

# Summer of the Seventeenth Doll



## INTRODUCTION

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHY OF RAY LAWLER

Lawler was the second child of eight of a Melbourne council worker. When he was 13 he left school to work in a factory, though he continued to attend evening classes. He wrote his first play when he was 19 years old, but didn't attract much attention until he presented *Cradle of Thunder* at a theatre competition in 1952. The premiere of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* three years later catapulted him to fame as an Australian playwright, and he played the role of Barney in the premiere and in the London production. After that, he lived in various European countries and married his wife, actress Jacklyn Kelleher, in 1956. They had three children together. In 1975, Lawler returned to Australia to fill the role of associate director at the Melbourne Theatre Company. He agreed to complete a trilogy centered on *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll*, which resulted in *Kid Stakes* and *Other Times*. In 1980, he was named an Officer of the Order of the British Empire, and a small theater in the Melbourne Theater Company's theater is named for him.

### HISTORICAL CONTEXT

*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is widely heralded as the first play that signifies Australia's maturity and ability to produce dramatic works that were engaging and successful on an international stage. It was the first Australian play to receive critical acclaim in London, in part because it was believed to truly capture both the Australian dialect and a unique national psyche. It was written at a time when many other Australian plays focused on men of the outback and glorifying the conflict of man versus nature—a lifestyle and a conflict that was by that point giving way to rapid urbanization and development. In terms of dramatic staging, the bush lifestyle was also notoriously hard to bring to life onstage if only because of the set requirements. Though *Doll* still holds up men of the bush, by bringing men like Roo, Barney, and Johnnie into an urban setting, it mirrors the real-life shift in Australian culture to the cities. Similarly, the advancing age of Roo and Barney suggest that the bush lifestyle itself, though compelling and culturally glorified, is on its way out.

### RELATED LITERARY WORKS

*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is part of what's known as "the doll trilogy": *Kid Stakes* tells how the tradition of the layoff season began for Olive, Nancy, Roo, and Barney in 1937, while *Other Times* takes place in the mid-1940s. *Doll* is often

compared critically to Henrik Ibsen's 1879 play [A Doll's House](#) because of similar themes of youth, particularly as it pertains to the plays' female characters. Similarly, Olive in particular shares many qualities with J.M. Barrie's [Peter Pan](#) in her desire to maintain her youth, even when doing so is practically impossible. Finally, the close, egalitarian friendship between Barney and Roo is part of an Australian literary tradition of "mateship," or close male friendship based on loyalty and shared experience. Henry Lawson explores this idea in his short story "A Sketch of Mateship."

### KEY FACTS

- **Full Title:** Summer of the Seventeenth Doll
- **When Written:** 1955
- **Where Written:** Melbourne, Australia
- **When Published:** The play premiered in 1955 in Melbourne and toured in London two years later
- **Literary Period:** Australian Postmodernism
- **Genre:** Drama
- **Setting:** Carlton, Victoria, Australia; 1952
- **Climax:** Roo and Barney's fight
- **Antagonist:** Advancing age is the enemy of many of the characters; Roo believes that Johnnie is his enemy
- **Point of View:** Theater

### EXTRA CREDIT

**There's an App for That.** In 2013, Currency Press released an iPad app detailing the history of *Doll*. It includes archival material from Australian productions as well as interviews with Ray Lawler, several prominent theatre critics, and actors from more recent productions.

**The American Movie.** In 1959, Leslie Norman, an English film director, adapted *Doll* for the screen. His adaptation has been criticized for rejecting the Australian character of the original. Norman didn't deny the criticism; he's quoted as saying he wanted "to keep it Australian, but unfortunately the Americans...couldn't understand the Australian accent and [he] had to cut out all the Australianisms." In the film, Roo is played by American actor Ernest Borgnine, who speaks with an American accent.



## PLOT SUMMARY

The play begins with three women—Olive, Pearl, and Bubba (who is younger than the other two)—awaiting the arrival of

Barney and Roo. Every summer for the last sixteen years Barney and Roo have spent their “layoff season” (when they are released from their jobs cane-cutting for a few months) at Olive’s house, which is owned by her mother, Emma. Roo is dating Olive, and Barney usually dates Nancy, but this year Nancy has gotten married and abandoned the layoff season, so Olive has invited her co-worker Pearl as a companion for Barney. Bubba lives next door, and was only a small child when the layoff seasons began.

The action opens with Bubba tying ribbons on candy canes in the living room (a tradition of the layoff season) while Pearl, dressed in her **good black dress**, reads a magazine. Olive comes downstairs and shows Pearl a photo of Barney, Roo, Nancy, and Olive drunk at an amusement park. Pearl isn't impressed. Olive insists that Nancy made a mistake getting married. In reply, Pearl insists that Nancy “made herself cheap” and says that Barney needs to be taken in hand. Bubba, who has gone to fetch beer, returns as Pearl asks what the candy canes are for. Bubba is embarrassed as Olive explains that it's an inside joke they play on Roo and Barney, while Pearl continues to act superior and standoffish. Bubba heads home. Pearl studies the photograph again and says she's not getting involved in a “nasty mess.” Olive angrily calls Pearl out on playing the part of a respectable mother (Pearl has an eighteen-year-old daughter, Vera), and tries to explain that the layoff season isn't indecent: it's magical and perfect. She tells Pearl to be polite or leave, and pours them both beer.

Barney enters the house carrying Emma over his shoulder, and Roo enters behind. Roo and Olive kiss while Barney and Pearl introduce themselves. Pearl introduces herself as “Missus Cunningham,” but Olive insists that Pearl go by her first name. Olive gives Barney a telegram from Nancy. Barney becomes serious and tells Olive that Roo is broke after he walked out on his job two months ago. Roo had fought with a new young employee named Johnnie Dowd after hurting his back. Roo returns from fetching luggage and seems embarrassed, and Olive gets upset that Roo didn't come to her when he walked out. They make up and call the others into the room to eat, and Roo gives Olive her seventeenth **kewpie doll** (another layoff season tradition for the group).

The next morning, Olive, dressed for work, tells Roo that Pearl didn't like Barney's drinking or the fact that he tried to go in her bedroom late at night. Olive picks up the seventeenth doll and insists that while the other dolls are pretty, this one is beautiful.

When Olive leaves, Emma talks to Roo and offers him a loan. Roo refuses. Bubba stops in to leave an envelope of photos from Nancy's wedding. She asks Roo to give it to Barney and not let Olive see. Bubba asks if the layoff season is going to be the same this year without Nancy, and Roo assures her it will be. Bubba leaves and Barney comes downstairs and insists he doesn't remember banging on Pearl's door. Roo says he's going get a job, and Barney is aghast—the layoff season is supposed

to be a break from working. Barney offers Roo money instead, and says that Roo is just mad at Barney for not joining him when Roo walked off the job cane-cutting. Roo huffs upstairs as Olive comes to tell Barney that he needs to sweet-talk Pearl into staying.

Pearl appears and tells Barney she doesn't approve of his “de facto wives”—he has three children with three different women. Barney tells her he has a lot of love to give, and isn't just out to take love. He begins to tell Pearl the three qualities he thinks a woman needs, but Olive appears and cuts him off. While Pearl fetches her purse, Olive and Barney commiserate that Roo is getting a job during the layoff season. As Pearl, Olive, and Roo leave, Pearl asks Barney to take her suitcases to her room—she's decided to stay.

On New Year's Eve, the group sits quietly in the living room listening to children playing outside. Barney suggests they go to the beach, but nobody is interested. Pearl says she's knitting a sweater for Barney's son. Bubba enters, dressed to go out, and explains that she's going to a social dance but would prefer to stay in. She suggests they all go to the Morris' before leaving. Pearl asks who the Morris' are, and Olive finally snaps that they're Nancy's cousins, so the group won't be going. A few minutes later, Pearl recounts a time that Olive referred to Barney and Roo as “eagles” coming down every year for the mating season, but this makes everyone else uncomfortable. Pearl goes on to say that the things they've done and the places they've gone haven't been as fantastic as Olive told her they'd be. Olive angrily tells Pearl to stop and decides to go to bed, but Barney suggests they have Emma come in to play piano, so they can sing.

Emma agrees, but after they start a song the second time, Emma insists that someone is singing off key, and leaves in a huff when Olive suggests that she's off. Barney suggests they open beer, and Olive and Pearl go to the kitchen to get snacks. In their absence, Barney tells Roo that he met up with “the boys” (other cane-cutters from their job) in the pub by coincidence, and asks if Roo would agree to go out with them and Johnnie Dowd. Roo is angry and wants nothing to do with Johnnie, and he becomes even more so when Barney suggests they leave the following week to take a job picking grapes. Barney insists this year hasn't been fun anyway without Nancy, but Roo insists that he owes it to Olive to stay. When Olive and Pearl return, Barney begins pouring beers for everyone. He raises a toast to “happy days and glamorous nights.” Pearl chokes on her beer and laughs at the thought of it being a “glamorous night.” Olive begins to cry, and Barney looks miserable as fireworks go off.

A few days later, Roo is asleep on the couch after work when the others return from the bar with a very drunk Barney. Olive comes in first, wakes Roo, and warns him that Barney brought a friend. When Roo goes to the window, he sees that the “friend” is Johnnie Dowd. Barney appears on the verandah, supported

by Johnnie and Pearl. Johnnie greets Roo and asks if they can shake hands. Roo finally accepts, and Barney excitedly tries to kiss Pearl. She retreats upstairs. Johnnie apologizes to Roo, and the men try to arrange all going out together. Roo finally agrees to go to the races the following day, and then leaves to shower. Barney suggests that he, Johnnie, and Roo go to the races as just the three of them, and then decides it'll be better if they take Pearl, Olive, and someone for Johnnie. Barney yells for Pearl and when she appears, asks if her young daughter, Vera, could go with Johnnie. Johnnie seems uncomfortable and Pearl even more so. She refuses, loses her composure, and runs upstairs.

Barney then runs outside and returns minutes later with a bewildered Bubba. Barney makes Bubba agree to come to the races with Johnnie, but Johnnie insists on asking Bubba himself. Bubba tells Johnnie that she does want to go with him. She tries to explain the magic of the house and the layoff season to Johnnie, but Johnnie doesn't see it. She tells him he just won't understand. Johnnie then asks Bubba for her real name (Kathie) before saying goodbye and leaving.

Bubba explains to Roo that she's going with Johnnie to the races the next day. Roo becomes angry when he decides that Barney and Johnnie conspired to get him to go out with them. He yells for Barney and tells Olive to leave. Roo then shoves Barney inside and accuses him of betraying him and trying to bring him down. Barney accuses Roo of being jealous of Johnnie, but Roo takes over and accuses Barney of a number of offenses. When he calls Barney a leech, the two start a fistfight. Olive and Emma run in and separate them. Olive is angry that the men are fighting over "one bad season," and Barney goads Roo to tell the truth of why he left their job early. Olive reminds everyone of Roo's bad back. When Barney laughs, Roo rushes Barney and forces him to his knees. Roo admits that his back was never hurt, and Johnnie's just a better man—that was why Roo left. Roo then begins to tell the room that women have started laughing at Barney after spending the night with him, and says that Barney isn't even good enough now to "hold" Nancy. Barney tries to throw a vase filled with dolls at Roo, but Roo intercepts and the vase shatters on the floor.

The next morning, Pearl is dressed in black again and prepared to leave. Olive calls Pearl's attention to the newly cleaned living room, free of all decorations (including the dolls Roo had given her). Pearl asks when Barney will return, and tells Olive she doesn't think that Olive knows Barney at all. Pearl continues, saying that nothing in the house is how Olive had described it, and she tells Olive that she'd think the same thing if she'd look at things from adult eyes. Olive implies that it's Pearl's fault things are different this year.

They hear a knock and Olive lets Barney in. Olive excuses herself as Barney comments on how respectable Pearl looks. Pearl insists she was never trying to be Nancy, and Barney admits that Pearl is leaving for the same reasons that Nancy

did: she couldn't get what she wanted here. Pearl tries to ask Barney what the third quality of a good woman is, but he says that Pearl doesn't possess the quality anyway. Olive returns to bid Pearl goodbye, and Pearl leaves.

Roo comes downstairs and remarks that the dolls are gone. Olive says that all the decorations were in bad repair and she couldn't bear to put them all back up. She insists she can live without decorations, since she's gone the summer thus far without fun and laughter. Roo tries to explain how hard it was to shake hands with Johnnie, but Olive is still angry about the fight and how this layoff season has been so awful. Emma enters as Olive runs upstairs. She sits and tells Roo that Nancy purposefully got out while things were still good. Roo asks Emma who's to blame for things going sour, and Emma is surprised. She tells Roo that no one is specifically to blame—they're all just getting too old for the layoff season. After arguing, Roo begins to see the sense in this. Emma points out that Barney only started lying when Roo started brushing him off, and she insists that Olive is a childish fool. As she leaves, Bubba and Barney come in from the verandah, arguing about Johnnie (Bubba wants to go meet Johnnie at a bar). Bubba insists that Johnnie honestly asked her out and asked for her real name, and says that this is her chance to recreate what she's been watching for seventeen years. She insists that she won't repeat the others' mistakes, and Roo calls her "Kathie" and gives her his blessing to go with Johnnie.

Olive returns and Roo sends Barney upstairs. Olive says that it's time to "settle up" for the past seventeen summers, which horribly offends Roo. Olive insists that the way Pearl saw things and spoke about things made her feel low and cheap. As Roo comforts her, Olive admits she didn't put the dolls back out because she was angry, and Roo tells Olive she's basically a young girl. He then tells her that he's not going back to cane-cutting again—he's planning on staying. Olive is confused, and Roo explains that only Barney is leaving—Roo wants to stay and marry Olive. Olive screams "No!" and insists that Roo go back to the cane fields. She yells at him to give her back what he took. As Emma and Barney run in, Olive leaves, sobbing. Emma tells the men to leave and not come back. Barney turns to Roo and says that they can go get jobs anywhere—they should stick together, and forget about Johnnie and the others. In a rage, Roo picks up the seventeenth doll and beats it against the piano. When the doll is shattered and ruined, he lets it drop. Barney encourages Roo to leave. They look at each other and silently acknowledge what they've lost before leaving.



## CHARACTERS

### MAJOR CHARACTERS

**Roo Webber** – Roo is a "ganger" (boss) of sugarcane cutters in northern Australia. He's the best of the best at his job and takes

great pride in this fact. Every layoff season, from December to April, he and his best friend, Barney, head south to spend their time off with Olive and Nancy. Two months before the start of the seventeenth layoff, Roo fired Tony Morena and hired a young man, Johnnie Dowd, to replace him. Johnnie was good enough that Roo felt threatened, and after a fight, Roo walked off the job. He was exceptionally hurt that Barney didn't walk off with him, and holds a grudge against Johnnie for usurping his position as ganger. When Roo and Barney arrive in Carlton, Roo is already out of money. Emma insists that Roo is trustworthy and offers him a loan, but Roo declines and decides to get a job. This is something that he seems to find distasteful, but the others find downright insulting. Despite this, Roo's relationship with Olive remains strong, affectionate, and tender. He brings her a **kewpie doll** every layoff as a token of his love, and she's particularly taken with the seventeenth doll. Though Roo continues to participate in the group's festivities and outings, his new job at the paint factory means the group doesn't often go out late. Like Olive, Roo sees the previous layoff seasons as magical and special, and is hurt and dismayed that Pearl doesn't see what they see. Roo places so much value in Barney's loyalty that he refuses to forgive Barney for not walking off the job with him. Roo is particularly incensed when Barney attempts to orchestrate an outing with Johnnie and some of the other boys from up north. This culminates in a fight between Roo and Barney, after which Roo realizes that he hasn't done anything wrong—he's just old. This realization brings about an entire change in demeanor. Roo decides to give up his job as a cane cutter and asks Olive to marry him, something both Roo and Olive previously despised in favor of their freewheeling lifestyle. When Olive refuses, Roo destroys the seventeenth doll and agrees to take new migrant jobs with Barney.

**Olive Leech** – Olive is a thirty-seven-year-old, happily employed barmaid who lives with her mother, Emma, in Carlton, Victoria. Olive looks forward to the layoff season when her lover, Roo, and Roo's friend Barney visit and spend five months vacationing away from the cane fields where they work. Every year Roo brings Olive a **kewpie doll**, and Olive arranges them throughout the living room. She sees them as a symbol of Roo's love for her. For the seventeenth summer, Olive invites her coworker Pearl to take Nancy's place. Olive laments Nancy's absence regularly and also speaks disparagingly about marriage in general. When Pearl talks about how she doesn't see the charm in any aspect of the layoff season, Olive angrily silences her. As the play goes on, Olive becomes progressively more distraught that Pearl seemingly refuses to see the magic of the season, though Olive eventually comes to the understanding that a person needs to have experienced the last sixteen layoffs to truly understand the significance and the beauty. Her relationship with Roo is generally tender and caring, though Olive is very upset when Roo has to get a job. After Roo and Barney fight and break a vase, Olive spends the

night tidying the living room of all the decorations, including the dolls, and doesn't redecorate when she's done. Emma tells Roo that she saw Olive sobbing in the middle of the night, cuddling the seventeenth kewpie doll—something that makes Roo understand the extent of Olive's intense immaturity. When Roo asks Olive to marry him, she's shocked, hurt, and confused, and yells for Roo to give her the seventeen summers back. Her refusal of marriage is a refusal to mature, grow up, and accept the reality that the layoff seasons as she knows them are over.

**Pearl Cunningham** – Pearl is one of Olive's coworkers at the pub, though she's much less content with her position than Olive is. Pearl is a widow about Olive's age with an eighteen-year-old daughter named Vera, and she hopes to marry Barney. She believes marriage will allow her to quit her job and lead a more "proper" life, as well as set a good example for Vera. Though Pearl accepts Olive's invitation to join her for the layoff season, she's skeptical of the entire arrangement: she sees the lifestyle as indecent and infinitely less desirable than marriage, and she fears that she's setting a terrible example for her daughter. Pearl also fails to see the charm and the fun in the layoff season activities, and becomes extremely offended when Olive silences her for voicing her opinions on the matter. Though Pearl is wary of becoming involved with Barney, she does eventually agree to stay for the season and have a relationship with him. She believes Barney is desperately in need of marriage and seeks to reform him and his relationships with his children. Pearl never fully grasps the significance of the layoff season to Barney, Roo, and Olive, and when she points out how shabby something is or how much fun they didn't have, she seems not to notice when it makes the others sad. The last straw for Pearl comes when Barney asks her if Vera can accompany Johnnie Dowd to the races. This causes her to reassume what Barney terms her "protective mother" guise, call things off with Barney, and leave Emma's house before the end of the season.

