

THE ADVENTURES OF
JACK AND MAX

a play by Harvey Perr

This play covers a span of twelve years - from 1952 to 1964. It takes place in America. Robert Frost America. Clean and clear and rugged and traditional. Chairs that people can sit on, be comfortable in. Portraits of presidents. Mount Rushmore in a living room. Patterns of flowers on the sofa. And potted palms. Big old radios and big new television sets. Rugs on the floor. Kate Smith America. Mid-West America. New England America. Small Town America. Red white and blue, and apple pie too!

There are three sets: the home of HETTY and CLYDE BROWN; the home of LEWIS KEYSTONE; the apartment of FANNY CRUICKSHANK. All three sets are similar in their stuffiness, their homeliness, their cheap and familiar monuments to archaic Americana. The differences are subtle. Each set, however, should provide us with a key to the character and personality of its inhabitants. The BROWN house should be vaguely pretentious; the KEYSTONE house should be symbolic of the disorder of LEWIS KEYSTONE, JR.'s mind, his lack of commitment to any style; the CRUICKSHANK apartment should be an ode to sterility, to FANNY's cold virginity. Haunted houses without ghosts.

ACT ONE: Nostalgia

(A Saturday night in the autumn of 1952. The home of CLYDE and HETTY BROWN. Foyer, living room, dining room downstairs. Bedroom upstairs. Connecting stairway. When the curtain rises, CLYDE, in his fifties, grey-haired and plain, is in the bedroom dressing. HETTY, in her fifties, grey-haired and plain, is in the dining room with ROSIE, their maid, a plain girl in her early twenties.)

HETTY

Dinner's at eight, Rosie. And that's final.

ROSIE

Yes, Mrs. Brown.

HETTY

You knew about this dinner party for weeks. And you had no business making a date for tonight. It's my last word on the subject, do you hear? For weeks. We've been planning this dinner party for weeks.

ROSIE

Yes, Mrs. Brown.

HETTY

Imagine making a date on the very night we're having a dinner party we've been planning for weeks. Well, it's one date you'll have to break. Do you hear?

ROSIE

Yes, Mrs. Brown.

HETTY

How do I look, Rosie? How do you like my new dress?

ROSIE

*sall right.

HETTY

What? What did you say, Rosie?

ROSIE

I said 'sall right. That's what I said.

HETTY

Oh. I paid too much for it, I'll tell you that. Much too much. Imagine me, at my age, wasting money on a new dress. Oh, it seemed like a good idea, all right, when I started planning this dinner party, but now it suddenly seems a waste. Well, maybe not altogether a waste. Max'll like it. Yes. Max'll like it. Do you think Max'll like it?

ROSIE

Yes, Mrs. Brown.

HETTY

Yes, I think he'll like it. I think you're right, Rosie. Max'll like it....Clyde?

CLYDE

(from the bedroom)

I'm up here.

HETTY

I know where you are. What are you doing?....Now, you watch that roast, Rosie!

(HETTY goes upstairs; ROSIE goes to the living room and makes a telephone call.)

ROSIE

Hello. Is Benjie there?... 'S Rose. Tell him 's Rose.

(She sings, waiting for Benjie)

Hi. It's me. Listen, I won't be able to make the seven thirty show. I know, but I gotta work a little late.. Well, they probably think they're gonna ruin my whole.. night, but I'll get outta here....Well, we'll make the nine thirty show. Meetcha in front of the Strand tween a quarter after nine and nine thirty. Okay?....What? Jesus Christ, Benjie!....Well, listen. I can't talk. See ya later...Bye...No. You hang up first!

(ROSIE goes to the dining room, singing. She exits, to kitchen. Attention is now on CLYDE and HETTY in the bedroom.)

HETTY

Did it ever occur to you, Clyde, that Jack may be a social leper of sorts?

CLYDE

Or Max.

HETTY

Not Max. Max has always been so out-going, so sure of himself. People like that in a man. On the other hand, you know it yourself, Clyde, Jack's been the stick-in-the-mud. Diffident is the word for Jack. I was just wondering if perhaps it wouldn't have been wiser to say on the invitations that there was just a dinner party on such and such a date instead of pointing out it was a party for Max and Jack. After all, there is the possibility that Jack's name on the invitation scared everyone off. And here I've been planning this party for weeks. My buying a new dress and all and you buying a new tie just for the occasion. And that big fat roast! All going to waste in a way. One telephone call after another, one insincere voice after another, all begging off, all filled with regrets. Let's face it, Clyde, nobody's coming. Nobody that we invited is coming tonight. As sure as I'm standing here, I swear it was Jack's name on the invitation that kept them away.

CLYDE

Or Max's!

HETTY

There you go again, Clyde, putting the blame on Max. What have you got against the poor boy anyway?

CLYDE

Nothing. I just said....

HETTY

I know what you said. But it's neither here nor there. The fact remains that I'm wearing a new dress, you're wearing a new tie, Rosie's fixing a big fat roast and candied yams just the way Max likes them, and we're stuck with the same people we see all the time, the left-overs, the same stupid people who always say Yes when you ask them to come to a dinner party at the last minute. And that's the truth. We invited all of them at the last minute. Clyde, you know as well as I do the sort of dull evening it's going to be.

CLYDE

It doesn't have to be.

HETTY

Well, of course, it doesn't have to be. But it will be.

CLYDE

But it doesn't have to be. I just said it doesn't have to be. Them that's coming, they're the ones know Jack and Max best. They're the ones the boys'll feel most at home with. There's something to say for that.

HETTY

Max and Jack are citizens of the world now. They want more.

CLYDE

What more could a person want than to come home to a house full of familiar, friendly faces?

HETTY

Coming home to a house filled with strange and exciting people, that's what! Oh, I suppose Jack will agree with you. I can see him now feeling right at home. As if he's never been away. But Max'd want something more, I'd bet anything on that. Max is like that. Put him in a room and you have a new piece of furniture. A decoration. I've always thought of Max as a decoration. On the other hand, and you have to agree with me if you're honest, Clyde, Jack just kind of fits. Right into the pictures on the wall!

CLYDE

I don't know about that.

HETTY

If you're honest, Clyde, you'd have to agree with me and say that I'm right. They're as much like each other, Clyde, as you and I are as much like each other. Which is as unlike as you can get. Wouldn't you say that?

CLYDE

I just don't know about that. I just don't know. People are different and yet not different. That's what I would say, if you want to know the truth.

HETTY

What does that mean? People are different and not different! What in Sam Hill does that mean? People are different and not different! I ask you, Clyde, just exactly what is that supposed to mean? People are different and not different! But that's neither here nor there. The plain truth is that we're having a dinner party and nobody's coming. Even that simpleton down there forgot about tonight and made a date. Can you imagine that? I plan a party for weeks and she makes plans to go to the movies with that hillbilly. You know the one I mean. That one who's got nothing better to do but sneak around the back door and cackle with that idiot down there. I plan a party, buy a new dress, get us the biggest, fattest roast you ever saw, and she's traipsing off to the back row of the movie house with a cackling hillbilly. I ask you, Clyde!

CLYDE

Cackling?

HETTY

Cackling! And other assorted sounds... Here, let me straighten your tie. There! That's better. Max'll know who picked that tie out. He'll take one look and say, 'Hetty, you picked that tie out!' It's a Max kind of tie!

CLYDE

A little loud for my taste.

HETTY

Not at all. Not at all. Loud? No. Not at all.

CLYDE

Takes a little getting used to, I guess. Jack'll know who picked it out, too.

HETTY

He may know, but he won't notice. No eye for things, you know. Never had...Look at those pants! Didn't you bring the suit to Sam's like I told you to?

CLYDE

Forgot. Looks all right, though. No need to make a fuss about it the way I look at it, Hetty.

HETTY

Oh, I can cry, Clyde. I could cry just thinking of all the preparations and the way everything has gone wrong. I just better stop thinking about it or I'll sit right down and cry. If you ask me, it's the Simpsons not coming had everyone else begging off. That's the reason, I'm sure of it. Why didn't I think of it before? The Simpsons. Oh, Clyde, I could cry!

CLYDE

Who are the Simpsons?

HETTY

The Simpsons! Oh, Clyde, everyone knows the Simpsons!

CLYDE

Oh.

HETTY

Why, they're...Well, I don't even want to talk about it. I'll just cry if I do...God, Clyde, couldn't you have had your suit pressed? Well, I guess it really doesn't matter. Not now. I guess it really doesn't matter at all! Oh, Clyde, I think I'm really going to cry. Clyde!

(The bell rings. Attention is now on ROSIE downstairs who enters from kitchen, crosses to foyer, opens the door. Enter ZEPH, thirtyish in face and body with the mind of a ten-year old, with a box in his hands.)

HETTY
(from upstairs)

It can't be them already.

CLYDE

Don't know. What time they say they'd be here?

HETTY

They didn't say.
(calling)
Who is it?

ROSIE

It's Zeph!

HETTY
(to CLYDE)

What's he doing here? Clyde!

ROSIE
(pointing to the box)

What the hell is that?

ZEPH

Guess.

ROSIE

I give up.

ZEPH

It's a cake. Mommy sent me to the bakery to pick it up for Aunt Hetty. Why don't you look at it? It's pretty. It's filled with chocolate and custard and it's got vanilla frosting and you know what it says on top? It says Welcome Home Max and Jack. Who's Max and Jack?

ROSIE

How the hell should I know? I only know that's all I been hearing around here lately. Max and Jack. It's coming out of my ears. Account of them I had to break a date tonight. Tell you one thing. I'm gettin outta here by nine if it's the last thing I do. No Max and Jack's gonna make me miss the nine thirty show tonight. I'll tell you that!

ZEPH

Are you going to the Strand?

ROSIE

Yeah. Did ya see the show?

ZEPH

Yes. I did. It was very good. With John Wayne.

ROSIE

I know. I love him.

ZEPH

And it's in Technicolor.

ROSIE

Thank God. I hate black and white, don't you. I mean, it's always so much better when it's in color. I always enjoy a show more when it's in color.

ZEPH

And there's a great big fight scene.

7 ROSIE

It must be terrific. Benjie likes action. When he sees a fight scene, it's like he's living it. Ya know? I mean, he really gets worked up. I think underneath it all he kinda fancies himself another John Wayne. So it was good, huh?

ZEPH

Oh, yes. It was very good.

ROSIE

Well, you can bet your bottom dollar I'll be outta here by nine. I'm not gonna miss that show. John Wayne. In color. I tell ya I been workin so lately I don't get to no shows anymore. Well, I'm not gonna miss this one. I hear it's terrific. Why Benjie'd have a fit, an honest to goodness fit if we missed it. They're not gonna ruin my whole night because of that Max and Jack whoever they are!

(HETTY and CLYDE come down-stairs.)

HETTY

Rosie, are you watching that roast? Or what? That's all we need to make the evening complete. A burnt roast. After all the preparations!

(ROSIE exits to kitchen.)

And what are doing here, Zeph? Tonight of all nights.

ZEPH

Mommy sent me to the bakery. She told me to bring this to you.

HETTY

Oh, the cake. Thank you, Zeph. That was very sweet of you. Thank you.

ZEPH

You're welcome, Aunt Hetty.

HETTY

Well, that's a good boy. Now you give the cake here to me. You'd better go on home. Mother will be worried.

ZEPH

No, she won't. She's drunk.

HETTY

Zeph, is that a way to talk about your mother?

CLYDE

Why not? It's true.

HETTY

My sister is not an alcoholic, Clyde. You're always insinuating.

CLYDE

Her own son says so. Not insinuating a thing!

HETTY

My God, Clyde, look at him. You listen to what he says?

CLYDE

Hetty!

ZEPH

It's a nice cake. I saw it. Got chocolate and custard inside and vanilla frosting.

HETTY

Well, I want you to know how much Uncle Clyde and I appreciate your getting it for us. It was very sweet of you, Zeph dear. But I do think that now the errand's done, it's time you got home.

ZEPH

Know what it says on top of the cake? Says Welcome Home Max and Jack.

HETTY

Yes, dear. I know what it says. I ordered it. Welcome Home. Max and Jack.

ZEPH

Who's Max and Jack?

HETTY

Noone you know, dear. Well now the errand's done, don't you think you should be getting on home. Mother may need you.

ZEPH

Can I have a piece of cake?

HETTY

Well, I'll tell you what, Zeph. We're not going to have any cake until later. So when we're ready to have some cake, I'll call Mother and tell her to send you over for some. Okay?

ZEPH

Okay. Goodbye, Aunt Hetty. Goodbye, Uncle Clyde.

HETTY

Goodbye, dear.

(ZEPH leaves.)

No wonder she drinks. With a son like that. Should have sent him away a long time ago. I always told her that that's what she should have done. There's a stubborn streak in our family, Clyde. A stubborn streak. Should have unburdened herself of that misfit long ago. Oh, he's a sweet boy and all that, I don't deny it. And a boon to her in many ways. But it's too much. She's a fragile woman. Always has been. Never should have had the child in the first place. Now, let's see nothing happened to the cake. Never know what might have happened between the bake shop and here with that one totting it all the way...Well, it's fine. It looks just fine. Here, doesn't it look fine? Why, it's a lovely looking cake. It's a shame to eat such a lovely looking cake. Cost a pretty penny too! Well, occasions like this are few and far between.

(The door bell rings.)

Rosie! The door.

CLYDE

We're right here. Why does Rosie.....

HETTY

We pay her, don't we?

(ROSIE enters, answers door.)

HETTY

You think it's them, Clyde?

CLYDE

Guess we'll see soon enough.

HETTY

Oh, Clyde, I have evil premonitions.

(ROSIE re-enters with MINNA TORKLE, a plump and matronly woman of thirty; LULU CRUICKSHANK, her mother, a little deaf woman in her seventies; FANNY CRUICKSHANK, a warmly attractive woman in her late twenties, Minna's sister.)

MINNA

Hello there, Hetty Brown. My, that's a pretty dress. New?

HETTY

Certainly is.

MINNA

Only the best. On a night like this, huh? Why, Clyde, you do look dapper tonight.

CLYDE

Good to see you, Minna. You look fine yourself.

MINNA

Well, I tell you I nearly froze to death in this thin frock. It certainly is cold out there. I guess this is the first real cold night of the year. Never would have thought it would get this cold so soon. But it certainly is cold out there. Nearly froze to death. And that's the truth!

HETTY

Fanny. Good to see you. And how are you, Mrs. Cruickshank?

MINNA

Why, Lulu's just fine. Aren't you, Lulu? Poor dear, she gets out so rarely, she was pleased as punch to get out tonight. Isn't that so, Fanny? Pleased as punch. Just to get out. We're not quite sure she knows why she's here. But she's here. Got herself all dolled up. And she's here. Why, Fanny, looks as if we're the first ones here. I hope we're not too early.

HETTY

Not at all. It's never too early.

(ROSIE exits to kitchen; she is followed by HETTY.)

HETTY

Be right back. Just going to check on the roast. Clyde, fix the girls a nice sherry.

(HETTY exits.)

CLYDE

Sherry all right?

MINNA

A sherry's just the thing to get the chill out of our bones. It certainly is cold out there. A sherry'll be fine. Just fine. Won't it, Fanny? Even Mama could use a little nip. To get the chill out of her bones.

CLYDE

Three sherries. Coming right up.

FANNY

I wonder. Could I have a glass of water?

MINNA

Water?

FANNY

My pills, Minna.

MINNA

Oh.

CLYDE

(calling)

Hetty, bring a glass of water when you come out, would you?

FANNY

Thank you so much, Mister Brown. I appreciate it.

(LULU takes her sherry and goes to the piano; she is always smiling, always nodding affirmatively as if she was always being asked questions to which there is no answer but Yes. She is daintily fussy. Since she can't hear a thing, her piano playing is bad, but she seems amused and nobody stops her from playing; throughout the play, she lives in her own world - a silent, smiling, nodding world.)
CLYDE gives MINNA and FANNY their drinks; exits to kitchen.)

MINNA

What'd I tell you, Fanny? We're the first ones here. Rush us to death. Rush rush rush. And what for? We're the first ones here. I always tell you it's better to be a little late. Make an entrance. Get noticed. Why the rush? Oh, Fanny, this sherry is nice, isn't it? Ooh, I feel warm all at once. Heavens to Betsy, what is Mama playing? The Wrong Note Sonata? Poor dear. Give her a piano and that's the end! Ooh, old Hetty Brown really did the place up. Everything's so neat. It certainly is neat, isn't it, Fanny? You knew, didn't you, that Dr. Joshua is going to be here tonight. I thought, Minna, this is your chance. Get yourself a new dress. Walk right in. Have Dr. Joshua get a good look. And you're off to the races. But you go and rush us to death and now we're the first ones here.

