody ever wants to discuss the important things in life with me. All's they want to talk about is have I been to prison lately.

DOLLY

(Pats him on the arm; very quietly) It doesn't do to go around asking men of the cloth if they believe in God.

MORT

It don't?

DOLLY

No, it don't. It'd be like going up to you when you're shoveling shit on the farm and asking you if you believe in it.

MORT

Hell, I been shoveling shit all my life. It's how I earn my living. Shit don't care if I believe in it or not, long as it gets shoveled.

DOLLY

That's right. And that's how preachers feel about God. They been shoveling Him for years. They shovel Him for a living. They stop shoveling, they starve. He don't care if they shovel Him or not. But they don't want to talk about it. So you shouldn't go up to a minister like that, especially after he's put a friend of his in the ground, and ask him if he really believes in God. At that point, what the poor guy really believes in is straight whiskey.

MORT

The older a feller gets, the more he starts wondering about the important things in life. What's it all mean? Stuff like that. I never go to Church. You know that. Hadn't been in ten, fifteen years. So I thought, long as I was there, I might as well ask the Reverend this question. It'd been on my mind lately.

DOLLY

(Gently, almost lovingly) Good old Mort. You're a good man, even if you do spend an awful lot of your time in prison.

MORT

(Embarrassed) Aw, Dolly...

DOLLY

(Reassuringly) That's all right. I know you didn't mean to go into that bank with that shotgun.

MORT

I wasn't going to rob nobody. And it wasn't really loaded. All that much.

DOLLY

I know.

MORT

I just wanted to talk about a loan, is all.

DOLLY

(Patting his shoulder) All is forgiven. Only thing is: I ever catch you asking a man of the cloth if he really believes in God again, I'm afraid I'll have to kill you. See? That's just the way it is.

MORT

(Sheepishly) I didn't mean no harm.

DOLLY

I know you didn't. *(Long pause)* Some war wounds. The reason you can't walk is you spent fourteen months dancing the Texas two-step with those colored boys up to the prison. I hear they turned you into a regular homecoming queen.

MORT

(Enraged) That ain't so!

(DOLLY laughs.)

PAUL

(Restraining him) Easy, Mort.

MORT

I'll get you.

DOLL

So. Come and get me. I ain't going nowhere. Besides, I'm a helpless widow now. All alone and defenseless.

MORT

You're crazy is what you are.

PAUL

Sit down. Orville, give him some whiskey.

DOLLY

Right. Give him some whiskey. Then come outside and help me bring in the rest of the ferns. You're the only real man here. You can lend a hand too, Paul. And you too, Grant. I got a truck load of stuff waiting to be brought in. And I'll take that thirty-five dollars for the boots while you're at it. Come on, Paul. Shake a leg.

PAUL

What are you yapping about?

DOLLY

Ferns. I'm yapping about ferns. And when I'm through yapping about ferns, I'm going to start yapping about curtains. (*Brandishes the curtains like a weapon*) And then I'm going to start yapping about fresh coats of paint, and ventilation, and cleanliness, and nutritious food, and cold milk instead of cold beer. And that's just for starters. It'll be a terrible shock to you boys, but change is good for the soul. I'm going to brighten this place up. Make it fit for human habitation. We're gonna have malted milk shakes here to cure your hangovers on Monday mornings. And we're gonna have some good nutritious food, on account of you boys is too stupid and disorganized to get a decent meal anywhere else. You're nice to me, I might consider letting you boys get drunk here once in awhile, after I get the place fumigated.

PAUL

Dolly, I don't—

DOLLY

Of course, if you boys don't like the idea of drinking in a place that don't smell like the sheep pavilion at the Iowa State Fair, you can always take your business elsewhere. You drunks that ain't put in a decent day's work between you in the last decade ain't exactly sending my property values soaring.

PAUL

The place don't need no brightening up. It's a saloon. If we wanted a place that's brightened up, we'd go outside and drink under the apple tree.

DOLLY

You don't say.

PAUL

The whole point of being in a saloon is to have a place that's dark and full of smoke. You start bringing in brightness, it ain't no saloon no more.

DOLLY

That's the point. Starting pretty soon, this ain't gonna be no saloon no more.

PAUL

What's it gonna be? Damn it, this is the only saloon in town.

DOLLY

I haven't decided yet. I'll tell you what it ain't gonna be. It ain't gonna be what it is now. Hell hole full of deadbeats and jaundice juice. For one thing, we're gonna have stuff that's safe to drink. Milk shakes. Fresh vegetable juice. We're all gonna lose weight. I'm gonna teach Orville to cook.

MORT

Now, wait just a second. You just downed a drink of whiskey would have killed a lot of men.

DOLLY

I have two things to say to you. First: Do as I say, not as I do. Second: A lot of things that would kill a lot of men haven't killed me.

PAUL

What's got into you?

DOLLY

Change, Paul, change. Change is good. Life is change. You don't change, you don't live. I'm going to serve a lunch here that'll take a load off your arteries. Stuff you consume now, hell, you might as well put a gun to your head. Change is good! And speaking of change, I got plenty of it on me, Grant, if you don't have thirty-five bucks even.

PAUL

What we got to change for? Everybody's been pretty happy the way things are. Right?

MORT

I'm happy.

DOLLY

No you're not. I was to venture an opinion, I would say you're just about the unhappiest creature on God's green Earth. Look at you. Sallow, sorry mess. When's the last time you had any exercise?

PAUL

You got exercise in prison?

MORT

That wasn't exercise; that was trying to not get killed. There's a difference.

DOLLY

No there isn't. That's the whole point of exercise: trying to put off getting killed. Of course, you can't prevent it, just delay it. But why not buy yourself a little time? What's the first thing you do when you get up in the morning?

MORT

I ask the jailer if anyone's put up my bail.

DOLLY

I mean, after that.

MORT

Since no one ever puts up my bail, I go back to sleep until the sheriff gets another prisoner and throws me out the back door.

DOLLY

If it's not too personal a question, Mort, what do you keep getting arrested for?

MORT

For getting beat up.

DOLLY

Is it against the law to get beat up?

MORT

No, but the guys that beat me up are awful big. The Sheriff figures it's easier to put me in jail than arrest them that's beating me. That way I won't get killed and he won't get beat up either.

DOLLY

First thing in the morning, what you're supposed to do is hit the floor and do a hundred push-ups. Then fifty sit-ups. Then run a mile. Then breakfast. What do you usually have for breakfast?

MORT

I haven't had breakfast since nineteen thirty-nine.

PAUL

My breakfast is sausage and whiskey. They say that sausage clogs up your arteries. But that ain't necessarily the case. See, the whiskey cuts through the grease. It melts it down. So you can have your sausage, as long as you wash it down with plenty of good whiskey. You eat that stuff plain, you don't stand a chance.

DOLLY

I see.

PAUL

I like to pour whiskey on corn flakes too.

DOLLY

This explains a lot of things.

PAUL

Sometimes I skip the sausage and the cornflakes and just have the whiskey, with some beer.

DOLLY

The heavens open to reveal a blue sky.

PAUL

Huh?

DOLLY

Nothing. Orville, I thought I told you to go get those ferns out of my truck.

ORVILLE

Yes, ma'am. Where do you want them?

DOLLY

Just line them up on the bar. I want the boys to get good and close to them. We'll all stand together and breathe for awhile. Probably be the only oxygen we'll get all day.

ORVILLE

Okay. *(Exits)*

DOLLY

(Calling after him) And bring in the big cardboard box too.

GRANT

Hold on a second.

DOLLY

What is it? You been awful quiet.

GRANT

You can't bring no ferns in here.

DOLLY

That surprises me. Seeing's how this here's my establishment now, my property, I was thinking that I could bring ferns or Easter lilies or Judge Crater or moonshine or Mahatma Gandhi's ashes or Dorothy Lamour's sarong or the family Bible or any other damn thing I felt like bringing in. I guess I was wrong. I was thinking me and Fred Astaire could come in here and do *The Continental* if'n we felt like it, seeing's how Ed left me the place and it's lawfully mine. I was going to put some cranberries on my head and make like Carmen Miranda if I felt like it, seeing's how, the last I heard, a body had the right to do whatever she felt like doing on her own property.

GRANT

I know it's been rough for you lately, Ed up and dying on you and all.

DOLLY

You know that, do you?

GRANT

Sure.

DOLLY

What do you know about "dying and all"?

GRANT

I know lotsa guys that kicked the bucket.

DOLLY

And all of them have one thing in common.

GRANT

What's that?

DOLLY

They're all luckier than me, 'cause they don't have to look at you no more.

(ORVILLE re-enters, laden with ferns, a cardboard box and some curtains. DOLLY digs into a coat pocket, pulls out a book, and tosses it to ORVILLE.)

DOLLY, *Continued*

Here you go, Orville. Start reading.

ORVILLE

(Examining the book carefully) I don't know, Dolly.

DOLLY

It's a cook book. Read. Learn.

GRANT

"Cook book"? There ain't never been no cooking in this place, and there ain't gonna be.

DOLLY

I got a machine out in the truck. Damndest thing I ever saw. You put some carrots in it, push a button, it makes some noise, and then you got yourself a nice cool glass of fresh vegetable juice. Make you live forever.

GRANT

Did you hear me? There ain't gonna be no cooking.

DOLLY

And there ain't gonna be no drinking, or breathing, for that matter, if you don't fork over thirty-five bucks for them boots. You ordered them boots from Ed. Here they are. You paid him fifteen dollars down, and now, if you don't mind, I'll take the remaining thirty-five.

GRANT

(Chuckling, looking around the bar at the other men, trying to get them on his side) You hear this? Thirty-five bucks, she says. Thirty-five. For what?

(DOLLY picks up the boots, which, by the way, look very nice. She approaches GRANT, holding the boots at eye-level, stops in front of him, and drops them.)

DOLLY

For these, Brother Joe.

(GRANT tenses, catches himself, and relaxes, or seems to. He's angry, but doesn't want it to show. Looks at the boots on the floor, then at DOLLY.)

GRANT

Thirty-five bucks. For those?

DOLLY

Last pair Ed ever started. After he took to his bed for the last time, I finished them. They're Ed's design and workmanship, just like always. I just sort of added a finishing touch or two. Ed taught me everything he knew about the trade. He even said, before he died, that the student had surpassed the master.

GRANT

(Still staring at the boots, pointing at them) These boots?

DOLLY

I don't take no checks.

GRANT

These boots?

