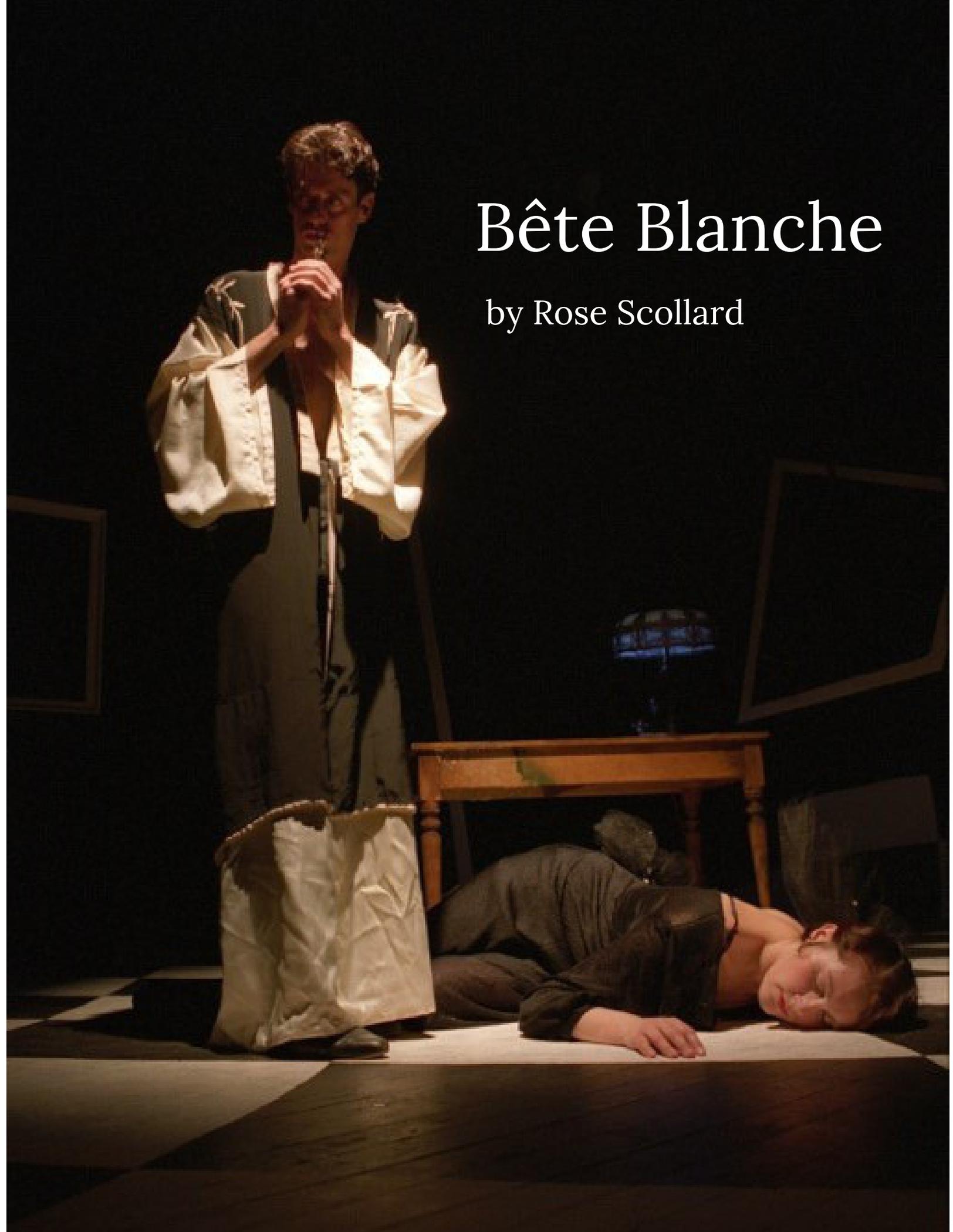


# Bête Blanche

by Rose Scollard



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*Bête Blanche* was written specifically as a companion piece for *Tango Noir*. First in the performance but later chronologically than *Tango Noir*, *Bête Blanche* depicts a woman, Faye, who is at an earlier stage of self-determination than Colette in *Tango Noir*. The structure in each play is a mirror image of the other with the whole forming a sort of theatrical diptych on the struggle for spiritual integration.

