ACT TWO

{There is no lapse of time. Margaret and Brick are in the same positions they held at the end of Act I.}

MARGARET {[at door]}:
{Here they come!}

{[Big Daddy appears first, a tall man with a fierce, anxious look, moving carefully not to betray his weakness even, or especially, to himself.]

GOOPER:
I read in the {Register} that you're getting a new memorial window.

{[Some of the people are approaching through the hall, others along the gallery: voices from both directions. Gooper and Reverend Tooker become visible outside gallery doors, and their voices come in clearly.]

{[They pause outside as Gooper lights a cigar.]

REVEREND TOOKER {[vivaciously]}:
Oh, but St. Paul's in Grenada has three memorial windows, and the latest one is a Tiffany stained-glass window that cost twenty-five hundred dollars, a picture of Christ the Good Shepherd with a Lamb in His arms.

MARGARET:
Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Well, Brick.

BRICK:
Hello Big Daddy.--Congratulations!

BIG DADDY:
--Crap. . . .

GOOPER:
Who give that window, Preach?

REVEREND TOOKER:
Clyde Fletcher's widow. Also presented St. Paul's with a baptismal font.

GOOPER:
Y'know what somebody ought t' give your church is a {coolin'} system, Preach.
MAE {
almost religiously}: Let's see now, they've had their typhoid shots, and their tetanus shots, their diphtheria shots and their hepatitis shots and their polio shots, they got those shots every month from May through September, and--Gooper? Hey! Gooper! -- What all have the kiddies been shot faw?

REVEREND TOOKER:
Yes, siree, Bob! And you know what Gus Hamma's family gave in his memory to the church at Two Rivers? A complete new stone parish-house with a basketball court in the basement and a--

BIG DADDY {uttering a loud barking laugh which is far from truly mirthful}:
Hey, Preach! What's all this talk about memorials, Preach? You think somebody's about t' kick off around here? 'S that it?

{{Startled by this interjection, Reverend Tooker decides to laugh at the question almost as loud as he can.}}

{{How he would answer the question we'll never know, as he's spared that embarrassment by the voice of Gooper'}

wife, Mae, rising high and clear as she appears with "Doc" Baugh, the family doctor, through the hall door.}

MARGARET {overlapping a bit}:
Turn on the hi-fi, Brick! Let's have some music t' start off th' party with!

BRICK:
You turn it on, Maggie.

{{The talk becomes so general that the room sounds like a great aviary of chattering birds. Only Brick remains unengaged, leaning upon the liquor cabinet with his faraway smile, an ice cube in a paper napkin with which he now and then rubs his forehead. He doesn't respond to Margaret's command. She bounds forward and stoops over the instrument panel of the console.}}

GOOPER:
We gave 'em that thing for a third anniversary present, got three speakers in it.

{{The room is suddenly blasted by the climax of a Wagnerian opera or a Beethoven symphony.}}

BIG DADDY:
{Turn that dam thing off!}

{{Almost instant silence, almost instantly broken by the shouting charge of Big Mama, entering through hall door like a charging rhino.}}

BIG MAMA:
{Wha's my Brick, wha's mah Precious baby!!}

BIG DADDY:
{Sorry! Turn it back on!}

{{Everyone laughs very loud. Big Daddy is famous for his jokes at Big Mama's expense, and nobody laughs louder at these jokes than Big Mama herself, though sometimes they're pretty cruel and Big Mama has to pick up or fuss with something to cover the hurt that the loud laugh doesn't quite cover.}}

{{On this occasion, a happy occasion because the dread in her heart has also been lifted by the false report on Big Daddy's condition, she giggles, grotesquely, coyly, in Big Daddy's direction and bears down upon Brick, all very quick and alive.}}

BIG MAMA:
Here he is, here's my precious baby! What's that you've got in your hand? You put that liquor down, son, your hand was made fo' holdin' somethin' better than that!

GOOPER:
Look at Brick put it down!

{{Brick has obeyed Big Mama by draining the glass and handing it to her. Again everyone laughs, some high, some low.}}

BIG MAMA:
Oh, you bad boy, you, you're my bad little boy. Give Big Mama a kiss, you bad boy, you!--Look at him shy away, will you? Brick never liked bein' kissed or made a fuss over, I guess because he's always had too much of it!

Son, you turn that thing off!

{{Brick has switched on the TV set.}}

I can't stand TV, radio was bad enough but TV has gone it one better, I mean--{[plops wheezing in chair]}--one worse, ha ha! Now what'm I sittin' down here faw? I want t' sit
next to my sweetheart on the sofa, hold hands with him and love him up a little!

{[Big Mama has on a black and white figured chiffon. The large irregular Patterns, like the markings of some massive animal, the luster of her great diamonds and many pearls, the brilliants set in the silver frames offer glasses, her riotous voice, booming laugh, have dominated the room since she entered. Big Daddy has been regarding her with a steady grimace of chronic annoyance.]}

BIG MAMA {[still louder]}:
Preacher, Preacher, hey, Preach! Give me you' hand an' help me up from this chair!

REVEREND TOOKER:
None of your tricks Big Mama!

BIG MAMA:
What tricks? You give me you' hand so I can get up an'--
{[Reverend Tooker extends her his hand. She grabs it and pulls him into her lap with a shrill laugh that spans an octave in two notes.]}

Ever seen a preacher in a fat lady's lap? Hey, hey, folks!
Ever seen a preacher in a fat lady's lap?
{[Big Mama is notorious throughout the Delta for this sort of inelegant horseplay. Margaret looks on with indulgent humor, sipping Dubonnes "on the rocks" and watching Brick, but Mae and Gooper exchange signs of humorless anxiety over these antics, the sort of behavior which Mac thinks may account for their failure to quite get in with the smartest young married set in Memphis, despite all. One of the Negroes, Lacy or Sookey, peeks in, cackling. They are waiting for a sign to bring in the cake and champagne. But Big Daddy's not amused. He doesn't understand why, in spite of the infinite mental relief he's received from the doctor's report, he still has these same old fox teeth in his guts. "This spastic condition is something else," he says to himself, but aloud he roars at Big Mama:]}

BIG DADDY:
{BIG MAMA,} WELL YOU QUIT {HORSIN'?--}You're too old an' too fat fo' that sort of crazy kid stuff an' besides a woman with your blood pressure--she had two hundred last spring! --is riskin' a stroke when you mess around like that. . . .

{[Mae blows on a pitch pipe.]}

BIG MAMA:
{Here comes Big Daddy's birthday!}

{[Negroes in white jackets enter with an enormous birthday cake ablaze with candles and carrying buckets of cham-}
pagne with satin ribbons about the bottle necks.]

[[Mae and Gooper strike up song, and everybody, including the Negroes and Children, joins in. Only Brick remains aloof.]]

EVERYONE:
Happy birthday to you
Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday, Big Daddy--

[[Some sing: "Dear, Big Daddy!]"

Happy birthday to you.

[[Some sing: "How old are you?]"

[[Mae has come down center and is organizing her children like a chorus. She gives them a barely audible.- "One, two, three!" and they are off in the new tune.]]

CHILDREN:
Skinamarinka--dinka--dink
Skinamarinka--do

We love you.
Skinamarinka--dinka--dink
Skinamarinka--do.

[[All together, they turn to Big Daddy.]]

Big Daddy, you!

[[They turn back front, like a musical comedy chorus.]]

We love you in the morning;
We love you in the night.
We love you when we're with you
And we love you out of sight.
Skinamarinka--dinka--dink
Skinamarinka--do.

[[Mae turns to Big Mama.]]

Big Mama too!

[[Big Mama bursts into tears. The Negroes leave.]]

BIG DADDY:
Now Ida, what the hell is the matter with you?

MAE:
She's just so happy.

BIG MAMA:
I'm just so happy, Big Daddy, I have to cry or something.
Brick, do you know the wonderful news that Doc Baugh got from the clinic about Big Daddy? Big Daddy's one hundred per cent!

MARGARET:
Isn't that wonderful?

BIG MAMA:
He's just one hundred per cent. Passed the examination with flying colors. Now that we know there's nothing wrong with Big Daddy but a spastic colon, I can tell you something. I was worried sick, half out of my mind, for fear that Big Daddy might have a thing like--

{[Margaret cuts through this speech, jumping up and exclaiming shrilly.]}  

MARGARET:
Brick, honey, aren't you going to give Big Daddy his birthday present?

