

the 1930's, a creator of memorable plays concerned with the Jewish immigrant experience. *Awake and Sing* is a striking portrayal of one family's economic and moral struggle against an oppressively materialistic culture. It vindicates the judgment that Robert Warshaw made of Odets when he characterized him as "the poet of the Jewish middle class."

Three unites  
Place  
Time  
Action



LIT 7034

## AWAKE AND SING

*Awake and Sing* was presented by the Group Theatre at the Belasco Theatre on the evening of February 19th, 1935, with the following members of the Group Theatre Acting Company:

MYRON BERGER	<i>Played by</i>
BESSIE BERGER	ART SMITH
JACOB	STELLA ADLER
HENRIE BERGER	MORRIS CARNOVSKY
RALPH BERGER	PHOEBE BRAND
SCHLOSSER	JULES GARFIELD
MOE AXELROD	ROMAN BOHNEN
UNCLE MORTY	LUTHER ADLER
SAM FEINSCHREIBER	J. E. BROMBERG
	SANFORD MEISNER

*The entire action takes place in an apartment in the Bronx, New York City*

*The production was directed by HAROLD CLURMAN*

*The setting was designed by BORIS ARONSON*

### THE CHARACTERS OF THE PLAY

*All of the characters in *Awake and Sing* share a fundamental activity: a struggle for life amidst petty conditions.*



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BESSIE BERGER, as she herself states, is not only the mother in this home but also the father. She is constantly arranging and taking care of her family. She loves life, likes to laugh, has great resourcefulness and enjoys living from day to day. A high degree of energy accounts for her quick exasperation at ineptitude. She is a shrewd judge of realistic qualities in people in the sense of being able to gauge quickly their effectiveness. In her eyes all of the people in the house are equal. She is naïve and quick in emotional response. She is afraid of utter poverty. She is proper according to her own standards, which are fairly close to those of most middle-class families. She knows that when one lives in the jungle one must look out for the wild life.

MYRON, her husband, is a born follower. He would like to be a leader. He would like to make a million dollars. He is not sad or ever depressed. Life is an even sweet event to him, but the "old days" were sweeter yet. He has a dignified sense of himself. He likes people. He likes everything. But he is heartbroken without being aware of it.

HENNIE is a girl who has few friends, male or female. She is proud of her body. She won't ask favors. She travels alone. She is fatalistic about being trapped, but will escape if possible. She is self-reliant in the best sense. Till the day she dies she will be faithful to a loved man. She inherits her mother's sense of humor and energy.

RALPH is a boy with a clean spirit. He wants to know, wants to learn. He is ardent, he is romantic, he is sensitive. He is naïve too. He is trying to find why so much dirt must be cleared away before it is possible to "get to first base."

JACOB, too, is trying to find a right path for himself and the others. He is aware of justice, of dignity. He is an observer of the others, compares their activities with his real and ideal sense of life. This produces a reflective nature. In this home he is a constant boarder. He is a sentimental idealist with no power to turn ideal to action.

With physical facts—such as housework—he putters. But as a barber he demonstrates the flair of an artist. He is an old Jew with living eyes in his tired face.

UNCLE MORTY is a successful American business man with five good senses. Something sinister comes out of the fact that the lives of others seldom touch him deeply. He holds to his own line of life. When he is generous he wants others to be aware of it. He is pleased by attention—a rich relative to the BERGER family. He is a shrewd judge of material values. He will die unmarried. Two and two make four, never five with him. He can blink in the sun for hours, a fat tomcat. Tickle him, he laughs. He lives in a penthouse with a real

Accorded  
more than  
twice the  
space than  
anyone  
else

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Japanese butler to serve him. He sleeps with dress models, but not from his own showrooms. He plays cards for hours on end. He smokes expensive cigars. He sees every Mickey Mouse cartoon that appears. He is a 32-degree Mason. He is really deeply intolerant finally.

MOE AXELROD lost a leg in the war. He seldom forgets that fact. He has killed two men in extra-martial activity. He is mordant, bitter. Life has taught him a disbelief in everything, but he will fight his way through. He seldom shows his feelings: fights against his own sensitivity. He has been everywhere and seen everything. All he wants is HENNIE. He is very proud. He scorns the inability of others to make their way in life, but he likes people for whatever good qualities they possess. His passionate outbursts come from a strong but contained emotional mechanism.

SAM FEINSCHREIBER wants to find a home. He is a lonely man, a foreigner in a strange land, hypersensitive about this fact, conditioned by the humiliation of not making his way alone. He has a sense of others laughing at him. At night he gets up and sits alone in the dark. He hears acutely all the small sounds of life. He might have been a poet in another time and place. He approaches his wife as if he were always offering her a delicate flower. Life is a high chill wind weaving itself around his head.

SCHLOSSER, the janitor, is an overworked German whose wife ran away with another man and left him with a young daughter who in turn ran away and joined a burlesque show as chorus girl. The man suffers rheumatic pains. He has lost his identity twenty years before.

#### THE SCENE

Exposed on the stage are the dining room and adjoining front room of the BERGER apartment. These two rooms are typically furnished. There is a curtain between them. A small door off the front room leads to JACOB'S room. When his door is open one sees a picture of SACCO and VANZETTI on the wall and several shelves of books. Stage left of this door presents the entrance to the foyer hall of the apartment. The two other bedrooms of the apartment are off this hall, but not necessarily shown.

Stage left of the dining room presents a swinging door which opens on the kitchen.

Awake and Sing, ye that dwell in dust:

ISAIAH—26:19



Time: The present; the family finishing supper.

Place: An apartment in the Bronx, New York City.

RALPH: Where's advancement down the place? Work like crazy! Think they see it? You'd drop dead first. *rebellious spirit*

MYRON: Never mind, son, merit never goes unrewarded. Teddy Roosevelt used to say— *nostalgia*

HENNIE: It rewarded you—thirty years a haberdashery clerk! (JACOB laughs.) *efficiency*

RALPH: All I want's a chance to get to first base!

HENNIE: That's all?

RALPH: Stuck down in that joint on Fourth Avenue—a stock clerk in a silk house! Just look at Eddie. I'm as good as he is—pulling in two-fifty a week for forty-eight minutes a day. A headliner, his name in all the papers.

JACOB: That's what you want, Ralphie? Your name in the paper? *idealist*

RALPH: I wanna make up my own mind about things . . . be something! Didn't I want to take up tap dancing, too?

BESSIE: So take lessons. Who stopped you? *realist*

RALPH: On what?

BESSIE: On what? Save money.

RALPH: Sure, five dollars a week for expenses and the rest in the house. I can't save even for shoe laces.

BESSIE: You mean we shouldn't have food in the house, but you'll make a jig on the street corner?

RALPH: I mean something.

BESSIE: You also mean something when you studied on the drum, Mr. Smartie!

RALPH: I don't know. . . . Every other day to sit around with the blues and mud in your mouth.

MYRON: That's how it is—life is like that—a cake-walk.

RALPH: What's it get you?

HENNIE: A four-car funeral.

RALPH: What's it for?

JACOB: What's it for? If this life leads to a revolution it's a good life.

Otherwise it's for nothing.

BESSIE: Never mind, Pop! Pass me the salt.

RALPH: It's crazy—all my life I want a pair of black and white shoes and can't get them. It's crazy!

BESSIE: In a minute I'll get up from the table. I can't take a bite in my mouth no more. 119

MYRON (*restraining her*): Now, Momma, just don't excite yourself—

BESSIE: I'm so nervous I can't hold a knife in my hand.

MYRON: Is that a way to talk, Ralphie? Don't Momma work hard enough all day? (BESSIE *allows herself to be reseated.*)

BESSIE: On my feet twenty-four hours?

MYRON: On her feet—

RALPH (*jumps up*): What do I do—go to night-clubs with Greta Garbo? Then when I come home can't even have my own room? Sleep on a day-bed in the front room! (*Choked, he exits to front room.*)

BESSIE: He's starting up that stuff again. (*Shouts to him*): When Hennie here marries you'll have her room—I should only live to see the day.

HENNIE: Me, too. (*They settle down to serious eating.*)

MYRON: This morning the sink was full of ants. Where they come from I just don't know. I thought it was coffee grounds . . . and then they began moving.

BESSIE: You gave the dog eat?

JACOB: I gave the dog eat. (*HENNIE drops a knife and picks it up again.*)

BESSIE: You got dropsy tonight.

HENNIE: Company's coming. (*Clout will run off before Mae comes*)

MYRON: You can buy a ticket for fifty cents and win fortunes. A man came in the store—it's the Irish Sweepstakes.

BESSIE: What?

MYRON: Like a raffle, only different. A man came in—

BESSIE: Who spends fifty-cent pieces for Irish raffles? They threw out a family on Dawson Street today. All the furniture on the sidewalk. A fine old woman with gray hair.

JACOB: Come eat, Ralph.

MYRON: A butcher on Beck Street won eighty thousand dollars.

BESSIE: Eighty thousand dollars! You'll excuse my expression, you're bughouse!

MYRON: I seen it in the paper—on one ticket—765 Beck Street.

BESSIE: Impossible!

MYRON: He did . . . yes he did. He says he'll take his old mother to Europe . . . an Austrian—

HENNIE: Europe . . .

MYRON: Six per cent on eighty thousand—forty-eight hundred a year.

BESSIE: I'll give you money. Buy a ticket in Hennie's name. Say, you



120 can't tell—lightning never struck us yet. If they win on Beck Street we could win on Longwood Avenue.

JACOB (*ironically*): If it rained pearls—who would work?

BESSIE: Another country heard from. (RALPH enters and silently seats himself.)

MYRON: I forgot, Beauty—Sam Feinschreiber sent you a present. Since I brought him for supper he just can't stop talking about you.

HENNIE: What's that "mockie" bothering about? Who needs him?

MYRON: He's a very lonely boy.

HENNIE: So I'll sit down and bust out crying "'cause he's lonely."

BESSIE (*opening candy*): He'd marry you one two three.

HENNIE: Too bad about him.

BESSIE (*naïvely delighted*): Chocolate peanuts.

HENNIE: Loft's week-end special, two for thirty-nine.

BESSIE: You could think about it. It wouldn't hurt.

HENNIE (*laughing*): To quote Moe Axelrod, "Don't make me laugh."

BESSIE: Never mind laughing. It's time you already had in your head a serious thought. A girl twenty-six don't grow younger. When I was your age it was already a big family with responsibilities.

HENNIE (*laughing*): Maybe that's what ails you, Mom.

BESSIE: Don't you feel well?

HENNIE: 'Cause I'm laughing? I feel fine. It's just funny—that poor guy sending me presents 'cause he loves me.

BESSIE: I think it's very, very nice.

HENNIE: Sure . . . swell!

BESSIE: Mrs. Marcus' Rose is engaged to a Brooklyn boy, a dentist. He came in his car today. A little dope should get such a boy. (*Finished with the meal, BESSIE, MYRON and JACOB rise. Both HENNIE and RALPH sit silently at the table, he eating. Suddenly she rises.*)

HENNIE: Tell you what, Mom. I saved for a new dress, but I'll take you and Pop to the Franklin. Don't need a dress. From now on I'm planning to stay in nights. Hold everything!

BESSIE: What's the matter—a bedbug bit you suddenly?

HENNIE: It's a good bill—Belle Baker. Maybe she'll sing "Eli, Eli."

BESSIE: We was going to a movie.

HENNIE: Forget it. Let's go.

MYRON: I see in the papers (*as he picks his teeth*) Sophie Tucker took off twenty-six pounds. Fearful business with Japan.

HENNIE: Write a book, Pop! Come on, we'll go early for good seats.

MYRON: Moe said you had a date with him for tonight.

BESSIE: Axelrod?

121 HENNIE: I told him no, but he don't believe it. I'll tell him no for the next hundred years, too.

MYRON: Don't break appointments, Beauty, and hurt people's feelings. (BESSIE exits.)

HENNIE: His hands got free wheeling. (*She exits.*)

MYRON: I don't know . . . people ain't the same. N-O- The whole world's changing right under our eyes. Presto! No manners. Like the great Italian lover in the movies. What was his name? The Sheik. . . No one remembers? (*Exits, shaking his head.*)

RALPH (*unmoving at the table*): Jake . . .

JACOB: Noo?

RALPH: I can't stand it.

JACOB: There's an expression—"strong as iron you must be."

RALPH: It's a cock-eyed world.

JACOB: Boys like you could fix it some day. Look on the world, not on yourself so much. Every country with starving millions, no? In Germany and Poland a Jew couldn't walk in the street. Everybody hates, nobody loves.

RALPH: I don't get all that.

JACOB: For years, I watched you grow up. Wait! You'll graduate from my university. (*The others enter, dressed.*)

MYRON (*lighting*): Good cigars now for a nickel.

BESSIE (*to JACOB*): After take Tootsie on the roof. (*To RALPH*): What'll you do?

RALPH: Don't know.

BESSIE: You'll see the boys around the block?

RALPH: I'll stay home every night!

MYRON: Momma don't mean for you—

RALPH: I'm flying to Hollywood by plane, that's what I'm doing. (*Doorbell rings. MYRON answers it.*)

BESSIE: I don't like my boy to be seen with those tramps on the corner.

MYRON (*without*): Schlosser's here, Momma, with the garbage can.