*Bête Blanche/Tango Noir* was produced at the  
Pumphouse in Calgary, April 1991.

*Bête Blanche*

Faye Alexandria Patience

Cliff / Shadow Don Enright

*Tango Noir*

Marguerite / Colette [Scene Two] Alexandria Patience

Colette [Scene One] /

Captain Bouchardon /

Sister Maria / Henri Don Enright

Director Gerri Hemphill

Set and Lighting Design Sandi Somers

Costume Design Lillian Messer

Choreography Nicole Mion

Waltz, Tango and Soundscape Kevin Labchuk

Stage Manager Nancy Jo Cullen

*Bête Blanche* was published in 2012 by Frontenac House under the title *Tango Noir*.

## Characters

This play is for two Actors:

A woman who plays:

FAYE

And a man who plays:

CLIFF and

SHADOW

**Setting:** Calgary, 1935

*[Dim spot on a large portmanteau placed prominently on a chair in a living room. It is a room where people live close to the bone - a chair, a lamp, a table a worn rug. - no extras.]*

*FAYE enters. Curses the dark.]*

FAYE: Damned electric! Cliff!

*[She fumbles about in a drawer, brings out a candle. Lighting it, she sees the portmanteau, reflects a momentary spark of interest, then fixes her face. But, in spite of herself, FAYE is attracted to the bag. She goes to it, opens it and takes out what she is obviously looking for, a wallet. Aware of someone beyond, she searches through it and removes three one-dollar bills. FAYE replaces the wallet and, idly fumbling through the bag, to her surprise finds something. It is a man's dressing case, expensive and beautifully made of tooled Moroccan leather. Inside the fittings are of silver, tarnished but solid. She fingers and turns over each piece: the razor, the brushes, a scent bottle. She rubs the lid of a jar and is startled by*

*something she imagines is inside it. She examines the jar and works at the lid.  
When she opens it there is a shifting sound somewhere in the room.]*

FAYE: Who is that? Cliff?

*[She looks about uneasily and stuffs the case back in the bag but, thinking better of it, she removes the case and hides it in the room. Again her attention is drawn and she looks harder into the gloom. Then, hearing a sound off, she sits at the table and riffles through a magazine.*

*Door opens and CLIFF stands in the doorway, holding a book.]*

FAYE: *[Reading from her magazine, wearily.]* "The door opened and her husband stood uncertainly in the doorway. Framed by the kitchen light he could have been the very one who had captured her young imagination – tall, lean, the kind who could wear open-necked shirts and tweeds, puff philosophically on a pipe and still come off looking like a man."

*[CLIFF, looking like the kind of man FAYE is reading about, goes to the portmanteau.]*

CLIFF: Faye? I've decided, Faye.

FAYE: I saw the bag *[CLIFF opens the bag and, without looking at the contents, puts the book inside.]*

FAYE: Cliff? Was there someone in the house just now?

CLIFF: Here?

FAYE: I thought I saw someone. A white figure, perfume and fur.

CLIFF: A woman?

FAYE: I don't know. It was just an impression. You know, out of the side of my eye.

CLIFF: You must have dozed off for a minute.

FAYE: Yes.

*[They both look at the bag, an awkward moment.]*

CLIFF: I'm going to give the cars a try. There's one going out at five.

FAYE: Five. That's early, isn't it?

*[CLIFF stands tentatively beside FAYE, hands in pockets. He is hunched in a way that typifies anxiety but FAYE seems to feel no obligation to soothe or praise him. He unpockets a hand and places it on her arm then, aware of her subtle stiffening, slips it off again.]*

CLIFF: I thought I'd snatch a couple of hours sleep before I left. I won't waken the boys.