{[Passing by him, she snatches his liquor glass from him.]}  

{[She picks up a fancily wrapped package.]}  

{Here it is, Big Daddy, this is from Brick!}

BIG MAMA:
This is the biggest birthday Big Daddy's ever had, a hundred presents and bushels of telegrams from--

MAE {[at same time]}:
What is it, Brick?

GOOPER:
I bet 500 to 50 that Brick don't {know} what it is.

BIG MAMA:
The fun of presents is not knowing what they are till you open the package. Open your present, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Open it you'self. I want to ask Brick somethin'! Come here, Brick.

MARGARET:
Big Daddy's callin' you, Brick.
[[She is opening the package.]]

BRIM:
Tell Big Daddy I'm crippled.

BIG DADDY:
I see you're crippled. I want to know how you got crippled.

MARGARET {{making diversionary tactics}}:
{Oh, look, oh, look, why, it's a cashmere robe!}

{[She holds the robe up for all to see.]}  

MAE:
You sound surprised, Maggie.

MARGARET:
I never saw one before.

MAE:
That's funny.--{Hah!}

MARGARET {{turning on her fiercely, with a brilliant smile}}:
Why is it funny? All my family ever had was family--and luxuries such as cashmere robes still surprise me!

BIG DADDY {{ominously}}:
Quiet!

MAE {{heedless in her fury}}:
I don't see how you could be so surprised when you bought it yourself at Loewenstein's in Memphis last Saturday. You know how I know?

BIG DADDY:
I said, Quiet!

MAE:
--I know because the salesgirl that sold it to you waited on me and said, Oh, Mrs. Pollitt, your sister-in-law just bought a cashmere robe for your husband's father!

MARGARET:
Sister Woman! Your talents are wasted as a housewife and mother, you really ought to be with the FBI or--

BIG DADDY:
QUIET!

{{Reverend Tooker's reflexes are slower than the others'.'}}
He finishes a sentence after the bellow.)

REVEREND TOOKER [{to Doc Baugh}]:

--the Stork and the Reaper are running neck and neck!

{{He starts to laugh gaily when he notices the silence and Big Daddy's glare. His laugh dies falsely.}}

BIG DADDY:
Preacher, I hope I'm not butting in on more talk about memorial stained-glass windows, am I, Preacher?

{{Reverend Tooker laughs feebly, then coughs dryly in the embarrassed silence.}}

Preacher?

BIG MAMA:
Now, Big Daddy, don't you pick on Preacher!

BIG DADDY [{raising his voice}]:
You ever hear that expression all hawk and no spit? You bring that expression to mind with that little dry cough of yours, all hawk an' no spit. . . .

{{The pause is broken only by a short startled laugh from Margaret, the only one there who is conscious of and amused by the grotesque.}}

MAE [{raising her arms and jangling her bracelets}]:
I wonder if the mosquitoes are active tonight?

BIG DADDY:
What's that, Little Mama? Did you make some remark?

MAE:
Yes, I said I wondered if the mosquitoes would eat us alive if we went out on the gallery for a while.

BIG DADDY:
Well, if they do, I'll have your bones pulverized for fertilizer!

BIG MAMA [{quickly}]:
Last week we had an airplane spraying the place and I think it done some good, at least I haven't had a--

BIG DADDY [{cutting her speech}]:
Brick, they tell me, if what they tell me is true, that you done some jumping last night on the high school athletic field?
BIG MAMA:

BRICK {[smiling vaguely over his drink]}:
What was that, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
They said you done some jumping on the high school track field last night.

BRICK:
That's what they told me, too.

BIG DADDY:
Was it jumping or humping that you were doing out there? What were doing out there at three A.M., layin' a woman on that cinder track?

BIG MAMA:
Big Daddy, you are off the sick-list, now, and I'm not going to excuse you for talkin' so--

BIG DADDY:
Quiet!

BIG MAMA:
{--nasty} in front of Preacher and--

BIG DADDY:
{QUIET!--}I ast you, Brick, if you was cuttin' you-self a piece o' poon-tang last night on that cinder track? I thought maybe you were chasin' poon-tang on that track an' tripped over something in the heat of the chase--'sthat it?

{[Gooper laughs, loud and false, others nervously following suit. Big Mama stamps her foot, and purses her lips, crossing to Mae and whispering something to her as Brick meets his father's hard, intent, grinning stare with a slow, vague smile that he offers all situations from behind the screen of his liquor.]}]

BRICK:
No, sir, I don't think so. . . .

MAE {[at the same time, sweetly]}:
Reverend Tooker, let's you and I take a stroll on the widow's walk.

{[She and the preacher go out on the gallery as Big Daddy]}

BIG DADDY:
Then what the hell were you doing out there at three o'clock in the morning?

BRICK:
Jumping the hurdles, Big Daddy, runnin' and jumpin' the hurdles, but those high hurdles have gotten too high for me, now.

BIG DADDY:
Cause you was drunk?

BRICK {[his vague smile fading a little]}:
Sober I wouldn't have tried to jump the {low} ones. . . .

BIG MAMA {[quickly]}:
Big Daddy, blow out the candles on your birthday cake!

MARGARET {[at the same time]}:
I want to propose a toast to Big Daddy Pollitt on his sixty-fifth birthday, the biggest cotton planter in--

BIG DADDY {[bellowing with fury and disgust]}:
{I told you to stop it, now stop it, quit this--!}

BIG MAMA {[coming in front of Big Daddy with the cake]}:
Big Daddy, I will not allow you to talk that way, not even on your birthday, I--

BIG DADDY:
I'll talk like I want to on my birthday, Ida, or any other goddam day of the year and anybody here that don't like it knows what they can do!

BIG MAMA:
You don't mean that!

BIG DADDY:
What makes you think I don't mean it?

{[Meanwhile various discreet signals have been exchanged and Gooper has also gone out on the gallery.]}
BIG MAMA:
Big Daddy, you don't mean that.

BIG DADDY:
Oh, yes, I do, oh, yes, I do, I mean it! I put up with a whole lot of crap around here because I thought I was dying. And you thought I was dying and you started taking over, well, you can stop taking over now, Ida, because I'm not gonna die, you can just stop now this business of taking over because you're not taking over because I'm not dying, I went through the laboratory and the goddam exploratory operation and there's nothing wrong with me but a spastic colon. And I'm not dying of cancer which you thought I was dying of. Ain't that so? Didn't you think that I was dying of cancer, Ida?

[[Almost everybody is out on the gallery but the two old people glaring at each other across the blazing cake.]]

[[Big Mama's chest heaves and she presses a fat fist to her mouth.]]

[[Big Daddy continues, hoarsely.-]]

Ain't that so, Ida? Didn't you have an idea I was dying of cancer and now you could take control of this place and everything on it? I got that impression, I seemed to get that impression. Your loud voice everywhere, your fat old body butting in here and there!

BIG MAMA:
Hush! The Preacher!

BIG DADDY:
Fuck the goddam preacher!

[[Big Mama gasps loudly and sits down on the sofa which is almost too small for her.]]

Did you hear what I said? I said fuck the goddam preacher!

[[Somebody closes the gallery doors from outside just as there is a burst of fireworks and excited cries from the children.]]

BIG MAMA:
I never seen you act like this before and I can't think what's got in you!

BIG DADDY:
I went through all that laboratory and operation and all just so I would know if you or me was boss here! Well, now it
turns out that I am and you ain't--and that's my birthday present--and my cake and champagne!---because for three years now you been gradually taking over. Bossing. Talking. Sashaying your fat old body around the place I made! I made this place! I was overseer on it! I was the overseer on the old Straw and Ochello plantation. I quit school at ten! I quit school at ten years old and went to work like a nigger in the fields. And I rose to be overseer of the Straw and Ochello plantation. And old Straw died and I was Ochello's partner and the place got bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger and bigger! I did all that myself with no goddam help from you, and now you think you're just about to take over. Well, I am just about to tell you that you are not just about to take over, you are not just about to take over a God damn thing. Is that clear to you, Ida? Is that very plain to you, now? Is that understood completely? I been through the laboratory from A to Z. I've had the goddam exploratory operation, and nothing is wrong with me but a spastic colon--made spastic, I guess, by {disgust!} By all the goddam lies and liars that I have had to put up with, and all the goddam hypocrisy that I lived with all these forty years that we been livin' together!