BESSIE: Come in here, Schlosser. (*Sotto voce*) Wait, I'll give him a piece of my mind. (*MYRON ushers in SCHLOSSER who carries a garbage can in each hand.*) What's the matter the dumbwaiter's broken again?

SCHLOSSER: Mr. Wimmer sends new ropes next week. I got a sore arm.

BESSIE: He should live so long your Mr. Wimmer. For seven years already he's sending new ropes. No dumbwaiter, no hot water, no steam— In a respectable house, they don't allow such conditions.

SCHLOSSER: In a decent house dogs are not running to make dirty the hallway.



122 BESSIE: Tootsie's making dirty? Our Tootsie's making dirty in the hall?  
SCHLOSSER (to JACOB): I tell you yesterday again. You must not leave her—  
BESSIE (*indignantly*): Excuse me! Please don't yell on an old man. He's got more brains in his finger than you got—I don't know where. Did you ever see—he should talk to you an old man?  
MYRON: Awful.  
BESSIE: From now on we don't walk up the stairs no more. You keep it so clean we'll fly in the windows.  
SCHLOSSER: I speak to Mr. Wimmer.  
BESSIE: Speak! Speak. Tootsie walks behind me like a lady any time, any place. So good-bye . . . good-bye, Mr. Schlosser.  
SCHLOSSER: I tell you dot—I verk verry hard here. My arms is. . . .  
(*Exits in confusion.*)  
BESSIE: Tootsie should lay all day in the kitchen maybe. Give him back if he yells on you. What's funny?  
JACOB (*laughing*): Nothing.  
BESSIE: Come. (*Exits.*)  
JACOB: Hennie, take care. . . .  
HENNIE: Sure.  
JACOB: Bye-bye. (*HENNIE exits. MYRON pops head back in door.*)  
MYRON: Valentino! That's the one! (*He exits.*)  
RALPH: I never in my life even had a birthday party. Every time I went and cried in the toilet when my birthday came.  
JACOB (*seeing RALPH remove his tie*): You're going to bed?  
RALPH: No, I'm putting on a clean shirt.  
JACOB: Why?  
RALPH: I got a girl. . . . Don't laugh!  
JACOB: Who laughs? Since when?  
RALPH: Three weeks. She lives in Yorkville with an aunt and uncle. A bunch of relatives, but no parents.  
JACOB: An orphan girl—tch, tch.  
RALPH: But she's got me! Boy, I'm telling you I could sing! Jake, she's like stars. She's so beautiful you look at her and cry! She's like French words! We went to the park the other night. Heard the last band concert.  
JACOB: Music. . . .  
RALPH (*stuffing shirt in trousers*): It got cold and I gave her my coat to wear. We just walked along like that, see, without a word, see. I never was so happy in all my life. It got late . . . we just sat there.

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She looked at me—you know what I mean, how a girl looks at you—right in the eyes? "I love you," she says, "Ralph." I took her home. . . . I wanted to cry. That's how I felt!  
JACOB: It's a beautiful feeling.  
RALPH: You said a mouthful!  
JACOB: Her name is—  
RALPH: Blanche.  
JACOB: A fine name. Bring her sometimes here.  
RALPH: She's scared to meet Mom.  
JACOB: Why?  
RALPH: You know Mom's not letting my sixteen bucks out of the house if she can help it. She'd take one look at Blanche and insult her in a minute—a kid who's got nothing.  
JACOB: Boychick!  
RALPH: What's the diff?  
JACOB: It's no difference—a plain bourgeois prejudice—but when they find out a poor girl—it ain't so kosher.  
RALPH: They don't have to know I've got a girl.  
JACOB: What's in the end?  
RALPH: Out I go! I don't mean maybe!  
JACOB: And then what?  
RALPH: Life begins.  
JACOB: What life?  
RALPH: Life with my girl. Boy, I could sing when I think about it! Her and me together—that's a new life!  
JACOB: Don't make a mistake! A new death!  
RALPH: What's the idea?  
JACOB: Me, I'm the idea! Once I had in *my* heart a dream, a vision, but came marriage and then you forget. Children come and you forget because—  
RALPH: Don't worry, Jake.  
JACOB: Remember, a woman insults a man's soul like no other thing in the whole world!  
RALPH: Why get so excited? No one—  
JACOB: Boychick, wake up! Be something! Make your life something good. For the love of an old man who sees in your young days his new life, for such love take the world in your two hands and make it like new. Go out and fight so life shouldn't be printed on dollar bills. A woman waits.  
RALPH: Say, I'm no fool!



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JACOB: From my heart I hope not. In the meantime— (Bell rings.)  
RALPH: See who it is, will you? (Stands off.) Don't want Mom to catch me with a clean shirt.  
JACOB (calls): Come in. (Sotto voce) Moe Axelrod. (MOE enters.)  
MOE: Hello girls, how's your whiskers? (To RALPH): 'All dolled up. What's it, the weekly visit to the cat house?  
RALPH: Please mind your business.  
MOE: Okay, sweetheart.  
RALPH (taking a hidden dollar from a book): If Mom asks where I went—  
JACOB: I know. Enjoy yourself.  
RALPH: Bye-bye. (He exits.)  
JACOB: Bye-bye.  
MOE: Who's home?  
JACOB: Me.  
MOE: Good. I'll stick around a few minutes. Where's Hennie?  
JACOB: She went with Bessie and Myron to a show.  
MOE: She what?!  
JACOB: You had a date?  
MOE (hiding his feelings): Here—I brought you some halavah.  
JACOB: Halavah? Thanks. I'll eat a piece after.  
MOE: So Ralph's got a dame? Hot stuff—a kid can't even play a card game.  
JACOB: Moe, you're a no-good, a bum of the first water. To your dying day you won't change.  
MOE: Where'd you get that stuff, a no-good?  
JACOB: But I like you.  
MOE: Didn't I go fight in France for democracy? Didn't I get my goddamn leg shot off in that war the day before the armistice? Uncle Sam give me the Order of the Purple Heart, didn't he? What'd you mean, a no-good?  
JACOB: Excuse me.  
MOE: If you got an orange I'll eat an orange.  
JACOB: No orange. An apple.  
MOE: No oranges, huh?—what a dump!  
JACOB: Bessie hears you once talking like this she'll knock your head off.  
MOE: Hennie went with, huh? She wantsa see me squirm, only I don't squirm for dames.  
JACOB: You came to see her?  
MOE: What for? I got a present for our boy friend, Myron. He'll drop

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dead when I tell him his gentle horse galloped in fifteen to one. He'll die.  
JACOB: It really won? The first time I remember.  
MOE: Where'd they go?  
JACOB: A vaudeville by the Franklin.  
MOE: What's special tonight?  
JACOB: Someone tells a few jokes . . . and they forget the street is filled with starving beggars.  
MOE: What'll they do—start a war?  
JACOB: I don't know.  
MOE: You oughta know. What the hell you got all the books for?  
JACOB: It needs a new world.  
MOE: That's why they had the big war—to make a new world, they said—safe for democracy. Sure every big general laying up in a Paris hotel with a half dozen broads pinned on his mustache. Democracy! I learned a lesson.  
JACOB: An imperial war. You know what this means?  
MOE: Sure, I know everything!  
JACOB: By money men the interests must be protected. Who gave you such a rotten haircut? Please (fishing in his vest pocket), give me for a cent a cigarette. I didn't have since yesterday—  
MOE (giving one): Don't make me laugh. (A cent passes back and forth between them, MOE finally throwing it over his shoulder.) Don't look so tired all the time. You're a wow—always sore about something.  
JACOB: And you?  
MOE: You got one thing—you can play pinochle. I'll take you over in a game. Then you'll have something to be sore on.  
JACOB: Who'll wash dishes? (MOE takes deck from buffet drawer.)  
MOE: Do 'em after. Ten cents a deal.  
JACOB: Who's got ten cents?  
MOE: I got ten cents. I'll lend it to you.  
JACOB: Commence.  
MOE (shaking cards): The first time I had my hands on a pack in two days. Lemme shake up these cards. I'll make 'em talk. (JACOB goes to his room where he puts on a Caruso record.)  
JACOB: You should live so long.  
MOE: Ever see oranges grow? I know a certain place— One summer I laid under a tree and let them fall right in my mouth.  
JACOB (off, the music is playing; the card game begins): From "L'Africana" . . . a big explorer comes on a new land—"O Paradiso." From

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act four this piece. Caruso stands on the ship and looks on a Utopia. You hear? "Oh paradise! Oh paradise on earth! Oh blue sky, oh fragrant air—"

MOE: Ask him does he see any oranges? (BESSIE, MYRON and HENNIE enter.)

JACOB: You came back so soon?

BESSIE: Hennie got sick on the way.

MYRON: Hello, Moe. . . . (MOE puts cards back in pocket.)

BESSIE: Take off the phonograph, Pop. (To HENNIE): Lay down . . . I'll call the doctor. You should see how she got sick on Prospect Avenue. Two weeks already she don't feel right.

MYRON: Moe . . . ?

BESSIE: Go to bed, Hennie.

HENNIE: I'll sit here.

BESSIE: Such a girl I never saw! Now you'll be stubborn?

MYRON: It's for your own good, Beauty. Influenza—

HENNIE: I'll sit here.

BESSIE: You ever seen a girl should say no to everything. She can't stand on her feet, so—

HENNIE: Don't yell in my ears. I hear. Nothing's wrong. I ate tuna fish for lunch.

MYRON: Canned goods. . . .

BESSIE: Last week you also ate tuna fish?

HENNIE: Yeah, I'm funny for tuna fish. Go to the show—have a good time.

BESSIE: I don't understand what I did to God He blessed me with such children. From the whole world—

MOE (coming to aid of HENNIE): For Chris' sake, don't kibitz so much!

BESSIE: You don't like it?

MOE (aping): No, I don't like it.

BESSIE: That's too bad, Axelrod. Maybe it's better by your cigarstore friends. Here we're different people.

MOE: Don't gimme that cigar store line, Bessie. I walked up five flights—

BESSIE: To take out Hennie. But my daughter ain't in your class, Axelrod.

MOE: To see Myron.

MYRON: Did he, did he, Moe?

MOE: Did he what?

MYRON: "Sky Rocket"?

BESSIE: You bet on a horse!

MOE: Paid twelve and a half to one.

MYRON: There! You hear that, Momma? Our horse came in. You see, it happens, and twelve and a half to one. Just look at that!

MOE: What the hell, a sure thing. I told you.

BESSIE: If Moe said a sure thing, you couldn't bet a few dollars instead of fifty cents?

JACOB (laughs): "Aie, aie, aie."

MOE (at his wallet): I'm carrying six hundred "plunks" in big denominations.

BESSIE: A banker!

MOE: Uncle Sam sends me ninety a month.

BESSIE: So you save it?

MOE: Run it up, Run-it-up-Axelrod, that's me.

BESSIE: The police should know how.

MOE (shutting her up): All right, all right— Change twenty, sweetheart.

MYRON: Can you make change?

BESSIE: Don't be crazy.

MOE: I'll meet a guy in Goldman's restaurant. I'll meet 'im and come back with change.

MYRON (figuring on paper): You can give it to me tomorrow in the store.

BESSIE (acquisitive): He'll come back, he'll come back!

MOE: Lucky I bet some bucks myself. (In derision to HENNIE): Let's step out tomorrow night, Par-a-dise. (Thumbs his nose at her, laughs mordantly and exits.)

MYRON: Oh, that's big percentage. If I picked a winner every day. . . .

BESSIE: Poppa, did you take Tootsie on the roof?

JACOB: All right.

MYRON: Just look at that—a cake walk. We can make—

BESSIE: It's enough talk. I got a splitting headache. Hennie, go in bed. I'll call Dr. Cantor.

HENNIE: I'll sit here . . . and don't call that old Ignatz 'cause I won't see him.

MYRON: If you get sick Momma can't nurse you. You don't want to go to a hospital.

JACOB: She don't look sick, Bessie, it's a fact.

BESSIE: She's got fever. I see in her eyes, so he tells me no. Myron, call Dr. Cantor. (MYRON picks up phone, but HENNIE grabs it from him.)

HENNIE: I don't want any doctor. I ain't sick. Leave me alone.



MYRON: Beauty, it's for your own sake.

HENNIE: Day in and day out pestering. Why are you always right and no one else can say a word?

BESSIE: When you have your own children—

HENNIE: I'm not sick! Hear what I say? I'm not sick! Nothing's the matter with me! I don't want a doctor. (BESSIE is watching her with slow progressive understanding.)

BESSIE: What's the matter?

HENNIE: Nothing, I told you!

BESSIE: You told me, but— (A long pause of examination follows.)

HENNIE: See much?

BESSIE: Myron, put down the . . . the . . . (He slowly puts the phone down.) Tell me what happened. . . .

HENNIE: Brooklyn Bridge fell down.

BESSIE (*approaching*): I'm asking a question. . . .

MYRON: What's happened, Momma?

BESSIE: Listen to me!

HENNIE: What the hell are you talking?

BESSIE: Poppa—take Tootsie on the roof.

HENNIE (*holding JACOB back*): If he wants he can stay here.

MYRON: What's wrong, Momma?

BESSIE (*her voice quivering slightly*): Myron, your fine Beauty's in trouble. Our society lady. . . .