**Barney Ibbot** – Barney is Roo's best friend. Though Olive describes him as being short, the stage directions indicate that he's only short in relation to Roo. He's about forty, beginning to gray, and has a potbelly. Until this layoff season, Barney had been in a relationship with Nancy. He's sad that Nancy married someone else, and Roo confides to Bubba that Barney may have even cried when he found out. However, Barney refuses to be tied down, and it's implied that he had (and has) a number of other women he sees. He insists to Pearl that he's not out to get all the love he can; rather, he says he just wants to give as much love as possible. Though Pearl seems to warm to the idea, she takes great offense that Barney has three children with three different women. He insists that he couldn't choose one to marry, and that he did the right thing because he paid the required child support. Throughout the play, Barney drinks heavily. His relationship with Roo, which has been inseparable in previous years, is faltering because Barney refused to walk

off the job with Roo in the north. Roo sees this as the ultimate betrayal, made worse only by Barney's open admiration of Johnnie Dowd, the young man who took Roo's place as "ganger." During Roo and Barney's massive fight, Barney admits that he lied when he said that Roo hurt his back to protect Roo's pride, though Roo continues to see it as evidence of Barney's untrustworthiness. Though Barney initially decides to pick grapes with Johnnie after the fight, when Olive turns down Roo's offer of marriage, Barney reaffirms his loyalty to Roo. The two leave together.

**Bubba Ryan** – Bubba is a twenty-two-year-old young woman who lives next door to Emma. She's been joining in on the layoff season festivities since she was a small child and views Barney and Roo as uncles. When she was fifteen she, Nancy, and Olive forced Barney and Roo to accept that Bubba wasn't a child anymore, but though they started bringing her adult gifts like perfume, they never fully accepted that she's an adult. She views the layoff season as a magical time and desperately wants to recreate the magic for herself. Bubba sees her opportunity to do so when Barney introduces her to Johnnie Dowd, a young man he and Roo worked with up north. Johnnie asks Bubba for her real name (Kathie) and remarks that Barney, Roo, and Olive haven't accepted the fact that Bubba is an adult. Despite her admiration for Johnnie, Bubba is hurt and defensive when Johnnie refuses to see the magic of the layoff season that she's seen for the past sixteen years, and is very slow to warm to Pearl for the same reasons. However, she agrees with Barney when he suggests that she's outgrown the layoffs of the past, and it's implied that she goes out to create her own layoff season magic with Johnnie.

**Emma Leech** – Emma is Olive's seventy-year-old mother. She allows the layoff season shenanigans to take place at her home in Carlton, Victoria, and Olive lives with her the rest of the year. Emma is a wry, irritable old lady who's always looking to eke money out of her houseguests, Barney and Roo in particular. She loves to eavesdrop and is generally cantankerous, though she cooks for her houseguests and tidies after them. She also loves to sing, and her voice is something she's exceptionally proud of. She kindly offers to lend Roo money and tries to support him in other ways throughout the play. She enlightens Roo to the fact that he's old and implies that she thought more highly of Nancy than she does of Roo, Barney, or Olive. Emma especially doesn't think very highly of Olive, as she thinks it's silly and immature for a grownup woman to cling so tightly to the **kewpie dolls** that Roo brings.

**Johnnie Dowd** – Roo hired Johnnie to replace Tony Moreno in the cane fields up north. He's a young, strong, and burly man. Roo soon found that Johnnie was stronger and faster than he was, which resulted in a fierce sense of rivalry and finally, a fight. Johnnie was made "ganger" after Roo left and for much of the play, Roo describes Johnnie as a good-for-nothing upstart. When Johnnie appears in person, he's kinder, more sensible,

and infinitely more emotionally intelligent than Roo made him out to be. He encourages Roo to shake hands and honestly wants to get on Roo's good side. When Barney tries to set Johnnie up with Bubba, Johnnie takes it into his own hands and steals Bubba's heart by asking her for her real name. Like Pearl, Johnnie is disillusioned by what he finds at the house. He finds it drab and not at all like Roo and Barney said it was.

**Nancy** – Nancy was one of the original four who stayed at Emma's house for the layoff season. Though she never appears in the play—she married several months before the seventeenth layoff season—the other characters mention her often. She was in a relationship with Barney and used to work at the pub with Olive. Olive, Barney, and Roo describe her as having been a lot of fun, and Olive often uses Nancy's words to tell Pearl about Roo and Barney. Emma insists that Nancy knew the layoff seasons wouldn't last forever and got out while it was still good.

## MINOR CHARACTERS

**Tony Moreno** – Tony is a man that Roo fires in the cane fields and then replaces with Johnnie Dowd. Though his age is never stated, he's likely around Roo's age, and it's this that finally makes Roo realize he's old. Tony never appears in the play.

**Vera** – Vera is Pearl's eighteen-year-old daughter. She never appears in the play herself.



## THEMES

In LitCharts literature guides, each theme gets its own color-coded icon. These icons make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. If you don't have a color printer, you can still use the icons to track themes in black and white.



### YOUTH, MATURITY, AND GROWING UP

*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* tells the story of four friends—Roo, Olive, Barney, and Nancy—whose summer tradition is changing. Roo and Barney, who work as sugarcane cutters in the bush seven months out of the year, spend their five non-working months (the "layoff season") with Olive and Nancy, engaging in all manner of youthful shenanigans. They've been observing this tradition for sixteen years, but the seventeenth year is different: Nancy has married another man so she can no longer participate, and a conflict in the cane fields leaves Roo unemployed and in need of a summer job. These unforeseen changes force all the characters to come face to face with the project of growing up, something that the deliberately youthful atmosphere of the layoff season has allowed them to put off until middle age. The characters' struggle to adapt to the basic facts of adulthood suggests that putting maturity off is not only

foolish, it can have disastrous consequences.

During the seventeenth summer, Roo, Barney, and Olive work hard to maintain their sense of immature, youthful abandon in spite of the fact that they're all between the ages of 35 and 40. Barney and Olive in particular fully expect to spend the time drinking and going out on the town, as well as engaging in all the other youthful activities that occupied their time in years past. This is a conscious decision to live as though they're still in their early twenties, the age they were when the tradition began. However, their attempts to remain youthful are unconvincing and ultimately, unsuccessful. First, the stage directions offer a number of notes alluding to the physical signs of the characters' advancing age: Barney is going gray and has a potbelly, while the newcomer Pearl, who's the same age as Olive, dyes her hair. This suggests that even if the characters behave like they're twenty years younger, their bodies tell a different story about their age. The physical effects of aging are most noticeable in Roo, who gave up his job cutting cane because he couldn't keep up with Johnnie Dowd, a man 15 years his junior. Clearly Roo's body is aging, even if he refuses to mature emotionally.

Roo, Barney, and Olive are also disturbed by Nancy's decision to marry, a choice that symbolizes her acceptance of adulthood. The other characters see this as a threat to the preservation of their own artificial youthfulness. To fill the gap left by Nancy, Olive invites her coworker, the widow Pearl Cunningham, to take her place as Barney's romantic partner. Unlike Olive (and Nancy in years past), Pearl strives to look and act like a proper woman approaching 40. Further, Pearl doesn't find the traditional layoff season activities charming: she finds them immature and distasteful. While Pearl fully embraces adulthood, Olive intentionally cultivates her image to seem young. Like Nancy's decision to marry, this suggests that some aspects of aging (or youth) are conscious choices individuals can make. Though they try desperately and overwhelmingly to choose youth, on New Year's Eve the group bickers over what unfulfilling activity to do while Bubba, the young neighbor girl from next door, goes out dancing. Bubba, whose activities and actual age (22) mark her as young, makes clear that the older generation's attempt to stay youthful is failing.

The play ends with the characters still unsettled about their age, though acknowledging it slightly more. As Olive finally cleans the living room the night after Barney and Roo's fight, the disintegrating butterflies are a powerful reminder that Olive's youth is no longer with her. Further, when Olive puts her beloved **kewpie dolls** away—symbols of her own willful immaturity—it similarly represents Olive putting away her youth. This shows that, even though one can choose whether or not to mature, the process of aging is inevitable.



## IDEALIZATION VS. REALITY

For the past sixteen years, Barney, Roo, Olive, and Nancy have idealized the layoff season, the five months of each year that they spend lounging, drinking, going out, and having sex. They value this time beyond measure and without any sense that their lifestyle is shallow, immature, or possibly damaging in the long run. During the seventeenth summer of the layoff, however, Nancy doesn't participate because she recently married another man. To replace her, Olive invites her coworker, Pearl. Later in the summer, Roo and Barney's young coworker (and Roo's rival) Johnnie Dowd joins them for an evening, and the outside perspectives of Pearl and Johnnie make the group of friends realize that their idealized summers look very different, and much less fantastical, through the eyes of others.

Barney, Roo, and Olive idealize every aspect of the layoff season, from the drinking and the outings to the house where they stay. They describe with joy the trinkets that Barney and Roo have brought back from the north throughout the years and recount the parties they attended with obvious nostalgia. These three literally see the last sixteen years as perfect. However, Nancy's marriage hits Barney, Roo, and Olive very hard. As they think of their summers as "heaven" and "a time to live," they struggle to understand why Nancy would voluntarily choose to give them up. Nancy's marriage is therefore the group's first hint that the layoff season might not be as idyllic as they imagined.

Instead of allowing the summers of the past to remain in the past and creating a new summer routine that better fits their adult lives, Olive decides to replace Nancy to save their dying ritual. Though Olive realizes that things cannot be exactly the same without Nancy, she foolishly believes that Pearl will integrate seamlessly into the group's immature hijinks. Pearl, however, finds the entire arrangement indecent. She finds Emma's house, where the group stays, shabby; she thinks the traditional trips are boring; and she's entirely unimpressed by the legends and stories of years past. Pearl is also very vocal about all of this, which distresses Olive to no end—Pearl's comments challenge Olive's belief in the idyllic past. Olive's touchiness about the subject suggests that she's aware that the illusion is tenuous.

It's logical that Pearl, a widow with a nearly-adult child, would find the layoff season traditions immature, but it's telling that when Roo's adversary, 25-year-old Johnnie, visits, he's similarly disillusioned by what he sees. Johnnie tells Bubba that from the stories Roo and Barney told about their layoff season shenanigans, he expected to find something much grander than a shabby house filled with **kewpie dolls**. This suggests that even though Johnnie is a young man, he recognizes the absurdity of the middle-aged adults' youthful lifestyle. Their layoff season isn't idyllic in his eyes; it's sad and reinforces how out of touch with reality Roo and Barney are. In addition to

objecting to the group's immature idealization of the layoff season, both Pearl and Johnnie also find it absurd that Olive, Roo, and Barney cannot acknowledge the reality that Bubba, a young neighbor who has witnessed the layoff season for all seventeen years, is no longer a child. Though Bubba looks and acts like the 22-year-old young woman that she is, her older companions continue to treat her as though she's still the young child they remember from years past. For them, it's essential that Bubba remain a child in their eyes because it allows them to imagine that nobody is aging and maintain the illusion of their idyllic past.

While the fight between Barney and Roo impresses upon them the undeniable and painful fact that the ideal they once strove for is no longer sustainable, their final conversation with Bubba makes them realize that they must pass the torch on to the younger generation. Bubba insists to them that she does still view the layoff seasons of the past as an ideal, and further, that she wants to recreate that ideal for herself as an adult. This shows that though the practice of sacrificing reality for a falsely idyllic lifestyle is over for the older generation, those of Bubba's generation will use what they witnessed as children (and still believe to be desirable) to imagine and map out their own futures. Though Bubba also witnessed the fights, discontent, and other ill effects of continuing the idealization for too long, she insists that sort of thing won't happen to her. Roo and Barney can only hope that by bearing witness to the consequences of their own prolonged idealization, Bubba—and the reader or audience—will be able to escape some of the pain they experienced as a result of refusing to accept reality.



## GENDER AND WORK

*Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* explores the intersection between gender and work, showing, in particular, how work informs the characters' ideas

of masculinity. For Barney, Roo, and Olive, cane cutting—backbreaking manual labor in the Australian bush—is an undeniably masculine job that allows for a freeform, untethered lifestyle. However, when it comes to light that Roo walked off the job after being humiliated by the physical limitations of his age and must then get a job in the city to support himself, the characters grapple with their biases about gender and work. Despite being confronted with the downsides of clinging tightly to their preconceived gender roles, they struggle to create new definitions, which shows how entrenched their biases about gender are.

Critics have noted that *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* is classically Australian in the way it styles masculinity. All three male characters—Barney, Roo, and Johnnie—perform backbreaking manual labor for the seven months they work cutting sugarcane, and then for the five months of the layoff season they get to enjoy the fruits of their labor in the city with beautiful women. Olive's comment to Pearl that Roo and

Barney are "real men" suggests that she defines masculinity in terms of how and where men work. She quotes Nancy and explains that the men who live in the city are "soft city blokes," and in comparison to Roo and Barney, they look like "a bunch of skinned rabbits." This shows that location itself is gendered: the bush is masculine, while the city is feminine. Notably, when the men are in the city to have a good time, they don't forfeit any of their masculine qualities. This is exactly because their time in the city is temporary, which suggests that their masculinity both benefits from and isn't threatened by occasional forays into a feminine setting. However, when Roo insists on getting a job in the city, his companions struggle to see him as a "real man" because "real men" work in the bush and absolutely do not work during their hard-earned layoff season.

Though both Olive and (at least until the seventeenth year) Nancy work in the city year-round at an appropriately feminine job as barmaids, they too get to share in Roo and Barney's masculine lifestyle during the layoff season. They get to drink, dance, and have sex—activities they don't get to enjoy for the rest of the year, and activities that Pearl considers "improper." What Pearl truly means, however, is that the behavior is improperly *feminine*. It's also worth noting that though Olive and Nancy participate in the layoff season, the season is not the same for them as it is for the men. It's not a vacation for them; rather, it's an extension of their everyday lives, just with the addition of their male partners and the privileges they get to enjoy by associating with them. This suggests that while the bounds of masculinity are well-defined and restrictive, femininity arguably grants women more freedom to choose exactly how to be a woman—as long as what they choose affirms their male partners' masculinity. In this way, Nancy's marriage to another man, for example, is a refusal to affirm Barney's masculinity. He is emasculated because he "couldn't hold her."

The play's ideas about gender crystallize when Roo asks Olive to marry him and Olive refuses. Olive doesn't see marriage as a different iteration of their present relationship; rather, she sees it as an emasculating choice for Roo (as he'd remain in the city full-time) and as a threat to her freedom to decide how she can appropriately perform femininity. In this way, Olive selfishly denies Roo the freedom to defy the gender norms that constrict him, which is the very freedom that she covets for herself. By outright refusing to change, Olive denies herself and Roo the opportunity to redefine how gender and work function within their relationship. The general unhappiness among all the characters at the end of the play suggests that refusing to redefine gender roles doesn't just hurt one gender or the other: everyone suffers.



## LOYALTY, FRIENDSHIP, AND TRADITION

The layoff season is a longstanding tradition for Roo, Barney, Olive, and Nancy, and it is the guiding

event around which they organize their year. As such, the characters prize loyalty to their tradition highly—even at the expense of loyalty to and empathy for one another. When the seventeenth layoff season doesn't unfold as planned, the play begins to question the wisdom of relying so heavily on upholding a tradition, since true friendships begin to crumble under the weight of loyalty to a ritual that has clearly run its course.

Within the greater tradition of observing the layoff season, the four friends observe a number of smaller traditions and rituals. They take the same boat tour every year, attend the same holiday parties with the same people, and spend Christmas at a house in Selby. These traditions are so much a part of the layoff season that the participants stop questioning whether or not to do them. However, despite the mindlessness with which they observe their traditions, they're fiercely loyal to the traditions at the expense of people about whom they presumably care. For example, when Olive learns that Roo walked out on his job in the cane fields and must get a job in the city, she fails to empathize with the difficulty of that decision and instead becomes enraged by his betrayal of their tradition. Similarly, Olive considers Nancy's decision to marry a betrayal. By characterizing these decisions this way, Olive shows that she values loyalty to a tradition over anything else, even when Roo and Nancy's "unconventional" choices are construed as being made out of necessity (in the case of Roo's job) or out of free will and a desire for a change (as with Nancy's marriage).

The relationship most threatened by the layoff season's changes is that between Barney and Roo. Like the construction of their masculinity, the depiction of their friendship is classically Australian: it's an example of "mateship," an Australian literary tradition that focuses on exploring platonic male friendship that develops based on shared experience, often in Australia's harsh bush climate. By both working together and playing together during the layoff season, Barney and Roo continually affirm their affection and loyalty for each other. Though their friendship likely started in the cane fields, the fact that their friendship continues into the layoff season every year shows that this kind of platonic male loyalty can survive changes of scenery and routine. However, the potential durability of their friendship is compromised by their conflation of loyalty to one another to the tradition of the layoff season, which—unlike their friendship—is untenable. When Barney chooses to stay in the cane fields after Roo walks away from his position as gang leader, Roo sees this as an act of betrayal, not a choice Barney made out of financial necessity (which Barney claims it is). For both Roo and Barney, the entire spirit of the layoff season is compromised primarily because their loyalty to each other suddenly seems tenuous and untrustworthy.

The characters' conflicts over loyalty to tradition versus loyalty to one another reach a fever pitch near the end of the play. Barney and Roo consciously try to shift their loyalty away from

each other: Barney decides to leave early with Johnnie, while Roo decides to remain in the city and marry Olive. However, when Olive refuses Roo's offer, she refuses to shift her loyalty from the layoff season to Roo—though in doing so, the layoff season comes to a premature, grinding halt, so her misplaced loyalty was worthless. Though the season ends, this brings about a reaffirmation of Barney and Roo's loyalty to each other. Their rekindled friendship suggests once again that relying on tradition is foolish, as traditions are guaranteed to change. When Barney and Roo leave together, the play demonstrates that the loyalty they share is stronger and more resilient than any tradition.



## SYMBOLS

Symbols appear in **teal text** throughout the Summary and Analysis sections of this LitChart.



### KEWPIE DOLLS

Every layoff season, Roo brings Olive a kewpie doll. Kewpie dolls are collectible baby dolls that were created in 1912 and were immensely popular until the middle of the twentieth century. Olive sees the dolls as a symbol of Roo's love for her. However, the dolls also symbolize Olive's willful immaturity, as well as the immaturity of her relationship with Roo. Emma in particular deems them childish and Olive's love for them even more so. When Olive denies Roo's proposal of marriage and he destroys the seventeenth kewpie doll, he symbolically destroys their youthful relationship in his own mind. Destroying the kewpie doll allows Roo to truly grow up, while hanging onto the dolls keeps Olive from having to face the reality that the layoff seasons of her youth are over.