Hey! Ida!! Blow out the candles on the birthday cake! Purse up your lips and draw a deep breath and blow out the goddam candles on the cake!

BIG MAMA:
Oh, Big Daddy, oh, oh, oh, Big Daddy!

BIG DADDY:
What's the matter with you?

BIG MAMA:
{In all these years you never believed that I loved you??}

BIG DADDY:
Huh?

BIG MAMA:
{And I did, I did so much, I did love you!--}I even loved your hate and your hardness, Big Daddy!

{[She sobs and rushes awkwardly out onto the gallery.]}
{BRICK! HEY, BRICK!}

{[He stands over his blazing birthday cake.]}  

{[After some moments, Brick hobbles in on his crutch, holding his glass.]}  

{[Margaret follows him with a bright, anxious smile.]}  

I didn't call you, Maggie. I called Brick.  

MARGARET:  
I'm just delivering him to you  

{[She kisses Brick on the mouth which he immediately wipes with the back of his hand. She flies girlishly back out. Brick and his father are alone.]}  

BIG DADDY:  
Why did you do that?  

BRICK:  
Do what, Big Daddy?  

BIG DADDY:  
Wipe her kiss off your mouth like she'd spit on you.  

BRICK:  
I don't know. I wasn't conscious of it.  

BIG DADDY:  
That woman of yours has a better shape on her than Gooper's but somehow or other they got the same look about them.  

BRICK:  
What sort of look is that, Big Daddy?  

BIG DADDY:  
I don't know how to describe it but it's the same look.  

BRICK:  
They don't look peaceful, do they?  

BIG DADDY:  
No, they sure in hell don't.  

BRICK:  
They look nervous as cats?  

BIG DADDY:  
That's right, they look nervous as cats.
BRICK:
Nervous as a couple of cats on a hot tin roof?

BIG DADDY:
That's right, boy, they took like a couple of cats on a hot tin roof. It's funny that you and Gooper being so different would pick out the same type of woman.

BRICK:
Both of us married into society, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Crap . . . I wonder what gives them both that look?

BRICK:
Well. They're sittin' in the middle of a big piece of land, Big Daddy, twenty-eight thousand acres is a pretty big piece of land and so they're squaring off on it, each dctermined to knock off a bigger piece of it than the other whenever you let it go.

BIG DADDY:
I got a surprise for those women. I'm not gonna lct it go for a long time yet if that's what they're waiting for.

BRICK:
That's right, Big Daddy. You just sit tight and let them scratch each other's eyes out. . . .

BIG DADDY:
You bet your life I'm going to sit tight on it and lct those sons of bitches scratch their eyes out, ha ha ha. . . .

But Gooper's wife's a good breeder, you got to admit she's fertile. Hell, at supper tonight she had them all at the table and they had to put a couple of extra leafs in the table to make room for them, she's got five head of them, now, and another one's comin'.

BRICK:
Yep, number six is comin'. . . .

BIG DADDY:
Six hell, she'll probably drop a litter next time. Brick, you know, I swear to God, I don't know the way it happens?

BRICK:
The way what happens, Big Daddy?
BIG DADDY:
You git you a piece of land, by hook or crook, an' things start growin' on it, things accumulate on it, and the first thing you know it's completely out of hand, completely out of hand!

BRICK:
Well, they say nature hates a vacuum, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
That's what they say, but somctimes I think that a vacuum is a hell of a lot better than some of the stuff that nature replaces it with.

Is someone out there by that door?

GOOPER:
Hey Mae.

BRICK:
Yep.

BIG DADDY:
Who?

{[He has lowered his voice.]}

BRICK:
Someone int'rested in what we say to each other.

BIG DADDY:
Gooper? --GOOPER!

{[After a discreet pause, Mae appears in the gallery door.]} 83

MAE:
Did you call Gooper, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
Aw, it was you.

MAE:
Do you want Gooper, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
No, and I don't want you. I want some privacy here, while I'm having a confidential talk with my son Brick. Now it's too hot in here to close them doors, but if I have to close those fuckin' doors in order to have a private talk with my son Brick, just let me know and I'll close 'em. Because I hate eavesdroppers, I don't like any kind of sneakin' an' spyin'.
MAE:
Why, Big Daddy--

BIG DADDY:
You stood on the wrong side of the moon, it threw your shadow!

MAE:
I was just--

BIG DADDY:
You was just nothing but {spyin'} an' you {know} it!

MAE {{begins to sniff and sob}}:
Oh, Big Daddy, you're so unkind for some reason to those that really love you!

BIG DADDY:
Shut up, shut up, shut up! I'm going to move you and Gooper out of that room next to this! It's none of your goddam business what goes on in here at night between Brick an' Maggie.

You listen at night like a couple of rutten peekhole spies and go and give a report on what you hear to Big Mama an' she comes to me and says they say such and such and so and so about what they heard goin' on between Brick an' Maggie, and Jesus, it makes me sick. I'm goin' to move you an' Gooper out of that room, I can't stand sneakin' an' spyin', it makes me puke. . . .

{{{Mae throws back her head and rolls her eyes heavenward and extends her arms as if invoking God's pity for this unjust martyrdom, then she presses a handkerchief to her nose and flies from the room with a loud swish of skirts.}}}

BRICK {{[now at the liquor cabinet]}:}
They listen, do they?

BIG DADDY:
Yeah. They listen and give reports to Big Mama on what goes on in here between you and Maggie. They say that--

{{[He stops as if embarrassed.]}}

--You won't sleep with her, that you sleep on the sofa. Is that true or not true? If you don't like Maggie, get rid of Maggie! --What are you doin' there now?

BRICK:
Fresh' nin' up my drink
BIG DADDY:
Son, you know you got a real liquor problem?

BRICK:
Yes, sir, yes, I know.

BIG DADDY:
Is that why you quit sports-announcing, because of this liquor problem?

BRICK:
Yes, sir, yes, sir, I guess so.

{{He smiles vaguely and amiably at his father across his replenished drink.}}

BIG DADDY:
Son, don't guess about it, it's too important.

BRICK {{vaguely}}:
Yes, sir.

BIG DADDY:
And listen to me, don't look at the damn chandelier. . . .

{{Pause. Big Daddy's voice is husky.}}

--Somethin' else we picked up at th' big fire sale in Europe.

{{Another Pause.}}

Life is important. There's nothing else to hold onto. A man that drinks is throwing his life away. Don't do it, hold onto your life. There's nothing else to hold onto. . . .

Sit down over here so we don't have to raise our voices, the walls have ears in this place.

BRICK {{hobbling over to sit on the sofa beside him}}:
All right, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Quit!--how'd that come about? Some disappointment?

BRICK:
I don't know. Do you?

BIG DADDY:
I'm askin' you, God damn it! How in hell would I know if you don't?
BRICK:
I just got out there and found that I had a mouth full of cotton. I was always two or three beats behind what was goin' on on the field and so I--

BIG DADDY:
Quit!

BRICK {{amiably}}:
Yes, quit.

BIG DADDY:
Son?

BRICK:
Huh?

BIG DADDY {{inhales loudly and deeply from his cigar; then bends suddenly a little forward, exhaling loudly and raising a hand to his forehead}}:

--Whew!--ha ha!--I took in too much smoke, it made me a little lightheaded. . . .

{{{The mantel clock chimes.}}}

{Why is it so damn hard for people to talk?}

BRICK:
Yeah. . . .

{{{The clock goes on sweetly chiming till it has completed the stroke of ten.}}}

--Nice peaceful-soundin' clock, I like to hear it all night. . . .

{{{He slides low and comfortable on the sofa; Big Daddy sits up straight and rigid with some unspoken anxiety. All his gestures are tense and jerky as he talks. He wheezes and pants and sniffs through his nervous speech, glancing quickly, shyly, from time to time, at his son.}}}

BIG DADDY:
We got that clock the summer we wint to Europe, me an' Big Mama on that damn Cook's Tour, never had such an awful time in my life, I'm tellin' you, son, those gooks over there, they gouge your eyeballs out in their grand hotels. And Big Mama bought more stuff than you could haul in a couple of
boxcars, that's no crap. Everywhere she wint on this whirlwind tour, she bought, bought, bought. Why, half that stuff she bought is still crated up in the cellar, under water last spring!

[[He laughs.]]