MYRON: Trouble? I don't under—is it—?

BESSIE: Look in her face. (*He looks, understands and slowly sits in a chair, utterly crushed.*) Who's the man?

HENNIE: The Prince of Wales.

BESSIE: My gall is busting in me. In two seconds—

HENNIE (*in a violent outburst*): Shut up! Shut up! I'll jump out the window in a minute! Shut up! (*Finally she gains control of herself, says in a low, hard voice*): You don't know him.

JACOB: Bessie. . . .

BESSIE: He's a Bronx boy?

HENNIE: From out of town.

BESSIE: What do you mean?

HENNIE: From out of town!!

BESSIE: A long time you know him? You were sleeping by a girl from the office Saturday nights? You slept good, my lovely lady. You'll go to him . . . he'll marry you.

HENNIE: That's what you say.

BESSIE: That's what I say! He'll do it, take MY word he'll do it!

HENNIE: Where? (*To JACOB*): Give her the letter. (*JACOB does so.*)

BESSIE: What? (*Reads.*) "Dear sir: In reply to your request of the 14th inst., we can state that no Mr. Ben Grossman has ever been connected with our organization . . ." You don't know where he is?

HENNIE: No.

BESSIE (*walks back and forth*): Stop crying like a baby, Myron.

MYRON: It's like a play on the stage. . . .

BESSIE: To a mother you couldn't say something before. I'm old-fashioned—like your friends I'm not smart—I don't eat chop suey and run around Coney Island with tramps. (*She walks reflectively to buffet, picks up a box of candy, puts it down, says to MYRON*): Tomorrow night bring Sam Feinschreiber for supper.

HENNIE: I won't do it.

BESSIE: You'll do it, my fine beauty, you'll do it!

HENNIE: I'm not marrying a poor foreigner like him. Can't even speak an English word. Not me! I'll go to my grave without a husband.

BESSIE: You don't say! We'll find for you somewhere a millionaire with a pleasure boat. He's going to night school, Sam. For a boy only three years in the country he speaks very nice. In three years he put enough in the bank, a good living.

JACOB: This is serious?

BESSIE: What then? I'm talking for my health? He'll come tomorrow night for supper. By Saturday they're engaged.

JACOB: Such a thing you can't do.

BESSIE: Who asked your advice?

JACOB: Such a thing—

BESSIE: Never mind!

JACOB: The lowest from the low!

BESSIE: Don't talk! I'm warning you! A man who don't believe in God— with crazy ideas—

JACOB: So bad I never imagined you could be. \*

BESSIE: Maybe if you didn't talk so much it wouldn't happen like this. You with your ideas—I'm a mother. I raise a family they should have respect.

JACOB: Respect? (*Spits.*) Respect! For the neighbors' opinion! You insult me, Bessie!

BESSIE: Go to your room, Papa. Every job he ever had he lost because he's got a big mouth. \* He opens his mouth and the whole Bronx could fall in. Everybody said it—

MYRON: Momma, they'll hear you down the dumbwaiter.

Jacob  
Bessie

\* Topicalization



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BESSIE: A good barber not to hold a job a week. Maybe you never heard charity starts at home. You never heard it, Pop?

JACOB: All you know, I heard, and more yet. But Ralph you don't make like you. Before you do it, I'll die first. He'll find a girl. He'll go in a fresh world with her. This is a house? Marx said it—abolish such families.

BESSIE: Go in your room, Papa.

JACOB: Ralph you don't make like you!

BESSIE: Go lay in your room with Caruso and the books together.

JACOB: All right!

BESSIE: Go in the room!

JACOB: Some day I'll come out I'll— (*Unable to continue, he turns, looks at HENNIE, goes to his door and there says with an attempt at*

*humor*): Bessie, some day you'll talk to me so fresh . . . I'll leave the house for good! (*He exits.*)

BESSIE (*crying*): You ever in your life seen it? He should dare! He should just dare say in the house another word. Your gall could bust from such a man. (*Bell rings, MYRON goes.*) Go to sleep now. It won't hurt.

HENNIE: Yeah? (MOE enters, a box in his hand. MYRON follows and sits down.)

MOE (*looks around first—putting box on table*): Cake. (*About to give MYRON the money, he turns instead to BESSIE*): Six fifty, four bits change . . . come on, hand over half a buck. (*She does so. Of MYRON*): Who bit him?

BESSIE: We're soon losing our Hennie, Moe.

MOE: Why? What's the matter?

BESSIE: She made her engagement.

MOE: Zat so?

BESSIE: Today it happened . . . he asked her.

MOE: Did he? Who? Who's the corpse?

BESSIE: It's a secret.

MOE: In the bag, huh?

HENNIE: Yeah. . . .

BESSIE: When a mother gives away an only daughter it's no joke. Wait, when you'll get married you'll know. . . .

MOE (*bitterly*): Don't make me laugh—when I get married! What I think of women? Take 'em all, cut 'em in little pieces like a herring in Greek salad. A guy in France had the right idea—dropped his wife in a bathtub fulla acid. (*Whistles.*) Sss, down the pipe! Pfft—not even a corset button left!

MYRON: Corsets don't have buttons.

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MOE (*to HENNIE*): What's the great idea? Gone big time, Paradise? Christ, it's suicide! Sure, kids you'll have, gold teeth, get fat, big in the tangerines—

HENNIE: Shut your face!

MOE: Who's it—some dope pullin' down twenty bucks a week? Cut your throat, sweetheart. Save time.

BESSIE: Never mind your two cents, Axelrod.

MOE: I say what I think—that's me!

HENNIE: That's you—a lousy fourflusher who'd steal the glasses off a blind man.

MOE: Get hot!

HENNIE: My God, do I need it—to listen to this mutt shoot his mouth off?

MYRON: Please. . . .

MOE: Now wait a minute, sweetheart, wait a minute. I don't have to take that from you.

BESSIE: Don't yell at her!

HENNIE: For two cents I'd spit in your eye.

MOE (*throwing coin to table*): Here's two bits. (*HENNIE looks at him and then starts across the room.*)

BESSIE: Where are you going?

HENNIE (*crying*): For my beauty nap, Mussolini. Wake me up when it's apple blossom time in Normandy. (*Exits.*)

MOE: Pretty, pretty—a sweet gal, your Hennie. See the look in her eyes?

BESSIE: She don't feel well. . . .

MYRON: Canned goods. . . .

BESSIE: So don't start with her.

MOE: Like a battleship she's got it. Not like other dames—shove 'em and they lay. Not her. I got a yen for her and I don't mean a Chinese coin.

BESSIE: Listen, Axelrod, in my house you don't talk this way. Either have respect or get out.

MOE: When I think about it . . . maybe I'd marry her myself.

BESSIE (*suddenly aware of MOE*): You could— What do you mean, Moe?

MOE: You ain't sunburnt—you heard me.

BESSIE: Why don't you, Moe? An old friend of the family like you. It would be a blessing on all of us.

MOE: You said she's engaged.

BESSIE: But maybe she don't know her own mind. Say, it's—



MOE: I need a wife like a hole in the head. . . . What's to know about women, I know. Even if I asked her. She won't do it! A guy with one leg—it gives her the heebie-jeebies. I know what she's looking for. An arrow-collar guy, a hero, but with a wad of jack. Only the two don't go together. But I got what it takes . . . plenty, and more where it comes from. . . . *(Breaks off, snorts and rubs his knee. A pause. In his room JACOB puts on Caruso singing the lament from "The Pearl Fishers.")*

BESSIE: It's right—she wants a millionaire with a mansion on Riverside Drive. So go fight City Hall. Cake?

MOE: Cake.

BESSIE: I'll make tea. But one thing—she's got a fine boy with a business brain. Caruso! *(Exits into the front room and stands in the dark, at the window.)*

MOE: No wet smack . . . a fine girl. . . . She'll burn that guy out in a month. *(MOE retrieves the quarter and spins it on the table.)*

MYRON: I remember that song . . . beautiful. Nora Bayes sang it at the old Proctor's Twenty-third Street—"When It's Apple Blossom Time in Normandy." . . .

MOE: She wantsa see me crawl—my head on a plate she wants! A snowball in hell's got a better chance. *(Out of sheer fury he spins the quarter in his fingers.)*

MYRON *(as his eyes slowly fill with tears)*: Beautiful . . .

MOE: Match you for a quarter. Match you for any goddam thing you got. *(Spins the coin viciously.)* What the hell kind of house is this it ain't got an orange!!

Slow Curtain

## ACT TWO

### SCENE I

One year later, a Sunday afternoon. The front room. JACOB is giving his son MORDECAI (UNCLE MORTY) a haircut, newspapers spread around the base of the chair. MOE is reading a newspaper, leg propped on a chair. RALPH, in another chair, is spasmodically reading a paper. UNCLE MORTY reads colored jokes. Silence, then BESSIE enters.

BESSIE: Dinner's in half an hour, Morty.

MORTY *(still reading jokes)*: I got time.

BESSIE: A duck. Don't get hair on the rug, Pop. *(Goes to window and pulls down shade.)* What's the matter the shade's up to the ceiling?

JACOB *(pulling it up again)*: Since when do I give a haircut in the dark? *(He mimics her tone.)*

BESSIE: When you're finished, pull it down. I like my house to look respectable. Ralphie, bring up two bottles seltzer from Weiss.

RALPH: I'm reading the paper.

BESSIE: Uncle Morty likes a little seltzer.

RALPH: I'm expecting a phone call.

BESSIE: Noo, if it comes you'll be back. What's the matter? *(Gives him money from apron pocket.)* Take down the old bottles.

RALPH *(to JACOB)*: Get that call if it comes. Say I'll be right back. *(JACOB nods assent.)*

MORTY *(giving change from vest)*: Get grandpa some cigarettes.

RALPH: Okay. *(Exits.)*

JACOB: What's new in the paper, Moe?

MOE: Still jumping off the high buildings like flies—the big shots who lost all their cocoanuts. Pfft!

JACOB: Suicides?

MOE: Plenty can't take it—good in the break, but can't take the whip in the stretch.

MORTY *(without looking up)*: I saw it happen Monday in my building. My hair stood up how they shoveled him together—like a pancake—a bankrupt manufacturer.

MOE: No brains.

MORTY: Enough . . . all over the sidewalk.

JACOB: If someone said five-ten years ago I couldn't make for myself a living, I wouldn't believe—

MORTY: Duck for dinner?

BESSIE: The best Long Island duck.

MORTY: I like goose.

BESSIE: A duck is just like a goose, only better.

MORTY: I like a goose.

BESSIE: The next time you'll be for Sunday dinner I'll make a goose.

MORTY *(sniffs deeply)*: Smells good. I'm a great boy for smells.

BESSIE: Ain't you ashamed? Once in a blue moon he should come to an only sister's house.

MORTY: Bessie, leave me live.

BESSIE: You should be ashamed!

MORTY: Quack quack!

BESSIE: No, better to lay around Mecca Temple playing cards with the Masons.



MORTY (*with good nature*): Bessie, don't you see Pop's giving me a haircut?

BESSIE: You don't need no haircut. Look, two hairs he took off.

MORTY: Pop likes to give me a haircut. If I said no he don't forget for a year, do you, Pop? An old man's like that.

JACOB: I still do an A-1 job.

MORTY (*winking*): Pop cuts hair to fit the face, don't you, Pop?

JACOB: For sure, Morty. To each face a different haircut. Custom built, no ready made. A round face needs special—

BESSIE (*cutting him short*): A graduate from the B.M.T. (*going*): Don't forget the shade. (The phone rings. She beats JACOB to it.) Hello? Who is it, please? . . . Who is it please? . . . Miss Hirsch? No, he ain't here. . . No, I couldn't say when. (*Hangs up sharply.*)

JACOB: For Ralph?

BESSIE: A wrong number. (*JACOB looks at her and goes back to his job.*)

JACOB: Excuse me!

BESSIE (*to MORTY*): Ralphie took another cut down the place yesterday.

MORTY: Business is bad. I saw his boss Harry Glicksman Thursday. I bought some velvets . . . they're coming in again.

BESSIE: Do something for Ralphie down there.

MORTY: What can I do? I mentioned it to Glicksman. He told me they squeezed out half the people. . . (*MYRON enters dressed in apron.*)

BESSIE: What's gonna be the end? Myron's working only three days a week now.

MYRON: It's conditions.

BESSIE: Hennie's married with a baby . . . money just don't come in. I never saw conditions should be so bad.

MORTY: Times'll change.

MOE: The only thing'll change is my underwear.

MORTY: These last few years I got my share of gray hairs. (*Still reading jokes without having looked up once.*) Ha, ha, ha—Popeye the sailor ate spinach and knocked out four bums.

MYRON: I'll tell you the way I see it. The country needs a great man now—a regular Teddy Roosevelt.

MOE: What this country needs is a good five-cent earthquake.

JACOB: So long labor lives it should increase private gain—

BESSIE (*to JACOB*): Listen, Poppa, go talk on the street corner. The government'll give you free board the rest of your life.

MORTY: I'm surprised. Don't I send a five-dollar check for Pop every week?

BESSIE: You could afford a couple more and not miss it.

MORTY: Tell me jokes. Business is so rotten I could just as soon lay all day in the Turkish bath.