FAYE: That's probably wise.

CLIFF: You'll say goodbye to them for me?

FAYE: Sure:

CLIFF: I have a little something for you. Not much, but it should cover an emergency if the dole doesn't come through right away.

*[FAYE takes the offered money and starts to leaf through it.]*

CLIFF: It's only six dollars.

FAYE: You sold your watch, didn't you. You sap.

CLIFF: You've been on to me to sell it for a month now.

FAYE: Well yes, but it should have brought more than six dollars.

CLIFF: Actually, it brought twelve. But I paid off a couple of debts and I need something for the road, don't I.

FAYE: Sure honey. *[Her eye strays unwillingly to the bag. She looks away and turns cold.]* I hope you paid the electric.

CLIFF: I did, yes. They're turning it back on tomorrow.

FAYE: *[Her eye is caught by the mirror. What she sees there distracts her.]* Cliff.  
Do you think I look like Aunt Selma?

CLIFF: I suppose there is a family likeness. Why?

FAYE: Oh I don't know. It's just that what's the point of fixing yourself up and taking care of yourself if you're destined to turn out like Selma anyway. *[CLIFF picks up the portmanteau and heads for the door.]* Maybe you should sleep in the back room huh, Honey? *[She's suddenly Shirley Temple.]* I have to get up awful early t'morra. Got to see the bad old welfare lady.

CLIFF: Yes, of course. You get your rest, sweetheart. Perhaps I'll look in on the boys before I bed down.

FAYE: Don't go waking them, now.

CLIFF: No no. I'll just look in on them. Goodbye, Darling.

FAYE: So long.

*[Once CLIFF is gone FAYE takes out the cases for a better look and starts shining up the silver backs of the brushes. There is a stirring behind her—a shadowy figure she can't quite make out, a figure that look a bit like her husband.]*

SHADOW: Pretty shabby, Faye.

FAYE: What? Who's there! *[She goes towards the voice but the figure is elusive.]*

SHADOW: Shabby thing to do.

FAYE: Cliff?

SHADOW: And the way you said goodbye to him. For someone you're not going to see again. No intimate moments. No last words.

FAYE: Is that you. Cliff? Quit horsing around!

SHADOW: You took his last dime, too.

FAYE: So what else am I supposed to do? *[Gathers up dressing case in a possessive manner.]* I thought I knew everything there was to know about you,

Cliff, and all along you were holding out on me. This must be worth twenty bucks, at least. What is it, a family heirloom? Cliff?

SHADOW: Not Cliff. *[He steps partly out of the gloom.]*

FAYE: You *are* Cliff.

SHADOW: Am I like him?

FAYE: Yes. No. You're too....

SHADOW: Perhaps I'm what you want Cliff to be.

FAYE: Cliff isn't capable of being anything. He's a magazine hero. Weak and spineless.

SHADOW: And not rich enough.

FAYE: He was rich when I married him. Or I thought he was. A nice fat cheque from the folks every month.

SHADOW: A remittance man.

FAYE: As soon as we married, the cheques from home stopped. I wasn't good enough for them.

SHADOW: You thought when the babies came along they might soften. You had two in a row, real fast.

FAYE: They had money to burn. Town houses, country houses. Stables and yachts. Gold rimmed potties to pee in. And what do I end up with? A tarnished dressing case. Probably isn't their best, either. This is probably second or third best in their eyes. A castoff. I should get a few dollars for it, though. It's all silver. *[She opens it. To her surprise there is something inside. She pulls out some crisp new notes.]* Where did this come from? Fifty dollars, for god's sake. Just tucked here into the lid. Where did it come from?

SHADOW: That was the deal, wasn't it?

FAYE: Deal?

SHADOW: You get the money. I get....a little of your time.

FAYE: I didn't make any deal. *[SHADOW shrugs, walks away.]* Wait! I didn't say no, did I? Let's start over. You're giving me fifty dollars? And... and you say you want a little of my time.