That Europe is nothin' on earth but a great big auction, that's all it is, that bunch of old worn-out places, it's just a big fire-sale, the whole fuckin' thing, an' Big Mama wint wild in it, why, you couldn't hold that woman with a mule's harness! Bought, bought, bought!--lucky I'm a rich man, yes siree, Bob, an' half that stuf is mildewin' in th' basement. It's lucky I'm a rich man, it sure is lucky, well, I'm a rich man, Brick, yep, I'm a mighty rich man.

[[His eyes light up for a moment.]]

Y'know how much I'm worth? Guess, Brick! Guess how much I'm worth!

[[Brick smiles vaguely over his drink.]]

Close on ten million in cash an' blue-chip stocks, outside, mind you, of twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile!

But a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life with it when his life has been spent, that's one thing not offered in the Europe fire-sale or in the American markets or any markets on earth, a man can't buy his life with it, he can't buy back his life when his life is finished. . . .

That's a sobering thought, a very sobering thought, and that's a thought that I was turning over in my head, over and over and over--until today. . . .

I'm wiser and sadder, Brick, for this experience which I just gone through. They's one thing else that I remember in Europe.

BRICK:
What is that, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
The hills around Barcelona in the country of Spain and the children running over those bare hills in their bare skins beggin' like starvin' dogs with howls and screeches, and how fat the priests are on the streets of Barcelona, so many of them and so fat and so pleasant, ha ha!--Y'know I could feed that
country? I got money enough to feed that goddam country, but the human animal is a selfish beast and I don't reckon the money I passed out there to those howling children in the hills around Barcelona would more than upholster the chairs in this room, I mean pay to put a new cover on this chair!

Hell, I threw them money like you'd scatter feed corn for chickens, I threw money at them just to get rid of them long enough to climb back into th' car and--drive away.

And then in Morocco, them Arabs, why, I remember one day in Marrakech, that old walled Arab city, I set on a broken-down wall to have a cigar, it was fearful hot there and this Arab woman stood in the road and looked at me till I was embarrassed, she stood stock still in the dusty hot road and looked at me till I was embarrassed. But listen to this. She had a naked child with her, a little naked girl with her, barely able to toddle, and after a while she set this child on the ground and give her a push and whispered something to her. This child came toward me, barely able t' walk, come toddling up to me and--

Jesus, it makes you sick t' remember a thing like this! It stuck out its hand and tried to unbutton my trousers! That child was not yet five! Can you believe me? Or do you think that I am making this up? I went back to the hotel and said to Big Mama, Git packed! We're clearing out of this country.

Big Daddy, you're on a talkin' jag tonight.

Big Daddy: [ignoring this remark]

Yes, sir, that's how it is, the human animal is a beast that dies but the fact that he's dying don't give him pity for others, no, sir, it--

--Did you say something?

Big Daddy: What?

Big Daddy: Hand me over that crutch so I can get up.

Big Daddy: Where you goin'?

Big Daddy: I'm takin' a little short trip to Echo Spring.

Big Daddy: To where?

Big Daddy: Liquor cabinet.
BIG DADDY:
Yes, sir, boy--

{[He hands Brick the crutch.]}

--the human animal is a beast that dies and if he's got money he buys and buys and buys and I think the reason he buys everything he can buy is that in the back of his mind he has the crazy hope that one of his purchases will be life everlasting!—Which it never can be. . . . The human animal is a beast that--

BRICK {[at the liquor cabinet]}:
Big Daddy, you sure are shootin' th' breeze here tonight

{[There is a pause and voices are heard outside.]}

BIG DADDY:
I been quiet here lately, spoke not a word, just sat and stared into space. I had something heavy weighing on my mind but might that load was took off me. That's why I'm taking.--The sky looks different to me. . . .

BRICK:
You know what I like to hear most?

BIG DADDY:
What?

BRICK:
Solid quiet. Perfect unbroken quiet

BIG DADDY:
Why?

BRICK:
Because it's more Peaceful.

BIG DADDY:
Man, you'll hear a lot of that in the grave.

{[He chuckles agreeably.]}

BRICK:
Are you through talkin' to me?

BIG DADDY:
Why are you so anxious to shut me up?

BRICK:
Well, sir, ever so often you say to me, Brick, I want to have a talk with you, but when we talk, it never materializes. Nothing is said. You sit in a chair and gas about this and that and I look like I listen. I try to look like I listen, but I don't listen, not much. Communication is—awful hard between people an'—somehow between you and me, it just don't—happen.

BIG DADDY:
Have you ever been scared? I mean have you ever felt down-right terror of something?

{[He gets up.]

Just one moment.

{[He looks off as if he were going to tell an important secret.]

BIG DADDY:
Brick?

BRICK:
What?

BIG DADDY:
Son, I thought I had it!

BRICK:
Had what? Had what, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
Cancer!

BRICK:
Oh . . .

BIG DADDY:
I thought the old man made out of bones had laid his cold and heavy hand on my shoulder!

BRICK:
Well, Big Daddy, you kept a tight mouth about it.

BIG DADDY:
A pig squeals. A man keeps a tight mouth about it, in spite of a man not having a pig's advantage.

BRICK:
What advantage is that?

BIG DADDY:
Ignorance--of mortality--is a comfort. A man don't have that comfort, he's the only living thing that conceives of death, that knows what it is. The others go without knowing which is the way that anything living should go, go without knowing, without any knowledge of it, and yet a pig squeals, but a man sometimes, he can keep a tight mouth about it. Sometimes he--

--can keep a tight mouth about it. I wonder if--

BRICK:
What, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
A whiskey highball would injure this spastic condition?

BRICK:
NO, sir, it might do it good.

BIG DADDY {[grins suddenly, wolfishly]}:
{Jesus, I can't tell you! The sky is open! Christ, it's open again! It's open, boy, it's open!}

{[Brick looks down at his drink.]}  

BRICK:
You feel better, Big Daddy?

BIG DADDY:
Better? Hell! I can breathe!--All of my life I been like a doubled up fist. . . .

{[He pours a drink.]}  

--Poundin', smashin', drivin'!--now I'm going to loosen these doubled-up hands and touch things {easy} with them. . . .

{[He spreads his hands as if caressing the air.]}  

You know what I'm contemplating?

BRICK {[vaguely]}:
No, sir. What are you contemplating?

BIG DADDY:
Ha ha!--{Pleasure!--}pleasure with {women!}

{[Brick's smile fades a little but lingers.]}

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Yes, boy. I'll tell you something that you might not guess. I still have desire for women and this is my sixty-fifth birthday.

BRICK:
I think that's mighty remarkable, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Remarkable?

BRICK:
{Admirable,} Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
You're damn right it is, remarkable and admirable both. I realize now that I never had me enough. I let many chances slip by because of scruples about it, scruples, convention--crap. . . . All that stuff is bull, bull, bull! --It took the shadow of death to make me see it. Now that shadow's lifted, I'm going to cut loose and have, what is it they call it, have me a--ball!

BRICK:
A ball, huh?

BIG DADDY:
That's right, a ball, a ball! Hell!--I slept with Big Mama till, let's see, five years ago, till I was sixty and she was fifty-eight, and never even liked her, never did!

{[The phone has been ringing down the hall. Big Mama enters, exclaiming.-]}

BIG MAMA:
Don't you men hear that phone ring? I heard it way out on the gall'ry.

BIG DADDY:
There's five rooms off this front gall'ry that you could go through. Why do you go through this one?

{[Big Mama makes a playful face as she bustles out the hall door.]}

Hunh!--Why, when Big Mama goes out of a room, I can't remember what that woman looks like--

BIG MAMA:
Hello.
BIG DADDY:
--But when Big Mama comes back into the room, boy, then
I see what she looks like, and I wish I didn't!

{{[Bends over laughing at this joke till it hurts his guts and
he straightens with a grimace. The laugh subsides to a
chuckle as he puts the liquor glass a little distrustfully
down the table.]}}

BIG MAMA:
Hello, Miss Sally.

{{[Brick has risen and hobbled to the gallery doors.]}}

BIG DADDY:
Hey! Where you goin'?

BRICK:
Out for a breather.

BIG DADDY:
Not yet you ain't. Stay here till this talk is finished, young fellow.

BRICK:
I thought it was finished, Big Daddy,

BIG DADDY:
It ain't even begun.

BRICK:
My mistake. Excuse me. I just wanted to feel that river breeze.

BIG DADDY:
Set back down in that chair.