### PEARL'S BLACK DRESSES

In contrast to the kewpie dolls that symbolize Olive's immaturity, Pearl's clothing choices—particularly her black dresses in the first and third acts—symbolize Pearl's very intentional act of maturity. Pearl desperately wants to be seen as and treated like a proper lady, and she treats her black dresses as a costume that allows her to assume the role of that proper lady. This suggests that both propriety and impropriety are costumes of sorts that the characters can choose to wear (or not wear). At the end of the play, Pearl's return to her black dress is a telling symbol of her disillusionment with the entirety of the layoff season. By reassuming her outward appearance of propriety, Pearl refuses a final time to see the magic of the season.



## QUOTES

Note: all page numbers for the quotes below refer to the Samuel French, Inc. edition of *Summer of the Seventeenth Doll* published in 2011.

## Act 1, Scene 1 Quotes

☞☞ That's what the lay-off is. Not just playing around and spending a lot of money, but a time for livin'. You think I haven't sized that up against what other women have? I laugh at them every time they try to tell me. Even waiting for Roo to get back is more exciting than anything they've got.

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech (speaker), Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber, Pearl Cunningham

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 15

**Explanation and Analysis**

As they wait for Roo and Barney to arrive, Olive earnestly and angrily tries to explain to Pearl what the layoff season truly is, and how it's better than being married. The words Olive uses (calling the layoff "a time for livin'") shows that she very much separates the layoff season from the rest of the year—it exists above and separately from what she or someone else might consider "real life." In turn, this is what allows her to idealize it so much. It's not real life for her and therefore, it's special. Every part of the season is special too, even the lead up.

Olive's insistence that this is preferable to marriage or other long-term relationships shows that she values loyalty to this tradition more than she values those long-term, stable relationships. Those other relationships don't have the element of excitement that the layoff season does, and it's absolutely essential in Olive's mind to maintain the sense of excitement—something that's possible as long as, and only if, she continues to idealize the layoff season.

☞☞ All round would be the regulars—soft city blokes...and then in would come Roo and Barney. They wouldn't say anything...there'd just be the two of them walkin' in, then a kind of wait for a second or two, and quiet. After that, without a word, the regulars'd stand side to let 'em through, just as if they was a—a coupla kings. She always reckoned they made the rest of the mob look like a bunch of skinned rabbits.

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech (speaker), Roo Webber, Barney Ibbot, Nancy, Pearl Cunningham

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 16

**Explanation and Analysis**

Olive tells Pearl how Nancy used to speak about Roo and Barney's status as "real men," as opposed to the soft, less masculine men of the city. Nancy's story shows that at least in the minds of Olive and Nancy, masculinity is defined in a very particular way in terms of location (the bush versus the city) and in terms of work. Barney and Roo enjoy this kind of strange power over the city men because they work in the bush doing hard manual labor in a particularly masculine setting. In comparison, these men work in the city. It's worth noting that Olive and Nancy also work (or worked) in this bar—the city is a place where both men and women can work, unlike the bush. This in turn brings the men of the city down to the level of their female counterparts.

This also shows how women in the play function to confirm (or deny) the masculinity of the men around them. Though it's never said if Roo and Barney are aware that Nancy felt this way or confirmed any of this in so many words to their faces, it's evident that Nancy feels she has the power to differentiate "real men" from "not real men."

☞☞ Not as good as Roo when he's fit, mind yer, but he could run rings round the best of us. And this time he even made Roo look like a has-been. I never seen Roo git so mad, in no time at all he made it like a running fight between 'em, tryin' to git the better of this kid.

**Related Characters:** Barney Ibbot (speaker), Johnnie Dowd, Roo Webber, Olive Leech

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 25

**Explanation and Analysis**

Barney explains to Olive how the conflict between Roo and Johnnie Dowd began in the cane fields. Barney only obliquely refers to this as an age issue, and never directly calls Roo old, but he implies that Roo is indeed getting older and isn't performing the way he used to. This is, of course, to be expected—Roo is around 40 years old, and it would be silly to expect him to be able to keep up with a 25-year-old,

healthy man. Roo, however, is unwilling to accept this clear sign that he's aging and tries to fight Johnnie in order to assert his dominance and his ability. Taken together, this begins to allude to the problems with living in an idealized or fantastical reality, as part of the problem is that Roo has spent the last twenty years idealizing himself as a cane cutter, as well as the layoff season. The arrival of Johnnie makes it clear to Roo that he's not actually the best cane cutter around anymore, though by wholeheartedly fighting to ignore this fact, Roo only makes it more obvious to everyone around him.

●● Olive: You didn't go with him?

Barney: No.

Olive: Why not?

Barney: I dunno. It was all messed up. You know what Roo's always been to me, a sort of little tin god. I've never seen him in the wrong before.

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech, Barney Ibbot (speaker), Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 26

### Explanation and Analysis

When Barney tells Olive that he didn't walk off the cane-cutting job with Roo, Olive is incredulous and accusatory. All three involved in this—Barney, Roo, and Olive—are operating with only past traditions and habits in mind: Barney and Roo always act together, Roo simply doesn't walk off jobs (or get bested by other men), and Olive knows both of these things. Because they're so caught up in their habits, it's a major shock when something like this happens that challenges the way things have always been. It forces them to realize that there are other ways to do things, and it begins to create cracks in the sanctity and value of the traditions themselves.

This also shows how Barney very much idolizes Roo when he notes that he's never seen Roo be wrong before. Barney doesn't just idealize his relationship with Roo; he idolizes Roo himself and sees him as almost infallible and untouchable. This realization is what begins to bring about the deterioration of Barney and Roo's relationship.

## Act 1, Scene 2 Quotes

●● No, they're not. Someone's taking special care. Other times they've been pretty, but this one's beautiful. You can see.

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech (speaker), Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**   

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 31

### Explanation and Analysis

As Olive studies the seventeenth kewpie doll from Roo, she believes that it looks different from all the others, despite Roo's insistence otherwise. The particular language that Olive uses to describe the dolls betrays the fact that this summer is different, and somehow more grown-up. "Beautiful" is an adjective that, when compared with "pretty," often denotes age and maturity. Therefore, by calling the kewpie doll beautiful, she suggests that the tradition is growing up, changing, and developing. It's an especially interesting word choice given that she's describing a baby doll, and in this situation, the kewpie doll becomes a symbol for the unchanging tradition of the layoff season itself. Though the tradition is an undeniably youthful, immature, and childish one, the characters are beginning to look at it with adult eyes and perspectives. This shift is still subconscious at this point, however.

●● Gettin' a bit crowded, maybe you should start upstairs.

**Related Characters:** Roo Webber (speaker), Olive Leech

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 31

### Explanation and Analysis

When Olive asks Roo's opinion on where she should put the seventeenth kewpie doll, he suggests that she begin putting them upstairs. Once again, this is a subconscious acknowledgement that things are changing, as it's asking Olive to change her tradition of arranging the kewpie dolls throughout the living room. This also suggests that Roo sees the reality of this particular, relatively minor situation: the living room is too full and cannot reasonably house yet

another doll. In turn, this shows that realizations like this will come to different characters at different times, and about different things. Olive goes on to brush Roo's suggestion off as silly and finds a place for the seventeenth doll in the living room anyway, thereby insisting that tradition continue.

☝ It's going to be just the same, isn't it? I mean, you'll still be going to Selby at Christmas time, and—and all the rest. You won't alter anything?

**Related Characters:** Bubba Ryan (speaker), Nancy, Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 35

### Explanation and Analysis

Bubba nervously asks Roo if the layoff season activities will continue as usual this year. Nancy's absence is the cause of her nervousness, and Bubba's previous interactions with Pearl have made it abundantly clear that regardless of the fact that Roo goes on to insist that things will be exactly the same, he's wrong. Everyone is growing up and changing, and Pearl doesn't see the value in the group's traditions the way everyone else does and Nancy presumably used to.

Interestingly, Bubba's concern betrays that at this point, she wishes to maintain the status quo—which keeps her in the role of a beloved child, not a participating adult. This shows how powerful the idealized image of the layoff season is in her mind, as she goes on to admit later in the play that she very much wants to experience it for herself, not just witness it from the sidelines. This shows both how idealization allows people to imagine their futures, but also keeps them trapped in an idealized past and unable to actually realize those imagined futures or embrace the present.

☝ But the ordinary bloke's got a way out, he can get married. There's always been a sorta reason why I never could—

**Related Characters:** Barney Ibbot (speaker), Pearl Cunningham

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 40

### Explanation and Analysis

When Pearl confronts Barney about his three children and lack of a wife, Barney struggles to explain to Pearl why he never married any of those women. Notably, Barney differentiates himself from "ordinary blokes" here, implying that he sees himself as extraordinary or different: he idealizes himself. In doing so, he's able to justify not doing what Pearl and "proper" society would have him do, explaining this decision by insisting that he simply couldn't handle marriage. However, whether Barney even realizes this, or realizes that it's not a good look on a man looking for a relationship, is unclear. This nebulosity points to Barney's privilege as a man, as it allows him to continue using women to validate his masculinity without ever answering to the consequences.

### Act 2, Scene 1 Quotes

☝ Y'know, it's a funny thing. All the wimmen I've ever knocked around with, there's never been one of them ever knitted anything for me. Now, why d'yer reckon that is?

**Related Characters:** Barney Ibbot (speaker), Pearl Cunningham

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 50

### Explanation and Analysis

On New Year's Eve, Pearl knits a sweater for one of Barney's sons. This creates compelling information about both Pearl and Barney. It shows that Pearl very much wants to bring Barney into what she sees as the real world of marriage: a world where the crazy possibility of having sweaters knitted for him is a reality, not just a fantasy. The fact that she's knitting these sweaters shows too how much work she's willing to put into orchestrating this reality, as sweaters aren't easy or fast to knit. For Barney, his observation that none of his female partners have ever knitted anything for him suggests that he doesn't inspire the kind of loyalty that such a project would connote. This fits in with the way that Barney characterizes himself as someone who's happy to have a good time, but isn't at all interested in a long-term commitment. In this way, the sweaters, both real and promised, become symbols for the changing times and for stability within a relationship. For Barney to accept the promise of these sweaters, he must shift his loyalty from his lifestyle and the tradition of the layoff season to

marriage and commitment.

☛ The way you went on about everythin'—sounded just as if when they arrived, the whole town was gunna go up like a balloon.

**Related Characters:** Pearl Cunningham (speaker), Olive Leech, Roo Webber, Barney Ibbot

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 52

### Explanation and Analysis

Pearl describes to Olive, Roo, and Barney how Olive has spent the past year speaking glowingly about Roo and Barney. But now that she's experienced for herself what the layoff season is like, Pearl is decidedly less impressed by Olive's descriptions. This shows just how much Olive cares about the layoff season. Because it's such an important time of the year for her, it naturally inhabits a very special place in her heart—and her words to others reflect this. For Pearl, however, who doesn't possess the memories that Olive does, the layoff season is much less fun, and certainly less impressive than the stories she heard.

As a consequence of Pearl's disillusionment, Roo, Barney, and Olive begin to question the usefulness and the fun of their long-held traditions. This shows that seeing one's traditions through the eyes of another or an outsider can help to highlight the reality of the situation. As a result, the traditions themselves begin to lose their shine and inevitably must change.

☛ ...We come down here for the lay-off, five months of the year, December to April. That leaves another seven months still hangin'—what d'yer reckon Olive does in that time? Knocks around with other blokes, goes out on the loose every week? No, she doesn't, she just waits for us to come back again—coz she thinks our five months is worth all the rest of the year put together!

**Related Characters:** Roo Webber (speaker), Olive Leech, Barney Ibbot

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 60

### Explanation and Analysis

When Barney suggests to Roo that they leave Olive's house early to go to work picking grapes, Roo angrily insists that he owes it to Olive to stay. Roo shows here that he's fully aware that Olive idealizes the layoff season, possibly so much that it negatively impacts the way she lives her life for the rest of the year. This creates a discernable timeframe for the "ideal" versus the "real": the layoff season is ideal life, while the other seven months of the year are unbearably real and not exciting.

Roo's anger also comes from Barney's suggestion that they buck tradition and find different work during the layoff season, something that must seem ironic to Roo in particular given that he already has a summer job in the paint factory. However, while Roo's job in the factory is gendered as less masculine because it's in the city, Barney's suggestion to pick grapes would return Roo to more masculine field work in the bush and "save" him some of the humiliation of keeping a job that raises questions about his masculinity.

### Act 2, Scene 2 Quotes

☛ Oh, of course I've never been here, it's just the reputation that's been built up among the boys. I reckon you could say it's almost famous, up north.

**Related Characters:** Johnnie Dowd (speaker), Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber, Bubba Ryan

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 72

### Explanation and Analysis

Johnnie explains to a confused Bubba that Barney and Roo have been talking about their layoff season adventures so much and in such a way that their time off is becoming the stuff of legend. This confirms that though Olive gets the most grief for telling fantastical stories about the layoff, Roo and Barney do exactly the same thing. Further, their coworker (Johnnie) finds the reality just as disappointing as Olive's coworker (Pearl) does, which indicates that everyone involved in the layoff traditions of the last sixteen years are equally entranced by the idyll they experience. Johnnie also suggests that Roo and Barney have been telling these stories for a number of years, which only creates an even stronger sense that this time of year is what they truly live for. Finally, Johnnie's sense of letdown at

seeing the house from the stories creates a rift between the different age groups in the play. Though Johnnie is around the age Roo, Barney, and Olive were when they began the tradition, he doesn't see it as appropriate for them to continue conducting their lives this way. It's sad and disappointing for him to discover that these older mentors and men that he admires are still living as though they're twenty.

☝ H-how can I? All that's happened in a house makes a feeling—you can't tell anyone that. It's between people.

**Related Characters:** Bubba Ryan (speaker), Olive Leech, Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber, Johnnie Dowd

**Related Themes:**   

**Page Number:** 73

### Explanation and Analysis

As Bubba tries to answer Johnnie's questions and comments about Roo and Barney's layoff season, she comes to this realization that it's not the real, physical setting that make the layoff season the idyllic time she remembers. What did that was instead the love, excitement, and friendship the participants felt for each other. These emotions are, notably, ones that they demonstrated for each other with some physical items such as the kewpie dolls—though Johnnie's reaction shows that listening to Bubba explain the significance of the kewpie dolls isn't enough to imbue them with the same weight and meaning in his mind. Taken together, this begins to show Bubba that there is a definite difference between the real, physical aspects and repetitive traditions of the layoff season and the emotions that made it what it was.

Bubba's defensiveness also speaks to her own idealization of the layoff season. She feels the need to defend it from Johnnie's criticism because she understandably feels as though her own happy memories are being attacked. This suggests that at this point, Bubba is still buying into the idealization of the layoff season like Olive is, though while Olive never experiences growth in this area, Bubba is currently poised to do so. This realization then will bring about Bubba's own coming of age as she truly grows from a child into a fully participating adult.

☝ Bubba? Is that what they call you? Seems to me they're keeping you in the cradle, too. What's your real name?

**Related Characters:** Johnnie Dowd (speaker), Olive Leech, Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber, Bubba Ryan

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 74

### Explanation and Analysis

When Johnnie confirms that Bubba does indeed want to go on a date with him, he asks for her name again. Johnnie (rightfully) sees the fact that Bubba still goes by her childish nickname as playing into the greater attempt for the older generation to maintain their sense of the idyllic layoff seasons of the past. Using a childish name to refer to the "child" who's been around since she was small denies Bubba the opportunity to behave like the young adult she actually is. By asking her for her real name, Johnnie rejects this façade and asks Bubba to join him in accepting her agency and adulthood.

Though Bubba undeniably treasures the layoff seasons of the past in which she was a child, by accepting Johnnie's use of her name, Bubba ushers in the beginning of a new layoff season tradition and helps to end the old traditions. This shows that a necessary component of creating new traditions is changing or casting off the old ones that are no longer useful.

☝ Yes, and so was he. Both of us sloggin' it out under the sun! Are you tryin' to say that's the same thing as this—a job in a paint factory? Are you?

**Related Characters:** Roo Webber (speaker), Johnnie Dowd, Barney Ibbot

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 77

### Explanation and Analysis

Roo is very offended that Barney brought Johnnie to the house while Roo was still dressed from work at the paint factory. Roo's discomfort is a product of the way the play genders work. The "sloggin' it out under the sun" refers to Roo and Johnnie's job in the cane fields—not just an appropriately masculine profession, but one that actively confirms and supports their respective masculinity. Roo's job in the paint factory, on the other hand, is gendered feminine because it exists in the city. Therefore, though Roo is working and fully plans to return to his masculine job in the cane fields (at this point in the play at least), the very

fact that he holds the job in the paint factory threatens his conception of his own masculinity, as well as the way that others view his masculinity.

By extension, Roo's questioning of his own masculinity also ties into his questions about his age. Emma later points out that Roo is slipping on account of his age and will no longer be as good or successful in his job in the cane fields. This links the proper performance of masculinity to age, as it implies that a young man like Johnnie is more capable of being traditionally masculine because of his youth than the 40-year-old Roo is. In this way, as Roo comes to accept his age and the passage of time, he naturally begins to give up some of the things that marked him as being particularly masculine.

### Act 3, Scene 1 Quotes

☝ I started off trying to fix up what they broke. After that, I couldn't seem to stop. Emma always sez tryin' to shift heavy furniture on your own's a sign you're crooked on the world. Wonder what spring cleanin' at two o'clock in the morning means?

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech (speaker), Emma Leech, Pearl Cunningham

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:** 

**Page Number:** 82

#### Explanation and Analysis

The morning after Barney and Roo's fight, Olive explains to Pearl why she spent all night tidying up the living room. Olive shows here that she is at least hinting at growing up and confronting her age, as evidenced by the fact that she's cleaned the room of all the tchotchkes accumulated over the last seventeen years. However, Olive cannot name this for what it is because she so desperately wants to ignore the fact that she's getting older and times are changing. For her, she's just "crooked on the world," and it's a temporary state that will presumably pass. While that may be true, this isn't a "crooked" state that she will recover from by returning to the way things were. Instead, Olive's cleaning represents a drastic, subconscious acceptance that things are changing, even if Olive is scared or unwilling to admit it.

☝ All right. But the least you can do is to see what you've got as it really is. Take a look at this place now you've pulled down the decorations—what's so wonderful about it? Nothing! It's just an ordinary little room that's a hell of a lot the worse for the wear. And if you'd only come out of your day dream long enough to take a grown up look at the lay off, that's what you'd find with the rest of it.

**Related Characters:** Pearl Cunningham (speaker), Olive Leech

**Related Themes:**  

**Related Symbols:**  

**Page Number:** 83

#### Explanation and Analysis

As Pearl leaves, she asks Olive to accept that the layoff season wasn't as idyllic as Olive insists it still is. Pearl sees the room for what it is: a shabby room that, objectively, has little to offer. It's only a palace in the minds of Roo, Barney, and Olive because of the memories they made there. For Olive, who doesn't possess those memories, she's able to much more easily take an entirely outside view of the situation and see it for the foolishly youth-preserving lifestyle that it is.

