

THREE RINGS

A Play in Three Acts

by

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SYNOPSIS

Two brothers meet in a bank to go through the contents of their deceased parents' safe deposit box.

Each item removed spurs a memory as we see the creation and dissolution of a mid-century American family: a father and mother who probably shouldn't have had children, yet a couple unable to set their children free. Two brothers dependent on each other who gradually become enemies. A family that plays any games necessary to get what they each want.

These stories are told using three actors playing each of four characters, all at different ages, enabling each character to play off the ghost of his or her younger or older selves.

The story is told cinematically, with each scene and location easily fading into the next.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

THE FATHER

Louie, around 22
Lou, around 45
Louis, 65 years old

THE MOTHER

Trixie, around 22
Bea, around 45
Beatrice, 65 years old

FIRST SON

Joey, around 10
Joe, around 16
Joseph, 39 years old

SECOND SON

Timmy, around 5
Tim, around 15
Timothy, 29 years old

TIME

1944-1984.

PLACE

Manhattan, Long Island and Florida.

ACT I

(No curtain. Onstage is a large oblong table and two plain wooden chairs, lit from above by a white pool of light. Blackness outside the circle. On the table: an open safety-deposit box, an ashtray, cigarettes, matches.

Lights out.

Lights up. TIMOTHY, seated, smoking. JOSEPH, standing, going through the safety-deposit box)

Where's that ring?

JOSEPH

What?

TIMOTHY

The ring. The ring.

JOSEPH

What ring?

TIMOTHY

You know. Grandpa's ring. It was round; it had a round... garnet, I think, and then diamonds around that.

JOSEPH

Hmmm...

TIMOTHY

Have you seen it?

JOSEPH

Isn't it in there?

TIMOTHY

Oh, there it is.

JOSEPH

Where?

TIMOTHY

Right there. On your finger.

JOSEPH

Oh, this.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, that. It's mine.

JOSEPH

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It is? TIMOTHY

It is. It was promised to me. JOSEPH

Maybe so. But it was given to me. TIMOTHY

Who gave it to you? JOSEPH

Mommy. TIMOTHY

Well then, she had no right to give it to you. Grandpa promised it to me. JOSEPH

As I said, maybe so, but he willed it to Mommy and she gave it to me. TIMOTHY

So unfair. JOSEPH

What's so important about this ring? It's not worth anything. TIMOTHY

What are you talking about? It's a diamond ring. JOSEPH

Chips, they're just chips. I had it appraised. TIMOTHY

Oh, so keep it if you want to. I'm not going to fight over a ring. I just don't think it's fair. JOSEPH

I'm telling you, it's not worth more than three hundred dollars. I'll buy it from you. That's all you'd get. TIMOTHY

Then I'll buy it from you. How's that? If that's all it's worth. JOSEPH

Joe, I don't want this ring hocked. It means more to me than this month's rent. TIMOTHY

I wouldn't hock it. JOSEPH

TIMOTHY

Like hell. Remember Grandma's silver candlesticks that you were so adamant about? All that sentimental value horseshit. Two months ago I saw them in the window of an antique store on Hudson Street.

JOSEPH

Here's Bea's charm bracelet. What should we do with this?

TIMOTHY

Oh no, I'm not gonna be the bad guy. What do you wanna do with it?

JOSEPH

Well, you got the ring; I should get this.

TIMOTHY

Let's not start on the ring business again.

JOSEPH

It's only fair.

TIMOTHY

You talking about fair, that's rich. Let me see it.

JOSEPH

I've been giving in to you since we got here.

TIMOTHY

I just wanna LOOK at it, for Christ's sake.

JOSEPH

Oh, here, here.

(HE throws it on the table)

We should have a lawyer here, I think.

TIMOTHY

Gee, I forgot all about this. She had these little silhouettes made in gold with our names on them. Do you remember? Look. A little gold head with my birthday and my birthstone for an eye. I'd really like to buy this from you.

JOSEPH

Well, it's got my head on it too! My birthday, my birthstone.

TIMOTHY

Why don't we just rip our respective heads off and hock the rest? How's that sound?

JOSEPH

Let me see.

(TIMOTHY gives it back to him)

This thing opens up, doesn't it?

TIMOTHY

What?

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JOSEPH
This gold heart. I think it opens up and there's pictures inside.

TIMOTHY
Don't fool with it.

JOSEPH
I just wanna look at it!

(HE tries to open the charm; the lid breaks off in his hand)

TIMOTHY
Brilliant. You can have it now.

JOSEPH
See? Pictures.
(The heart opens up. HE pulls out a string of miniature pictures)
Who is this? Is this me?

TIMOTHY
No, I think it's me. Now I remember. That was taken in Montauk.

JOSEPH
No, I think it's me. At Northport Beach. You were never there.

TIMOTHY
No, this one is you.

JOSEPH
Oh yeah.

TIMOTHY
Look at the shape of your head. You look like a pear.

JOSEPH
Well you've got your finger up your nose.
(THEY laugh)
Look at this? Why does she have a photo of our old Packard? Do you remember that car?

TIMOTHY
Before my time.

JOSEPH
Who's this?

TIMOTHY
Whaddya mean, who's this? That's Daddy.

JOSEPH
It is?

TIMOTHY
Sure it is. Sorta looks like you.

JOSEPH
God, I hope not. You can have it.

TIMOTHY
It's yours. What am I gonna do with a charm bracelet? What else is in there?

JOSEPH
Shouldn't we have a lawyer in here?

TIMOTHY
He's already been through this stuff a hundred times over.

JOSEPH
No, I mean... just for... well, it doesn't matter. I just thought the lawyer was supposed to go through this with us.

TIMOTHY
I told him I didn't want him here. But give him a call, if you like.

JOSEPH
No, no...
(HE looks through the box)
Look, there's a... what the hell is this?
(HE takes out a small round can)
It looks like a can of film.
(HE opens it)
It is. It's a movie.
(HE takes out the spool of film,
unravels some of it, holds it up to the
light)
I wonder why they put this in there?

TIMOTHY
What is it? Can you tell?

JOSEPH
It's some old home movie. You can have it.

TIMOTHY
But why keep it in the bank? It's like... Agatha Christie, or something. Maybe this is the missing piece of the puzzle, the thing that ties everything together.

JOSEPH
Probably just some 1940s porn.

TIMOTHY
We have to at least run it. It wasn't on the inventory; probably has all the answers to every question you ever had.

JOSEPH

The mysteries of the universe revealed on a strip of celluloid.

(HE tosses it to TIMOTHY)

Let me know how it turns out. I'll read the book.

(HE continues riffling through the box.
TIMOTHY holds the film up to the light)

TIMOTHY

Someone. Someone running. It looks like a beach. There's water. I see water.

(A screen descends, obscuring JOSEPH and TIMOTHY. Played out on the screen is a faded home movie, slightly out-of-focus. A MALE FIGURE, naked, stands at the water's edge. The waves break. HE runs back and forth along the surf. The camera jerkily follows him. HE stops, picks up a stone, skims it across the waves. HE points out to sea, turns around, looks directly at the camera. Freezes. HE quickly covers himself with his hands. Runs around, embarrassed, looking for cover. HE runs towards the camera, picks a towel up off the sand, throws it. The screen goes black. A woman's laughter is heard and the screen ascends. Onstage is TRIXIE, her head covered by a towel, laughing. LOUIE, naked, quickly grabs another towel, wraps it around himself)

LOUIE

What the hell did you wanna go and do that for?

TRIXIE

Just to see your face. And it was worth a million bucks, Nature Boy.

LOUIE

We can't even develop that. We'll have to throw it out.

TRIXIE

Over my dead body, you're throwing it out. This is gonna give me a good laugh when I'm old and withered.

LOUIE

You kidding? I can't bring this into the drugstore. They'll develop it, then they'll have me arrested.

TRIXIE

My father'll develop it for us. He knows how.

LOUIE

Oh, sure. Then he'll think I'm a pervert, on top of everything else. He'll never let me take you out ever again. Is that what you want?

TRIXIE

Oh, Pop's got an open mind. He'll get a kick out of it. He'll say: (Thick German accent:) "No wonder he was the lucky one to catch such a pretty fish as you. He was using a bigger hook!"

(SHE laughs. LOUIE turns red)

LOUIE

Cut it out. My mother wouldn't be so understanding.

TRIXIE

No need to tell me about your mother.

LOUIE

Don't start in now.

(HE sits on the blanket, lights a cigarette)

TRIXIE

I'm not starting anything. It's not your fault she belongs in an asylum.

LOUIE

Come on now, Trixie. Don't be mean. She's just getting scared, is all. She don't really mean those things she said.

TRIXIE

Oh, I'm not talking about me, but now that you mention it, I don't usually get called a whore when I meet someone for the first time. But face it, Louie. Someone who hangs a chicken on her laundry line in order to "get the poison out" is certifiable.

LOUIE

All she's got in this world is me. And now she's afraid I'm gonna leave her, too. She's like that with all my girlfriends.

TRIXIE

All of 'em, huh? I better leave you alone if you're so busy.

LOUIE

Oh, I didn't mean it like that. I just mean that she don't like me seeing girls.

TRIXIE

Like who?

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Huh?

LOUIE

Who else doesn't she like?

TRIXIE I'd like to know I'm not the only whore in town.

Oh, any other girl I bring home she doesn't like.

LOUIE

How 'bout a name?

TRIXIE

Oh... Dottie Schumacher.

LOUIE

She dyes her hair.

TRIXIE

Oh, now, I don't think so.

LOUIE

Oh, Louie, you're sweet, but you got a lot to learn about women if you think that's true. No woman has hair that color naturally. The only thing is my friends and I have all known her for years and she's had that color for as long as we've known her. No one knows what color it really is. Must be something awful if she's been covering it up this long. Must be green. Who else?

LOUIE

I never knew you had a mean streak.

TRIXIE

It's not mean. I just don't want you to go through life with a woman who's going to be bald in ten years. Is that mean? Who else?

LOUIE

I was seeing Elsie Buchner for a while.

TRIXIE

Oh? Elsie Buchner? Her father's a Nazi.

LOUIE

Oh, come on now, you don't know that.

TRIXIE

Well, my father told me it was true and he writes for the German newspaper, so if he says it's true, it must be true. You know, the postman told us her father is always getting postcards from Berlin and they have all this nonsense like "The ducks are fine this year," and "Susie says you should grow tomatoes," and all this other stuff obviously in code, and they're all signed, get this: "A.H."

LOUIE

Oh, so what? Probably a relative on vacation.

TRIXIE

Oh, sure. If I had a free week this year, the first place I'd go on vacation is Berlin. I bet the Reichstag is swingin'. Who else?

LOUIE

I ain't playing this game no more. Enough.

TRIXIE

Come on, come on. I'm curious.

LOUIE

Yeah, and you're perfect, I suppose. You got no faults, right?

TRIXIE

I did not say that. Did I? Come on, tell me. Of course I understand if you're embarrassed about admitting to this...

LOUIE

All right. Okay. Louisa Weber.

TRIXIE

You never dated Louisa Weber.

LOUIE

I did. Last summer.

TRIXIE

Hmmm. Louisa Weber.

LOUIE

Yeah. So what's wrong with her?

TRIXIE

Nothing. Nothing at all.

LOUIE

Come on, come on, what's the matter with her?

TRIXIE

I told you! Nothing! She's perfect. She's heaven on earth. Go on and marry her, for crying out loud.

LOUIE

What's wrong now?

TRIXIE

Go ahead. She's cute, she's fun at parties, everybody loves her. You'll be the envy of all your friends. Of course "Louis and Louisa" is gonna look pretty stupid on the invitations, but you'll get over that. It'll be wonderful! And would you mind taking me home now?

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LOUIE

What is this?

TRIXIE

Not only that, but think of all that money! I'll bet that's at the top of your list, huh? You'll get a job in Daddy's pork shop, then take over when he kicks; set for life. How nice for you.

LOUIE

I don't want that.

TRIXIE

Like mud. You got cellophane on your heart, I see right through you. We can still see each other too, when I stop to pick up my order. Maybe you'll sneak in an extra frankfurter in memory of old times. If you learn how to keep your finger on the scales without getting caught, you can save up for a new house for Louisa and all your little kiddies.

LOUIE

Geez. You talk about my mother. You're a bigger fruitcake than she is. I don't want to be a butcher. You think I want to spend my days sticking my hands up some dead pig's ass?

TRIXIE

Awww, you're breakin' my heart. It's good money.

LOUIE

Not if somebody else is making it. I don't believe in that. You do all the work and then the boss comes in and cleans up. That's not for me. I gotta start from scratch. How else can you feel you're worth anything?

TRIXIE

Gee... I don't know...

(SHE stares out to sea)

LOUIE

What's wrong with you now?

TRIXIE

Nothing. Just thinking.

LOUIE

(Nuzzling her:) Thinking 'bout what?

TRIXIE

Nothing.

(SHE stands)

We better get going, it'll be dark soon.

LOUIE

NOW what did I do?

TRIXIE

I told you... nothing.
(SHE starts packing up)
(Under her breath:) It's what you didn't do.

LOUIE

Come on, sit back down. You know how I feel.

TRIXIE

I only know what you tell me, Mr. Clam.

LOUIE

I'm not good at telling. Talk, talk, talk. What's it mean, anyway? I'm better at showing.

(HE starts setting up a tri-pod, places the camera on top of it, focuses the camera, etc.)

TRIXIE

Yeah, you're a regular Mr. Show-and-Tell. You show me nothing, tell me nothing. How'm I supposed to get the message? Through brain waves or something? Excuse me, but your signal's weak. What are you doing?

(LOUIE has finished setting up the camera)

LOUIE

I told you I was better at showing. C'mere.
(HE takes her in his arms. SHE stands downstage, covering him)
Now, in the future, if you ever have any doubts, you just have to watch this movie.

TRIXIE

You nut. Have you got that camera on?

LOUIE

I'll show your father something to make his hair stand on end.