MYRON: Why'd I come in here? (*Puzzled, he exits.*)

MORTY (*to MOE*): I hear the bootleggers still do business, Moe.

MOE: Wake up! I kissed bootlegging bye-bye two years back.

MORTY: For a fact? What kind of racket is it now?

MOE: If I told you, you'd know something. (*HENNIE comes from bedroom.*)

HENNIE: Where's Sam?

BESSIE: Sam? In the kitchen.

HENNIE (*calls*): Sam. Come take the diaper.

MORTY: How's the Mickey Louse? Ha, ha, ha. . .

HENNIE: Sleeping.

MORTY: Ah, that's life to a baby. He sleeps—gets it in the mouth—sleeps some more. To raise a family nowadays you must be a damn fool.

BESSIE: Never mind, never mind, a woman who don't raise a family—a girl—should jump overboard. What's she good for? (*To MOE—to change the subject*): Your leg bothers you bad?

MOE: It's okay, sweetheart.

BESSIE (*to MORTY*): It hurts him every time it's cold out. He's got four legs in the closet.

MORTY: Four wooden legs?

MOE: Three.

MORTY: What's the big idea?

MOE: Why not? Uncle Sam gives them out free.

MORTY: Say, maybe if Uncle Sam gave out less legs we could balance the budget.

JACOB: Or not have a war so they wouldn't have to give out legs.

MORTY: Shame on you, Pop. Everybody knows war is necessary.

MOE: Don't make me laugh. Ask me—the first time you pick up a dead one in the trench—then you learn war ain't so damn necessary.

MORTY: Say, you should kick. The rest of your life Uncle Sam pays you ninety a month. Look, not a worry in the world.

MOE: Don't make me laugh. Uncle Sam can take his *seventy* bucks and— (*Finishes with a gesture.*) Nothing good hurts. (*He rubs his stump.*)

HENNIE: Use a crutch, Axelrod. Give the stump a rest.

MOE: Mind your business, Feinschreiber.

BESSIE: It's a sensible idea.

Mother opposed to her son's affair

double standard: pushes Hennie into marriage; prevents Ralph from leaving home; or is the motive the same in both?



MOE: Who asked you?  
 BESSIE: Look, he's ashamed.  
 MOE: So's your Aunt Fanny.  
 BESSIE (*naïvely*): Who's got an Aunt Fanny? (*She cleans a rubber plant's leaves with her apron.*)  
 MORTY: It's a joke!  
 MOE: I don't want my paper creased before I read it. I want it fresh. Fifty times I said that.  
 BESSIE: Don't get so excited for a five-cent paper—our star boarder.  
 MOE: And I don't want no one using my razor either. Get it straight. I'm not buying ten blades a week for the Berger family. (*Furiously, he limps out.*)  
 BESSIE: Maybe I'm using his razor too.  
 HENNIE: Proud!  
 BESSIE: You need luck with plants. I didn't clean off the leaves in a month.  
 MORTY: You keep the house like a pin and I like your cooking. Any time Myron fires you, come to me, Bessie. I'll let the butler go and you'll be my housekeeper. I don't like Japs so much—sneaky.  
 BESSIE: Say, you can't tell. Maybe any day I'm coming to stay. (*HENNIE exits.*)  
 JACOB: Finished.  
 MORTY: How much, Ed. Pinaud? (*Disengages self from chair.*)  
 JACOB: Five cents.  
 MORTY: Still five cents for a haircut to fit the face?  
 JACOB: Prices don't change by me. (*Takes a dollar.*) I can't change—  
 MORTY: Keep it. Buy yourself a Packard. Ha, ha, ha.  
 JACOB (*taking large envelope from pocket*): Please, you'll keep this for me. Put it away.  
 MORTY: What is it?  
 JACOB: My insurance policy. I don't like it should lay around where something could happen.  
 MORTY: What could happen?  
 JACOB: Who knows, robbers, fire . . . they took next door. Fifty dollars from O'Reilly.  
 MORTY: Say, lucky a Berger didn't lose it.  
 JACOB: Put it downtown in the safe. Bessie don't have to know.  
 MORTY: It's made out to Bessie?  
 JACOB: No, to Ralph.  
 MORTY: To Ralph?

JACOB: He don't know. Some day he'll get three thousand.  
 MORTY: You got good years ahead.  
 JACOB: Behind. (*RALPH enters.*)  
 RALPH: Cigarettes. Did a call come?  
 JACOB: A few minutes. She don't let me answer it.  
 RALPH: Did Mom say I was coming back?  
 JACOB: No. (*MORTY is back at new jokes.*)  
 RALPH: She started that stuff again? (*BESSIE enters.*) A call come for me?  
 BESSIE (*waters pot from milk bottle*): A wrong number.  
 JACOB: Don't say a lie, Bessie.  
 RALPH: Blanche said she'd call me at two—was it her?  
 BESSIE: I said a wrong number.  
 RALPH: Please, Mom, if it was her tell me.  
 BESSIE: You call me a liar next. You got no shame—to start a scene in front of Uncle Morty. Once in a blue moon he comes—  
 RALPH: What's the shame? If my girl calls I wanna know it.  
 BESSIE: You made enough mish mosh with her until now.  
 MORTY: I'm surprised, Bessie. For the love of Mike tell him yes or no.  
 BESSIE: I didn't tell him? No!  
 MORTY (*to RALPH*): No! (*RALPH goes to a window and looks out.*)  
 BESSIE: Morty, I didn't say before—he runs around steady with a girl.  
 MORTY: Terrible. Should he run around with a foxie-woxie?  
 BESSIE: A girl with no parents.  
 MORTY: An orphan?  
 BESSIE: I could die from shame. A year already he runs around with her. He brought her once for supper. Believe me, she didn't come again, no!  
 RALPH: Don't think I didn't ask her.  
 BESSIE: You hear? You raise them and what's in the end for all your trouble?  
 JACOB: When you'll lay in a grave, no more trouble. (*Exits.*) *Home of death*  
 MORTY: Quack quack!  
 BESSIE: A girl like that he wants to marry. A skinny consumptive-looking . . . six months already she's not working—taking charity from an aunt. You should see her. In a year she's dead on his hands.  
 RALPH: You'd cut her throat if you could.  
 BESSIE: That's right! Before she'd ruin a nice boy's life I would first go to prison. Miss Nobody should step in the picture and I'll stand by with my mouth shut.  
 RALPH: Miss Nobody! Who am I? Al Jolson?

*Some  
mo' five  
20 before*



BESSIE: Fix your tie!

RALPH: I'll take care of my own life.

BESSIE: You'll take care? Excuse my expression, you can't even wipe your nose yet! He'll take care!

MORTY (to BESSIE): I'm surprised. Don't worry so much, Bessie. When it's time to settle down he won't marry a poor girl, will you? In the long run common sense is thicker than love. I'm a great boy for live and let live.

BESSIE: Sure, it's easy to say. In the meantime he eats out my heart. You know I'm not strong.

MORTY: I know . . . a pussy cat . . . ha, ha, ha.

BESSIE: You got money and money talks. But without the dollar who sleeps at night?

RALPH: I been working for years, bringing in money here—putting it in your hand like a kid. All right, I can't get my teeth fixed. All right, that a new suit's like trying to buy the Chrysler Building. You never in your life bought me a pair of skates even—things I died for when I was a kid. I don't care about that stuff, see. Only just remember I pay some of the bills around here, just a few . . . and if my girl calls me on the phone I'll talk to her any time I please. (He exits. HENNIE applauds.) *because she never had the nerve to protest*

BESSIE: Don't be so smart, Miss America! (To MORTY): He didn't have skates! But when he got sick, a twelve-year-old boy, who called a big specialist for the last \$25 in the house? Skates!

JACOB (just in. Adjusts window shades): It looks like snow today.

MORTY: It's about time—winter.

BESSIE: Poppa here could talk like Samuel Webster, too, but it's just talk. He should try to buy a two-cent pickle in the Burland Market without money.

MORTY: I'm getting an appetite.

BESSIE: Right away we'll eat. I made chopped liver for you.

MORTY: My specialty!

BESSIE: Ralph should only be a success like you, Morty. I should only live to see the day when he rides up to the door in a big car with a chauffeur and a radio. I could die happy, believe me.

MORTY: Success she says. She should see how we spend thousands of dollars making up a winter line and winter don't come—summer in January. Can you beat it?

JACOB: Don't live, just make success.

MORTY: Chopped liver—ha!

*Petty-bourgeois aspirations*

JACOB: Ha! (Exits.)

MORTY: When they start arguing, I don't hear. Suddenly I'm deaf. I'm a great boy for the practical side. (He looks over to HENNIE who sits rubbing her hands with lotion.)

HENNIE: Hands like a raw potato.

MORTY: What's the matter? You don't look so well . . . no pep.

HENNIE: I'm swell.

MORTY: You used to be such a pretty girl.

HENNIE: Maybe I got the blues. You can't tell.

MORTY: You could stand a new dress.

HENNIE: That's not all I could stand.

MORTY: Come down to the place tomorrow and pick out a couple from the "eleven-eighty" line. Only don't sing me the blues.

HENNIE: Thanks. I need some new clothes.

MORTY: I got two thousand pieces of merchandise waiting in the stock room for winter.

HENNIE: I never had anything from life. Sam don't help.

MORTY: He's crazy about the kid.

HENNIE: Crazy is right. Twenty-one a week he brings in—a nigger don't have it so hard. I wore my fingers off on an Underwood for six years. For what? Now I wash baby diapers. Sure, I'm crazy about the kid too. But half the night the kid's up. Try to sleep. You don't know how it is, Uncle Morty.

MORTY: No, I don't know. I was born yesterday. Ha, ha, ha. Some day I'll leave you a little nest egg. You like eggs? Ha? *of to Jacob/Ralph*

HENNIE: When? When I'm dead and buried?

MORTY: No, when I'm dead and buried. Ha, ha, ha.

HENNIE: You should know what I'm thinking.

MORTY: Ha, ha, ha, I know. (MYRON enters.)

MYRON: I never take a drink. I'm surprised at myself, I—

MORTY: I got a pain. Maybe I'm hungry.

MYRON: Come inside, Morty. Bessie's got some schnapps.

MORTY: I'll take a drink. Yesterday I missed the Turkish bath.

MYRON: I get so bitter when I take a drink, it just surprises me.

MORTY: Look how fat. Say, you live once. . . . Quack, quack. (Both exit.)

*MOE stands silently in the doorway.*

▶ SAM (entering): I'll make Leon's bottle now!

HENNIE: No, let him sleep, Sam. Take away the diaper. (He does. Exits.) ◀

MOE (advancing into the room): That your husband?

HENNIE: Don't you know?



MOE: Maybe he's a nurse you hired for the kid—it looks it—how he tends it. A guy comes howling to your old lady every time you look cock-eyed. Does he sleep with you?

HENNIE: Don't be so wise!

MOE (*indicating newspaper*): Here's a dame strangled her hubby with wire. Claimed she didn't like him. Why don't you brain Sam with an axe some night?

HENNIE: Why don't you lay an egg, Axelrod?

MOE: I laid a few in my day, Feinschreiber. Hard-boiled ones too.

HENNIE: Yeah?

MOE: Yeah. You wanna know what I see when I look in your eyes?

HENNIE: No.

MOE: Ted Lewis playing the clarinet—some of those high crazy notes! Christ, you coulda had a guy with some guts instead of a cluck stands around boilin' baby nipples.

HENNIE: Meaning you?

MOE: Meaning me, sweetheart.

HENNIE: Think you're pretty good.

MOE: You'd know if I slept with you again.

HENNIE: I'll smack your face in a minute.

MOE: You do and I'll break your arm. (*Holds up paper.*) Take a look. (*Reads*): "Ten-day luxury cruise to Havana." That's the stuff you coulda had. Put up at ritzy hotels, frenchie soap, champagne. Now you're tied down to "Snake-Eye" here. What for? What's it get you? . . . a 2 x 4 flat on 108th Street . . . a pain in the bustle it gets you.

HENNIE: What's it to you?

MOE: I know you from the old days. How you like to spend it! What I mean! Lizard-skin shoes, perfume behind the ears. . . . You're in a mess, Paradise! Paradise—that's a hot one—yah, crazy to eat a knish at your own wedding.

HENNIE: I get it—you're jealous. You can't get me.

MOE: Don't make me laugh.

HENNIE: Kid Jailbird's been trying to make me for years. You'd give your other leg. I'm hooked? Maybe, but you're in the same boat. Only it's worse for you. I don't give a damn no more, but you gotta yen makes you—

MOE: Don't make me laugh.

HENNIE: Compared to you I'm sittin' on top of the world.

MOE: You're losing your looks. A dame don't stay young forever.

HENNIE: You're a liar. I'm only twenty-four.

MOE: When you comin' home to stav?

HENNIE: Wouldn't you like to know?

MOE: I'll get you again.

HENNIE: Think so?

MOE: Sure, whatever goes up comes down. You're easy—you remember—two for a nickel—a pushover! (*Suddenly she slaps him.* *They both seem stunned.*) What's the idea?

HENNIE: Go on . . . break my arm.

MOE (*as if saying "I love you"*): Listen, lousy.

HENNIE: Go on, do something!