SHADOW: I want...*[He slips a white satiny wrap over her shoulders.]*... to tell you stories.

FAYE: *[She strokes the wrap in wonder.]* So, tell me a story.

*[As SHADOW tell his story he removes exotic undergarments from his pockets and passes them suggestively to FAYE. Chemise, panties, silk stockings — all white.]*

SHADOW: There was once a woman who was unsatisfied in her marriage. The trouble was, her husband had no imagination. He just couldn't give her what she wanted. What's more he didn't seem to care about it. She tried to bring the matter up with him, make suggestions, but he never understood.

She brooded about it for a while. Then she decided to take matters into her own hands. She advertised. There were a lot of replies, two that interested her. The first was in his middle age. Rich. Elegant. Claimed to be a count.

The second said he was a seaman but looked more like a gangster. He wore a wide brimmed hat and a dark striped suit with wide shoulders.

FAYE: Which one did she choose?

SHADOW: Both of them. On Tuesdays she was picked up by the count's chauffeur and taken to his country estate where she was subjected to various expensive pleasures. Do I have to be explicit? *[FAYE shrugs and smiles.]* On Thursdays she rented a small room near the docks where she was brutalized by the ruffian in the dark suit. She outfitted herself according to the experience. Tuesdays, white silk and furs. Thursdays she squeezed herself into black, skin-tight dresses and tarty shoes. For a long time the arrangement was satisfactory. Even her husband noticed an improvement in her colour.

Then, out of the blue, the count said he wanted to see her more often. She gave him Fridays. And the gangster, though he'd never shown he was interested, insisted on more frequent meetings and she gave him Mondays.

One day the count demanded Thursdays as well. She said that her husband was at home on Thursdays and she couldn't leave the house. The count said nothing but the next Thursday he followed her to the hotel near the docks. He stormed into the cheap little room and challenged his rival to a duel.

FAYE: A duel? With swords and things?

SHADOW: Revolvers. The duel was to take place the following week in an open field on the edge of the city. That morning the woman rose before dawn and clothed herself in a clinging silk garment — the left side was white, the right black, like a harlequin. Her husband, suspicious of her strange actions, followed her to the field. She refused to speak to him.

A black limousine pulled up at one end of the field, at the other a white phaeton. The two assailants got out, faced each other and raised their revolvers.

The woman stood watching, no expression on her face. "I will kill the survivor," said her husband. But, as it turned out there was no need. Each was a deadly shot. Both were killed. The husband drove the woman home, where he stripped off her harlequin robe and forced her to confess the entire story. When she finished he led her from the room without speaking. From then on he was imaginative and masterful and as brutal as anyone could have wished. She never had reason to advertise again.

FAYE: Where did you get *that* one from?

SHADOW: Same place I got the money.

FAYE: Fifty bucks and a good story too. [*Brushes his cheek, all kittenish.*] It must have been some place.

SHADOW: It was.

FAYE: I'd offer you a drink but I'm stony. [*Looks at the money in her hand.*] Well I was until....

SHADOW: *[With a flourish reveals a store of liquor.]* What would you like?  
Irish? Rye? *[He pours from a decanter into a heavy cut glass.]*

FAYE: This is real crystal. *[He adds some ice from a silver bucket.]* Chipped ice.  
My God, this is class, isn't it. Mud in your eye. Oh!

*[She looks anxiously into the mirror.]*

SHADOW: Something wrong?

FAYE: For a minute there I could see Aunt Selma smirking at me.

SHADOW: For the last fifteen of her twenty-eight years, Faye has been obsessed  
with eradicating all traces of her family from her face.

FAYE: It's not just her face, it's that slumping way she walks. Why can't she walk  
upright like God meant her to. It drives me crazy!

SHADOW: She's been working hard remodelling herself to be like the women  
who beam out at her from magazines and film screens.