{{[Big Mama's voice rises, carrying down the hall.]}}

BIG MAMA:
Miss Sally, you're a case! You're a caution, Miss Sally.

BIG DADDY:
Jesus, she's talking to my old maid sister again.

BIG MAMA:
Why didn't you give me a chance to explain it to you?

BIG DADDY:
Brick, this stuff burns me.

BIG MAMA:
Well, goodbye, now, Miss Sally. You come down real soon. Big Daddy's dying to see you.

BIG DADDY:
Crap!

BIG MAMA:
Yaiss, goodbye, Miss Sally. . . .

{[She hangs up and bellows with mirth. Big Daddy groans and covers his ears as she approaches.]}  

{[Bursting in:]}  

Big Daddy, that was Miss Sally callin' from Memphis again! You know what she done, Big Daddy? She called her doctor in Memphis to git him to tell her what that spastic thing is! Ha--{HAAAA!--}And called back to tell me how relieved she was that--Hey! Let me in!

{[Big Daddy has been holding the door half closed against her.]}

BIG DADDY:
Naw I ain't. I told you not to come and go through this room. You just back out and go through those five other rooms.

BIG MAMA:
Big Daddy? Big Daddy? Oh, big Daddy!--You didn't mean those things you said to me, did you?

{[He shuts door firmly against her but she still calls.]}  

Sweetheart? Sweetheart? Big Daddy? You didn't mean those awful things you said to me?--I know you didn't. I know you didn't mean those things in your heart. . . .

{[The childlike voice fades with a sob and her heavy footsteps retreat down the hall. Brick has risen once more on his crutches and starts for the gallery again.]}  

BIG DADDY:
All I ask of that woman is that she leave me alone. But she can't admit to herself that she makes me sick. That comes of having slept with her too many years. Should of quit much sooner but that old woman she never got enough of it--and I was good in bed . . . . I never should of wasted so much of it on her. . . . They say you got just so many and each one is numbered. Well, I got a few left in me, a few, and I'm going to pick me a good one to spend 'em on! I'm going to
pick me a choice one, I don't care how much she costs, I'll smother her in--minks! Ha ha! I'll strip her naked and smother her in minks and choke her with diamonds! Ha ha! I'll strip her naked and choke her with diamonds and smother her with minks and hump her from hell to breakfast. {Ha aha ha ha ha!}

MAE {[gaily at door]}:

Who's that laughin' in there?

GOOPER:
Is Big Daddy laughin' in there?

BIG DADDY:
Crap! --them two--{drips.} . . .

{[He goes over and touches Brick's shoulder.]}

Yes, son. Brick, boy.--I'm--{happy!} I'm happy, son, I'm happy!

{[He chokes a little and bites his under lip, pressing his head quickly, shyly against his son's head and then, coughing with embarrassment, goes uncertainly back to the table where he set down the glass. He drinks and makes a grimace as it burns his guts. Brick sighs and rises with effort.]}

What makes you so restless? Have you got ants in your britches?

BRICK:
Yes, sir . . .

BIG DADDY:
Why?

BRICK:
--Something--hasn't--happened. . . .

BIG DADDY:
Yeah? What is that!

BRICK {[sadly]}:
--the click. . . .

BIG DADDY:
Did you say click?

BRICK:
Yes, click.

BIG DADDY:
What click?

BRICK:
A click that I get in my head that makes me peaceful.

BIG DADDY:
I sure in hell don't know what you're talking about, but it disturbs me.

BRICK:
It's just a mechanical thing.

BIG DADDY:
What is a mechanical thing?

BRICK:
This click that I get in my head that makes me peaceful. I got to drink till I get it. It's just a mechanical thing, something like a--like a--like a--

BIG DADDY:
Like a--

BRICK:
Switch clicking off in my head, turning the hot light off and the cool night on and--

{[He looks up, smiling sadly.]}

--all of a sudden there's--peace!

BIG DADDY {[whistles long and soft with astonishment, he goes back to Brick and clasps his son's two shoulders]}:

Jesus! I didn't know it had gotten that bad with you. Why, boy, you're--{alcoholic!}

BRICK:
That's the truth, Big Daddy. I'm alcoholic.

BIG DADDY:
This shows how I--let things go!

BRICK:
I have to hear that little click in my head that makes me peaceful. Usually I hear it sooner than this, sometimes as early as--noon, but--
--Today it's--dilatory. . . .

--I just haven't got the right level of alcohol in my bloodstream yet!

{[This last statement is made with energy as he freshens his drink.]}  

BIG DADDY:  
Uh--huh. Expediting death made me blind. I didn't have no idea that a son of mine was turning into a drunkard under my nose.

BRICK {[gently]}:  
Well, now you do, Big Daddy, the news has penetrated.

BIG DADDY:  
UH-huh, yes, now I do, the news has--penetrated. . . .

BRICK:  
And so if you'll excuse me--

BIG DADDY:  
No, I won't excuse you.

BRICK:  
--I'd better sit by myself till I hear that click in my head, it's just a mechanical thing but it don't happen except when I'm alone or talking to no one. . . .

BIG DADDY:  
You got a long, long time to sit still, boy, and talk to no one, but now you're talkin' to me. At least I'm talking to you. And you set there and listen until I tell you the conversation is over!

BRICK:  
But this talk is like all the others we've ever had together in our lives! It's nowhere, nowhere!--it's--it's {painful,} Big Daddy. . . .

BIG DADDY:  
All right, then let it be painful, but don't you move from that chair!--I'm going to remove that crutch . . .

{[He seizes the crutch and tosses it across room.]}  

BRICK:  
I can hop on one foot, and if I fall, I can crawl!
BIG DADDY:
If you ain't careful you're gonna crawl off this plantation and then, by Jesus, you'll have to hustle your drinks along Skid Row!

BRICK:
That'll come, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Naw, it won't. You're my son and I'm going to straighten you out; now that {I'm} straightened out, I'm going to straighten out you!

BRICK:
Yeah?

BIG DADDY:
Today the report come in from Ochsner Clinic. Y'know what they told me?

{{[His face glows with triumph.]} }
The only thing that they could detect with all the instruments of science in that great hospital is a little spastic condition of the colon! And nerves torn to pieces by all that worry about it

{{[A little girl bursts into room with a sparkler clutched in each fist, hops and shrieks like a monkey gone mad and rushes back out again as Big Daddy strikes at her.]} }

{{[Silence. The two men stare at each other. A woman laughs gaily outside.]} }

I want you to know I breathed a sigh of relief almost as powerful as the Vicksburg tornado!

{{[There is laughter outside, running footsteps, the soft, plushy sound and light of exploding rockets.]} }

{{[Brick stares at him soberly for a long moment; then makes a sort of startled sound in his nostrils and springs up on one foot and hops across the room to grab his crutch, swinging on the furniture for support. He gets the crutch and flees as if in horror for the gallery. His father seizes him by the sleeve of his white silk pajamas.]} }

Stay here, you son of a bitch!--till I say go!

BRICK:
I can't.
BIG DADDY:
You sure in hell will, God damn it.

BRICK:
No, I can't. We talk, you talk, in--cicles! We get no where, no where! It's always the same, you say you want to talk to me and don't have a fuckin' thing to say to me!

BIG DADDY:
Nothin' to say when I'm tellin' you I'm going to live when I thought I was dying?!

BRICK:
Oh--{that!--}Is that what you have to say to me?

BIG DADDY:
Why, you son of a bitch! Ain't that, ain't that--{important?!}

BRICK:
Well, you said that, that's said, and now I--

BIG DADDY:
Now you set back down.

BRICK:
You're all balled up, you--

BIG DADDY:
I ain't balled up!

BRICK:
You are, you're all balled up!

BIG DADDY:
Don't tell me what I am, you drunken whelp! I'm going to tear this coat sleeve off if you don't set down!

BRICK:
Big Daddy--

BIG DADDY:
Do what I tell you! I'm the boss here, now! I want you to know I'm back in the driver's seat now!

{[Big Mama rushes in, clutching her great heaving bosom.]}
What in hell do you want in here, Big Mama?

BIG MAMA:
Oh, Big Daddy! Why are you shouting like that? I just cain't {stainnnnnnnd--}it. . . .

BIG DADDY {{[raising the back of his hand above his head]}: {GIT!--}outa here.

{{[She rushes back out, sobbing.]}]

BRICK {{[softly, sadly]}: {Christ.} . . .