MOE: Listen—

HENNIE: You're so damn tough!

MOE: You like me. (*He takes her.*)

HENNIE: Take your hand off! (*Pushes him away.*) Come around when it's a flood again and they put you in the ark with the animals. Not even then—if you was the last man!

MOE: Baby, if you had a dog I'd love the dog.

HENNIE: Gorilla! (*Exits. RALPH enters.*)

RALPH: Were you here before?

MOE (*sits*): What?

RALPH: When the call came for me?

MOE: What?

RALPH: The call came. (*JACOB enters.*)

MOE (*rubbing his leg*): No.

JACOB: Don't worry, Ralphie, she'll call back.

RALPH: Maybe not. I think somethin's the matter.

JACOB: What?

RALPH: I don't know. I took her home from the movies last night. She asked me what I'd think if she went away.

JACOB: Don't worry, she'll call again.

RALPH: Maybe not, if Mom insulted her. She gets it on both ends, the poor kid. Lived in an orphan asylum most of her life. They shove her around like an empty freight train.

JACOB: After dinner go see her.

RALPH: Twice they kicked me down the stairs.

JACOB: Life should have some dignity.

RALPH: Every time I go near the place I get heart failure. The uncle drives a bus. You oughta see him—like Babe Ruth.

MOE: Use your brains. Stop acting like a kid who still wets the bed. Hire a room somewhere—a club room for two members.

RALPH: Not that kind of proposition, Moe.

MOE: Don't be a bush leaguer all your life.



RALPH: Cut it out!

MOE (*on a sudden upsurge of emotion*): Ever sleep with one? Look at 'im blush.

RALPH: You don't know her.

MOE: I seen her—the kind no one sees undressed till the undertaker works on her.

RALPH: Why give me the needles all the time? What'd I ever do to you?

MOE: Not a thing. You're a nice kid. But grow up! In life there's two kinds—the men that's sure of themselves and the ones who ain't! It's time you quit being a selling-plater and got in the first class.

JACOB: And you, Axelrod?

MOE (*to JACOB*): Scratch your whiskers! (*TO RALPH*): Get independent. Get what-it-takes and be yourself. Do what you like.

RALPH: Got a suggestion? (*MORTY enters, eating.*)

MOE: Sure, pick out a racket. Shake down the cocoanuts. See what that does.

MORTY: We know what it does—puts a pudding on your nose! Sing Sing! Easy money's against the law. Against the law don't win. A racket is illegitimate, no?

MOE: It's all a racket—from horse racing down. Marriage, politics, big business—everybody plays cops and robbers. You, you're a racketeer yourself.

MORTY: Who? Me? Personally I manufacture dresses.

MOE: Horse feathers!

MORTY (*seriously*): Don't make such remarks to me without proof. I'm a great one for proof. That's why I made a success in business. Proof—put up or shut up, like a game of cards. I heard this remark before—a rich man's a crook who steals from the poor. Personally, I don't like it. It's a big lie!

MOE: If you don't like it, buy yourself a fife and drum—and go fight your own war.

MORTY: Sweatshop talk. Every Jew and Wop in the shop eats my bread and behind my back says, "a sonofabitch." I started from a poor boy who worked on an ice wagon for two dollars a week. Pop's right here—he'll tell you. I made it honest. In the whole industry nobody's got a better name.

JACOB: It's an exception, such success.

MORTY: Ralph can't do the same thing?

JACOB: No, Morty, I don't think. In a house like this he don't realize even the possibilities of life. Economics comes down like a ton of coal on the head.

MOE: Red rover, red rover, let Jacob come over!

JACOB: In my day the propaganda was for God. Now it's for success. A boy don't turn around without having shoved in him he should make success.

MORTY: Pop, you're a comedian, a regular Charlie Chaplin.

JACOB: He dreams all night of fortunes. Why not? Don't it say in the movies he should have a personal steamship, pyjamas for fifty dollars a pair and a toilet like a monument? But in the morning he wakes up and for ten dollars he can't fix the teeth. And millions more worse off in the mills of the South—starvation wages. The blood from the worker's heart. (*MORTY laughs loud and long.*) Laugh, laugh . . . tomorrow not.

MORTY: A real, a real Boob McNutt you're getting to be.

JACOB: Laugh, my son. . . .

MORTY: Here is the North, Pop.

JACOB: North, south, it's one country.

MORTY: The country's all right. A duck quacks in every pot!

JACOB: You never heard how they shoot down men and women which ask a better wage? Kentucky 1932?

MORTY: That's a pile of chopped liver, Pop. (*BESSIE and others, enter.*)

JACOB: Pittsburgh, Passaic, Illinois—slavery—it begins where success begins in a competitive system. (*MORTY howls with delight.*)

MORTY: Oh Pop, what are you bothering? Why? Tell me why? Ha ha ha. I bought you a phonograph . . . stick to Caruso.

BESSIE: He's starting up again.

MORTY: Don't bother with Kentucky. It's full of moonshiners.

JACOB: Sure, sure—

MORTY: You don't know practical affairs. Stay home and cut hair to fit the face.

JACOB: It says in the Bible how the Red Sea opened and the Egyptians went in and the sea rolled over them. (*Quotes two lines of Hebrew.*)

In this boy's life a Red Sea will happen again. I see it!

MORTY: I'm getting sore, Pop, with all this sweatshop talk.

BESSIE: He don't stop a minute. The whole day, like a phonograph.

MORTY: I'm surprised. Without a rich man you don't have a roof over your head. You don't know it?

MYRON: Now you can't bite the hand that feeds you.

RALPH: Let him alone—he's right!

BESSIE: Another country heard from.

RALPH: It's the truth. It's—

MORTY: Keep quiet

santose!

populists  
American  
dream

the  
Am  
Ar  
re

Sweatshop  
talk



JACOB: For sure, charity, a bone for an old dog. But in Russia an old man don't take charity so his eyes turn black in his head. In Russia they got Marx.

MORTY (*scoffingly*): Who's Marx?

MOE: An outfielder for the Yanks. (MORTY *howls with delight*.)

MORTY: Ha ha ha, it's better than the jokes. I'm telling you. This is Uncle Sam's country. Put it in your pipe and smoke it. *Patriotism in the*

BESSIE: Russia, he says! Read the papers. *mouth of the corrupt capitalist*

SAM: Here is opportunity.

MYRON: People can't believe in God in Russia. The papers tell the truth, they do.

JACOB: So you believe in God . . . you got something for it? You! You worked for all the capitalists. You harvested the fruit from your labor? You got God! But the past comforts you? The present smiles on you, yes? It promises you the future something? Did you found a piece of earth where you could live like a human being and die with the sun on your face? Tell me, yes, tell me. I would like to know myself. But on these questions, on this theme—the struggle for existence—you can't make an answer. The answer I see in your face . . . the answer is your mouth can't talk. In this dark corner you sit and you die. But abolish private property!

BESSIE (*settling the issue*): Noo, go fight City Hall!

MORTY: He's drunk!

JACOB: I'm studying from books a whole lifetime.

MORTY: That's what it is—he's drunk. What the hell does all that mean?

JACOB: If you don't know, why should I tell you.

MORTY (*triumphant at last*): You see? Hear him? Like all those nuts, don't know what they're saying. *humiliates him*

JACOB: I know, I know.

MORTY: Like Boob McNutt you know! Don't go in the park, Pop—the squirrels'll get you. Ha, ha, ha. . .

BESSIE: Save your appetite, Morty. (To MYRON): Don't drop the duck.

MYRON: We're ready to eat, Momma.

MORTY (to JACOB): Shame on you. It's your second childhood. (Now they file out. MYRON first with the duck, the others behind him.)

BESSIE: Come eat. We had enough for one day. (Exits.)

MORTY: Ha, ha, ha. Quack, quack. (Exits.)

(JACOB sits there trembling and deeply humiliated. MOE approaches him and thumbs the old man's nose in the direction of the dining room.)

MOE: Give 'em five. (Takes his hand away.) They got you pasted on

the wall like a picture, Jake. (He limps out to seat himself at the table in the next room.)

JACOB: Go eat, boychick. (RALPH comes to him.) He gives me eat, so I'll climb in a needle. One time I saw an old horse in summer . . . he wore a straw hat . . . the ears stuck out on top. An old horse for hire. Give me back my young days . . . give me fresh blood . . . arms . . . give me— (The telephone rings. Quickly RALPH goes to it. JACOB pulls the curtains and stands there, a sentry on guard.)

RALPH: Hello? . . . Yeah, I went to the store and came right back, right after you called. (Looks at JACOB.)

JACOB: Speak, speak. Don't be afraid they'll hear.

RALPH: I'm sorry if Mom said something. You know how excitable Mom is . . . Sure! What? . . . Sure, I'm listening . . . Put on the radio, Jake. (JACOB does so. Music comes in and up, a tango, grating with an insistent nostalgic pulse. Under the cover of the music RALPH speaks more freely.) Yes . . . yes . . . What's the matter? Why're you crying? What happened? (To JACOB:) She's putting her uncle on. Yes? . . . Listen, Mr. Hirsch, what're you trying to do? What's the big idea? Honest to God. I'm in no mood for joking! Lemme talk to her! Gimme Blanche! (Waits.) Blanche? What's this? Is this a joke? Is that true? I'm coming right down! I know, but— You wanna do that? . . . I know, but— I'm coming down . . . tonight! Nine o'clock . . . sure . . . sure . . . sure . . . (Hangs up.)

JACOB: What happened?

MORTY (enters): Listen, Pop. I'm surprised you didn't— (He howls, shakes his head in mock despair, exits.)

JACOB: Boychick, what?

RALPH: I don't get it straight. (To JACOB): She's leaving. . .

JACOB: Where?

RALPH: Out West— To Cleveland.

JACOB: Cleveland?

RALPH: . . . In a week or two. Can you picture it? It's a put-up job. But they can't get away with that.

JACOB: We'll find something.

RALPH: Sure, the angels of heaven'll come down on her uncle's cab and whisper in his ear.

JACOB: Come eat. . . We'll find something.

RALPH: I'm meeting her tonight, but I know— (BESSIE throws open the curtain between the two rooms and enters.)

BESSIE: Maybe we'll serve for you a special blue plate supper in the garden?



JACOB: All right, all right. (BESSIE goes over to the window, levels the shade and on her way out, clicks off the radio.)

MORTY (within): Leave the music, Bessie. (She clicks it on again, looks at them, exits.)

RALPH: I know . . .

JACOB: Don't cry, boychick. (Goes over to RALPH.) Why should you make like this? Tell me why you should cry, just tell me. . . . (JACOB takes RALPH in his arms and both, trying to keep back the tears, trying fearfully not to be heard by the others in the dining room, begin crying.) You mustn't cry. . . .

(The tango twists on. Inside the clatter of dishes and the clash of cutlery sound. MORTY begins to howl with laughter.)

Curtain

SCENE II

That night. The dark dining room.

AT RISE JACOB is heard in his lighted room, reading from a sheet, de-claiming aloud as if to an audience.

JACOB: They are there to remind us of the horrors—under those crosses lie hundreds of thousands of workers and farmers who murdered each other in uniform for the greater glory of capitalism. (Comes out of his room.) The new imperialist war will send millions to their death, will bring prosperity to the pockets of the capitalist—aie, Morty—and will bring only greater hunger and misery to the masses of workers and farmers. The memories of the last world slaughter are still vivid in our minds. (Hearing a noise he quickly retreats to his room. RALPH comes in from the street. He sits with hat and coat on. JACOB tentatively opens door and asks): Ralphie?

RALPH: It's getting pretty cold out.

JACOB (enters room fully, cleaning hair clippers): We should have steam till twelve instead of ten. Go complain to the Board of Health.

RALPH: It might snow.

JACOB: It don't hurt . . . extra work for men.

RALPH: When I was a kid I laid awake at nights and heard the sounds of trains . . . far-away lonesome sounds . . . boats going up and down the river. I used to think of all kinds of things I wanted to do. What was it, Jake? Just a bunch of noise in my head?

JACOB (waiting for news of the girl): You wanted to make for yourself a certain kind of world.

RALPH: I guess I didn't. I'm feeling pretty, pretty low.

JACOB: You're a young boy and for you life is all in front like a big mountain. You got feet to climb.

RALPH: I don't know how.

JACOB: So you'll find out. Never a young man had such opportunity like today. He could make history.

RALPH: Ten P.M. and all is well. Where's everybody?

JACOB: They went.

RALPH: Uncle Morty too?

JACOB: Hennie and Sam he drove down.

RALPH: I saw her.

JACOB (alert and eager): Yes, yes, tell me.

RALPH: I waited in Mount Morris Park till she came out. So cold I did a buck'n wing to keep warm. She's scared to death.

JACOB: They made her?

RALPH: Sure. She wants to go. They keep yelling at her—they want her to marry a millionaire, too.

JACOB: You told her you love her?

RALPH: Sure. "Marry me," I said. "Marry me tomorrow." On sixteen bucks a week. On top of that I had to admit Mom'd have Uncle Morty get me fired in a second. . . . Two can starve as cheap as one!

JACOB: So what happened?

RALPH: I made her promise to meet me tomorrow.

JACOB: Now she'll go in the West?

RALPH: I'd fight the whole goddamn world with her, but not her. No guts. The hell with her. If she wantsa go—all right—I'll get along.