(HE kisses her and slowly pulls down the straps of her bathing suit. His towel falls to the ground. Lights out and lights up on another area of the stage. BEA, 40, sits at a Formica table with four chairs. The remains of breakfast is on the table. SHE drinks coffee. TIMMY, 6, drinks a glass of chocolate milk through a straw. JOE, 16, sits backward on his chair, which is pushed several feet away from the table. HE smokes a cigarette)

BEA

He was a German, Joe. In those days, during the war, I really didn't have much of a choice. Not that I didn't love him, but in my neighborhood the only other boy my age was Gus Messerschmitt. Gus had a head like a sledgehammer and a personality to match. So: be grateful HE'S not your father. And believe me, if I were the type of woman who believed in bad omens, your father wouldn't be your father. Everything seemed to be going against us, right from the start. But. Luckily for you, we plodded on. I mean, there were problems with the blood tests, they mixed up the results, we had to do them over, then we had to do them over again. The printer misspelled my name on the invitations. The place where were having the reception, when I called up to make the arrangements, they thought I said "fifteen" instead of "fifty," so thirty-five people went without dinner. What else? Oh yeah, when the paper printed our announcement, the mixed up the plates or something and our wedding announcement was printed on the Obituaries page. Upside-down. I'm telling you, it was... if it could've gone wrong, it did. I'm laughing now, but back then I don't think my eyes were dry for a week. But the icing on the cake... oh, yeah, remind me to tell you about what happened to the cake. Anyway, you know what a kook your grandmother is, I mean, she's simmered down a bit, but back then she was a real whirling dervish. Every time it'd rain, she'd rip off all her clothes, everything, run outside, throw herself in the gutter and start praying. Anyway, here we are, me and your father, saying our vows, everybody watching, and the priest gets to the part about "if anybody here sees any reason why these two shouldn't be married," you know, and you always think wouldn't it be funny if somebody did? Well, at our wedding, somebody did. This lunatic comes running down the aisle, screaming "You're not gonna marry that Lutheran bitch!" Your grandmother. Some of the ushers tried to stop her, but, well, she was old but she was strong. She barreled right through 'em. She even decked one of 'em; socked him right in the mouth, broke his jaw. She started cursing at us in German, cursing me, cursing my family. Everybody was running out of the pews, trying to stop her before she could get to me, but she was knocking 'em down like bowling pins. We still don't know how she got out of the house that day. I mean, everyone knew she was going to try something, so no one told her where or when the wedding would be. They had one of her pinochle friends keeping her company and they locked both of them in the house. When they got her home, they found out she'd conked her friend over the head with a soup tureen and she'd gotten out somehow. The doors were all locked from the outside. She had bars on all the windows; she was afraid gargoyles were going to fly in during the night and carry her off. We still don't know how she got out.

BEA (CONTINUED)

Anyway, she's knocking over everybody in the church trying to get to me. She yanks off my veil, and I put on the ugliest face I can think of, curl my fingernails, stick out my tongue, pop out my eyes and say "Ich will dich fressen!" which is "I'm going to eat you!" in German, and she faints dead away. Everyone applauds. The priest led us into his chambers and married us there, while the family took her back home. Should've taken her straight to the loony bin. So you see, if I'd believed in omens, you wouldn't be here today.

(JOE grunts, stubs out his cigarette,
starts to exit)

NOW where are you going?

JOE

Out.

BEA

Out? We're having lunch in an hour.

JOE

I don't want lunch.

BEA

Whaddya mean? Stay with us.

JOE

See ya.

(HE exits)

BEA

(Yelling after him:) You're supposed to help your father! Listen to him: "see ya." You're supposed to... I wanted you to help me today! (Sighs) Can't tell him anything. Can't get him to do anything for you. I hope you won't grow up like that.

TIMMY

I won't.

BEA

You promise?

TIMMY

Uh-huh.

BEA

He's always been like that. Never does what you want him to do. Always looking for an argument. Even when he was a kid: a troublemaker.

TIMMY

What did you say to Grandma?

BEA

Huh?

TIMMY

What was it you said to Grandma again?

BEA

(Baring her teeth, bulging her eyes, turning her hands into claws:) Ich will dich fressen!

(SHE grabs ahold of his hand, nibbles at his fingers. HE giggles with delight. Lights fade on them and come up on JOEY, 6, and LOUIE, 25, walking on the beach. LOUIE holds JOEY's hand)

LOUIE

Look for something we can give your mother. Okay, Joey? Let's find something pretty.

(JOEY shakes LOUIE's hand loose, runs a few steps ahead)

Oh no ya don't.

(LOUIE runs after him, takes him by the hand)

You stay with me. Where'd Tootsie go? You see her?

(Calls:) Tootsie! Here, girl!

(HE whistles)

Where'd she go, Joey? You think she's chasing a birdie? A birdie for her supper? You want her to bring you back a little birdie?

(HE whistles again. JOEY imitates him, puckering his lips, letting out a stream of air)

What, you tryin' to whistle?

(LOUIE squats down to his level)

Pucker up your lips like this:

(HE demonstrates. JOEY imitates)

Now. Pull your tongue to the back of your mouth and keep the tip pointed, like this:

(HE sticks out his tongue. So does JOEY)

No, not flat. Point it, like this. You gotta keep it pointed, that's what makes the whistle. Like this. No, not flat, like this:

(HE sticks his tongue out flat)

Like this.

(HE demonstrates. JOEY copies him)

That's it. Now put your tongue back in your mouth and blow.

(JOEY does, but only air and spit come out. LOUIE laughs)

No, no. You'll get it. You gotta keep practicing. Here, I'll show you another one. You take your thumb and your second finger like this:

(HE makes a high sign)

Put them under your tongue like this, the curl your tongue over and blow.

(HE whistles, loud, high and shrill.

JOEY claps his hands over his ears and laughs. So does LOUIE)

Loud, huh? That's a big man's whistle. You can't do that 'til you get old, like me.

(THEY keep walking, JOEY trying to whistle)

LOUIE (CONTINUED)

That's it. Practice. You'll get it. Ooooooh, look Joey!

(HE bends down, picks up a stone)

Look at this pretty stone! Looks like a pearl, doesn't it? So round. Perfectly round. Here, why don't you bring this back to Mommy?

(HE hands JOEY the stone who looks at it for a moment then turns and tosses it out to sea)

Joey, don't! Oh, now what did you wanna go and do that for, huh? Joey? Why'd you do that? That wasn't nice.

(JOEY laughs)

Okay, we'll find something else.

(JOEY grabs LOUIE's pants leg, pulls on it, makes a whining sound)

What? What do you want?

(The whining gets stronger)

What, you want up?

(A confirmation; an insistent whine)

Okay, okay. Up we go!

(HE grabs JOEY's arms and lifts him in the air, over his head. JOEY laughs.

LOUIE looks up at his face and smiles.

HE tickles him. JOEY giggles)

You like it up there?

(HE sits JOEY on his shoulders)

Hold on, now.

(LOUIE stands, looking out to sea, JOEY on his shoulders)

Look. See the boat? That's a big boat. Maybe someday we'll have a boat like that. Would you like that, Joey? Someday. Someday. A big boat. Big car. Big house. Hmmm? Could take you out fishing. Bring home a big fish for Mommy. And have contests. Who catches the biggest fish. That'd be good. Oooooh, look, Joey! Look at that sailboat. Wouldn't THAT be nice? A sailboat? Would you like to have that, Joey, take Mommy out for a sail? Live in that house up there on the cliff? See it, Joey? I could wave to you in the sailboat. Can't afford but a walk on the beach right now. Someday. You gotta help me, Joey. (Singsong:) First you get the money, then you get the sailboat... First you get the money... Money, money, money, money...

(HE has been bouncing up and down on his heels, bouncing JOEY along with him.

JOEY likes it at first, then gets impatient and wants down. HE wriggles, but can't get free. HE pulls LOUIE's hair)

Owww, shit! What the hell are you doing?

(HE takes JOEY off his shoulders)

LOUIE (CONTINUED)

If you wanna get down, tell me! Don't just pull on my hair! Do you understand me? That's a very bad thing, like when you threw your lima beans on the floor the other day, do you remember that? If you don't like something, tell somebody. Don't just do whatever you feel like. Don't just throw your lima beans on the floor, for Christ's sake. Or pull my hair. You understand, young man?

(JOEY nods)

Well answer me if you do!

JOEY

Uh-huh.

LOUIE

Jeez.

(THEY continue walking. JOEY sees something on the ground. HE picks it up, looks at it a minute, pops it into his mouth)

LOUIE

Joey, what did you just put in your mouth? Joey? Spit it out! Spit it out in my hand! Do as I tell you! What was it? Joey?

(HE grabs him behind the head, pries his mouth open, sticks his fingers in his mouth)

Where is it? Did you swallow it? Joey!

(HE takes his hand out. HE holds something small and round)

What the hell is this?

(HE throws it away)

Don't ever do that again, Joey! There might be all kinds of germs on something like that, you don't know. Some dog comes along, makes a pee-pee on that, and you put it in your mouth, for Christ's sake!

(JOEY breaks free of him, runs offstage)

Did you hear me? Don't run away from me when I'm talking to you! Get over here! Get over here, Joey. Joey! Jesus, get outta the water! You got your new shoes on!

(HE starts to run offstage, JOEY runs on, giggling, his shoes soaking wet, water sloshing out)

Look at that! Look at your shoes! Brand-new, goddammit. Don't you laugh at me when I'm yelling at you!

(HE grabs JOEY by the shoulders, puts his face up against his)

You listen to me! Do you know how long I worked to buy those shoes?

(HE shakes JOEY by the shoulders like a rag doll)

And then you go and ruin 'em! Have some respect.

(HE slaps JOEY on the backside, hard. JOEY, stung, glares at him. JOEY slaps him square in the face, pulls free, runs offstage. LOUIE is dumbfounded for a moment, then his rage boils over)

LOUIE (CONTINUED)

What the hell do you think you're doing, you little son of a bitch! Don't you dare hit me! Who do you think you are? I'll knock you into tomorrow!

(His fists are clenched, his neck bulging, his face red. HE pauses, relaxes somewhat, sighs and throws himself on the ground. His voice gets cloudy)

I can't do it... I can't... I can't do it... What am I gonna do?

(A long pause)

I wanna kill him.

(Lights out. Lights up on JOEY on the girder of an unfinished apartment building, five flights up. HE wears winter clothes)

JOEY

(Pointing:) The Empire State Building! This is great. I'm gonna come here a lot.

(HE walks back and forth along the girder, balancing with his arms)

They can't get me! They can't get me!

(A pause)

Uh-oh. Here they come.

(LOUIE and TRIXIE are heard from below)

LOUIE

There he is!

TRIXIE

Oh my God!

LOUIE

There he is!

JOEY

Look at 'em. Stupid jerks.

TRIXIE

How'd he get up there?

LOUIE

How the hell should I know?

TRIXIE

Joey... Joey...

LOUIE

Get down here! Get the hell off of there!

JOEY

I like it up here. He looks smaller. He looks like a teeny little...

TRIXIE

Call the police or something.

LOUIE

What are the police gonna do, would you tell me?

JOEY

Like a bug. Like something in a microscope. Like an amoeba. Get outta here, you amoeba.

TRIXIE

Well do something!

LOUIE

What am I supposed to do? Huh? What do you want me to do?

JOEY

Hey. I got an idea.

(HE squats down on the girder, grabs onto it with his arms and lets the rest of his body dangle, swinging his legs back and forth)

Help!

LOUIE

(A scream:) Joey!!!

TRIXIE

Oh my God, my God!!

(This convulses JOEY with laughter. HE pulls himself back up on the girder and laughs)

TRIXIE

Oh, Joey, please!

LOUIE

You heard your mother!

JOEY

Look at 'em. If I spit right now, I could probably get him right in the eye. I heard that if you drop a penny off the top of the Empire State Building, it'll make a hole in the sidewalk a foot deep. Maybe if I spit on him, it'll go right through and come out the back of his head.

(HE spits)

LOUIE

Hey! That little bastard is spitting on us! You better not come down from there, 'cause I'll beat the shit out of you if you do!

TRIXIE

What the hell do you wanna say that for, you stupid. Now he'll be up there all night.

LOUIE

Ahh, let him stay there. I'm going home.

JOEY

Yeah, go on home.

TRIXIE

Oh my God. Joey, please!

LOUIE

Look what you're doing to your mother! I hope you're happy!

JOEY

As a matter of fact, I am.

LOUIE

Come on, come on. Let's go.

TRIXIE

No!

LOUIE

Come on, he'll come down. You'll see. This is just what he wants.

JOEY

Good. One down, one to go.

TRIXIE

Joey, please. Please come down. We're sorry. Your father's sorry. He didn't mean to yell. You know how he gets.

JOEY

Leave me alone!!!

(A pause)

TRIXIE

Fine. Be that way.

JOEY

Alone at last! Hooray!

(HE walks around, doing a balancing act on the girder. HE sings a made up tune, with gibberish for lyrics)

JOEY (CONTINUED)

I could stay up here a long time. I guess I'd have to go home to eat. But then they'd never let me come back here. No, I could stay here. The workmen bring sandwiches and stuff. I've seen 'em. They'd like me. They'd give me stuff to eat. I could stay here forever if I wanted to. I could. And when they finish the building then I could just move into one of these apartments. It'd be nicer than ours; it's bound to be. This one's mine, right here at the top. This is mine. It's got a big bedroom right here, where I can see the Empire State Building. It's got a big kitchen right over here, and I can make what I want to; no asparagus. It's got a big... It's got big everything. Big, big. I'm staying here. I'm gonna have to go to the bathroom. I can just stay up here and pee on everyone. That's good. Make everyone scared of me. Everyone's gonna have to bring an umbrella to work, 'cause they know I'm here, waiting for 'em. I'm here! I'm here!

(A pause)

I wish they'd hurry up and finish this building. I'm cold.

(A police siren sounds)

Oh, no... oh, no...!

(The police siren grows louder. JOEY takes off his jacket, jumps off the girder onto the stage and is met by TRIXIE)

TRIXIE

Don't go in there.

JOEY

Why?

TRIXIE

Never mind why. Stay here with me. I'll make you a grilled cheese sandwich.

JOEY

I don't want no sandwich. It's two o'clock.

TRIXIE

I told you, don't go in there! Sit down.

(HE does)

JOEY

There's a police car outside. And a ambulance.

TRIXIE

It'll be gone soon.

JOEY

What's it doing here?

(TRIXIE starts to cry)

What is it? Did I do something bad?

(SHE shakes her head. Her crying

intensifies. HE starts to cry as well)

Whatsa matter, Mommy?

(SHE shakes her head. LOUIE enters.
SHE looks up at him)

LOUIE

They've gone.

(TRIXIE tries to stop crying)

TRIXIE

I have to make a list. I have to call... I've gotta remember who to call...

LOUIE

Here.

(HE puts a ring on the table)

I took this off his finger. I figured the police'd steal it.

(JOEY grabs for the ring. TRIXIE grabs his hand)

TRIXIE

Let go.

(A pause. HE doesn't)

Give it to me!

