

AXEL. What's this?

WILLUM. That's the Regency. As of this morning.

TANSY. Pretty stark.

AXEL. Looks like a huge air conditioner.

WILLUM. I know, I know. I—well, I just keep telling myself, no matter how it ends up, it's still mine. It still has my name on it. And that's—something, I guess.

AXEL. I guess.

TANSY. Look—if this Rick person is ruining your career and your life, you have to do something about it, that's all.

WILLUM. I can't. I can't hurt his feelings. I owe him too much.

AXEL. Well, maybe he'll just drift away one of these days.

WILLUM. I don't think so. He's been dropping hints about what he'd like for Christmas.

TANSY. Oh, no.

AXEL. What does he want?

WILLUM. A "Mister Microphone."

AXEL. All right—something's obviously got to be done. What are the rules? We can't hurt his feelings, right?

WILLUM. That's right.

AXEL. All right, that makes it a little tricky. Here's one idea. See what you think of this. All right—you know when you travel, you spend time in a foreign country? I mean, it's fun, but it also puts a hell of a *strain* on you. I mean, people are talking different, they've got different customs, they all remember different things than you do. They eat weird things. Pretty soon you're glad to get back home. And the more bizarre the place is, the faster you get homesick.

WILLUM. So?

AXEL. So—just an idea—but I'm thinking, why couldn't we hit Rick with a dose of culture shock? I mean, what if we start confronting him with some rituals, and memories, and traditions he's never seen before?

WILLUM. (*Skeptical.*) Ax, how do we know what rituals and traditions Rick's never seen before?

AXEL. We make them up.

WILLUM. Oh, Ax.

AXEL. Really. I think we could do it.

WILLUM. What, in other words, leave him out.

AXEL. No, invite him to join in. If he gets fed up with us—he! I bet if we could find things to do that are stupid enough, or strange, or boring enough—I betcha money Rick'll be on the next Amtrak back to Silverheels. What do you think?

WILLUM. I think that sounds really cowardly.

AXEL. I thought you'd like it. When do we rehearse?

WILLUM. We're not going to rehearse.

AXEL. (*Taking him by the shoulders.*) Willum, *face* it. This is a desperate situation. It calls for something infantile. (*Willum sighs.*) Kemp—that's who I bet could help us. Kemp would know some strange customs. He lives in a transient hotel in Indianapolis.

WILLUM. Ax—.

AXEL. (*Getting more excited.*) Oh, let me work on this; it could be—it could be that favor Tansy's always bugging me about.

WILLUM. What?

AXEL. Tansy's always saying, "Do somebody an anonymous favor, will you?" Well—this could be it. Of course, there's no way for it to be anonymous, but—.

TANSY. (*Astonished.*) Well, Axel—?

AXEL. What?

TANSY. Just—surprised you remembered that.

AXEL. So would this count with you? I mean, if Rick were to leave—?

TANSY. Well—it's not for me to say—.

AXEL. But?

TANSY. But—yes, all right; if you really somehow got Rick to leave Willum in peace, with no hard feelings—yes, in my book, that would count.

WILLUM. (*Setting up his drawing materials.*) Look—far be it from me to be a godless party-pooper, but you're going to have to forget this.

AXEL. Leave it for now. Call me if you change your mind. (*At the door.*) "Mister Microphone," huh? Wonder what he'll ask you for *next* Christmas? (*He leaves.*)

WILLUM. Oh, me.

TANSY. I'll go down, too. I've got phoning to do. (*She starts out with her paper.*)

WILLUM. What's that? Washington paper?

TANSY. The Post, yes. (Willum smiles briefly, starts taping a piece of sketch paper to his drawing board.) I—listen, for what it's worth—since this Rick thing started, I feel like a real traitor—.

WILLUM. No, pooh.

TANSY. I do. Leaving here Friday? Leaving you here, with him?

WILLUM. No, listen, I'm gonna say something to him. I will.

TANSY. Good.

WILLUM. I don't know what.

TANSY. (At the window.) Here he comes, he's walking down the road. You want me to stay?

WILLUM. I'll be fine. I'm doing my work.

TANSY. All right. (She leaves. Willum starts to set up his drawing materials, then starts pacing back and forth in front of the couch, speaking objectively, maturely, to an imaginary Rick.)