(CLYDE returns with a glass of water; gives it to FANNY.)

FANNY

Thank you.

CLYDE

Don't mention it. You're not ill, are you?

FANNY

No. They're not those kind of pills. I'm fine.

CLYDE

Well, I'm relieved to hear that. I just thought....

FANNY

Oh, No, they're not those kind of pills at all. I'm just fine. These pills here, these pink ones, they just sort of help me to maintain my composure. Things like the sudden change in weather sometimes do things to a woman. I do hope you understand. No, Mister Brown, they're not those kind of pills at all!

MINNA

This is a very nice sherry, Clyde. Very nice. May I have another. If it's not too much trouble. Really gets you warm, it does.

CLYDE

Of course. Fanny?

FANNY

Yes. I think I will.

(CLYDE re-fills their glasses; the girls sip the second sherry a bit more slowly.)

MINNA

Well, it's a big day.

CLYDE

Sure is. Way Hetty's been planning and preparing, it's been something to see. Bought me this tie. First new tie I've had in I don't know how many years. A little loud for my taste if you want to know, but in a way it's a good feeling wearing something new.

MINNA

Well, it's a lovely tie. It certainly is a lovely tie. Don't you think so, Fanny.

CLYDE

Takes getting used to, I guess. Just a little loud, I'd say!

(HETTY enters from kitchen.)

HETTY

Been a long time since that piano's been played.

MINNA

I hope it doesn't bother you. I can take her away from it if you'd like.

HETTY

No. No. Let her play. She seems so happy. I just mentioned it because it brought to mind the last time I heard it. You know, we don't play. Clyde and me. We don't play. Last time that piano was played, it was Max did the playing. Now here it is the day Max comes back and the piano is being played again. Bought that piano for Max. He used to play so well. Remember, Clyde? The way Max'd play?

CLYDE

Jack played well, too.

HETTY

Well, Jack played that classical stuff. Thing I liked about Max was that he was so down to earth. He could play anything. Lively stuff. Made this living room sing. Yes, he did. And he could play classical, too. He studied. Why, he studied for years. But he wasn't afraid to let his hair down.

FANNY

I remember Max playing that piano.

HETTY

Sure you did. Used to come here every afternoon that summer. The summer you had a case on Max. Now don't deny it. You did. You had a case on Max. But then everyone did.

FANNY

I was so young.

MINNA

What summer was that? I didn't know you and Max were....

FANNY

Don't be silly, Minna. I was going to high school. I just liked to listen to him play the piano.

MINNA

Well, I didn't know.

HETTY

Why sure. Every day. It was the summer your mother had the operation. You know, on her ears.

MINNA

That summer. Well, now I remember. That was just about the time I met Sam Torkle. I guess you can understand why I just blocked that summer clear out of my mind. Whew, that was a wild summer. Bet folks around here never saw the likes of that summer again...or before. Well, it's a long time ago.

HETTY

Not really so long ago.

MINNA

The summer I met Sam Torkle was a million years ago, Hetty Brown. A million years ago. To this day I curse that summer. To this very day.

FANNY

May I have another drink, Mister Brown.

CLYDE

Of course.

FANNY

Something a little bit stronger this time. If you don't mind.

MINNA

Fanny!

FANNY

It's all right, Minna!

CLYDE

Scotch all right?

FANNY

Scotch is fine...Unless you have some bourbon.

CLYDE

Bourbon it is.

FANNY

I like the taste of bourbon. Scotch is so medicinal tasting.

HETTY

I know what you mean.

FANNY

Tastes just like medicine. I always feel as if I have a cold to cure when I drink Scotch.

MINNA

It certainly is funny the way my mother's Wrong Note Sonata got us thinking back to that summer. I mean, it's funny because it was Mama started the whole thing in a way. Her being in the hospital and us with nothing to do. A girl with nothing to do just naturally falls in with a Sam Torkle. Not that he was really a bad sort. It was a wild summer. In general. Everything that happened that summer was wild.

(FANNY takes another pill, a green one this time, with the drink.

Cackling is heard in the kitchen and the door bell rings.)

HETTY

Clyde, did you hear that? That hillbilly is in the kitchen. And that must be them at the door.

CLYDE

Answer the door then.

HETTY

Rosie!

(ROSIE enters and crosses to open the door. BENJIE, an awkward and homely boy in his twenties can be seen in the doorway of the kitchen. There is expectancy in the room, waiting to see who will show up. It is DR. JOSHUA KEYSTONE, A wiry and rather ordinary man in his early thirties whose manner is direct and ironical.)

HETTY

It's Joshua, Clyde.

MINNA

Good evening, Doctor Joshua.

JOSHUA

Hello, Minna. Hetty. Clyde. Fanny.

(he waves to LULU, who nods)

Rosie, is that your young man in the shadows over there?

HETTY

Where?

CLYDE

Have him come in. Have a drink.

ROSIE

He's not dressed. He just stopped by for a minute.

CLYDE

Well, we're not formal.

(ROSIE crosses and brings BENJIE to the living room. To HETTY's dismay, ROSIE and BENJIE have a drink and stay.)

HETTY

I mean, really, Clyde. After all my preparing. Tell me, who's watching the roast? Tell me that....Rosie, the roast!....Doctor Joshua, noone's given you a drink yet, have they? Sherry?

JOSHUA

Fine. That's fine.

HETTY

Clyde, a sherry for Doctor Joshua.

JOSHUA

Well, where're the golden boys? They here?

CLYDE

Who?

MINNA

Why, Clyde Brown, you know who. Did you hear that, Fanny? Where're the golden boys? Why, that is funny. That certainly is funny. Did you hear that? I always said Joshua Keystone is just about the cleverest man I know. I mean, you're just very clever, Doctor Joshua. Why, everyone says so.

HETTY

Rosie, the roast!

BENJIE

Mrs. Brown's talkin' on ya, Rose.

ROSIE

'S all right, I'm goin. C'mon, Benjie. Gotta watch the roast.

(ROSIE and BENJIE exit.)

MINNA

(overlapping the above)

Well, anyway, they're not here yet. The golden boys, as you so cleverly put it, the golden boys have not arrived. We were the first ones come, Mama, Fanny, and myself. We absolutely raced. I kept saying there was no rush. Didn't I, Fanny? Keep saying there was no rush? I mean, you know Max. The sweet boy never could remember appointments. So we rushed, rushed, rushed. We were the first ones come. And now you. And you see they have not arrived. Would it surprise you, Doctor Joshua, if Max just plum forgot about tonight? It wouldn't surprise me. It certainly wouldn't surprise me. Would it surprise you, Fanny?

HETTY

Minna, what are you saying? Say a thing like that, it just shows you don't know Max. You don't know Max at all. After all, it is his party. Really, Minna, you say a thing like that, you just don't know Max at all.

CLYDE

How's the sherry?

JOSHUA

Very nice, Clyde. Very dry. Very nice.

HETTY

Only the best.

FANNY

Excuse me. Would it be much trouble, would you mind?
Another bourbon, please.

HETTY

Of course not, dear. Clyde!

MINNA

How are the girls, Doctor Joshua?

JOSHUA

Growing.

MINNA

You can say that again. I saw Cathy Elizabeth just the other day. In the school yard? And I said to myself, well she certainly is growing. Remember, Fanny, my telling you I saw Cathy Elizabeth? And she's such a lovely girl. Looks so much like Meg, may her sweet soul rest in peace. Doctor Joshua, everyone says they're just the loveliest girls. They must be a boon to you. You must be awfully proud.

JOSHUA

I am that. Very proud.

MINNA

Yes, they're just the loveliest girls. Everyone says so. You ought to be proud. You being so busy and all. Still finding time to see they grow so lovely, poor girls. It must be lonely, you being away so much. And Meg gone. It certainly must be lonely without a mother. And yet it is a small miracle that they are so lovely, that they are growing so lovely.

HETTY

Yes, they are. Sweetest things. Regular little ladies.... Clyde, what time is it? It seems to me it must be time the boys were here.

CLYDE

It's early.

HETTY

What does that mean, it's early? I ask for the time and you tell me it's early.

MINNA

Well, it's almost eight.

CLYDE

Seven minutes to. According to my watch.

HETTY

Well, then, it isn't early at all. I told Rosie to set the roast so that it'd be ready by eight. Seven minutes to eight. It isn't early at all.

JOSHUA

What about the other golden boys?

HETTY

Who?

MINNA

Why, don't you know who? Doctor Joshua, you are a stitch. What a way to talk about one's own kin. Isn't he a stitch, Fanny?

HETTY

You know something? I didn't think of it till this very minute. Where are they? They're usually right on time.

JOSHUA

Oh, they'll be here. They're probably attending to some last minute detail. They're probably tying each other's shoe laces is all.

MINNA

That is funny. That certainly is funny. Fanny, tell the truth. Don't you think Doctor Joshua is just a stitch? That is a good thing in a man. A sense of humor. First thing I look for in a man.

HETTY

They're usually right on time.

MINNA

Well, they're probably tying each other's shoe laces. That is very funny. You do have a sense of humor, Doctor Joshua.

JOSHUA

It wasn't all that funny.

MINNA

Well, maybe not funny. You know. Funny. Maybe that's the wrong word. Amusing. Yes, that's better. It was a very amusing thing to say. Funny thing about it is it's so accurate. I mean, I can just see it. Their tying each other's shoe laces. I can just see it. Can't you just see it, Fanny? You can't deny it, Doctor Joshua. It certainly is amusing...and accurate.

HETTY

I think it's sweet, a father and son being so close. I think it's just sweet. You don't see much of that sort of thing anymore.

FANNY

Yes.

(Door bell rings.)

HETTY

It's them.

CLYDE

Which ones?

HETTY

Rosie!

MINNA

(overlapping)
Take your choice.

HETTY

(overlapping)
Rosie!

CLYDE

I'll go.

HETTY

You stay right there. You hear? You stay right there.

(ROSIE enters and goes to the door. There is great expectation. The door opens and ZEPH enters.)

HETTY

Zeph. What are you doing here? What on earth are you doing here?

ZEPH

Is it time?

HETTY

Time?

ZEPH

May I have a piece of cake?

HETTY

Oh. Well, not yet, dear. I told you I would call Mother and have her send you over. Now you run along, hear? Aunt Hetty has guests.

ZEPH

Oh, who's here? May I see the guests?

HETTY

Later, dear. You run along.

(FANNY comes in.)

FANNY

Zeph! How are you, sweet child?

ZEPH

Hello, Fanny. I am very good. Mother sends her regards.

FANNY

Well, I appreciate that. And you send her mine right back, sweet child. You tell her I'll be around to see her soon. You will remember? You tell her I haven't been feeling too well but I think of her quite often and I promise I will be around to see her.

HETTY

Yes, dear. You run along now and relay Miss Cruickshank's message to Mother. And I'll call later. I promise.

ZEPH

Okay, Aunt Hetty. Goodbye, Fanny. It was very nice to see you again. I miss you a lot sometimes. We don't get many visitors. And we miss you. Mother's drunk tonight.

HETTY

Zeph!

ZEPH

But I'll tell her that you'll be over like you said. Goodbye, Fanny.

FANNY

Goodbye, sweet child. Now you remember me to your mother.

(ZEPH exits.)

HETTY

I swear I can almost understand my sister. There are times I can almost understand that poor fragile woman. It is a terrible shame and I love that boy like my own, like my very own. But you know, we're only human and the Lord knows we get tense and His poor creatures for all their needs just make us nervous. I can understand my sister sometimes. I really can.

(FANNY takes another pill.
Another color.)

Fanny dear, I didn't know you weren't feeling well. I am sorry to hear that. I didn't know.

FANNY

Oh, they're not those kind of pills. I'm fine. I'm just fine. They're not those kind of pills at all.

HETTY

Well, I am relieved to hear that.

FANNY

No, not those kind at all.

ROSIE

The roast is ready, Mrs. Brown. 'S almost eight. Like you said.

HETTY

Well, we'll just have to wait a little while. You get the the table ready in the meantime. We're going to have to wait. I know I said eight but the guests of honor aren't here yet and we're just going to have to wait. You just get the table ready, hear?

ROSIE

(under her breath as she leaves)

Well, I'm going to be outa here by nine, 's all. Not gonna wait around....

HETTY

You say something, Rosie? Rosie?

MINNA

Rosie is an absolute angel. Life hasn't been easy for the child. She has had her tribulations. She certainly has had her tribulations. And yet, all things considered, spite of everything, the child is an absolute angel. And she works so hard. I feel for Rosie. I always did. My heart has always gone out to that girl. Works so hard!

CLYDE

Yes, she does.

HETTY

Laziest creature breathing.

MINNA

Really? And I always thought she absolutely slaved.

HETTY

Lazy. Laziest creature I ever come across.

MINNA

Well then, Hetty Brown, you're an absolute martyr for keeping her on the way you do. It's your naturally kind feelings for human beings that will finally undo you. Why, you're an absolute martyr. You certainly are.

HETTY

Still it's true just the same, I'd never say no, the waif's life has been a series of put-upon trials.

MINNA

That's just what I said. She certainly has had her tribulations.

HETTY

Max'd be proud to know how kindly I've been to that girl, passing over her faults the way I do. Max'd be proud.

JOSHUA

Max'll have her in the pantry between courses, his hand under her skirt, snapping at her panties.

HETTY

Joshua Keystone, you take that back!

MINNA

(overlapping)

You're an absolute stitch, Doctor Joshua. An absolute stitch.

CLYDE

That sure sounds like Max.

JOSHUA

Right between soup and the salad.

HETTY

It's just because he's a gamy lad. Always has been. Max has a sense of fun is all. But he never has meant any harm. Never. It's just his sense of fun is all.

MINNA

(overlapping)

Did you hear that, Fanny? Right between soup and the salad. Isn't he just the cleverest man you know, Fanny?

HETTY

Just his sense of fun is all.

MINNA

Mama, did you hear that? Mama? Lost to the world. Sweet old thing.

JOSHUA

Why in heaven's name doesn't she wear her hearing aid?

MINNA

Oh, I don't know. Vanity, I suppose. You know women. You certainly must know women, Doctor Joshua. Old as they get, the one thing's left them is their vanity. We're all a bit vain, you know. Every last one of us. Just a little bit vain. We certainly are. What gets me livid is how much it cost me for that goddamned flapdoodle that she won't even wear in the privacy of her toilet. Sweet, vain old thing!

FANNY

I get awfully sad at times.

CLYDE

What?

FANNY

Oh, nothing really. I guess I was kind of talking out loud...to myself.

HETTY

Are you feeling well, Fanny. Can I get you something?

MINNA

Nonsense. Fanny is perfectly fine. Aren't you, Fanny?
There's nothing wrong, is there?

HETTY

I know what you feel, dear. It's expectation. It's all this expectation is all. Isn't that it? I was like you, Fanny, when I was young. Yes, I was. You ask your mother. You just get sad when you're excited, when you're filled with expectation. Isn't that it, Fanny?

FANNY

My, this bourbon is so smooth, it just seems to disappear. Clyde?

HETTY

Isn't that right, Fanny? You feel sad because you're so excited.

MINNA

Why, that certainly must be the reason, Hetty Brown. I mean, I know there is nothing wrong physically with her.

FANNY

I don't know. I guess it makes me sad thinking of people like Zeph and like Mama. It makes me sad thinking of the way things evolve. I don't know.

HETTY

Yes, things like that are sad in a way.

MINNA

They certainly are.

JOSHUA

Nonsense!

CLYDE

Here you are. An extra drop of the good stuff. And one less ice cube.

FANNY

Thank you....I don't know. I guess it makes me sad thinking how natural even the most unnatural things seem sometimes. I mean the way things...evolve. Naturally. Even the most unnatural things.

MINNA

Well, we are getting morbid, aren't we? After all, this is a party. We ought to be gay. Not morbid. We ought to be as gay as all get-out. Come on now, Fanny. This is a party.

HETTY

Where are they? I am getting edgy now. You don't really think it possible, Minna, that Max forgot. That he forgot his own party.

CLYDE

There's always Jack to remind him.

JOSHUA

That's true, isn't it? There's always Jack. You really can't talk about Max without dredging Jack up from the recesses of your mind. There's always Jack, isn't there? The real gone to hell golden boys.

MINNA

I just can't get over it. That is certainly the cleverest description of those two I ever heard. You're a stitch, Doctor Joshua. You really are!

