

EPISODE TWO

At Home

Scene: a kitchen: table, chairs, plates and food, garbage can, a pair of rubber gloves. The door at the back now opens on a hall – the window, on an apartment house court.

Sounds: buzzer, radio (voice of announcer; music and singer).

Characters

YOUNG WOMAN
MOTHER

Outside voices: characters heard, but not seen

A JANITOR
A BABY
A MOTHER *and a* SMALL BOY
A YOUNG BOY *and* YOUNG GIRL
A HUSBAND *and a* WIFE
ANOTHER HUSBAND *and a* WIFE

At rise: YOUNG WOMAN and MOTHER eating – radio off-stage – radio stops.

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma – I want to talk to you.

MOTHER. Aren't you eating a potato?

YOUNG WOMAN. No.

MOTHER. Why not?

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want one.

MOTHER. That's no reason. Here! Take one.

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't want it.

MOTHER. Potatoes go with stew – here!

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma, I don't want it!

MOTHER. Want it! Take it!

YOUNG WOMAN. But I – oh, all right. (*Takes it – then.*) Ma, I want to ask you something.

MOTHER. Eat your potato.

YOUNG WOMAN (*takes a bite – then*). Ma, there's something I want to ask you – something important.

MOTHER. Is it mealy?

YOUNG WOMAN. S'all right. Ma – tell me.

MOTHER. Three pounds for a quarter.

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma – tell me – (*Buzzer.*)

MOTHER (*her dull voice brightening*). There's the garbage. (*Goes to door – or dumbwaiter – opens it. Stop radio.*)

JANITOR'S VOICE (*offstage*). Garbage.

MOTHER (*pleased – busy*). All right. (*Gets garbage can – puts it out. YOUNG WOMAN walks up and down.*) What's the matter now?

YOUNG WOMAN. Nothing.

MOTHER. That jumping up from the table every night the garbage is collected! You act like you're crazy.

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma, do all women –

MOTHER. I suppose you think you're too nice for anything so common! Well, let me tell you, my lady, that it's a very important part of life.

YOUNG WOMAN. I know, but, Ma, if you –

MOTHER. If it weren't for garbage cans where would we be? Where would we all be? Living in filth – that's what! Filth! I should think you'd be glad! I should think you'd be grateful!

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma!

MOTHER. Well, are you?

YOUNG WOMAN. Am I what?

MOTHER. Glad! Grateful.

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes!

MOTHER. You don't act like it!

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma, don't talk!

MOTHER. You just said you wanted to talk.

YOUNG WOMAN. Well now – I want to think. I got to think.

MOTHER. Aren't you going to finish your potato?

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma!

MOTHER. Is there anything the matter with it?

YOUNG WOMAN. No –

MOTHER. Then why don't you finish it?

YOUNG WOMAN. Because I don't want it.

MOTHER. Why don't you?

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma! Let me alone!

MOTHER. Well, you've got to eat! If you don't eat –

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma! Don't nag!

MOTHER. Nag! Just because I try to look out for you – nag! Just because I try to care for you – nag! Why, you haven't sense enough to eat! What would become of you I'd like to know – if I didn't nag!

Offstage – a sound of window opening – all these offstage sounds come in through the court window at the back.

WOMAN'S VOICE. Johnny – Johnny – come in now!

A SMALL BOY'S VOICE. Oh, Ma!

WOMAN'S VOICE. It's getting cold.

A SMALL BOY'S VOICE. Oh, Ma!

WOMAN'S VOICE. You heard me! (*Sound of window slamming.*)

YOUNG WOMAN. I'm grown up, Ma.

MOTHER. Grown up! What do you mean by that?

YOUNG WOMAN. Nothing much – I guess. (*Offstage sound of baby crying. MOTHER rises, clatters dishes.*) Let's not do the dishes right away, Ma. Let's talk – I gotta.

MOTHER. Well, I can't talk with dirty dishes around – you may be able to but – (*Clattering – clattering.*)

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma! Listen! Listen! – There's a man wants to marry me.

MOTHER (*stops clattering – sits*). What man?

YOUNG WOMAN. He says he fell in love with my hands.