The stage notes indicate that Pearl is wearing her black dress for her departure, which is a symbol that Pearl has re-accepted her role as the true adult of the group. In this way, she purposefully differentiates herself from the youthful Olive. While Olive insists on behaving as though she's twenty years younger, Pearl carefully cultivates an image of herself that makes her unmistakably mature.

☝ This is what I call interestin'. The lot of yez squabbling at last 'stead of all that playin' around went on other times. Only thing I'm sorry for is Nancy ain't here. She knew which way the wind was blowin', that one.

**Related Characters:** Emma Leech (speaker), Nancy, Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 88

#### Explanation and Analysis

Emma is thrilled to see that Roo, Barney, and Olive are

finally growing up and outgrowing the layoff season. She implies here that Nancy was aware that the dynamics of the layoff seasons would soon change. In turn, this, along with Nancy's recent marriage, shows that unlike her friends, Nancy began to grow up and realized the truth a year ago (if not before). Her own emotional maturity, then, is essentially what brings about the coming of age of the entire group. The changes that happen as a result of her absence force the others to look critically at their habits, traditions, and most importantly, their advancing age, and then make changes to their lives.

☝ You and Barney are two of a pair. Only the time he spent chasin' wimmin, you put in being top dog! Both of you champions! Well, that's all very fine and a lot of fun while it lasts, but last is one thing it just don't do. There's a time for sowing and a time for reaping—and reapin' is what you're doing now.

**Related Characters:** Emma Leech (speaker), Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**    

**Page Number:** 90

### Explanation and Analysis

As Emma and Roo discuss the fact that Barney and Roo are both getting older and are moving past their prime, Emma insists that this time was always going to come and is inevitable. By positioning herself as an all-knowing outsider, Emma shows that she's viewed the layoff season through a lens of reality for the entire seventeen years. Unlike the four friends, Emma was aware that the summer shenanigans weren't going to last forever. This is primarily due to Emma's own age (70) and the fact that she, presumably, accepted her own advancing age years ago. This is an example, then, of the wisdom that sometimes comes with age, as it positions Emma as a kind of end result of the process of accepting maturity and adulthood.

☝ He might have been drinking, and this morning he might have forgotten like you said, but this is the only chance I've ever had of comin' close to—I dunno—whatever it is I've been watchin' all these years. You think I'd give that up?

**Related Characters:** Bubba Ryan (speaker), Johnnie Dowd,

Barney Ibbot, Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 93

### Explanation and Analysis

As Bubba argues with Barney and Roo about whether or not she should contact Johnnie about their canceled plans to attend the races together, Bubba realizes (as do the men) that she's growing up. When taken together with the notion that Emma represents the end result of adulthood, Bubba now represents the process of moving from being a child to being a young adult. Though until last she night she only wanted to preserve the spirit of the layoff season for the older generation, now that she's gotten a taste of experiencing it herself, she understands that it's time for her to take on the role of the young adult.

Bubba's language also shows how she uses the ideal image of the layoff season she holds in her mind to formulate and map out an ideal future for herself. Though she's not quite sure of exactly what she witnessed over the years, she's absolutely sure that she wants to experience all of it for herself now that she's old enough and has the opportunities to do so.

☝ And it's more than looking—it's havin' another woman walking around knowin' your inside and sorry for you 'coz she thinks you've never been within cooe of the real thing. That's what hurts. It was all true, everythin' I told her was true, an'—and she didn't see any of it.

**Related Characters:** Olive Leech (speaker), Pearl Cunningham, Roo Webber

**Related Themes:**  

**Page Number:** 98

### Explanation and Analysis

Olive explains to Roo why Pearl's presence this summer was so very upsetting for her: Pearl was unable or unwilling to see the magic of the layoff season that Olive sees. Olive's particular issues are illustrative of the active steps she takes throughout the play to maintain the illusion that the layoff season is perfect, in particular her assertion that Pearl knows what goes on, but doesn't understand it. This shows that Olive absolutely believes that the layoff season is still fulfilling and worthwhile, while Pearl sees it as a marker of Olive's immaturity. However, Olive cannot get past the fact

that she'll never be able to make Pearl see the beauty of the

summer.



## SUMMARY AND ANALYSIS

The color-coded icons under each analysis entry make it easy to track where the themes occur most prominently throughout the work. Each icon corresponds to one of the themes explained in the Themes section of this LitChart.

## ACT 1, SCENE 1

It's a warm Sunday afternoon in December. Bubba, a young woman of twenty-two, is busy tying ribbon onto walking stick candies (candy canes) in a decorated living room while Pearl, an older woman dressed in her "good black" dress, sits on the sofa, smokes, and reads a magazine. Bubba begins to stare at Pearl. When Pearl looks up and catches Bubba staring, she asks Bubba "well?" in a hostile tone. Bubba turns back to her walking sticks. From upstairs, Olive yells to ask Bubba if she's seen her silver earrings, but Olive finds them.

Bubba smiles nervously at Pearl and explains that Olive always gets nervous, and that she and Nancy always had to make jokes to pull Olive out of her mood. Bubba continues, saying that Olive is probably more nervous than usual because she's worrying about how Pearl will fit in. Pearl snaps that she doesn't have to fit in, she's just here for a visit. Bubba assures Pearl that Olive hasn't said anything otherwise. In reply, Pearl tells Bubba to not be nasty, which surprises Bubba. Bubba sullenly explains that she wasn't being nasty, she was just thinking about how it used to be when Nancy was here. Pearl confirms that thinking that is nasty, and Bubba assures Pearl that there's nothing nasty about the layoff season or about Nancy.

From upstairs, Olive calls that she's coming down. She swishes into the room in a pretty green and white dress and asks Pearl and Bubba what they think. Eager for a new topic of conversation, Bubba hastily compliments Olive's look. Pearl deems the dress "not her taste," but says it's pretty. Olive decides this dress will have to do since she doesn't have time to change. She looks the room over and says that she needs to bring in the beer. Bubba volunteers to get it and abandons her walking sticks.

Olive says fondly that Bubba is a good kid, and Pearl says that Bubba isn't as innocent as she seems. Olive is somewhat surprised, but insists that Bubba is only a baby. Pearl declares that if her daughter, Vera, had spoken like Bubba did, she'd spank her. Olive again insists that Bubba is just the kid next door, has been running in and out of the house since she was a toddler, and treats Barney and Roo like uncles.

*From the first few lines, the play makes it abundantly clear that the power dynamics at work are very much based on the characters' relative ages. Bubba's activity (and nickname) is one that the play will consider childish, while Pearl's clothing and activities are comparatively adult. Pearl also seems assured that she's more senior and more important than Bubba, which shows that Pearl believes that age brings power.*



*The joke is on Olive, of course: Pearl's edginess and clothing choices suggest that she absolutely won't fit in and further, that she doesn't want to. When she calls Bubba nasty, Pearl is primarily taking offense to Bubba treating Pearl as though they both have an equal right to be here and to have this conversation—in effect, Pearl feels threatened that Bubba won't acknowledge Pearl's superior maturity. It's important to note that the layoff season is something normal and good in Bubba's mind, not something improper like Pearl implies.*



*In comparison to Pearl's "good black" dress, Olive's clothing choices show that she's purposefully trying to look youthful. Again, Pearl shows that she believes that age is a good and powerful thing by implying that youth (as represented by Olive's dress) isn't to her taste. By calling it "pretty," Pearl suggests that performing youth like this is superficial (and in Olive's case, it usually is).*



*While there's no way to know who's correct here, it's apparent that it's never occurred to Olive that Bubba is growing up. Instead, she holds onto the ideal in her mind that Bubba is still a child, something that Pearl as an outsider sees is obviously false. This sets up the main conflict between Pearl and Olive: Pearl sees what's objectively real; Olive sees only a nostalgic ideal.*



Olive begins laughing and calls Pearl a "cautious Kate" when she notices that Pearl's suitcases are still sitting by the stairs. Pearl primly says that she's taken her overnight bag to her room, but won't take her cases up until she's sure. Olive assures Pearl that "he" is alright, but Pearl insists that she'll find that out for herself. She asks Olive for a photo that Olive promised to share, and Olive fetches the photo from a drawer. Olive explains that the photo was taken at an amusement park two years ago. When Pearl asks, Olive explains that Nancy was drunk. Pearl says that Nancy looks like the sort who'd get sick in public, and Olive explains that Nancy was just a good sport and that Barney was fond of her.

Pearl is unimpressed. She remarks on the close way that Barney is holding Nancy in the photo, and Olive tells Pearl that Roo and Barney are cane-cutters, not professors. Pearl sits and declares that Barney will never her touch her like that in public, and Olive insists that Pearl hasn't met anyone as charming as Barney. Pearl says that Barney's charm didn't stop Nancy from getting married.

Olive says that Nancy's decision to get married was a mistake, even if there was no hope of ever marrying Barney. Pearl says that it's likely Barney didn't marry Nancy because Nancy probably made herself "cheap." Pearl continues, saying that from what Olive has said about Barney, he needs desperately to be married and "taken in hand."

Bubba walks in with her arms full of cold beer bottles. Olive helps her set them on the table, despite Pearl's insistence that they'll leave water rings. Olive asks Bubba if she's done her walking sticks. Pearl asks what they're for, and Bubba seems embarrassed as she starts to explain. Olive takes over and says that when Bubba was five, she was jealous of the gifts that Barney and Roo brought, especially the **kewpie doll** on a walking stick. To placate her, Barney and Roo brought a walking stick for Bubba until she was fifteen, at which point they seemed not to realize she was too old for kids' candy. To "teach them a lesson," Olive had Bubba prepare walking sticks to give to Barney and Roo when they arrived. After that they started bringing perfume or gloves for Bubba, but Olive still gets her doll every year. Pearl is unimpressed.

*Pearl's intense discomfort throws Olive's normalization of what's happening into sharp relief: Olive sees no problem with a woman becoming drunk enough to vomit in public, while Pearl implies that doing so is very improper. This shows that both Pearl and Olive have very distinct ideas about what constitutes femininity: for Pearl, a feminine lady is one who is proper, while for Olive, a lady should be a "good sport" and attractive to men. It's also important to note that Olive isn't helping Pearl to feel welcome by bringing up Nancy here, which makes it more apparent that Pearl is an outsider.*



*Olive asserts here that Barney's charm is capable of overpowering propriety in some cases—and she specifically ties this charm to Barney's masculinity, as evidenced by bringing up where Barney works. He works in the Australian bush, an environment classically gendered as masculine.*



*Again, Pearl paints single women as people who are behaving wrongly, and here she even blames Barney's single status on Nancy's "bad" behavior. This shows that Pearl sees marriage as the only appropriate result of a romantic relationship.*



*Again, Pearl shows how caught up she is in performing responsible adulthood, while Olive is much more concerned with properly setting the room up for a party: a youthful concern. The story about the walking sticks (candy canes) shows that in some situations at least, the usual layoff crew does accept that some of their members are getting older—though they do so with a symbol of childhood. Similarly, Olive's yearly kewpie doll is a symbol of her continuing youthfulness (or attempts to cling to youthfulness), particularly when she says that the 15-years-younger Bubba gets adult gifts like gloves and perfume.*



Bubba seems ashamed, and asks Olive if she can do anything else. When Olive says everything's ready, Bubba says she'll come back after tea, and leaves. Olive looks at the sky getting dark and wonders where her mother (Emma) is, since she was supposed to have been home from her community choir long ago. Pearl checks her watch and is alarmed to find it's after 6:00pm. Olive wonders if her mother went to meet Roo and Barney at the airport, and says that she'll have gotten money out of the men before they find a taxi. When Pearl insists that that's not a kind thing to say about one's mother, Olive insists that her mother gets all sorts of money out of Roo and Barney while they're here, and Roo at least seems to like it.

Olive turns on the radio and looks at a photograph of Roo. She declares that he has the handsomest mouth in the world. As Pearl inspects her makeup, she says that Roo looks like a better prospect than "the other one," and Olive insists that you can't compare Roo and Barney. She says that Roo's a "big man" and runs his own gang of cane-cutters, but Barney's the ladies' man and makes people laugh. Pearl says that Barney shouldn't count on anything since she hasn't made her mind up yet.

Pearl asks why people call Barney Barney. Olive isn't sure, but says his real name is Arthur. She excitedly offers that Roo's real name is Reuben, and Pearl remarks that it's a Biblical name. Olive acts politely surprised and hears a car honking outside. She looks out the window and realizes it's a car up the road, not Roo and Barney. Olive surveys the table and hurries to the kitchen to fetch food and glasses, singing along with the radio. Pearl picks up the photo and frowns at it, and when Olive returns, Olive cautions her that she'll start hating Barney before he even arrives.

Pearl insists that she won't hate Barney, but she's not getting involved in a "nasty mess" either. Olive is offended, and Pearl explains that she has Vera to worry about—if Vera knows that her mother is doing something wrong, she'll do wrong things too. Olive angrily turns off the radio and says she won't stand for "the respectable mother stunt."

*Bubba is hyper-aware that Pearl doesn't see the charm in the layoff traditions, which in turn makes her question the traditions themselves. This begins to illustrate how the introduction of an outside perspective can begin to cause questions about deeply entrenched beliefs and traditions, something that this group of friends has seemingly never had. Pearl continues to police Olive's words and actions because they don't fit her view of appropriate femininity.*



*Olive shows here that she enjoys a highly idealized view of both Roo and Barney: in her mind they're both exceptionally handsome and worthwhile partners. It's also worth noting that the qualities she lists here are ones that will, over the course of the play, be shown to be no longer true. This suggests that at this point, Olive is unable or unwilling to see that anything will change.*



*Olive's lack of genuine interest in Pearl's comment about Roo's name shows that she's entirely uninterested in feeding or rewarding Pearl's desire to think of the layoff season in "adult" terms. The fact that Roo has a Biblical name is little more than a fun tidbit for her, while for Pearl, it's indicative of the possibility that Roo (and possibly, Barney) might be able to be "tamed."*



*Olive's ultimatum is clear: Pearl accepts that the layoff season is a youthful escape from the (adult) real world, or she gets out. Having a mother around who's intent on policing the morality of the season is a direct threat to Olive's sense of tradition and her enjoyment of the summer.*



Olive loudly continues that Pearl keeps making the layoff season sound dirty and low. Pearl insists that it's not decent—*marriage* is decent. Olive shudders and agrees that marriage is different from the layoff season, but says that she gets five months of heaven every year. She explains that Roo and Barney work hard for seven months and then come down to live. Olive says that she's compared what she has to what married women have, and believes it's more exciting waiting for Roo to come than anything she'd experience in a marriage. Turning to Pearl, Olive says that she either needs to be polite or leave. Olive opens a bottle of beer, and Pearl looks uneasy.

Pearl says she isn't sure how the summer is going to go if she can't voice opinions. Olive pours two glasses of beer as Pearl continues to defend voicing an opinion, but Olive shoves a glass at her and tells Pearl to stop talking if she can't make sense. Pearl indignantly reminds Olive that Roo and Barney don't write while they're gone, and Olive simply says that they don't have to because they're real men. Pearl insists there's no difference, but Olive recounts with pride what Nancy used to say about Roo and Barney: she'd be in the pub with the "soft city blokes" drinking, and when Roo and Barney walked in, the other men would stand aside for them like they were kings.

Olive sighs about Nancy, and Pearl asks if Nancy got what she wanted. Olive says she'd like to ask Nancy if sitting chained to her husband is worth missing the excitement of waiting for Roo and Barney. Pearl awkwardly apologizes for offending Olive, and Olive says that Pearl reminded her of her mother. Pearl commiserates, and says she had an aunt that was similarly prone to bringing up "unsuitable" matches at funerals. Olive finishes her beer as they hear a car horn from the street. She hides her glass and tells Pearl to drink her beer.

Barney appears in the doorway, carrying Emma over his shoulder. Emma pretends to be angry. Barney asks where the garbage is, and Olive laughs and lets them in. When Roo enters, Olive steps into his arms and they kiss. Pearl watches Barney and Emma apprehensively as Barney lets Emma down. Barney tells Emma to stop playing as he eyes Pearl, and finally sends Emma to help with the luggage. Emma doesn't move, and stays to watch Barney approach Pearl. Pearl introduces herself as "Missus Cunningham," and offers Barney her hand awkwardly. He takes it and holds it, smiling warmly at her as they exchange pleasantries. Emma cackles and leaves for the kitchen.

*Pearl confirms for the reader her belief that marriage is the only appropriate relationship for men and women to have. Olive, on the other hand, prioritizes excitement over stability or propriety through marriage. This again makes it clear that she's trying very hard to play the role of a woman much younger than she actually is. Similarly, Pearl's insistence on critiquing the layoff season for its questionable morality makes her seem years older than Olive.*



*Here, Olive creates a very clear definition of what constitutes a "real" versus a "soft" man, and she ties it primarily to where they work and live. Barney and Roo are real men because they work out in the bush and come to the city only for pleasure, while the "soft city blokes" are less masculine because they live and work in the city. In this way, Olive also suggests that the city men support and acknowledge these notions of masculinity.*



*Pearl's comment about her aunt suggests that Pearl was possibly once as willfully youthful as Olive is now—though she's apparently outgrown it. This shows that Pearl might have more empathy for Olive and/or the situation than she lets on, but is also aware that growing up is certainly a possibility (or necessity) for the other characters.*



*Even the 70-year-old Emma participates in the childish shenanigans of the layoff season, something that's understandably unsettling for Pearl. When Pearl introduces herself using her last name, she insists that Barney think of her as being a proper adult and not a "girl" like Olive. When Barney doesn't miss a beat in this interaction, it shows how confident he is that his masculinity will win Pearl over and encourage her to "let loose" and behave more youthfully.*



Olive turns towards Pearl and Barney and asks if they've met, and Barney shares that he's introduced himself to "Missus Cunningham." Olive insists that he call her Pearl, and Barney asks why they didn't come to meet them at the airport. He winks at Pearl, who isn't sure what to do. Olive introduces Pearl and Roo, and Pearl begins to relax a little. Barney grabs one of Bubba's walking sticks off the mantel and asks where she is before stepping onto the back verandah to call for her. Bubba laughs and yells greetings from her house to Barney and Roo, and Olive calls the men back inside.

Barney hugs Olive and calls her his favorite barmaid, and Olive jokingly explains that Pearl works at the same bar as she does. Barney sits happily next to Pearl and says it's just like the old days. Pearl looks unsettled as Emma rushes in and accuses Olive of stealing vinegar. Olive insists it was only a little for the salad and reminds her mother that she wasn't supposed to pick the men up at the airport. Emma imperiously insists that they wouldn't have gotten to the house at all if she hadn't gotten them, but Barney cuts her off. Roo reminds Emma that she can afford to buy more vinegar, and Emma threatens to file a police report if she finds more vinegar gone. This seems a usual threat, and Emma stomps off to the kitchen.