DOLLY

Orville, give Grant some whiskey. His brains is stalled. They need a good kick.

(GRANT picks up one of the boots and examines the toe. His face contorts.)

GRANT

The hell...the goddamn...What the goddamn hell in the name of Christ sweet Jesus is this?

DOLLY

(Craning her neck to see the problem with the boot) Oh, that. Something I added at the last minute. You know. Kind of a personal touch. In the magazines, it's what they call a Fashion Statement.

(GRANT is frozen in horror as he stares at the boot. PAUL and MORT leave their bar stools, cross to GRANT, and try to see what's bothering him)

PAUL

Well, I'll be dipped in shit.

MORT

I think it's kinda cute.

PAUL

You do this, Dolly?

DOLLY

It was my own idea.

ORVILLE

What's going on, guys?

MORT

(Going back to his drink) Damndest thing I ever seen. Dolly put a heart on the boots. Big ol' pink hearts.

(PAUL holds the boots up for ORVILLE to see. There is a big pink heart on the toe of each boot.)

PAUL

Two hearts. One on the toe of each boot. *(Laughs)* Hearts! Like something a bunch of little kiddies would wear. *(Laughs heartily)*

MORT

Hearts! Them's ladies' boots. Dolly oughta give you a discount.

PAUL

Discount, hell. She oughta charge extra.

MORT

Put 'em on, Grant. Let's go down to the lumber yard. I want to hear what the boys have to say about them hearts!

PAUL

Let's go into town, see if we can find him a purse to match!

MORT

Hey, Grant. If you don't like them boots, there's probably some girls in town that would give you five dollars for the pair.

PAUL

Whatever you do, don't let the Sheriff see you. There's laws against men wearing ladies' clothes.

DOLLY

Try 'em on. Then give me my thirty-five bucks.

GRANT

You was a man, I'd kill you.

DOLLY

You was a man, you'd pay your damn bills.

GRANT

(Throws the boots across the room) Ed was right. You're a crazy old broad, and he was crazy to marry you.

DOLLY

Don't matter to me if you damage the boots. You gotta pay for them anyway.

GRANT

He said marrying you was the worst mistake he ever made

DOLLY

That's funny. A few days before he expired, he told me he had only one regret in life: he never got around to shooting you.

GRANT

You're a lying sack of shit.

DOLLY

But I've got plenty of nerve. I'd love to shoot you. And I will, if you don't fork over that thirty-five bucks. And there's not a jury in the world that will convict me.

GRANT

You're crazy, shooting a man over a few dollars.

DOLLY

If it's so puny, why don't you just pay up and forget about it?

GRANT

(Ruminating) Principle.

DOLLY

What's boots got to do with principle? Boots is boots. You put 'em on your feet in the morning and scrape the cow shit off 'em at night. Boots is about hygiene, not principle. Not that you ever gave a damn about hygiene.

MORT

High who?

PAUL

Keeping clean.

MORT

Nobody needs to tell me about keeping clean. In prison, I was known as the king of the laundry.

GRANT

You sure that wasn't "queen"?

MORT

(*Angry*) Goddamn it, Grant, your days are numbered.

DOLLY

It's funny hearing you talk about principles. Trouble with you has always been that you can't tell your principles from your appetites. They've always been one and the same to you. A guy comes in here, you ask him if he voted for Eisenhower. If he says no you knock him down and call it principle. Got nothing to do with principle. You just like to beat people up.

GRANT

I like Ike.

DOLLY

You don't like Ike. You like ass-kickers. Ike wore a cute little uniform and his boys kicked ass for a few years. He fooled you just like he fooled everyone else. The only thing the people of this country really appreciate is a good ass-kicker. You know, Ed used to be a pretty good ass-kicker. But he grew out of it, Grant. He grew up. He came to see ass-kickers for what they are. All ass and no kick. So you think Ike is a real hot guy, huh? Let me tell you something: Next time you're sick, or broke, or you got no place to spend a winter night, you just call ol' Ike. See what he does for you.

GRANT

I don't need nobody's help. But if I did, all I'd need to do was pick up the phone. I believe he'd do what he could. We take care of our own.

DOLLY

He'd laugh in your face, if you could reach him, which you could not. And if you tried to see him in person, he'd have you shot. What's this "we"? Ike was in the army. Where was you during the war?

GRANT

(*Embarrassed*) I was...well, I was farming. That's what I was doing. A little truck driving on the side. My knees hurt. I got the arthur-itis.

DOLLY

Arthur-itis. Damned amazing how everyone in Holstein was fit as a fiddle on December 6, 1941. The town had never seen a case of arthur-itis. Come sundown on December 7, every man in town is suddenly a thousand years old. Never seen such a bunch of cripples. Funny how it was just the men that couldn't walk all of a sudden. Ladies was as fit as they'd ever been. Funny how the same guys who'd been chasing everything in skirts since the last damn war suddenly could hardly get across the street. Arthur-itis. My dying ass.

GRANT

Now, don't start with me.

DOLLY

"We take care of our own." The only one of our own you've ever taken care of was you. And you ain't part of Ike's "own." His "own" is the guys that got shot at for four years. An elite group, of which you ain't a part.

GRANT

You watch your mouth—

DOLLY

You was to call up Ike and tell him you was down and out and needed a bowl of soup and a place to flop for the night, he might say a lot of things, but "Hey Grant, come on over to the White House, I'll have Mamie air out the Lincoln Bedroom for you," probably isn't one of them.

GRANT

I don't care if you are a broad, you're starting to make me mad—

DOLLY

He wouldn't piss on you if you was on fire.

GRANT

Goddammit, I served my country. My farm fed our soldiers, and my truck took valuable produce to market. I served, just the same as if I'd gotten shot.

DOLLY

You don't think for a minute that Ike gives a rat's ass about you or your puny-ass produce, do you? Wake up. There's two kinds of people in the world: The rich and the poor. The rich are the only ones who take care of their "own," and that leaves you, and me, out in the cold. Admit it: You're poor. We're the poor. And we got to take care of our own, 'cause sure as hell, nobody else will.

GRANT

That's commie talk.

PAUL

You can't go calling Dolly here a commie.

GRANT

Sure I can.

DOLLY

Sure he can.

PAUL

What's that?

DOLLY

I said sure he can call me a commie. I am a commie. Here. See?

(DOLLY removes a wallet from her back pocket and removes a card. She hands it to MORT and PAUL.)

DOLLY, *Continued*

Had this for a couple of years now.

MORT

(Reading with great difficulty) Comm-u-nist Par-ty of the U-ni-ted States of A-mer-I-ca.

PAUL

I'll be dipped in shit.

DOLLY

Yes, boys, I saw a newspaper with this fat, ugly, drunk son-of-a-bitch from Wisconsin, complaining about how much he hates the commies. I got to thinking: If this sack of shit is agin' 'em, I'm for 'em.

GRANT

Joe McCarthy is the father of his country.

DOLLY

I remember listening to the radio on December 8, 1941, about how everybody and his brother was hauling ass down to the armory to get signed up for the army. Like cattle signing up for the stockyards. And I had to ask myself: Why?

GRANT

Duty. It's called "duty."

DOLLY

It's called "capitalism." It's called "money," Grant. "Money." It was a capitalist's war, only poor boys had to die in it. We was in a depression, and in a depression, the best way to get everybody back to work is to make a war. Put everybody on the assembly line making mess kits and coffins. Paychecks. We was sending off our boys so the guys that make mess kits and coffins could make money and toss what they couldn't use to the rest of us poor bastards in the form of paychecks. And you know what a paycheck is, don't you?

GRANT

It's something good men like me sweat blood to earn.

DOLLY

It's a bribe. You let Ike's friends in Abilene, Texas, and F.D.R.'s friends in New York send a few million of our sons off to die, they'll let you earn a living in Holstein. And, dumb son-of-a-bitch that you are, you accepted.

GRANT

Traitor!

DOLLY

Am I? I'm just a scary broad from Holstein, and I'm sitting in my little room, listening to this guy on the radio talking about how all able-bodied men in town got to beat cheeks down to the armory and sign up to get killed in Europe, and I'm thinking: Why? And I had an epiphany. You know what an epiphany is? An epiphany is when you used to have your head up your ass and just for a split-second the Almighty lets you come up for air. Actually, an epiphany is when the clouds part to reveal the true sky.

GRANT

(Scribbling in his book) You're going to jail. They're going to fry you, just like they fried those other commies.

DOLLY

I saw that in a fortune cookie in one o' them Chinee restaurants they got in Des Moines. Did you know they got Chinee restaurants in Des Moines? "The clouds part to reveal the true sky." Ain't that pretty?

GRANT

It don't surprise me. Des Moines is full o' commies.

DOLLY

You'd kiss the rosy red ass of any hillbilly from Texas that throws you a few crumbs from the capitalist table. He throws you crumbs, calls it prime rib, and you lap it up like a sow snorting shit. Some asshole from Abilene, Texas tells you guys to go get killed in Europe, off you go.

GRANT

I ought to kill you.

DOLLY

Wouldn't matter if you did. The world would still go round and round, the sun would still go up and down, and you'd still be as confused as a long-tailed cat in a roomful of rocking chairs. That war made a communist out of me, Grant. Seeing all those boys march off to the slaughter so the money boys could make more money. That's the way capitalism works. Every time the capitalists run out of money, the rest of us have to go get killed. If there weren't no capitalists, there wouldn't be no war. You want a traitor? Ike's your traitor. A traitor to you and everyone you know, 'cause he led a war that shouldn't never have been fought.

GRANT

Dwight D. Eisenhower happens to be the President of the United States. People who talk like you been talking in this place usually leave with a few less teeth than they come in with.

DOLLY

He also cheats on his wife, which is probably another reason why you like him. "Birds of a feather," and all that other happy horseshit.

GRANT

You'd better—

DOLLY

I remember, ol' Priscilla told me, she couldn't figure out why you thought it was your patriotic duty to beat up every Democrat in Holstein, but you'd take any woman in central Iowa to bed, even if she'd voted for Henry Wallace.

GRANT

Hold it right there. You can talk about me any way you want. You and me, we never had nothing good to say to each other, and there's no use pretending we did. But when it comes to my wife, you shut your mouth.

DOLLY

Hell, I didn't mean nothing. I always liked Priscilla. We was good friends for a long time. Since she died, not a day goes by that I don't think about her. If I offended you, I apologize.

GRANT

Thanks.

