

LITTLE GIRL LAID

In the semi-darkness, visible is the prone body of a little girl. Without moving, she hums a child's song. Suddenly she opens her eyes.

LITTLE GIRL.- Why is everything so dark? It is night time? *(She cries out in fear.)* Somebody! Please turn on the lights! *(Lights illuminate the circle of space occupied by the child. She breathes a sigh of relief.)* I was scared. I thought I'd fallen asleep... Or that I was all alone.... Or that I had gotten lost... *(Smiling slightly)*

(Standing up) I'm thirsty; so thirsty. *(She starts to abandon the halo of light but thinks better of it.)* This is a very strange place. *(Confused)* This isn't my house. I've never been here before. *(She squints into the silent shadows around her.)* Anybody out there? *(Hardly breathing, she listens.)* Nobody answers. But.... *(Listening anxiously again)* It seems like there is someone... Yes, I hear breathing... but I don't see anybody. *(Suddenly frightened)* Maybe it's "THEM"... and they haven't left yet. I heard their footsteps when they left... and then, everything was quiet. Where's my mommy? *(Screaming pathetically)* Momma!.... Momma!.... Why don't you answer me? Where are you? *(Terrified, and expecting the worst)* Why, Momma? Why did you leave? Why have you left me alone again? You know I'm scared to be home all by myself, waiting for you to get back,. "THEY".... can come.... "THEY".... and I'm just a little girl...

(Searching for an answer) Could I be dreaming? ... Yes! Of course, that's it! I'm having a nightmare. But I shouldn't be scared; soon I'll wake up; then everything will be like it was... like every day... *(Alarmed)* Like... yesterday? Yesterday... What a strange word... Y-E-S-T-E-R-D-A-Y. Seems so long ago... yesterday. What happened yesterday?... Where did yesterday go? Did.... "THEY" take it away?

(She begins to bounce to ward off the fear but, startled by something, she pauses.) What's this wet stuff on my legs?...*(She touches herself and looks at her hands, shocked.)* Is that blood? *(Forcing a smile to comfort herself)* No, silly; it's your period again. Mama told me about it last month, when I first got it; she said I shouldn't be afraid. *(Sorrowfully)* She says I'm no longer a child, and that everything is different now.... and I have to be very careful... What did she mean? ... Things don't seem any different. *(Thinking, happily)* I still like to play with my rag doll... my Lily, the one Mama made for me last year, with the string hair and button eyes. *(Cradling an imaginary doll in her arms as she sings a lullaby)* "Little one, my baby with the funny eyes, go to sleep, your mommy will be back by and by."

(She stops singing.) Where can I get some water? My throat burns... Why is that? ... Could it be something I drank?... What do you think? *(Asking her doll)* Do you know if I drank something? *(Listening for the answer)* Yes, I did drink something before going to sleep... But, what?... I can't remember.... You tell me, my baby... Do you know what it was?... *(Putting the doll aside, anxious again)* I need water to wet my throat... and wash my legs. *(She touches herself again between the legs.)* Will it always hurt so bad? It wasn't like this last month. But.... yesterday... *(Unable to repress a sigh)* I feel like my body has been ripped open. Mommy, it hurts! It hurts so bad! Is this what being a woman is like? Come home, Mommy! Make this awful pain in my insides go away! Make it go away! I can't play like this, and I want to go on playing....

My head is full of things... and smells.... and noises. My head is little, so don't put anything else in there... please.... please... And don't put anything inside me, either... Let me get up.... Leave me alone with my silence... Let me keep waiting for mama... Give me back the yesterday you stole. But before you leave, give me water, please; water to put out this fire that burns my whole body...

(Squinting, terrified, into the shadows) What's that? I heard something move out there. *(Relieved)* No, it's not "THEM"—the men who... hurt me... That noise, Lily, it's the rats. *(Her eyes widen in realization.)* Oh, now I know what I took. Now I know where I am... and what happened. *(Remembering painfully)* Mama keeps it in the kitchen, under the sink. It's a little package. Smells like acid... and pain.... and sorrow. I'm scared. On the package, it says "RAT POISON." Mama went to town and left me alone..... "THEY" came, smelling of liquor and cigarettes... They laughed a lot...and real loud, showing their big yellow teeth as they felt my hair.... my face.... my legs....

(Closing her eyes, trying to block out the memory) Then they..... "laid" (f----?) me; that's what they called it.

(Picking up her imaginary doll again and speaking to it maternally) I didn't eat the rat poison to die. I wanted to stay home, playing with you, Lily. You are the little daughter I want, my little rag child. I didn't want a real baby... a flesh-and-blood daughter to tear up my insides. I wanted to live.... and play. I'm a just little girl.

(Opening her eyes decisively) That's why I did it. That's why I ate rat poison.

(She rocks the imaginary doll, trying to smile sweetly as she tells her the end of the story.) Why didn't you tell me, Lily? ... You didn't dare, my little one?... Were you afraid to tell your mommy she's dead? Were you afraid to come with me to this dark place where the rats in our hut come when they get all stiff from eating that stuff mama keeps under the sink? *(Caressing the doll maternally)* Don't be silly, little one.... I understand now... And I'm not afraid to be dead, because the pain is all gone. I'm not afraid anymore, because we're together, and we can go on playing.

(Suddenly cheerful) Of course, silly... Besides.... We're not alone! Didn't you hear there are lots of little girls who did just what I did?... They didn't want to die, either; all they wanted was to go on playing with their dolls. *(Listening intently)* Do you hear their laughter?... Let's go, Lily; let's go find them; let's play with the other little girls in this hiding place where "THEY" will never find us... Here "THEY" can't steal our fun from us ever again.

(With an intense desire to play, the little girl lies down in the circle of light, singing to her doll. Then a chorus of little girls singing swells like a giant wave over the theater. The surrounding half-light gathers them all softly, as a mother might, in her arms.)