(The door bell rings.)

HETTY

Rosie!

(ROSIE comes running out, looks derisively at the guests, wipes her hands on her apron, and goes to the door. Enter two very well-dressed men, LEWIS KEYSTONE, SR., an impressive white-haired man in his late fifties whose manner is ebullient, aggressive, enormously charming - and LEWIS KEYSTONE, JR., a tall and handsome young man of 23, whose charm is a good deal less authentic than his father's; beneath the smiling facade, we can always see a trace of hard arrogance, an intensity which is alien to anything we've encountered thus far. The two men take off their coats with almost stylish fussiness, a bit like women showing off. They proceed with warmth and charm but, although we can not see it, we should sense that they just had an argument that has not really been resolved.)

LEWIS, SR.

(entering room, a sweeping gesture)

Love. Love. Love. Howdy do, all. Sorry I'm late. I am truly sorry. Well, looka here, Junior, everyone is assembled tout ensemble. Well, where are they? Let me at them, the old gypsies.

HETTY

They're not arrived...as yet.

LEWIS, SR.

You mean to say they're not here. Well, what the hell is keeping them?

HETTY

I don't know, Lew. I swear I don't know. I could cry. I'm beginning to fear the worst.

LEWIS, SR.

Well, don't you cry. Hell, Max is just waiting for the right moment. He always was one to create a little drama.

MINNA

Well, how are you, Lewis Senior? You certainly look dashing as ever, young as ever.

LEWIS, SR.

Couldn't be better. Couldn't be better.

HETTY

(overlapping)

Yes, that must be it, Lew. Max is just waiting for the right moment.

LEWIS, SR.

Sure, honey. That's exactly what he's doing. Do I or do I not know Max? Josh, you look pale.

JOSHUA

I do?

LEWIS, SR.

Yes, you do. Doesn't he, Junior? You better put some color on. You've got a deathly pallor, son. It sure as hell isn't the best looking face I've seen. You're a big doctor now, Josh. You got to look healthly. Else what're your patients ever going to think. I look a hell of a lot younger than you do, Josh. And I'm over the hill already. That right, Junior? Ain't you talking tonight, Junior?

JOSHUA

It's good to see you, Pop. Weren't for special occasions, I guess we'd never see each other.

LEWIS, SR.

Well, how do you like that? My own son reprimanding me in public. Well, I plead guilty, beg for leniency, and call for a truce. It's just I been busy. Busy. Busy. Busy. You're not going to be mad now, are you? Why, that's all I need. Two brooding sons.

JOSHUA

No, I'm not going to be mad. I wasn't thinking of me. I was thinking of the girls. They never see their own grandfather.

LEWIS, SR.

Josh. Josh. Josh. You know me and children. I hardly even looked at my own till they reached their teens. Look, Josh, I think of them every minute of the day and that is the honest-to-goodness, solemn truth. I always say I have the two prettiest little girls in the world.

HETTY

Oh, they are, Lew. Regular little ladies.

LEWIS, SR.

Looka that. Lulu's playing the piano. You know, I haven't heard that piano in years. Who was the last one played that piano?

HETTY

Max.

LEWIS, SR.

That's right. Max was the last one played that piano. You know who taught him, don't you?

LEWIS, JR.

I'll bet you did.

LEWIS, SR.

As a matter of fact, I taught that boy everything he knows to do.

LEWIS, JR.

Yes, I'll bet you did.

LEWIS, SR.

Everything. You ask him. Ask him if there's anything I didn't teach him.

HETTY

That is the truth. As sure as I'm standing here, that is the truth.

LEWIS, SR.

Everything. You ask him.

FANNY

He played the piano very well. Max played the piano very well. Odd, I just assumed it was all self-taught. I always thought everything Max did was self-taught. Odd.

LEWIS, SR.

It was his air of self-confidence gave you that impression.

MINNA

You can say that again. Max certainly was sure of himself. It is not one of the most admirable qualities in a man. It certainly is not the most admirable of qualities to my way of thinking.

HETTY

I disagree.

(During the following, ROSIE drifts off and comes on every so often, setting the table.)

MINNA

Of course, I didn't mean that a man should be a total milksop. I certainly didn't mean that. It's just I always felt Max walked a rather thin line between what you all call his self-confidence and what I'd call out-and-out cockiness.

LEWIS, SR.

Don't make the poor boy sound so unpleasant.

MINNA

Why, Lewis Senior, I didn't mean to. I certainly didn't mean to.

LEWIS, JR.

Why not?

MINNA

What?

LEWIS, JR.

I said why not. Unpleasant strikes me as a rather mild description of Max.

LEWIS, SR.

You do?

LEWIS, JR.

Fanny, you're empty. Can I get you a fresh one?

FANNY

Why thank you, Lewis.

LEWIS, SR.

You do? I'm talking to you.

LEWIS, JR.

Bourbon?

FANNY

Yes. Thank you.

CLYDE

I'll get it.

LEWIS, JR.

It's okay. I'll find things.

JOSHUA

It's all clearly labeled, huh?

LEWIS, SR.

(overlapping)

I asked you a question.

LEWIS, JR.

I'm sorry. I didn't hear. Drink, Pops?

HETTY

Orange Blossom. Right, Lew?

LEWIS, SR.

Hetty Brown, is there a single thing you don't know about me?

HETTY

Rosie, the orange juice!

LEWIS, SR.

You know who else drinks Orange Blossoms, don't you?

LEWIS, JR.

Max. Right?

LEWIS, SR.

That's right.

MINNA

Funny the things you remember about a person. It certainly is funny. Isn't it, Fanny? Why, the very second you mentioned Orange Blossom, I said to myself, why that's Max's drink. I mean, I never really knew Max. Not like the rest of you knew him. We weren't close, you know. We certainly were not very close. Yet you mentioned Orange Blossom, and there he was, clear as day, right before my very eyes. Tall, straight, with his Orange Blossom in his hand. Yes, it certainly is funny the things you remember about a person.

JOSHUA

Orange Blossom. That's a rather effete drink for a man like Max, isn't it?

MINNA

When you think of it.

LEWIS, JR.

Intimations?

FANNY

I can't even remember Max drinking at all. I just don't picture Max with a drink in his hand.

HETTY

Oh, he could drink, all right. Knew how to hold his liquor, though. One thing about Max. He was one of those men knew how to hold his liquor.

LEWIS, SR.

By the by, Hetty, I've been meaning to ask. How's your sister?

HETTY

Poor creature. I asked. I asked her would she come over tonight. But she just never leaves that parlor of hers. Poor creature just sits there in the dark all day, watching her TV. And it's no secret anymore about her little problem. Well, all she has is Zeph, you know. The dear

HETTY (cont.)

boy does all her errands for her, you know.

FANNY

Sweet child.

HETTY

Why, she'd be lost without him.

LEWIS, SR.

My Helen would turn over in her grave if she knew.

HETTY

She'd be absolutely lost without him. Lost without him, and lost with him, I fear. I forgive her, you know. I forgive her her little problem. Times I really understand that woman. And we were never close, you know.

MINNA

It is a shame. It certainly is a shame.

LEWIS, SR.

(overlapping)

Bad. Bad. Bad. Well, she's too old to change now, I guess. Anyway, we mustn't think about it. There is entirely too much sorrow around to start lingering over such misfortune. I say that without malice, cause I loved her dearly. As if she were my own sister.

HETTY

I know that, Lew.

LEWIS, SR.

Why, she and Helen were inseparable. When Helen was alive, she was over the house all the time.

HETTY

Don't I know that, Lew? She was closer to Helen than she was to me. Her own sister. Of course, Helen was such a patient woman.

MINNA

Yes, she was. She certainly was. She had the patience of a saint. Everyone said so. Isn't that right, Fanny? The patience of a saint.

LEWIS, JR.

Amen.

ROSIE

Mrs. Brown, everything's ready. 'S gettin' late.

HETTY

I told you that we'll have to wait a little while.

ROSIE

Yes, Mrs. Brown. Just thought it ain't gettin' any earlier.

HETTY

I know. I know. But we'll just have to wait. Hear?

LEWIS, SR.

(overlapping, into LULU's ear)

Lovely, lovely Lulu. How's about a duet? How's about some real piano playing. You play. And I'll sing. How's about it, Lulu?

(LULU nods, agrees)

Let's see. What'll it be? One of the old ones. That one Max like so. Remember?

(LULU plays.)

That's it. Don't let anyone ever tell you you don't have the best darn memory of anyone. Why, that is perfectly beautiful, Lulu.

(LEWIS, SR. goes through an elaborate song-and-dance routine, singing 'Brother, Can You Spare A Dime?', to the amusement of everyone except FANNY and LEWIS, JR., the only ones who don't begin to gather around the piano. During the second chorus, the following conversation - uneasy and slow - overlaps the entertainment.)

LEWIS, JR.

You look lovely tonight, Fanny.

FANNY

Why, thank you, Lewis.

LEWIS, JR.

Exceptionally lovely.

FANNY

You look rather well yourself, Lewis.

LEWIS, JR.

Do I?

FANNY

Yes, you do.

(She takes a pill)

You're beginning to develop character.

LEWIS, JR.

(overlapping)

What's that?

FANNY

A little something to help me maintain my composure. Just a little something to keep me going from one minute to the next.

LEWIS, JR.

Does it work?

FANNY

To tell the truth, I don't know anymore. I mean, I have so many pills of different colors, you see, that I am inclined to forget which is which.

LEWIS, JR.

(after a pause)

Whenever Pops sings that song, he starts getting nostalgic.

FANNY

Some put me to sleep. Some keep me awake. One of them, I forget which now, just helps me to maintain my composure. I suppose one day they'll just sort of counteract one another and, who knows, perhaps I'll just die.

(She laughs)

I suppose whatever is going on inside is as much chemical by now as anything else.

(More laughter, a bit more nervous now)

Chemical as much as mental, I mean.

LEWIS, JR.

(after a pause)

Why did you come back?

FANNY

What?

LEWIS, JR.

Why did you come back?

FANNY

I don't know anymore.

LEWIS, JR.

What I'm trying to say, I guess, is that somehow you don't belong here. It seems strange. You. All this. This waiting for Max. You don't fit.

FANNY

I don't fit anywhere really. I really don't know anymore. I suppose if I can just maintain my composure. Lewis, I really don't know anymore.

LEWIS, JR.

(after a pause)

I hope to Christ they get here soon. For one thing, I'm hungry. For another, I feel kind of strange.

FANNY

Here, take a pill.

LEWIS, JR.

What does this one do?

FANNY

What difference does it make?

LEWIS, JR.

(after a long pause)

Did you ever see Pops in one of his nostalgic outbursts?
Holy Christ!

(LEWIS, SR. is again the center of attention; all applaud his little act and he is all too willing to continue)

LEWIS, SR.

They don't write songs like that anymore.

MINNA

No, they don't. They certainly don't.

LEWIS, SR.

Nothing is like it used to be anymore. Nothing. Nothing. Nothing. You know why? Cause we leave everything to the youngsters. That's it. In a nutshell. We let them change the world. Change, change, change! No respect for any of the old traditions.

LEWIS, JR.

(remote)

Hear! Hear!

LEWIS, SR.

(overlapping)

And they're cold. Heartless. Remember, Clyde, when we were young? Remember? We had fire in us. We had blood in our veins. We were men. Remember World War One? That was a war! Jesus Christ, that was a war! I'd have given anything to have fought in that war. You made it, huh, Clyde?

CLYDE

And awful proud of it.

LEWIS, SR.

Sure you are. Sure you are.

CLYDE

Awful proud.

LEWIS, SR.

Men. Not thin-lipped statisticians. That's what changing the world today. Everyone forgets. Everyone forgets. Too easily. Altogether too easily. I hate to admit it, but even the old ones forget. Did you see those picket lines in front of the Strand? When they showed 'Limelight'?

ROSIE

Isn't John Wayne at the Strand? I thought John was at the Strand!

LEWIS, SR.

Don't worry, you'll see your John Wayne. This is last week I'm talking about.

ROSIE

Oh, good. Benjie'd have a fit if he thought we missed the John Wayne.

LEWIS, SR.

No. I'm talking about last week. Did you all see the film?

HETTY

Really, Lew, you know what they're saying about Chaplin! Oh, the things they say. Why, he's a terrible man.

LEWIS, SR.

But it was a beautiful film. This sad old clown, this lovely, sad old clown, lying in a drum, dying of a broken heart. Is that politics?

HETTY

I don't think we should talk about it.

MINNA

Why, I certainly wouldn't pay good money to see that movie.

LEWIS, SR.

Just a sad old clown dying of a broken heart. See what I'm talking about? We all forget too easily. Why, we grew up with that man. We grew up with Chaplin. The man's a great artist. A beautiful man.

HETTY

Lew, I really don't think we should talk about it.

LEWIS, SR.

Max'd know what I mean.

HETTY

Say a thing like that, Lew, you certainly don't know Max!

LEWIS, SR.

Nobody but nobody knew Max better than me. I'll bet Max wouldn't stand for a world that's being changed by those two cold-eyed young punks out there giving information to Senator McCarthy.

(For a second, everyone freezes; it should be made clear to the audience after all this trivia that this is what the play is really about - fear, frozen fear at the mention of a name!)

HETTY

Lew, please! You sing so nicely. Sing, Lew! This is a party!

LEWIS, SR.

(sentimental now, vaudeville-like)

All right, Lulu. Let's play 'em a good one. For old times sake, let's give 'em an old-fashioned Cake Walk.

(LULU starts to play)

They don't want to hear about the wars we fought, the Depression we lived through, and I mean lived through. Clyde don't want to remember why we went off to Spain together to fight, why we left our families to go off to Spain.

LEWIS, JR.

The first betrayal.

LEWIS, SR.

They want a song. A dance.

(LEWIS, SR. does a Cake Walk, starting slowly, building in intensity; he enjoys showing off; he is a true peacock, in his greatest moment of glory. Even FANNY and LEWIS, JR. are caught up in the excitement. When it is over, there is great applause from everyone except LEWIS, JR.)

MINNA

Doctor Joshua, your father should be on the stage. I know now where you get your personality. I certainly know where you get your personality. Lewis Senior, you're a marvel. You're an absolute marvel. I never saw such dancing. Why, it exhausted me just watching you. I never did see dancing like that.

CLYDE

I think we're all exhausted. And hungry.

HETTY

But the boys aren't here yet.

CLYDE

Maybe we should start anyway. It'd be all right.

HETTY

You think two citizens of the world would understand if we started without them?

LEWIS, SR.
Hetty, only two citizens of the world would understand.

HETTY

Well, if you say so, Lew. You'd know. Rosie! We'll start dinner now. It would be a shame if we let that big fat roast dry up on us.

MINNA

Oh, it certainly would.

CLYDE

Shall we sit down?

(LEWIS, SR. takes LULU to the table; LEWIS, JR. takes FANNY; JOSHUA and MINNA drift together; CLYDE and HETTY sit.)

HETTY

Well, there's still the cake. Perhaps they'll be here for the cake.

LEWIS, SR.

Long before that.

HETTY

Clyde. Grace!

(CLYDE bows his head for Grace; during the following, LULU keeps eating regardless of what happens at the table - she can't hear, remember? ROSIE serves one course at a time, and everyone really eats! There should be much overlapping of all the ensuing conversation)

MINNA

This soup is delicious, Hetty. Mama, isn't the soup delicious? Poor Mama. Lewis Senior, would you nudge her?

CLYDE

Rosie is a fine cook.

HETTY

It's a little watery, don't you think?

MINNA

Is it? Why, I didn't notice but now that you mention it. It is a little watery at that. But it tastes just

MINNA (cont.)
fine. Doesn't it, Fanny?

FANNY

Yes.

MINNA

It's just fine.

HETTY

Well, I'm glad Max is missing the soup.

CLYDE

It's a good home-made soup.

HETTY

What in the Sam Hill does that mean? It's a good home-made soup. You're really full of cliches tonight, aren't you, Clyde?

MINNA

Is that horrible story I heard about Sam Sapirstein really true, Doctor Joshua?

CLYDE

Who?

LEWIS, SR.

Sam Sapirstein.

JOSHUA

What story?

CLYDE

Oh, Sam.

MINNA

About his having cancer. It's all over.

JOSHUA

I guess it's true, then.

CLYDE

Sam?

HETTY

That's what they said. Why, that's terrible.

MINNA

Seems everyone's dying of cancer these days. When I was younger, I never heard of anyone dying of cancer. Suddenly everyone has cancer. It certainly must be a modern disease.