BIG DADDY {{[fiercely]}: {Yeah! Christ! --is right . . .

{{Brick breaks loose and hobblies toward the gallery.]]
{{[Big Daddy jerks his crutch from under Brick so he steps with the injured ankle. He utters a hissing cry of anguish, clutches a chair and Pulls it over on top of him on the floor.]}
Son of a--tub of--hog fat. . . .

BRICK:
Big Daddy! Give me my crutch.

{{[Big Daddy throws the crutch out of reach.]}
Give me that crutch, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Why do you drink?

BRICK:
Don't know, give me my crutch!

BIG DADDY:
You better think why you drink or give up drinking!

BRICK:
Will you please give me my crutch so I can get up off this floor?

BIG DADDY:
First you answer my question. Why do you drink? Why are you throwing your life away, boy, like somethin' disgusting you picked up on the street?

BRICK {{[getting onto his knees]}: {Big Daddy, I'm in pain, I stepped on that foot.

BIG DADDY:
Good! I'm glad you're not too numb with the liquor in you to feel some pain!

BRIM:
You--spilled my--drink . . .

BIG DADDY:
I'll make a bargain with you. You tell me why you drink and I'll hand you one. I'll pour you the liquor myself and hand it to you.

BRICK:
Why do I drink?

BIG DADDY:
Yea! Why?

BRICK:
Give me a drink and I'll tell you.

BIG DADDY:
Tell me first!

BRICK:
I'll tell you in one word.

BIG DADDY:
What word?

BRICK:
DISGUST!

{[The clock chimes softly, sweetly. Big Daddy gives it a short, outraged glance.]} 

Now how about that drink?

BIG DADDY:
What are you disgusted with? You got to tell me that, first. Otherwise being disgusted don't make no sense!

BRICK:
Give me my crutch.

BIG DADDY:
You heard me, you got to tell me what I asked you first.

BRICK:
I told you, I said to kill my disgust!

BIG DADDY:
DISGUST WITH WHAT!

BRICK:
You strike a hard bargain.

BIG DADDY:
What are you disgusted with?—an' I'll pass you the liquor.

BRICK:
I can hop on one foot, and if I fall, I can crawl.

BIG DADDY:
You want liquor that bad?

BRICK {[dragging himself up, clinging to bedstead]}:
Yeah, I want it that bad.

BIG DADDY:
If I give you a drink, will you tell me what it is you're disgusted with Brick?

BRIM:
Yes, sir, I will try to.

{[The old man pours him a drink and solemnly passes it to him.]}  
{[There is silence as Brick drinks.]}  

Have you ever heard the word "mendacity"?

BIG DADDY:
Sure. Mendacity is one of them five dollar words that cheap politicians throw back and forth at each other.

BRICK:
You know what it means?

BIG DADDY:
Don't it mean lying and liars?

BRICK:
Yes, sir, lying and liars.

BIG DADDY:
Has someone been lying to you?

CHILDREN {[chanting in chorus offstage]}:

We want Big Dad-dee!  
We want Big Dad-dee!

{[Gooper appears in the gallery door.]}

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GOOPER: Big Daddy, the ~ddies are shouting for you out there.

BIG DADDY {[fiercely]}: Keep out, Gooper!

GOOPER: 'Scuse {me!}

{[Big Daddy slams the doors after Gooper.]} BIG DADDY: Who's been lying to you, has Margaret been lying to you, has your wife been lying to you about something, Brick?

BRICK: Not her. That wouldn't matter.

BIG DADDY: Then who's been lying to you, and what about?

BRICK: No one single person and no one lie. . . .

BIG DADDY: Then what, what then, for Christ's sake?

BRICK: --The whole, the whole--thing. . . .

BIG DADDY: Why are you rubbing your head? You got a headache?

BRICK: No, I'm tryin' to--

BIG DADDY: --Concentrate, but you can't because your brain's all soaked with liquor, is that the trouble? Wet brain!

{[He snatches the glass from Brick's hand.]} What do you know about this mendacity thing? Hell! I could write a book on it! Don't you know that? I could write a book on it and still not cover the subject? Well, I could, I could write a goddam book on it and still not cover the subject anywhere near enough!!--Mink of all the lies I got to put up with!!--Pretenses! Ain't that mendacity? Having to pretend stuff you don't think or feel or have any idea of? Having
for instance to act like I care for Big Mama!—I haven't been able to stand the sight, sound, or smell of that woman for forty years now!—even when I {laid} her!—regular as a piston.

Pretend to love that son of a bitch of a Gooper and his wife Mae and those five same screechers out there like parrots in a jungle? Jesus! Can't stand to look at 'em!

Church!—it bores the bejesus out of me but I go!—I go an' sit there and listen to the fool preacher!

Clubs! --Elks! Masons! Rotary! --{crap!}

{[A spasm of pain makes him clutch his belly. He sinks into a chair and his voice is softer and hoarser.]}  

{You} I {do} like for some reason, did always have some kind of real feeling for--affection--respect--yes, always.

You and being a success as a planter is all I ever had any devotion to in my whole life!—and that's the truth.

I don't know why, but it is!

{I've} lived with mendacity!—Why can't {you} live with it? Hell, you {got} to live with it, there's nothing {else} to {live} with except mendacity, is there?

BRICK:
Yes, sir. Yes, sir there is something else that you can live with!

BIG DADDY:
What?

BRICK {[lifting his glass]}:
This! --Liquor.

BIG DADDY:
That's not living, that's dodging away from life.

BRIM:
I want to dodge away from it.

BIG DADDY:
Then why don't you kill yourself, man?

BRICK:
I like to drink.

BIG DADDY:
Oh, God, I can't talk to you . . .

BRICK:
I'm sorry, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
Not as sorry as I am. I'll tell you something. A little while back when I thought my number was up--

{[This speech should have torrential pace and fury.]} --before I found out it was just this--spastic--colon. I thought about you. Should I or should I not, if the jig was up,
give you this place when I go--since I hate Gooper an' Mae an' know that they hate me, and since all five same monkeys are little Maes an' Goopers.--And I thought, No!--Then I thought, Yes!--I couldn't make up my mind. I hate Gooper and his five same monkeys and that birch Mae! Why should I turn over twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile to not my kind?--But why in hell, on the other hand, Brick--should I subsidize a goddam fool on the bottle?--Liked or not liked, well, maybe even--{loved!}--Why should I do that?--Subsidize worthless behavior? Rot? Corruption?

BRICK {{smiling}}:
I understand.

BIG DADDY:
Well, if you do, you're smarter than I am, God damn it, because I don't understand. And this I will tell you frankly. I didn't make up my mind at all on that question and still to this day I ain't made out no will!--Well, now I don't {have} to. The pressure is gone. I can just wait and see if you pull yourself together or if you don't.

BRICK:
Thats right, Big Daddy.

BIG DADDY:
You sound like you thought I was kidding.

BRICK {{rising}}:
No, sir, I know you're not kidding.

BIG DADDY:
But you don't care---?

BRICK {{hobbling toward the gallery door}}:
No, sir, I don't care. . . .

{{He stands in the gallery doorway as the night sky turns Pink and green and gold with successive flashes of light.}}

BIG DADDY:
{WAIT!}--Brick. . . .

{{His voice drops. Suddenly there is something shy, almost tender, in his restraining gesture.}}

Don't let's---leave it like this, like them other talks we've had, we've always---talked around things, we've---just talked around things for some fuckin' reason, I don't know what, it's always like something was left not spoken, something avoided
because neither of us was honest enough with the--other. . . .

  BRICK:
  I never lied to you, Big Daddy.

  BIG DADDY:
  Did I ever to {you?}

  BRICK:
  No, sir. . . .

  BIG DADDY:
  Then there is at least two people that never lied to each other.

  BRICK:
  But we've never {talked} to each other.

  BIG DADDY:
  We can {now.}

  BRICK:
  Big Daddy, there don't seem to be anything much to say.

  BIG DADDY:
  You say that you drink to kill your disgust with lying.

  BRICK:
  You said to give you a reason.

  BIG DADDY:
  Is liquor the only thing that'll kill this disgust?

  BRICK:
  Now. Yes.

  BIG DADDY:
  But not once, huh?

  BRICK:
  Not when I was still young an' believing. A drinking man's someone who wants to forget he isn't still young an' believing.

  BIG DADDY:
  Believing what?

