

Billie (Gingens)

BILLIE. (Quietly.) Forty-one?
BROCK. (Loudly.) Forty-one! (SHE marks score, then takes a sip of her drink. HE shuffles, cuts, hands her the pack. HE takes cigarette, lights it. SHE deals slowly, moving her lips as she counts inaudibly. THEY pick up their cards and play. BROCK discards first. BILLIE draws, discards. BROCK draws again.) If you pay attention, that Verrall guy can do you some good.
BILLIE. (Not looking up.) All right. (Draws and discards.)
BROCK. (Draws.) You're in the Big League now. I want you to watch your step. (Discards.)
BILLIE. (Still absorbed in game.) All right. (Draws and discards. BROCK draws and discards.)
BROCK. You gotta learn to fit in. If not, I can't have you around, and that's no bull. (A pause, as THEY play. BILLIE draws and discards.) You gotta be careful what you do. (Draws and discards.)
And what you say!
BILLIE. (Picking up his discard.) Three! (Lays out her hand.)
BROCK. (Scores his cards. Lays one off on her hand.) Twenty-eight.
BILLIE. (Pencil poised, ready to score. SHE wants to hear him say it again.) Twenty-eight?
BROCK. (Too clearly.) Twenty-eight! (BILLIE shoves cards to BROCK for him to shuffle. SHE starts to score. Arithmetic is not her strong point, so using her hand, on which SHE is resting her head, SHE counts with her fingers, tapping them in sequence against her forehead. In this way, SHE achieves total, scores it, then leans back.)
BILLIE. You could use a little education yourself, if you ask me.
BROCK. Who asked you?
BILLIE. Nobody.
BROCK. So shut up! (Hands cards over. BILLIE deals, her annoyance speeding tempo, and again counting inaudibly. When she has finished, she slams down remainder of deck.)
BILLIE. Can't I talk?
BROCK. Play your cards. (Pause. SHE begins to sort cards.)
BILLIE. (Loudly.) It's a free country.
BROCK. (Discards.) That's what you think. (A pause. BILLIE starts to sing "Anything Goes," without words. Her memory of the song includes the orchestration, complete with breaks, trumpet figures and percussion. SHE gets through sixteen bars, BROCK becoming increasingly annoyed. HE has picked up a card, but her singing has so disconcerted him that HE cannot make a decision.)

BILLIE. (Imitating muted trumpet.) Tyah—dah—
BROCK. (Yelling.) Do you mind? (Looks first at his card, then at his hand, discards.)
BILLIE. (Picking up his discard.) Gin. (SHE lays out her hand, as BROCK begins to resemble the King of Diamonds.)
BROCK. (Scores his cards.) Thirty-four.
BILLIE. (Ready with pencil as before.) Thirty-four?
BROCK. Thirty-four!
BILLIE. (Scores, as before, as HE shuffles, then with a smile and a shout.) Schneider.
BROCK. (Stops shuffling.) Where do you get the schneid? (BILLIE twists score-pad around to prove it.)
BILLIE. Fifty-five dollars. And sixty cents.
BROCK. (Petulantly.) All right, that's all! (BROCK throws down cards, rises. Crosses to sideboard, pours drink.)
BILLIE. Pay me now.
BROCK. (Yelling.) What the hell's the matter? Don't you trust me?
BILLIE. What are you hollerin'? You always make me pay.
BROCK. (Annoyed.) Christ sake!
BILLIE. (Taunting him in sing-song.) Sore loser!
BROCK. Shut up!
BILLIE. (With perfect, ladylike control.) Fifty-five dollars and sixty cents. (HE comes down to table, takes large roll of bills from his pocket, pays off fifty-five dollars. HE starts to go, but BILLIE stops him with a querying look. Pained, but resigned to defeat, HE counts out change, two quarters and a dime, tosses them to her across table. SHE slaps each one into possession.) Thanks. (HE starts for staircase, stops discreetly behind BILLIE, looks down at her with predatory eyes.)
BROCK. Come on up.
BILLIE. (Casually.) In a minute. (BROCK starts up stairs.)
BROCK. (Stops on second step.) Now! (This is the one moment in their daily life of which Billie is boss. BOTH recognize the fact.)
BILLIE. (In charge.) In a minute, I told you! (SHE rifles cards. BROCK goes up quietly, shuts door. BILLIE moves her winnings to one side, clears table in front of her and lays out a hand of solitaire. SHE sings, softly, as before, and plays in time to music. This time we hear the lyric, as they were carefully coached into the chorus.)
"In olden days a glimpse of stocking
Was looked on as something shocking