(SHE twists his fingers until HE drops the ring. SHE grabs it. JOEY runs off)

LOUIE

Come back here!

TRIXIE

Let him go.

LOUIE

Did you tell him?

(TRIXIE shakes her head. JOEY re-enters)

JOEY

Where's Grandpa?

LOUIE

Tell him.

JOEY

I'm supposed to read to him now. Did he go to the store?

TRIXIE

I can't.

JOEY

He said he was gonna take me Christmas shopping.

(TRIXIE runs off. JOEY looks at LOUIE)

What do you want for Christmas, Daddy?

THREE RINGS I-22

I want a good boy. LOUIE

What? JOEY

Sit down. LOUIE

Why? JOEY

Do as I tell you. LOUIE
(HE sits. A pause)
Okay, Joey. I'm sorry, but your Grandpa was very, very sick. And he died.

(A pause)

You're lying. JOEY

What? LOUIE

You're a lousy liar. JOEY
(LOUIE slaps his face)

I'm your father. Remember that. LOUIE

Then why are you lying? JOEY

Don't you say I'm lying again, do you understand? LOUIE

Let go o' me! JOEY

I'm not lying! He's dead! LOUIE

Mommy! JOEY

Don't go running to your mother. Listen! If I tell you something, it's the truth. I don't lie. Listen! LOUIE

I won't listen to you. Mommy! JOEY
(TRIXIE re-enters)
Mommy, Daddy said Grandpa's dead.

TRIXIE

Yes, Joey. He died.

JOEY

(A scream:) NOOOO!!!!

(Lights out on them. Lights up on
TIMOTHY and JOSEPH at the table. More
articles from the safe deposit box lie
about)

JOSEPH

I ran away from home that weekend. I didn't plan to go for
good, I just wanted to scare them so I went to the city and
saw a movie.

TIMOTHY

What movie?

JOSEPH

"Sabrina." Anyway, I got home and all these cop cars were
outside. I just walked in like nothing. Lou must've given
me hell, but I don't even remember. I ran away from home a
lot in those days, most times they didn't even know; I'd be
home for dinner. I went to the cemetery a lot. I always
thought Grandpa would show up, sit down beside me and say "I
didn't really die. I just had to get out of there." And I
stayed mad at him as long as I believed that. You know, he
really was the only friend I had back then. We were already
making plans to move to the new house so the kids in the
neighborhood stayed away from me like I had the pox. They
knew I wouldn't be there in September. He was also the only
one who did anything with me. Took me on trips. To the
zoo, you know. Lou was always too busy with something and
Bea, well, I don't know what she had to do, but she was
never around.

TIMOTHY

Awww....

JOSEPH

I tried to do some of the things we did together by myself.
But... well, for instance, he used to take me to every
saloon up and down Queens Boulevard. I'd sit on his lap and
he'd let me sip the head of his beer.

TIMOTHY

That sounds dirty.

JOSEPH

But they wouldn't let me in those places without him. They
didn't even know who I was. Bea would try to find some time
for me, but then she wouldn't know what to do. She was
spoiled; she'd had him taking care of me for so long. And
the only place we seemed to go was dress shopping. I didn't
have much patience as far as that was concerned.

TIMOTHY

"If you don't stop, I'm never taking you shopping with me again!"

JOSEPH

Exactly. As if that was some kind of threat. But I stayed mad. Even after we moved to the new house. I made friends in school, but then I was left back a grade. And I had no friends again. And I got madder. But nowadays I think back to how he used to sit me on his lap and read to me. He taught me some words in German so that when Lou and Bea would start talking German so I wouldn't know what they were saying, I really did. We had private jokes like that between us. Maybe that's what I missed the most; I had no one on my side. He let me comb his moustache. He taught me the transit system so I knew it like the back of my hand. When other kids couldn't get around the corner, I knew how to get to Elizabeth and Delancey. I remember the beer halls the best. All that carved wood, stuffed deer heads on the walls. One we used to go to had a bowling alley - I loved that. He used to let me wear his ring. During the summer, he had a straw hat that I just loved. He'd let me wear that, too. I wonder whatever happened to that straw hat? Probably sold in an umpteenth garage sale. When I think about these things, I'm not mad anymore.

(HE cries. A pause)

TIMOTHY

Oh, here, take it, take it!

(HE pulls the ring off his finger)

JOSEPH

What?

TIMOTHY

Take the goddamned ring already!

(HE slams it down on the table)

JOSEPH

You mean it?

TIMOTHY

There's no denying you're a member of this family, I'll tell you that. You use feelings like a deck of playing cards.

JOSEPH

What do you mean?

TIMOTHY

What the hell was the point of that little sob story? If not to get me to give you the ring? That's an old trick you picked up from Mommy. And it's so compulsive I bet you don't even know you're doing it. I think it's sick. See something you want and use any ploy to get it, no matter how damaging. Make it look like you've been violated, someone will give in to you sooner or later. Your mistake was playing the game in front of me. 'Cause I know all the rules. And Rule One is that there are no rules. I've seen it played out a million times and I've had it played on me a million times. Look, Joe, use your head. I'm not a total stranger who'll think all that horseshit was the truth. That's the problem, Joe. I know you. I know you. I can smell something like that coming from a mile away. I see put on your poker face, but it's no good. I've seen your cards. The thing to remember is: I always know it's a game. I was dealt in the day I was born. It was probably played the night I was conceived. Your mistake is that YOU think it's for real. You play it so well you believe it. But I know that "I used to comb his moustache" is just another chip in the kitty. Hold for a reaction, then up the ante with "I loved that straw hat." Tears are always good. Everyone seems to think that can't be faked. Tears are the Royal Flush. Please. The stakes are always way too high; I fold. The players are always out to win, no matter what, win. No matter how meaningless the victory, win. No matter how much of yourself you've sacrificed in the process, win. Well, you won. Happy? Take the ring.

(Lights out on them. Lights up on
TRIXIE, at table. LOUIE enters behind
her, holding a lit birthday cake. HE
sings:)

LOUIE

"Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday to you,
Happy Birthday, Little Cutie...
(HE comes up behind her, nuzzles her)
...Happy Birthday to you!"

(HE puts the cake on the table in front
of her)

TRIXIE

Oh, isn't that beautiful? Oh, thank you!

(SHE kisses him)

LOUIE

Make your wish.
(SHE doesn't even think. SHE blows out
all the candles. Blackout. LOUIE
lights a match, lights two candles on
the table)
That was quick.

I knew what I wanted. TRIXIE

Well, I hope you get it. LOUIE

We'll see. TRIXIE

(SHE giggles)

I'm sorry I don't have a present to give you. LOUIE

Oh, that's okay. TRIXIE

(SHE slices the cake)

You said you didn't want one. LOUIE

I don't. Well, you bought this house! That's my present. TRIXIE
Good enough for me.

(SHE hands him a slice of cake)

Nice to be alone for a change, isn't it?

What time do I have to pick him up? LOUIE

You don't. The Bordens are having him stay overnight. TRIXIE

Oh. LOUIE

(A pause. HE looks at her)

Oh.

(SHE leers at him. HE laughs)

Oh-ho!

You want another drink? TRIXIE

I've had enough. You tryin' to get me drunk? LOUIE

(SHE laughs. A pause)

No. TRIXIE

(SHE gives herself a piece of cake.
THEY eat)

TRIXIE (CONTINUED)

Oh, wait'll you see what I'm gonna do with this place. First off, I'm having our old living room furniture re-upholstered.

LOUIE

Let's not get carried away.

TRIXIE

Oh, well, we have to! It looks like hell the way it is. I need to get some kind of table for the entranceway. I've been looking, but I haven't seen anything I like yet.

LOUIE

Uh-huh.

TRIXIE

We need a coffee table in there, too.

LOUIE

What's wrong with the one we got?

TRIXIE

Oh, Louie.

LOUIE

What's wrong with it?

TRIXIE

The legs are broken and the table part's got water rings on it and it's scratched. That's what's wrong with it.

LOUIE

So? A little furniture polish is all you need. I can fix the legs.

TRIXIE

We're getting a new one, and that's all there is to it. No arguments. We're also eventually going to need a china closet for the dining room, and some kind of a thing, what do you call it? Like a buffet. A sideboard.

LOUIE

What, are you going crazy? What do we need all that shit for? We got plenty.

TRIXIE

Come on, Louie. Did you expect to move from a two-room apartment to a seven-room house and not have to buy any more furniture? Be reasonable.

LOUIE

You're the one who's unreasonable. Sure, we can get some furniture, but we don't need it by Saturday night, do we?

No. TRIXIE

All right, then. LOUIE

It's my birthday. Humor me. TRIXIE

Sure, sure. LOUIE

TRIXIE
You know what I'd really like to do? When we can afford it?
I'd like to have the whole basement finished. Put in some
wood paneling. Give parties. Wouldn't that be nice?

LOUIE
Sure, it'd be nice. It'd be nice to have a swimming pool in
the backyard, too.

TRIXIE
I'm talking eventually. But I hate it down there now. It
looks like a cave down there.

LOUIE
Well, that's all we can afford right now. A cave.

TRIXIE
Oh, you!
(SHE slaps him, playfully. A pause)
Want another piece of cake?

LOUIE
Not now.
(A pause)
But I think I will have another drink.

TRIXIE
I'll get it.

LOUIE
No, you sit. It's your birthday. It's the least I can do.

(SHE laughs. HE goes offstage. A
pause. SHE talks louder, so HE can
hear)

TRIXIE
I haven't figured out yet what to do with that extra
bedroom.

(A pause)
I wanna put something in there.

(A pause)
What do you think?

(HE re-enters, with drink)

Gee, I dunno. LOUIE

Want me to tell you what I want for my birthday? TRIXIE

I thought you didn't want anything. LOUIE

I want another baby. TRIXIE

(A pause. HE looks at her)

What, you gone nuts? LOUIE

(A pause)

No. TRIXIE

Well, I think you have. LOUIE

We can afford it. TRIXIE

We're too old. LOUIE

No we're not. TRIXIE

I don't care. No more. LOUIE

Can I have a reason? TRIXIE

Yeah, I'll give you a reason. But he's spending the night at the Borden's. LOUIE

Oh, come on. TRIXIE

I mean it! I can't manage another one like him. One's enough. LOUIE

But that's Joey. The next one'll be different. TRIXIE

And if it's not? What are we gonna do, return it? Use your head. What do you want to put yourself through all that trouble again for? LOUIE

I don't mind. TRIXIE

Oh, sure. LOUIE

TRIXIE
But this one'll be so much easier! We know what to expect, we've been through it all already. All the problems we've had, we can nip right in the bud before they happen.

LOUIE
No. Now that's final. We don't have the time, we really don't have the money, and besides, I don't want one. Is that good enough for you? No more arguments. We'll turn that bedroom into a study.

TRIXIE
Yeah, all that studying we do.

LOUIE
Never mind.

(A pause. LOUIE drinks. TRIXIE picks at the icing on her cake)

TRIXIE
You know, we wouldn't have to spend much time with it. Joey's old enough now to babysit, and change diapers and all of that. I mean, it wouldn't take up all that much more time.

LOUIE
I thought we'd closed this discussion.

TRIXIE
I know, I know... I was just thinking.

LOUIE
Well then, please don't think. You'll get us into trouble.

(HE laughs)

TRIXIE
Everyone on the block has two kids. Some have more.

LOUIE
Awww, Trixie. That's no good reason.

TRIXIE
Well, wouldn't you like to have another little version of you running around?

LOUIE

That's what I thought the first time. But if that's what I was like when I was a kid, I don't know why my mother didn't drown me at birth. I'm serious now. When I first saw him, in the hospital, I thought, here's this new little guy. No ideas, no thoughts, no nothing. It's all up to us. We'll have to teach him everything; he depends on us to show him the way. Well, I was dead wrong. I always thought that a personality developed from nothing, you got back whatever you put in, but not with this kid. His personality was there, he was born with it, like his eyes and ears. His hands were small, his feet were small, but he was a fully-developed troublemaker at birth. There was nothing we could do about it.

(A long pause)

TRIXIE

But this would teach him responsibility! This is the best lesson I can think of to teach him the facts of life. I mean, it's no wonder he's run wild. He's got nothing to hold him down. A new baby would show him he can't just run off whenever and wherever he wants to. He'd have to learn respect, and we can't seem to be able to teach him. But this would. Take my word for it.

LOUIE

You've really got this stuck in your craw, haven't you? No. How many times do you need to have me say it?

TRIXIE

I don't want him to be an only child, goddammit! I was an only child, and I know what that's like. Sitting in the house on a rainy day, nothing to do, my father reading his books. Play with me. Later, later, when I finish this. My mother in the kitchen. Play with me. Can't you see I'm busy? Can I help? Give me something to do. You just sit there like a good girl and be quiet. Then, when I got older and found things to do, the worrying. Where are you going? With who? What time will you be home? Why are you going with him? Is it any wonder I couldn't wait to get out as quick as I could? The first chance, the first open door? I used to pray they'd have another kid, just so there'd be someone else for them to worry about. But they were too old. It was too late for them. But it's not too late for us. It's not. We still have a chance for Joey not to take the first thing that comes along. He has to hate us, we're all he knows. He has to get mad when we punish him, because he doesn't see anyone else getting the same treatment. You understand? If we had somebody else here, the blame would be divided equally. All of his bad feelings for us would be divvied up. He'd have a partner. And he's all we know, too. We have nothing to compare him to. That's why we take all our bad feelings out on him. With someone else here, we wouldn't have to. Do you see? He wouldn't hate us for always blaming him, because he'd see us blaming somebody else. And we wouldn't always blame him, because there'd be somebody else to blame. Everything would be equal.

TRIXIE (CONTINUED)

I'm not putting this very well, but do you understand? Oh, forget it. I can tell this is falling on deaf ears.

(SHE puts her head in her hands and cries)

LOUIE

Don't cry now. Come on, I'm sorry.

TRIXIE

Yeah, sure. How sorry?
(A pause)
I'm going to bed.

LOUIE

Already? It's your birthday! Let's do something, now that we've got the house to ourselves. Let's play a game.

TRIXIE

Are you cracked? I'm in no mood for games. You made sure of that.

LOUIE

Oh, come on. I wanna cheer you up. On your birthday.

TRIXIE

What have you got in mind?

LOUIE

Well... remember how we used to play hide and seek at your parent's house? That was fun. You used to like that.

TRIXIE

Oh, I don't know.

LOUIE

If you don't wanna play with me, that's okay. You can go to bed.

TRIXIE

No, I'll play if you want to.

LOUIE

Nah, I don't wanna force you.