  BRICK:
  Believing. . . .

  BIG DADDY:
  Believing {what?}
BRICK {[stubbornly evasive]}:
Believing. . . .

BIG DADDY:
I don't know what the hell you mean by believing and I don't think you know what you mean by believing, but if you still got sports in your blood, go back to sports announcing and---

BRICK:
Sit in a glass box watching games I can't play? Describing what I can't do while players do it? Sweating out their disgust and confusion in contests I'm not fit for? Drinkin' a coke, half bourbon, so I can stand it? That's no goddam good any more, no help time just outran me, Big Daddy---got there first . . .

BIG DADDY:
I think you're passing the buck.

BRICK:
You know many drinkin' men?

BIG DADDY {[with a slight, charming smile]}:
I have known a fair number of that species.

BRICK:
Could any of them tell you why he drank?

BIG DADDY:
Yep, you're passin' the buck to things like time and disgust with "mendacity" and---crap!---if you got to use that kind of language about a thing, it's ninety-proof bull, and I'm not buying any.

BRICK:
I had to give you a reason to get a drink!

BIG DADDY:
You started drinkin' when your friend Skipper died.

{{[Silence for five beats. Then Brick makes a startled movement, reaching for his crutch.]}}

BRICK
What are you suggesting?

BIG DADDY
I'm suggesting nothing
---But Gooper an Mae suggested that there was something not right exactly in your---

BRICK {[stopping short downstage as if backed to a wall]}
Not right ?

BIG DADDY
Not well exactly {normal} in your friendship with---

BRICK
They suggested that, too? I thought that was Maggie's suggestion

{[Brick's detachment is at last broken through. His heart is accelerated, his forehead sweat-beaded his breath becomes more rapid and his voice hoarse The thing they're discussing, timidly and painfully on the side of Big Daddy fiercely, violently on Brick's side, is the inadmissible thing that Skipper died to disavow between them The fact that if it existed it had to be disavowed to keep face in the world they lived in, may be at the heart of the "mendacity" that Brick drinks to kill his disgust with It may be the root of his collapse Or maybe it is only a single manifestation of it, not even the most important The bird that I hope to catch in the net of this Play is not the solution of one man's psychological problem I'm trying to catch the true quality of experience in a group of people, that cloudy, flickering, evanescent---fiercely charged!---interplay of live human beings in the thundercloud of a common crisis Some mystery should be left in the revelation of character in a Play, just as a great deal of mystery is always left in the revelation of character in life, even in one's own character to himself This does not absolve the playwright of his duty to observe and probe as clearly and deeply as he legitimately can but it should steer him away from "pat" conclusions, facile definitions which make a play just a play, not a snare for the truth of human experience]}

{[The following scene should be played with great concentration with most of the power leashed but palpable in what is left unspoken.]}
my tune

  BRICK
What's that got to do with---

  BIG DADDY
I said Hold on ---I bummed I bummed this country till I was---

  BRICK
Whose suggestion, who else's suggestion is it?

  BIG DADDY
Slept in hobo jungles and railroad Y`s and flophouses in all cities before I---

  BRICK
Oh, {you} think so, too, you call me your son and a queer Oh

Maybe that's why you put Maggie and me in this room that was Jack Straw's and Peter Ochello's, in which that pair of old sisters slept in a double bed where both of em died

  BIG DADDY.
{Now just don't go throwing rocks at-}--

{{Suddenly Reverend Tooker appears in the gallery doors, his head slightly, playfully, fatuously cocked, with a practised clergyman's smile, sincere as a bird call blown on a hunter's whistle, the living embodiment of the pious, conventional lie}]

{{[Big Daddy gasps a little at this Perfectly timed, but incongruous, apparition]}}

---What're you lookin for, Preacher?

  REVEREND TOOKER
The gentleman's lavatory, ha ha! ---heh, heh . . .

  BIG DADDY {{[with strained courtesy]}}
--Go back out and walk down to the other end of the gallery, Reverend Tooker, and use the bathroom connected with my bedroom, and if you can't find it, ask them where it is

  REVEREND TOOKER:
Ah, thanks

{{[He goes out with a deprecatory chuckle.]}}

  BIG DADDY
It's hard to talk In this place . . .

BRICK
Son of a---

BIG DADDY {{leaving a lot unspoken}}:
---I seen all things and understood a lot of them, till 1910
Christ, the year that---I had worn my shoes through hocked
my---I hopped off a yellow dog freight car half a mile down
the road, slept in a wagon of cotton outside the gin---Jack
Straw an Peter Ochello took me in. Hired me to manage this
place which grew into this one---When Jack Straw died---
why, old Peter Ochello quit eatin like a dog does when its
master's dead, and died, too!

BRICK
Christ

BIG DADDY:
I'm just saying I understand such---

BRICK {{violently}}
Skipper is dead. I have not quit eating!

BIG DADDY
No, but you started drinking.

{{Brick wheels on his crutch and hurl's his glass across the
room shouting.}}

BRICK
YOU THINK SO, TOO?

{{Footsteps run on the gallery. There are women's calls.}}

{{Big Daddy goes toward the door.}}

{{Brick is transformed, as if a quiet mountain blew suddenly
up in volcanic flame.}}

BRICK
You think so, too? You think so, too? You think me an'
Skipper did, did, did --{-sodomy} !---together?

BIG DADDY.
Hold---

BRICK -
That what you---
BIG DADDY
--ON---a minute

BRICK
You think we did dirty things between us, Skipper an ---

BIG DADDY
Why are you shouting like that? Why are you---

BRICK
---Me, is that what you think of Skipper, is that---

BIG DADDY
---so excited? I don't think nothing. I don't know nothing
I'm simply telling you what---

BRICK
You think that Skipper and me were a pair of duty old men?

BIG DADDY.
Now that's---

BRICK
Straw? Ochello? A couple of---

BIG DADDY
Now just---

BRICK
---fucking sissies? Queers? Is that what you---

BIG DADDY
Shhh

BRICK
---think?

{{He loses his balance and pitches to his knees without
noticing the pain He grabs the bed and drags himself up.}}

BIG DADDY
Jesus ---Whew. . Grab my hand.

BRICK
Naw I don't want your hand ..

BIG DADDY
Well, I want yours Git up

{{He draws him up, keeps an arm about him with concern}}
and affection.}}

You broken out in a sweat You're panting like you'd run a race with---

BRICK {{freeing himself from his father's hold}}
Big Daddy, you shock me, Big Daddy, you, you---{shock} me
Talkin' so---

{{He turns away from his father.}}

---casually ---about a---thing like that

---Don't you know how people {feel} about things like that? How, how {disgusted} they are by things like that? Why, at Ole Miss when it was discovered a pledge to our fraternity Skipper's and nune, did a {attempted} to do a, unnatural thing with---

We not only dropped him like a hot rock ---We told him to git off the campus, and he dud, he got ---All the way to---

{{He halts, breathless.}}

BIG DADDY
---Where?

BRICK:
---North Africa, last I heard

BIG DADDY
Well, I have come back from further away than that, I have just now returned from the other side of the moon death's country, son, and I'm not easy to shock by anything here

{{He comes downstage and faces out.}}

Always, anyhow lived with too much space around me to be infected by ideas of other people One thing you can grow on a big place more important than cotton ---is {tolerance!}---I grown it.

{{He returns toward Brick.}}

BRICK
Why can't exceptional friendship {real, real deep, deep friendships} between two men be respected as something clean and decent without being thought of as---

BIG DADDY
It can, it is, for God's sake.
BRICK
---{Fairies}

{[In his utterance of this word, we gauge the wide and pro-
found reach of the conventional mores he got from the
world that crowned him with early laurel.]}

BIG DADDY
I told Mae an Gooper---

BRICK
Frig Mae and Gooper frig all dirty lies and liars ---Skipper
and me had a clean, true thing between us ---had a clean
friendship, practically all our lives, till Maggie got the idea
youre talking about Normal? No ---It was too rare to be
normal, any true thing between two people is too rare to be

normal. Oh, once in a while he put his hand on my shoulder
or I'd put mine on his, oh, maybe even, when we were touring
the country in pro-football an shared hotel-rooms we d reach
across the space between the two beds and shake hands to say
goodnight, yeah, one or two times we---

BIG DADDY
Brick, nobody thinks that that's not normal!

BRICK
Well, they re mistaken, it was It was a pure an true thing
an that's not normal.