JACOB: For sure, there's more important things than girls. . . .

RALPH: You said a mouthful . . . and maybe I don't see it. She'll see what I can do. No one stops me when I get going. . . . (Near to tears, he has to stop. JACOB examines his clippers very closely.)

JACOB: Electric clippers never do a job like by hand.

RALPH: Why won't Mom let us live here?

JACOB: Why? Why? Because in a society like this today people don't love. Hate!

RALPH: Gee, I'm no bum who hangs around pool parlors. I got the stuff to go ahead. I don't know what to do.

JACOB: Look on me and learn what to do, boychick. Here sits an old man polishing tools. You think maybe I'll use them again! Look on this



failure and see for seventy years he talked, with good ideas, but only in the head. It's enough for me now I should see your happiness. This is why I tell you—DO! Do what is in your heart and you carry in yourself a revolution. But you should act. Not like me. A man who had golden opportunities but drank instead a glass tea. No. . . . (A pause of silence.)

RALPH (*listening*): Hear it? The Boston air mail plane. Ten minutes late. I get a kick the way it cuts across the Bronx every night. (*The bell rings: SAM, excited, disheveled, enters.*)

JACOB: You came back so soon?

SAM: Where's Mom?

JACOB: Mom? Look on the chandelier.

SAM: Nobody's home?

JACOB: Sit down. Right away they're coming. You went in the street without a tie?

SAM: Maybe it's a crime.

JACOB: Excuse me.

RALPH: You had a fight with Hennie again?

SAM: She'll fight once . . . some day. . . . (*Lapses into silence.*)

JACOB: In my day the daughter came home. Now comes the son-in-law.

SAM: Once too often she'll fight with me, Hennie. I mean it. I mean it like anything. I'm a person with a bad heart. I sit quiet, but inside I got a—

RALPH: What happened?

SAM: I'll talk to Mom. I'll see Mom.

JACOB: Take an apple.

SAM: Please . . . he tells me apples.

RALPH: Why hop around like a billiard ball?

SAM: Even in a joke she should dare say it.

JACOB: My grandchild said something?

SAM: To my father in the old country they did a joke . . . I'll tell you: One day in Odessa he talked to another Jew on the street. They didn't like it, they jumped on him like a wild wolf.

RALPH: Who?

SAM: Cossacks. They cut off his beard. A Jew without a beard! He came home—I remember like yesterday how he came home and went in bed for two days. He put like this the cover on his face. No one should see. The third morning he died.

RALPH: From what?

SAM: From a broken heart. . . . Some people are like this. Me too. I could die like this from shame.

JACOB: Hennie told you something?

SAM: Straight out she said it—like a lightning from the sky. The baby ain't mine. She said it.

RALPH: Don't be a dope.

JACOB: For sure, a joke.

RALPH: She's kidding you.

SAM: She should kid a policeman, not Sam Feinschreiber. Please . . . you don't know her like me. I wake up in the nighttime and she sits watching me like I don't know what. I make a nice living from the store. But it's no use—she looks for a star in the sky. I'm afraid like anything. You could go crazy from less even. What I shall do I'll ask Mom.

JACOB: "Go home and sleep," she'll say. "It's a bad dream."

SAM: It don't satisfy me more, such remarks, when Hennie could kill in the bed. (*JACOB laughs.*) Don't laugh. I'm so nervous—look, two times I weighed myself on the subway station. (*Throws small cards to table.*)

JACOB: (*examining one*): One hundred and thirty-eight—also a fortune. (*Turns it and reads*): "You are inclined to deep thinking, and have a high admiration for intellectual excellence and inclined to be very exclusive in the selection of friends." Correct! I think maybe you got mixed up in the wrong family, Sam. (*MYRON and BESSIE now enter.*)

BESSIE: Look, a guest! What's the matter? Something wrong with the baby? (*Waits.*)

SAM: No.

BESSIE: Noo?

SAM (*in a burst*): I wash my hands from everything.

BESSIE: Take off your coat and hat. Have a seat. Excitement don't help. Myron, make tea. You'll have a glass tea. We'll talk like civilized people. (*MYRON goes.*) What is it, Ralph, you're all dressed up for a party? (*He looks at her silently and exits. To SAM*): We saw a very good movie, with Wallace Beery. He acts like life, very good.

MYRON (*within*): Polly Moran too.

BESSIE: Polly Moran too—a woman with a nose from here to Hunts Point, but a fine player. Poppa, take away the tools and the books.

JACOB: All right. (*Exits to his room.*)

BESSIE: Noo, Sam, why do you look like a funeral?

SAM: I can't stand it. . . .

BESSIE: Wait. (*Yells*): You took up Tootsie on the roof.

JACOB (*within*): In a minute.

BESSIE: What can't you stand?



SAM: She said I'm a second fiddle in my own house.  
 BESSIE: Who?  
 SAM: Hennie. In the second place, it ain't my baby, she said.  
 BESSIE: What? What are you talking? (MYRON enters with dishes.)  
 SAM: From her own mouth. It went like a knife in my heart.  
 BESSIE: Sam, what're you saying?  
 SAM: Please, I'm making a story? I fell in the chair like a dead.  
 BESSIE: Such a story you believe?  
 SAM: I don't know.  
 BESSIE: How you don't know?  
 SAM: She told me even the man.  
 BESSIE: Impossible!  
 SAM: I can't believe myself. But she said it. I'm a second fiddle, she said.  
 She made such a yell everybody heard for ten miles.  
 BESSIE: Such a thing Hennie should say—impossible!  
 SAM: What should I do? With my bad heart such a remark kills.  
 MYRON: Hennie don't feel well, Sam. You see, she—  
 BESSIE: What then?—a sick girl. Believe me, a mother knows. Nerves.  
 Our Hennie's got a bad temper. You'll let her she says anything. She  
 takes after me—nervous. (To MYRON): You ever heard such a re-  
 mark in all your life? She should make such a statement! Bughouse.  
 MYRON: The little one's been sick all these months. Hennie needs a rest.  
 No doubt.  
 BESSIE: Sam don't think she means it—  
 MYRON: Oh, I know he don't, of course—  
 BESSIE: I'll say the truth, Sam. We didn't half the time understand her  
 ourselves. A girl with her own mind. When she makes it up, wild  
 horses wouldn't change her.  
 SAM: She don't love me.  
 BESSIE: This is sensible, Sam?  
 SAM: Not for a nickel.  
 BESSIE: What do you think? She married you for your money? For your  
 looks? You ain't no John Barrymore, Sam. No, she liked you.  
 SAM: Please, not for a nickel. (JACOB stands in the doorway.)  
 BESSIE: We stood right here the first time she said it. "Sam Feinschrei-  
 ber's a nice boy," she said it, "a boy he's got good common sense,  
 with a business head." Right here she said it, in this room. You sent  
 her two boxes of candy together, you remember?  
 MYRON: Loft's candy.  
 BESSIE: This is when she said it. What do you think?

MYRON: You were just the only boy she cared for.  
 BESSIE: So she married you. Such a world . . . plenty of boy friends she  
 had, believe me!  
 JACOB: A popular girl. . . .  
 MYRON: Y-e-s.  
 BESSIE: I'll say it plain out—Moe Axelrod offered her plenty—a servant,  
 a house . . . she don't have to pick up a hand.  
 MYRON: Oh, Moe? Just wild about her. . . .  
 SAM: Moe Axelrod? He wanted to—  
 BESSIE: But she didn't care. A girl like Hennie you don't buy. I should  
 never live to see another day if I'm telling a lie.  
 SAM: She was kidding me.  
 BESSIE: What then? You shouldn't be foolish.  
 SAM: The baby looks like my family. He's got Feinschreiber eyes.  
 BESSIE: A blind man could see it.  
 JACOB: Sure . . . sure. . . .  
 SAM: The baby looks like me. Yes. . . .  
 BESSIE: You could believe me.  
 JACOB: Any day. . . .  
 SAM: But she tells me the man. She made up his name too?  
 BESSIE: Sam, Sam, look in the phone book—a million names.  
 MYRON: Tom, Dick and Harry. (JACOB laughs quietly, soberly.)  
 BESSIE: Don't stand around, Poppa. Take Tootsie on the roof. And you  
 don't let her go under the water tank.  
 JACOB: Schmah Yisroel. Behold! (Quietly laughing he goes back into  
 his room, closing the door behind him.)  
 SAM: I won't stand he should make insults. A man eats out his—  
 BESSIE: No, no, he's an old man—a second childhood. Myron, bring in  
 the tea. Open a jar of raspberry jelly. (MYRON exits.)  
 SAM: Mom, you think—?  
 BESSIE: I'll talk to Hennie. It's all right.  
 SAM: Tomorrow, I'll take her by the doctor. (RALPH enters.)  
 BESSIE: Stay for a little tea.  
 SAM: No, I'll go home. I'm tired. Already I caught a cold in such  
 weather. (Blows his nose.)  
 MYRON (entering with stuffs): Going home?  
 SAM: I'll go in bed. I caught a cold.  
 MYRON: Teddy Roosevelt used to say, "When you have a problem, sleep  
 on it."  
 BESSIE: My Sam is no problem.



MYRON: I don't mean . . . I mean he said——

BESSIE: Call me tomorrow, Sam.

SAM: I'll phone supper time. Sometime I think there's something funny about me. (MYRON sees him out. In the following pause Caruso is heard singing within.)

BESSIE: A bargain! Second fiddle. By me he don't even play in the orchestra—a man like a mouse. Maybe she'll lay down and die 'cause he makes a living?

RALPH: Can I talk to you about something?

BESSIE: What's the matter—I'm biting you?

RALPH: It's something about Blanche.

BESSIE: Don't tell me.

RALPH: Listen now——

BESSIE: I don't wanna know.

RALPH: She's got no place to go.

BESSIE: I don't want to know.

RALPH: Mom, I love this girl. . . .

BESSIE: So go knock your head against the wall.

RALPH: I want her to come here. Listen, Mom, I want you to let her live here for a while.

BESSIE: You got funny ideas, my son.

RALPH: I'm as good as anyone-else. Don't I have some rights in the world? Listen, Mom, if I don't do something, she's going away. Why don't you do it? Why don't you let her stay here for a few weeks? Things'll pick up. Then we can——

BESSIE: Sure, sure. I'll keep her fresh on ice for a wedding day. That's what you want?

RALPH: No, I mean you should——

BESSIE: Or maybe you'll sleep here in the same bed without marriage. (JACOB stands in his doorway, dressed.)

RALPH: Don't say that, Mom. I only mean. . . .

BESSIE: What you mean, I know . . . and what I mean I also know. Make up your mind. For your own good, Ralphie. If she dropped in the ocean I don't lift a finger.

RALPH: That's all, I suppose.

BESSIE: With me it's one thing—a boy should have respect for his own future. Go to sleep, you look tired. In the morning you'll forget.

JACOB: "Awake and sing, ye that dwell in dust, and the earth shall cast out the dead." It's cold out?

MYRON: Oh, yes.

JACOB: I'll talk to Tootsie now.

MYRON (eating bread and jam): He come on us like the wild man of Borneo, Sam. I don't think Hennie was fool enough to tell him the truth like that.

BESSIE: Myron! (A deep pause.)

RALPH: What did he say?

BESSIE: Never mind.

RALPH: I heard him. I heard him. You don't needa tell me.

BESSIE: Never mind.

RALPH: You trapped that guy.

BESSIE: Don't say another word.

RALPH: Just have respect? That's the idea?

BESSIE: Don't say another word. I'm boiling over ten times inside.

RALPH: You won't let Blanche here, huh. I'm not sure I want her. You put one over on that little shrimp. The cat's whiskers, Mom?

BESSIE: I'm telling you something!

RALPH: I got the whole idea. I get it so quick my head's swimming. Boy, what a laugh! I suppose you know about this, Jake?

JACOB: Yes.

RALPH: Why didn't you do something?

JACOB: I'm an old man.

RALPH: What's that got to do with the price of bonds? Sits around and lets a thing like that happen! You make me sick too.

MYRON (after a pause): Let me say something, son.

RALPH: Take your hand away! Sit in a corner and wag your tail. Keep on boasting you went to law school for two years.

MYRON: I want to tell you——

RALPH: You never in your life had a thing to tell me.

BESSIE (bitterly): Don't say a word. Let him, let him run and tell Sam. Publish in the papers, give a broadcast on the radio. To him it don't matter nothing his family sits with tears pouring from the eyes. (To JACOB): What are you waiting for? I didn't tell you twice already about the dog? You'll stand around with Caruso and make a bug-house. It ain't enough all day long. Fifty times I told you I'll break every record in the house. (She brushes past him, breaks the records, comes out.) The next time I say something you'll maybe believe it. Now maybe you learned a lesson. (Pause.)

JACOB (quietly): Bessie, new lessons . . . not for an old dog. (MOE enters.)

MYRON: You didn't have to do it, Momma.

BESSIE: Talk better to your son, Mr. Berger! Me, I don't lay down and die for him and Poppa no more. I'll work like a nigger? For what?

Ralph makes the connection



Wait, the day comes when you'll be punished. When it's too late you'll remember how you sucked away a mother's life. Talk to him, tell him how I don't sleep at night. (*Bursts into tears and exits.*)

MOE (*sings*): "Good-by to all your sorrows. You never hear them talk about the war, in the land of Yama Yama. . . ."