TRIXIE

No, it's okay. I'll play.

LOUIE

Okay. I'll hide. You count.

TRIXIE

No, I wanna hide.

LOUIE

(Whining:) No...

It's my birthday. TRIXIE

Okay. You can hide. LOUIE

Count to a hundred by fives. TRIXIE

Okay. Ready? LOUIE

Yeah. Close your eyes. TRIXIE

Okay. No peeking. Go. (HE does)

Five, ten, fifteen, twenty... LOUIE

Wait, wait. That's too fast; I won't even get to the end
of the hall. Like this:
 (SHE counts very slowly:)
Five... ten... fifteen... twenty...

Okay, okay. LOUIE
(He closes his eyes and begins counting,
slowly, as SHE taught him. SHE,
meanwhile, takes off a shoe, puts it
down in front of him, moves back a few
feet, takes off another shoe, leaves it
on the floor. SHE moves back a few more
feet, unfastens her garters, pulls off a
stocking, leaves it on the floor. Moves
a few more feet, leaves the other
stocking. SHE goes offstage, and her
half-slip flies in, lands a few feet in
front of the stocking)

Ninety... ninety-five... one hundred! Ready or not, here
I come!

 (HE opens his eyes. HE sees TRIXIE's
clothing on the floor. A pause. HE
sighs, sheepishly blows out the candles.
Lights come up on JOSEPH and TIMOTHY at
the table)

Well, go on. Take it. TIMOTHY

I will. JOSEPH

Go ahead. TIMOTHY

JOSEPH
I mean, it's rightfully mine.

TIMOTHY
So take it.

(A pause)
Of course if you take it, you realize you've just gone and proved my point.

JOSEPH
What point?

TIMOTHY
That your story was a bunch of shit. That you only used it to get me to do what you want me to do. That the memory doesn't mean any more to you than a grocery list, you just used it as a means to an end. So go on, take it.

(A pause)

JOSEPH
No, I don't want it now. You can have it back. You take it.

(A pause)
Of course you realize what it means if you take it back.

TIMOTHY
(Smiling) No. What does it mean?

JOSEPH
It shows that you're even worse than I am. You knew that the ring DID belong to me by rights, but rather than just admit it, you play this elaborate game. That way, you knew I wouldn't dare lay claim to it and you get to keep it. Not only that, but you're an Indian Giver.

TIMOTHY
What?

JOSEPH
You're worse than I am. So go on, take it.

TIMOTHY
No.

JOSEPH
Go on.

TIMOTHY
No, if you think you should have it, you take it.

JOSEPH
I don't want you to think I'm stealing something that belongs to you. If you really believe it's yours, take it back.

(A pause)
So what do we do now? Just stand here?

TIMOTHY

We can sit.

(HE sits. So does JOSEPH after a pause)

JOSEPH

Now what?

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(Lights up. TIMOTHY and JOSEPH at table, same as before. A pause)

TIMOTHY

This is ridiculous.

(HE takes the ring, put it back on his finger)

After all, it IS mine. And you're not gonna make me feel guilty about it.

JOSEPH

I'm not making you feel anything.

TIMOTHY

Well, it IS mine. It was given to me. And I shouldn't have to be so defensive about it.

JOSEPH

You do as you please. If you feel guilty, don't pin it on me. That's your problem.

TIMOTHY

What else is in the box?

JOSEPH

Have we finished with this business?

TIMOTHY

I thought so. Unless you have two more cents to throw in.

JOSEPH

No. I just wondered if it was settled.

TIMOTHY

As far as I'm concerned, it is.

JOSEPH

Well... okay.

(HE goes to the box)

TIMOTHY

Oh, wait. I forgot about this.

(HE takes a briefcase off the floor, puts it on the table, opens it)

JOSEPH

Is that your briefcase?

TIMOTHY

Uh-huh.

JOSEPH

Fancy-schmantzy.

TIMOTHY

What do you wanna do with this?

(HE takes an envelope out of the case)

JOSEPH

Since when have you started carrying a briefcase?

TIMOTHY

Oh... I don't know. I DO have a job.

JOSEPH

What else you got in there?

TIMOTHY

Nothing.

(HE closes it)

JOSEPH

Looks like papers.

TIMOTHY

That's what they were.

JOSEPH

What kind of papers? Something I should know about?

TIMOTHY

None of your business! Look, we're here to go through this box, not my pockets. Okay? Now: I got this in the mail.

(HE opens the envelope, takes out a ring)

What do you wanna do with it?

JOSEPH

What is it?

TIMOTHY

What does it look like?

JOSEPH

Looks like her wedding ring.

TIMOTHY

"A" plus. It was sent to me the other day.

JOSEPH

It came in the mail?

TIMOTHY

Well, it was insured.

JOSEPH

Isn't that dangerous?

TIMOTHY

Hell, they didn't just throw it in an envelope and stick a stamp on it! I had to sign for it and everything.

JOSEPH
Hmmm. Why was it sent to you?

TIMOTHY
What do you mean?

JOSEPH
I mean, why didn't I get it? Why didn't I have to sign for it?

TIMOTHY
Oh, for crying out loud, JOE, who gives a good goddamn? I don't know. I was the one they spoke to on the phone, I gave them my address. Who cares?

JOSEPH
I care. I don't like all this stuff behind my back.

TIMOTHY
I shouldn't have even said anything.

JOSEPH
Well, I'd have found out about it eventually.

TIMOTHY
How?

(A pause)

JOSEPH
Don't worry. I'd have found out.

TIMOTHY
(Overlapping:) Look. Let's just finish this up and get outta here. I don't wanna take issue with you on every single thing. Do you want the ring?

JOSEPH
What, you don't want it?

TIMOTHY
No.

JOSEPH
We should first, get it appraised, then we can decide who wants to buy it from whom.

TIMOTHY
It's yours. Here. I don't want to argue.

JOSEPH
Oh. Okay. How much do you want for it?

TIMOTHY
Nothing. It's a gift. Since I was so sneaky about it, as you seem to think.

JOSEPH

Well then, I'm not going to take it. So you can hold this over my head for the rest of our lives. How I cheated you.

TIMOTHY

You're really driving me insane, do you know that?

JOSEPH

I am? You're as bad as me.

TIMOTHY

Okay. Fine. Let's come back to the ring later, how's that? What else is in there?

JOSEPH

Let's hash it out. We need to make a decision eventually.

TIMOTHY

Later, goddamn it!

(A pause)

Come on, what's next?

(JOSEPH goes to the box, pulls out some papers)

JOSEPH

Here's some... looks like stock certificates or something. There's a... what in the world?

(HE reaches into the box, takes out a large metal bowl. HE looks at it. A long pause)

What the...?

TIMOTHY

Let me see.

(A pause)

I won't steal it. I promise.

(JOSEPH gives it to him)

JOSEPH

It's not gold.

TIMOTHY

Oh! This is... It's the hubcap from Mommy's old Pontiac. Remember that car? The red and white one? This is one of the hubcaps.

(A pause. THEY look at each other. And laugh)

JOSEPH

Did they go senile and not tell us? Why would BEA keep a hubcap? Well, wait, that's the wrong question. I mean, it doesn't surprise me she'd keep it, she keeps stationery from a motel in Tucson she stayed in thirty years ago. But in a safe deposit box? I mean, who'd steal it?

(THEY laugh)

JOSEPH (CONTINUED)

Not only that, but I can't believe Lou would let her do it. I mean, all this valuable space he's paying rent on and she fills it up with a hubcap.

TIMOTHY

Daddy probably didn't even know. Knowing Mommy, I see her finding out when he was planning a visit here and getting here a day early, taking it out and then putting it back when he was gone.

JOSEPH

Oh, now I remember it! You know why I'll bet she kept it? This was her first car. I mean, we always had a car but after you were born they could finally afford two, so Lou bought her one of her own. God, yeah, she was nuts about it. Lou dropped a cigarette and burned a hole in the front seat and she cried for days, like she'd lost her virginity again.

TIMOTHY

I remember this hubcap distinctly. I used to think it looked like... what are those things in a casino? See all those grooves along there? A roulette wheel. See here; the one spoke that's black? I did that. I took a crayon and made one of the spokes black. It was a game I had with myself. See, when the car stopped, if this spoke way pointing up, it was good luck. Down, bad. I used to check it every time the car stopped.

JOSEPH

How normal.

TIMOTHY

Didn't you do that? Have games with yourself? I had thousands. Seeing if I could get to the candy store on the corner before I counted to a hundred. Seeing if I could get from the top floor of the house to the basement on one breath. If I could count twenty Volkswagens on the street before I got to school it meant it was going to be a good day. The nice thing about it is that the rules always changed according to how I was doing. Like, if I was at eighty-nine and only halfway to the candy store, I'd change the goal to a hundred and fifty. Or take bigger steps. Or count slower.

JOSEPH

Cheating.

TIMOTHY

I always fixed the rules so I could win. And no one was there to tell me otherwise. Like this.

(HE balances the hubcap on his index finger)

See? I spin this, and if the black spoke points to you, it's good luck for you, bad luck for me. If it points to me, you get it.

(HE spins it. It stops. JOSEPH smiles. A

pause)

Two out of three.

(TIMOTHY spins again. Light out on them. Lights up on the hubcap on the wheel of a car, spinning, stuck in the sand. TIMMY, 6, sits in the sand watching it. HE has a stuffed bear in his lap. The front end of the car is offstage. BEA is heard from off:)

BEA

(Offstage:) Is anything happening?

(TIMMY doesn't respond; HE just watches the wheel. It stops spinning, then spins again)

How 'bout now?

(A car door opens and closes and BEA enters. SHE's in great distress)

Oh my God, my God! Look, I'm just making it worse, it's just getting deeper. Oh, God. Come on, Timmy. Help me. Come on, stand up.

(HE does)

Help me push. Push on the car with me, Timmy.

(SHE heaves against the trunk of the car with all her might. TIMMY bangs on the trunk with the palms of his hands. It doesn't budge)

Wait a minute, wait a minute, stop. Stop banging, Timmy. Maybe it's too heavy.

(SHE runs off, comes back on holding the keys to the car. SHE opens the trunk and begins taking out several different-sized suitcases. While they had been packed with order and efficiency, SHE yanks them out and throws them haphazardly around the beach. SHE mutters as she "unpacks.")

No wonder. Look at all this shit. Why'd I have to take so much? I don't need half this stuff.

(The trunk is empty)

Okay. Good. Now it should go. We'll be fine. Okay, Timmy. I'm going to start the car; you push as hard as you can, okay?

(SHE exits. A car door slams)

(Off:) Oh my God!

(SHE runs back on)

What did I do with the keys? Where the hell are the keys? Oh, Jesus.

(SHE gets down on her hands and knees in the sand)

I must've dropped them. Have you seen 'em? Help me look, Timmy. Oh Jesus, help me. We've gotta find them... Look, Timmy! Are you looking? Look under the suitcases. Maybe I... Maybe they fell out of my hands, maybe they fell under the car. Look! Now wait a minute, wait a minute. Let's calm down. I got out of the car. Did I have the keys? Yes! Yes, I did, because I had to open the trunk.

(SHE goes to the trunk, sees the keys still in the lock)

Oh, thank God! Look, Timmy! Here they are! Oh, thank God.

(It's hard to tell if SHE's laughing or crying. SHE sits on one of the suitcases)

Look at me: lost the keys, now I've lost m' mind.

(SHE laughs/cries)

BEA (CONTINUED)

Let's just sit for a while, okay, Timmy? Let me just... sit. For a minute.

(A long pause. SHE stares out to sea. TIMMY entertains himself; builds a sandcastle or something)

You wanna play the radio, Timmy?

(HE does, HE jumps up and down for the keys. SHE gives them to him)

Now be very, very careful with those.

(SHE takes him by the shoulders, looks into his eyes)

Whatever you do, don't drop them.

(HE goes offstage with the keys. Music is heard from the car radio. TIMMY re-enters, dances around, sings along with the parts of the song HE knows)

Somebody'll come along soon and help us out, don't you worry. I don't see a soul. (Pointing:) Is that someone? Or is that a rock? I can't even tell. We'll be okay. It's a beautiful day, isn't it, Timmy. Not too hot. I could live my whole life at the beach, I swear I could. I was an idiot to take the car down here; I should've known this'd happen. Well, we'll just have to take the four o'clock ferry instead. We'll go someplace nice for dinner, how's that? Where would you like to go, Timmy?

(A pause. SHE looks at him. HE shrugs)

Come over here to me.

(HE does. SHE takes him in her arms)

You love me, don't you, Timmy?

(A pause)

Well, don't you? I love you. Don't you love me?

TIMMY

Uh-huh.

BEA

That's a good boy. Gimme a nice kiss.

(HE does. SHE sings)

"Big fat Mommy, little tiny Baby! Big fat Mommy, little tiny baby..."

(SHE bounces him on her knees. HE giggles)

Where is everybody today? Somebody's gotta help.

(SHE points straight out)

We'll be over there soon, Timmy. Across the water. Away. Just you and me. Joe's big enough to take care of himself; he doesn't need us. He'll manage. He'll be okay. But not you; you're just a little tiny baby. "Big fat Mommy, little tiny Baby..." We'll have a nice trip, it's a beautiful day. My Daddy used to take me on lots of trips when I was a little girl, just like you. He took me to the zoo, he took me to the museum, he took me to the park, he took me all sorts of places. We went to the amusement park and he bought me a candy apple. Would you like that? Go on all the rides? I'll buy you a candy apple. Those are good, aren't they? I feel like a nice juicy steak. Or maybe fried chicken. Would you like fried chicken for dinner with lots of French fries? Doesn't that sound good? We can have whatever we want from now on.

(A long pause)

BEA (CONTINUED)

Did Daddy hit you this morning? Tell me the truth: did he hit you?

(TIMMY shakes his head)

Well, he's never gonna hit you or yell at you or me ever again, I promise. He's never...

(Her voice falters)

He's never gonna be mean to us... Son of a bitch... Oh, God...

(SHE cries for a long time, not saying anything. TIMMY moves away from her, walks around the beach. HE picks up the suitcases, starts stacking them up. HE makes a little house out of them, goes inside. A long pause. HE sticks his head out to see if SHE's watching him. SHE's not. HE sticks his head back in. A pause)

TIMMY

Look, Mommy! This is our house.

(SHE looks over at him)

See? I made us a house.

(Something catches her eye)

BEA

Oh, look, here comes somebody! Get out of there, Timmy, and help me get this stuff back in the trunk.

(SHE topples the house and starts re-packing the trunk. TIMMY stands, looking at the person in the distance)

TIMMY

It's Daddy.