DOLLY

(*Pause*) Why did you cheat on her every chance you got?

GRANT

I'm warning you—

DOLLY

(*To MORT and PAUL*) There was a committee of women over in Black Hawk County, Women for Henry Wallace. Grant plowed a lot of virgin field in that little acreage, then he'd come over here, drink a gallon of suds, and beat up the first poor bastard who came in here without an "I Like Ike" button on.

GRANT

I never decked nobody that didn't have it coming.

DOLLY

You decked poor Charlie Simmons. He come in here for a beer one night. You was running around, talking about how Adlai Stevenson was a communist. You come up to ol' Charlie, ask him who he voted for. Old Charlie said he heard Ike was from Texas, and Charlie was of

DOLLY, *Continued*

the opinion that any son-of-a-bitch from Texas was too busy marrying their sisters to run the United States. Ol' Charlie says: "If a husband and wife get divorced in Texas, are they still legally brother and sister?"

GRANT

Adlai Stevenson was a communist.

DOLLY

He wasn't, but I am.

GRANT

(Laughs meanly) I suppose you're a Hebe, too.

DOLLY

No, but if I believed in some Almighty, I think that's the road I'd take. But I'm an atheist and a communist, and happy as a butterfly.

GRANT

Ugliest butterfly I ever saw. And your life expectancy's gonna be about as long as a butterfly, soon as I write Brother Joe what you just said. You stupid broad. You got a big mouth.

DOLLY

Write anything you like. He'll be too drunk to read it.

GRANT

Most of you commies are smart enough to try to hide it. You're the only red I know goes around bragging about it.

PAUL

He's making a list, Dolly. He writes down the name of everyone who didn't vote for Ike, and he sends it to Joe McCarthy. I didn't even know who Joe was until Grant told me.

DOLLY

(Sits beside PAUL; puts arm around him) Paul, you get out of the house much?

PAUL

You know I ain't got no house. I live in back of my sister's. She got a little place for me.

DOLLY

What about newspapers? You ever read any of them?

PAUL

(Chuckles) Come on. You know I can't read. I went to high school right here in this town. *(Laughs and drinks)* Read? Hell, weren't nobody over there that could read.

MORT

I always figured: Hell, I'm gonna be living in Iowa all my life. I don't need to learn how to read.

DOLLY

When you're not here or in your sister's tool shed not reading, Paul, you get out much?

PAUL

I come here a lot.

DOLLY

I know you do. And Ed and me have always been grateful for the business. But did you ever think about getting one of those things everyone else has? You know.

PAUL

(Thinking real hard) What things?

DOLLY

Come on, now. Isn't there something everyone else seems to have that you don't have?

PAUL

You mean a shotgun?

DOLLY

No. We all know your probation officer won't allow you to have firearms.

PAUL

I dunno. I pretty much got everything I need.

DOLLY

Everything?

PAUL

(Long pause) I was thinking about getting me an electric guitar.

DOLLY

Beg pardon?

PAUL

My nephew got one of them. You plug it into the wall just like a radio. And he says you can play it, and it sounds just like the radio, only not as good.

DOLLY

You don't say. Why, I never heard of such a thing.

MORT

You want to know what it sounds like? Remember my Uncle Fuzzy? Bought himself the first television set in Holstein? Went up to the roof to put up the antenna one July. Last anyone ever seen or heard of him.

PAUL

They found ol' Fuzzy's body, didn't they? Looked kind of like a piece of burnt toast, way I heard it.

MORT

They didn't find nothing. 'Cept maybe a few crumbs. They just swept him up and put him in an ashtray. Still there, last I heard.

DOLLY

Excuse me. What's uncle Fuzzy getting killed by lightning got to do with electric guitars?

MORT

'Cause that's what I think of when I think of electric guitars. Lightning, smoke, and ashes. I'll take the Jew's harp any day.

DOLLY

You ever play a normal guitar?

PAUL

No.

DOLLY

Why do you want to play an electric one, you don't know how to play a real one?

PAUL

I don't care about guitar music. My nephew says his social life has improved a lot since he started. Says because he can play guitar, he got himself a girl. I was just thinking about getting me one of them.

DOLLY

That is a truly scary thought...Paul, you ever think about getting one of those things that everyone else has that you can use?

PAUL

Like what?

DOLLY

A life, Paul. Like a life.

PAUL

Oh no. My probation officer won't let me have one of those.

GRANT

(Writing in his book) Speaking of probation officers, Dolly, you're gonna have one of your very own. You're going down, girl. I'm putting your name in my book. When I write my Sunday letter to Brother Joe, your name will be on the list. But don't worry. I hear the food's lousy in prison. You'll lose a lot of weight. When you get out of the joint, you won't be ugly as two pigs any more. Just ugly as one.

DOLLY

Brother Joe? Senator Joseph McCarthy? The wino from Wisconsin? The Dorr County Dick-head? That alcoholic son-of-a-bitch that wouldn't know the truth if it bit him on the ass? That Brother?

GRANT

Man likes his drink same as anyone else. Hell, that's how you and Ed made your living, selling booze. Brother Joe come in here, you'd sell him a drink same as anyone.

DOLLY

Brother Joe's a wet-brained sot. Sure, I'd serve him. I'd kick his ass across the floor a few times, but I'd serve him. Yeah, I've heard about Brother Joe and his list of communists. One day he's got twenty-three and the next day a hundred and eleven and the day after that it's two hundred and twelve. But he never says who's exactly on that list.

GRANT

It's classified information. In the interests of national security.

DOLLY

Brother Joe's drinking buddies keep having these hearings in Washington. I read the papers to find out about all the big-shit communists Brother Joe's going to nail to the cross. I keep waiting to see about how the commies who were going to overthrow the American Way of Life and sell our first-born into bondage and poison our wells and turn us all into slaves have been caught and brought to justice. I keep waiting to see just who it is that Joe McCarthy and all the other drunken sots have gotten hog-tied. I keep thinking these commies who are trying to destroy us all must be big, scary guys, like my great-grandpa Silas, guys with muscles in their ear-lobes. Monsters. Real men. And then I pick up the paper to see what they've come up with. You know who Brother Joe and his buddies catch? Their pictures are in the paper every day. You know who they are? Singers and dancers. Singers and dancers and actors and actresses. Couple of weeks ago, I seen this one picture. All these hot-shit Senators and Congressmen who've been telling us how they're saving the world for democracy are gathered around this big old room in Washington. And you know who was at the center of it all? An actress. Little bitty actress, couldn't have weighed more 'n ninety pounds sopping wet. Little tiny piece of blonde fluff, cute as a button. And you know what her crime was? Seems fifteen or twenty years ago she signed a petition that said that the richest nation in the world ought to be able to feed its people, whether they got any money or not. Said the richest nation in the world ought to be able to have hospitals for its sick people, whether they got money or not. Said a country that spends half its money building bombs and airplanes to defend its people in wars ought to spend some of that money defending its people against cancer.

GRANT

Nobody's taking my money to build no hospitals. We got to defend ourselves against the commies.

DOLLY

If we don't defend our people against cancer, what's the point of defending them from the commies?

GRANT

I'm writing this down. Your ass is grass.

(GRANT scribbles furiously in his book while DOLLY talks.)

DOLLY

That stuff you're writing down's about as much good as tits on a boar hog. While you're at it, ask Brother Joe if he's proud of himself, picking on that itty-bitty actress, tiny little blonde thing, scared as a bunny rabbit. *(Shakes head)* Made me sick. All them fat, bloated, lard-ass sons-of-bitches, ain't done a day's work in their lives between 'em, proud of themselves for running that poor little thing up a tree and yapping at her like a bunch of hound dogs, hoping she'd fall so they could tear her to pieces. There's nothing worse than a bully. I wish those fat bastards would come to Holstein and try that shit with me. Ordinarily, I make it a rule not to kick the snot out of anyone, on account of it'd be too easy. But in Joe's case, I'd be glad to make an exception. The one thing that might prevent me from punching him in the mouth is the fact that I don't like to get bullshit on my hands.

GRANT

You're digging your own grave.

DOLLY

Year after year these fat boys have their little hearings. They run around making speeches about how they're defending America and how they're getting all these Commie Boots dangerous criminals who are going to overthrow the government. And you know who they get? Singers and dancers, that's who they get. Actors and actresses. I'm supposed to feel grateful to Brother Joe because he scared the bejesus out of some little Hollywood actress who thinks that the richest country in the world should feed the hungry and help heal the sick. Ever wonder why all they pick on is itty-bitty actresses? Ever wonder why all they pick on is folks that like to sing and dance? Ever wonder why they never go looking for no commie lumberjacks or commie plumbers or commie coal miners? You'd think the only commies in America are singers and dancers? I don't believe that. If there are singers and dancers who believe in feeding the hungry and healing the sick, you can be damn sure there are lumberjacks and plumbers and coal miners who feel the same way. How come Brother Joe don't go after any of them? You know why? *(Very close to GRANT; in his face)* 'Cause lumberjacks and plumbers and coal miners don't like fat stew-bums who never done a day's work in their life coming around telling them what to think and what to do. Because Brother Joe and his drinking buddies are chicken-shits, that's why. I dearly hope that Brother Joe comes to Holstein someday and tries to "blacklist" some farmers. Any farmer in Holstein

DOLLY, *Continued*

Brother Joe messed with would kick Brother Joe's balls out through his nostrils. Brother Joe comes in here, I'll make him pray for death, and then I'd grant his wish. I'll turn his testicles into prairie oysters and eat 'em raw. Singers and dancers. Actresses. Army privates without a friend in the world. I'd like to see Brother Joe and his drinking buddies come in here and try to blacklist us.

GRANT

Whaddy mean, "Us"?

(There is a pause as DOLLY looks at MORT and PAUL, who look back at her. They begin to look a bit sheepish. Slowly, MORT and PAUL reach into their back pockets, produce billfolds, and pull out little white cards. They hold up their Communist Party membership cards for GRANT to see, although they're a little embarrassed about it, as they never really wanted him to know.)

GRANT

(Scribbling frantically) You're all going on the list!

DOLLY

Tell Joe if he wants to discuss it, I intend to be here every morning at seven o'clock sharp.

MORT

It's true, Dolly. He writes Joe a letter every Sunday and mails it Monday morning. He was gonna send my name in last year if I didn't give him three dollars.

PAUL

Me too.

DOLLY

Grant, you ever heard the word "extortion"?

GRANT

I was just taking up a contribution. Man's got a right to send campaign contributions to the candidate of his choice.