JOSHUA

They just had other names for it.

MINNA

Well, it's just horrible. It was your sister's husband's disease, too, wasn't it, Hetty?

HETTY

No. It washis liver. That was it, wasn't it, Josh?

JOSHUA

What?

HETTY

Floyd's liver!

JOSHUA

Yes. And complications.

MINNA

And that is another thing. Isn't it just horrible how many people really die in hospitals because of complications?

LEWIS, SR.

Hetty, that was the best soup I've ever tasted. Really and truly the very best.

HETTY

Why, thank you, Lew.

MINNA

I mean, no wonder people are afraid to go to a hospital even in this day and age.

CLYDE

Poor Sam.

LEWIS, SR.

Would he care about you? I mean, after all, Clyde, you know the Sapirsteins!

ROSIE

(picking up the soup bowls)
Shit!

HETTY

Rosie!

ROSIE

Sorry, Mrs. Brown. Just broke my fingernail.

JOSHUA

It's not bleeding, is it?

ROSIE

'S Okay!

LEWIS, SR.

The butter, please.

FANNY

Here.

LEWIS, SR.
You never did say where Max and Jack were coming from.

HETTY
They didn't say. It's all so mysterious. They just said they'd be here. Well, you know Max!

CLYDE
Weren't they somewhere in Europe last?

MINNA
Oh, no, that was ages ago.

LEWIS, SR.
Where was the letter postmarked?

HETTY
It was a telegram. I never could read telegrams. Everything is so garbled.

LEWIS, SR.
Seems I heard somewhere that Max had some important business in Washington.

MINNA
I know they were in New York about a year ago.

FANNY
This salad dressing is lovely.

HETTY
Thank you. It's my own recipe.

MINNA
Or was it Los Angeles?

LEWIS, SR.
Yes, it is good, isn't it?

CLYDE
Delicious.

MINNA
Have you been in touch with them, Doctor Joshua?

LEWIS, SR.
Josh was never really close.

JOSHUA
No.

LEWIS, SR.
I heard Sam Torkle was in New York. Maybe that's what made you think they were in New York.

MINNA
Oh, is Sam in New York? Doing what?

FANNY
Isn't the salad dressing lovely, Lewis?

LEWIS, SR.
Managing a restaurant, I hear.

MINNA

Oh.

CLYDE

Who?

HETTY

Sam Torkle.

MINNA

Well, I wish him well. I certainly never meant him any harm.

LEWIS, SR.

Didn't you know? I thought you knew.

MINNA

No, I haven't heard from Sam at all. Not in years. First I've heard of it.

HETTY

Well, Sam was wild.

MINNA

He certainly was wild.

FANNY

It's good that he's settled down.

MINNA

Do you think he's really settled down?

JOSHUA

I hope he's taking care of his health.

HETTY

Why, he was the picture of health!

JOSHUA

He was in bad shape last physical.

MINNA

Why, I never knew. But then again, we never did speak very much. This salad dressing is wonderful. Hetty, you must give me the recipe.

HETTY

He seemed the picture of health.

LEWIS, SR.

You know how Josh exaggerates. Sam Torkle was a perfect specimen. We worked out together. Marvelous body. You know who had a perfect body?

LEWIS, JR.

Max.

MINNA

Will you take a look at that roast?

LEWIS, SR.

Marvelous body.

HETTY

Max? He could've won contests!

MINNA

That is what I call a roast! That certainly is a roast!

LEWIS, SR.

Max cuts a fine figure. It's an important thing. A good body.

HETTY

That's why he's so highly admired wherever he goes.

LEWIS, SR.

The world notices a good body.

MINNA

Will you look at that roast, Doctor Joshua? Isn't that something?

CLYDE

Jack is quite trim, too.

LEWIS, SR.

Jack was no athlete. And that's what does it for you. Being athletic.

MINNA

And tasty!

HETTY

Clyde, how could you compare Jack's body with Max's?

LEWIS, JR.

Max! Max! Max!

LEWIS, SR.

Did you say something, Junior?

LEWIS, JR.

Candied Yams, Fanny?

FANNY

Thank you, Lewis?

LEWIS, SR.

Junior, did I hear you say something?

JOSHUA

Cut it, Dad.

LEWIS, SR.

I thought Junior said something!

MINNA

And the yams are heavenly.

HETTY

They're Max's favorites.

MINNA

They're just heavenly. Aren't they heavenly, Doctor Joshua?

HETTY

Made them just like Max likes them.

JOSHUA

Everything is fine, Hetty. Fine.

LEWIS, SR.

Hetty Brown, this is a dinner fit for kings.

HETTY

Thank you, Lew.

MINNA

It certainly is. Isn't it, Fanny?

LEWIS, SR.

Fit for kings!

HETTY

Now this is the course I wish Max were here for. I tell you I could cry.

LEWIS, JR.

Max! Again!

LEWIS, SR.

Go ahead. Tell me you didn't say something that time!

CLYDE

Hetty, Rosie has outdone herself.

LEWIS, SR.

I'm talking to you, Junior. Didn't I hear you say something just then?

LEWIS, JR.

Yes you did, Pops. Shall I repeat it?

JOSHUA

Dad! Lewie! Come on.

LEWIS, SR.

I heard you.

LEWIS, JR.

I thought it was a rhetorical question!

LEWIS, SR.
Talking about Max bothers you, don't it?
LEWIS, JR.
Screw Max!

MAX out of it J.D. em
Jack = me

(Everyone stops, except LULU, now. There is an occasional murmur at the table during the following, but nobody really tries to stop either LEWIS, JR. or LEWIS, SR.)

What's the matter, Pops? Aren't you going to ask me if I said something?

LEWIS, SR.
You are sensitive, aren't you?

LEWIS, JR.
Look, Pops, all I've heard all day is Max, Max, Max. Max is coming home. Well, good. I like Max. I get along with Max. But it gets a little boring, you know. When you sit down at a table and start to eat the bastard, it gets a little boring. And another thing, I thought this party was for Jack, too. I thought Jack was coming home, too! What the hell, if you don't like the guy, if you can't find one good thing to say about him, why in the world make a party for him? Of course, I know what it is. I know you're all a little afraid of Jack. I know that.

LEWIS, SR.
Afraid?

LEWIS, JR.
I forgot. We don't talk about that, do we? That's why we don't hear too much about Jack, isn't it? It doesn't matter. It really doesn't matter.

LEWIS, SR.
You're jealous, aren't you? Jealous of Max.

LEWIS, JR.
That might be a valid point, Pops. That just might be a valid point. If I didn't know that bastard. I could really understand your adoration of Max, the way you make him sound like God's gift to American manhood, the way you build a verbal shrine to his marvelous body, if I didn't know the bastard, if I never saw you pinching the asses of every potential Max that carries on in your gym, if I could take the whole thing seriously. If I didn't know that Max was just a pugnacious, pushy, self-absorbed little bastard who happens to look good in a bathing suit and knows it! Then you might have a valid point, Pops. I might be jealous.

LEWIS, SR.
Jesus Christ, you have a dirty mind.

LEWIS, JR.
What did you expect?

LEWIS, SR.
Just watch who you're talking to, Junior!

LEWIS, JR.
Look, Pops, put it this way. Suppose Max is everything you say he is. Suppose he's everything you all say he is. Well, Christ, he travels all over the world with Jack. He must like Jack. He must see something in Jack. Do you think he's got bad taste in friends? I haven't heard anyone say, One thing about Max, he doesn't have good judgment about the friends he picks to share his travels, his adventures around the world. I haven't heard anyone say that. Max just has bad taste. One thing, I wouldn't be the one to say it. I think he has damned good taste. Personally, I wonder what Jack sees in Max. Personally!

LEWIS, SR.
I wouldn't bring it up. Only your bad manners happen to be a reflection of your upbringing. Which, naturally, sheds a rather bad light on me, since everyone here knows your mother's been dead, may her soul rest in peace, since you were a small child. What I'm getting at, Junior, is your timing's all wrong. I mean, for all it's worth, there is a time and place for all your verbal puking - how's that? That's an expression you'd use, isn't it? - and the middle of the main course simply isn't it.

LEWIS, JR.
Don't patronize me, Pops. Just don't you patronize me, hear? Who the hell do you think you are?

LEWIS, SR.
Your father. That's who.

LEWIS, JR.
Screw you. Screw you and Max together.

LEWIS, SR.
Hold it right there, Junior. Hear?

LEWIS, JR.
Who the hell do you think you are, patronizing me?

LEWIS, SR.
Enough, Junior, is enough.

LEWIS, JR.
No, it's not. No, it is not. I'm going to tell you something, even if you are my father - my father, ha! - Don't ever tell me enough is enough. I'm sick of you spouting cliches all the time. Hear me?

LEWIS, SR.

You are?

LEWIS, JR.

Yes, I am. I most certainly am. Sick and tired of your patronizing me, your calling me Junior. Do you know how old I am?

LEWIS, SR.

Whatever it is, act it!

LEWIS, JR.

(after a pause)

Pops, you're a dazzler. Fast. Sharp. You can sing, you can dance. Holy Christ, can you dance. Hell, you've even fought Fascists. Twice, wasn't it? That is a record. That is quite a lot to pack into one lifetime. I really do admire you, deep down. There's not many fathers did all of that in one single, lonely, isolated lifetime. Know what, Pops? I know someone's father was killed for less than that.

LEWIS, SR.

(afraid)

What are you starting?

LEWIS, JR.

I am not starting anything. I am getting at something. Not starting. Getting at.

LEWIS, SR.

What are you getting at?

LEWIS, JR.

That's better, Pops. Actually, all I want to do is to balance the evening. I want to put things into perspective.

LEWIS, SR.

Are you going to write a novel for us?

LEWIS, JR.

What I am trying to say is that Max isn't the All-American hero after all. The true All-American hero is actually Jack. Because there's one thing Jack's got Max'll never have, Max'll always need Jack for. Balls! The guts to act. To act honestly. To be direct, to the point, honest! The way I see it Max sort of plays at life, you know. But can you see Max making a direct confrontation with someone, with something. I don't know about you. But I certainly cannot see Max doing that. He just sort of plays at life, Max does. He sort of fools around with whatever is there. You know? But Jack, you see, is a little cooler, quieter, because he's looking, you see, his eyes open. He's looking at what's not there, at what's not there to see. I mean, he really sees!

LEWIS, SR.

I don't know what it is you are getting at, Lewie, but you are certainly being elliptic about it.

LEWIS, JR.

I just want to put in a good word for Jack is all. Max has a marvelous body. Good! Max knows how to hold his liquor. Fine! Max can play the piano. Great! But can Max kill his father. Not only kill his father but get away with it. Not only kill with a simple stroke, one tiny gesture, but to stab again and again, twist the knife, pluck eyes out with his own fingernails.

LEWIS, SR.

You know why he got away with it. What's the point of all this, Lewie? This is a dinner table. Jesus Christ!

LEWIS, JR.

I knew you would say that. You know why he got away with it. Sure, we know. He was only five years old. Hell, give credit where it's due. That's what takes brains. To do it when you're five, to commit your one honest act of violence when you're young enough not to be held responsible for your actions. That's all I wanted to say. Jack has brains, Jack has balls. That's all.

LEWIS, SR.

To be blunt, and I guess I have no alternative, I thought you got your rocks off at your typewriter. I didn't know you had taken to masturbating in public. I think that I prefer it to the things you write.

LEWIS, JR.

I thought you liked my writing.

LEWIS, SR.

Like your writing? Like reading how you make monsters of everyone you know, the only ones who care about you.

LEWIS, JR.

You mean to say you have lied to me all these years?

LEWIS, SR.

Treating your family like a joke. You can't even get yourself published in some avant-garde New York literary publication that nobody reads. No, you get yourself published in the community gazette where everyone can get a big laugh out of your little family jokes.

LEWIS, JR.

What are you saying? Dad, what are you saying?

LEWIS, SR.

(overlapping)

I'll tell you something about Jack. He needs Max. He really needs Max. Max only thinks he needs Jack. Max thinks Jack can help him because he knows about the world, about the way the world is, was, could be.... but the only world Jack knows about is the private world up there in his twisted little head which has nothing whatsoever to do with the real world. You want us to say something about Jack. How's this? Jack is a sponge. Jack is a sponge. Like you. Why don't you work?

(LEWIS, JR. gets up to leave.)

LEWIS, SR.
What's the matter, Junior. I thought you admired honesty.
(runs after him)
Where are you going?

LEWIS, JR.
Leave me alone.

LEWIS, SR.
(grabs him)
You son of a bitch.
(tries to strangle him)
Son of a bitch.

(JOSHUA, FANNY, HETTY rise to stop them.)

JOSHUA
Dad, you know you shouldn't get excited.

FANNY
Go on, Lewis. He'll be all right.

LEWIS, SR.
Son of a bitch sponge.

(LEWIS, JR. puts on his coat and leaves.)

I never want to see him again.

HETTY
Sit down. Lew, please sit down. Rosie, bring the coffee in here.

MINNA
(entering the living room)
How in the world did all this start? It certainly all happened very, very quickly. I am not at all certain I know what the to-do was all about.

(Doorbell rings.)

HETTY
It's them. I know it's them. Jack would pick a time like this to show up. Rosie!

LEWIS, SR.
It's him come to beg his forgiveness. It's always the same. But not this time, the son of a bitch.

(ROSIE opens the door. It is BENJIE)

BENJIE

Ya know what time it is?

ROSIE

I know. But I can't come now. 'S crazy. I tell you 's crazy.

HETTY

Benjie, is something wrong?

ROSIE

No, Mrs. Brown, 's nothing. Go on, Benjie.

FANNY

(entering)
Hello, Benjie. Come to pick up Rosie, have you? That is nice.

HETTY

Pick her up?

ROSIE

We had a date. Remember?

HETTY

Well, you can't go.

FANNY

Oh, let her go, Hetty. I'll help with the dishes.

HETTY

That is sweet of you. I guess it's okay then. Go on, Rosie.

ROSIE

Thanks. I'll be right out, Benjie.

(ROSIE goes to kitchen.)

FANNY

What's playing?

BENJIE

I don't know.

FANNY

I thought I heard something about John Wayne.

BENJIE

I think so.

FANNY

Why then, it most probably is a Western.

BENJIE

I guess so.

(There is a long pause as FANNY and BENJIE look at each other, neither one of them at ease. ROSIE comes out of the kitchen, her coat on, and pushes BENJIE out the door.)

LEWIS, SR.

I'm sorry, Hetty. I truly am sorry.

HETTY

These things do happen, Lew.

LEWIS, SR.

I'd better get on home.

HETTY

But the boys haven't shown up yet.

LEWIS, SR.

No, I'd better get on home. No telling what the electricity bill will be like. Big and sassy as that boy is, he's afraid of the dark. Would you believe it? No, Hetty, I'd better get on home.

JOSHUA

Shall I drop you off?

LEWIS, SR.

No, son, I'll be all right. Watch that pallor, hear?

(LEWIS, SR. puts on his coat and leaves.)

JOSHUA

Too bad incest is one of those taboos that is part of Dad's idea of the good old traditions. Otherwise he'd have a good healthy love affair going with his son.

MINNA

Why, Doctor Joshua, you do say the funniest things. You certainly do.

JOSHUA

Hetty, I think I'll be going, too. It doesn't much look like the golden boys'll show up before midnight. Thank you for the evening. The dinner was fine. Just fine.

HETTY

Oh, don't mention it, Josh. Kiss the girls for me, hear?

JOSHUA

Can I drop anyone off?

MINNA

Fanny?

FANNY

I think I'll wait a little longer. If it's all right with Hetty.

HETTY

Of course, dear. Don't you be silly!

MINNA

Well, I am awful tired. Would you mind if I left?

FANNY

No, Minna. You go on.

MINNA

And Mama?

FANNY

I'll take care of Mama. She'll go home with me.

MINNA

Thank you, Fanny. I certainly do appreciate that. Well, Doctor Joshua, I guess you have a passenger.

JOSHUA

Fine.

MINNA

Bye, all. Oh, I do fear the cold. Me and this thin frock. On the coldest day of the year!

(JOSHUA and MINNA put their coats on; MINNA places her arm in JOSHUA's; they leave.)

HETTY

I knew it would be a disaster. I just knew it. I could cry. I swear I could cry.

(HETTY goes into the kitchen; LULU crosses to the piano and begins to play, softly; FANNY fixes herself a drink and sits down.)

CLYDE

You know something. I like this tie.

FANNY

Yes.

