

BIG JULE

I tell you I don't want to go to no prayer meeting.

HARRY

Big Jule, you give your marker, and if you welch—it will cause me no little embarrassment. I am sure you do not wish to cause me embarrassment?

(THEY both walk to stage L. and stop)

BIG JULE

But if it ever gets back to Chicago that I went to a prayer meeting, no decent person will talk to me.

(THEY exit L.1 – THREE CRAP SHOOTERS enter from R.1 and cross to stage L. ADELAIDE enters from L.1 reading a newspaper – she looks around obviously looking for Nathan. She stops stage L. NATHAN enters R.1. ADELAIDE sees him and drops the newspaper and purposely bumps into NATHAN – CRAP SHOOTER picks up newspaper as THEY exit L.1)

START HERE

NATHAN

Adelaide!

ADELAIDE

(Lady Windermere)

Oh! What a coincidence!

NATHAN

Adelaide, did Nicely explain to you about tonight? I hope you ain't sore about it?

(Tries to embrace her – SHE pulls away to C.)

ADELAIDE

Please! Let us not have a vulgar scene. After all, we are civilized people – we do not have to conduct ourselves like a slob.

NATHAN

Adelaide! What is this? You are my doll.

ADELAIDE

Your doll! Please, if that weren't so amusing one could laugh at it.

NATHAN

Sweetheart! Baby! How can you carry on like this over one lousy elopement? Adelaide, please!

ADELAIDE

It's no use, Nathan. I have succeeded in your not being able to upset me no more. I have got you completely out of my –

(Sneezes. Then throws herself into Nathan's arms, weeping)

(ADELAIDE)

Oh, Nathan!

NATHAN

Adelaide, baby! Don't ever do that to me again! I can't stand it. We'll get married. We'll have a home, a little white house with a green fence—just like the Whitney colors.

ADELAIDE

(Through her tears)

Nathan, we got to do it soon. I had another letter from my mother today asking a lot of questions. And she put in a letter for you, too.

(Hands it to him)

NATHAN

A letter for me? From your mother? Well—

(Opens it and reads)

—“Dear Son Nathan: This is my first letter to you, although you have now been married to my daughter for twelve years. But I feel like I know you from Adelaide's letters, and in my mind's eye I can see you as you go down to work every morning at seven. What a responsibility it must be, to be the assistant manager of an A. & P.”

(He breaks off)

I'm not even the manager?

(Looks at Adelaide)

ADELAIDE

I was going to promote you for Christmas.

NATHAN

(Back to the letter)

—“I know how hard you have to work to take care of your family—Adelaide and the five children and the one that's on the way.”

(Looks at Adelaide)

ADELAIDE

Mother wanted me to visit her, so I had to tell her that.

NATHAN

(Righteous indignation)

Don't she know I can't have six kids on what they pay me at the A. & P.?

(Reads quickly to himself, then slows up as he reads it aloud)

(NATHAN)

—“I am very proud to have you as a son-in-law. You are a good man and I know you will always take care of Adelaide.” I feel like a heel.

ADELAIDE

Look, Nathan darling, we can still make everything all right. Look—it’s not even midnight yet. Five minutes to twelve—let’s elope right now.

NATHAN

Okay, Adelaide.

(Embrace. BENNY and NICELY enter from R.1. NATHAN sees them)

No, I can’t.

ADELAIDE

Why not?

(BENNY and NICELY are crossing at this moment)

BENNY

Come on, Nathan—we’ll be late.

NICELY

Come on!

(THEY exit L.1)

ADELAIDE

(In measured tones)

Nathan, *why* can’t we elope now?

NATHAN

Because—well, I got to go to a prayer meeting.

ADELAIDE

(This one really hits her)

Nathan. This is the biggest lie you ever told me.

NATHAN

But I promise you it’s true.

LIGHT CUE

(ADELAIDE takes letter from Nathan, tears letter up—throws it on floor, crosses D.R. NATHAN kneels, picks up pieces of torn letter)