But now Lord knows (tyah dah)
Anything Goes (tata tata—tata tata—tzing!)
Good authors, too, who once—"

(Door buzzer sounds. SHE stops singing, looks upstairs, makes a few personal adjustments, goes to door and opens it. PAUL comes in, carrying a few books and two newspapers.)

PAUL. Hello.

BILLIE. (Feigning surprise.) Hello!

PAUL. Moping papers. (Offers them to her.)

BILLIE. You could of saved yourself the trouble. I don't read papers.

PAUL. Never?

BILLIE. Once in a while the back part.

PAUL. I think you should. The front part.

BILLIE. Why?

PAUL. It's interesting.

BILLIE. Not to me.

PAUL. How do you know if you never read it?

BILLIE. Look, if you're gonna turn out to be a pest, we could call the whole thing off right now.

PAUL. Sorry.

BILLIE. I look at the paper sometimes. I just never understand it. So what's the sense?

PAUL. Tell you what you do. You look through these. (HE gives her newspapers.) Anything you don't understand, make a mark. (Takes red editing pencil from his pocket and hands it to her.) Then, tomorrow, I'll explain whatever I can. All right?

BILLIE. All right.

PAUL. (Adding books.) And I thought you might like these.

BILLIE. I'll try. (SHE pulls books and newspapers on top of bookcase.)

PAUL. No, don't do that. Just start reading. If you don't like it, stop. Start something else.

BILLIE. (Coming back to him.) There's only one thing. My eyesight isn't so hot.

PAUL. Well, why don't you wear glasses?

BILLIE. (Aghast.) Glasses!

PAUL. Why not?

BILLIE. Because they're terrible! (THEY look at each other for a time. SHE notices his glasses, but cannot think of anything to say that will soften her remark. SHE moves in closer to him. Then

closer still. It is as though they were about to dance. SHE leans toward him. Now THEY are touching. All at once THEY melt into an embrace, and kiss. A long expert kiss. THEY come out of it. BILLIE continues, casually.) Of course, they're not so bad on men.

PAUL. (Softly.) Good-night, Billie.

BILLIE. Good-night. (PAUL leaves, BILLIE looks after him, then with a new smile SHE starts to sing. In time to music, moves to light switch R. of door.)

"Good authors, too, who once knew better words—"

(Snaps out sitting-room lights. Balcony is still illuminated. Starts up stairs, slowly, continuing song.)

"Now only use four-letter words

Writing prose (tyah dah)—"

(SHE stops, pivots on last phrase, then moves down stairs, picks up newspapers and books, clutches them tightly, starts up again, singing.)

"Writing prose—"

(SHE reaches top of stairs, sings the break through HARRY'S closed door as two notes of derision.)

"Tyah! Dah!"

(SHE enters her own room as she finishes the phrase triumphantly.)
"Anything goes!"

(SHE slams the door closed. The room is in darkness.)

FAST CURTAIN

ACT II

SCENE. The same. About two months have passed. The room looks lived in. A desk has replaced table R.C. It is loaded with books, papers, copies of *The New Republic*, clippings, tall glass filled with pencils, phone, memo pad, desk basket. On down stage chair R. are record albums and a large paper map. In front of this chair is a large globe map on a pedestal. The shelves of the sideboard are filled with books. Also books on floor under sideboard. On chair L. and downstage of sideboard is a large framed Picasso reproduction. On floor under chair a pile of art folios. In front of balcony are four piles