CLYDE

I guess I got used to it. It takes getting used to.

FANNY

It's a lovely tie.

CLYDE

Hetty said it was Max's kind of tie. You know something?
I don't think it's Max's kind of tie at all.

(After a pause)

I'm tired, Fanny. I think I'll turn in. Tell Hetty I turned in, okay? Goodnight.

FANNY

Goodnight.

(There is a long silence, interrupted by the door-bell. FANNY goes to the door, opens it. It is ZEPH.)

FANNY

Come in, sweet child. Come in.

ZEPH

You didn't eat the cake yet, did you?

FANNY

Not yet. Not yet.

HETTY

(entering)
Who was it? Oh, it's you, Zeph.

ZEPH

Mother fell asleep. I didn't know if you called.

HETTY

It's all right, dear. I suppose you want a piece of cake.

ZEPH

Yes, Aunt Hetty.

HETTY

Isn't he polite?

FANNY

The sweetest and most polite child I know.

HETTY

I might as well open the cake. I'll go get it.
(She exits)

ZEPH

I love cake. Don't you love cake?

FANNY

I most certainly do.

ZEPH

This cake is filled with chocolate and custard and it has vanilla frosting. And you know what it says on top?

FANNY

What, dear?

ZEPH

It says Welcome Home Max and Jack.

(HETTY enters with cake;
she cuts five slices;
brings one to LULU, one to
FANNY, one to ZEPH. She
goes upstairs with the
other two pieces.)

Look, Fanny. I got the M.

FANNY

Yes, sweet child, you have.

ZEPH

What do you have?

FANNY

Why, it looks like I have the J.

ZEPH

M and J. That's Max and Jack.

FANNY

That's right, sweet child.

ZEPH

Who's Max and Jack?

CURTAIN

Dedicated with love to Bruce

ACT TWO: More Nostalgia

(Monday, November 25, 1963. The large living room of the Keystone house, now occupied by LEWIS KEYSTONE, JR. When the curtain rises, the stage is empty. During the first few minutes, we hear off-stage voices, the sound of cars pulling into the driveway. Everyone in this act wears black except MINNA, who is dressed a little too brightly, perhaps in red. BENJIE and ROSIE are the first to enter.)

ROSIE

Are you just going to go on and on about it all day?

BENJIE

I just don't see why we had to come here. That's all. You know what I mean?

ROSIE

You're going to go on and on about it, is that it?

BENJIE

You better watch I don't kick you in the head. That's all.

ROSIE

Look. We had to come.

BENJIE

Why?

ROSIE

You're gonna go on and on about it, aren't you?

BENJIE

On and on about what? Just because I want to know why we had to come here? You watch your mouth, Rose. You know what I mean? Just watch your mouth. And don't think I don't know why we had to come here. Just don't you think I'm so stupid I don't know why we come. You know what I mean?

ROSIE

Look, Benjie, we come to pay our respects. 'S as simple as that.

BENJIE

Respects? You know what it's costing me this week-end paying respects?

ROSIE

You never stop, do you?

BENJIE

Closing the shop down on Saturday and then again today. You know what it's costing me?

ROSIE

Benjie, you sound plain unpatriotic. It's not out of respect for Mister Keystone you closed your shop. Or don't you remember? Wow, Benjie, you take the cake. Going on and on like you do.

(whispering)

Besides, Benjie, it weren't for Mr. Keystone's loan, you'd have no shop to close. Or to open. And now the old man's gone, it's one loan you probably won't ever have to pay back. So I think paying your respects is the very least you can do. The way you talk, Benjie, I swear, shows you just never think. The way you go on and on.

BENJIE

All you talk about is that loan. What'd you have to do for that loan, anyways? I heard the old man didn't go for no normal sex.

ROSIE

You're just plain desgusting, 's all.

BENJIE

First the father. Then the son. You better watch your step, Rose, fore you get stuck with the Holy Ghost!

ROSIE

You getting biblical again, Benjie?

BENJIE

The least we can do, now the shop's closed, is go to a movie. You know when the last time was we saw a movie?

ROSIE

And leave the kids with your mother all day?

(laughs)

Though it'd serve her right, those kids of yours being the miserable brats they are. It'd serve her right. What's playing, anyway?

BENJIE

McClintock's playing, that's what. I only been talking about it ever since

ROSIE

With John Wayne? I saw it last week.

BENJIE

You what? When?

ROSIE

I just told you last week. Now don't start in going on and on about it.

BENJIE

You knew I wanted to see it. I been talking about it for weeks.

ROSIE

Well, you go yourself then. I told you I saw it. 's no sense starting a Civil War, is it?

(Enter HETTY, CLYDE,
and ZEPH.)

BENJIE

I will. You'll see.

ROSIE

Mr. and Mrs. Brown. It is so good to see you.

HETTY

Terrible tragedy, wasn't it? Yet it was a lovely funeral. It was only fitting Lew should have the best.

ROSIE

Mister Keystone was a fine man. We always said so.

HETTY

Nothing but the best. And there was such dignity about it. Well, I guess the boys saw to that. Loveliest funeral I've seen. Don't you agree, Clyde?

CLYDE

Yes, it was.

HETTY

Just lovely. Max should have been there, don't you think? Lew would have wanted Max to be there.

(Enter FANNY and LULU. LULU is much older and FANNY directs her to a chair near the TV, and LULU sits.)

ZEPH

Hello, Fanny.

FANNY

Sweet child, how are you? You look quite handsome, Zeph. You know?

HETTY

New suit.

ZEPH

(overlapping)
Thank you.

FANNY

I thought I'd put the TV on. Mama wants to see the funeral.

HETTY

Do you think it's right? I was going to mention it myself. I did so want to watch. But I didn't think it was right. Today. Curious, isn't it, Lew's old heart giving in just moments before the news came out. Why, if he had lived to hear the news, his heart would have broken anyway. Right then and there, don't you think? Terrible, terrible tragedy.

(Enter MINNA.)

MINNA

Well. Who would have thought Josh'd be the one to fall apart like that? I never would have given him the credit for being so emotional. I certainly would not. Why, the sight of him carrying on like that must have given the girls a trauma. That's why I sent them on home. Well, I tell you I certainly never thought Josh'd be the one to fall apart like that. I just naturally thought Lewis would be the one to fall apart. But did you see him? Cold as ice. Didn't move a single muscle. I never saw anyone react as coldly. At his own father's funeral. I'll tell you one thing about Lewis, though. The older he gets, the handsomer he gets! Didn't he look fine, though?

ROSIE

He is an impressive looking man.

MINNA

He certainly is. The years haven't done any harm to your husband, either. Benjie, you're breathtaking. Well, I guess we're ready for refreshments. I imagine we're all tired out and ready for refreshments. Benjie, would you mind giving me a hand? And Fanny, why don't you put on the television? Let mama watch the funeral. Give her something to do. Come on, Benjie.

(MINNA and BENJIE exit. FANNY turns the television set on.)

ROSIE
'S amazing how shrill she's become.

ZEPH
(noticing a chess table)
Fanny, would you like to play a game of chess?

FANNY
Not really, dear. I'm not quite up to it. I have a feeling you're too good for me, anyway. Thank you just the same. Thank you very much.

HETTY
Beats Clyde all the time.

ZEPH
(overlapping)
You're welcome. Uncle Clyde?

(CLYDE nods; sits down at chess table with ZEPH and sets the game up.)

HETTY
Now you give Uncle Clyde an even chance, hear?

ROSIE
'S really wonderful, the marvels you've done with that boy.

HETTY
Yes, I suppose it is. It's a terrible thing to say, but in a way I suppose my sister's passing on was a blessing in disguise. She never did have time for him, you know. To turn him into a man. He's working, you know.

ROSIE
I heard.

HETTY
Yes, he is. Down at the mill. Goes in with Clyde three times a week. Helps Clyde out. Rest of the time, he's home helping me. There's some think we should have put him away, but we love him, you know. A little patience, just a little patience. Why, he's turned into a fine young man. Helping out the way he does. It is stuffy in here. I could use a drink. I could use a drink.

(ROSIE and HETTY drift towards the TV set; HETTY sits on the arm of LULU's chair. MINNA enters, followed by BENJIE, wheeling a tea wagon, filled with little sandwiches, and drinks. MINNA silently leads and orders BENJIE to pass out the drinks. FANNY reaches into her bag, takes out some pills, and swallows them with her drink. MINNA places her hand on BENJIE's when they have gotten to everybody. ROSIE moves around, comes to a phonograph and absent-mindedly places the needle on a record. It is an old, scratchy recording of the Cake Walk we heard in the first act. We hear just a brief snatch since everyone turns to look at ROSIE who immediately removes the needle in embarrassment. We have a stage picture now of CLYDE and ZEPH playing chess, FANNY watching. LULU and HETTY watching TV from the chair, MINNA and BENJIE from the tea wagon, ROSIE eating a sandwich. Enter JOSH, older, with less hair, very tired. And LEWIS, JR., who is even more intense and more striking than he seemed in the first act.)

JOSHUA

Where's the booze? I want to get good and drunk. You know what happened? We no sooner buried the old man, we no sooner covered the box with dirt, this guy comes over to us and hands us a bill. Can you beat that? Hands us a bill. Jesus Christ! I can't get over it. Ah, there's the booze.

MINNA

Josh!

JOSHUA

Don't call me that. You make it sound like some cheap insult. It's a good name. A good Biblical name. You know. Joshua fit the Battle of Jericho. So, for Christ's sake, don't make it sound like a cheap insult. Like some joke. Josh! It's Joshua. U-A at the end.

MINNA

You sound as if you had a few. I was wondering what was keeping you.

JOSHUA

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did have a couple of quick, quiet ones with my brother. Didn't we, Lewie? Have a couple of quick, quiet ones?

MINNA

I certainly did wonder what was keeping you.

HETTY

(watching the TV)
Terrible, terrible. Just terrible.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)
Now you know.

HETTY

Every time I think of it, it's just terrible.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)
Where's the girls?

MINNA

I sent them on home, Josh.

JOSHUA

Don't you think they're old enough to know what happened?

MINNA

It isn't that. It isn't that at all. Do I have to tell you how upset they were? Seeing you cry. Seeing a grown man cry like that. They certainly were upset. And besides, I thought it was for the best.

JOSHUA

What's wrong with a grown man crying? What's wrong with a good, healthy, honest emotion? My father died, you know. In case you didn't know, my father died.

(JOSHUA fixes two drinks, brings one DS, where LEWIS is seated. MINNA sits down near the TV; FANNY looks towards LEWIS but goes US to sit down, another drink in her hand. BENJIE points to the time on his watch to ROSIE, but she ignores him and eats another sandwich, her eyes going from LEWIS to the TV.)

JOSHUA

(to LEWIS)
Here. Drink up.

(pause)
Why the hell are you so sober?

LEWIS

You want to be drunk.

JOSHUA
Maybe I do. Yes, I guess I do. Am I overdoing it? Am I being...overbearing?

LEWIS
No. It's good to see you have some spirit left, Josh.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)
Just tell me if I am.

LEWIS
I honestly can't remember the last time you showed this much spirit.

JOSHUA
What are you trying to say, that it takes death to wake me up? Maybe.

LEWIS.

Did I say that?

JOSHUA

(overlapping)
Maybe it does. I don't know. I thought I was used to death. What did you say?

(LEWIS shakes his head)
I thought you said something. So you think I been sleeping? Huh? I don't know. It's not sleeping, really. Look at me. Don't you know me. Jesus Christ, Lewie, we had the same mother. The same father. We slept

JOSHUA (cont.)

together, for Christ's sake. You think I been sleeping, huh? Who the hell do you think you are, anyway, to pass judgment.

(laughs)

Christ, I sounded like Dad there for a minute, didn't I? Listen, kid, don't mind me. Like you said, I want to be drunk. Sure, I want to be drunk. What I mean is hell, I was going to change the world once. You didn't know me when I was in college, you know. What I mean is I was hit over the head about three times more than I was prepared for. I'm an okay guy, deep down. For a general practitioner.

(Pause)

So the crummy golden boys didn't make it. Again. Jesus Christ, there was a time when there was a special occasion, you know a wedding or a funeral, you could count on them to make an appearance. How long's it been now they showed up anywhere? It's like they don't exist, you know. Like they sure as hell don't even exist. What I mean is I know they were supposed to have split apart there for a time. Dad said it was over some political thing. Between you and me, they just got tired of each other, couldn't stomach each other, couldn't stand the sight of each other, couldn't ...I don't know. You know? You think Max at least'd show up for the funeral.

HETTY

(watching the TV)

Isn't it the most stately funeral you've ever seen?

MINNA

It certainly is.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)

Did you say something? No? You know what it is, I think maybe I want you to say something. I think I keep hearing you say something because I want to hear you say something. Jesus Christ, I should have been a psychiatrist, huh? I should have been a goddamned psychiatrist. What this town needs is a good goddamned psychiatrist. General practitioners are a dime a dozen. What I mean is if I'm going to be clinical, I might as well be really clinical.

HETTY

(watching the TV)

Terrible. Terrible. Just terrible.

JOSHUA

What's terrible?

(walks over to the TV)

What's so terrible?...Oh, God! I forgot. God!

(passes by the chess table)

Hey, did you know Dad was the best chess player in

JOSHUA (cont.)

the county? Only one person could beat Dad. Only one person. Max. Used to sit for hours and watch them. Right at this here table.

(Comes DS to LEWIS)

You want to know something, Lewie? You know why Max used to beat Dad? He cheated.

(lifts right hand)

On the bible. Max cheated. The bastard cheated. Why, Max was the only guy in the entire world could manage to cheat at chess.

(crosses to get another drink, comes back DS)

How the hell do you manage to stay so sober?

(Pause)

Jesus Christ, what a morbid bunch. Isn't one funeral a day enough for them? You'd think one would be more than enough. You know?

HETTY

Look. Did you see who I saw?

MINNA

Who was that?

HETTY

Max. Right there. Wait a minute. Maybe they'll show him again.

MINNA

Where?

HETTY

Right there. In the crowd. Why, I could swear it was Max.

MINNA

You sure?

HETTY

(overlapping)

Looked just like him.

JOSHUA

It must have been him. Max'd be there.

HETTY

(overlapping)

The spitting image. Yes, I could swear it was him.

CLYDE

Hetty, there's so many people there. Probably just seeing things is all.

JOSHUA

No, it was probably him all right. Max'd be there.

HETTY

Maybe they'll show him again.

Interview on T.V.

(LEWIS crosses to the phonograph, puts it on, plays the Cake Walk very softly while the following goes on.)

FANNY

How'd he look? Older?

HETTY

Couldn't see too clear. But he looked fine. Just fine.

FANNY

I supposed he'd look older.

BENJIE

(overlapping)
Don't you think it's time we were getting?

JOSHUA

Older? Not Max.

ROSIE

Hold your horses. We just got here.

HETTY

He looked fine. Just fine.

CLYDE

If it was him!

BENJIE

I just thought it wasn't getting any earlier?

ZEPH

Who?

JOSHUA

(overlapping)

Oh, it was him all right. He loved that man, you know. According to Dad, it's what started their rift, you know. Max going gung ho for that man just at the time Jack sold his book to the movies and got himself a few dollars and let it go to his head. Did you know Jack started campaigning for some Conservative party. The great liberal writer became a goddamned Fascist there for a while. Till the money ran out, I hear. Then they got together again. Did you see Jack there too, Hetty? Or just Max? It be interesting to know if they're together again.

FANNY

After all, it's only natural that he'd get older.

HETTY

(overlapping)

Near as I could make out, he was alone. I didn't notice if Jack was there or not.

ZEPH

Who?

BENJIE

You watch that Conservative Party. Let a little time pass, let people forget, you watch that Conservative Party.

FANNY

Forget?

JOSHUA

Business going well, Ben?

ROSIE

Flourishing.

JOSHUA

Artificial plants, isn't it?

BENJIE

That's right.

ROSIE

'S Flourishing. Business is flourishing.

HETTY

(overlapping)

Come to think of it, I'm sure Jack wasn't with him.

ZEPH

Fanny, who is getting older?

CLYDE

We all are.

JOSHUA

So Max is on his own again.

ROSIE

Everyone thought we were crazy going into artificial plants. Which just shows how important it is to just go right ahead and follow your own inclinations. Why, we're even thinking of opening another shop, business is so good.

HETTY

Terrible. Every time I think of it, it's just terrible.

MINNA

It certainly has been a nightmare.

FANNY

For a time, it was as if there was just no more tension. There was just this wonderful feeling of being totally relaxed.