Roo moves to take bags upstairs, but Olive asks him to only take up his own and not Barney's. Roo heads upstairs and Olive gives Barney a telegram. Olive asks Pearl to go check on Emma and the salad, and Barney sighs and says the telegram is from Nancy. He asks Olive where Nancy lives now, and Olive insists he needs to concentrate on Pearl. Barney seems unconcerned, even when Olive says that Pearl refuses to take her bags upstairs and is concerned that she's setting a bad example for her eighteen-year-old daughter. Barney seems disgusted, and asks if Pearl is "one of them," but Olive insists Pearl just has principles and wants to reform Barney. She continues, saying that Pearl wants to marry, and Barney is incredulous but believes that Pearl will take to him.

Barney sits and tells Olive that what Emma said about needing her to make it home was true, and Roo is broke. He sighs and continues that it was an awful season: Roo strained his back, fired one of his regular workers, Tony Moreno, and then hired a young man named Johnnie Dowd. Johnnie was fast enough to make Roo seem like a has-been, and it escalated into a running fight between Roo and Johnnie. Barney says that two months ago, Roo and Johnnie fought because Johnnie laughed when Roo fell. After the other men broke up the fight, Roo walked off and didn't meet up with Barney again until a week ago. Olive is surprised Barney didn't walk off with Roo, and Barney explains that things were messed up and he'd never seen Roo be wrong before.

*Pearl's discomfort stems from the fact that she realizes she's witnessing a very old, established ritual. Though the men politely greeted Pearl, she's painfully aware that she doesn't know the routine. However, by acting so uptight and proper, Pearl only makes this even more apparent to everyone involved, and makes the others more defensive about their usual rituals.*



*Pearl's unsettled look comes from hearing Barney accept and imply that Pearl is only here to replace Nancy: Pearl isn't here to be herself, she's here to fill a role. Barney's happiness at all of this shows that he currently shares Olive's optimism that things will go as planned and that Pearl will simply step up to replace Nancy. In turn, this is indicative of how Barney idealizes the layoff season, just like Olive does. Essentially, he can't imagine why Pearl wouldn't want to be Nancy.*



*Olive thinks of Pearl as a means to an end. Per Olive's reasoning, if Pearl takes to Barney, then the layoff season will continue as it always has, even with Pearl's reservations. However, despite Nancy's absence, the other characters are still very much aware of her ghostly presence. This ensures that the remaining characters will be unable to forget that things are indeed different, as they cannot escape their thoughts of Nancy. Barney's insistence that Pearl will accept him shows his belief in the power of his masculinity. Like Olive, he believes it will be stronger than Pearl's desire for decency (or even her preferences as an individual).*



*On the men's side, the layoff season has also changed before it even begins, since Roo doesn't have the money saved that he usually does, and he has suffered a major blow to his masculinity. Barney and Olive also gloss over the fact that Johnnie is young, which makes Roo sound old. Particularly since this all came about because Roo hurt his back, this shows them actively ignoring the fact that their bodies are aging. When Barney didn't walk off with Roo, Barney rejected his friendship with Roo in favor of upholding the traditional way they go about their year, something that seems troubling to everyone.*



Barney says that when they met in Brisbane, Roo had already spent all his money drinking. Barney says that he thinks Roo resents him for not walking out with him, and Olive glares at him accusingly. Barney insists he needed the money, and made things worse by telling Roo that the boys made Johnnie "ganger" (boss) in Roo's place, and that Johnnie did a great job. Roo appears behind Barney and sarcastically asks about Johnnie, and then tells Barney not to blab. Olive insists that she asked, and tells Barney to take his luggage upstairs to the back room. Barney jokes about his subpar lodgings.

Barney leaves, and Roo seems embarrassed. Olive asks why Roo went to Melbourne instead of coming to her. Roo explains he has a cousin there, but Olive is angry that Roo didn't come to her. She starts crying and Roo comforts her. He insists that he won't take money from her and says he'll get a job, but says they can talk about it tomorrow. He suggests they open beer, and Olive giggles and explains that she and Pearl already started drinking. Roo and Olive start laughing, and Roo turns on the radio. They call everyone into the living room to eat, and Barney passes Roo the **seventeenth doll** to give to Olive. When Roo gives it to Olive, she cries out happily.

## ACT 1, SCENE 2

The next morning, Emma is tidying the living room and calls to Olive upstairs to take a coat to work with her. Olive resists. Roo and Emma meet in the hallway and Emma says irritably that there's going to be a cool breeze, before heading to the kitchen. Olive enters the living room and finds Roo collecting Barney's empty beer bottles from the verandah. Olive says that Pearl didn't like Barney's drinking, and Roo says he doesn't think that Pearl and Barney will get along. Olive agrees, and says that Barney tried Pearl's door last night. Roo insists that that's to be expected, and Olive says she told Pearl the same.

Olive asks Roo how his back is, but Roo tells Olive to ask Barney. Olive picks up the **seventeenth doll** and says that she thinks this doll is dressed better than the others—it's beautiful, while the others are just pretty. She cuddles the doll and tells Roo why she likes the dolls better than the coral or butterflies he's brought because they're special things he thought of himself. Roo grunts. Olive finds a place for the doll with the others, which are tucked in vases throughout the room, and she kisses Roo's head.

*Olive apparently shares Roo's sense of betrayal, which shows that she values the friendship between the men as well as the traditional way the group does things. Barney didn't follow Roo for practical reasons, however, which shows that he's beginning to think about his life in a more adult way. This situates the adults here in a very precarious place, as they're all partially aware that they're aging, but not quite sure what to do with that fact.*



*Again, Roo's decision to go to Melbourne is seen as a betrayal of both his relationship with Olive and the traditional way things are done in the group. When Roo says he won't take money from Olive, it begins to create the sense that Roo is very prideful, something supported by Roo's apparent displeasure that Barney shared the situation with Olive at all. At this point, nobody appears to take Roo's suggestions that he'll get a job seriously—nobody believes he'd compromise his prideful masculinity and the tradition of a leisurely layoff season like that.*



*Though it's unclear whether hiding beer bottles is a normal activity for Barney or not, now that Pearl is here it looks particularly bad. The same goes for Barney trying to get into Pearl's bedroom, something that seems normal for everyone but Pearl. This begins to show how an outside perspective casts a shadow on what has been considered normal. Essentially, all the characters are becoming hyper-aware of their habits and how they look to others.*



*Olive's choice to describe the doll as beautiful instead of pretty shows that whether she's aware of it or not, she's moving towards maturity. Using more adult descriptors is an unconscious acceptance of this fact. It's worth noting that no matter what Olive says, now that the dolls are a tradition, Roo doesn't have to think of a gift. The strength of the tradition fills in for the emotional labor of finding a unique gift.*



Olive asks Roo what he's going to do for the day. Roo is engrossed in the newspaper and answers noncommittally, and Olive suggests he come to the pub, and asks him to book her seats for the theatre. Emma barges in and says that breakfast is hot, but insists she won't yell for Barney. She begins cleaning the living room. Olive returns her attention to Roo and asks about the tickets, but he deflects. Olive leaves to call for Barney, and Emma asks Roo if he only gave her a dollar the day before because he's broke. She says he heard him yelling about it yesterday. Roo comments that Emma's hearing is just fine, and Emma replies that she has to listen to the goings-on in this house to protect herself.

Roo points to an ad in the paper and asks if Lyman Paint Company is near the house, and Emma says it's around the corner. She asks if Barney is broke too, which Roo says is unlikely. Emma says she'd never think of helping Barney out, and offers Roo a loan. Roo jokes that the loan will only be five dollars, but Emma seriously says that she was thinking fifty dollars. Emma asks Roo to keep it quiet, and Roo asks if she's been taking from Olive. Bubba lets herself in, and Emma tells Roo to not ask questions.

Emma asks Bubba if she's come to help clean up, and Bubba answers that she's just dropping in on her way to work. Emma storms off to the kitchen. Bubba breathlessly tells Roo that she has something for Barney and hands an envelope to Roo. She explains that the envelope contains photos from Nancy's wedding, and she doesn't want Olive to see them. Roo looks through them and asks Bubba if she cried at Nancy's wedding. Bubba says that both she and Nancy cried, and Roo confides in her that he thinks Barney cried when he found out. Bubba says it's an awful situation, and Roo tries to change the subject by asking when Bubba will get married.

Bubba insists that she's been out with a bunch of men since she ended things with the young man she was dating last summer, and Roo teases that she'll grow up to be like Barney. Bubba quietly asks how much more she'll grow, since she's twenty-two. Roo insists he meant no harm, and Bubba hesitantly asks if this layoff season is going to be the same as all the others. She says she's scared with Nancy gone that things will be different, and Roo assures her it'll be just the same. Bubba hugs Roo as Emma walks in with a bowl of fruit. Emma teases Bubba about the shop where she works not opening, and Bubba asks Roo to come visit her at work before she leaves.

*Olive is entirely unaware (or willfully ignoring) that Roo is refusing to take her suggestions because they require money, and he has none. This suggests that Olive didn't take it seriously last night when Roo and Barney explained the situation. Accepting that Roo is broke would mean that Olive would have to accept that this summer's activities will need to change, something that's in direct opposition to her desire to keep things the same as they've always been.*



*The characters have thus far painted Emma as having few goals other than acquiring money, a quality that's become a tradition by this point. When Roo turns Emma's offer into a joke and struggles to understand that she's honestly offering him a loan, it indicates that Roo is just as entrenched in tradition as Olive is, and cannot fathom that Emma might be capable of real generosity.*



*Nancy's marriage hit everyone so hard because it was a firm, inescapable reminder that the layoff season isn't going to last forever. Marriage is also a comparatively adult path, hence Bubba's insistence that Olive not see the pictures—Olive has already insinuated that she's not interested in seeing the decision to marry as anything but a grave mistake. Bubba is still idealizing the summers of the past by lamenting the end of Nancy and Barney's relationship and refusing to acknowledge Nancy's present happiness.*



*Bubba's comment about her many dates shows that even if she objects to Roo's phrasing, she definitely learned from watching Barney that having multiple romances like this is desirable. This shows that Bubba is very much channeling her adult role models and will almost certainly reject Pearl's outlook on life and romance. Though Bubba expresses a desire to be seen as an adult, she also clings to the past layoff seasons in which she was a child. She's in a liminal state, and will have to decide whether, or how, to grow up.*



Emma asks Roo if he'll take the loan, and Roo insists he shouldn't. He explains it'd only be enough for a few weeks, and says he's just as untrustworthy as Barney is. Emma says that she knew from the first day she met Roo that he was trouble, but honest, and asks Roo what he's going to do. Roo says he's getting a job, and Emma acts surprised. Emma runs into Barney as she leaves the room and tells him to get breakfast. Barney approaches Roo in his nightclothes and says that sleeping on the sofa was awful.

Roo says that everyone knows as much—they all heard Barney banging on Pearl's door in the night, and Pearl wasn't impressed. Roo throws the envelope at Barney and explains the contents. Barney looks for a moment at the photos and says that Nancy must've been crazy, and then asks Roo what they're going to do today. Roo insists he's getting a job, and Barney tells Roo that he can't work during the layoff. He offers to give Roo money, but Roo refuses.

Barney angrily says that Roo's pride is keeping him from taking money, and insists that Roo is mad because Barney didn't follow him off the job after Roo fought with Johnnie. Roo says he's not mad, and he and Barney argue for a minute until Roo threatens to punch Barney. Olive bursts in as Roo huffily heads upstairs. Olive says that she and Pearl have to leave, but she's convinced Pearl to speak to Barney before they do. Olive tells Barney to butter Pearl up because Pearl's ready to leave, but Barney sullenly tells Olive to let Pearl go.

Olive is shocked at Barney's disaffect, and Barney explains that Roo is going to look for work. Olive is even more shocked, and then angry. She bustles upstairs, yelling for Roo, as Pearl heads downstairs. Pearl hesitantly calls Barney's attention and asks to talk to him. Barney seems somewhat uninterested, but apologizes for apparently making a fuss outside her door. He claims to not remember doing so and says that Nancy always had that room, but Pearl says that Barney kept yelling for "Pearl," not for Nancy. Barney says that Pearl must've made an impression on him.

Pearl again tries to begin the real conversation, but Barney insists that she sit. Pearl seems uncertain, but accepts the chair. She says that she didn't realize Barney had any "de facto wives," and Barney insists he doesn't have wives—just kids in three states. Pearl looks stiff and makes to leave, but Barney asks her to stay. He tells Pearl he pays "maintenance" on them, which Pearl sees as no comfort. She says that she's a mother, and understands what those women went through. She says there's no excuse for that kind of behavior.

*Like Bubba, Roo is also caught between responsible adulthood and youth: he recognizes that taking Emma's loan isn't a long-term solution to his problem, which implies that on some level, Roo understands that the layoff season won't be able to continue per usual. Similarly, getting a job is an adult decision and will absolutely change the layoff season, regardless of what he told Bubba.*



*Barney's unwillingness to acknowledge or dwell on the changes taking place shows that he's still fully prepared to pretend as though they're not happening at all. When Roo refuses Barney's money, it shows Roo distancing himself from both his friendship with Barney and from the layoff season as a whole—an active choice to not follow tradition.*



*For Roo, admitting that Barney is right would be admitting that something serious happened to their relationship when Roo walked off. By extension, this means accepting that things are different and the layoff season is no longer as idyllic as it once was, something that nobody wants to face at this point.*



*Olive's anger comes from believing that there's nothing more important than keeping up with their yearly traditions, something that Roo's impending employment will undoubtedly threaten. Like Olive calling the kewpie dolls "beautiful," when Barney drunkenly remembered that Pearl is here, not Nancy, it shows that he's subconsciously aware that things this year are different and cannot continue as usual.*



*Pearl's concerns show that she has a very different conception of loyalty than Barney does: she insinuates that it's most important to "do the right thing" and create lasting familial relationships. Barney's rejection of that option reinforces for the reader his loyalty to his own traditions, which marriage would jeopardize.*



Very sincerely, Barney says that he can't help it: when he sees a beautiful woman, he feels as though he's just received a birthday present. This makes Pearl even angrier, and she says that doesn't give him the right to have kids everywhere. Barney says that regular men get married, but he always had reasons why he never could. Pearl can't fathom what his reasons might be, and Barney explains that his two oldest boys are about the same age. He says their mothers were in trouble the same time, and he was only eighteen then. Pearl says that's old enough to deal with the responsibility, but Barney says that he wasn't old enough to be able to decide which one to marry. He says that both women thought it'd be a huge insult to marry the other.

Pearl insists that Barney could've done something, but can't come up with what. Barney continues his story, and says his father kicked him out after he found out about Barney's pregnant girlfriends, and Barney then went to Queensland to work. He says he sent money home to the women and their babies and asked the women to decide which one got to marry him. With a smile, Barney says they're still deciding. Pearl deems this criminal, and Barney says that most of his former partners are happily settled and married to other men, and the only one who suffers is him. Pearl says he deserves as much, and says that Olive tells tales of Barney's exploits. Barney says he's not as bad as Olive claims, but he tends to get lucky.

Pearl isn't amused by Barney calling himself "lucky," but Barney explains that only a special kind of woman really understands him. Most hear about him and run, but every now and again, a woman realizes that Barney isn't after all the love he can get—he has a lot of love to give. Pearl slowly says that she can imagine that's not something most women understand, and she and Barney say it again. Barney says that the right kind of woman must have enough experience to realize what kind of a man he is, and she must be able to take him as-is and not try to tie him down—but then he stops talking when he notices Olive in the doorway. He tells Pearl he'll share the final quality of the right kind of woman another time. Pearl leaves to collect her things for work, looking disappointed.

Barney asks Olive if Roo is actually going to get a job, and Olive moodily says that he is. Barney curses as Roo walks in, half dressed, and offers to walk Pearl and Olive to the tram. Roo says his goodbyes to Barney, who acts offended. When Emma enters and sees that Roo is going out, she yells about Roo's uneaten breakfast. Roo tells Emma to give the steak to Barney. Emma rants a little more before saying that by tomorrow, there will be changes around here. She returns angrily to the kitchen.

*For Barney, beautiful women exist to confirm his masculinity and his role as a ladies' man. This shows how he idealizes himself and his lifestyle, as he necessarily has to believe in his own sexual superiority in order to justify this outlook. Barney's insistence that he's not a regular man further supports his sense of superiority and justifies his worldview. Taken all together, this shows how Barney constructs his lifestyle by deciding to believe fully that he's incapable of being a "regular" man.*



*By absolving himself of any responsibility to make decisions about what to do, Barney ensured that he'd be able to continue his youthful lifestyle with minimal interruption. Because he does pay "maintenance" (child support), it suggests that consequences like having unplanned children are ones that can be solved with money. This in turn supports the relationship between Barney's masculine lifestyle and money: Barney can pay to continue acting this way, while Roo no longer can after walking out on the job.*



*Barney is a skilled manipulator: despite Pearl's understandable suspicion of him, he's now successfully convincing her that he is indeed different than other men. This shows that Barney's self-idealization is something that Barney can absolutely make others see, thereby encouraging them to idealize him as well. Barney also tells Pearl straight off that her plan to tame him through marriage won't work, which only makes it even clearer that Barney is only interested in remaining loyal to past traditions and his lifestyle, not to individuals who might cause those things to change.*



*Barney and Olive view Roo's decision as selfish and as a clear rejection of tradition. This forces them to confront a new and different reality of the layoff season, as Roo's job will certainly make it unlikely that the layoff season will proceed as it has in the past. This shows that Barney and Olive are still petulantly and immaturely holding onto their idealized visions, while Roo is choosing (by necessity) to grow up.*



Pearl comes breathlessly back down the stairs with her hat and purse. Pearl tells Barney she's off, and asks him to take her bags upstairs—but not to jump to conclusions. Barney smiles and tries to follow her, but Pearl rushes away with Olive. Barney watches Olive, Pearl, and Roo go and then swaggers to the suitcases and carries them upstairs.

*As Pearl speaks to Barney, she appears to be stepping into the role of a younger, more carefree woman. For now, she will accept the idealized stories of the layoff season. For Barney, this is a testament to the power of his masculinity, as he was able to convince her to make this change and decide to stay.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 1

The group is assembled in the living room on New Year's Eve. Barney is writing a letter, Pearl is knitting, and Olive is playing cards with Roo. They can hear children playing outside and Pearl comments on the noise. When nobody responds, Pearl asks Barney if she included her comment about having "her" (his daughter) trained for dressmaking in his letter. He insists the recipient wouldn't know what to do if he started suggesting things like that, and Pearl declares that he can hardly call the relationship he has with his daughter now "having a family." Barney insists he has kids, not a family, and swats at a mosquito.