DOLLY

Not by threatening people, he doesn't. *(To MORT)* You give him the money?

MORT

Heck no.

GRANT

It didn't matter. I was gonna send your name in whether you give me the money or not. Now that I know you're a commie, I'm gonna send it in twice.

PAUL

He's put everybody's name in town on that list, and sent it to Joe McCarthy, telling him we're communists, on account of he thinks we hate Ike. I don't hate Ike. On election day, I was just too drunk to vote.

GRANT

That's 'cause you been opiated. One of them big-shot commies said something about that. "Communism is mass opium." That's a direct quote.

DOLLY

Your politics is like your truck driving. All over the road. What the hell do you really know about communism? What Brother Joe tells you? You ever know a real communist? (*GRANT growls and waves her off as he continues to write.*) My great-grandfather, Silas. Now there was a real man, and a real communist. A hundred years ago, or so, he and his friends and family set up a real community. They shared everything. They farmed together. They worked together. They all chipped in and sent their kids off to become doctors and lawyers, and the kids came back and served the community. They made wine too, you know. On Sundays, they went to church, then went over to their park and got drunk and knocked the stuffings out of each other. Had their own church, their own baseball team, everything they needed. That was real communism, Grant. That's all communism is, you know. It's not about making lists and rattling on your friends, and it's not about some fat bastard from Wisconsin that don't have nothing better to do than make trouble for people who have done him no harm. It's about having a community. That's all. A community. Friends helping each other...Mort, Paul, go out and get the rest of the stuff out of the truck. I got curtains, curtain rods, paint, mops, brooms. Get to work. (*Surveying the room*) Let's see. I think I'll put the solarium over there.

PAUL

Solarium? Is that like something you can eat?

DOLLY

No, Paul. It's like something you can breathe. That's what I'm trying to do. Give people a place they can admire, where they can breathe freely and enjoy the finer things of life. Like the omelets I'm going to teach Orville here to make. Give you something good to eat, so you can be healthy. Instead of being drunk all day.

MORT

Being drunk all day is what I admire most in life.

PAUL

We're kind of set in our ways.

DOLLY

Well, get unset. Ed left this place to me. He also made me Mayor, but I don't give two hoots about that. I'm aiming to have one business in this town that don't smell like a barn. Paul, I want you and Mort to start painting tomorrow morning. I'll pay you double what you guys usually get for a paint job. How much is that?

PAUL

Folks usually just set a keg in the middle of the room, and when it's empty, they throw us out.

DOLLY

It's a deal. Now, what I want—

GRANT

No.

DOLLY

Beg pardon?

GRANT

I said no.

DOLLY

Well, say it again. Only say it on the other side of that door. You just been evicted.

GRANT

No.

DOLLY

Don't do this to yourself.

GRANT

It ain't what I'm doing to myself. It's what I'm gonna do to you if you mess up my tavern. Now pick up your stinking plant, and those sissy curtains, and pick up your big fat rear end, and get 'em all out of here, and don't ask why, 'cause you're lookin' at why. I'm why. Get all of you and your dirt out of here, and don't come back and no one will get hurt. Otherwise, I can't make any promises.

DOLLY

What's the sign out front say?

GRANT

I ain't playing games.

DOLLY

It says "Ed's Place." Ed's gone. The place is mine now. Tomorrow, I'm going to have Mort and Paul paint me a new sign. It's gonna say, "Dolly's Place: Free Beer for Free People." It's a commie bar now. I'm rich, and everybody else is poor, so why the hell should all you penniless bums have to pay? Them that has should give. From now on, all party members drink free. And since you ain't a member, and since no one's inviting you to become a member, feel free to leave and stay the hell out. In plain English, and I know truck drivers don't speak it, but it's the only language I know, scram. Vamoose. You can leave the thirty-five bucks on the bar. Out of here, you fascist bastard.

GRANT

(Slowly removes a gun from his pocket) Here's plain English, Dolly. I ain't tolerating no commies in my tavern. Ed was my best friend and I was his best friend. Far as I'm concerned, I got an easement here. This is my place now. And I ain't tolerating no commies. I ain't drinking in no commie tavern, and I ain't listening to no commie talk, and I ain't paying for no commie boots. *(Aims the gun at DOLLY)* No broads allowed. Especially no commie broads. Now git.

(MORT and PAUL down their beers and leave in a hurry, as they have no desire to get shot. GRANT and DOLLY face each other.)

DOLLY

I just got one question for you. Grant:

(DOLLY sings, softly, a few bars of an old Hank Williams song.)

DOLLY, *Singing*

Why don't you love me like you used to do?
 How come you treat me like a worn-out shoe?
 My hair's still curly and my eyes are still blue.
 Why don't you love me like you used to do?
 Oh, why don't you love me like you used to do?

(GRANT continues to point the gun at DOLLY who continues to sing soothingly. ORVILLE putters around behind the bar as LIGHTS FADE OUT.)

End of Act One

ACT TWO

(AT RISE: A few seconds later. MORT and PAUL are gone. GRANT is pointing the gun at DOLLY. ORVILLE works behind the bar, oblivious to one and all.)

GRANT

I don't want to hurt no one.

DOLLY

Sure you do. You want to hurt everyone, long as they're littler than you. It's what keeps you alive.

GRANT

(Losing patience) I ain't arguing with no broad. Now pick up your fern and get out.

DOLLY

It's my tavern. Ed left it to me. Besides, as City Building Inspector, I got a right to be in any building in town anytime I want.

GRANT

Building Inspector? I thought you was Mayor.

DOLLY

I am. The City Code says the Mayor is also Building Inspector.

GRANT

I didn't know that.

DOLLY

You couldn't, unless you'd read the City Code. I'm also weed commissioner, city clerk, city engineer, sanitation director, restaurant inspector, recorder, rat killer, and a few other things I don't want to be and never will, but that's life. It's all in the City Code.

GRANT

I never read it.

DOLLY

I don't see how you could. We only had the one copy. Ed was going to make up another one, but couldn't drum up enough interest to cover the printing costs, so he just kept it at home, behind the whiskey. Speaking of which. (*Gestures to ORVILLE, who pours her a drink*)

GRANT

Now ain't that a hell of a thing. A guy's the mayor, and he's got the only copy of the laws.

DOLLY

Wrong as usual. A guy was the mayor. A mean and often intoxicated old broad is mayor now. But it don't matter. There's only one copy of the City Code, and it's over to the house. Ed figured, hell, he wrote the city Code. If anyone ought to have a copy, it would be Ed.

GRANT

No wonder no one never knew the laws around here.

DOLLY

Everyone knows the laws. You want to know what they are?

GRANT

I don't need no lecture from you. I know what the laws is.

DOLLY

Do me a favor. First put the gun down. I'll get you a beer.

GRANT

I'll get my own drink. Orville! Serve it up!

DOLLY

Don't take his money, Orville!

(GRANT slaps a dime on the bar and shoves it at ORVILLE. DOLLY goes to the bar and shoves it back. They shove the dime back and forth. On the last shove, DOLLY keeps her hand on the dime. GRANT doesn't want to touch her hand to get at the coin, so he gives up. She slowly removes her hand from the dime and slides it toward him. He gingerly picks it up and puts it in his pocket.)

DOLLY

Your money's no good here. I'm gonna make you an honorary commie. Orville, Grant here drinks free until further notice.

(GRANT raises an accusatory finger toward DOLLY and opens his mouth to protest. But when ORVILLE passes him a free beer, he thinks better of it, as he sees nothing wrong with drinking on the house. He isn't entirely happy with the situation, and doesn't quite understand it, but he's thirsty, and he takes the free beer ORVILLE gives him.)

GRANT

(Laughs, congratulating himself and consoling himself at the same time; Sneers) Mayor. My dying ass. You don't know nothing about no law.

DOLLY

The law is easy, Grant: Be nice to people and they'll probably be nice to you. And if they're nice to you and you ain't nice back, you'll probably get hurt. That's what the law is all about. Ed told me that. You understand that, you don't need no copy of no City Code.

GRANT

He must have been goofy from all that medicine they give him at the hospital. Hospitals ought to be shot.

DOLLY

We was going over some stuff the night before he died. I knew he wasn't long for this world, but I didn't think he'd go that fast. He'd been mayor forever, you know. No one else wanted the damn job. He says, Darling: I got good news and bad news. The good news is, there's money in the bank, and here's the passbook. There's deeds in my safe deposit box, and here's the key. The bad news is: You're mayor now, and you own the tavern, and Grant Standard is all yours. You poor thing. And then he died.

GRANT

Best friend I ever had.

DOLLY

He thought you were the biggest horse's patootie ever came down the pike.

GRANT

He would have done anything for me.

DOLLY

He'd have shot you, but he didn't want to be hanged for killing the likes of you.

GRANT

If I ever order beer, and that retard hands me a glass of vegetable juice, I'll kill you.

DOLLY

You keep putting away the suds like that, boy, nobody'll have to kill you. I can smell the clay on you already.

GRANT

What's that supposed to mean?

DOLLY

You ever look at yourself in the mirror? You got the complexion of a clam. You got valises under your eyes. You look like you lost your best friend. And you're fat.

GRANT

I did lose my best friend.

DOLLY

(Comforting; consoling) No, you didn't. Ed never liked you.

GRANT

How the hell would you know? You're just a woman.

DOLLY

And a communist.

GRANT

Don't remind me. How the hell did the wife of a man like Ed, man with down-home Christian values, end up with a pinko wife?