BEA

What? Is it? Oh, God, Timmy, hurry, help me with this.

(SHE throws the rest of the stuff in the trunk, tries to slam it shut, but it won't close)

Oh Jesus, it won't fit. Here. Put this stuff in the back seat. Help me!

(THEY takes some stuff out of the trunk and exit. THEY re-enter; BEA slams the trunk lid and it closes)

There. Now... where are the keys? What the hell happened to the keys?! I gave them to you, Timmy! What did you do with them?!

TIMMY

They're in the car.

BEA

Right. The radio. Are you sure that's him?

(SHE squints)

Oh God, it is. Okay, get in the car, get in the front seat.

(THEY exit. SHE turns off the radio and starts the engine)

BEA (CONTINUED)

(Offstage:) Now I don't want you to say a word. You just sit there.

(A long pause. Nothing. Then LOU enters. HE goes to the back of the car, looks offstage at them)

LOU

So ya got stuck, did ya?

(A long pause. Silence)

Still not talking, huh? What do you plan to do, sit here 'til high tide? You're really nuts, you know that?

(A long pause)

Put it in drive.

(A pause. HE pushes his body against the trunk of the car)

Now step on the gas.

(HE heaves against the car as the wheels begin to spin. HE pushes the end of the car offstage. A pause, and HE re-enters)

Look. Joe's home from work and he wants something to eat. You know I can't cook. And I'm getting a little hungry myself.

(A pause. HE stands there, then exits. A pause. TIMMY enters, looks after him. Lights up on the kitchen table. LOU sits at the head, JOE to his side. THEY wait for dinner. After a pause, BEA enters with two bowls. SHE puts them on the table, goes to TIMMY, picks him up and puts him at his place at the table. SHE exits, then returns with a platter of meat)

BEA

Has everybody got everything?

(Silence. SHE sits)

Now. Can I make a rule here? I don't want any fighting tonight. After last night, I wanna see if we can get through one dinner without a fight. Okay? Joe, pass the meat to your father.

(HE helps himself first, then HE does. TIMMY starts to get up)

Whoa, whoa, where are you going?

TIMMY

Chocolate milk.

BEA

I'll get it. You don't move.

(SHE exits)

LOU

(Shouting to her:) Isn't there any well done?

BEA

(Off:) Sure there is. Right on top.

LOU

It all looks rare to me.
(HE looks at JOE's plate)
No wonder. Joe took it all.

JOE

I don't like rare.

LOU

But did you have to take it all? There must be six slices there.

JOE

So?

LOU

So maybe somebody else wants some, if that's all right with you.

BEA

(Off:) Wait a minute. Wait. Don't you two say another word to each other until I get back to the table.

(A pause and SHE re-enters with a glass of
chocolate milk, which SHE gives to TIMMY.
SHE sits)

Now. What's the problem here?

LOU

Piggy over here took all the well done.

JOE

Gee, I'm sorry. I didn't realize there were rations. Why don't you just do like they do at school: put a sign-out sheet on the table and we all write down what we're taking?

LOU

Don't be a wise-acre. Just put some back and give someone else a chance.

JOE

Oh, here, here.

(HE picks up some meat off his plate, puts it
on LOU's)

LOU

Jesus Christ, what the hell is the matter with you? I don't want it, now that your fingers have been all over it.

JOE

I figured you wouldn't shut up 'til you got some.

LOU

Don't you tell me to shut up.

BEA

Hold on, hold on, I can settle this. Joe, take the meat back.

(JOE does, smiling)

BEA (CONTINUED)

Lou, there's five more well done pieces at the end of the roast, all you have to do is dig for them.

(LOU takes the platter, picks through it)
Everything all right now?

(LOU grunts)
Here, Timmy. Help yourself.

(SHE passes him a bowl of vegetables)

TIMMY

No thank you.

BEA

What's the matter?

TIMMY

I hate peas.

BEA

Oh, I forgot all about it. I've got some corn for you; I'll get it.

(SHE exits)

LOU

Hey, wait a minute. Isn't there another end piece?

BEA

(Off:) Yes, Lou, a roast has two ends; it's there somewhere.

LOU

No, it isn't, Bea.

(SHE re-enters with a bowl of corn, gives it to TIMMY)

TIMMY

Thank you.

JOE

Hey, how come he gets corn? I hated peas too, when I was his age, but you always made me eat them.

LOU

Well, no wonder.

(HE points to JOE's plate)
He took both ends, too.

BEA

Well, he happens to be a baby and you are a grown-up, or so I thought.

JOE

That doesn't answer my question. Can I have some of that corn?

No. TIMMY

Bea, he took both ends, too. LOU

Oh, for crying out loud, here. JOE

(HE starts to pick up a piece of meat)

Oh no you don't. I'll help myself, thank you. LOU
(HE takes his fork, spears a piece of meat)
Wait a minute. I want this one.

(HE stabs another piece, puts it on his plate)

Wait, wait. Are you sure you don't wanna weigh them both before you decide? I mean, it's a big decision. JOE

Just a minute... LOU

Cut it out, you two. BEA

Well I mean really. Does he want to look at the piece I've got in my mouth before he decides? JOE

Look, young man... LOU

Excuse me, but would the two of you both shut up for once? Here you are, arguing about who gets what and Timmy and I are sitting here with clean plates while everything gets cold. Would it be all right if we had something to eat as well? Or do you two cavemen just want to fight it out down to the last piece of gristle? BEA

(A long pause)

Apologize to your mother. LOU

Me? You. JOE

I will too. You first. LOU

I'm sorry. JOE

Apology accepted. BEA

That's better. Here's the meat. LOU

(HE hands BEA the platter)

Hey, bub. You too. BEA

Oh, I'm so very, very sorry. LOU

Like pulling teeth. You're worse than Joe sometimes. Apology accepted. BEA

(SHE takes some meat from the platter, gives it to TIMMY. THEY pass the bowls around and eat)

You going out tonight?

(A long pause)

Uh-huh. JOE

Where are you going? BEA

Out. JOE

No kidding. You're not gonna tell me? BEA

Your mother asked you a question. LOU

What's the point? No matter where I tell you I'm going, you'll make some kind of comment about it. JOE

Listen, Mister, you're fifteen years old. We have a right to know... LOU

Sixteen. JOE

...what you're doing when you're living in this house. LOU

Oh... JOE

(A pause)

THREE RINGS II-50

You going to the city? BEA

No. JOE

Going to a friend's house? BEA

Oh, for Christ's sake. It's Barbara's birthday and we're going
to her house for a party. Her parents are out of town. Okay?
(HE turns to LOU)
Your witness. JOE

Barbara Cohen? BEA

Uh-huh. JOE

The one that wears all that make-up? BEA

See? What'd I tell you? JOE

I didn't mean anything by it. I was just mentioning that she
enjoys wearing make-up. A great deal of it. BEA

Yeah, sure. JOE

(BEA looks at LOU. THEY smile at each other.
LOU winks)

How are you getting there? You need the car? BEA

No. I'm getting a lift. JOE

With who? BEA

Here we go again. A friend. JOE

I'm just trying to stir up a little conversation at the dinner
table, you know. I don't want to be accused of prying into your
personal life. BEA

Well, pick on someone else. JOE

BEA

Okay. Timmy, what are you doing tonight? Going to Roseland with Jayne Mansfield again? Remember, honey, breakfast is at eight o'clock, so try to be home by then.

(SHE and LOU laugh. TIMMY looks lost)

JOE

All right already. Steve D'Amico is picking me up.

BEA

Steve D'Amico?

JOE

Yeah. Satisfied? May I be excused now?

BEA

Just a minute. Didn't you tell me that Steve D'Amico cracked up his father's car?

JOE

Maybe.

BEA

And correct me if I'm wrong, but wasn't he drunk at the time?

JOE

So what?

BEA

Well, first off, if he cracked up the car, how are you getting there?

JOE

He's taking his mother's car.

LOU

What a family that must be.

BEA

Well... I don't think I want you going with him.

JOE

Well. How am I supposed to get there?

BEA

You mean to tell me no one else you know is driving?

JOE

Not from this neighborhood, no.

BEA

What about Rhonnie? She's not going?

JOE

She went to the Catskills with her parents, so no, she's not going. Geez, I knew I shouldn't a told you. I should a made up a name. That's what I get for trying to tell the truth around here.

LOU

Well, look. Your mother and I aren't busy. I'll drive you and when you're ready to come home, you give me a call.

JOE

Are you kidding? I'm not gonna have my father drop me off at the door like I'm five years old. No offense.

LOU

Well, excuse me, Mr. Big Shot. I guess you won't be going then.

JOE

Oh, come on! I can't believe this. I've been in the car with Steve before and he usually a very good driver. And if he's drunk when it's time to go, I'll drive.

BEA

I'll bet he's a fast driver.

JOE

No faster than I am.

(BEA and LOU laugh)

BEA

In that case, you're bound for disaster.

JOE

Oh, come on! I'll tell him to go slow. I'll tell him I've got whiplash and can't go faster than thirty miles an hour.

BEA

Make it twenty.

JOE

Hell, why don't I just walk so I can be there by Tuesday?

BEA

All right, all right. One condition. That you call me as soon as you get there.

JOE

Oh, sure. In front of all my friends I'm going to say, "Excuse me, I have to call my Mommy."

BEA

What's wrong with that?

JOE

Oh, please.

BEA

Okay, do this: When you get there, call up, let the phone ring three times, then hang up. That way, I'll know you arrived in one piece.

JOE

Oh come on, what is this?

BEA

If you won't do one simple thing, you can't go.

JOE

Oh, all right, all right. Jesus. What a worry-wart. If I told my friends about this, they'd never believe me.

LOU

You should be grateful your mother cares about you so much. Not like your friend Steve.

JOE

Yeah, yeah. If the cross-examination is over, I'd like to go get ready.

BEA

Fine with me. (To LOU:) You have anything you wanna say?

LOU

Yeah. Try to be home at a reasonable hour for a change. Your mother waits up.

JOE

I'll be home.

(HE exits)

BEA

(shouting after him:) Don't forget! Give me three rings!
(SHE stands, goes to LOU, picks up his plate)

You done?

(HE nods, pushes his chair away from the table. SHE exits. HE belches. TIMMY looks at him, giggles. HE smiles at TIMMY. BEA is heard from offstage)

(Off:) You better hurry up, we don't have much time. Also, I told the Bauman's we'd pick them up on the way.

(BEA re-enters, dressed in a fancy cocktail dress, circa 1964)

You're gonna shave, aren't you?

LOU

Uh-huh.

BEA

Well, get going!

(HE stands and exits)

And wear what I've laid out for you on the bed if you don't want any arguments.

LOU

(Off:) I'm gonna wear that green jacket.

BEA

Over my dead body. You're gonna wear what I've put out or we're not going. (To TIMMY:) Isn't he silly? Come on, Timmy, let's see what's on T.V.

TIMMY

Are you going out?

BEA

What? No, no... We're not going out. We're just... changing our clothes.

TIMMY

Where you goin'?

BEA

Nowhere. No, we're just going to the store.

TIMMY

Can I go?

BEA

Oh, you don't wanna go. We'll be back in a few minutes. We're just going down to the corner. We're going dress shopping. You don't wanna do that, do you? Besides, I think Joe wants to play a game with you. That's what he told me. Wouldn't you rather do that? And I'll bring you back a nice big candy bar.

TIMMY

I wanna be with you.

BEA

Not when you find out all the games Joe wants to play. We're just going out to find you a surprise and if you come with us, you'll know what it is and that won't be any fun. Wait'll you see. Tomorrow morning you'll wake up and see what it is and you'll be so glad you waited. Let's go find Joe.

(SHE picks him up in her arms and exits. SHE calls, frantically:)

(Off:) Joe? Joe?! Oh, Timmy, no! Oh God, oh God! Timmy... oh, no... no...

(SHE re-enters. Her dress is off; SHE stands in her bra and slip)

Joe?

(JOE enters, eating a doughnut)

JOE

Yeah?

BEA

Go take care of Timmy for me, will ya? He's in the bathroom; he's sick.

(JOE exits)

Lou? Lou, come here.

(LOU enters, wearing a towel, shaving cream on his face)

What is it now? LOU

We can't go. BEA

What's the matter? Why aren't you dressed? LOU

Timmy threw up. He threw up all over my dress. BEA

Well, Joe'll take care of him. Come on, shake a leg. LOU

No, we can't go. BEA

Why? LOU

That's my only dress. BEA

Very funny. You got dresses you don't even know what to do with. You could open a dress shop. LOU

But no one's seen that one before. BEA

Don't go crazy now. Pick one and let's go. LOU

Maybe he's really sick. BEA

Oh, Bea, he does it every time! He'll outgrow it. What, I never get to go out again because the kid doesn't like to be away from his Mommy? No. You can stay home if you want to, hold his hand, tuck him in, but I'm not wasting another Saturday night. LOU

God, how unfeeling. BEA

LOU

I got plenty of feelings. But this is getting ridiculous. He has to learn we're not always gonna be here. You worry about him so much, we'll never be able to leave the house. Besides, Joe's here to take care of him, he doesn't need you as well. Wasn't that the point of this little exercise? To teach Joe some responsibility? Well, here's your chance to try it out. I'm sure he'd much rather be with Joe, anyway. You know what your problem is? You're always giving him exactly what he wants, whenever he asks for it. It's your fault he's like this.

BEA

All right, I won't think about it. Let's just go. Joe has the number to call in case anything happens. Come on.

(SHE exits)

LOU

That's right. He acts like this now, but ten minutes after we're gone, he won't remember our names. They'll have a good time, just the two of them all alone in the house. Fun and games on a Saturday night.

(HE exits. Music: Soundtrack from a '50s horror movie. TIMMY sits inches away from the T.V. screen, intent on the proceedings. HE watches for a minute, then a commercial comes on. HE looks around the room. A pause)

TIMMY

Joe? Joe, where'd you go? You making popcorn? The good part's coming! Joe? Joe?

(A pause. Then, a blackout. Another pause. TIMMY sits in the darkness. There is terror in his voice, which HE tries to hide)

Joe? Where are you? The lights went out. I can't see anything. Are you upstairs?

(TIMMY bumps into something; there's a crash)

Joe, I fell down! I broke something.

(A pause. Then, music: Poulenc's Organ Concerto in G Minor. TIMMY's voice gets a little more worried)

Joe? Where are you? I can't see.

(The sound of footsteps coming down a staircase, very very slowly and very loudly. TIMMY stops trying to hide the fear in his voice)

Joe? Is that you?! Joe, somebody's coming down the stairs, Joe, help me, somebody's coming to get me!