MAE {[off stage]}
Big Daddy, they re startin the fireworks

{[They both stare straight at each other for a long moment
The tension breaks and both turn away as if tired.]}

BIG DADDY
Yeah, it's---hard t'---talk. . .

BRICK
All right, then, let s---let it go . . .

BIG DADDY.
Why did Skipper crack up? Why have you?

{[Brick looks back at his father again. He has already de-
cided, without knowing that he has made this decision,
that he is going to tell his father that he is dying of cancer.
Only this could even the score between them one inad-
missible thing in return for another.]}
BRICK {[ominously]}:
All right You're asking for it, Big Daddy. We're finally going
to have that real true talk you wanted It's too late to stop it,
now, we got to carry it through and cover every subject.

{[He hobbles back to the liquor cabinet.]} Uh-huh.

{[He opens the ice bucket and picks up the silver tongs
with slow admiration of their frosty brightness.]} Maggie declares that Skipper and I went into pro-football
after we left Ole Miss because we were scared to grow
up..

{[He moves downstage with the shuffle and clop of a cripple
on a crutch. As Margaret did when her speech became
"recitative," he looks out into the house, commanding its
attention by his direct, concentrated gaze---a broken, "trag-
ically elegant" figure telling simply as much as he knows
of the "Truth".]}

---Wanted to---keep on tossing---those long long ---high,
high ---passes that---couldn't be intercepted except by time,
the aerial attack that made us famous And so we did we
did, we kept it up for one season, that aerial attack, we held
it high ---Yeah, but---

---that summer, Maggie she laid the law down to me, said,
Now or never, and so I married Maggie .

BIG DADDY
How was Maggie in bed?

BRICK {[wyly]} -
Great the greatest!

{[Big Daddy nods as if he thought so.]} She went on the road that fall with the Dixie Stars Oh she
made a great show of being the world's best sport She wore
a---wore a---tall bearskin cap A shako they call it a dyed
moleskin coat, a moleskin coat dyed red --Cut up crazy

Rented hotel ballrooms for victory celebrations, wouldn't
cancel them when it---turned out---defeat . . .

MAGGIE THE CAT Ha ha.
{[Big Daddy nods.]}

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---But Skipper, he had some fever which came back on him which doctors couldn't explain and I got that injury--turned out to be just a shadow on the X-ray plate--and a touch of bursitis

I lay in a hospital bed, watched our games on TV, saw Maggie on the bench next to Skipper when he was hauled out of a game for stumbles, fumbles ---Burned me up the way she hung on his arm ---Y know, I think that Maggie had always felt sort of left out because she and me never got any closer together than two people just get in bed which is not much closer than two cats on a---fence humping . .

So She took this time to work on poor dumb Skipper. He was a less than average student at Ole Miss you know that, dont you? ---Poured in his mind the duty, false idea that what we were, him and me was a frustrated case of that ole pair of sisters that lived in this room Jack Straw and Peter Ochello ---He, poor Skipper went to bed with Maggie to prove it wasn t true, and when it didn't work out, he thought it {was} true ---Skipper broke in two like a rotten stick---nobody ever turned so fast to a lush--or died of it so quick.

---Now are you satisfied?

{[Big Daddy has listened to this story, dividing the grain from the chaff. Now he looks at his son.]}  

BIG DADDY:  
Are {you} satisfied?

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BRICK:  
With what?

BIG DADDY:  
That half-ass story.

BRICK:  
What's half-ass about it?

BIG DADDY:  
Something's left out of that story. What did you leave out?

{[The phone has started ringing in the hall.]}  

GOOPER {[off stage]}

Hello

{[As if it reminded him of something, Brick glances sud-
denly toward the sound and says.}}

BRICK:
Yes ---I left out a long-distance call which I had from Skipper---

GOOPER:
Speaking, go ahead

BRICK:
---In which he made a drunken confession to me and on which I hung up

GOOPER:
No

BRICK:
---Last time we spoke to each other in our lives

GOOPER:
No, sir.

BIG DADDY:
You musta said something to htm before you hung up

BRICK:
What could I say to him?

BIG DADDY:
Anything Something

BRICK:
Nothing

BIG DADDY:
Just hung up?

BRICK
Just hung up

BIG DADDY:
Uh-huh Anyhow now ---we have tracked down the lie with which you're disgusted and which you are drinking to kill your disgust with Brick You been passing the buck This disgust with mendacity is disgust with yourself

{You!}---dug the grave of your friend and kicked him in it --- before you'd face truth with him.

BRICK:
{His} truth, not {mine!}
BIG DADDY:
His truth, okay. But you wouldn't face it with him!

BRICK:
Who {can} face truth? Can {you?}

BIG DADDY:
Now don't start passin' the rotten buck again, bog!

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BRICK:
How about these birthday congratulations these many, many happy returns of the day when everybody knows there won't be any except you.

{[Gooper, who has answered the hall phone, lets out a high, shrill laugh the voice becomes audible saying No no you got it all wrong! Upside down! Are you crazy?.]}
{[Brick suddenly catches his breath as he realized that he has made a shocking disclosure He hobbles a few paces, then freezes, and without looking at his father's shocked face, says.]}

Let's let's---go out now, and---watch the fireworks. Come on Big Daddy

{[Big Daddy moves suddenly forward and grabs hold of the boy's crutch like it was a weapon for which they were fighting for possession.]}

BIG DADDY:
Oh, no, no! No one's going out. What did you start to say?

BRICK:
I don't remember.

BIG DADDY:
Many happy returns when they know there won't be any ?

BRICK:
Aw, hell, Big Daddy, forget it. Come on out on the gallery and look at the fireworks they re shooting off for your birth-
day ... 

BIG DADDY:
First you finish that remark you were makin before you cut off. "Many happy returns when they know there wont be any"?---Ain't that what you just said?
BRIM:
Look, now. I can get around without that crutch if I have to but it would be a lot easier on the furniture and glassware if I didn't have to go swinging along like Tarzan of th---

BIG DADDY:
FINISH WHAT YOU WAS SAYIN

{[An eerie green glow shows in sky behind him.]}

BRICK {[sucking the ice in his glass, speech becoming thick]}
Leave th place to Gooper and Mae an' their five little same little monkeys. All I want is---

BIG DADDY:
LEAVE TH' PLACE, did you say?

BRICK {[vaguely]}
All twenty-eight thousand acres of the richest land this side of the valley Nile.

BIG DADDY:
Who said I was leaving the place to Gooper or anybody? This is my sixty-fifth birthday. I got fifteen years or twenty years left in me! I'll outlive {you!} I'll bury you an' have to pay for your coffin.

BRICK:
Sure Many happy returns. Now let's go watch the fireworks, come on, let's---

BIG DADDY:
Lying have they been lying? About the report from th'-- clinic? Did they, dud they---find something?--{Cancer} Maybe?

BRICK:
Mendacity is a system that we live in. Liquor is one way out an' death's the other . .

{[He takes the crutch from Big Daddy's loose grip and swings out on the gallery leaving the doors open.]}

{[A song, "Pick a Bale of Cotton," is heard.]}

MAE {[appearing in door].}
{Oh, Big Daddy, the field hands are singin' fo' you!}

BRICK -
I'm sorry, Big Daddy. My head don't work any more and it's
hard for me to understand how anybody could care if he lived or died or was dying or cared about anything but whether or not there was liquor left in the bottle and so I said what I said without thinking. In some ways I'm no better than the others, in some ways worse because I'm less alive Maybe it's being alive that makes them lie and being almost {not} alive makes me sort of accidentally truthful---I don't know but---anyway---we've been friends . . .

---And being friends is telling each other the truth . . .

{[There is a pause.]}

You told {me!} I told {you!}

BIG DADDY {[slowly and passionately]}

CHRIST---DAMN---

GOOPER {[off stage]}

Let her go

{[Fireworks off stage right.]}

BIG DADDY:
---ALL---LYING SONS OF---LYING Bitches!

{[He straightens at last and crosses to the inside door. As the door he turns and looks back as if he had some desperate question he couldn't put into words. Then he nods reflectively and says in a hoarse voice.]}

Yes, all liars, all liars, all lying dying liars!

{[This is said slowly, slowly, with a fierce revulsion. He goes on out.]}

---Lying! Dying! Liars!

{[Brick remains motionless as the lights dim out and the curtain falls.]}