FAYE: If you saw her walk you'd know what I mean. Ankles streaming over the  
edges of her slippers. Breasts sagging down over her belt in two flower printed  
bundles. If I turn out like that I'll kill myself! *[Spots the dressing case where some  
more bills are revealed.]* More money! Where does this come from?

SHADOW: I do things.

FAYE: Sex, I suppose.

SHADOW: *[Smiles.]* Supposable sex.

FAYE: And you just give this away. To people like me.

SHADOW: Like you.

FAYE: *[Suddenly a little worried and out of control.]* I'm not crazy about rye. I'm  
not crazy about...lots of things.

SHADOW: *[While she speaks he slips in a whispered word now and then.]*  
Supposable.

FAYE: What you have to understand about Cliff is how he brought all my dreams crashing down.

SHADOW: *Succulent.*

FAYE: I had him cast as the hero and almost from the first he was a disappointment. The minute things got tough the backbone went out of him. It was pathetic how fast he crumbled.

SHADOW: *Sinister.*

FAYE: At first I played the little woman who coped. I cleaned this place top to bottom every day. I washed the windows every week, every window in the goddamned house, which shows you how crazy I was.

SHADOW: You had a roof over your head.

FAYE: Some roof. Stuck between the river and the railway tracks. You can see St. George's Island from here. They have a zoo on the Island. I take the boys sometimes in the afternoons to see the animals.

Come and see this. See what they're doing? Those constructions over there. You can just make them out. They're building huge plaster dinosaurs. The country is knee deep in depression and that's all they can think to do with their money. Which shows you how crazy other people are.

*[FAYE crosses to the other side of the room.]*

FAYE: From this side of the house you can see the railway tracks. When a train goes by, Sandford and Benjy stand on the couch to watch. The train is always piled high with men — sitting, standing, lying on the tops of the cars, clinging to the sides — all heading west, looking for work. A few hours later another train goes by, heading east, swarming with men looking for work. If you saw it in a movie it would be funny

SHADOW: You sent Cliff off to ride the cars.

FAYE: It was his decision.

SHADOW: It was cute the way you did it. Making him think it was his own idea.

FAYE: He had to, so we could get the welfare.

SHADOW: Taking his last dollar and his family keepsake. That was cute too. And nervy You're one tough cookie.

FAYE: It wasn't stealing. I'm his wife. He wouldn't begrudge it.

*[SHADOW smiles knowingly. This irritates FAYE.]*

FAYE: Do you know what it's like living with a man like Cliff? Oh, he tries. Takes any work going. He works on city projects, planting trees, digging drainage ditches. But there's no purpose in anything he does.

SHADOW: *[Slipping a finger under the lapel of her wrap.]* Does white interest you? It interests me.

FAYE: He has no plan. Something comes up, he does it. Otherwise he sits around till something comes up.

SHADOW: Old white flesh, drained of blood.

FAYE: After a while it rubs off. That's the scary part. I don't want to drift like that. I don't want to grin and bear it! *[SHADOW still toys with her lapel. She grabs his hand, emphasizing her point.]*

SHADOW: White as snow. White as death.

FAYE: I don't want to go day after day on bread and potatoes with no heat, no electricity and barely enough clothes to stuff a busted window pane.

SHADOW: White as a baby's teeth.

FAYE: Not enough. Never enough! I don't want those words in my life!

SHADOW: White as a voyeur's prick.

*[Pause.]*

FAYE: It's too dark in here.

SHADOW: Faye wants light. Let there be light. *[He switches on a beautiful lamp.]*

FAYE: The electric's cut off. Where did that come from?

SHADOW: You should know.

FAYE: I've never had a lamp like this.

SHADOW: Faye never remembers. She never wants to admit that all this is really her doing. The drink. The furniture. The perfumes. The dresses.

FAYE: Dresses?

*[She discovers a hoard of dresses, different styles and textures, silks and feathers and sateens, some in bright colours, others suffused and demure.]*

FAYE: I don't believe this. Linen, voile, silk. *[FAYE is distracted, delighted, overwhelmed with dresses. She holds them up to herself looking in the mirror.]*  
This is real silk. It was made for me.