DOLLY

Be glad to tell you. Every time I picked up a newspaper, the politicians was always saying: If the commies take over, they'll take away from the rich and give to the poor! Well, that sounded pretty good to me. I'd always worked hard, but was always poor, 'til I got together with Ed. Besides, I thought, if everyone's so scared of it, it must be sort of fun. Kind of like apple jack, when we was kids. So, I did me a little research. I even got me the address of the Communist Party of the United States. They got a place in New York City. I give 'em a call. Ed would have throttled me if he'd known I was calling. He thought long distance was a luxury only rich folks could afford. So I got me a handful of change and made the call from Old Man Ferguson's drug store. Right off the bat, I was suspicious. I said I wanted to join their club. Can't say they welcomed me with open arms. They was nervous, I could tell over the phone. They asked me why, and I said I was poor and wasn't all that thrilled with rich folk, not that I've ever met any rich folks. You could tell they wasn't used to talking to ordinary people. And I remember thinking, if they're so all fired hot on helping the poor

people, how come they're so damn surly to me? Christ, when it comes to plain, simple manners, the commies are worse than the phone company. They told me to come to New York, and I said: Whoa, there. Remember? I'm one of the poor. If I could afford no trip to New York, I wouldn't be making this damn call. They didn't seem to understand that. I got the feeling the guy I was talking to wasn't used to speaking proper English. Anyway, we went back and forth for awhile, and I spent a lot of Ed's nickels and dimes in Old Man Ferguson's phone, and he's standing there mixing medicine all the while, but you could tell he was listening to every word I said. Finally, this guy says they got folks in Chicago, and can I meet somebody there. Well, I was kind of looking for an excuse to get out of the house for a day or two. And I got a sister out in Moline, Illinois. I figure I'll just kill two birds with one stone and go out and see this fella in Chicago, and catch my sister on the comeback. So I hopped on the bus one night, rode all night, got to Chicago early the next morning. I had wrote down the address they give me. Turned out to be a little restaurant. Not even a restaurant, really, just a dirty little hole in the wall where they had coffee and a bunch of people who looked like they hadn't had a good night's sleep since before the war. I went in, ordered a cup of java. They give me a cup of dishwater, but at least it was hot. Pretty soon, this little fella come sit down across from me. Greasy little guy in a greasy little coat. Looked like he hadn't had a good feed his whole life, and I'd bet you ten to one he'd never got himself laid. He sat down there, without saying hello or nothing. He seemed to know who I was. Don't know how he could tell it was me, but he seemed to know. Said his name was Walter, but he didn't say it like he meant it. We got to talking. He asked me a bunch of questions. Who my family was and where I was from and had I read this book or that book. Where I went to school. Where I'd traveled. I said, "Son, I been to the Mahaska County Fair and the Iowa State Fair twice, and if I ever want to do any more traveling, I'll let you know." I don't think this guy knew what I was talking about. Didn't appear to me to be the fair-going type. Finally, I said, "Hey, fella. If I wanted to talk about myself, I'd have stayed home. I don't need to come to Chicago to talk about myself. I want to know about you guys and what you're up to. I just want to join this club that's supposed to help the poor, on account of I'm poor, and I want to help poor people and maybe help myself along the way." Well, he didn't seem to understand that at all. He started taking notes, and I tried to see what he was writing, but the more I tried to see, the more he held up the paper to his face, and the more I tried the more he started leaning backward and pretty soon he was sliding down in the booth 'til he was practically on the floor. He was sweating like a pony. I didn't like it. Finally, I said, "Look, just give me a membership card, tell me what the dues are, gimme an instruction book or send me some books or whatever the hell you got about helping the poor, and I'll be on my way." But he just got queerer and queerer, and finally I got a little testy. I said, "Lay it on the line, bub! Just what in hell do you people do for the poor?" And I hit the table with my fist. Like this (*Demonstrates; GRANT jumps*) I shouldn't have done that. It just scared the poor little guy. He up and took off like a jackrabbit. I tried to call his friends in New York and tell them I was sorry, but they didn't seem to know what I was talking about. They said they'd call me back. They never did. Didn't think they would. Nobody ever calls me back.

GRANT

What in hell are you jawing about?

DOLLY

Here's what: I was coming back on the bus, and I was thinking about that greasy little guy in his greasy little coat. And I got to thinking about my whole life. I'd never done much of that before, on account of I've always thought the past was gone and there ain't nothing you can do about it, so why worry yourself? But I had a lot of time on that bus, and I got to thinking how happy I was on that bus going out there, and how down in the dumps I was coming back. And it occurred to me: I shouldn't have been surprised. Life's always like that. You get your hopes up. You get happy. You spend some money and get ready for the dawn of a new day. And at the end of the line, it's always the same. That's always been the problem with my hopes and dreams. They look so beautiful in my mind. And when I meet them face to face, they always turn out to be a greasy little man in a greasy little coat. And dishwasher instead of java. Serves me right for going. You know what else occurred to me? I'll bet there ain't no pretty communists. Don't know why I thought that. But I bet it's true.

GRANT

That guy. He the one sent you that card?

DOLLY

(Pulls out her membership card) This? Oh, hell no. I got these printed up at a magic shop in Des Moines. They got a guy there'll print up fake business cards, joke stuff, anything you want. He printed up a bunch for me. I just did it partly to piss you off. And partly because I got to thinking, if I want to be a communist and help my poor neighbors, what the hell do I need with greasy little bastards in New York and Chicago? I'll start my own communist party. Dolly's Commies. I like the sound of that. These little cards cost me three dollars, but it was worth it. *(GRANT grumbles with disgust.)* Hell, I just want to help poor people. The communists I talked to didn't know any more about helping the poor than you do. I thought communism was sharing and helping each other. Turns out, it's just a bunch of greasy guys who don't know how to have a good time. All they want to do is ask you questions. You know what the problem with the commies I talked to is? They never get laid. Hell of a way to run a revolution. So I started my own party. Don't you see? I'm going to help people on my own. I don't need no party. You can spend your days feeling sorry for yourself, on account of nobody loves you and the world is cruel. Or you can get out there and help people. Take food to the hungry. Give 'em a pair of boots if they got no shoes. If that's being a commie, count me in. Once you start helping people, the whole world is your friend.

GRANT

No commie is my friend.

DOLLY

(Softly) Didn't used to be that way.

(DOLLY has obviously touched a nerve. GRANT glares at her.)

GRANT

Goddammit, Dolly. I told you. If you ever breathe one word of that, so help me, I'll—

DOLLY

(Patient, pacifying) Don't worry. My lips are sealed... There was a time when they weren't. Remember?

GRANT

(Angry) I'm warning you.

DOLLY

All right. No need to get your bowels in an uproar. I was hoping we can still be friends.

GRANT

(Pouting) You hoped wrong.

DOLLY

I'm sorry.

GRANT

And I mean it about those plants. And all that other sick stuff. All that health stuff. White paint, plants, milk, vegetables. It makes me sick.

DOLLY

Healthy stuff makes you sick?

GRANT

Damn straight.

DOLLY

(Indicating beer) You like making yourself sick.

GRANT

You think drinking beer makes people sick, why in hell do you sell it?

DOLLY

Same reason people been selling it since the Pharaohs: To ease the pain of life. Thought you knew that.

GRANT

(Scoffing) More commie horseshit.

DOLLY

If killing pain with alcohol is communist, you'll be leading the next May Day parade. I never seen anyone can drink beer like you do.

GRANT

You stupid broad. I don't drink because of no pain. I got no pain, never have had. Pain is for sissies. No. I drink because I'm a man, plain and simple. All men drink.

DOLLY

You come in here and kill your brain cells every day as a test of manhood?

GRANT

I ain't got to take no tests. I proved myself a long time ago. I'm a man. Only real man in this town.

DOLLY

You don't need to tell me you're a man. I know that. More than anyone else.

GRANT

(Riled) You shut your mouth.

DOLLY

(Pacifying him) All right, all right. Keep your shirt on. I won't tell no one. Who would I tell?

GRANT

You better not.

DOLLY

Relax. I am a commie at heart. That means I love everybody, even you. And I believe that them that has should pay and them that ain't got, they should get taken care of. I'm a rich widow now. I'm them that has. You're just a broken-down old farmer. You got nothing. *(Gently slides a glass of beer toward him)* So here, Grant. Have a free beer. It's the commie way.

GRANT

You want me to have another free beer?

DOLLY

Them that got, gives.

GRANT

You want me to drink a beer that you're giving me because you think it's the right thing to do?

DOLLY

Damn straight.

(GRANT digs into his pocket for change. He slaps the dime on the bar and takes the beer.)

GRANT

I can pay for my own damn beer.

DOLLY

(Pushes the money back toward GRANT) No. This is a commie bar now: Free Beer for Free People. I'm the mayor, and I say that's the law.

GRANT

(Pushing the money back) I'm paying, and that's that.

DOLLY

(Pushes it back) Like hell you are. You got to unite with Paul and Mort and all the other workers of the world. Why should you pay when you ain't got nothing? Why shouldn't I pay since I'm rich? Come on. Drink up. You got nothing to lose but your brains.

(GRANT pushes the money back toward her. She pushes it back. He pushes. She pushes. They push the money back and forth a few more times until GRANT gives up, grumbles something incoherent and drinks his beer.)

GRANT

If you're so all-fired up to go giving stuff away, how come you're making me pay for them commie boots?

DOLLY

'Cause you ordered them boots from Ed. Ed weren't no communist. The money you pay me for the boots goes to buy a nice memorial wreath for his grave. Big old wreath. Red roses. Bright red roses.

GRANT

No money of mine is going to buy nothing that's red. Now. You made me lose my concentration. Oh yeah. *(Picks up gun again, points it at her)* Where were we?

DOLLY

I was about to explain my theory of government and you were about to shoot me.

GRANT

Right. Now I want you and your ferns and your stupid ideas about sunshine and milk shakes out of this place. This is a man's bar and I'm the man. So git.

DOLLY

(Disgusted) Oh, go ahead and shoot.

GRANT

I mean it.

DOLLY

So do I. What are you waiting for?

GRANT

This is your last chance.

DOLLY

Baloney. People been giving me last chances since I was learning to walk. I'm used to it.

GRANT

Goddammit, Dolly—

DOLLY

If you're gonna kill me, go ahead and kill me. The world will keep on turning and the flag will keep on waving and Orville here'll keep pouring you free beers and you'll still be a drunken bum. So go ahead and shoot already. I'm old and way past my prime and nobody gives a shit any more. The world will get along just fine without one more sorry-ass old broad. So fire away.

GRANT

You still got it.

DOLLY

What do I still got?

GRANT

A way of taking the fun out of everything. You won't even let me have fun killing you.

DOLLY

I let you have some fun once. Don't you remember?

GRANT

(Very angry again) That's it. You bring that up one more time, and I'll kill you.

DOLLY

(Raises her hands to calm him down) Okay, I won't mention it any more. *(Pause)* You're kind of cute when you're mad.

GRANT

(Brandishing the weapon) You just ran out of reasons to live.

DOLLY

Hell, I never did have one. You're born with a mug like this, what's the use? My own daddy, rest his soul, he'd look at me and shake his head. Poor man, honest and kind as the day is long. He tried to get me into a nunnery when I was thirteen. Tried to buy my way in. Was willing to put up cash, too. They wouldn't take me.