JOSHUA

(Another drink, overlapping)
Dad loved that man.

HETTY

We just mentioned a while ago how curious that your father's heart gave in just moments before the news.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)
What I mean is Dad was always something of an ersatz politician, you know. But I never knew him to be so political till this here last election. It was that physical fitness thing got through to him. I never knew him to be so political.

FANNY

(overlapping)
Do you understand what I mean by this feeling of being relaxed?

MINNA

All I know is what a nightmare it's all been.

(LEWIS turns off the phonograph now and returns DS; the dialogues continue so that LEWIS' actions are not conspicuous.)

FANNY

And a kind of freedom, too.

HETTY

Why, I've been glued to that TV all week-end. I tell you I'll never forget yesterday. Seeing that man shot before my eyes. Just terrible. You wonder how things like that can happen in America.

JOSHUA

Sometimes I think it could only happen in America.

HETTY

I tell you it's just terrible.

FANNY

(to ZEPH)

Who's winning?

BENJIE

(overlapping)

Naturally. That's why I say soon as time passes, soon as people forget, there're changes due.

ZEPH

(overlapping)

I think I am, Fanny.

CLYDE

Too soon to tell. Too soon to tell.

HETTY

There he was again. Why, that was Max. I'll swear to it.

(to LULU)

Did you see that? Wasn't that Max? I'll swear, that was Max.

JOSHUA

Could only happen right here.

MINNA

Josh, make that the last one please. *Did you hear me*
I don't feel like driving. Hear?

BENJIE

(overlapping)
That's what I say.

CLYDE

Too soon to tell. *Down to*

BENJIE

That Jack sounds a real sensible guy. Must be a real sensible guy.

MINNA

Did you hear me, Josh?

JOSHUA

Yes, Minna, I heard you. *We know*

BENJIE

Yep, that Jack is sure a sensible guy.

HETTY

It was him all right. It was Max, all right, just won him.

FANNY

(taking a pill)

Lewis, you understand, don't you? What I mean when I say a freedom...from tension?

JOSHUA

(comes DS to LEWIS, overlapping)

Aren't you ever going to finish that drink? What are you going to do, stay sober all day, Lewis Keystone, Junior?

MINNA

Josh.

JOSHUA

Did it ever occur to you how funny it is you're Lewis Junior. What I mean is you were the second son, you know.

MINNA

Well, that certainly better be his lastndrink.

JOSHUA

You'd think he'd give his name to his first son, wouldn't you?

ZEPH

Checkmate.

CLYDE

I'll be damned!

JOSHUA

(overlapping)

Look, Lewie, it's my last drink. You heard. Let's drink to happy days. Or something. Come on, damn it. Get a little drunk. Get a little emotional. For Christ's sake, show a little emotion for Dad. Hasn't been anyone here today to show any real feeling for him and you were the closest. Come on, cry for him. Or something. He needs someone's tears.

(Pause)

I bet you thought I was crying for him, huh? You know something? I wasn't. What I mean is it wasn't news to me, you know. It was his fourth attack in fifteen years, for Christ's sake. Come on, to happy days. It's my last drink.

(Pause)

Know something? I guess I was crying for myself. That's what all the goddamned crying was about.

HETTY

Terrible. Terrible. Every time I think of it. Just terrible.

JOSHUA

Jesus Christ, fathers die, you know. Fathers die!

(JOSHUA exits.)

MINNA

Josh, where are you going?

(Pause)

All that crying. All that drinking. I don't know what has happened to that man today. I certainly don't. Well, he's probably going to call the girls. That is what he's probably going to do.

CLYDE

Another game? Zeph?

ZEPH

Yes, Uncle Clyde.

HETTY

Just terrible. Rosie, I wonder could you fix me another little drink?

MINNA

(to LEWIS, overlapping)

I've never seen your brother like this. I must say you certainly are as different as two brothers could possibly be. Why, everyone I know has remarked to me how different you two are. Everyone talks about Josh being a doctor and all and about his dry wit - although I must admit sometimes his wit is so dry it escapes me altogether - and things like that. Well, what I'm saying is that for all his wit, for all his...social position, it's you, you're the one gives people the feeling of confidence. You certainly have an air of confidence about you, Lewis. And I must say you get more attractive with each passing year. Yes, you do.

(ROSIE has given HETTY her drink, comes DS to LEWIS and MINNA with bottle.)

ROSIE

Can I freshen your drink for you, Lewis?

LEWIS

No, thank you.

MINNA

I was just telling Lewis how he gets more attractive each year.

ROSIE

Yes.

MINNA

Though I certainly don't think it's very manly to just sit back and let the world admire you. Don't you think I'm right, Rosie?

ROSIE

Guess I never thought much about it.

MINNA

No, I don't think it's very manly at all.

~~BENJIE~~
BENJIE

Rosie!

ROSIE

Never really gave it much thought.

MINNA

Your husband's calling.

ROSIE

Is he?

MINNA

Just sitting back there like some god waiting to be served. No, it certainly is not very manly. Sam Torkle was like that. Do you remember Sam, Lewis? Well, he was like that.

LEWIS

Are you through?

MINNA

I'm sorry. Did I hurt your feelings?

LEWIS

Not at all. I get a vicarious thrill out of women making a fuss over me. Good, bad, or indifferent.

MINNA

I used to think there was such a thing as a perfect man. Well, I know now there is no such thing. You, you're not perfect. Neither was Sam. Not even Jack or Max. Certainly not Josh. Really, the things a young girl thinks of sometimes about men! Life certainly does give a lie to all those ideas, don't you think, Rosie? You sure I'm not hurting your feelings, Lewis?

LEWIS

You're pleasuring me, Minna.

MINNA

Something to write about, huh, honey? Putting me in your book?

LEWIS

You're not interesting enough.

ROSIE

You writing a book, Lewis?

MINNA

Lewis is always writing a book.

(Bored, goes US)

Benjie, would you be a lamb and see what Joshua is doing? Please.

(BENJIE leaves.)

Thank you, dear.

(to FANNY)

He's probably calling the girls. I don't know what the hell he'd do without them.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

I didn't know you were writing a book, Lewis.

(whispering)

I hope I'm not in it. You wouldn't put me in it, would you? Here, let me freshen that drink. Look, I think Benjie's going off to the movies. You know? Shit, 's up to me, there'd be nothing but John Wayne movies! You know?

HETTY

I could cry. I honestly don't know how much of this I can bear.

MINNA

You ask me, Cathy Elizabeth has a case on her father.

CLYDE

Watch how this game goes, Zeph. I may finally win one.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

No, I didn't know you were writing a book. 'S' probably a lot of things I don't know.

Enter

(JOSHUA and BENJIE enter.)

MINNA

Where were you? Calling the girls?

(Pause)

Well, aren't you going to answer me?

JOSHUA

Do you care?

MINNA

Called your precious Cathy Elizabeth, didn't you?

HETTY

I tell you I can hardly bear another minute of this.
It's just terrible.

LEWIS

Why not shut it off then? Why not just shut it off?
(crosses to TV, shuts it off)
Cheer. Cheer. Aren't there enough sad things
in this world without lingering on....more sad things?
How's that? Sounded a hell of a lot like him, didn't
it?

HETTY

Lewis, we were watching that. Don't you have no regard
for history?

LEWIS

I just think we should forget. That's what we're here
for. To forget. Isn't that what we're here for?

FANNY

Lewis, they were watching. Mama was watching.

LEWIS

I'm sorry, Fanny, but Lulu doesn't want to watch
funeral processions all day. Do you, Lulu? Lulu wants
to dance.

(Lifts LULU, dances with her, to her shocked surprise)
Come on, Lulu. Dance!
(sings)

Once I built a railroad, made it run
Made it run against time

Once I built a railroad, now it's done...
(LULU collapses)

Lulu!

MINNA

What kind of crazy family did I marry into anyway?

FANNY

(overlapping)

Mama!

JOSHUA

What happened?

(feels LULU's pulse)

She's okay. Do you have any idea how old she is, Lewie?

FANNY

Is she okay?

JOSHUA

She's fine. We'd better take her to the bedroom. Let her rest. Jesus Christ, Lewie.

LEWIS

I'm sorry. I'm sorry.

FANNY

(overlapping)

She's okay, isn't she?

MINNA

He said she was okay, Fanny. She just needs rest.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

I'm sorry.

JOSHUA

Jesus Christ! Come on, Fanny. Let's get her upstairs.

(JOSHUA and FANNY exit,
carrying LULU.)

MINNA

You take the cake. You certainly do take the cake. Have you gone out of your senses entirely? That woman is ancient.

LEWIS

I said I was sorry.

MINNA

(overlapping)

Ancient! The woman is an invalid, for God's sake.

ROSIE

He said he was sorry. You're not going to go on and on about it, are you?

HETTY

Why, of course, he's sorry.

(takes a drink)

You don't think he did anything intentionally, do you?

BENJIE

(overlapping)

Rose, you stay out of this, hear?

ROSIE

What?

ZEPH

Checkmate.

CLYDE

Why, I didn't even see that.

BENJIE

(overlapping)

I said stay out of it.

MINNA

(overlapping)

A helpless old invalid, for God's sake.

HETTY

Zeph win again?

CLYDE

I didn't even see that.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

I just said I think 's silly to go on and on about it when he said he was sorry.

ZEPH

(overlapping)

I won. Aunt Hetty, I won twice today.

HETTY

Well, sure you did.

BENJIE

(overlapping)

And I said stay out of it!

(LEWIS finally finishes his drink; takes another, drinks it quickly and pours himself another one. JOSHUA re-enters.)

JOSHUA

Of all the damn stupid things. I don't know, Lewie, seems to me the older you get, the more like a child you become. That's an old woman up there. You could have done real damage to her.

MINNA

That is exactly what I told him.

JOSHUA

Real damage.

LEWIS

Have a drink, Josh.

JOSHUA

What the hell do you think this is? You think this is a party or something?

LEWIS

Yes, as a matter of fact, I did think this was a party. I thought you said it was a party.

JOSHUA

For Christ's sake, don't you know what happened today?

LEWIS

Maybe I don't. No, I don't think I know what happened today. Do you know?

ZEPH

Your father was buried today.

LEWIS

Thank you, Zeph.

JOSHUA

You needn't be sarcastic, Lewie, with...him.

LEWIS

I wasn't being sarcastic. I thanked him, genuinely thanked him for reminding me.

JOSHUA

Jesus Christ!

LEWIS

(overlapping)

I apologize for my brother's outburst, Zeph. And I thank you...again.

ZEPH

You're welcome.

LEWIS

(another drink)

I apologize for my brother because, really, deep down, he's an okay guy. You know? We even slept together, Zeph, whatever the hell that's supposed to mean.

JOSHUA

(another drink)

Son of a bitch!

MINNA

Josh, I said no more.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

You know I sometimes think Zeph's the only person in this town a guy can talk to. He listens. He's got manners. He has vision. Imagination. He's stayed young.

(putshis arm around ZEPH)

He tells the truth, puts things directly. You know what I'm saying, don't you, Zeph? Let me show you something.

(LEWIS takes ZEPH to DS area and faces out to the audience.)

Look out that window, Zeph. What do you see?

ZEPH

I see houses.

LEWIS

Yes?

ZEPH

And trees. And grass.

LEWIS

What else?

ZEPH

I see the sky.

LEWIS

You sure you can't see anything else? I'll bet if you look real hard, you can see something else. If you look hard, you can see the world out there.

ZEPH

The world?

JOSHUA

He's insane. The son of a bitch is insane!

LEWIS

(overlapping)

Sure. See all those faces. Laughing. Crying. That's the whole world looking at you, telling you something. The whole screwed-up world, right out there, looking at you through the window.

ZEPH

I see....

LEWIS

X

ZEPH

I see the sun.

LEWIS

Well, that's something. I'll bet you're one of the very few people can look out that window...today... and see the sun shining. I'll bet you're one of the very few, Zeph.

JOSHUA

Jesus Christ!

ZEPH

I see the sun. I do. I see the sun.

JOSHUA

(overlapping)

The son of a bitch is mad, I tell you. Minna, I think it's time we were going.

LEWIS

Not yet, Josh. Not before we drink a toast.

JOSHUA

We have to go.

LEWIS

One toast to Pop.

MINNA

I told you no more. Now I'm not going. I'm not driving.

LEWIS

(Overlapping; remote)

One little drink to the heroes and villains of Lewis Keystone's unwritten, never to be published, volume on American mythology.

JOSHUA

The girls are all alone.

LEWIS

To McCarthy. And Roy Cohn. And Charlie Chaplin. To Franco. And Hitler. And to F.D.R.

MINNA

(overlapping)

I said I'm not driving.

LEWIS

To all of Pop's gods and goddesses. Come on. One drink. To Max.

JOSHUA

Max, my ass!

HETTY

I'll drink to that, to Max.

LEWIS

And Jack. And Zeph. To the boys at the gym. To Baseball. And Football. And Tennis. The era of Pop is dead. Long live the era of...tennis!

JOSHUA

I tell you the son of a bitch is insane. Minna, the girls are all alone.

MINNA

I said I'm not driving. You like that, I'll end up driving.

JOSHUA

I'm leaving. You do what you want.

(JOSHUA exits.)

MINNA

Looks like I got myself married into a family of crazy people.

LEWIS

You better go. You better go, because if you don't go now, you'll have to go later with Benjie and by that time, you won't feel like going straight home to a drunk husband and two teen-age bitches - they're my nieces, but that's what they are - and you'll want to take a long drive somewhere and you will because you'll be alone with Benjie. Rosie, you see, Rosie'll find some excuse to stay on.

ROSIE

Lew!

BENJIE

You dirty, filthy cock-sucker!

MINNA

(overlapping)

Lewis, what are you saying?

LEWIS

(overlapping)

And you'll do something you'll wind up doing anyway one day but I like to think you didn't start the day Pop was buried. So go, Minna.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

Benjie, it's not true. Lew, tell him it's not true.

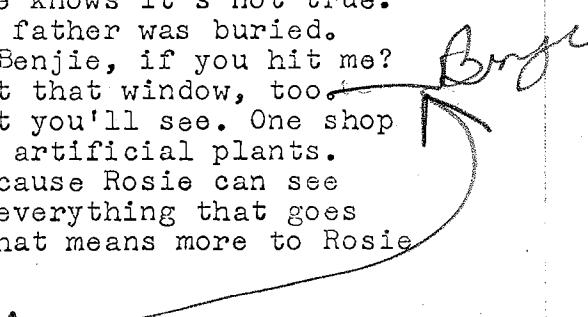
BENJIE

(overlapping)

Wait'll I get my hands on you, you dirty...

LEWIS

Of course it's not true. Benjie knows it's not true. Would I make a date the day my father was buried. What good will it do, anyway, Benjie, if you hit me? Come here, Benjie. You look out that window, too. If you look hard, you know what you'll see. One shop after another. All filled with artificial plants. That's a good thing to see. Because Rosie can see that too. All those shops and everything that goes with it. Believe me, Benjie, that means more to Rosie than a few hours with me.



BENJIE

I ain't looking out no window.

ROSIE

Benjie, let's go.

BENJIE

You watch yourself, hear?

MINNA

You're crazy, Lewie. You certainly have gone clear out of your senses.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

All those artificial plants!

ROSIE

Come on, Benjie.

(BENJIE and ROSIE exit.)

LEWIS

All those goddamned artificial plants!

(JOSHUA re-enters.)

JOSHUA

Minna?

MINNA

I'm coming, Josh. Lewis? Tell Fanny I'll call later.
You will tell her?

(JOSHUA and MINNA exit.)

HETTY

You don't mind if I have another? It's getting so I
like the taste of liquor every now and then.

(another drink)

To the memory of your father. I'm going to miss him,
Lewis. We're all going to miss him. Your father was
the one person I could talk to, you know. Why, I could
tell him all sorts of silly things. He'd be the only
one I'd listen to me sometimes. Funny, if he was here
now and it was him told me to look out that window,
you know what I'd tell him I could see, Lewis? I see
shadows is what I see. Zeph, Clyde. I guess it's time
we were going, too.

(kisses LEWIS)

Bye, Lewis. Now anytime you feel lonely, anytime you
want company, you call. Hear?

CLYDE

I'll go on and get the coats.

(CLYDE exits.)

ZEPH

Goodbye, Lewis.

LEWIS

See you soon, Zeph.

ZEPH

Say goodbye to Fanny for me.

HETTY

Yes, Lewis, you do that. Say goodbye to Fanny.