(HE screams at the top of his lungs. The footsteps stop. A pause; just the music is heard. Then TIMMY can be heard sobbing. Another pause and TIMMY lights a match in the dark. HE looks around. The room is empty)

I found some matches!

(HE walks around, holding the match. It burns down to his fingers and HE drops it. A pause. Then, JOE appears far upstage holding a lit flashlight under his chin, cackling demonically. TIMMY screams again, starts to cry)

TIMMY

Joe! Help me, Joe! Help me! Help!

(JOE turns off the flashlight, the cackling stops. TIMMY's sobbing subsides. Silence, save for the music. TIMMY strikes another match. JOE stands directly behind him. He's pulled his shirt over his head so as to appear headless and he has his arms stretched out in front of him, one hand holding a huge carving knife. TIMMY turns around. JOE lets out a fierce growl, moves towards him. TIMMY scream louder than before, drops the match. Blackout)

Don't kill me, please don't kill me! Help me, Joe! Joe...

(It takes much longer for TIMMY to quiet down. When HE finally does, HE lights another match. The room is empty. HE looks around)

Joe, he's gone! The monster's gone, Joe!

(TIMMY finds an empty Chianti bottle with a candle stuck in its mouth. HE lights the candle)

That's better.

(HE starts to walk around the room)

What am I gonna do? Maybe the monster got Joe, maybe he's got Joe!

(This starts him crying again)

I gotta hide. I gotta hide and wait for Mommy and Daddy. They'll come home and scare the monster away. Or maybe Joe'll come back, kill the monster and save me. I'll hide under the sofa; he won't find me.

(HE walks over to the sofa. A hand shoots out from underneath and grabs onto his leg. HE screams his loudest, drops the candle, the bottle shatters, the light goes out. The sound of a scuffle. A hand is clapped over TIMMY's mouth. More scuffling, then TIMMY is heard again. His voice is muffled. HE pounds his fists)

Help me! Help me! The monster put me in a coffin! Help, Joe! I'm in a coffin!

(The lights come back up. Center stage is a large cardboard box, turned upside down. TIMMY is obviously inside, pounding to get out. JOE enters, holding a bowl of popcorn in one hand, a portable tape recorder in the other. HE looks at the box, giggles. HE goes over to it, pounds on it, growls. TIMMY screams, then subsides to whimpering. JOE shuts off the tape recorder, the music stops.

THREE RINGS II-58

HE sits in front of the T.V., munches popcorn.

Music: a Cha-Cha. LOU and BEA dance on.
THEY're very good; THEY've been practicing)

BEA
Have you noticed? We're the only ones dancing.

LOU
Guess they don't wanna be shown up.

BEA
God, that dinner was lousy, huh?

LOU
Oh, I don't know.

BEA
Cooking is not one of Marilyn's high cards.

LOU
I'm glad we came, though.

BEA
Oh, me too.
(THEY dance)
You think the kids are all right?

LOU
Just dance. We had an agreement.

BEA
You're right; I'm sorry.
(THEY dance)
You know, I've been thinking. I wanna go back to work.

LOU
Huh?

BEA
There's a lady at church who's willing to take care of him 'til one of us gets home.

LOU
Yeah? How much?

BEA
Oh, it's really cheap.
(SHE laughs)
Almost too cheap. She must be lonely.

LOU
Sounds fine, if YOU take care of it.

BEA
Uh-huh.
(THEY dance)
I think Joe's smoking in the bathroom.

LOU
Yeah?
(HE laughs)

BEA
Either that, or... But he uses up a can of Glade every two weeks.

LOU
That's a good one. Hey, what happened to our agreement?

BEA
Oh. Sorry.
(THEY dance)

LOU
You know what I found in his night table? The instruction booklet that comes in your box of Tampax.

BEA
You're kidding. Oh God...
(SHE laughs)
He must be really hard up for a thrill. And what, may I ask, were you doing in his night table, Sneaky-Pete?

LOU
I was looking for...

BEA
Tsk, tsk, tsk.

LOU
Yeah, listen. My house, my night table. I can look in there if I want to.

BEA
Did you happen to read that love letter from Barbara Cohen?

LOU
You too?

(THEY laugh. THEY dance)

BEA
Did I tell you Timmy wrote a letter to the Tooth Fairy?

LOU
No. Did he?

BEA

Well, another one of his teeth fell out last week and so I left a quarter under his pillow. And when he came down to breakfast he was so upset, 'cause he'd gotten fifty cents for his first tooth. So I give him this big explanation of how the first tooth to go is always the most important, but he wasn't buying any of it. The second tooth was way bigger than the first; it should be worth more. So he sat down and wrote a letter telling the Tooth Fairy he thought he'd been gypped. Pretty soon he's gonna be asking her for interest on the rest of his mouth. I swear, he's gonna grow up to be just like you.

LOU

And what's wrong with that?

(SHE laughs)

Listen to us. We're finally out of the house. And we had an agreement. Can't we talk about anything else?

BEA

Sure we can. Go ahead. You start.

(A pause. THEY dance. HE laughs)

Yeah, I figured as much.

(Joe goes over to the box, turns it over and opens the flaps. Timmy is whimpering.)

JOE

What the hell are you doing in there?

TIMMY

Oh, Joe! Oh, Joe, you're all right!

(HE jumps out of the box, throws his arms around JOE. JOE shakes him free)

JOE

What's the matter with you?

TIMMY

Oh, Joe, didn't you see the monster?

JOE

What monster?

TIMMY

A big monster was here! A monster without a head! And he came and he put me in the box and he wouldn't let me out.

JOE

He came?

TIMMY

Yeah.

(JOE laughs)

And all the lights went out and I couldn't see anything.

JOE
What, are you going crazy? I've been sitting right here; I didn't see any monster.

TIMMY
All the lights went out!

JOE
No they didn't. I've just been sitting here watching the movie.

TIMMY
No, the lights went out when you went upstairs to make the popcorn.

(A pause)

JOE
No, I had the popcorn down here the whole time. I never left the room.

TIMMY
Yes you did!

JOE
No, I didn't. Boy, you must be going crazy. I'll have to tell Mommy and Daddy. Maybe you need to go to the hospital.

TIMMY
No! No, don't tell 'em!

JOE
Are you gonna tell them you saw a monster?

TIMMY
No, I won't tell 'em. If you don't tell 'em I'm crazy. We can pretend like it didn't happen.

JOE
But it didn't happen. I think I better tell 'em.

TIMMY
Oh, no! Please. PLEASE.

JOE
Well... okay.

TIMMY
Boy, I was scared. I was sure there was a monster. Maybe I was dreaming it was a monster.

JOE
Yeah, maybe. Shut up, this is the best part of the movie.

(HE watches T.V., eating popcorn. BEA and LOU have stopped dancing and are sitting in folding chairs, resting. LOU drinks a Scotch. TIMMY grabs a handful of popcorn, runs to LOU, sits on his lap)

THREE RINGS II-62

LOU
Careful! You'll spill my drink!

BEA
Timmy, where's your brother?

TIMMY
He's with his friends. They told me to go away. They wanna go to the beach.

BEA
Where?

TIMMY
Over there.
(HE points)
His friend Rhonnie called me a brat.

BEA
Joe? Joe, come here?
(JOE gets up, goes to her, leaving the popcorn behind)
Come with me. I wanna introduce you to somebody.

JOE
Ugh. Please.

BEA
Flossie brought her daughter. See? She's all alone.

JOE
Oh, come on. If Flossie's daughter is anything like Flossie, I pass.

BEA
Just say hello. She likes The Supremes too.

(THEY exit)

LOU
Isn't it past your bedtime, young man?

TIMMY
I like to watch you dance.

LOU
Yeah, you like that?

TIMMY
You're better than anybody.

LOU
That's just 'cause we practice. That's the important thing. I used to get a lot of exercise, believe it or not. Your mother and I both, we used to be very athletic. You wouldn't know it to look at us now. Not with this big gut hanging out. Did I ever tell you how your Mommy and I met each other?

(LOUIE enters, holding JOEY by the hand)

LOUIE
You stay here with me, young fellow, and I'll tell you a story.

JOEY
Mommy's going for a ride in the car.

LOUIE
Never you mind about that. If she'd a wanted you with her, she'd a took you.

JOEY
I wanna go!

LOUIE
You stay here with me. Sit on my lap.
(HE sits, puts JOEY on his lap. JOEY
squirms)
Sit still. Stop it now, or no dessert.

LOU
We met at the Turnverein. That was a place in the city where
you'd go for sports. You know?

TIMMY
Like gym class?

LOU
That's right. A gym. I used to go there to play basketball with
my friends. Well, this one day I got there early and your mother
was there.

(Lights up on TRIxie, in a leotard, walking a
balance beam. SHE continues a routine on the
bar throughout the scene)

LOUIE
No, no. There's an American word for it. You know, when you
play basketball in school, where do you go?

JOEY
The playground?

LOUIE
No, no. Like the Y.M.C.A. What do you call that? Come on.

JOEY
I don't know.

LOU
She was practicing her routine on the balance beam. I think she
must a known I was watching her, 'cause she put on quite a show.

JOEY
Was she pretty?

LOUIE

What? Well, of course she was. She's pretty now, isn't she?

LOU

So I went and played basketball and after we finished I went back, and she was STILL practicing. Must a been four hours later and she was still there, working hard. This is the girl for me, I thought. One of my friends knew her, so I had him introduce us. Those first few months we only saw each other at the Turnverein. Once, sometimes twice a week.

LOUIE

No, of course we didn't have you. We hadn't even gotten married yet.

JOEY

Where was I?

LOUIE

I'll get to that. Now be quiet and let me tell my story.

LOU

I'd been pretty good at gymnastics in school, so we started working together. We practiced, we worked up a routine, we set it to music: we had a regular show.

LOUIE

And we were pretty damn good, if I do say so myself. Maybe this weekend, if I can talk your mother into it, we'll show you what we used to do. Would you like that?

LOU

Of course, we can't do that kind of thing anymore, or I'd show you.

TIMMY

Oh, I wanna see!

LOU

Oh, no, no. That's out of the question.

LOUIE

Because it would be interesting! You'll see. We'll put on a regular show. Here, watch this.

(HE stands on his hands, walks around)

I'll bet you can't do this. Can you do this?

JOEY

No.

LOU

One part of the routine had me standing on my hands, while your mother lays on her back. Then we join hands and I stand up. Upside down.

TIMMY

Show me!

LOU

What, you wanna embarrass me in front of everyone?

TIMMY

No one's here. Please.

LOU

Somebody might come in.

TIMMY

Please!

(LOU looks around. Satisfied, HE puts his palms on the floor, tries to throw his legs up in the air. HE falls. Tries again, falls again. Maybe stays aloft for a second or two, but then crashes down. LOUIE continues walking around on his hands. LOU tries again, falls, hurts himself)

LOU

Owww, shit! I can't do it. Sorry, Timmy. Even if I could still pick myself up, I'm fifty pounds heavier; I'd break your mother's arms. When you get to be my age, all you do is think about the things you used to do but can't do anymore. It's too late.

LOUIE

You wanna try?

JOEY

No.

LOU

Now what was the point of that story?

(HE laughs)

LOUIE

You need to see it. It'll teach you...

LOU

Trust.

LOUIE

...trust.

(LOUIE sits again, puts JOEY on his lap)

LOU

We learned trust. You have no choice but to trust each other, or somebody's gonna get hurt. You have to trust enough to do whatever your partner wants you to do, even if you think it's wrong. Even if you know it's wrong, you do it. It's better than breaking that trust. You probably don't understand this now, but you will. One day you will.

(A pause)

LOU (CONTINUED)

And since we learned to trust each other that way, it just carried over into everything else. That's an important lesson to learn.

You understand? LOUIE

Understand? LOU

If we didn't trust in each other, we'd be sunk. You gotta learn that early. Stop squirming. Now, we gotta learn to trust you as much as you gotta learn to trust us. LOUIE

I guess you think it sounds pretty silly, two grown people spending so much time just to learn a cartwheel, do a perfect handstand. But that's how we got started. Everything followed from there. LOU

Can I go now? JOEY

No, no. You sit right there. I'm not through. LOUIE

I wanna go. Let me go. JOEY

Now stop. LOUIE

What happened next? TIMMY

No, that's enough stories for now. time for you to go to bed. LOU

No... TIMMY

Don't tell me no. Go on now. LOU

(JOEY wriggles free and runs off)

Come back here! Stay with me! LOUIE

Go on now. I'll see you tomorrow. LOU

Just a little longer. TIMMY

Joey!
LOUIE

LOU
No. That's enough now. Go.
(A pause)
Go on. Get outta here.

(A pause. TIMMY slowly goes off. Lights out. Music. Lights up on JOE, setting up a stereo set. HE spends a great deal of time adjusting speakers, putting them in different positions, playing with the treble and bass. LOU enters, pushing an electric floor waxer. Through the scene, HE polishes the floor of the stage. TIMMY sits in a corner of the room with crayons and a coloring book, coloring. BEA enters, dragging a table. SHE covers it with a tablecloth and sets it with silverware, napkins, plates, etc., buffet-style. After a minute of this, LOU shouts over the music)

LOU
Ya think that's loud enough?

JOE
Huh?

LOU
So loud he can't even hear me.

(JOE turns down the volume on the stereo)

JOE
Ah, gimme a break already. When you give a party, YOU play records this loud.

LOU
Never. Bea, I don't play records that loud, do I?

BEA
I don't know.

LOU
I most certainly do not. Also, I don't play that nigger music. Isn't that what your mother called it, Bea? Nigger music?

(HE laughs)

BEA
Now listen. The ham is ready; I'm putting the roast in now, so it's up to you to take it out at six-thirty, then it'll be ready to be sliced and served when everybody gets here. The casseroles I'll take care of.

LOU
I hope you appreciate all your mother's doing for you.

THREE RINGS II-68

JOE

You know what you play? Bubble music. Lawrence Welk bubble music schmaltz.

LOU

Yeah? Well at least it doesn't sound like somebody collecting garbage, knocking over all the cans.

JOE

(Overlapping:) Well why did you buy this for me if you didn't want me playing it?

BEA

I've been making ice cubes since yesterday, so there should be plenty. You might wanna run down to the gas station for an extra bag, though, just in case.

LOU

I didn't say I don't want you playing it. I just didn't realize you wanted people in the next county to hear it too.

BEA

Would you two cut it out for a minute? I'm trying to make arrangements here.