GRANT

Lucky nuns.

DOLLY

We weren't Catholic, was the reason they gave. My old man offered to get me converted. They still said no. They wouldn't have cared if I was the Virgin Mary's kid sister. No way was I getting into that nunnery.

GRANT

You was too ugly for the nuns. Now that's ugly.

DOLLY

Dad took me over there once. I didn't see nobody that reminded me of Grace Kelly.

GRANT

I got a dog looks like Grace Kelly next to you.

DOLLY

My grandma, who I loved dearly, despaired of me ever finding a husband. When I was a kid, she used to look at me and say, "There ain't a kettle so crooked that you can't find a lid to fit it." As I got older, she said that less and less. Eventually, she stopped saying it altogether. Right before she died, she threw away all her kettles.

GRANT

Ed married you 'cause he felt sorry for you. Also, he needed somebody to sweep up the shop. He never loved you.

DOLLY

You can curse me all you like. A lot's happened to me lately. My husband died, left me a well-fixed woman. Losing your life's companion changes a person. Of course, there are exceptions.

GRANT

I never change.

DOLLY

Right. You was a mean-ass bastard when Priscilla was alive, and you're a mean-ass bastard now she's gone.

GRANT

She's better off. She was in... a lot of pain.

DOLLY

Most of which was caused by you.

GRANT

Goddamn you—

DOLLY

(Holding up her hands to ward off his words) Knock it off. Drink your beer. Orville, pour him another one. Like I said, I been through a lot of changes, even before Ed up and died on me. Ed and I got married, I knew he had this place. I knew he made boots. He taught me how to run a business and keep the books and not let the distributors rob you. He taught me how to make boots. By the way, skip the thirty-five bucks. You can have 'em. *(Picks up boots and places them in front of GRANT.)*

GRANT

I don't want nothing made by you. Go around talking about how you're a commie. I ain't wearing 'em.

DOLLY

That's no way to thank someone for a gift. I put my heart into finishing those boots. Something come over me when Ed was showing me the ropes. I wasn't very good at it at first. My hands are too big. Ed had these real skinny little fingers. Tools belonged in his hands. But he was real patient with me, even when I screwed up bad. He got me on the right track real soon. And when I got the hang of it, I could feel a change coming over me. I'd make a nice boot with a good sole and a nice solid heel, and I'd think: God gave me two good hands to make things. He give me two good eyes. I can sit here and do something that a blind person or a guy with arthritis couldn't do. I can make boots. And when I was done, I was so grateful to God that I didn't want to sell the things. I wanted to give them away to someone who couldn't afford them. And I did. Never felt so good in my life. And I'm gonna keep giving them away.

GRANT

Don't surprise me none. Ed always said you was running him into the ground. Said you broke him financially.

DOLLY

I'd think a man your age would have learned by now not to believe everything someone told him. Ed had farm land from here to the Mississippi. He just told you he was poor so you wouldn't be jealous.

GRANT

Thanks a lot.

DOLLY

Don't mention it. Look: I'm not trying to get into an argument with you here. It's just that there's some stuff I want you to know.

GRANT

You don't know nothing I want to know. What the hell do you mean, going around with a card saying you're a commie? I don't care if you think it's a joke. It ain't no joke to me.

DOLLY

Something deep within me just loves to piss you off.

GRANT

You're going to prison. Impersonating a commie's as bad as being the real thing, in my book.

DOLLY

I started doing it part out of curiosity. I kept hearing all these politicians accusing each other of being "card-carrying communists." They kept having these hearings in Washington, D.C., trying to find all the "card-carrying communists." But no one ever said what that meant. I wanted to know what a "card-carrying communist looked like. So I got me a card, and I found

DOLLY, *Continued*

out what they look like. You know what “card-carrying communists” look like? They look like me, Grant. They look like me. (*Smiles*)

GRANT

You look like dogshit.

DOLLY

It's just a reflection.

GRANT

If you was a man, I'd beat the crap out of you.

DOLLY

If you was a man, you wouldn't threaten a woman.

GRANT

You ain't a woman.

DOLLY

You seem to be forgetting a certain night some thirty-odd years ago, don't you?

GRANT

Why you—

DOLLY

Stop flying off the handle. You're too old to be blowing your stack. One of these days, you get mad, the top of your head is going to fly right off, and we'll have to find us a new village asshole.

GRANT

You breathe one word of this—

DOLLY

Who in hell would I breathe it to?

GRANT

If you ever tell Paul or Mort or anybody—

DOLLY

I ain't telling nobody. Nobody gives a shit what we did a million years ago. They're not interested in the past and neither am I. That's one of the things that lead folks to the communist party. A communist isn't interested in yakking about the mistakes of the past. A true communist is interested only in the future. A bright new day.

GRANT

I ain't listening.

(GRANT holds out his glass for a refill, which ORVILLE provides. GRANT puts a dime on the bar. ORVILLE pushes it back. GRANT pushes it back. They push it back and forth until GRANT picks up the dime and throws it at ORVILLE, who patiently picks it up and puts it in the cash register.)

DOLLY

Why can't you accept a little charity?

GRANT

That's what I'm talking about. You drove Ed into an early grave with all your so-called charity, which is nothing but communism. Giving hard-earned goods away to a bunch of bums.

DOLLY

The poor ain't a bunch of bums. They're good people.

GRANT

It was bad enough, you taking picnic baskets over to a bunch of bums. Ed told me you give away a pair of his best boots to old man Davis, who, as we all know, is nothing but a drunken bum.

DOLLY

I take food to a lot of needy folks. What the hell does helping your neighbor have to do with communism?

GRANT

If God wanted those bastards to have help, He'd help them himself. You're not only a commie, you're an atheist to boot.

DOLLY

If we waited for God to help us every time we needed help, we all would have died a long time ago.

GRANT

You ought to be shot.

DOLLY

I take food to the hungry. For Christ's sake, we live in Iowa. All we got is food. We got food coming out of our ears. I can't share my food with a friend in need, what the hell good am I?

GRANT

That's what happened in Russia. First the government started giving food to people. Then, they got the people depending on them for everything. Then they started shooting them. The government of the United States has never shot one of its own citizens and it never will. *(Pulls out his book and scribbles in it)* I usually wait until Sunday to write my weekly letter to

GRANT, *Continued*

Brother Joe. But I'm writing him tonight. I'm telling him that here in Holstein, we got us a card-carrying communist. *(Toasts her)* Enjoy yourself, Dolly. End of the month, you'll be blacklisted.

DOLLY

Blacklisted? *(Laughs loudly)* From what? I already live in Iowa. And your God blacklisted me when he give me this face.

GRANT

I am not gonna sit here and listen to some ugly commie broad bad-mouth God!

DOLLY

Good. Don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out.

(Pause. GRANT realizes he is not wanted and decides to stay.)

GRANT

Blacklisted by God. That's blasphemy. Time was, you'd have been burned at the stake. You keep talking, the world is gonna turn its back on you.

DOLLY

(Pause) Like you turned your back on me?

GRANT

(Stands up quickly, ready to strike) You say that one more time, I don't care if you are a broad, I'll kill you.

DOLLY

What's the point? I'm dead already. I was dead the day I was born. The only reason I keep living is that I think I may be able to help some other folks who are worse off than me. I'm going to keep making boots and giving 'em to people. I may not be able to keep anyone from going to hell, but I can make sure they're well-shod on the way. And I'm going to feed the hungry.

GRANT

Commie talk. Anyone's hungry, he can go get a job, same as me.

DOLLY

When the hell did you ever have a job?

GRANT

I been farming all my life.

DOLLY

You mean your old man left you a farm. That don't make you no farmer. The last time you had dirt on your hands was the time old man Fenton caught you honky-tonkin' with his sixteen-year-old daughter and threw you head first out of the hayloft and into the hog shit.

GRANT

That girl was twenty-one if she was a day.

DOLLY

What made you cheat on Priscilla, Grant? Nice lady like that. Gave you a good home. Tried to keep you sober. Tried to make a man out of you. And look at you. Drunk, sorry-ass mess, making trouble for other people with your letters to Joe McCarthy.

GRANT

I got a responsibility to this country.

DOLLY

(Laughs) Since when are you interested in responsibility?

GRANT

Watch your mouth.

DOLLY

The only time I knew of anyone that suggested you take a little responsibility for something, you turned tail and fled like a scared jackrabbit.

GRANT

You can't prove nothing. It was all a mistake.

DOLLY, *Sings*

Why don't you love me like you used to do?
Why do you treat me like a worn-out shoe?

GRANT

(Aiming the pistol again) I'm giving you to the count of three.

DOLLY

My hair is still curly and my eyes are still blue.
Why don't you love me like you used to do?

GRANT

(Giving up in despair) All right. I give up. You can have the damn place. *(Heads for the door)* Only one thing: If you ever tell anyone...

DOLLY

Who would I tell? I don't want to tell anyone. I just wanted to tell you, in case you forgot.

GRANT

I didn't forget. And I didn't do nothin' to forget.

DOLLY

It's nothing to be ashamed of. We was young. Even an ugly broad ain't that bad looking, way back then. And you wasn't bad either. Thirty-seven years and a hundred pounds ago.

GRANT

You can't prove nothing in court. Your word against mine.

DOLLY

(Shaking her head) I don't need to prove nothing. *(Pause)* Suit yourself. *(Walks around the room, surveying it)* Want to help me paint the place?

GRANT

You ain't painting nothing.

DOLLY

Thought I'd hire me an artist. Put a nice mural on that wall there.

GRANT

Where you gonna get an artist?