MYRON: Yes, Momma's a sick woman, Ralphie.

RALPH: Yeah?

MOE: We'll be out of the trenches by Christmas. Putt, putt, putt . . . here, stinker. . . . (*Picks up Tootsie, a small, white poodle that just then enters from the hall.*) If there's reincarnation in the next life I wanna be a dog and lay in a fat lady's lap. Barrage over? How 'bout a little pinochle, Pop?

JACOB: Nnno.

RALPH (*taking dog*): I'll take her up. (*Conciliatory.*)

JACOB: No, I'll do it. (*Takes dog.*)

RALPH (*ashamed*): It's cold out.

JACOB: I was cold before in my life. A man sixty-seven. . . . (*Strokes the dog.*) Tootsie is my favorite lady in the house. (*He slowly passes across the room and exits. A settling pause.*)

MYRON: She cried all last night—Tootsie—I heard her in the kitchen like a young girl.

MOE: Tonight I could do something. I got a yen . . . I don't know.

MYRON (*rubbing his head*): My scalp is impoverished.

RALPH: Mom bust all his records.

MYRON: She didn't have to do it.

MOE: Tough tit! Now I can sleep in the morning. Who the hell wantsa hear a wop air his tonsils all day long!

RALPH (*handling the fragment of a record*): "O Paradiso!" *Symbolic!*

MOE (*gets cards*): It's snowing out, girls.

MYRON: There's no more big snows like in the old days. I think the whole world's changing. I see it, right under our very eyes. No one hardly remembers any more when we used to have gaslight and all the dishes had little fishes on them.

MOE: It's the system, girls.

MYRON: I was a little boy when it happened—the Great Blizzard. It snowed three days without a stop that time. Yes, and the horse cars stopped. A silence of death was on the city and little babies got no milk . . . they say a lot of people died that year.

MOE (*singing as he deals himself cards*):

"Lights are blinking while you're drinking,  
That's the place where the good fellows go.

Good-by to all your sorrows,  
You never hear them talk about the war,  
In the land of Yama, Yama  
Funicalee, funicala, funicalo. . . ."

MYRON: What can I say to you, Big Boy?

RALPH: Not a damn word.

MOE (*goes "ta ra ta ra" throughout.*)

MYRON: I know how you feel about all those things, I know.

RALPH: Forget it.

MYRON: And your girl. . . .

RALPH: Don't soft soap me all of a sudden.

MYRON: I'm not foreign born. I'm an American, and yet I never got close to you. It's an American father's duty to be his son's friend.

RALPH: Who said that—Teddy R.?

MOE (*dealing cards*): You're breaking his heart. "Litvak."

MYRON: It just happened the other day. The moment I began losing my hair I just knew I was destined to be a failure in life . . . and when I grew bald I was. Now isn't that funny, Big Boy?

MOE: It's a pisscutter!

MYRON: I believe in Destiny.

MOE: You get what-it-takes. Then they don't catch you with your pants down. (*Sings out*): Eight of clubs. . . .

MYRON: I really don't know. I sold jewelry on the road before I married. It's one thing to— Now here's a thing the druggist gave me. (*Reads*): "The Marvel Cosmetic Girl of Hollywood is going on the air. Give this charming little radio singer a name and win five thousand dollars. If you will send—"

MOE: Your old man still believes in Santy Claus.

MYRON: Someone's got to win. The government isn't gonna allow everything to be fake.

MOE: It's a fake. There ain't no prizes. It's a fake.

MYRON: It says—

RALPH (*snatching it*): For Christ's sake, Pop, forget it. Grow up. Jake's right—everybody's crazy. It's like a zoo in this house. I'm going to bed.

MOE: In the land of Yama Yama. . . . (*Goes on with ta ra.*)

MYRON: Don't think life's easy with Momma. No, but she means for your good all the time. I tell you she does, she—

RALPH: Maybe, but I'm going to bed. (Downstairs doorbell rings violently.)

MOE (*ring*): Enemy barrage begins on sector eight seventy-five.



RALPH: That's downstairs.

MYRON: We ain't expecting anyone this hour of the night.

MOE: "Lights are blinking while you're drinking, that's the place where the good fellows go. Good-by to ta ra tara ra," etc.

RALPH: I better see who it is.

MYRON: I'll tick the button. (*As he starts, the apartment doorbell begins ringing, followed by large knocking. MYRON goes out.*)

RALPH: Who's ever ringing means it. (*A loud excited voice outside.*)

MOE: "In the land of Yama Yama, Funicalee, funicalo, funic——"  
MYRON enters followed by SCHLOSSER the janitor. BESSIE cuts in from the other side.)

BESSIE: Who's ringing like a lunatic?

RALPH: What's the matter?

MYRON: Momma. . . .

BESSIE: Noo, what's the matter? (*Downstairs bell continues.*)

RALPH: What's the matter?

BESSIE: Well, well . . . ?

MYRON: Poppa. . . .

BESSIE: What happened?

SCHLOSSER: He shlipped maybe in de snow.

RALPH: Who?

SCHLOSSER (*to BESSIE*): Your fadder fall off de roof. . . . Ja. (*A dead pause. RALPH then runs out.*)

BESSIE (*dazed*): Myron. . . . Call Morty on the phone . . . call him.  
MYRON starts for phone.) No. I'll do it myself. I'll . . . do it. (*MYRON exits.*)

SCHLOSSER (*standing stupidly*): Since I was in dis country . . . I was puddung out de ash can . . . The snow is vet. . . .

MOE (*to SCHLOSSER*): Scram. (*SCHLOSSER exits.*)

(*BESSIE goes blindly to the phone, fumbles and gets it. MOE sits quietly, slowly turning cards over, but watching her.*)

BESSIE: He slipped. . . .

MOE (*deeply moved*): Slipped?

BESSIE: I can't see the numbers. Make it, Moe, make it. . . .

MOE: Make it yourself. (*He looks at her and slowly goes back to his game of cards with shaking hands.*)

BESSIE: Riverside 7— . . . (*Unable to talk she dials slowly. The dial whizzes on.*)

MOE: Don't . . . make me laugh. . . . (*He turns over cards.*)

Curtain

## ACT THREE

*A week later in the dining room. MORTY, BESSIE and MYRON eating. Sitting in the front room is MOE marking a "dope sheet," but really listening to the others.*

BESSIE: You're sure he'll come tonight—the insurance man?

MORTY: Why not? I shtupped him a ten-dollar bill. Everything's hot delicatessen.

BESSIE: Why must he come so soon?

MORTY: Because you had a big expense. You'll settle once and for all. I'm a great boy for making hay while the sun shines.

BESSIE: Stay till he'll come, Morty. . . .

MORTY: No, I got a strike downtown. Business don't stop for personal life. Two times already in the past week those bastards threw stink bombs in the showroom. Wait! We'll give them strikes—in the kishkas we'll give them. . . .

BESSIE: I'm a woman. I don't know about policies. Stay till he comes.

MORTY: Bessie—sweetheart, leave me live.

BESSIE: I'm afraid, Morty.

MORTY: Be practical. They made an investigation. Everybody knows Pop had an accident. Now we'll collect.

MYRON: Ralphie don't know Papa left the insurance in his name.

MORTY: It's not his business. And I'll tell him.

BESSIE: The way he feels. (*Enter RALPH into front room.*) He'll do something crazy. He thinks Poppa jumped off the roof.

MORTY: Be practical, Bessie. Ralphie will sign when I tell him. Everything is peaches and cream.

BESSIE: Wait for a few minutes. . . .

MORTY: Look, I'll show you in black on white what the policy says. For God's sake, leave me live! (*Angrily exits to kitchen. In parlor, MOE speaks to RALPH who is reading a letter.*)

MOE: What's the letter say?

RALPH: Blanche won't see me no more, she says. I couldn't care very much, she says. If I didn't come like I said. . . . She'll phone before she leaves.

MOE: She don't know about Pop?

RALPH: She won't ever forget me she says. Look what she sends me . . . a little locket on a chain . . . if she calls I'm out.

MOE: You mean it?



RALPH: For a week I'm trying to go in his room. I guess he'd like me to have it, but I can't. . . .

MOE: Wait a minute! (*Crosses over.*) They're trying to rook you—a freeze-out.

RALPH: Who?

MOE: That bunch stuffin' their gut with hot pastrami. Morty in particular. Jake left the insurance—three thousand dollars—for you.

RALPH: For me?

MOE: Now you got wings, kid. Pop figured you could use it. That's why. . . .

RALPH: That's why what?

MOE: It ain't the only reason he done it.

RALPH: He done it?

MOE: You think a breeze blew him off? (*HENNIE enters and sits.*)

RALPH: I'm not sure what I think.

MOE: The insurance guy's coming tonight. Morty's "shtupped" him.

RALPH: Yeah?

MOE: I'll back you up. You're dead on your feet. Grab a sleep for yourself.

RALPH: No!

MOE: Go on! (*Pushes boy into room.*)

SAM (*whom MORTY has sent in for the paper*): Morty wants the paper.

HENNIE: So?

SAM: You're sitting on it. (*Gets paper.*) We could go home now, Hennie! Leon is alone by Mrs. Strasberg a whole day.

HENNIE: Go on home if you're so anxious. A full tub of diapers is waiting.

SAM: Why should you act this way?

HENNIE: 'Cause there's no bones in ice cream. Don't touch me.

SAM: Please, what's the matter. . . .

MOE: She don't like you. Plain as the face on your nose. . . .

SAM: To me, my friend, you talk a foreign language.

MOE: A quarter you're lousy. (*SAM exits.*) Gimme a buck, I'll run it up to ten.

HENNIE: Don't do me favors.

MOE: Take a chance. (*Stopping her as she crosses to doorway.*)

HENNIE: I'm a pushover.

MOE: I say lotsa things. You don't know me.

HENNIE: I know you—when you knock 'em down you're through.

MOE (*sadly*): You still don't know me.

HENNIE: I know what goes in your wise-ony head

MOE: Don't run away. . . . I ain't got hydrophobia. Wait. I want to tell you. . . . I'm leaving.

HENNIE: Leaving?

MOE: Tonight. Already packed.

HENNIE: Where?

MORTY (*as he enters followed by the others*): My car goes through snow like a dose of salts.

BESSIE: Hennie, go eat. . . .

MORTY: Where's Ralphie?

MOE: In his new room. (*Moves into dining room.*)

MORTY: I didn't have a piece of hot pastrami in my mouth for years.

BESSIE: Take a sandwich, Hennie. You didn't eat all day. . . . (*At window*): A whole week it rained cats and dogs.

MYRON: Rain, rain, go away. Come again some other day. (*Puts shawl on her.*)

MORTY: Where's my gloves?

SAM (*sits on stool*): I'm sorry the old man lays in the rain.

MORTY: Personally, Pop was a fine man. But I'm a great boy for an honest opinion. He had enough crazy ideas for a regiment.

MYRON: Poppa never had a doctor in his whole life. . . . (*Enter RALPH.*)

MORTY: He had Caruso. Who's got more from life?

BESSIE: Who's got more? . . .

MYRON: And Marx he had.

(*MYRON and BESSIE sit on sofa.*)

MORTY: Marx! Some say Marx is the new God today. Maybe I'm wrong. Ha ha ha. . . . Personally I counted my ten million last night. . . . I'm sixteen cents short. So tomorrow I'll go to Union Square and yell no equality in the country! Ah, it's a new generation.

RALPH: You said it!

MORTY: What's the matter, Ralphie? What are you looking funny?

RALPH: I hear I'm left insurance and the man's coming tonight.

MORTY: Poppa didn't leave no insurance for you.

RALPH: What?

MORTY: In your name he left it—but not for you.

RALPH: It's my name on the paper.

MORTY: Who said so?

RALPH (*to his mother*): The insurance man's coming tonight?

MORTY: What's the matter?

RALPH: I'm not talking to you. (*To his mother*): Why?

BESSIE: I don't know why.

RALPH: He don't come in this house tonight.



MORTY: That's what *you* say.

RALPH: I'm not talking to you, Uncle Morty, but I'll tell you, too, he don't come here tonight when there's still mud on a grave. (*To his mother*): Couldn't you give the house a chance to cool off?

MORTY: Is this a way to talk to your mother?

RALPH: Was that a way to talk to your father?

MORTY: Don't be so smart with me, Mr. Ralph Berger!

RALPH: Don't be so smart with *me*.

MORTY: What'll you do? I say he's coming tonight. Who says no?

MOE (*suddenly, from the background*): Me.

MORTY: Take a back seat, Axelrod. When you're in the family—

MOE: I got a little document here. (*Produces paper.*) I found it under his pillow that night. A guy who slips off a roof don't leave a note before he does it.

MORTY (*starting for MOE after a horrified silence*): Let me see this note.

BESSIE: Morty, don't touch it!

MOE: Not if you crawled.

MORTY: It's a fake. Poppa wouldn't—

MOE: Get the insurance guy here and we'll see how— (*The bell rings.*) Speak of the devil. . . . Answer it, see what happens. (*MORTY starts for the ticker.*)

BESSIE: Morty, don't!

MORTY (*stopping*): Be practical, Bessie.