JOE

I'm only trying to set volume levels, I'm not going to play it that loud.

LOU

Well, listen, Mr. Disc Jockey, I'll give you a hint. When blood starts to come out of your ears, it's too loud.

TIMMY

Have we got blood coming out of our ears?

LOU

See? You're scaring your brother.

TIMMY

Look, Mommy. I colored a picture of Daddy. See? I made his face red like a fire engine.

BEA

Very pretty. Now I've put all the soda under here. You can use this side of the table for the bar and the other side can be for food.

(JOE picks up a can of soda)

JOE

Would somebody please tell me why we can't drink Coke or Pepsi like regular people? Why do you have to buy this Waldbaum's Cola? And what's this one? "Peppy Cola." Oh, that's very clever.

LOU
 What the hell's the difference? You can't tell one from the other.

JOE
 I can. My friends can.

LOU
 All that shit tastes the same.

JOE
 Well then why, when you give a party, do you buy Pinch Scotch when it tastes the same as the cheap kind?

BEA
 How would YOU know what it tastes like, huh?

LOU
 I'll tell you why, Mr. Wise Guy. Because I'm the one giving the party. And I decide what goes on. Just like I'm paying for this little shindig. If YOU were taking care of it, you could buy Tiffany Cola for all I care. But as long as I'm footing the bill, you'll take what you're given. And be grateful for it. Or you and your party can go someplace else, how's that?

JOE
 Maybe I should.

LOU
 Don't you get fresh with me, Buddy.

BEA
 Now stop. Stop it, you two. There's work to be done. Lou, mind the floor. And JOE. You keep doing whatever you were doing. Let's try to get through this day without an argument.

JOE
 Well, it's a little late, isn't it? We've already had one.

BEA
 Never mind. Get to work.

(A pause, and THEY do. LOU continues to wax the floor. JOE stacks 45 rpms on a table. BEA continues setting the table)

TIMMY
 Mommy, can we go to Playland today?

BEA
 Don't be silly, Timmy, look how busy I am. When I'm done here, you can help me in the kitchen.

TIMMY
 Daddy?
 (A pause. LOU can't hear him from the noise of the waxer. TIMMY tugs his pants)
 Daddy?

LOU

What, what?

TIMMY

Will you take me to Playland tomorrow?

LOU

You see I'm busy working here.

TIMMY

I don't mean today. I mean tomorrow. Can we go?

LOU

I'm too busy. Maybe next weekend.

TIMMY

You said we'll go next weekend last weekend.

LOU

Don't bother me now, Timmy. We'll go sometime, Playland isn't going anywhere. Don't worry about it.

TIMMY

When?

(LOU glares at him)

I'm sorry.

LOU

I can't do this. Already I'm pooped.

(HE wipes the back of his neck, shows it to
BEA. She "tsks.")

Sweating like a pig. Timmy, if you want a sixteenth birthday party, you're gonna have to wait 'til you're twenty. Once every ten years is too soon.

TIMMY

Okay.

(A pause)

Daddy, if I promise not to have a sixteenth birthday party in ten years, can we go to Playland tomorrow?

LOU

Listen to him. (To JOE:) You taught him that.

JOE

Yeah. Here, watch this. Timmy?

TIMMY

Yeah?

JOE

Sing "The Name Game." Except use "Lucky" for the name.

TIMMY

(Singing:) "Lucky, lucky, bo-bucky
Banana fanna fo-fucky
Fee fi fo-mucky
Lucky!"

(JOE is convulsed with laughter)

Oh, Joe. BEA

Sing it again! JOE

(Singing:) "Lucky, lucky bo-bucky
Banana fanna fo-fucky..." TIMMY

Timmy, stop that! BEA

(JOE is hysterical)

You should be ashamed, teaching a kid that. LOU

He doesn't know what it means. JOE

What's it mean? TIMMY

Don't you ever say that again, Timmy. LOU

What? TIMMY

What you said. LOU

He means "fucky." JOE

Shut up! LOU

What's it mean? TIMMY

(Trying to drive the car:) How's it feel to finally be sixteen,
Joe? Finally a man! BEA

Not as good as it's gonna feel when I turn eighteen. When I can
go to a bar or dirty movies if I want to. JOE

Is that all you care about. BEA

Oh, and voting. JOE

THREE RINGS II-72

BEA

Daddy, he's not our little boy anymore. He's grown into a man. He doesn't need his Mommy anymore!

(SHE hugs him, making boo-hoo sounds)

JOE

Oh, brother.

TIMMY

What?

JOE

No, Timmy. "Oh, brother": it's a saying. Like "Oy vey!"

TIMMY

Oy vey!

(HE giggles)

BEA

Your birthday. And next month, your father's birthday. We're all getting older.

JOE

Yeah. Whaddya want for your birthday?

(A pause. LOU thinks)

LOU

A good boy.

JOE

Oh for God's sake.

LOU

Sixteen. Jeez. When I was sixteen, I was already working.

JOE

Where's the violin?

LOU

You better believe it, bub. I deserve one. When I was sixteen I was getting up at four in the morning, delivering milk. All the time I was dating your mother I couldn't stay out 'til all hours, gallivanting and playing records, 'cause I had to get up at four the next morning.

BEA

I don't mean to contradict you, but you didn't. When you met me, you were living off your father's insurance policy.

LOU

Well, before I met you, that's what I was doing. I'm trying to prove a point here. That I didn't have a fraction of the things he's got. A nice house, a nice school to go to, nice clothes, food always on the table. Records! A birthday party! I think some appreciation is due.

JOE
(Overdramatically:) Oh, father darling, thank you! Thank you!
How can I ever repay you?

(HE goes to him, gets on his knees)

LOU
Get away from me. Don't be such a smart-ass.

JOE
Well, what do you want from me? What do you want me to do?

LOU
Oh, nothing. Nothing. I don't expect anything from you anymore.

JOE
I'm serious. What can I do? Do you want me to kiss your ring?

LOU
Get away from me. A little appreciation is all I want, but I
guess that's asking too much. I guess it's too late to teach you
anything but gimme, gimme, gimme. Have a nice party.

(HE drops the waxer, exits)

JOE
I appreciate this! What can I do? How do you want me to show
you?

LOU
(Off:) Never mind, never mind.

(A long pause. HE looks at BEA, shrugs, goes
back to his record collection)

BEA
You've hurt his feelings. Wait five minutes and go to him. Tell
him you're sorry.

JOE
Sorry for what? I didn't do anything.

BEA
All right, fine.

(SHE goes back to setting the table. JOE
puts on another record. TIMMY dances around)

TIMMY
I like this one!

(LOU re-enters, in a rage. Goes face-to-face
with JOE)

LOU
I just want you to understand something. Turn that thing off.

THREE RINGS II-74

JOE
I'm just setting up the speakers.

LOU
Do as I tell you for once in your life and turn that fucking thing off.

BEA
Lou...

TIMMY
Fucky.

(JOE shuts off the record player. TIMMY goes back to his corner)

LOU
Now you listen to me. This is my house! Don't you ever forget that. Do you understand me?

(A pause)

JOE
Uh-huh.

(LOU pushes him with both hands; HE hits the wall)

LOU
Don't grunt at me like an animal! Words! I want the words!

JOE
Yes.

LOU
I'm sick of your whole attitude. You think everyone is going to do everything for you while you sit around playing records, picking your nose. While I wax the floor for you like I'm your goddamn slave!

JOE
I'll wax the floor, and you have to do is tell me, for Christ's sake! How am supposed to know what you want me to do? You don't have to scream at me.

(LOU grabs him by the shoulders, shakes him)

LOU
I'll scream whenever I want to, do you understand me? This is my house!

(JOE breaks free of him, runs off)
I'm not through with you!

(HE runs off after him. JOE, choking, is dragged on by LOU by the collar of his shirt)

BEA
Lou, for Christ's sake, what's the matter with you?

LOU

(Pointing at her:) You stay out of this; it's none of your concern. This is between him and me. (To JOE:) You bet your ass you're gonna wax the floor. All right. Go on. Wax it.

(HE picks up the tin of floor wax, shoves it at him. JOE, crying, starts rubbing the floor with the wax)

That's it. Do it good. You wax the floor while I play records. While I go to the movies. While I go and get a "D" in gym. Jesus! How does anybody get a "D" in gym, would you tell me? I figure all you have to do is show up and they give you a "C". And you go and get a "D." That must've been harder work than getting a "C."

JOE

I'm not even going to try and explain.

LOU

You're damn right, you better not, not if you know what's good for you. I'll shove your whole goddamn face in that goddamn can of wax. I don't know who the hell you think you are; King Tut, or something. Sixteen years old, thinks he owns the world... Did you just wanna see how far you could go with us, is that it? Maybe your mother will put up with your horseshit but not me, buddy. You can push me just so far. I work hard for you, your mother works hard for you, KILLS herself for you. I don't think I've ever heard you thank your mother, not after all she's done for you. Not even a thank you. You probably think that'd be degrading yourself, huh? To say thank you.

JOE

Thank you.

LOU

Oh-ho. No, it's too late now. It's way too late for that now. Do you have any idea how much this little party of yours is costing us? Not to mention the cooking, the cleaning, all our personal sweat. The soda, the food, all those stupid decorations, and even that's not good enough for you, you've got to find something to complain about.

JOE

Well, listen, you don't have to worry about that, any of it. Because as soon as you let me get out of here, I'll be calling everyone and tell them it's off. You can take it all back. I don't want any goddamn party.

LOU

Who the hell do you think you're talking to, one of your friends?!

BEA

Now Lou, stop it.

LOU

Who the hell do you think you're talking to?!

(HE grabs JOE by the collar, knocks him to the floor)

THREE RINGS II-76

JOE

Let go o' me!

LOU

There IS going to be a party, buddy. You're having this party after all this work: I'll kill you first.

BEA

(Tearful:) Lou, Lou, stop it.

(LOU picks up the floor waxer, turns it on, holds the spinning end of it inches from JOE's face)

BEA

Lou! Lou, stop!

TIMMY

Daddy! Daddy,
please!

(HE sobs)

JOE

(Screaming:) Oh,
God! God help me.

LOU

Don't you ever talk to me like that again. I'll stick this right in your face I ever hear you talking to me like that again. Do you understand?

(A pause)

I said, do you understand me?!

JOE

Yes, yes!

(BEA pulls the plug out of the waxer. It stops. LOU throws it on the floor)

LOU

I don't know who in the hell he thinks he is, talking to us like that. I don't know who he is.

(HE exits, knocking over the table of records. A pause. JOE is sobbing. BEA goes to him, holds him)

BEA

It would've been all right if you'd just kept your mouth shut. If you'd just let him get it out of his system. You know how he gets. It would've blown over. But you always have to...

(SHE exits. TIMMY, crying, shaking, goes to him)

TIMMY

Are you okay, Joe? Are you okay?

JOE

Get outta here, you little brat. Leave me alone.

(HE pushes TIMMY away. Lights fade on them. Lights up on JOSEPH and TIMOTHY at the table)

JOSEPH

He had a knack for ruining birthdays, you ever notice that? I can't remember a birthday where we didn't have a fight. I couldn't figure out if it was because my birthday meant he was another year older and he hated that, or if it just meant that I was another year closer to taking a real stand against him. Another year closer to the day I get out from under his thumb. What do you think?

TIMOTHY

I really don't care.

JOSEPH

Gee, thanks.

TIMOTHY

What else is in there?

(A pause. JOE reaches into the box)

JOSEPH

Papers. Stock certificates, I think.
(HE hands them to TIMOTHY)
You're shaking.

TIMOTHY

What?

JOSEPH

Look at you; you're shivering. Your hands. Your whole body.

TIMOTHY

Well, it's fucking cold in here! I should've brought a sweater. No wonder I'm shivering.

JOSEPH

I don't feel cold.

TIMOTHY

Well, I do.

JOSEPH

It feels fine in here to me.

TIMOTHY

Well, not to me! What do you want me to do, call in a meteorologist? To me it is cold. Hence I am shivering. Okay? Can we move on or should we have a debate with the bank staff?

JOSEPH

All right, Jesus, your point is made.
(A pause. TIMOTHY looks at the papers)
Well, it's almost winter.

TIMOTHY

Uh-huh.

JOSEPH

Summer's gone.

TIMOTHY

Yep.

(A long pause)

JOSEPH

They probably still have the air conditioners on in here.

TIMOTHY

Good deduction.

(A long pause)

JOSEPH

Why do we have to be this way? Rushing through everything. Can't we take time to talk? It's like we hardly know each other. You're making me feel like a stranger.

TIMOTHY

(Parroting him:) Excuse me, but I'm not making you feel anything. If you feel like a stranger, that's your problem.

JOSEPH

Okay, sorry. I feel like a stranger to you, okay? Why are we rushing through this? All of this is important; I can't believe you have something more important to do that this has to be rushed, like you're gonna miss your bus.

TIMOTHY

(Like HE has a mouth full of molasses:) Well, maybe if I talked slower, you wouldn't accuse me...

JOSEPH

(Overlapping:) Come on, knock it off! What is the matter with you?

TIMOTHY

No, what is the matter with you? You know more about me than any other person on earth. How can you possibly feel like a stranger?

(A pause)

JOSEPH

(Shrugs:) I just do. And I know Lou and Bea wouldn't want to see us like this.

TIMOTHY

Well, they put us here like this. So it's their responsibility.

JOSEPH

No. Not anymore. We're not supposed to be like this.

TIMOTHY

Oh? How are we supposed to be? You wanna pass me the rule book?

JOSEPH

You know what I mean.

TIMOTHY

As a matter of fact, no, I don't. Correct me if I'm wrong, but when I was born, I don't remember them bringing in a line-up of potential brothers and I picked you. You were a given. So as far as I'm concerned, anything else is fair game.

JOSEPH

All I'm saying is, can't we have a conversation? Or has that become impossible? I mean I know that after we leave here today, I won't see or hear from you for months. Maybe a year. That's why I want to take time now. Can't this be anything but strictly business?

TIMOTHY

Why? Mommy and Daddy always used to pester me to call you, find out how you were doing. Now I no longer have to. And I plan to take full advantage of it. You see, I really don't care how you're doing. I don't like you very much.

(A pause)

Besides, you always find some reason to call ME to tell me how you're doing. Always a reason that's "strictly business," by the way. "Can I borrow such-and-such?" "What are you getting Bea for Mother's Day?" Just an intro to the boredom that lies ahead. JOE's weekly sturm und drang report. Don't you have anyone outside the family that can handle your burden? Friends, maybe?