(HETTY and ZEPH exit.)

LEWIS

(looking out the window, at the audience)
Pops, they're going to miss you, everyone's going to
miss you...for a while. You think Max'll miss you,
Pops? Sure. Max'll miss you.

(FANNY enters.)

FANNY

Where is everybody?

LEWIS

Gone. Everybody's gone. Drink, Fanny?

FANNY

I shouldn't.

LEWIS

Just one.

FANNY

Okay. One.

LEWIS

I'm sorry, I'm truly sorry about your mother.

FANNY

Oh, it's all right. Lulu is not a fragile woman. She comes from pioneer stock, you know. She is made, as they say, of sterner stuff.

LEWIS

You look lovely today, Fanny.

FANNY

Lewis, every time you see me, you say that. Why, I don't look lovely at all. I'm getting older and I have hundreds of little lines and wrinkles virtually all over the place to prove it.

LEWIS

Nevertheless, you look lovely....Max had a crush on you once, didn't he?

FANNY

I'm afraid it was the other way around the way I remember it.

LEWIS

What about Jack? Did you ever think much about Jack?

FANNY

It gets so sometimes that I really can't remember either one of them very clearly. I mean there's always been an awful lot of talk about them which helps, I suppose, to re-enforce one's memory of them, but the truth is I don't see them very clearly at all anymore.

LEWIS

You know something curious, Fanny?

FANNY

Yes?

LEWIS

We've known each other all our lives.

FANNY

That's right. Yes, we have.

LEWIS

And yet this is the first time we have ever been alone in the same room together.

FANNY

I never thought of that. But it is true, isn't it?

LEWIS

And you look lovely to me right now. You really do look lovely.

FANNY

It's the booze, Lewis.

LEWIS

Maybe.

FANNY

Well, that's what it is all right. The liquor's gone right to your head.

LEWIS

Why haven't we ever been alone before?

FANNY

Well, it's not for lack of wanting...on my part. I don't know, Lewis. You've always been so busy, I suppose. I always imagined you were so very busy.

LEWIS

The one thing I've never been is busy. Busy or involved or committed.

FANNY

That is not true, Lewis.

LEWIS

Yes, it is. One thing about my father, good, bad, or indifferent, he was a busy, involved, committed, alive person. He, too, was made, as they say, of sterner stuff. Me, I've never been committed to anything but myself.

FANNY

You look very young now. Very vulnerable.

LEWIS

I mean, don't you think it's funny that I've always been so self-involved and yet I've never really managed to be truthful about myself? Like in my writing. Whenever I write about me, I'm always a little bit more intelligent, a little bit more passive than everyone else. And sensitive, of course. And perceptive. And a little child-like to boot. Hell, nobody is all of those things. And even with all those qualities, I start writing about me and I become a blob. I mean, I ought to start acting my age if I'm ever going to make a valid comment on anything. You know what I'm talking about?

FANNY

I think you're too alone. That's what I think.

LEWIS

I finished my novel, Fanny, and it's terrible. I have everyone else down to a tee, but the central character is a blob, Fanny. I think maybe now that Pops is dead, I'll really get to work on it, really get it down.

(Pause)

This tastes good.

(Pause)

I mean, if you can suddenly get un-involved, you can begin to get things down. What I really mean is - Look at Jack. At five he was un-involved. At six, he was a goddamned poet. I think I'm going to finally get down to business, and there's always Me facing Me and totally incapable of being true to Me.

(Pause)

If you knew how lovely you looked. Fanny, I love you.

FANNY

You are drunk, Lewis.

LEWIS

If I asked you to marry me, would you marry me?

FANNY

I would. I would, Lewis, but you're drunk.

LEWIS

Well, great. Who knows if I'd ask you if I wasn't? You love me, too, don't you?

FANNY

I don't know, Lewis. I suppose I do. I don't know. Don't joke with me. You're funny and you're sweet, but I have a feeling it's the booze. You don't even know me. Really.

LEWIS

Yes I do. Of course I know you.

FANNY

Not really.

LEWIS

I love you. I know that. And it feels wonderful. Say you love me.

FANNY

Lewis, for fifteen years now, fifteen years more or less, I've been trying to kill myself. Not really. I wouldn't slash my wrists because I hate blood. I'd never take an overdose of any pill I ever had, because I was afraid I'd be found and they'd have to pump out my stomach. I'm trying to say that I hate the pain, but I've been trying to kill myself just the same. In a way, Lewis, I'm dead. And you, you're so young. I know you're only a year or two younger than I am, but you're alive and vulnerable and I'm dead.

LEWIS

Then I'll make you alive. That's it. I'll commit myself to you, I'll commit myself to making you young and alive.

FANNY

I've spent my life watching people die and saying to myself, why couldn't it have been me? That's who I am, Lewis. I keep a book that lists the date of every death of anyone I know.

LEWIS

Love me.

FANNY

Oh, Lewis, I do love you. But I need a drink. And could you get my bag?

LEWIS

I knew it. I knew all that had to happen was for Pops to kick the bucket.

FANNY

(overlapping)

There is one thing you should know, Lewis. When you were in New York?

LEWIS

Here. The drink. Your bag. What about New York?

FANNY

Thank you.

(takes a pill)

When you were in New York, Lewis, I was in a sanitarium.

LEWIS

Confessions? Okay, Fanny, when I was in New York, I was in jail for six months. You don't tell me why you were in a sanitarium and I won't tell you why I was in jail. It's from now on, Fanny.

FANNY

You were in jail?

LEWIS

It was horrible.

FANNY

This drink tastes bitter.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

Just think of from now on.

FANNY

How can we? There's too much behind us to just throw it all out some window. I'm afraid, Lewis, you're drunk. You're joking with me.

LEWIS

I'm not. I swear it.

FANNY

What about Rosie?

LEWIS

What about Rosie?

FANNY

Everyone knows.

LEWIS

Look, I don't love her. I don't even like her.

FANNY

Don't you see what I mean? Your whole life is filled with living. My whole life is filled with dying. With death.

LEWIS

It's just from now on.

FANNY

When?

LEWIS

When?

FANNY

When are we getting married?

LEWIS

Tomorrow. Next week. As soon as you like.

FANNY

No. We've got to make plans. There's the proper mourning period for your father to be considered. And I want a church wedding. And a white gown. And I want children, Lewist

LEWIS

I want children, too, Fanny.

FANNY

I don't think we're too old to still have children, do you?

LEWIS

No, of course not.

FANNY

I think next summer would be a good time. You'd have time to change your mind if you wanted to. If we waited until next summer. Could you add a little water to this? What is it? Scotch?

(Pause)

I love you, Lewis.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

It's bourbon, Fanny. I didn't forget.

FANNY

It tastes like scotch. It tastes bitter. Lewis?

LEWIS

Yes, love?

FANNY

Don't you think you should tell me why you were in jail? It won't make a difference. Really. It's just one hears things.

LEWIS

Someday. Not now. It was horrible. And now I just want to be happy. Okay?

FANNY

Okay.

LEWIS

You get lovelier every minute.

FANNY

I keep telling you it's the booze.

LEWIS

I don't care what it is.

FANNY

Lewis?

LEWIS

Yes?

FANNY

I want you to know something. Remember that party? That welcome home party for Jack and Max? Oh, it was ages ago. Well, it was at that party that I first wanted you to ask me...what you've asked me today. Do you think I'm silly bringing it up now? Do you think I'm silly remembering that? Yes, you do. I'm going upstairs now. I want to tell Mama. I want her to be the first to know. Christ, I hope she knows what the hell I'm talking about.
 (she kisses LEWIS, tentatively)
 She just won't wear that hearing aid come hell or high water.

(FANNY exits. LEWIS crosses to the phonograph, touches it, looks at it for a moment, begins to play the CakeWalk recording quietly.)

LEWIS

Pops, I didn't tell you this before because I felt guilty. I guess I always felt a little guilty about something or other with you. I'm sorry I wasn't here when you were dying. I would have been if I knew. Anyway, I was just overseeing your territory, Pops. I was at the gym, Pops, when the news about the President's assassination came through. I was at the gym. Otherwise I would have been here. Anyways, Pops, I have good news for you. You know Fanny?
 (Pause)

Pops, may I take a giant step? Yes, you may. Pops, may I take two giant steps? No, you may not.

(makes the record louder)

Go forward. Go backward. Go backwards, go backwards, O time in thy flight, for I'm gonna....dance you a Cake Walk tonight.

LEWIS (cont.)

(Dancing now, without stop)

Pretty good, huh, Pops?....Not bad, huh?....They weren't there, Pops. Jack and Max didn't show up, you know. They didn't make the funeral. But they've got a wedding to go to now....How's that, Pops?....Pops, I'm a dazzler!Zeph, you're right. The sun is shining....How about that? Pretty good, huh, Pops?

CURTAIN

00181

SCENE

ACT THREE: A Prophesy

(Sunday afternoon in
the late summer of 1964.
The apartment of FANNY
CRUICKSHANK.

At Stage L, a sitting
room; at Stage R, a foyer;
directly behind the foyer
is FANNY's bedroom.
The apartment is fussily
furnished but somewhat
gives the impression of
being bare and empty.
A large table has been
set up in the sitting
room.

FANNY is at a dressing
table in the bedroom,
looking into a mirror
which means that FANNY
is directly facing the
audience. She is wearing
a slip; she is applying
make-up; there is a
bottle of brandy on the
dressing table, a half-
filled glass in front
of her.)

FANNY

(looking at a little book)

Actual deaths and assorted bad news. June 28, 1963.
Hetty's sister Lucy dies, liver ailment. November
22, 1963. Lewis's father succumbs to heart attack.
December 18, 1963. Clyde Brown passes on, of old age
presumably. April 11, 1964. Mama gets stroke. April
13, 1964. Mama gives up the ghost. I have been getting
poetic lately, haven't I? July 4, 1964. Now, there's
a day for you. Minna and Benjie in car accident coming
home from picnic. Nothing serious. Minor abrasions.
Simpson yacht blows up at sea. Wire from Jack, requesting
money. Picked up for vagrancy with seven cents in
pocket. Note. Where's Max?

(sips brandy)

What do you think, Fanny Cruickshank, soon to be Fanny
Keystone, do you think you'll ever get that lipstick
on straight? Your stupid mouth is getting smaller,
isn't it? Old age...presumably. Keeps getting smaller
and smaller. Soon you'll have hardly no mouth at all.
Keeps twisting up to boot. Fuck it! My eyes look good,
anyway. Did anyone ever tell you you've got pretty
eyes? Well, you do. Yes, you do. A little glazed.
Given to blank stares. But pretty! Now if he just
looks at your eyes instead of at your stupid mouth,
you've got it made.

FANNY (cont.)

(puts lipstick on)
That is that. Not bad. It looks a little bit more like a mouth anyway. As mouths go.

(sips brandy)
Delicious. Now, Fanny, you've been a good girl. Don't go and get tipsy today of all days. After all, it isn't every day a girl... Now, that's funny. A girl. Did you say a girl? I mean, it isn't every day a young lady of misfortune goes and gets married. Rouge? You think rouge? Or should you just pinch your cheeks a little?

(pinches her cheeks)
A little rouge, I guess. Not too much now. There. That looks kind of sweet. Doesn't that look sweet? Well, if he doesn't like it, fuck him!

(sips brandy)
Now, let's see. Who's being buried today? It seems only right you should get married the day of someone's burial. Proposed to the day of his father's burial. Screwed the night of Mama's being put to rest. Well, at least there's that. You won't have to contend with that today of all days. He was a lot smaller, wasn't he, Fanny, than you had imagined? Well, I guess a lot of things about Lewis seem smaller now than you had imagined. Still he's a good catch. Everyone says so. You think everyone imagines he's a lot bigger than he actually is? Minna says it's not the size so much. You and your stupid mouth, why does it have to go and twist up all the time?

(MINNA and ROSIE enter sitting room from Stage L - the kitchen - with table cloth, plates, etc. to set up table.)

ROSIE

I repeat, 'dja ever think he'd tame down so?

MINNA

I certainly didn't.

ROSIE

I hear he hasn't missed a day since he started. 'S funny, I can't hardly picture Lew at a desk, I mean, even if it is his father's mill and all that. Can you picture him sitting at a desk day in and day out like that? 'S lovely, this cover. Feal lace?

MINNA

As real as you're likely to get around here.

ROSIE

'S lovely.

FANNY

(to herself)

Now if you got yourself onto something really major like, tell me, Fanny, do you love him?, instead of worrying about your stupid mouth. And don't start crying now. You don't want to go and ruin your eyes, they're the only thing, right at this moment, you've got going for you.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

Something special about lace. 'S very fine, lace is. Benjie likes things simple. Mention lace to him, 's like I don't know what.

FANNY

(to herself)

You know, Fanny, you're not even sure you like the same things. Go ahead, tell me what it is makes you love him. Wouldn't you know, today of all days, you'd start getting a taste for brandy.

ROSIE

'S got no taste at all, Benjie.

MINNA

Oh?

ROSIE

Well, you know, he's got some.

FANNY

(to herself)

What I better do is get another doctor. Joshua can't know very much if he thinks I'm chemically balanced. Besides, I don't know if I like the idea of going to my husband's brother. And my sister's husband, to boot. Chemically balanced! Mary, mother of God, I haven't been chemically balanced in years. Or any other kind of 'balanced' at that.

MINNA

One doesn't see very much of him anymore.

ROSIE

Who?

MINNA

Benjie.

ROSIE

Oh. Benjie. Well, you know. There's the two shops. And now his opening the third and trying to find a good manager. A good manager is very important.

MINNA

It certainly is.

ROSIE

And he really got himself involved campaigning locally for Mister Goldwater. Why, it's practically become a vocation for him in itself. He's got this cute little button. Did you see it? This cute little button; says In Your Heart You Know He's Right? IS the cutest little button.

FANNY

(to herself, overlapping)

And another thing, there you were thinking he was going to write this great novel and the next thing you know he's telling you getting married is a responsibility and he takes this job you know he hates and you know he'll hate you for being the reason he took it in the first place. Chemically balanced, indeed!

ROSIE

Didn't you ever see him wearing it? Why, he never takes it off. He's got the kids talking about Barry like he was someone living down the block or something.

MINNA

(overlapping)

Is that what that button is?

FANNY

(to herself)

I think you've got too much rouge on, that's what I think. Would have been better off if you had just pinched your cheeks a bit. You think he'll notice? He probably won't even notice. Fuck him!

ROSIE

(overlapping)

And the silverware is divine. There's one thing I want it's fine silverware. Does a lot to make a table look right. Fine china helps, too. This is certainly fine looking china.

FANNY

(overlapping)

You look ugly, that's what. Too much rouge, that stupid twisted mouth; those glassy eyes, that impossibly unmanageable hair. You look ugly. And he'll say, You look lovely today. That's what he always says. You look lovely. Stock phrase. Who does he think I am, anyway, filling me with a pile of shit like that?

MINNA

Is he bringing the flowers?

ROSIE

Who?

MINNA

Well, who do you think?

ROSIE

Oh. Benjie. Oh, sure.

MINNA

Wonder what's keeping them then.

ROSIE

I think he said something about picking up Hetty Brown and Zeph.

MINNA

Terrible about old Hetty, isn't it?

FANNY

(to herself)

You have yourself a little glass of brandy in this town and you're practically crucified even if it is just to help you maintain your composure. Steady your nerves or something. Well, to hell with them if they've got nothing else to talk about. I wonder if there's anything in the house'll take the odor away.

ROSIE

(overlapping)

Isn't it, though? Just sits around all day. In the dark, I hear. Never puts a light on anymore. With her bottle. Watching TV. Hear the house has gone to seed, much as Zeph tries to keep it tidy in case someone should come over which nobody does anyway.

MINNA

It certainly is terrible.

FANNY

(to herself)

And another thing. It is enough to make you puke the way everyone's fussing as if you were marrying some damn movie star or something when all he is is some nine to five bureaucrat with artistic pretensions! As if he were the hope of the world, fresh out of college, when he's only one year, I repeat, one year younger than you are, which you know isn't very young or at least not as young as we were once, baby! You better put some powder on that rouge or someone is sure to make a crack about your trying to hide your age even if you are...which you are!

ROSIE

I can't wait to see Fanny's gown. I heard it was just beautiful. Do you think we should open one of the bottles of champagne before leaving for church? I think it would be nice, don't you, have a toast before we leave.

MINNA

I guess it would be all right.