SHADOW: Silk and fur and linen, each has its own texture, its own scent, its own story. *[He holds a beautiful white dress up to her.]*

FAYE: I don't like that smell. *[But she takes the dress.]*

SHADOW: It's white thorn.

FAYE: White thorn? *[She holds the dress up to herself and looks in the mirror.]*

SHADOW: I knew someone who was born when the white thorn was in bloom. The mother said it was bad luck. She wouldn't allow the flowers into the house. But a careless servant brought a bough of it into the room where the baby slept.

The child grew up beautiful and good. But she was unable to speak. Not a word could she utter. It didn't seem to matter. She had many suitors, among them a King of great power. The King showered her with precious gifts and saw that she lacked for nothing. He offered her his kingdom and asked her hand in marriage. The girl accepted him but, worried that she couldn't speak, she sought the advice of a wise woman. "The solution is easy," said the wise women. "The reason you cannot speak is that a thorn from the white thorn tree is lodged behind your ear. Remove the thorn and you will no longer be dumb."

The girl was overjoyed and wanted the woman to remove it at once. The wise woman hesitated. "There is a drawback," she said. "If I remove the thorn you will be able to speak but your words will have such wisdom and power that you will no longer be the King's darling." The girl smiled and signalled to the woman to leave the thorn where it was.

*[Pause.]*

FAYE: She should have pulled the thorn.

SHADOW: She wouldn't have been his good and innocent darling any more.

FAYE: She could have faked it.

*[SHADOW smiles and sips his drink.]*

FAYE: It's a stupid story.

SHADOW: The stories are for *my* satisfaction.

*[FAYE fumbles through the shoes, trying and discarding them.]*

FAYE: I planted a garden the first years of our marriage. The carrots were puny. The radishes went to wood. Something nipped off the beans as soon as they came out. Most of the time we lived on porridge and potatoes.

There was no money for fuel or boots, Sometimes Selma came to visit. She'd bring corn, fruitcake, cast-off clothing. She always pressed a dollar or two in my hand before she left. It wasn't for me. She never had any use for me and didn't pretend to. But there were the boys to think about. She couldn't let her own flesh and blood starve, could she? That's what she'd say.

*[She finds a pair of shoes she likes and puts them on. She moves to the window.]*

FAYE: Sometimes I feel I'm drifting with no shore in sight.

SHADOW: *[Echoes her, whispering.] Drifting.*

FAYE: Look at those things. The moonlight makes them seem alive. Great beasts floating in the moonlight.

SHADOW: *Floating.*

FAYE: *[Sings in a soft, husky whisper.]* "I went to the animal fair. /The birds and the beasts were there. The big baboon by the light of the moon/ was combing his auburn hair..." I'll take the boys there tomorrow. They like the zoo.

SHADOW: The boys? The boys aren't here. You know that.

FAYE: They're in their beds. *[Tries to read his face.]* You've done something to them! What have you done with them? *[She runs off.]* Sanford! Benjy!

SHADOW: *[Takes Faye's seat and opens a pot of powder. Sings in a broken, dead voice as he powders his face white.]*

Take the face as a warning

Red lips. White skin.

White fringe of lashes

The sudden Joker grin

Vacant eyes

The sudden Joker grin.

Bloodless encounters

You can never win

Take the face as a warning

Immaculate as sin

Leprous dreams

The sudden Joker grin.

*[FAYE comes back distracted, confused.]*

SHADOW: You put them in a home.

FAYE: Yes, I know. For a moment I ..... I visit them sometimes.

SHADOW: Once, wasn't it?

FAYE: It's not so bad. They get to play in the woods with the other boys. Build forts for cowboys and Indians. It's very nice. They make little fires under the trees and fry potatoes. They teach them how to darn socks there too and take care of themselves. It's better than I could do for them.

*[SHADOW hums his song and applies red lipstick.]*

FAYE: *[Finds more money in the case.]* This is so incredible. What do you do for this?