MOTHER. In love! Is that beginning again! I thought you were over that!

Offstage BOY's voice – whistles – GIRL's voice answers.

BOY'S VOICE. Come on out.

GIRL'S VOICE. Can't.

BOY'S VOICE. Nobody'll see you.

GIRL'S VOICE. I can't.

BOY'S VOICE. It's dark now – come on.

GIRL'S VOICE. Well – just for a minute.

BOY'S VOICE. Meet you round the corner.

YOUNG WOMAN. I got to get married, Ma.

MOTHER. What do you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN. I gotta.

MOTHER. You haven't got in trouble, have you?

YOUNG WOMAN. Don't talk like that!

MOTHER. Well, you say you got to get married – what do you mean?

YOUNG WOMAN. Nothing.

MOTHER. Answer me!

YOUNG WOMAN. All women get married, don't they?

MOTHER. Nonsense!

YOUNG WOMAN. You got married, didn't you?

MOTHER. Yes, I did!

Offstage voices.

WOMAN'S VOICE. Where you going?

MAN'S VOICE. Out.

WOMAN'S VOICE. You were out last night.

MAN'S VOICE. Was I?

WOMAN'S VOICE. You're always going out.

MAN'S VOICE. Am I?

WOMAN'S VOICE. Where you going?

MAN'S VOICE. Out.

End of offstage voices.

MOTHER. Who is he? Where did you come to know him?

YOUNG WOMAN. In the office.

MOTHER. In the office!

YOUNG WOMAN. It's Mr. J.

MOTHER. Mr. J.?

YOUNG WOMAN. The Vice-President.

MOTHER. Vice-President! His income must be – Does he know you've got a mother to support?

YOUNG WOMAN. Yes.

MOTHER. What does he say?

YOUNG WOMAN. All right.

MOTHER. How soon you going to marry him?

YOUNG WOMAN. I'm not going to.

MOTHER. Not going to!

YOUNG WOMAN. No! I'm not going to.

MOTHER. But you just said –

YOUNG WOMAN. I'm not going to.

MOTHER. Are you crazy?

YOUNG WOMAN. I can't, Ma! I can't!

MOTHER. Why can't you?

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't love him.

MOTHER. Love! – what does that amount to! Will it clothe you? Will it feed you? Will it pay the bills?

YOUNG WOMAN. No! But it's real just the same!

MOTHER. Real!

YOUNG WOMAN. If it isn't – what can you count on in life?

MOTHER. I'll tell you what you can count on! You can count that you've got to eat and sleep and get up and put clothes on your back and take 'em off again – that you got to get old – and that you got to die. That's what you can count on! All the rest is in your head!

YOUNG WOMAN. But Ma – didn't you love Pa?

MOTHER. I suppose I did – I don't know – I've forgotten – what difference does it make – now?

YOUNG WOMAN. But then! – oh Ma, tell me!

MOTHER. Tell you what?

YOUNG WOMAN. About all that – love!

Offstage voices.

WIFE'S VOICE. Don't.

HUSBAND'S VOICE. What's the matter – don't you want me to kiss you?

WIFE'S VOICE. Not like that.

HUSBAND'S VOICE. Like what?

WIFE'S VOICE. That silly kiss!

HUSBAND'S VOICE. Silly kiss?

WIFE'S VOICE. You look so silly – oh I know what's coming when you look like that – and kiss me like that – don't – go away –

End of offstage voices.

MOTHER. He's a decent man, isn't he?

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't know. How should I know – yet.

MOTHER. He's a Vice-President – of course he's decent.

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't care whether he's decent or not.
I won't marry him.

MOTHER. But you just said you wanted to marry –

YOUNG WOMAN. Not him.

MOTHER. Who?

YOUNG WOMAN. I don't know – I don't know – I haven't found him yet!

MOTHER. You talk like you're crazy!

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma – tell me!

MOTHER. Tell you what?

YOUNG WOMAN. Tell me – (*Words suddenly pouring out.*)

Your skin oughtn't to curl – ought it – when he just comes near you – ought it? That's wrong, ain't it? You don't get over that, do you – ever, do you or do you? How is it, Ma – do you?

MOTHER. Do you what?

