ACT ONE

Scene Sixteen

Gordon home. MALLORY is flipping through the ledger for the diner. Slams it shut and throws her apron over it when SHE hears Scott at the door. SCOTT enters.

SCOTT
Thank you for waiting up. You didn’t have to.

MALLORY
Couldn’t sleep anyway. How’d it go? How’s Mama?

SCOTT
Same as earlier.

(SCOTT and MALLORY sit at the table.)

I wish we could stay at the hospital, but we’ll do our best to keep a close eye on her.

MALLORY
It could go on for weeks.

SCOTT
I know.

MALLORY
Then you’ll stay? You won’t be leaving for California tomorrow?

SCOTT
Not until she’s out of danger and back home. I wouldn’t leave.

MALLORY
No, of course not. I’m only thinking of what needs to be done. We’ll have to close the diner.

SCOTT
I’m not asking you to close the diner.

MALLORY
I know you won’t—that’s why I’m not waiting for you to tell me what I already know. We can’t keep it open.

SCOTT
Please. You’re moving too quickly. It’s too soon to make a decision. And it’s not a foregone conclusion. It could be weeks or it could only be days. We’ll do what it takes. Do you need help?—Why don’t you ask Addie?

MALLORY
Me, ask Addie? You know she might have been helping me in the kitchen already if she was my sister. And who cares about the kitchen? Sure, I love the diner, but I love Addie more. I love you more. Even when you’re—
(pause)
Don’t think I don’t know what it costs to keep that diner open. It’s just one more thing keeping you from everything that matters to you. It’s not worth it!

SCOTT
Maybe this isn’t a good time to talk. We’re both tired and stressed about Mama.

MALLORY
When else am I going to talk with you? You’re never here to listen!

SCOTT
And when I am, nothing you say makes any sense. That diner means everything to you.

MALLORY
You presume. Maybe you don’t know me.
SCOTT
Don’t I? Mal, I should know you well enough to know what matters to you.

MALLORY
You should.
(beat)
And I think you did, before. But not anymore. Whatever that diner was to me, it hardly matters now. And the last thing I want is for you to put any more of your hard-earned money into it.

SCOTT
It’s a small expense.

MALLORY
It’s a business. It shouldn’t be an expense. It’s ridiculous to keep it open—even I can see that. But you say, “It’s not a foregone conclusion. We’ll do whatever it takes.” No. No more.

SCOTT
Mallory—

MALLORY
I’m not finished. Did you think I’d never wonder about the rent? Why wouldn’t you tell me you were contributing?

SCOTT
I didn’t want you to worry. Didn’t want you getting worked up about it.

MALLORY
Like this? This isn’t because you put money in, this is because you went behind my back. Why were so afraid of telling me?

SCOTT
I didn’t want you to do something you’d regret.

MALLORY
Something I’ll regret? As if my happiness is the only reason you’re so set on keeping it open!
SCOTT
Yes, there’s another reason—a whole town out there that doesn’t need to see another building boarded up, another failure.

MALLORY
(scoffing)
“Another failure”—of course you wouldn’t want them to see that. They’ll hardly even notice. They’ve moved on. Why can’t you?

SCOTT
Just because I’m never here, do you think I don’t care about this town?

MALLORY
Oh, I know you care. Care what they think, care what they say. Why don’t you care about someone else for a change?

SCOTT
I do, Mallory. I care about your opinion, I care about your future, I…
(waits for a response)
I’m sorry if I don’t know what you want.

MALLORY
And I’m sorry if what I want isn’t convenient for you. I sort of thought you’d like to stop being miserable. Maybe I was wrong.

SCOTT
It’s just been a hard couple of months. I’ll get over it.

MALLORY
When?—As soon as you get a harvest? As soon as it rains? Listen to me, Scott. It doesn’t have to be this way.

SCOTT
Sure. I could forget about paying back the money borrowed against the house, and I could—

MALLORY
That isn’t what I’m saying—
SCOTT
You think I wanted a four year engagement? You think I choose to live like a dog—chasing after trains, sleeping under—

MALLORY
Yes, you chose it.

SCOTT
If I had known...

MALLORY
No one’s standing in your way. Except you won’t marry Addie ‘til you can bring her home to a house with a white picket fence. You won’t let Mama and me make a single sacrifice.

SCOTT
That doesn’t mean I want it to be this way.

MALLORY
Well I sure don’t. So if it’s not you, I don’t know who’s to blame. You won’t even let me be responsible for closing the diner. I want to do it. So quit telling yourself you’re keeping it open for me, for Mama. Honestly, Scott—who is it for? (pause)
The diner is my decision, and I’ve made it. Now you can decide what to do with your life. (MALLORY exits.)

SCOTT
WHO IS IT FOR? WHY
DID YOU HAVE TO ASK THAT QUESTION?
OR, SHOULD WE SAY “WAS IT FOR”? YOUR THREAT TO CLOSE WAS NO SUGGESTION.

THROWING DOWN YOUR DREAM LIKE IT’S A GAUNTLET—SAYING YOU DON’T WANT IT ANYMORE. WHO SAID THAT WAS YOURS TO THROW? I CAN STILL HEAR IT HIT THE FLOOR.
IN MY EARS, WORDS ARE STILL RINGING—
“IT’S TIME TO CLOSE.”
WE’LL ALWAYS BE FRIENDS,
BUT ON THIS ONE WE’RE FOES.

I SHOULD JUST SAY “FINE.”
THE DINER WAS NO DREAM OF MINE.
IT’S NOT MY FUTURE ON THE LINE

THEN WHY DOES THE VERY THOUGHT UNDO ME?—
REPULSE ME, UPSET ME, SEND DAGGERS RIGHT THROUGH ME.
YET YOU JUST WALK AWAY...

CALLING OFF THE FIGHT BEFORE IT ENDED
LIKE I’D EXPENDED EVERYTHING.
WHY THE SUDDEN CHANGE OF HEART?
TELL ME TRUE, DON’T YOU FEEL THE STING?
THOUGH THE VICTR’Y WASN’T CERTAIN,
I LONGED TO WIN,
BUT WE’LL NEVER KNOW—
LOOKS LIKE I’M GIVING IN.

I SHOULD JUST SAY “FINE.”
THE DINER WAS NO DREAM OF MINE.
IT’S NOT MY FUTURE ON THE LINE

THEN WHY DOES THE VERY THOUGHT UNDO ME?—
REPULSE ME, UPSET ME, SEND DAGGERS RIGHT THROUGH ME.
YET YOU JUST WALK AWAY...

HOW CAN YOU JUST SAY, “OH WELL, IT’S OVER,”
AND, MOREOVER, SAY WE FAILED,
THEN GO ON YOUR MERRY WAY
BEFORE THE COFFIN’S EVEN NAILED?
I’M ALONE—FLOODING THE WAY IN
THIS FUNERAL MARCH.
I’M WEARING THE BLACK
WHILE YOU HAVE STEELED YOUR HEART.

I SHOULD JUST SAY “FINE.”
THE DINER WAS NO DREAM OF MINE.
IT’S NOT MY FUTURE ON THE LINE

THEN WHY DOES THE VERY THOUGHT UNDO ME?
REPULSE ME, UPSET ME, SEND DAGGERS RIGHT THROUGH ME.

YET YOU JUST WALK AWAY
AT THE END OF THE DAY
LIKE YOU’VE NOTHING TO LOSE—
LIKE YOU’VE NOTHING TO PROVE.