SHADOW: *[Hums on.]*

FAYE: You rob people, don't you.

SHADOW: *[Speaks.]* Red lips. White skin.

FAYE: You do awful things. I can tell.

SHADOW: Vacant eyes.

FAYE: Prostitution? Rape?

SHADOW: *[Whispers.]* The sudden Joker grin.

FAYE: Murder?

SHADOW: Not yet.

FAYE: Not yet. Then there's time.

SHADOW: I doubt it.

FAYE: What can I do?

SHADOW: You could give up the money.

FAYE: I would. But it keeps appearing.

SHADOW: Just stop spending it.

FAYE: Yes, I will.

SHADOW: Will you? You'll give up this voluptuous life I provide for you? The little package of bills every morning? I only ask for a few moments warmth. *[He touches her cheek and she shrinks back.]*

FAYE: Don't!

SHADOW: Give it up then.

FAYE: I'll get a job. This guy I know at Woolworth's will hire me. He's as good as said.

SHADOW: If you say so.

FAYE: I'll throw it away. *[Flings case across room.]*

SHADOW: You've already tried that.

FAYE: *[Picks up case.]* Look at it. Is it any wonder it tempted me? I could see right away it was something special.

SHADOW: Something you could get a few bucks for.

FAYE: Something that would have special meaning for me. *[Traces the design on the leather.]* I feel like it's been with me forever.

SHADOW: *[Whispers an echo.]* Ever ever ever ever....

FAYE: I've tried selling it. But I can't. The leather is as soft as skin.

SHADOW: *Skin...*

FAYE: It's been well cared for at one time. Cream rubbed into it. *[Removes more money.]* I needed the money. But I can stop now.

SHADOW: There is a little maggot of independence in Faye.

FAYE: I'll just put it back. I'll put it in his bag where I found it.

SHADOW: His bag? Cliff left months ago.

FAYE: He's sleeping in the back room.

SHADOW: The boys weren't there, were they?

FAYE: This is just some stupid dream I'm having. He *is* there. *[She looks into the case.]* A letter. Addressed to me.

SHADOW: Already opened. Some time ago.

*[FAYE, letter in hand, pours herself another drink. She reads silently while SHADOW says the words.]*

SHADOW: My Darling Faye,

I've been everywhere you can name looking for work. There's not much going on in the way of jobs. I signed up with a harvesting outfit near Swift Current but we got hailed out in three counties. I've enclosed a little something....

FAYE: Four lousy bucks.

SHADOW: I'll send you more when I can.

*[FAYE throws the letter down, losing interest. SHADOW picks it up and moves closer to her as he recites the letter.]*

SHADOW: I hear you gave up the boys.

FAYE: He must have been talking to Selma.

SHADOW: I'm sure you did it for the best. I'm sure you miss them badly. I know I do. And I miss you too. Especially you. I can't wait till we're together again. A thousand kisses. *[He strokes FAYE's neck.]*

FAYE: I don't like you touching me.

*[SHADOW drops the letter and drifts off in a provocative manner. FAYE doesn't notice. She picks up the letter and goes on talking as though he's still there.]*

FAYE: Cliff died....oh, a few days after he sent this, it must have been. It was a senseless, stupid death. Fell off the top of a car pulling out of Brandon.... Now I can never....

SHADOW: *[Whispering off.]* Never....

FAYE: Nothing can....

SHADOW: *Nothing...*

FAYE: Where does the money come from? What do you do for it?

SHADOW: Everything now. Everything you can name.

FAYE: But I'm giving it up. *[Distracted by her image in the mirror.]* Sometimes I think I'd like to be a dancer. A showgirl. Diamonds. Pearls. Lacquered hair.

Everything glittering like the movies. I'm young. I still have my figure.

SHADOW: *Sugar...*

FAYE: Where are you!

SHADOW: *Sweet...*

FAYE: Where did you go?

SHADOW: *Nowhere...*

FAYE: *[Searching.]* Quit playing games. Show yourself.