DOLLY

Thought I'd go over to the state college. They got a whole building over there, nothing but art and artists. I'll get me a starving artist college kid to come over here and paint me a nice mural. An artist's rendering of a summer night on the Skunk River thirty, forty years ago, before they started dumping fertilizer and soap suds in it. *(Gestures toward the wall, pantomiming a painter at work)* Remember that river, how beautiful it was? The gentle murmur of cool water flowing on a hot summer night, crickets singing in the distance, the trees hanging low over the dark water. Ripple of tall grass. Lying down in the tall whispering grass. There was a Fourth of July picnic in the park, on the hill overlooking the river. I was there with my sister. It was getting dark. There were fireworks. I sat and watched the colors in the sky. You were there, Grant. With your friends. Donny Harkness and Tim Kelly and George Dalrymple. You guys was drunk. George's old man had a still. He brought some corn in a jar to the picnic. Old Lady Wallace caught them drinking it and shooed them away. You came back, but I didn't see them again... 'til later. I lost track of my sister. I was caught up in the beauty of the Roman candles and the fireworks when it got dark. You see, I lived with my sister and my parents. We was poor country folk. Little beauty in my life, Grant. Anything beautiful ever came along, it just hit me right between the eyes. I lost track of time. Next thing I knew, George Dalrymple was tapping me on the shoulder. He said my sister was down to the river. Said she'd almost drowned, and they'd pulled her out and was ministering to her, and would I come down there and take her home. *(Laughs quietly to herself)* I was very young. I should have known Bea would never do anything so dumb as go swimming in the Skunk River, especially at night, especially with a bunch of drunk farm boys around. But I was so struck. You see, when he tapped me on the shoulder, that was just about the first time anyone had ever touched me, except when my old man knocked me into Mahaska County for

sassing him. I guess I was so hungry for some kind of kindness that I mistook a tap on the shoulder for some kind of real affection. I don't know. Anyway, I followed him down to the river. It was dark. I was still half hypnotized by the fireworks, hot summer air, somebody touching me but not out of hate. Guess I forgot what I was doing. Of course, Bea had been home an hour by then, but what did I know? I got down to the riverbank. She wasn't there. But you was there, Grant. You and Donny, and Tim. And George right behind me. When he knocked me down, I was still thinking he liked me, that getting knocked down was some sort of accident. But when Donny got on top of me, I knew it wasn't no accident. I was a farm girl, strong for my age. But even a farm girl ain't no match for a bunch of boys, strong with drink. And when you got on top of me, I couldn't fight back. You squeezed the life out of me, boy... You're still kind of cute.

GRANT

I am not. And I never got on top of you... And it was George Dalrymple knocked you up. Not me.

DOLLY

George Dalrymple was too drunk to know where he was. All of you guys was drunk. You, old Tim, all of you.

GRANT

It wasn't him...

DOLLY

No, it wasn't him, and it wasn't old Kelly. It was you knocked me up, Grant. You know that. I didn't bother to tell you. Knew you wouldn't do anything about it. I figured you'd hear soon enough and deny the whole thing. I didn't care. Anyway, my old man found somebody to take me in, after he spent a week kicking my ass halfway to Omaha. You didn't think I disappeared for all those years 'cause I was on tour with the Bolshoi Ballet, did you?

GRANT

I didn't know where the hell you were.

DOLLY

And didn't care, did you?

GRANT

How would you know what anybody cares about?

DOLLY

Did you?

GRANT

Not much. Besides. I don't believe it. You can't prove nothing.

DOLLY

We'll see about that.

GRANT

What the hell do you mean?

DOLLY

You never need to ask me what I mean. I always say what I mean.

GRANT

(Puts a dime on the bar) Orville! Serve it up, you damn retard.

DOLLY

His money's no good here, Orville.

GRANT

I ain't taking no commie beer. You take this dime, Orville.

(He pushes the coin toward ORVILLE.)

DOLLY

Don't take it, Orville.

(GRANT picks up the dime and throws it at ORVILLE, hard. He drinks the beer ORVILLE serves him.)

GRANT

I work hard for a living. I pay my own way. Don't need no charity. I don't give nothing to nobody, and I don't accept nothing from nobody.

DOLLY

I don't know about that. I recall you gave me quite a lot. *(GRANT throws his glass at her.)* Don't worry. You don't have to pay for the glass. It's all free!

GRANT

You're trying to get rid of me, ain't you?

DOLLY

Hell no! As long as you're around, I know there's one person on God's green Earth who's worse off than I am.

GRANT

Sure you are. You're trying to get me to lose my temper so I go away and never come back again. Well, you're wrong. Far as I'm concerned, this tavern is mine. And I'll drink here 'til the day I die.

DOLLY

Okay by me, as long as you don't pay. I ever catch you paying, I'll have Orville here show you the door.

GRANT

(Digs into his pocket for another dime) Hell if you will. I'm paying. *(Slams dime onto the bar)* Orville! Beer!

DOLLY

What you ashamed of? You were a boy and I was a girl. Now you're a homely old man and I'm a homely old woman. It was thirty-seven years ago. So shut up and drink your beer already. Orville, pour some whiskey. Give him some of the good stuff Ed used to keep under the cash register there.

GRANT

Whiskey's too expensive for me.

DOLLY

It's free!

GRANT

I ain't taking it.

DOLLY

Free whiskey for free people.

GRANT

Like hell.

DOLLY

But I owe it to you.

GRANT

What in hell you owe me for?

DOLLY

For what you give me.

GRANT

When did I ever give you anything? The only thing I ever give you was a ration of shit every chance I got.

DOLLY

You give me my most prized possession.

GRANT

What "prized possession" does an old battle-axe like you have? *(Laughs with disgust)* "Prized possession." In a pig's eye.

DOLLY

You'd be surprised.

GRANT

Nothing surprises me. I'm too big for surprises. I'm the only real man in this town.

DOLLY

Nobody's challenging your masculinity. Maybe you're too male. Rampaging all over the place, beating up anyone that disagrees with you. You're all male, all right.

GRANT

Damn straight.

DOLLY

You and Orville are kind of a pain in the keester some of the time, but you're both real men.

GRANT

I take that as an insult. Orville there ain't no man. Orville there's a retard.

DOLLY

Orville, drop that dishrag and come around over here and set a spell.

(ORVILLE, who has been wiping the bar with a rag, washing and drying glasses, etc., comes around to Dolly's side of the bar and sits. She smiles and behaves toward him in a motherly way.)

DOLLY

That's a good boy. How you doin', Orville?

ORVILLE

All right, I guess.

DOLLY

You're a good boy.

ORVILLE

Thanks, I guess.

GRANT

Whaddya mean, how's he doin'?' He's a retard. That's how he's doin'.

DOLLY

That's no way to talk.

GRANT

It's true. Telling the truth is the way to talk.

DOLLY

You and your meanness.

GRANT

Who's mean? I'm just talking truth here. He don't mind. Do you, Orville? See? He don't mind. He knows he's a retard. Don't you, Orville?

DOLLY

You are so damn mean.

ORVILLE

I don't know.

DOLLY

If there's a God, we're all His children. And if there ain't, we're all in the same damn boat. So go pour yourself another free beer, Grant, and hush your meanness.

ORVILLE

I guess I am a retard.

DOLLY

Now, Orville...

ORVILLE

Least, everyone says I am. So's I must be.

DOLLY

Orville, if everyone said turkeys could fly, would that make it so?

ORVILLE

I dunno. Depends on what Grant said.

DOLLY

You trust Grant to tell you what's true?

ORVILLE

Purty much. He's always been nice to me.

DOLLY

He calls you names. You call that nice?

ORVILLE

I dunno.

GRANT

Quit arguing with him, Dolly. Man here knows an honest guy when he sees one. Orville knows he can believe everything I say. So shut up. Orville's a good man. I'm gonna buy him a drink.

DOLLY

No.

ORVILLE

I ain't allowed to drink.

GRANT

Ain't allowed? What's with this "allowed"? You're a grown man, ain't you?

ORVILLE

I dunno.

GRANT

(Goes behind the bar and draws a beer) Sure you are. You're a big boy. And you know something? For a retard, you're not all that dumb. You got an eye for honesty, Orville. You know a man who's got down-home Christian values when you see one, right?

(GRANT serves the beer to ORVILLE.)

ORVILLE

I dunno.

GRANT

Sure you do.

DOLLY

I don't know that Orville should drink. Honey, you don't have to drink that if you don't want to.

GRANT

What is this "Honey"? Stop treating him like a child. He's old enough to drink. Go on, Orville, tell her you're old enough. How old are you anyway, Orville? Honey.

(ORVILLE looks to DOLLY for the answer. She does not respond. ORVILLE and DOLLY look at each other, long-sufferingly.)

GRANT

Come on, honey. How old are you? *(ORVILLE and DOLLY continue to look at each other.)* Goddammit! I know you're a retard, but you gotta know how old you are.

DOLLY

He's thirty-six years.

GRANT

The way he looks, that sounds about right.

DOLLY
 And three months.

GRANT
 Yeah, I believe it.

DOLLY
 And nine days.

(Impatient with her talk, GRANT bangs his glass on the table.)

GRANT
 What are you, his mother?

DOLLY
 Yes.

(ORVILLE looks at DOLLY, then takes a long, smiling look at GRANT.)

GRANT
 You call me Daddy, I'll kill you.

(ORVILLE smiles lovingly at GRANT, who looks back in horror. ORVILLE starts to put his head on Grant's shoulder, but GRANT jumps up quickly as MORT and PAUL enter. They are carrying the redecorating items from Dolly's truck: cans of paint, curtains, plants, bric-a-brac.)

MORT
 When are you two gonna kill each other and get it over with?

PAUL
 We're tired of waiting. We're thirsty.

DOLLY
 Come on in, boys. Nobody's gonna get killed. Although, at the moment, it's touch and go for Orville. But as soon as I give Grant another drink, it'll be all right. Mort, you'll have to draw your own beer. Orville's busy.

(MORT goes behind the bar and draws beer. ORVILLE continues to smile at GRANT.)

GRANT
(Nervous) Make him quit doing that.

DOLLY
 Quit doing what?

GRANT

He's smiling at me. Make him stop.

DOLLY

Ain't no law against smiling. Especially in a privately owned business of which I am the private owner. I want folks to smile in here. In fact, I was thinking of getting that starving artist I'm gonna hire from the state college to paint me a big smiling face on the wall over there. Nothing fancy. Just a big round face with a pair of little eyes and a cute little nose and a great big smile. What do you think of that?

GRANT

I think I need to find me a new saloon. *(To ORVILLE, who continues to stare and smile)* Stop that.

DOLLY

You can still drink here, Grant. But on one condition: You drink here, you gotta smile.

PAUL

He smiles, we ain't gonna recognize him.

(HOMER GRUNDLE rushes in. He is in a state of panic.)

HOMER

Grant! You gotta help me!

GRANT

(Sodden, depressed, tired and deeply uninterested) Huh?

HOMER

The Sheriff's after me! You gotta help me! I had to jump out the Courthouse window! They was gonna take me to jail!

GRANT

I got troubles of my own.

(HOMER, frantic for attention, grabs Grant's arm.)

HOMER

You gotta help me. The Sheriff and his boys are after me. Say something to them!

DOLLY

Simmer down there Homer. Why's the Sheriff after you?