*Though Pearl is attempting to insert herself in Barney's affairs and change how he does things, Barney resists. This shows that he's still entirely committed to continuing life as he always has, and likely still idealizes his lifestyle as well. It's worth noting that staying in and doing quiet activities like this instead of going out is an indicator of age. However, the group's valiant efforts to seem youthful show that they're unwilling to admit the truth of this.*



Roo says that the ferns on the verandah are full of mosquitos, and Barney suggests they all go to the beach. Pearl deems it too late, but Barney notes that even children are playing outside at 11:30pm. Olive reminds Barney that he hasn't been working all day. Roo insists they go without him, but neither Pearl nor Olive are interested. Barney reminds Olive that she was once the one dragging everyone to the beach, and asks if she remembers the time they stayed out until 7:30 in the morning. Pearl tells Barney to drop it.

*The tenseness of these exchanges suggests that the characters don't quite know what to do with this change of tradition. Barney's comment about the children playing outside makes their own middle age stand out in comparison. Olive's unwillingness to fondly remember a past adventure suggests that she's starting to become aware that the past cannot be resurrected, and is noticing that this layoff season isn't especially fun.*



Pearl calls Barney to her to test the length of the sweater sleeve she's working on. Barney resists, saying that the recipient of the sweater is taller and bigger than he is. Olive asks who the sweater is for, and Pearl looks warm and maternal as she replies that it's for Lennie, Barney's oldest son. She assures Barney that once she's done with this sweater, she'll start one for Arthur, Barney's other son. Barney corrects her, saying that they call Arthur "Chippa."

*Again, Pearl's desire to use Arthur's given name rather than a nickname shows that she believes that "proper" names are a way to bring individuals like Barney to a more decent way of living. Sweaters are traditionally a symbol of commitment because they take so long to knit, which suggests that Pearl believes she's in Barney's life to stay.*



Bubba appears on the back verandah in an evening dress and calls to Olive. She tells Barney that she promised to show Olive her dress. When Bubba steps into the living room, Barney teases her as she explains that she's going to a social club dance with girls from work. She says hesitantly that she'd almost rather not go, but Olive insists that she meet her friends. Barney teases Bubba about meeting a lucky man. Bubba asks if anyone else is going out, and suggests they still try to go visit the Morrisises. Barney looks hopeful, but Olive shuts her down. Pearl asks who the Morrisises are, but everyone else ignores her as they say goodbye to Bubba.

*Bubba's appearance and evening plans make the differences between the generations extremely apparent: the older generation is mellowing, while the younger generation is both excited to experience adult fun and nervous about "leaving the nest." When Olive shuts down Barney's suggestion, it's an underhanded acceptance that the group is getting older and must change, as well as an attempt to idealize their quiet evening activities.*



Pearl asks again who the Morrises are, trying to sound casual. Olive shuffles cards and explains that they used to go to their New Year's parties. Pearl suspiciously asks why they didn't go this year, and Olive snaps that the Morrises are Nancy's cousins. Pearl begins winding a new ball of yarn, and Barney moves to help her. He says that he's spent time with many women, but none have knitted him a sweater, and asks the room why. Olive suggests they didn't have time, but Barney declares that they didn't want to.

Pearl happily says that some women don't want to knit a sweater for an "eagle," which confuses Barney. Pearl explains that it's something Olive said once, and Olive tries to change the subject to no avail. With obvious pleasure, Pearl tells the room that there was a man in the pub who talked on and on about migratory birds, and it was around the time that Olive had started telling Pearl about Roo and Barney. Olive had been wrapped up in this man talking about his birds, and after the man left, told Pearl that Roo and Barney were like eagles coming down for the mating season. Pearl laughs and remains focused on her winding, and doesn't notice that the other three aren't amused.

Olive tries to recover and says that the eagle analogy fit in with what the man was saying, but Pearl keeps giggling and tells Roo and Barney that she had no idea what to expect with everything Olive said about them. Pearl smugly says that Olive talked as though the town would float once the men arrived, and says that Olive had the Sunday boat trips made out to be beautiful. Pearl says the boat was objectively terrible, and Olive insists she didn't give it a fair chance. In reply, Pearl insists she gave Christmas in Selby a fair chance. Barney asks what was wrong with the house in Selby. Pearl admits that it wasn't bad, but she expected a palace. Roo chimes in that Selby is fantastic, but Pearl remarks that the house doesn't have electricity.

Olive throws her cards down and tells Pearl to stop making her out to be a liar. Pearl is surprised and says she was only voicing her opinion, and Olive retorts that Pearl has too many opinions. Roo tries to convince Olive to finish her hand of cards, but Olive angrily declares that staying up until midnight is silly and she'd rather go to bed. Barney insists she stay, and suggests they get Emma in to play the piano so they can have a singalong.

*Olive understands that if Pearl remains unaware of the happy past, she won't have to acknowledge that this year is very different. By admitting that things are different this year, Olive also must admit to herself that she's not actually having the fun she usually does. Barney seems more open to accepting a woman permanently into his life if it means hand-knit sweaters, which shows that his traditions and loyalty are also potentially changing.*



*Pearl's eagle comment recalls Barney's three necessary qualities for women he has relationships with, as it shows that Pearl is trying very hard to accept and deal with the fact that Barney doesn't want to be tied down (though again, the sweater suggests that she still does hope to tie him down). The others' reaction shows that Pearl hit a nerve with this story, and it's possibly truer than they'd like to admit. It sexualizes the situation without taking into account the deep romantic relationships the characters share.*



*Finally, Pearl insists that Olive's idealized layoff season is, in reality, nothing to write home about. Olive's offense stems from her intense desire to maintain her idyllic vision, which cannot handle Pearl's criticisms. However, the fact that Roo and Barney jump to Olive's defense of the traditional layoff season activities indicates that they too share Olive's idealized memories and desire to cling to them for as long as possible. Essentially, they're not yet able to critically wonder if Pearl might be right, and if the layoff activities are objectively not fulfilling to them anymore.*



*By deciding to give up and go to bed, Olive truly betrays to the reader or viewer that she's too old to keep up the charade. She's incapable of and unwilling to consider that the layoff season isn't fun anymore, and chooses a comparatively adult way to deal with these emotions.*



Barney calls for Emma, who's sitting outside. He offers her money to play any tunes she likes, and she agrees as long as there's "no muckin' about." Barney organizes everyone on the sofa as Emma enters. Olive whispers that Emma will no doubt play only her favorite songs. Emma takes off her ring, puts it on the piano, and says she'll only walk out in the middle of the singalong if they don't take it seriously. She sits, massages her fingers, and calls the others to their feet. Pearl asks if she has to join, and Emma insists she does before announcing the first song (her favorite). Olive tells Barney she told him so, and Emma takes offense.

Emma glares angrily at Olive and then starts playing the introduction to the song. She begins to sing and the others join in feebly. Emma stops, annoyed. She plays the first note a few times and tells the others to try again. The second time is better, though Pearl doesn't sing and just stares incredulously at the others. After a few lines, Emma stops again and says fiercely that someone is singing flat. She glares at Pearl, who looks exceptionally irritated. Emma continues her witch hunt and Barney tries to ask her to just play and not give them all singing lessons. Emma says that singing flat is mucking about.

Olive asks Emma if maybe *she's* singing wrong, but Emma insists she's never hit a wrong note. She shares that even the conductor at the community choir would agree: he gives Emma a solo every year for her birthday. Olive suggests the conductor does that as a joke. Emma bursts out angrily and resists Roo's attempts to calm her down. She puts her ring back on and storms out, calling the group amateurs. Pearl deems it the shortest singing session on record and returns to her knitting.

Roo tells Olive she shouldn't have made fun of Emma's singing because it's the one thing she's proud of, but Olive says that Emma never apologizes for hurting her. To try to save the tense situation, Barney suggests they open some beer. Olive jumps on the idea and calls Pearl to the kitchen to help her make snacks.

Barney and Roo discuss Emma's fussiness. There seems to be a guarded air around the men as Barney asks how the paint business is. He laughs and says he might be joining Roo at the factory since his money is already running out. Roo says that Lyman's is small and Barney might not be able to get in there. Barney says he can go a few more weeks with what he has. He suddenly becomes very animated and tells Roo that some of the "boys" from the gang are in town and they all met up in the pub that morning. They're in town before heading out again to pick fruit. Roo seems unconvinced that this was a chance meeting, and Barney accuses Roo of being overly suspicious.

*Unlike the rest of the layoff season traditions, Emma remains comfortingly (if annoyingly) predictable. Notice, however, that Emma's comment that she won't tolerate "mucking about" is an underhanded request for the others to behave like adults and not treat the singalong like a game. This suggests that Emma is aware that the group is growing up and changing, and is giving them opportunities to act their age or betray their emotional immaturity.*



*Though the singalong isn't introduced as an entirely normal layoff season event, it is normal and traditional for everyone to participate fully—something that Pearl, as an outsider, is completely shocked to realize. In this way, even though Emma wants the others to take it seriously and behave like adults, Pearl shows that she views the singalong as a childish activity that's absolutely ridiculous for adults to enjoy.*



*Olive's incessant attacks on Emma's singing show that she too is capable of ruining someone else's idealized visions. Emma also responds very similarly to the way that Olive did to Pearl's attacks. This shows that the pain of having one's idealized memories and beliefs taken down like this is painful regardless of one's age; it's not something unique to one generation or another.*



*Barney still wants to try and turn this unfortunate evening into a fun and fulfilling one, as he too is desperate to recreate his idealized past and not accept the reality of the present. Though Olive agrees, her attitude suggests that she doesn't believe this night is salvageable.*



*Roo's suspicions show that the trust between him and Roo is absolutely compromised, and Barney's meet-up with the "boys" (intentional or not) only makes it seem as though Barney is actively turning away from his friendship with Roo. When Barney asks about getting a job in town, it shows that he too is beginning to grow up and is willing to consider a less masculine city job—assuming it allows him to maintain his idyllic layoff season lifestyle.*



Barney tells Roo that he told the boys Roo was working, but didn't say where. At Roo's prompting, Barney insists he kept it a secret because he thought Roo would want him to. Barney continues that the boys want to go out with Barney and Roo sometime. Roo asks if Johnnie Dowd is with them, and when Barney says he is, Roo says he won't go. Barney angrily says that Johnnie isn't holding a grudge and would like to see Roo, but Roo stubbornly refuses. Barney says this puts him in a "fine spot," and when Roo tells Barney to go without him, Barney says he won't go alone.

Barney sobers and quietly admits to Roo that he didn't walk out with him up north, but insists he's never slipped in his loyalty except for that one time. Roo says that the one time was the one time he needed Barney there.

Barney asks if he can make it up to Roo, and suggests they go north with the boys to pick grapes. Roo is incredulous that Barney is suggesting they walk out on Olive and Pearl, but Barney says that this year hasn't been much fun without Nancy anyway. Disgusted, Roo moves away from Barney and accuses him of running off once the fun leaves. Barney angrily insists that Olive definitely isn't enjoying herself, and though Pearl seems to be doing alright, she doesn't know how it used to be. He pleads with Roo to speak to Olive about it.

Roo stands over Barney and reminds him that they come here five months out of every year for the layoff. He asks what Barney thinks Olive does during the other seven months, and insists that she doesn't go out with other men; she waits for the next layoff season because the layoff is so special to her. Roo says that knowing that and not wanting to let her down is what made him come back this year, and he wants to hear nothing about picking grapes. After a moody pause, Barney asks what he should do when his money runs out. Roo tells him to get a job. They begin to argue again when they hear Olive and Pearl coming with trays.

Olive and Pearl enter with plates of sandwiches and snacks, and Olive cheerfully notes that they have time to pour drinks before midnight. Roo suggests they call Emma, but Olive says that Emma will join them if she feels like it. Olive sits beside Roo and apologizes for being dramatic earlier. Roo soothes Olive as Barney offers them glasses, telling them to drink before they start kissing. Pearl giggles and pours herself a beer, and Barney pours one for himself. Fireworks begin going off outside and Roo and Pearl turn off the lights inside.

*Remember that Johnnie is much younger than Roo. Simply keeping this in mind suggests that Roo feels threatened by Jonnie primarily because of his age. This shows that Roo is struggling with the obvious signs of his own decline as well as with Barney's betrayal. Roo's stubbornness, however, is an immature quality that keeps him from finding a mature and level way of dealing with these changes.*



*Again, Roo's unwillingness to accept Barney's remorse shows both Roo's immaturity and his "growing pains." He needs Barney more than ever because things are changing, but being together is difficult for the same reason.*



*Notice that Barney is trying to make Roo recognize that he's still loyal to him: he's insisting they leave together, and framing it in a way that makes it seem as though Barney is "saving" Roo from the drudgery of this bad layoff season. When Barney finally states that things aren't the same without Nancy, it's actually an important realization for him, and is proof that Barney is potentially maturing too.*



*Finally, Roo reveals the most important reason why he wants to follow through with the charade of this layoff season: he loves Olive too much to disappoint her. Though in practice continuing the layoff season isn't necessarily the most adult decision, when Roo places Olive's dreams and desires above his own, it shows that his love for her at least is quite mature. However, this also suggests that he idealizes the relationship he has with Olive—something that will have dire consequences.*



*Again, Roo demonstrates his increasing maturity by suggesting the group be inclusive and welcoming to others, while Olive shows the opposite by not following his lead and behaving generously. Olive's apology here suggests that her relationship with Roo might actually be as strong and loyal as Roo thinks it is, and further, that it's based on mutual respect and affection.*



They all watch the fireworks for a few minutes and Olive says to Roo that she's glad they didn't go out. Barney raises a toast to happy days and glamorous nights, which makes Pearl choke on her beer. She starts laughing as the others look at her curiously, and Pearl laughs at the suggestion that this night is glamorous. Pearl turns to her beer and seems unaware that the others are looking at each other with bewildered looks. Olive breaks down crying and Roo tries to comfort her. Barney stares into his beer and looks ashamed as the clock chimes midnight.

*Pearl sees the night for what it is: a sad, tense night. This mirrors her view of the entire layoff season and shows that she still refuses to buy into the idealism of the others. Similarly, Roo and Olive's willingness to go along with the toast says that they do still believe the idealism, though their reactions to Pearl's laughter suggests that for all their attempts, Pearl's harsh view of their sad reality is wearing on them.*



## ACT 2, SCENE 2

A few days later, Roo, still dressed from work, is asleep on the couch as the sound of a drunk argument comes from outside. Olive enters the house, yelling at whoever's outside to pay the taxi driver, and Emma hisses at her to be quiet to let Roo sleep. Olive is surprised that Roo's asleep, and upset with Emma for letting him sleep. She goes to wake him up as Barney calls for Emma to come settle things with the taxi driver.

*Even if working in the city is considered less masculine, Roo's exhaustion shows that it's still hard work. This in turn begins to imply that the characters' assessment of the relationship between masculinity and work is completely arbitrary.*



When Olive shakes Roo, it takes him a minute to fully wake up. Olive tells Roo that Barney is very drunk and is here with a friend. She describes the friend as Roo becomes alert. He gets up to look out the window and returns to Olive angry: the "friend" is Johnnie Dowd. They hear laughter from outside and Olive quickly comes up with a plan to allow Roo to escape seeing Johnnie, but Roo refuses because he doesn't want Johnnie to think he's scared. Olive makes Roo promise to not start anything.

*Here there's a definite maturity gap between Roo and Barney. After a long day's work Roo looks adult and responsible, while Barney's drunken decision to bring Johnnie home to see Roo appears exceptionally short-sighted. Olive shows her loyalty to Roo by trying to save him from the situation, which in turn affirms that Barney is breaking tradition by bringing another cane field worker here.*



An extremely drunk Barney appears on the verandah. He has ahold of Emma's apron and asks her loudly for a kiss while Pearl and Johnnie try to control him. When Barney lunges at Emma, she breaks free and runs into the house. Johnnie laughs and warns Barney that he'll be in trouble for "carnival knowledge." Emma sharply reprimands him and runs upstairs. Olive snaps at Barney to stop, and Pearl seems relieved to have help. As Barney tries to break free, he and Johnnie swing into the room. In silence, Roo stares at Johnnie and Barney.

*At Barney's age, this drunken behavior seems particularly irresponsible and even dangerous, since even the hard and sharp Emma struggles to escape him. Drinking with Johnnie is also a betrayal of the layoff season traditions, which only heightens the negative connotations of Barney's drunkenness, particularly for Roo.*



Johnnie congenially greets Roo and they exchange awkward pleasantries. Barney steps forward and begins to try to talk to Roo, but Johnnie pushes Barney back and steps towards Roo himself. He holds out his hand and tells Roo he'd like to shake hands. Roo grudgingly accepts, which excites Barney. In his excitement Barney turns to kiss Pearl and Pearl, disgusted, runs upstairs. When Barney starts talking again, Johnnie roughly tells him to stop before turning back to Roo and apologizing for laughing at him. Roo tries to deflect the apology, but Johnnie persists.

*When Johnnie takes charge and doesn't allow Barney to dictate the terms of this interaction, Barney looks young, immature, and entirely incapable. Johnnie, on the other hand, looks responsible and adult despite his actual youth. This is yet another reminder that maturity is not necessarily associated with age.*



After an awkward pause, Johnnie says that the boys want to see Roo, and they were wondering if they could all go to the stadium tonight. Roo uneasily tries to escape the invitation and Olive tells the men that Roo has other plans for the night. Unperturbed, Johnnie suggests they all go to the races the next day. When Olive again tries to say that Roo has other plans, Roo cuts her off and agrees to go. Johnnie enthusiastically starts to make plans, but Roo tells Johnnie to plan with Barney and let him know. He motions to his dirty clothes and says he needs to shower. Johnnie comments that they caught him just home from work. As he leaves the room, Roo agrees, and seems pained.

Olive coldly asks Johnnie if he'll stay for dinner, but Johnnie declines the invitation. She follows Roo upstairs. Barney, elated, tells Johnnie that getting Roo to shake was easy. Johnnie is less thrilled—he says that Roo treated him like he was a prickly cactus. Johnnie darkly says that Roo had better start acting right, because he's not going to apologize and grovel. He suggests that he needs to have a drink with Roo, and says he'd like to have a good relationship with him. Barney insists that Johnnie and Roo actually have a lot in common.

Suddenly, Barney lights up with an idea. He suggests that just the three of them—he, Roo, and Johnnie—go to the races tomorrow instead of going out in a big group. When Johnnie says that Roo won't talk in that situation, Barney suggests they take Pearl and Olive. When Johnnie notes the women's age, Barney assures him that they'll find someone younger to go with him. He hollers up the stairs for Pearl to come down and asks Johnnie if he'd be interested in going out with an eighteen-year-old girl. Johnnie is skeptical and asks if a southern girl will be silly.