SHADOW: I'm not really here. I'm just a notion in your brain.

FAYE: Stop it!

*[SHADOW steps into the light. His face is chalk white with black smears, a mask-like apparition.]*

SHADOW: Do I upset you? I'm really just an aspect of you.

FAYE: You don't look anything like me!

SHADOW: But I feel like you.

FAYE: No you don't!

*[SHADOW moves towards her. FAYE backs off.]*

FAYE: What do you want?

SHADOW: I want to dance. *[Reaches for her.]*

FAYE: Don't do that! Keep away! *[Moves out of reach.]* You're a ghost, aren't you.

SHADOW: Not a ghost.

FAYE: Then why am I so cold?

SHADOW: Warmth is a spiritual assumption. *[There is music and he moves slowly towards her.]* Join me

FAYE: No!

SHADOW: We have been dancing together for a long time.

*[As he tells his next story SHADOW dresses FAYE in a white gown and caresses her. At first she's mesmerized by her own loveliness, then the story wraps her round, possesses her.]*

SHADOW: I will tell you the story of a woman who was very beautiful — not unlike yourself — white skin, dark hair. People ached to touch her. She kept herself from them, She kept herself for herself — the smooth silky skin, the creamy touch. She even avoided the caress of the sun. Not a freckle was allowed to mar that immaculate skin.

Some said it was what she ate, that she fed exclusively on red and white foods — apples, cream, rice, cherries. Others said that she bathed in milk and brandy. Still others said that the whiteness of her skin was bought at great cost from a sorcerer. It was even rumoured that her pallor was from feeding on unborn children. "She can't be that white," they would say.

A great king wanted to marry her. She agreed, on one condition, that she be allowed to sleep alone. "Every evening I will come to your bed. But I will sleep in my own bed." She was so beautiful the king could only agree. She was everything a king could desire in a consort. She was beautiful, lively, responsive to his every whim. She denied him nothing. But every evening before sleep took her she left his bed for her own. She slept alone in a chamber filled with lilies and snowdrops in a bed curtained with hangings of voile and white wool.

After a while the king came to regret his promise. In the dead of night a great restlessness would take possession of him and he would wander up and down the corridors of the palace. Invariably he would come to his queen's door but he could not enter as it was always bolted from the inside. He would stand in front of the door as though it were a puzzle to be solved. But it provided no solution. All was silent and still behind that door. And yet, if he put his ear to the door there was a sound. He couldn't identify it. It was a small spitting sound, like lard frying.

Every day the queen grew more beautiful. Every day the whispering and the rumours about the court grew more rabid. At last the king could no longer abide this mystery within his palace. One night he caused the chamber to be opened and the curtains of the bed to be drawn aside. There lay his queen, sleeping peacefully, as beautiful and as pale as alabaster. And lying beside her, entwining her body like a pale rosy vine, its tongue forced deep into her mouth as she slept, was a great white snake.

FAYE: It's a dream, isn't it. A warning. Well I know it's been bad but it's not too late. I can get the boys back. I can.... It's all been a dream....

SHADOW: Yes. How could I exist after all? I'm just a part of your imagination.

*[SHADOW moves closer to FAYE. Faint music of a waltz can be heard, lurid and fatal, as Shadow clasp her in his arms. Faye struggles to avoid his embrace]*

SHADOW: Just a notion in your brain.

FAYE: I want to stop now.

SHADOW: The corrupt white notion of frailty

FAYE: No.

SHADOW: The corrupt white notion of innocence.

FAYE: I can't!

SHADOW: The corrupt white notion of purity.

FAYE: Please!

*[FAYE cannot resist. SHADOW forces her to dance.]*

SHADOW: We'll dance now. What could be sweeter? We'll dance and dance till we melt into each other. Then I will tell you the story of the white kiss. The long, white, melting, serpent kiss.

*[FAYE, locked in SHADOW's embrace, dances until the lights fade.]*

***THE END***