HOMER

(Rushing to her; desperate.) I did just what Grant said.

DOLLY

That was your first mistake. What happened?

HOMER

I went to court, just like Grant said. The government lawyers stood up and said a bunch of things about me being a tax cheater and how I had to be taught a lesson. Then, Judge Fragg told me I could say what I wanted to say. So I stood up, and I read the papers Grant told me to read.

GRANT

I paid seventy-five dollars for them papers. And I sold them to you at only a modest profit.

DOLLY

Grant, who'd you buy them papers from?

GRANT

Fella I met down to the lumber yard. He showed up last year with some papers that showed we ain't got to pay no more taxes. Nice fella. We all bought 'em, and none of us has paid a penny's worth of taxes since.

HOMER

Judge Fragg made me stop reading! He said the papers were nothing but lies put together by a bunch of tax cheaters. He said if I kept reading he'd find me in contempt of court.

GRANT

Judge Fragg is a communist and a tootie-frootie.

DOLLY

Judge Fragg is married and has six kids.

GRANT

That proves my point exactly. A lotta them tootie-frooties got wives and kids. It's a cover-up, so's nobody will suspect what side of the fence they're really on.

DOLLY

So what happened, Homer?

HOMER

I didn't know what to do. So I just kept reading, about how no white Christian gentleman has got to pay taxes on account of it's unconstitutional and God gave me the right to keep my hard-earned money without giving it to the International Jewish Cartel of Wall Street.

DOLLY

(*To GRANT*) You tell Homer to say all that?

GRANT

I told him his God-given constitutional rights. I can't help it if Homer ain't a good public speaker.

DOLLY

That's quite a mouthful for a little guy like Homer. Couldn't you have given him something easier?

GRANT

I just give him the law. I didn't write it.

HOMER

Judge Fragg told me everything I was reading was a lie and that somebody had sold me a bill of goods and if I didn't be quiet he was going to put me in jail. (*Wailing*) It all sounded so good when you was reading it to me, Grant. You should have come with me!

GRANT

A man's gotta stand up for himself. I ain't no baby-sitter.

HOMER

Judge Fragg started yelling at me. But I kept reading. I didn't know what else to do. I thought I was entitled to my day in court. He told the bailiff I was in contempt, and to call the Sheriff to come get me. I turned and jumped out the window and ran all the way over here. You gotta help me!

GRANT

Maybe you forgot to read him the good parts.

HOMER

I read just what you told me to read. Judge Fragg wouldn't hardly let me get started. Said he'd heard it all before, and it's all been overruled, and that it'd all been thrown out of court so many times he was sick of hearing about it. (*Looks out the window*) My God! It's the Sheriff!

GRANT

It ain't my fault if you ain't got no powers of persuasion.

HOMER

I don't want to go to jail.

MORT

Jail ain't so bad. When you get there, ask for an old friend of mine, goes by the name of Machine Shed. Ol' Shed, he knows you're my friend; he'll take good care of you.

DOLLY

Grant, if you told Homer here to say something that upset Judge Fragg's appplecart, seems to me you ought to go over to the Courthouse and sit down with the Judge and set the record straight.

GRANT

(Laughs with contempt) Man would have to be crazy to try to talk to Judge Fragg. My mama didn't raise no fool.

DOLLY

You wouldn't be afraid of an old tootie-frootie, would you?

GRANT

I ain't afraid of the tootie-frootie part. I'm afraid of the part that can put a man in jail for being a free white Christian gentleman.

MORT

(Consolingly, putting a hand on Homer's shoulder) Homer, jail ain't so bad. They let you have cigarettes and magazines. They let one guy bring his harmonica. We had to take it away from him, though. There's only so many choruses of "Oh, Susannah" a man can take in one lifetime. One thing, Homer: If it's Thursday, don't eat the fried chicken. It ain't really chicken. Other than that, you'll be all right.

HOMER

(Looking out the window) The Sheriff's at the door! For God's sake, Grant, do something!

GRANT

(Sighs wearily) Just because I told you to do something, didn't mean you had to do it.

HOMER

(Wild with disbelief) What?

GRANT

What I'm saying is...life is full of risks.

HOMER

They're going to take me to jail!

GRANT

That was a risk I was willing to take.

HOMER

(Grabs Grant) I can't go to jail!

GRANT

(Unfazed) Pipe down. Homer. You ever read your history?

HOMER

For God's sake!

GRANT

(So full of beer by now that he is almost comatose) People have been suffering for their freedom all through history. If you want to be free, you gotta suffer. This great nation of ours began with suffering, guys getting shot. The Battles of Luxembourg and Concord...something like that. Anyway, what I'm saying is: A lot of guys go to jail for freedom.

PAUL

What he's saying, Homer, is that Grant wants you to go to jail so that he can be free.

(There is loud knocking at the door.)

HOMER

(To MORT and PAUL) Is there a way out of here?

GRANT

And then there was Gettysfield, and the Battle of Shylock. Lots of guys got shot for freedom. It's good to get shot.

(HOMER is frantically darting around the room, looking for a route to sanctuary.)

HOMER

Isn't there an attic, something, a cellar, anything?

GRANT

And Pearl Harbor and D-Day and Armistice Day, Battle of the Bulge, Dunkirk, Custer's Last Stand, the Whiskey Rebellion. Coxe's Army. All kinds of people getting shot. That's what freedom is, Homer. Getting shot.

HOMER

What am I going to do?

GRANT

You should be proud. This is your lucky day. *(Clasps him on the shoulder like a comrade)* Homer, this is your day to get shot.

(HOMER dashes out. DOLLY looks out the window. She winces.)

DOLLY

Ouch. Homer ain't got much meat on his bones, does he? Did you really tell him to bend Judge Fragg's ear with all that freedom nonsense? Everyone knows: Last thing on Earth Judge Fragg's interested in is freedom. He was interested in freedom, he wouldn't have become a judge.

GRANT

They shoot him yet?

DOLLY

(Still looking) No. They're just having a little fun with him. *(Winces)* Ouch. Shouldn't do that, old man like that. Them boys never did have much in the way of manners. Exactly what did you tell Homer?

GRANT

I told him to go to Court and demand his rights. For the good of all of us. Ain't no point in working for a living any more. All of it goes for taxes.

DOLLY

When did you ever work for a living?

GRANT

I been working my daddy's place all my life.

DOLLY

You been watching people work your daddy's place, what's left of it. And those that will work for you don't stay long on account of you never want to pay a man for a day's work.

GRANT

I pay my own way. And I try to help other guys. I helped old Homer there and look at him. He left without even thanking me.

DOLLY

Why make him go to court? Why didn't you go yourself?

GRANT

(Suddenly angry) Why don't you stop asking me questions? Get the hell out of my tavern!

(He is suddenly short of breath. He puts his hand to his chest.)

GRANT, *Continued*

Get out...of my tavern. Orville...more beer!

(ORVILLE serves him the beer. GRANT slides him a dime; ORVILLE slides it back. GRANT starts to slide it back, but suddenly lacks the energy.)

DOLLY

I know why you didn't go. You knew what was going to happen. You better sit down. You don't look so hot, not that you ever did, at least in the light of day. Go on, sit. Orville, see if there's any of that aspirin behind the bar there.

(GRANT, obviously not feeling good, growls)

DOLLY

(Urging aspirin on him) You knew Homer was a babe in the woods in that courtroom. Judge Fragg is a killer. He's put horse thieves and rapists and every manner of loser under the sun in prison for the last thirty years. And you send poor, miserable old Homer in there—alone!—to read the law to Judge Fragg? Son, Judge Fragg wrote the law. He is the law. I'm glad I wasn't there. I couldn't have stood it when poor sad old Homer stands up and starts telling Judge Fragg what the law is.

GRANT

I know what the law is.

DOLLY

The law is that Homer is going to jail for awhile for contempt of court. When and if Judge Fragg decides to spring him, he's going to prison for tax evasion. That's the law.

GRANT

(Pointing the gun at her again) This is the law.

DOLLY

Again? Put that stupid thing down. You're in no condition to be threatening somebody that could whip you in half a second. Besides, you shoot me, you know what's gonna happen? You're gonna wind up in front of Judge Fragg, he's going to send you to prison for the rest of your life, and you're going to spend your golden years learning the tango from Mort's friends.

MORT

She's right. You don't want to go there.

DOLLY

You're sweating. Want me to drive you home?

GRANT

What are you doing there, Mort?

MORT

(Taking glasses from a carton) I'm unpacking a box for Dolly. These are glasses. Ain't they pretty?

DOLLY

Those are milk-shake glasses. From now on, Monday's milk-shake day at Dolly's Place. Cure your hangover, slicker than snot on a doorknob.

GRANT

Paul, what you got there?

PAUL

(Removing a vase from a box) It's a vase. It's a thing you put flowers in.

GRANT

(Pointing to a box that MORT and PAUL brought in) What you got there?

DOLLY

When I called those folks in New York City, them communists, and they were fixing me up with that greasy little guy in Chicago, I asked them to send me some stuff to read. Bro-chures and such, like stuff on how to help the poor, as if I anybody in New York City was going to teach me anything about helping folks. Anyway, they said they'd send me some books. And here they are. *(Holds a book close to her eyes, reads the title slowly)* "The Communist Man-I-fest-O." Well, I'll be jiggered. *(Quickly leafs through a copy)* Well, I'll keep a stack of these at the bar, free for the taking. First man who can explain the damn thing to me gets one of Orville's milks shakes, free. Second prize is two shakes. You know? I lived in this town at the beginning of my life. Now I'm ready to start my golden years, and here I am, back again. Only this time, I'm going to do things right.

(GRANT throws the glasses across the room, then the vase, then the books. He holds the gun very close to Dolly's face.)

GRANT

I won a war for you. I built this town for you. I fed you. *(Gestures to ORVILLE)* And this is what you give me. You even took my best friend away from me.

DOLLY

The only war you ever fought was the war against your fellow man. You were always at war with the world and everyone in it. And you lost. Here. *(Reaches into a pocket)* I fixed up a card for you, with your name on it. Sign up. It's a new day. We're the poor people of the world. We got to unite.

(DOLLY hands him a card, which he stares at in disbelief.)

MORT

Actually, Grant, Dolly didn't take any friends away from you.

PAUL

Hey, Dolly. I just thought of something. Ever occur to you that Grant and Orville look a little bit alike?

This is Not the End of the Play
Ending Intentionally Omitted for Security Purposes