

MATT

body ready? This is a waltz, remember, one-two-three, one-two-three.

There was a time — or, all right, I think that has to be: Once upon a time — there was a hope throughout the land. From the chaos of the Great Depression, people found strength in union, believing their time had come. But even as this hope was perceived, once again a dark power rose up from the chaos in another land. Once again this country pitched its resources and industry into battle. Now, after almost three years of war, it has become apparent that the battle is turning. Once again we are told that "peace and prosperity" are in the air. But in the midst of battle, that "hope" the people had known has been changed into the enemy. Peace, and — more to the point — prosperity, is our ally now. Once again, we are told the country has been saved by war.

Now, you would think that in this remote wood, on this remote and unimportant, but sometimes capricious, river — that world events would not touch this hidden place. But such is not the case. There is a house on the hill up there, and there is a family that is not at peace but in grave danger of prosperity. And there is a girl in the house on the hill up there who is a terrible embarrassment to her family because she remembers that old hope, and questions this new fortune, and questioning eyes are hard to come by nowadays. It's hard to use your peripheral vision when you're being led by the nose.

Now I know what you're thinking. You're saying if I'd known it was going to be like this, I wouldn't have come. Or if I'd known it was going to be like this, I would have listened. But don't worry, we're going to do this first part all over again for the late-comers. I want to give you and me both every opportunity. So. Okeydokey. (*Checks pocket watch.*) Oh, boy, this has gotta be fast. So: (*Deep breath, then all in a run.*) They tell me that we have ninety-seven minutes here tonight without intermission so if that means anything to anybody if you think you'll need a drink of water or anything I'll just point out some of the facilities till everybody gets settled in if everything goes well for me tonight this should be a waltz one-two-three, one-two-three a no-holds-barred romantic story and since I'm not a ro-

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manic type I'm going to need the whole schmeer here to help me the woods the willows the vines the moonlight the band there's a band that plays tonight over in the park the trees the berries the breeze the sounds water and crickets frogs dogs the light the bees ... (*Pauses. With a slight hill accent.*) Frogs, dogs ... (*To stage manager in sound booth.*) Could we have a dog? I'd like a dog. (*He listens a second. Nothing. Then a furious, wabbling, tiny terrier is heard.*) Fellas! A dog! (*Beat. Then a low, distant woof-woof-woof that continues until Sally's entrance. Matt listens a beat, pleased.*)

Oh, yeah. Old man Barnette kicked out Blackie and called in the kids, and about now the entire family is sitting down to supper. Even Blackie, out by the smokehouse. But a car pulled off the road about a mile downstream, and someone got out. And at this hour it begins to be difficult to see, the chickens have started to go to bed, and noises carry up the river as though there was someone there in the barnyard. And Blackie wants to let everybody know the Barnette farm is well guarded. (*Beat. Then back to run-on narration.*)

Working all night did you know that bees work worker bees work around the clock never stop collecting nectar or pollen whatever a bee collects of course their life expectancy is twenty days or in a bee's case twenty days and twenty nights or possibly expectancy is wrong in the case of a bee who knows what a bee expects but whatever time there is in a life is a lifetime and I imagine after twenty days and ...

SALLY. (*Off, yelling.*) Matt? (*Matt is silent. He almost holds his breath.*) Matt? (*The houselights begin to dim. The sunset and reflection from the river begin to appear; we hear the sound of the river and birds.*) Matt?

MATT. (*Softly, to the audience.*) This is a waltz, remember. One-two-three, one-two-three....

SALLY. (*Off.*) Are you in that boathouse? I'm not going to come down there if you're not there 'cause that place gives me the creeps after dark. Are you down there?

MATT. No.

SALLY. (*Coming closer.*) I swear, Matt Friedman, what in the devil do you think you're doing down here? (*Coming through the*

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START

MATT