YOUNG WOMAN. Do you get used to, it – so after a while it doesn't matter? Or don't you? Does it always matter? You ought to be in love, oughtn't you, Ma? You must be in love, mustn't you, Ma? That changes everything, doesn't it – or does it? Maybe if you just like a person it's all right – is it? When he puts a hand on me, my blood turns cold. But your blood oughtn't to run cold, ought it? His hands are – his hands are fat, Ma – don't you see – his hands are fat – and they sort of press – and they're fat – don't you see? – Don't you see?

MOTHER (*stares at her bewildered*). See what?

YOUNG WOMAN (*rushing on*). I've always thought I'd find somebody – somebody young – and – and attractive – with wavy hair – wavy hair – I always think of children with curls – little curls all over their head – somebody young – and attractive – that I'd like – that I'd love – But I haven't found anybody like that yet – I haven't found anybody – I've hardly known anybody – you'd never let me go with anybody and –

MOTHER. Are you throwing it up to me that –

YOUNG WOMAN. No – let me finish, Ma! No – let me finish! I just mean I've never found anybody – anybody – nobody's ever asked me – till now – he's the only man that's ever asked me – And I suppose I got to marry somebody – all girls do –

MOTHER. Nonsense.

YOUNG WOMAN. But, I can't go on like this, Ma – I don't know why – but I can't – it's like I'm all tight inside – sometimes I feel like I'm stifling! – You don't know – stifling. (*Walks up and down.*) I can't go on like this much longer – going to work – coming home – going to work – coming home – I can't – Sometimes in the subway I think I'm going to die – sometimes even in the office if something don't happen – I got to do something -- I don't know – it's like I'm all tight inside.

MOTHER. You're crazy.

YOUNG WOMAN. Oh, Ma!

MOTHER. You're crazy!

YOUNG WOMAN. Ma – if you tell me that again I'll kill you! I'll kill you!

MOTHER. If that isn't crazy!

YOUNG WOMAN. I'll kill you – Maybe I am crazy – I don't know. Sometimes I think I am – the thoughts that go on in my mind – sometimes I think I am – I can't help it if I am – I do the best I can – I do the best I can and I'm nearly crazy! (MOTHER *rises and sits.*) Go away! Go away! You don't know anything about anything! And you haven't got any pity – no pity – you just take it for granted that I go to work every day – and come home every night and bring my money every week – you just take it for granted – you'd let me go on forever – and never feel any pity –

Offstage radio – a voice singing a sentimental mother song or popular home song. MOTHER begins to cry – crosses to chair left – sits.

Oh Ma -- forgive me! Forgive me!

MOTHER. My own child! To be spoken to like that by my own child!

YOUNG WOMAN. I didn't mean it, Ma – I didn't mean it! (*She goes to her mother – crosses to left.*)

MOTHER (*clinging to her hand*). You're all I've got in the world – and you don't want me – you want to kill me.

YOUNG WOMAN. No – no, I don't, Ma! I just said that!

MOTHER. I've worked for you and slaved for you!

YOUNG WOMAN. I know, Ma.

MOTHER. I brought you into the world.

YOUNG WOMAN. I know, Ma.

MOTHER. You're flesh of my flesh and –

YOUNG WOMAN. I know, Ma, I know.

MOTHER. And –

YOUNG WOMAN. You rest, now, Ma – you rest –

MOTHER (*struggling*). I got to do the dishes.

YOUNG WOMAN. I'll do the dishes – You listen to the music, Ma – I'll do the dishes.

MA sits. YOUNG WOMAN crosses to behind screen. Takes a pair of rubber gloves and begins to put them on. The MOTHER sees them – they irritate her – there is a return of her characteristic mood.

MOTHER. Those gloves! I've been washing dishes for forty years and I never wore gloves! But my lady's hands! My lady's hands!

YOUNG WOMAN. Sometimes you talk to me like you're jealous, Ma.

MOTHER. Jealous?

YOUNG WOMAN. It's my hands got me a husband.

MOTHER. A husband? So you're going to marry him now!

YOUNG WOMAN. I suppose so.

MOTHER. If you ain't the craziest –

The scene blacks out. In the darkness, the mother song goes into jazz – very faint – as the scene lights into