MOE: Sometimes you don't collect on suicides if they know about it.

MORTY: You should let. . . . You should let him. . . . (*A pause in which ALL seem dazed. Bell rings insistently.*)

MOE: Well, we're waiting.

MORTY: Give me the note.

MOE: I'll give you the head off your shoulders.

MORTY: Bessie, you'll stand for this? (*Points to RALPH.*) Pull down his pants and give him with a strap.

RALPH (*as bell rings again.*) How about it?

BESSIE: Don't be crazy. It's not my fault. Morty said he should come tonight. It's not nice so soon. I didn't—

MORTY: I said it? Me?

BESSIE: Who then?

MORTY: You didn't sing a song in my car a whole week to settle quick?

BESSIE: I'm surprised. Morty, you're a big liar.

MYRON: Momma's telling the truth, she is!

MORTY: Lissen. In two shakes of a lamb's tail, we'll start a real fight and

then nobody won't like nobody. Where's my fur gloves? I'm going downtown. (*To SAM*): You coming? I'll drive you down.

HENNIE (*to SAM, who looks questioningly at her*): Don't look at me. Go home if you want.

SAM: If you're coming soon, I'll wait.

HENNIE: Don't do me any favors. Night and day he pesters me.

MORTY: You made a cushion—sleep!

SAM: I'll go home. I know . . . to my worst enemy I don't wish such a life—

HENNIE: Sam, keep quiet.

SAM (*quietly; sadly*): No more free speech in America? (*Gets his hat and coat.*) I'm a lonely person. Nobody likes me.

MYRON: I like you, Sam.

HENNIE (*going to him gently; sensing the end*): Please go home, Sam. I'll sleep here. . . . I'm tired and nervous. Tomorrow I'll come home. I love you . . . I mean it. (*She kisses him with real feeling.*)

SAM: I would die for you. . . . (*SAM looks at her. Tries to say something, but his voice chokes up with a mingled feeling. He turns and leaves the room.*)

MORTY: A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush. Remember I said it. Good night. (*Exits after SAM.*) (*HENNIE sits depressed. BESSIE goes up and looks at the picture calendar again. MYRON finally breaks the silence.*)

MYRON: Yesterday a man wanted to sell me a saxophone with pearl buttons. But I—

BESSIE: It's a beautiful picture. In this land, nobody works. . . . Nobody worries. . . . Come to bed, Myron. (*Stops at the door, and says to RALPH*): Please don't have foolish ideas about the money.

RALPH: Let's call it a day.

BESSIE: It belongs for the whole family. You'll get your teeth fixed—

RALPH: And a pair of black and white shoes?

BESSIE: Hennie needs a vacation. She'll take two weeks in the mountains and I'll mind the baby.

RALPH: I'll take care of my own affairs.

BESSIE: A family needs for a rainy day. Times is getting worse. Prospect Avenue, Dawson, Beck Street—every day furniture's on the sidewalk.

RALPH: Forget it, Mom.

BESSIE: Ralphie, I worked too hard all my years to be treated like dirt. It's no law we should be stuck together like Siamese twins. Summer



shoes you didn't have, skates you never had, but I bought a new dress every week. A lover I kept—Mr. Gigolo! Did I ever play a game of cards like Mrs. Marcus? Or was Bessie Berger's children always the cleanest on the block? Here I'm not only the mother, but also the father. The first two years I worked in a stocking factory for six dollars while Myron Berger went to law school. If I didn't worry about the family who would? On the calendar it's a different place, but here without a dollar you don't look the world in the eye. Talk from now to next year—this is life in America.

RALPH: Then it's wrong. It don't make sense. If life made you this way, then it's wrong!

BESSIE: Maybe you wanted me to give up twenty years ago. Where would you be now? You'll excuse my expression—a bum in the park!

RALPH: I'm not blaming you, Mom. Sink or swim—I see it. But it can't stay like this.

BESSIE: My foolish boy. . . .

RALPH: No, I see every house lousy with lies and hate. He said it, Grandpa—Brooklyn hates the Bronx. Smacked on the nose twice a day. But boys and girls can get ahead like that, Mom. We don't want life printed on dollar bills, Mom!

BESSIE: So go out and change the world if you don't like it.

RALPH: I will! And why? 'Cause life's different in my head. Gimme the earth in two hands. I'm strong. There . . . hear him? The air mail off to Boston. Day or night, he flies away, a job to do. That's us and it's no time to die. *(The airplane sound fades off as MYRON gives alarm clock to BESSIE which she begins to wind.)*

BESSIE: "Mom, what does she know? She's old-fashioned!" But I'll tell you a big secret: My whole life I wanted to go away too, but with children a woman stays home. A fire burned in my heart too, but now it's too late. I'm no spring chicken. The clock goes and Bessie goes. Only my machinery can't be fixed. *(She lifts a button: the alarm rings on the clock; she stops it, says "Good night" and exits.)*

MYRON: I guess I'm no prize bag. . . .

BESSIE *(from within)*: Come to bed, Myron.

MYRON *(tears page off calendar)*: Hmmm. . . . *(Exits to her.)*

RALPH: Look at him, draggin' after her like an old shoe.

MOE: Punch drunk. *(Phone rings.)* That's for me. *(At phone.)* Yeah? . . . Just a minute. *(To RALPH)*: Your girl. . . .

RALPH: Jeez, I don't know what to say to her.

MOE: Hang up? *(RALPH slowly takes phone.)*

RALPH: Hello. . . . Blanche, I wish. . . . I don't know what to say. . . .  
Yes. . . . Hello? . . . *(Puts phone down.)* She hung up on me. . . .

MOE: Sorry?

RALPH: No girl means anything to me until. . . .

MOE: Till when?

RALPH: Till I can take care of her. Till we don't look out on an airshaft. Till we can take the world in two hands and polish off the dirt.

MOE: That's a big order.

RALPH: Once upon a time I thought I'd drown to death in bolts of silk and velour. But I grew up these last few weeks. Jake said a lot.

MOE: Your memory's okay?

RALPH: But take a look at this. *(Brings armful of books from JACOB'S room—dumps them on table.)* His books, I got them too—the pages ain't cut in half of them.

MOE: Perfect.

RALPH: Does it prove something? Damn tootin'! A ten-cent nailfile cuts them. Uptown, downtown, I'll read them on the way. Get a big lamp over the bed. *(Picks up one.)* My eyes are good. *(Puts book in pocket.)* Sure, inventory tomorrow. Coletti to Driscoll to Berger—that's how we work. It's a team down the warehouse. Driscoll's a show-off, a wiseguy, and Joe talks pigeons day and night. But they're like me, looking for a chance to get to first base too. Joe razed me about my girl. But he don't know why. I'll tell him. Hell, he might tell me something I don't know. Get teams together all over. Spit on your hands and get to work. And with enough teams together maybe we'll get steam in the warehouse so our fingers don't freeze off. Maybe we'll fix it so life won't be printed on dollar bills.

MOE: Graduation Day.

RALPH *(starts for door of his room, stops)*: Can I have . . . Grandpa's note?

MOE: Sure you want it?

RALPH: Please—*(MOE gives it.)* It's blank!

MOE *(taking note back and tearing it up)*: That's right.

RALPH: Thanks! *(Exits.)*

MOE: The kid's a fighter! *(To HENNIÉ)*: Why are you crying?

HENNIÉ: I never cried in my life. *(She is now.)*

MOE *(starts for door. Stops)*: You told Sam you love him. . . .

HENNIÉ: If I'm sore on life, why take it out on him?

MOE: You won't forget me to your dyin' day—I was the first guy. Part of



your insides. You won't forget. I wrote my name on you—indelible ink!

HENNIE: One thing I won't forget—how you left me crying on the bed like I was two for a cent!

MOE: Listen, do you think—

HENNIE: Sure. Waits till the family goes to the open air movie. He brings me perfume. . . . He grabs my arms—

MOE: You won't forget me!

HENNIE: How you left the next week?

MOE: So I made a mistake. For Chris' sake, don't act like the Queen of Roumania!

HENNIE: Don't make me laugh!

MOE: What the hell do you want, my head on a plate?! Was my life so happy? Chris', my old man was a bum. I supported the whole damn family—five kids and Mom. When they grew up they beat it the hell away like rabbits. Mom died. I went to the war; got clapped down like a bedbug; woke up in a room without a leg. What the hell do you think, anyone's got it better than you? I never had a home either. I'm lookin' too!

HENNIE: So what?!

MOE: So you're it—you're home for me, a place to live! That's the whole parade, sickness, eating out your heart! Sometimes you meet a girl—she stops it—that's love. . . . So take a chance! Be with me, Paradise. What's to lose?

HENNIE: My pride!

MOE (*grabbing her*): What do you want? Say the word—I'll tango on a dime. Don't gimme ice when your heart's on fire!

HENNIE: Let me go! (*He stops her.*)

MOE: WHERE?!!

HENNIE: What do you want, Moe, what do you want?

MOE: You!

HENNIE: You'll be sorry you ever started—

MOE: You!

HENNIE: Moe, lemme go— (*Trying to leave*): I'm getting up early—lemme go.

MOE: No! . . . I got enough fever to blow the whole damn town to hell. (*He suddenly releases her and half stumbles backwards. Forces himself to quiet down.*) You wanna go back to him? Say the word. I'll know what to do. . . .

HENNIE (*helplessly*): Moe, I don't know what to say.

MOE: Listen to me.

HENNIE: What?

MOE: Come away. A certain place where it's moonlight and roses. We'll lay down, count stars. Hear the big ocean making noise. You lay under the trees. Champagne flows like— (*Phone rings. MOE finally answers the telephone*): Hello? . . . Just a minute. (*Looks at HENNIE.*)

HENNIE: Who is it?

MOE: Sam.

HENNIE (*starts for phone, but changes her mind*): I'm sleeping. . . .

MOE (*in phone*): She's sleeping. . . . (*Hangs up. Watches HENNIE who slowly sits.*) He wants you to know he got home O.K. . . . What's on your mind?

HENNIE: Nothing.

MOE: Sam?

HENNIE: They say it's a palace on those Havana boats.

MOE: What's on your mind?

HENNIE (*trying to escape*): Moe, I don't care for Sam—I never loved him—

MOE: But your kid—?

HENNIE: All my life I waited for this minute.

MOE (*holding her*): Me too. Made believe I was talkin' just bedroom golf, but you and me forever was what I meant! Christ, baby, there's one life to live! Live it!

HENNIE: Leave the baby?

MOE: Yeah!

HENNIE: I can't. . . .

MOE: You can!

HENNIE: No. . . .

MOE: But you're not sure!

HENNIE: I don't know.

MOE: Make a break or spend the rest of your life in a coffin.

HENNIE: Oh God, I don't know where I stand.

MOE: Don't look up there. Paradise, you're on a big boat headed south. No more pins and needles in your heart, no snake juice squirted in your arm. The whole world's green grass and when you cry it's because you're happy.

HENNIE: Moe, I don't know. . . .

MOE: Nobody knows, but you do it and find out. When you're scared the answer's zero.



HENNIE: You're hurting my arm.

MOE: The doctor said it—cut off your leg to save your life! And they done it—one thing to get another. (*Enter RALPH.*)

RALPH: I didn't hear a word, but do it, Hennie, do it!

MOE: Mom can mind the kid. She'll go on forever, Mom. We'll send money back, and Easter eggs.

RALPH: I'll be here.

MOE: Get your coat . . . get it.

HENNIE: Moe!

MOE: I know . . . but get your coat and hat and kiss the house good-bye.

HENNIE: The man I love. . . . (*MYRON entering.*) I left my coat in Mom's room. (*Exits.*)

MYRON: Don't wake her up, Beauty. Momma fell asleep as soon as her head hit the pillow. I can't sleep. It was a long day. Hmmm. (*Examines his tongue in buffet mirror*): I was reading the other day a person with a thick tongue is feeble-minded. I can do anything with my tongue. Make it thick, flat. No fruit in the house lately. Just a lone apple. (*He gets apple and paring knife and starts paring.*) Must be something wrong with me—I say I won't eat but I eat. (*HENNIE enters dressed to go out.*) Where you going, little Red Riding Hood?

HENNIE: Nobody knows, Peter Rabbit.

MYRON: You're looking very pretty tonight. You were a beautiful baby too. 1910, that was the year you was born. The same year Teddy Roosevelt came back from Africa.

HENNIE: Gee, Pop; you're such a funny guy.

MYRON: He was a boisterous man, Teddy. Good night. (*He exits, paring apple.*)

RALPH: When I look at him, I'm sad. Let me die like a dog, if I can't get more from life.

HENNIE: Where?

RALPH: Right here in the house! My days won't be for nothing. Let Mom have the dough. I'm twenty-two and kickin'! I'll get along. Did Jake die for us to fight about nickels? No! "Awake and sing," he said. Right here he stood and said it. The night he died, I saw it like a thunderbolt! I saw he was dead and I was born! I swear to God, I'm one week old! I want the whole city to hear it—fresh blood, arms. We got 'em. We're glad we're living.

MOE: I wouldn't trade you for two pitchers and an outfielder. Hold the fort!

RALPH: So long.

MOE: So long.

(*They go and RALPH stands full and strong in the doorway seeing them off as the curtain slowly falls.*)

Curtain