When Pearl enters the living room, Barney reintroduces her to Johnnie. She steps past them to sit on the sofa and tells Barney that Olive has been telling her all about Johnnie. Barney asks if Olive mentioned that they were going to the races and tells her that the plan has changed, and they'd like to take her and Olive with them. Pearl is surprised, as she and Olive work on Saturday afternoons, and Barney nonchalantly tells her to take the day off. Pearl hesitantly agrees and says she used to like the races. Barney insists that it's settled and turns to Johnnie.

*For Roo, having Johnnie see him in his work clothes during the layoff season makes it unavoidably real that this season is different than the others. It robs him of the ability to lie and tell the boys upon his return to the cane fields that his layoff season went as usual. Similarly, having to admit to someone like Johnnie that he works in the paint factory makes Roo face up to the uncomfortable fact that they'll think less of his masculinity because of his job, which will in turn rob Roo of more of his power.*



*For all the unsavory things Roo has said about Johnnie, Johnnie shows that he's actually a pretty levelheaded, understanding, and kind individual. In this way, he's far more mature than either Roo or Barney, despite being 15 years younger. When Barney suggests that Roo and Johnnie are similar, it shows that Barney relies on having a platonic male friendship with a particular kind of person.*



*Johnnie's comment about southern girls suggests that just as Pearl has definite ideas about cane cutters, cane cutters have similarly prejudiced ideas about women from certain areas. It's ironic, however, that Johnnie's preconceptions are directed at Pearl's daughter, someone who Pearl has led everyone to believe would never be describable as silly.*



*Barney's offhand request that Pearl and Olive take the day off shows how little he values the work the women do. Barney only values their work when he's in their bar drinking with them, not when it interferes with his plans. This supports the idea that Barney in particular needs women to consistently confirm and actively support his masculinity.*



Pearl asks if Johnnie will be going without a date. Barney begins to say that Johnnie is shy and particular with women. Johnnie tries to stop Barney, but Barney presses on and asks if Pearl's daughter would like to go with him. Barney cannot remember Vera's name, and Pearl is alarmed. She gets up and says that she couldn't allow Vera to go: she's only eighteen, and she wants Vera to be raised better. When Barney persists, Pearl stiffly says she doesn't want Vera getting into bad company.

Amazed, Barney reminds Pearl that she'd be there to supervise Vera. Johnnie tries to diffuse the situation, as Barney accuses Pearl of messing everything up. Pearl nearly cries, and Barney gets another idea for who to bring for Johnnie instead of Vera. He runs out onto the back verandah. Johnnie kindly tells Pearl that he won't insist on Vera coming. Pearl loses her composure completely and says that all cane cutters are "tarred with the same brush" as she runs upstairs.

Johnnie impatiently calls for Barney, who comes back into the living room dragging a surprised Bubba with him. Johnnie tries to tell Barney that Pearl is upset, but Barney tells him to forget about Pearl. He introduces Johnnie and Bubba, though Barney doesn't let Bubba talk. Bubba and Johnnie shake hands as Barney invites Bubba to the races with Johnnie tomorrow. Bubba is uncertain, but Barney insists she has nowhere else to go and Bubba finally agrees. Barney is thrilled at his planning victory, but Johnnie sourly says that not everything is settled. He firmly asks Barney to wait outside, and Barney reluctantly leaves the room.

Johnnie turns to Bubba and awkwardly tells her that if she doesn't want to go to the races, she doesn't have to go. Bubba insists she'd like to go and she only seemed hesitant because she was surprised. She continues that Barney and Roo have never brought someone from up north to this house. Johnnie looks around and asks Bubba if she lives here. When she explains that she lives next door, Johnnie suggests that Barney asking her to the races is less proper, but Bubba assures him that she spends a lot of time with Roo and Barney.

Johnnie begins to walk through the room and says he's spent a lot of time imagining this place, and it's developed a reputation among the boys up north with what Roo and Barney say about it. As Johnnie looks around, he says it looks like their tales were mostly lies. Bubba nervously says the house isn't big, but Johnnie insists that this place just doesn't look fun at all. When Bubba insists that Johnnie just doesn't understand, he asks her to tell him. She shakily says that it's the events that create the feeling here and it's not something she can just tell him about.

*Again, Johnnie shows that he's more adept at reading social cues than Barney is, an indicator of maturity (and, though Pearl would never admit it, a sign that not all cane cutters are drunken ladies' men). Despite Pearl's delicate phrasing, she does finally admit that she still takes a very low view of the layoff season and believes Barney and his ilk are crude and unworthy of her (or Vera's) time.*



*Barney is accusing Pearl of more than messing up his race day plans; this is also an underhanded accusation that Pearl isn't Nancy. This shows that though Pearl is the one who suffers the brunt of Barney's pained disillusionment, Barney is truly angry with Nancy for forcing the friends to deal with these changes in the first place.*



*Though Barney is behaving extremely selfishly through all of this, it's worth remembering that he's trying so hard to make the day at the races happen to save his relationship with Roo. This sheds light on the fact that Barney is undoubtedly suffering without his close friendship with Roo, and is willing to make his close friends very uncomfortable (as well as accept Bubba's adulthood, something he's been previously unwilling to do) to fix his relationship.*



*Once again, Johnnie shows that he and Pearl have quite a bit in common: he's also concerned with the propriety of asking a young girl like Bubba or Vera to the races. Though Johnnie is a cane cutter, he's also behaving like the kind of decent, thoughtful man Pearl seems to desire. Bubba's desire to go to the races suggests that she sees this as an opportunity to experience for herself the joys of the layoff season she's spent her whole life watching: essentially, this is an opportunity for her to grow up.*



*Having Johnnie experience the same kind of reaction to the house that Pearl did drives home that Barney and Roo's conception of the layoff season was a highly embellished, idealized version of the truth. Similarly, Bubba's discomfort at Johnnie's lack of understanding shows that she too idealizes the season and what goes on, but she gets at an important point: it's lived experience and the created memories that allow for the idealization in the first place.*



Johnnie motions to the **kewpie dolls** and asks what they're for. Bubba explains that Roo gives one to Olive every year, and Johnnie snorts and makes disparaging remarks about the dolls. Seeing Bubba's face, he asks if she's a relative, and then asks how he's hurt her feelings. She tells him that the dolls are meaningful to Olive and Roo, and says again that he wouldn't understand.

Johnnie sits and asks why everyone treats anything connected to Roo as though Johnnie won't understand it, or can't live up to the standard. Bubba sits and wonders if it's like the walking sticks. When Johnnie looks confused, she begins to explain that it's a running joke. He turns the conversation back to the races and asks Bubba if she'd truly like to go with him. When Bubba says she'd like to, he asks her to remind him of her name. Johnnie says that Roo and Barney are trying to keep Bubba "in the cradle" by calling her a nickname, and asks for her real name. Bubba smiles at him and says her name is Kathie. They smile warmly at each other, and then Johnnie yells for Barney so he can say goodbye.

Barney comes in from the verandah and calls for Roo. Johnnie asks Barney to tell Kathie the plan for tomorrow. Barney is confused for a moment until he follows Johnnie's gaze to Bubba. Roo appears, half shaved, and cursorily says goodbye to Johnnie. At Johnnie's prodding, Roo asks him to tell the boys to stay out of trouble. Everyone laughs and then Barney walks Johnnie out to the road.

Roo asks Bubba why she's here, and she explains that she met Johnnie. Olive enters, asks if Johnnie's gone, and greets Bubba. Roo seems angry and when Olive tries to say that meeting Johnnie wasn't so bad, Roo coldly says that Barney forced him to give in to Johnnie. Olive moves away from him and tells him to not make things worse, since Emma is upset and Pearl is crying.

Roo asks why Pearl is crying, and Olive says she's not sure, but it's something about Barney asking her to allow Vera to go to the races. Bubba cuts in and says that Johnnie asked *her* to go, not Vera. Olive sighs and insists that Barney wouldn't try to take such a young girl to the races with only men. Bubba explains that it's not all men going tomorrow; it's her, Roo, Barney, Olive, Pearl, and Johnnie. Roo is incensed that Barney and Johnnie apparently worked out the plan before they even arrived to try to get him in the same room with Johnnie. He wipes his face, throws his towel at Olive, and yells out the door for Barney. Olive and Bubba try to call Roo back, but Roo tells them to go away as Barney drunkenly wanders back towards the door.

*Johnnie's remarks about the dolls emphasize their childish nature, as they reinforce for Johnnie that his adult idols are living in a state of suspended immaturity and questionable reality, where baby dolls signify more than childishness.*



*Barney and Roo aren't just the gods of their own tales: Johnnie implies that the other men in the north also think of them as gods. However, now that Johnnie sees the reality of their so-called paradise, he realizes that all of that is just idealization, not reality. Johnnie also makes the connection that the idealization hinges on ignoring that everyone is getting older. Therefore, by asking Bubba for her real name, Johnnie asks Bubba to reject the layoff season's idealization and instead create her own reality as an adult.*



*Barney's confusion supports the idea that Bubba must also remain a child in order to maintain the idealized fantasy of the layoff season. It shows that he's never thought of her as an adult with a real, adult name, but will only treat her like an adult when it's convenient for him.*



*Roo is so angry because he relied heavily on the idealized image of his masculinity to maintain his power and control over the boys in the north. Now that Johnnie has seen a dressed down version of Roo, maintaining that power is going to be harder—and Roo sees Barney as to blame for facilitating this shift.*



*Olive's comment about Vera is ironic, given that Vera is only a year or two younger than Olive was when the tradition of the layoff season began, which presumably included some outings to the races. This shows that Olive is entirely unable to conceptualize the relative ages and maturity levels of the other characters. She cannot accept her own age, and she's similarly unwilling to accept that Pearl, someone Olive's age, could have a child old enough to participate in these "adult" activities. This also reinforces how and why Olive continues to deny Bubba's adulthood.*



Olive warns Roo that he can argue, but not fight. Roo yells at her to get out, and Olive pulls Bubba away with her. Roo grabs Barney's collar and hauls him inside. Barney asks Roo to be gentle since he's drunk, but Roo furiously shoves Barney into the room. Barney admits he brought Johnnie for Roo's own good, but Roo won't let him speak more. He insists that Barney is trying to bring him down by letting Johnnie see him covered in paint. Barney insists that they've all been nearly naked together out in the cane fields, but Roo says that the cane fields aren't the same as a paint factory. Barney tries to turn away, but Roo insists they stay and talk.

Barney turns back to Roo and accuses him of being jealous of Johnnie, and he says that the boys feel the same way. He says that Johnnie is going to be ganger next season, and Roo asks if Barney brought Johnnie here so that they could make up and Roo could resume his role as ganger. Roo begins lobbing accusations at Barney: of scheming and using Bubba as bait, of chasing after Johnnie, and of trying to get Johnnie to join them here for the layoff. He calls Barney a leech. Barney rushes Roo and they fight. Olive and Emma run in and try to separate the men as Bubba and Pearl look on. Olive finally screams and the men break apart. She helps Roo to a chair and threatens to make them sleep outside. Roo tells Olive that this is none of her business.

Olive angrily asks if she's supposed to just sit and watch men their age fight over one bad season. When Roo insists it's not about the bad season, Barney tells Roo to "be a man" and admit the truth. He goads Roo, taunting him by saying he's not willing to admit the truth. Olive asks if Barney wants Roo to admit that Johnnie Dowd was the better man, and reminds Barney that Roo had a bad back. Barney laughs. Olive asks what's funny, and when Barney asks Roo to tell her, Roo rushes Barney, pulls his hands behind his back, and forces him to his knees. Gasping, Barney says that Roo never had a bad back. Roo says that Johnnie did a better job because he's a better man, and then Roo throws Barney to the floor.

Barney asks Roo if he really thought he would've told the women his secret, and Roo insists it's time the women knew they were dealing with losers. Roo continues and tells Barney to share how disappointing of a lover he's been recently. Roo mentions several women who have been seen laughing after a night with Barney, as Barney pleads with Roo to stop and says the women were lying. Finally, Roo says that Barney couldn't even hold Nancy. Barney curses at Roo. He grabs the nearest vase, which holds the seventeenth **kewpie doll**, and tries to throw it at Roo's head. Roo catches it and throws it to the floor, where it shatters. Olive sinks to the floor and grabs the doll, while Bubba runs out the back door.

*Barney's immaturity comes through when he tries to use the natural consequences of his immature drinking spree (being sloppily drunk) to get out of having an honest, adult conversation. Again, though the conversation revolves around Johnnie's role in all of this, the true problem here is the erosion of the trust and friendship between Barney and Roo, and the aging of both men. Roo (selfishly and immaturity) refuses to see Barney's attempts to patch up the conflicts as actions taken in good faith.*



*Roo's comment about Bubba shows that like Barney, he's unable or unwilling to think of Bubba as an adult who's certainly old enough to make her own decisions and agree to something like the invitation to the races. All of the accusations add up to a greater, unspoken accusation that Barney is trying to change the traditions in order to repair the friendship. The fact that Roo is hurt about this shows that the men prioritize these traditions even over true caring and friendship.*



*When Roo finally admits the truth that he's just old, it successfully shatters the illusion of the entire layoff season. It makes it abundantly clear that everyone is far too old to keep pretending that they're in their early twenties. However, it's interesting to note that Barney's lie about Roo's back also suggested that Roo was aging. In turn, this shows that age has been the primary culprit all along, both in lies and in truth.*



*When Barney continues to insist that he's still unshakably loyal to Roo, it again makes Barney's earlier actions seem like unsuccessful attempts to demonstrate his loyalty, rather than malicious jabs at Roo. Roo, however, is too self-conscious about his own age, and so instead of accepting Barney's intent, he turns to insulting the unfortunate consequences of Barney's age by insulting his inability to perform sexually. Like Roo, Barney constructed his identity around his ability to woo women and affirm his masculinity, just as Roo constructed his around being a ganger boss. This emasculates both men.*



## ACT 3, SCENE 1

The next morning, Pearl stands in the living room dressed in **black** again, waiting sadly for a taxi. Olive enters the living room with a cup of tea and offers it to Pearl. Pearl tries to refuse, but finally sits down and accepts the kindness. She and Olive discuss when Pearl will get the rest of her things, and Olive asks Pearl if she notices anything different about the room. The room has been cleared and tidied of any decoration, including all the **kewpie dolls**. Pearl tells Olive she heard her cleaning late last night. Olive explains that she started trying just to clean up the broken vase, but couldn't seem to stop. She laughs and says that Emma always tells her that it's a sign that something is off when a person tries to move furniture alone.

Pearl asks when Barney will be back. Olive answers that if she knows Barney, he's guaranteed to return before evening. Pearl suggests that Olive doesn't really know Barney. She says that the seventeen years Olive talks about don't prove anything, since nothing in this house is actually how Olive described it. Olive says, "Oh, Pearl," but Pearl continues. She says that Olive is blind to everything outside the house and outside of the layoff season. Olive insists she's blind to what she chooses. Pearl persists: she tells Olive to look at the undecorated room and see that it's not wonderful anymore, it's dreary and tired. She tells Olive that if she'd look at the layoff like an adult, she'd find the same thing.

Olive approaches Pearl and says stonily that everything she ever said about Roo and Barney was the truth, every year until this one. She says that Pearl is the last person who should be complaining about this year. Pearl's eyes widen and she asks if Olive is blaming her for coming instead of Nancy. Olive affirms this, and Pearl says she's wasting her breath if Olive won't see the truth. Then Barney knocks on the front door. Olive goes to let him in, but Pearl blocks her way and says that Barney will try to convince her to stay. Olive steps around and lets Barney in.

Olive tells Barney that he's just in time to say goodbye to Pearl, and Barney replies that he thought Pearl might be on her way. Pearl and Barney greet each other quietly and Olive angrily excuses herself to the kitchen. Barney nudges Pearl's suitcase with his toe and asks her if she's planning on taking it somewhere. Pearl begins to say that her taxi is coming, but Barney cuts her off and says she needs to let him help, since the suitcase is too big for a woman to carry.

*Pearl's black dress once again symbolizes her active choice to look and act like the mature adult she is. The few weeks she spent at Emma's house were a few weeks that she got to pretend she was younger, and now that the spell is broken it's time to return to the real world. Olive's recitation of Emma's words suggests that Olive is still unaware that she's growing up. Cleaning up the childish decorations is a symbolic acceptance of adulthood, but Olive is too caught up in maintaining the façade that she can't see it.*



*Pearl underhandedly suggests that Roo, Barney, and Olive's blind loyalty to their traditions kept them from ever having to work to make them useful and fulfilling each year. Rather than asking questions about whether or not an activity is still exciting, they instead insisted on doing it anyway just because of tradition. As an outsider, Pearl understood immediately that none of the traditions were fulfilling anymore; they only kept doing them because of the idealized visions in their minds that she doesn't share.*



*Olive confirms that Nancy's marriage is to blame for the changes that took place this summer. If she hadn't left, the others would (probably) not have been faced with the impossible task of figuring out how to suddenly adapt when they'd spent the last 16 years actively refusing to do so. Olive essentially blames Nancy's mature decision for forcing the others to think critically and maturely, thereby shattering the carefully constructed layoff season illusions.*



*Barney's comment about the suitcase is a way for him to affirm and bolster his slipping sense of masculinity: even if he does struggle to perform sexually, he's still manly enough to lug around heavy suitcases. This also reinforces the idea that masculinity is a performance. Barney's masculinity isn't defined by the simple fact that he's male; it's defined by what he can do.*



Pearl asks Barney where he's been, but Barney insists that only a wife can ask that question. He turns to Pearl, looks her up and down, and tells her that her **black dress** is the most respectable dress of her wardrobe. He says that he doesn't mind her leaving, but asks if she has to look like she's going to a funeral. Pearl imperiously puts her gloves on and says that she knew he wouldn't be able to stand her being respectable again, but Barney insists that she was never *not* respectable. Angrily, Pearl shoots back that she was never trying to be a second Nancy.

Barney looks confused and says that when it comes down to it, Pearl is leaving for the same reason Nancy did. He says that Nancy left to get married because she couldn't get what she wanted here. Sadly, Pearl asks Barney if he still thinks he's a prize. She admits that she came here foolishly intending to marry and after last night, when he wanted to take Vera to the races, she knows it won't work out. Barney sits and insists that an afternoon at the races isn't horrible, but Pearl insists she knows about all the shenanigans that go on at the races. She insists that Vera will grow up to be visibly respectable even when she's not wearing **black**. Barney gives in and says he's not going to stop Pearl from being a strict mother.

Pearl begins to ask Barney a question, and a horn honks outside. Barney leans out the door and yells to the taxi driver that they'll be there momentarily before asking Pearl what she wants to know. She asks Barney to tell her the third thing a woman needs to have. Barney says it's too late, and that Pearl doesn't have it anyway. When she looks downcast, he says there was only one woman, Nancy, who had it—and she didn't have enough to make a relationship work. He picks up Pearl's suitcase as Olive enters.