FANNY

(to herself)

All right. You're as lovely as you're ever going to get. Besides, if they don't like it, they can go to hell. Give them something to talk about. My god, today of all days, to look so wretchedly ugly.

(gets up, calls)

Minna!

MINNA

Yes?

FANNY

I'm ready.

MINNA

Coming!

(MINNA and ROSIE enter bedroom.)

ROSIE

You look beautiful, Fanny.

FANNY

Thank you, Rosie. The gown is on the bed, Minna.

MINNA

It certainly is heavy.

FANNY

I know. I know. I'll probably collapse under the weight of it. Is it hot out?

ROSIE

'S cooling off some.

FANNY

Well, it is awfully hot in here. Watch that, Minna. I think there's a pin somewhere in that gown.

MINNA

It's just a snap.

FANNY

No, it's a pin. The snap was my nerves.

MINNA

There.

ROSIE

It's every bit as beautiful as I heard it was.

FANNY

Where's Joshua?

MINNA

Took the girls to the church first. Then he's coming over. Nervous, honey? I know how it feels. I certainly know how it feels. You just sit here and relax till we're ready. What's that smell?

FANNY

Did the flowers get here?

ROSIE

Benjie's bringing them. Don't you worry!

FANNY

I'm not worried. I'm just asking questions...to ask questions.

MINNA

You calm down. Relax. You look wonderful. You look just wonderful. You can use a bit more rouge, though, if you ask me.

(The doorbell rings. MINNA and ROSIE enter sitting room. MINNA goes to foyer to open door. It is ZEPH who is holding on to a rather beaten HETTY.)

HETTY

Where are we, Zephaniah? Huh? Think you can just push me out of my house, drag me into some automobile, and take me into some strange house without saying a word? Who do you think I am? Who's that? That you, Minna?

(MINNA kisses HETTY.)

ZEPH

This is Fanny's house.

HETTY

It is? It looks different. Who's that? That you, Rosie?

ROSIE

Yes, it is. My, you look stunning. New dress?

HETTY

I don't know what it is. Zephaniah put it on me.

ZEPH

I have to help Benjie with the flowers.

ROSIE

Go on. We'll take care of Hetty.

HETTY

Drag me around like that.

(BENJIE enters, his arms filled with artificial flowers.)

BENJIE

That's the first load.

(BENJIE and ZEPH exit.)

ROSIE

Aren't they beautiful?

HETTY

No smell.

ROSIE

'S because they're artificial.

MINNA

Come on, Hetty. Sit down. How have you been?

HETTY

Awful. I have had these...social workers...over every day. Seems they're doing research on mentally retarded persons who function...function?...who function in society. I tell you Zephaniah functions so well they ought to put him away just for the rest, dragging me around like he does. Why all those bright lights so early in the day?

(BENJIE and ZEPH enter, carrying more artificial flowers; ZEPH exits.)

BENJIE

Just the one more load Zeph has to get and I guess that does it. Beautiful, aren't they?

HETTY

Flowers should smell.

ROSIE

I think they look so real you almost can smell them.

BENJIE

Hello, Minna.

ROSIE

See the button? Cute, huh?

Want to see my button Minna

MINNA

Passed the campaign headquarters. I see you have Cathy Elizabeth volunteering her services. She didn't even tell us.

BENJIE

She's a good worker.

MINNA

She certainly didn't tell us. She wouldn't dare. You know what her father would say if he knew?

BENJIE

She knows her own mind, that girl.

MINNA

Does she? Well, her father wouldn't like it. He certainly wouldn't, feeling the way he does...politically.

(ZEPH enters with flowers.)

BENJIE

Aah, Minna, in your heart....

MINNA

I know. I know he's right..

ZEPH

When do we go?

BENJIE

Come on, Zeph, let's arrange these a little first. Can't just leave them hanging around, can we?

(ZEPH and BENJIE arrange flowers.)

FANNY

(to herself)

A little Lavoris might help or don't you have any pride at all? I mean, who's going to smell it anyway? Father White? Why, everyone knows he's the town drunk.

BENJIE

Tell the truth, I don't know why everyone's so afraid to hold onto good, rugged American traditions, which is really what the man stands for, anyways.

MINNA

Well, I just don't want to talk about it.

ROSIE

'S many very important people involved in this. Why, Benjie got a letter signed by John Wayne himself, which is very impressive, I must admit. I guess Benjie has seen just about every movie John Wayne ever made and now here he is, corresponding with him.

BENJIE

That's America for you.

FANNY

(to herself)

And another thing, he never did tell you what he was in jail for, did he? What kind of marriage do you think it'll be, starting off like that, with some secret between you? You better ask, once and for all. Very first thing, you hear? Fanny, you look like a ninny just sitting there.

(She gets up and enters sitting room)
I felt like a ninny just sitting there.

ZEPH

You are beautiful.

FANNY

You sweet child!

HETTY

Who's that? That you, Fanny?

FANNY

Hetty Brown, I didn't know you were here.

HETTY

What are you all dressed up for? You look like you're dressed for some costume party!

MINNA

Hetty, didn't you know? Fanny's wedding is today.

HETTY

What?

ROSIE

Fanny's wedding to Lewis Junior.

HETTY

Well, how was I to know? I was just dragged out of the house. Zephaniah never said a word. Just dragged me out of the house. Is that what we're here for? I knew it was sometimes this summer. Well! Zephaniah, why on earth didn't you say something? Fanny, I apologize. You know how Zephaniah is!

ROSIE

Can I get the champagne out now? We ought to drink to the bride now that she's before us, looking so heavenly. I'll get the champagne. Fanny, you're a dream!

(ROSIE leaves.)

FANNY

The table looks quite festive, doesn't it? Somehow, that table makes everything suddenly seem real.

BENJIE

Real? It sure as hell is real.

HETTY

(overlapping)

How many places you have set? It looks like you have quite a few places set.

MINNA

Well, there's you, Hetty. And Zeph. And then there's Ben and Rose. And Joshua and myself, of course. And the girls. And don't forget the bride and groom. And we've even set a place for Jack and Max. We sent invitations out, you know. And they just might show up.

HETTY

Max?

MINNA

Yes, they just might show up. Isn't that right, Fanny? I have a feeling that they will show up today.

(ROSIE re-enters.)

ROSIE

Benjie, would you open this? You know I can't open a champagne bottle for anything. Can you, Minna? Open a champagne bottle?

(BENJIE opens the bottle; there is a loud pop which startles everyone just as the doorbell rings.)

MINNA

That must be Josh. Just in time for champagne. Now that is what I call perfect timing.

(ZEPH answers the door. It is LEWIS.)

LEWIS

Good afternoon, Zeph.

ZEPH

Lewis.

MINNA

(overlapping)

Lewis! What are you doing here? You're not supposed to be here. Fanny, get back in the bedroom.

(FANNY is pushed into the bedroom)

Don't you know you're not supposed to see the bride before the wedding, Lewis? What are you doing here?

BENJIE

We were just going to drink to the bride. I guess we can drink to the groom instead, huh?

FANNY

(to herself)

What is he doing here so early?

MINNA

(overlapping)

What are you doing here?

LEWIS

I had to see Fanny.

MINNA

Well, you can't. You certainly can't. You just go on to the church. You'll see her there. Do you know what time it is?

BENJIE

(filling glasses)

One drink. To your last hour of freedom and independence, Lewis.

LEWIS

It's very important.

MINNA

Nothing could be that important. It's bad luck to see the bride before the wedding. You know that!

FANNY

(to herself)

What could he want? What the hell could he want?

BENJIE

(overlapping)

To the groom.

MINNA

Well, this one drink and then you go, hear?

ALL

To the groom.

FANNY

(to herself)

What the hell is all that to-do out there?

MINNA

Now, you go on.

LEWIS

Minna, please. I said it's important.

FANNY

(entering sitting room)

Did he leave?

(sees LEWIS)

Lewis.

MINNA

Fanny, you get back in that bedroom this very minute.

LEWIS

Fanny, I have to see you.

MINNA

Lewis, I told you that it is out of the question. What a curious time for you to suddenly not understand English! Fanny, in the bedroom!

(FANNY returns to bedroom)

Now, Lewis, for the last time, please go.

LEWIS

Where's Josh?

MINNA

I don't know what in the world is keeping him. He certainly should have been here by now.

ROSIE

Benjie, I think we should go now. I want a good seat. The closer I am, the more I cry. I could use a good cry.

MINNA

Lewis, what's keeping you?

ROSIE

You can go with us, Lewis. Benjie, would you get my stole. I think I left it in the kitchen.

(BENJIE exits)

That's settled then, right, Lew? You'll go with us?

LEWIS

I'll wait for Josh.

MINNA

You'll do no such thing. Josh is taking Fanny.

LEWIS

I want to wait for Josh, Minna.

(BENJIE re-enters with a mink stole which he places on ROSIE's shoulders.)

ROSIE

Well, we're going to go. We can take Hetty and Zeph. I think that'll be easiest. Lew?

MINNA

Well, I don't know what to do. I wanted a good seat, too.

ROSIE

Well then, you come with us, too.

MINNA

I really should wait for Josh.

BENJIE

Josh'll get here.

MINNA

Well, I am certainly not going to leave Lewis here alone.

ROSIE

Come on, Hetty. You'll go with us.

MINNA

Zeph, would you do me a favor and stay here until Doctor Joshua comes?

ZEPH

Stay here?

MINNA

And see that Lewis doesn't see Fanny. Hear?

ZEPH

Lewis doesn't see Fanny. Okay.

MINNA

Good.

(enters bedroom)

Now, Fanny, you stay right here till Josh comes.

FANNY

Where is he?

MINNA

Outside. He wants to wait for Josh. You know him. I am not going to fight with him. Now, you just relax. You look wonderful. What's that smell? Fanny, is that brandy you're drinking? What sort of fool thing is that to do?

(takes the bottle and the glass)

Now you put some powder on the rouge and brush your teeth or something. And stay right here in this room. Promise?

FANNY

Promise.

MINNA

Good.

(kisses FANNY)

Good luck.

(enters sitting room)

Okay, are we all ready?

BENJIE

Yes we are.

HETTY

Where are we going? Someone please tell me where we're going, instead of just dragging me around all over.

MINNA

To the church, Hetty. To the church. Now, Lewis, don't you go in there.

(kisses LEWIS)

Good luck.

(BENJIE, ROSIE, HETTY,
and MINNA exit.)

FANNY

(to herself)

Why is it so quiet? Why is it so god-awful quiet?

ZEPH

Why shouldn't you see Fanny?

LEWIS

That's a good question. No reason. You wouldn't say anything, you wouldn't tell anybody, would you, if I did see her? I'll just go in there for a few minutes and then when I come out, you can go to the church with me. Okay?

ZEPH

Okay.

FANNY

(entering sitting room)
Where is everybody? What time is it?

LEWIS

Fanny, you look lovely.

FANNY

You get out of here. You're not supposed to be here.

LEWIS

Zeph, would you go into the bedroom for a few minutes. I would like to be alone with Fanny.

(EZEPHE enters bedroom, sits at the dressing table and looks out at the audience during the scene.)

FANNY

You shouldn't be here.

LEWIS

Fanny, I wouldn't be here if it wasn't important.
(Pause)

It is important. I think.

(Pause)

Fanny, I received a letter this morning from Max.

FANNY

Max?

LEWIS

Yes. From Max. Special Delivery. Can I read it to you?

FANNY

No. I don't want to hear it.

LEWIS
I'd like to read it to you.

FANNY
I don't want to hear it.

LEWIS
It's from Alabama.

FANNY
What do I care where it's from?

LEWIS
It's that murder this summer. That brutal murder of those three boys. Max is all excited about it so he's down there working, helping.

FANNY
What murder?

LEWIS
You know the one. Let me read the letter to you.

FANNY
What does that letter have to do with us?

LEWIS
It says, Dear Lewis.

FANNY
I don't want to hear it, Lewis.

LEWIS
Listen, Fanny. Just this part about Jack.

FANNY
No.

LEWIS
After a year of bumming around the country, you know what he's gone and done. He's become an English teacher at this small college.

FANNY
Is that what you came to tell me?

LEWIS
No. Listen to me. He's at this college two weeks and he practically gets fired because he's leading some student rally.

FANNY
Student rally? I don't understand.

LEWIS

Don't you see. Jack out there fighting for a cause. Max in Alabama. They're not old. They are not old. There is still some of that freshness, that spirit, in them. Isn't that great?

FANNY

(overlapping)

It's a tradition you know. The groom not seeing the bride before the wedding.

LEWIS

Are you listening to me?

FANNY

Yes. I heard you. Max in Alabama. It doesn't make sense.

LEWIS

It's the only thing that does make sense.

FANNY

Not that I'm superstitious, Lewis. But you shouldn't be here. Really you shouldn't.

LEWIS

If you let me read just part of the letter, you'd know what I'm getting at.

FANNY

I don't want to hear one single word of that letter, Lewis. I don't care what it says. I don't see what it has to do with us, with your breaking traditions. If Max is in Alabama, it means he won't be here for the wedding. Is that why you came here? To tell me Max won't be here? Is that what was so terribly important that you went and broke a tradition and came here when you know you're not supposed to be here?

LEWIS

Fanny, do you love me?

FANNY

I want you. I need you. Yes, I guess I love you, Lewis.

LEWIS

If you love me, you'll listen to me.

FANNY

I am listening. It's just that it's bad luck. Don't you understand.

LEWIS

(overlapping)

Fanny, I am asking you to help me make a very important decision.

FANNY

Shouldn't we be at the church? Where is Joshua? I thought Joshua was supposed to be here.

LEWIS

I won't be long. Just a few weeks. We've waited this long. What difference will another few weeks make? We'll make everyone understand.

FANNY

What are you talking about?

LEWIS

Fanny. Love me. Understand me.

FANNY

What time is it? We're supposed to be at the church, aren't we?

LEWIS

Fanny! Just another few weeks.

FANNY

No.

LEWIS

What?

FANNY

No. Not today.

LEWIS

Not today?

FANNY

Are we or are we not standing in the same room? I said No. Not today. Yesterday, just yesterday, if you had come to me. If you had come to me and asked me, I would have said, Yes, Lewis, go. I love you. And I understand. And I'd write every day and tell you I love you every day. And think of you every minute. I would have done that. Yesterday. I would have explained. I would have even done that for you. I would have explained, you know how impulsive Lewis is. Well, it's just another few weeks. That's what you said, isn't it? Another few weeks? I'd hold you and kiss you and tell you, Yes, Lewis, Go. I love you and I understand. Yesterday. But not today, Lewis. Today is too late. Today I want you. And we're going to be at the church. And if you're not there, then that, Lewis, is that. If you're not there, you can go to Alabama or anywhere else you want to go, and I won't care if you ever come back. That is what I said. Not today. What in the world is Max doing in Alabama, anyway? Max?

LEWIS
I thought you'd understand.

(LEWIS begins to leave;
he is directly in front
of ZEPH)

FANNY
Which pattern are you repeating?
(Pause)
What, Lewis, are you running away from?
(Pause)
What is it that you have to do?
(Pause)
Lewis?

LEWIS
(after a long pause)
I'll be at the church. For whatever it's worth, I love
you. And for whatever it's worth, at this precise
moment, I also hate you.

FANNY
Well, I suppose, Lewis, that that, at least, is about
as honest a way to start a marriage as you can possibly
get. I'd say that. Wouldn't you? Say that whatever
else it is, it's honest?

LEWIS
I'll see you at the church.

FANNY
Lewis?

LEWIS
Yes?

FANNY
We will be happy.
(Crosses; kisses him.)
Won't we?

LEWIS
I hope so.

(FANNY goes to the
bedroom; LEWIS exits;
ZEPH enters the sitting
room.)

ZEPH
Lewis!
(re-enters bedroom)
FANNY. He was going to say

FANNY

Decision?

LEWIS

Yes. A decision.

FANNY

Lewis, you shouldn't be here.

LEWIS

Fanny, Max wants me to come to Alabama.

FANNY

What?

LEWIS

Immediately. He says there's work for me to do there.

FANNY

Max? You hate Max. Remember?

LEWIS

This is important. I thought about it all morning. Fanny, just once in my life, I have to do one thing that means something. I knew, I hoped, you'd understand. That I have to do this.

FANNY

Do what?

LEWIS

I want to do this.

FANNY

What, Lewis? What?

LEWIS

Go.

FANNY

That's right, Lewis. Go. You shouldn't even be here.

LEWIS

I mean, go to Alabama. To meet Max.

FANNY

What is Max doing in Alabama?

LEWIS

Fanny, please. Listen to me.