Olive and Pearl say goodbye, and Pearl reminds Olive to tell their boss that she won't be in today. Pearl softly apologizes to Olive for not being the right type before she leaves for her taxi. Olive watches her go as Roo comes downstairs, realizes that Pearl is leaving, and notices that Barney is back. He looks the room over and remarks that the **dolls** are gone. Irritated, Olive says she took everything down to dust and the birds and butterflies fell apart in her hands. She says the dolls weren't broken, but she couldn't stand putting back up the few things that were in good repair.

Roo offers to get Olive new decorations, but Olive refuses. When Roo reminds Olive that she always liked the decorations, she spits back that she likes lots of things she hasn't seen recently, like joking and laughing. She says if she can live without the laughter, she can live without decorations.

*Pearl's insistence that she isn't a second Nancy is ironic given that unlike the others, Nancy did finally decide to grow up, just like Pearl did. Though Nancy certainly enjoyed her extended youth, she and Pearl are more alike than Pearl wants to realize. Notably, Pearl won't accept this because the others speak only of an idealized version of a younger, less responsible Nancy.*



*Pearl admits that she came into the layoff season with idealized visions, but her visions mapped out a path for her to achieve a greater degree of adulthood. This shows again the degree to which Pearl truly is adult in contrast with the wild immaturity of all the other characters. When Barney mentions why Nancy left, he shows that he understands that the layoff season wasn't going to be able to continue to be fulfilling forever. He finally accepts that Nancy changed, and for her, the layoff season had to change to accommodate that.*



*The third quality could possibly be a sense of consistent, unwavering youthfulness—something that Nancy gave up when she married someone else. In Barney's mind, this quality is the one that would in turn allow him to never have to marry, as his partner would never be mature enough to ask for such a commitment.*



*Even if Olive's cleaning spree was only a subconscious acceptance of adulthood, her discovery that the decorations were in bad repair is proof that she cannot ignore adulthood anymore, or only engage with it subconsciously. Refusing to put the dolls back out supports this: because Olive is moving on from her youthfulness, the dolls are an uncomfortable reminder of the years she's spent behaving childishly.*



*Here, Olive suggests that what truly matters is friendship and loyalty to her partner, though Olive's later choices will show that she doesn't actually buy into what she's suggesting.*



Roo insists that the fight with Barney had been brewing for some time and reminds Olive what Barney "did to him." Olive insists that Barney just got drunk and brought someone home who Roo doesn't like. Roo struggles to say that shaking hands with Johnnie was the hardest thing he's ever done, and his fingers felt like they'd been crushed after. Near tears, Olive asks why Roo didn't leave the conflict up north, since it seems to have little to do with the layoff season. Roo tries to say that it just all seemed to happen. Olive whirls away and comes face to face with Emma. She angrily accuses Emma of eavesdropping, and runs upstairs.

Roo sits on the piano stool and Emma picks up Pearl's cup and saucer. Seeing how moody Roo looks, she tells him to not let Olive get him down. She confirms that she was indeed eavesdropping and on a day like this, she wouldn't miss it for the world. She sits down and seems pleased as she says that it's interesting to finally see everyone fighting, and she's only sad Nancy's not here to see it. She says that Nancy knew what was going on.

Roo says that Nancy got married, but Emma insists that Nancy purposefully got out while things were good. Emma says that she remembers everything. She recounts the very first Sunday when Nancy and Olive met Roo and Barney at the aquarium, and Nancy said that Roo and Barney were the only fish out of water. Emma says that she liked Nancy, and Roo says they all did.

Suddenly, Roo asks Emma who's at fault for messing up the layoff season, him or Barney. Emma is astonished and asks him if he's kidding. She asks if he really thought the layoff seasons would last forever. Roo repeats his question and says it has to be somebody's fault, but Emma says that they're all just too old for it now. She tells Roo to look in the mirror, and when Roo resists, asks if the youthful Johnnie was a mirage. Roo insists that he's not old; Emma's old and Tony Moreno is old. At this, Roo turns to the mirror over the fireplace and studies his reflection, looking confused and concerned.

Emma tells Roo he's not ancient yet, but he's not seventeen either, and she asks him to sit down. Roo, still confused, says that something went wrong and it was either his fault or Barney's. Emma concedes that Barney may have had more to do with the fight, but says that he's been slipping longer than Roo has. Roo quickly insists that one lousy cane season doesn't mean he's slipping, but Emma says it's just the first. She says that Roo will certainly still be able to earn a living, but he won't be the best anymore.

*When Roo insists that things just happened, he's attempting to absolve himself of responsibility for anything that went wrong. It's important to remember that this is a trend; the group's strict adherence to their yearly traditions has allowed them to skirt the responsibility of figuring out how to manage and grow with their changing relationships. The fact that the conflict followed Roo south is testament to the fact that age isn't something that can be compartmentalized; it will fundamentally change who he is, wherever he is.*



*Finally, Emma uses her advanced age to step into the role of an all-knowing oracle of sorts. By implying that she (and Nancy) saw this conflict coming, she tells the reader/audience that age isn't something people can escape forever. It's inevitable, and refusing to adapt to one's advancing age has painful and even disastrous consequences.*



*Emma continues to construct Nancy as someone who was fully aware that the layoff season was something finite, and that the youthfulness that accompanied it was an act that she'd someday have to leave behind. The comment at the aquarium implies that Nancy knew Roo and Barney would struggle with these realizations.*



*Though the notes and stage directions never give Tony Moreno's exact age, Roo's reaction here implies that Tony is likely within a few years of Roo himself. This shows that while Roo was able to understand that men his age can be considered old in some situations, he never made the leap that he could be considered old. Emma suggests that traditions simply cannot stay the same when people are constantly changing.*



*The conflict between Roo and Barney aside, Roo shows here that he still idealizes Barney and cannot conceive of the possibility that Barney might be "slipping." The characters don't just idealize the traditions; they all idealize each other and fail to notice when the idealizations are no longer true.*



Emma asks Roo why he thinks Barney lied. Roo insists that lying is natural for Barney, but Emma says that Barney only started lying when women started brushing him off. She asks Roo to connect the dots that his own brush-off of Barney coincides with when Barney started lying about Roo. Annoyed, Emma says that both men were champions, but being champions would never last. She turns to leave, but Roo stops and says that she might be making sense. Emma says that if he and Barney had stopped to look, they would've seen this coming—like Nancy did.

Roo asks about Olive. Emma says that Olive is a fool. She drags out the seventeenth **doll** from a cupboard and says that Olive was up in the middle of the night, hugging the doll and crying her eyes out: a grown woman crying over a baby doll. Emma tosses the doll on the table and goes upstairs to Olive. Roo miserably picks up the doll and fixes its skirts.

Roo hears Bubba and Barney approaching. Barney tries to grab Bubba, but Bubba pulls free. Barney asks Bubba why she needs to talk to Olive, and Bubba looks hurt and confused as she explains that Olive will tell her whether it's true or not that the day at the races is canceled. Roo confirms that the races are indeed off. Barney says he told Johnnie last night that Bubba wouldn't be able to come. Bubba asks where Johnnie is staying, and says she'll go tell him herself that she can come. She threatens to wait outside the bar if Barney won't tell her. When Roo approaches her, she tells him he won't be able to talk her out of talking to Johnnie.

Roo tells Bubba that she's certainly entitled to talk to Johnnie, but deserves to know why she was asked to the races in the first place. Barney says it's his fault and he was drunk, but Bubba insists that Johnnie asked her personally after sending Barney out. Roo tries to tell Bubba that Johnnie was drinking and likely doesn't even remember, and Barney asks if she'd like to make a fool of herself going down to see him.

As he sits, Roo asks Bubba what's so important about going to the races. Bubba says emotionally that Johnnie asked her, and he asked to call her by her real name. She runs to Roo and says that even if Johnnie forgot, this is the closest she'll come to getting to experience for herself what she's witnessed for the last seventeen years. Barney tries to tell Bubba that Johnnie isn't like them, but Bubba says that Johnnie is more like Roo and Barney than any of the other men. Barney tries to disillusion Bubba, but Roo stops him and calls Bubba to him. He takes her hand and asks seriously if she's sure she knows what she's getting herself into. He asks if they've spoiled the layoff for her, but Bubba says that nothing else is as good as the layoff.

*By bringing up the concept of sight, Emma suggests in another way that the problems here are a matter of choosing to see the truth or not. She insists that it's not a horrible thing that Roo and Barney are no longer at the top of their games, and instead asks Roo to consider that this is just a natural consequence of aging. This idea will stick with Roo and carry over into his later conversation with Bubba.*



*For all of Olive's subconscious signals that she's growing and maturing, Emma insists that Olive is resisting the hardest. Olive's meltdown over the doll is a heartbreakingly childish event, but Emma cannot muster sympathy when she sees that Olive is actively resisting maturity and change.*



*Roo and Barney are very much treating Bubba like a child by not allowing her agency in making the plans, and then not including her when the plans change. In the last twelve hours, however, Bubba has undergone a change herself: she now demands to be treated like an adult, and is even willing to do the "improper" and adult activity of going and finding Johnnie herself. This shows that Johnnie's words had an impact on Bubba, and showed her that she needs to mature in order to begin making her ideals her reality.*



*The way that Barney and Roo tag team Bubba shows that their relationship isn't entirely finished; they can still come together to accomplish a common goal and protect someone close to them. As Barney accepts responsibility for being drunk, he also accepts that he's too old for such shenanigans.*



*Unlike Roo and Barney, Johnnie gave Bubba a taste of what it's like to be treated like an adult by a masculine, attractive cane cutter. When she says that Johnnie is more like Roo and Barney than other men are, she insists that Roo and Barney are, as Emma said, past their prime: in his youth, Johnnie is the picture of cane-cutting masculinity that Bubba remembers from her childhood. This suggests also that Barney and Roo's attempts to continue playing that part were unsuccessful, as it disintegrated next to the real thing.*



When Roo asks if that's true even after last night, Bubba insists that what happened won't happen to her. Softly, Roo says that Bubba has outgrown them, and Bubba agrees. Roo asks Barney to tell Bubba where Johnnie is, and then tells Bubba to arrange to meet Johnnie somewhere and to tell him that Barney isn't talking sense so she doesn't make herself cheap. Barney scowls and grudgingly wishes Bubba the best. Bubba says that they don't have to worry about her, and Roo replies, "We know, Kathie." Bubba leaves, and Roo and Barney decide they'll beat up Johnnie if he's not good to her.

Barney tells Roo that he's leaving to pick grapes with the boys and Johnnie. He asks Roo if he's going to make a fuss about it, and Roo insists he doesn't care anymore. Barney is shocked, but says that it's probably for the best, since they can't seem to coexist anymore. He continues, saying that he'll go pick grapes and they'll meet back up in the north for a fresh start at the beginning of the cane season. Roo slowly says that he's not going north this year; he's staying here. He insists the cold won't be so bad and it's time he made a change, and tells a mystified Barney that he's had too much of a good thing. Barney asks if Roo's quitting because of Bubba, which Roo denies.

Roo and Barney hear an argument upstairs. Olive, dressed for work, comes down the stairs followed by Emma. Emma turns for the kitchen as Olive enters the living room. Olive remarks snidely that the men can be in the same room together, and Barney says that they were fixing the damage. Olive insists the only damage was a broken vase and old decorations. Roo tries to reprimand Olive, and Barney reminds her that it's not just Olive who's suffering after the fight. Olive asks Barney if he's upset after losing Pearl. The three speak over each other, Olive catches that someone is leaving on Monday, and then Roo firmly sends Barney upstairs to pack.

Olive asks Roo if it's time to settle up, and asks him to tell her what all the broken decorations and seventeen summers are worth in cash. Angry, Roo says that he's not leaving; only Barney is. He tells her it's horrible to talk about money that way. Olive replies that Roo's the sort to just leave money on the mantel. Roo collects himself and says they've never been that low and cheap, but Olive insists she feels low and cheap after what's happened this summer. She says that Pearl made her feel that way. Roo is disgusted at this, but Olive says that she couldn't stand Pearl walking around and looking at everything, but not seeing what Olive wanted her to see. She starts crying and says that she never lied to Pearl, but Pearl didn't see any of the things Olive told her about.

*To some degree, Pearl's desire for decency has rubbed off on Roo. This shows that even if he idealizes his own youthful past, he also wants Bubba to do better and be better than those that came before her. By calling her Kathie, Roo tells Bubba that he finally sees and recognizes her as an adult and will endeavor to treat her that way. In accepting his own age, then, Roo also accepts Bubba's new sense of adulthood.*



*Both men think that the only way to handle the changes is to throw out everything and start mostly fresh, abandoning their traditions and their friendship in the process. By deciding to stay in the city, Roo also accepts that he's never again going to be the hyper-masculine gangster that he once was, which suggests that he's open to exploring different ways to perform masculinity. He realizes that though working in the city makes him seem less masculine than the cane cutters, it doesn't entirely deprive him of being a man.*



*Olive continues to unsuccessfully pretend that her life wasn't actually upended last night, which shows that Emma was right: Olive's immature habit of avoiding conflict means that she's entirely unable to handle these new adult problems that demand her attention. She's also extremely selfish here, as her jab about Pearl suggests more that she's upset her plan didn't work than honestly concerned for Barney's emotional wellbeing.*



*Olive cannot make the leap (like Bubba did) that happy, positive memories and feelings are what allowed Olive to idealize the layoff season in the first place. Those things aren't things she can share or explain to another person, so this now leaves Olive isolated and unmoored. This is also a very youthful view to take on the world, which in turn suggests that at least in terms of emotional maturity, Bubba surpassed Olive when she realized how idealization really happens.*



Roo tries to comfort Olive and suggests that Pearl might've seen some of the charm, but Olive won't be convinced. Roo says that they'll just forget Pearl ever came as Olive fishes out a hankie and blows her nose. Roo teases her kindly about how she looks when she cries, and Olive insists to Roo that the butterfly decorations *did* fall apart when she touched them, but she admits that she didn't put the **kewpie dolls** back out because she was angry. Roo softly tells Olive that it's silly to treat her as a woman when she's really just a young girl. He kisses her and asks if she has to go to work, but Olive insists she must.

Olive asks Roo if he and Barney could come down for the afternoon, but Roo explains that Barney is still going to the races with the boys that he'll later leave with. When Olive asks if Roo couldn't get Barney to stay, Roo replies that Barney wouldn't take a job in the city. Olive says she doesn't blame him, and Roo tenses. Olive hesitantly asks if Roo would like to go with the boys and says she wouldn't mind, and Roo asks if Olive is trying to get rid of him. She replies that it just doesn't seem right for the two men to not leave together.

Roo tells Olive that he's staying here with her. She stares at him and asks how he'll meet up with Barney for the start of the season, and Roo insists that Barney will be fine without him, since he has Johnnie now. He says that he's not going back ever again, and takes Olive in his arms. She's stiff and looks bewildered. Roo tenderly tells Olive that he wants to marry her, seventeen years too late. Olive freezes in horror for a moment before almost screaming "No!" at Roo. Roo is appalled at her reaction and asks her what's wrong, and she says that he has to go back. Olive continues screaming and asks Roo if he really thinks she'll let this end in marriage and the paint factory.

Roo grabs Olive and shouts at her that she first told him that he made her look bad, and now she won't marry him. Olive breaks away and then runs back to Roo, pummeling his chest and yelling at him to give her back what he's taken. Roo grabs her wrists and tells her it's all gone, and then throws her away from him. Olive falls to the floor and sobs that she'll kill Roo before she lets him take it. Roo tells her to go ahead and kill him. He gets on the floor with her, hits it, and says that they're going to be here for the rest of their lives. Olive doubles over crying.

*Roo finally understands that Olive is extremely immature, petty, and selfish—it's entirely appropriate to think of her as a young girl, even though she's close to 40. However, Roo's kindness as he makes this realization shows that he still loves Olive and idealizes their relationship, her immaturity aside. He still believes their relationship is built on mutual affection and trust, and will certainly weather this storm just fine.*



*Olive's support for Barney's decision suggests that she still holds a very particular view of what makes a real man (that is, he doesn't work in the city). In turn, this begins to chip away at Roo's belief that his relationship with Olive is solid. Further, Olive shows that she cares more about upholding tradition than about her actual relationship when she asks Roo if he wants to go.*



*Rather than accept the changes and grow up, Olive goes backwards: her tantrum is a spectacularly childish one, thrown because she isn't getting what she wants. Because Roo believed that Olive cared more for him than she did for traditions, he never expected her to reject his offer. Essentially, he discovers that Olive prizes tradition (including the maintenance of Roo's masculinity in the cane fields) over caring love and happiness, simply because that kind of love isn't "exciting."*



*Roo hasn't "taken" anything but Olive's ability to ignore the truth that things have changed. His proposal of marriage is one that carries weight and means that there's no going back: either she says yes and things change, or she says no and things change anyway. In recognizing this, Olive shows that she does understand that maturity has come for her, but by continuing to throw her tantrum, she also continues to resist.*



Emma and Barney run in, asking about the commotion. Olive won't tell Emma what's going on. She gets up and walks to the door as though she's drunk, sobbing and gagging. She looks at Roo one last time before grabbing her bag, steadying herself, and wandering away. The others watch her for a minute and then Emma turns to the men. She tells them to leave Olive alone and never come back: the layoffs are over for everyone. Emma suddenly seems older as she leaves for the kitchen.

Barney quietly turns to Roo and says that the other boys, Johnnie included, can go to hell: the two of them can make a fresh start anywhere. He suggests several places they can go and tries to turn Roo's gaze away from the seventeenth **doll**, which sits on the piano. Roo, breathing heavily, picks up the doll. Barney continues throwing out suggestions but backs away from Roo. Roo begins to beat the doll against the piano until it's shattered and its clothes are shredded. He drops it, and a single scrap of silk clings to his fingers. Roo sways for a minute and drops to the piano stool. Barney puts his hand on Roo's shoulder and encourages him to get up. Roo stands and looks at the silk before finally letting it fall. He locks eyes with Barney, and they silently acknowledge what they've lost. They leave the house.

*When Olive leaves, she tells Roo that she values her memories and their traditions over the real, grownup person Roo has become over the last several months. Emma then assumes the role of Olive's protective mother, reinforcing her loyalty to her daughter, which remains despite the end of the traditions.*



*When Barney and Roo lose their opportunities to choose any other avenue, they reaffirm their friendship. In doing so, Barney and Roo show that platonic male friendship like theirs is stronger than their traditions, and will outlast their traditions as well. When Roo beats the doll, he damages a token that Olive might use to remember the layoff seasons and turns it into something ugly and violent—which is exactly what the seventeenth layoff season has been. In destroying the doll, he also destroys the magic.*





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