(A pause)

You were here first; you defined everything for me. We have no choice but to go on this way. Can't change the rules. That's the story.

JOSEPH

It can be changed, of course it can. You're just being pig-headed, as usual. Can't you consider the possibility of change? God, you're just like Lou.

TIMOTHY

(Laughs) There, you see? No, it's too late. It's like a growth, a lesion, and what you're talking about requires a very delicate operation. And I don't care to have you be the one doing the fiddling around, thank you very much.

(A pause)

God, I hate all this yakking about stuff that's over and done with. Can't we move on? People talk about wanting to control the future, change their destiny, all that shit. Who cares? I'd rather control the past. Impossible, but still... I wish I could just forget it, put it behind me. Who cares about the future when memory after memory keeps popping into your head, nothing you can do about it? Why should I be sitting around, minding my own business, when suddenly it's 1964 all over again. A smell, a song and I can't get it out of my head for the rest of the day. It's so unfair. I think amnesiacs must be the happiest people on earth.

(A long pause)

JOSEPH

Fine. We'll just move on then. Finish this up, go our separate ways. Is that what you want?

TIMOTHY

Don't you?

JOSEPH

Okay.
(HE pulls a big white book out of the box)
Here.

TIMOTHY

God, that thing's like Mary Poppins' carpetbag. What is that?

JOSEPH

Photograph album.

TIMOTHY

Oh, God.
(HE laughs)
Get that kryptonite away from me.

(JOSEPH turns the pages of the album)

JOSEPH

Ooooh, look! Here you are blowing out the candles on a birthday cake! Aww, playing with the dog. Isn't that cute?
(A pause)
What are you gonna do? Pretend this is some other person?

TIMOTHY

Joe, would you do me a favor?

JOSEPH

Depends.

TIMOTHY

Just leave me alone for a minute? Go get yourself a cup of coffee or something. Just a minute and I'll be okay. I'm sorry for what I said. Just leave me alone and I'll be better.

JOSEPH

Well, I don't know...

TIMOTHY

Oh, I see.
(HE puts everything back in the box save for the photograph album, locks it. Gives JOSEPH the key)
Here. Now you don't have to trust me.

JOSEPH

No, I trust you. Here, you can keep the key.
(But HE doesn't give it to him)
Do YOU want a coffee?

TIMOTHY
No, thanks.

JOSEPH
Something to eat? There's a deli, I think, next door.

TIMOTHY
No, nothing.

JOSEPH
You sure.

TIMOTHY
Uh-huh.

JOSEPH
Okay. I'll be back in a few minutes.

(HE exits. TIMOTHY is alone. HE sighs.
JOSEPH sticks his head back in, looks around.
TIMOTHY looks up)

JOSEPH
Just checking.
(HE laughs and exits. TIMOTHY laughs, then starts to cry. HE opens the photograph album. A pause and lights come up on TIMMY, sitting on the floor playing with blocks. HE sings:)

TIMMY
"I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts,
There they are a-standing in a row.
Big ones, small ones,
Some as big as your head..."
(Lights fade on TIMOTHY)
"Give 'em a twist,
A flick of the wrist,
That's what the showman said.
I've got a lovely bunch of coconuts,
Every ball you throw will make me rich.
There stands me wife,
The idol of me life,
Singing, 'Roll or bowl a ball a penny a pitch!'"
(HE has placed block upon block, making a very unsteady tower)
Mommy! Mommy, look! C'mere quick, before they fall! This is the highest I ever got 'em!
(HE stands. Looks around the empty stage)
Mommy? Where'd you go? Mommy?
(A pause)
Daddy?
(A pause)
Joe? Joe, would you play with me?
(A pause)
Joe, play with me! Joe? Where is everybody?
(HE runs around the stage, looking into the wings)
Joe? Joe, where are you? Where'd everybody go?

(HE realizes HE's alone in the house)

TIMMY (CONTINUED)

Joe?! Mommy?!!

(HE kicks over his tower of blocks)

Where is everybody?

(HE screams, falls on the floor crying. HE mumbles as HE throws the blocks around the stage)

They're all gone... they left me... nobody here... I'm all alone...

(His sobbing quiets. A long pause as HE sits there, sniffing. Suddenly, JOE jumps in from offstage)

JOE

Hey, Timmy!

TIMMY

You're here!

JOE

You wanna play our game, Timmy? See: look. I've left a trail of pennies for you. See 'em?

TIMMY

Oh, boy.

JOE

Now, you follow the trail of pennies, pick up each one, and at the end of the trail, you'll get a big surprise.

TIMMY

Do I get to keep the pennies?

JOE

No, no. You have to save them otherwise we'll never be able to play the game again. Okay?

TIMMY

Okay.

JOE

Okay. Now you wait here until I tell you, then when I say "Go," you start picking up the pennies.

(HE exits. TIMMY looks after him. After a pause, JOE is heard from offstage and far away)

JOE

(Off:) Okay, Timmy. Go!

(And TIMMY starts picking up the pennies. The trail twists and turns, taking him all over the stage. Eventually, HE ends up upstage as BEA, LOU and JOE move on from offstage. With them is a table and chair. On the table is a lit birthday cake with five white candles and one blue one. By the table is a pile of wrapped presents. BEA holds a flash camera. TIMMY follows the pennies, meets them. THEY sing:)

BEA, LOU and JOE

"Happy birthday to you,
Happy birthday to you.
Happy birthday dear Timmy,
Happy birthday to you!"

TIMMY

What's this?

JOE

Your birthday!

TIMMY

What?

JOE

It's the day you get to eat cake and ice cream and then you get to open all these presents.

TIMMY

It is? All these are for me?

BEA

Sure!

TIMMY

And I get to open them and then I get to keep them?

BEA

Of course, Timmy.

TIMMY

What for?

JOE

Because it's your birthday! Now first you have to sit down and blow out all the candles on your cake. Now listen. You make a wish. Think of something you want more than anything else, ten blow. And if you blow out all the candles at the same time, your wish comes true. Okay?

TIMMY

Oh, boy!

JOE

Now sit here.

(TIMMY sits)

Now make a wish.

(TIMMY closes his eyes. A pause. HE opens them)

Got one?

TIMMY

Yeah, I wished that...

JOE

No, no, don't tell anyone or it won't come true. Okay. Now, blow 'em all out.

(TIMMY blows the candles out. The blue one stays lit. HE looks at JOE with tears in his eyes)

Awww, too bad. You don't get your wish. Poor Timmy.

(BEA snaps a picture: a bright flash of light. Lights come back up on TIMOTHY and JOSEPH. TIMOTHY still has the photograph album open in front of him)

JOSEPH

It was a trick candle.

TIMOTHY

Huh?

JOSEPH

It was one of those candles that always stays lit.

TIMOTHY

WHAT?!

(JOSEPH throws back his head and laughs)

BLACKOUT

END OF ACT TWO

ACT THREE

(Lights up. TIMOTHY and JOSEPH at table, same as before. The box is empty, its contents scattered all over the table. JOSEPH holds the box upside down)

That's all. The end. JOSEPH

Oh... well, who gets what? TIMOTHY

I can't believe it. JOSEPH

I guess we ask the lawyers to sell the stocks for us. Or we can hold onto them. This stuff here I'd like to keep. You can go through it; see if there's anything you wanna fight me on. TIMOTHY

This can't be it. It just can't be. It's impossible. JOSEPH

Or you can just keep it all, except for the money. I don't feel like fighting anymore. It's getting late; I'd like to go home. TIMOTHY

How is this possible? JOSEPH

Huh? TIMOTHY

How can this be all there is? I mean, they lived well. They were well off. How can it come down to this? A few savings accounts, some stocks, a photo album some crummy jewelry and a hubcap? There's got to be more. JOSEPH

Well, we haven't gone through the house yet. There might be some jewelry... TIMOTHY

I'm not talking about jewelry! I'm talking money. How did they live? JOSEPH

They lived off interest. And dividends and stuff. TIMOTHY

JOSEPH

From these piddly accounts? Oh, sure, maybe they could squeeze by if they lived frugally, like I do.

TIMOTHY

(Grunts:) Yeah, like you. That's a thrifty little cashmere sweater you're wearing.

JOSEPH

That's another thing. They couldn't get by on interest and still have enough left to loan me money.

TIMOTHY

Loan you money? Why the hell should they loan you money?

JOSEPH

It wasn't a present. It was a loan.

TIMOTHY

Well, you be sure and tell me how much so we can deduct it from your share. That was a little slip-up wasn't it? I don't suppose there's any promissory note for this "loan."

JOSEPH

Well, I've paid most of it back already.

TIMOTHY

I'm sure. And I'm sure you'll want to pay it ALL off so you can send them off with a clean conscience. How much?

JOSEPH

Don't try to get me side-tracked, now. I'm asking a question. They took trips. They bought new furniture. They bought a new car. How? On what?

TIMOTHY

Well, they'd both been retired for almost ten years. Maybe they went through it all. This must be all that's left.

JOSEPH

Impossible.

TIMOTHY

What, you think there's a secret panel in the house with a treasure trove waiting behind it? I didn't expect there to be much, anyway. I knew they were spending a lot. Mommy told me they had to be careful. Of course, she didn't say anything about you soaking them for millions.

JOSEPH

I didn't soak them! I just thought, here I am, having to return deposit bottles if I want to buy a can of soup and they're going on a cruise of the Greek islands; they can afford to help me out.

TIMOTHY

It's their fault you're almost forty and still can't pay the rent.

JOSEPH

It's no one's fault. And would it be okay if we stayed on one subject for more than a minute?

TIMOTHY

Okay, which subject? You're the one who...

JOSEPH

Can we just try to figure this out before we start getting into how I milked them of their fortune and what a failure I am? How did they live on this little money?

TIMOTHY

You're asking me like I have the answers. How the hell should I know? Maybe they got in on the drug trade out of Miami. Maybe they bought a boat and pillaged the yachts sailing down the Florida coast; they were pirates. How do I know? We never talked about money. Hell, I could barely get Mommy to give me her recipe for pepper steak, I certainly wasn't going to ask about bank accounts.

JOSEPH

Well... it just doesn't make sense. What I'm going to do is add it all up. I'm going to figure out how much interest they got per year. Then I'll figure out what the dividends were on the stocks. Then we'll see.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, you do that.

(And JOSEPH does. HE piles up the passbooks, takes pen and paper and starts writing down figures)

JOSEPH

Have you got a calculator?

(TIMOTHY reaches into his briefcase, hands him one)

Yeah, I figured you would.

(JOSEPH works. TIMOTHY lights a cigarette. A pause)

TIMOTHY

I'll just sit here. I'll memorize the pattern on the wallpaper. I'll take a nap. I'll order a pizza. Can't you do this some other time? Can't we go home? Round One is over, can't we go to our corners and rest?

JOSEPH

This will take me ten minutes. Gimme a break. Jesus.

(A pause)

TIMOTHY

Guess I'll just have to play by myself. Nobody wants to play with me.

(HE stands. Paces)

I'm bored.

(A pause)

TIMOTHY (CONTINUED)

Joe, I'm bored.

JOSEPH

What do you want me to do about it? Sit down and shut up. It's too early for you to start going through a second childhood.

(A pause. TIMOTHY goes behind JOSEPH, rubs his hands through his hair and runs away, laughing)

Goddammit, cut it out! What is wrong with you?

(TIMOTHY shrugs)

Well, there must be some reason you're acting like you're five years old.

TIMOTHY

I don't know. I guess I thought it would be appropriate. I'm going crazy in here, that's it. We've been locked up in here all day. Can't we go get some dinner or something? Just get outta here? Or a drink. That'd help. Let's get a drink and then we can finish up.

JOSEPH

Five years olds aren't supposed to drink. Now sit down and be a good boy and let me finish this.

(TIMOTHY sticks out his tongue. JOSEPH laughs)

TIMOTHY

You used to be a lot more fun.

JOSEPH

Yeah, well, you were never fun.

TIMOTHY

What's that supposed to mean?

JOSEPH

I'm working here.

TIMOTHY

I wanna know.

JOSEPH

You take everything too seriously. Give it a rest. You acted the same at five as you do now. And I don't mean that you're acting immature now. I mean that when you were a kid, you were already a little old man. You were never any fun.

TIMOTHY

(Shrugs) What was fun? Going to gym and having your pants pulled down in front of the whole class? Being beaten up in the playground?

JOSEPH

Oh, please. I'm not in the mood for a "poor me" monologue. I thought you wanted to get out of here so bad? Well, we're never going to if you keep yakking.

(A pause. JOSEPH goes back to figuring)

TIMOTHY

Maybe I'm just making up for lost time. I'm gonna start having all the fun I missed out on. Okay? Let's stay. I don't wanna go home. I wanna stay here for the rest of my life.

(HE starts playing with the stuff on the table. HE stands the photo album on end. Puts the hubcap on top of it. Puts the reel of film on top of that, unwinds some of it artfully. Takes some of the jewelry and clips it onto the hubcap)

Look! Mountain of memories! The idol of our lost lives. We'll sell 'em at Macy's. Everyone can have their own little family shrine: "Mountain of Memories!"

JOSEPH

Would you stop?

(HE knocks over the pile)

Why don't you do something useful, like get us some coffee? I'll even pay for it.

TIMOTHY

I don't want any coffee.

JOSEPH

Well then, what do you want, dear?

TIMOTHY

I wanna get the hell out of this fucking, cock-sucking, son of a bitch shitty shithole.

(TIMOTHY giggles. JOSEPH looks at him, laughs)

JOSEPH

You've really lost it.

TIMOTHY

I know.

(HE stands. Paces. He slaps JOSEPH on the arm)

You're it!

THREE RINGS III-90

(JOSEPH looks at him. A pause. HE stands. TIMOTHY scurries away, giggling)

JOSEPH

Look. Come here. Sit down. I want you to sit here and make an inventory of all that was in the box. Here's paper. Look. Here's a pen.

TIMOTHY

There already is an inventory.

JOSEPH

I know, but I want you make out another one.

TIMOTHY

You wanna make out?

(HE laughs hysterically. JOSEPH takes him by the shoulders, sits him down in the chair)

JOSEPH

Just do as I tell you and don't speak until spoken to.

(HE goes back to his chair. TIMOTHY picks up the pen, looks at the paper. HE pouts. HE draws circles on the paper)

TIMOTHY

You touched me!

(HE slaps JOSEPH on the arm)

You're it!

(JOSEPH throws down his pen)

JOSEPH

Now I told you not to speak.

(HE points his finger at him)

You do as I tell you. Do you understand?

(TIMOTHY nods)

Good.

(HE pats him on the arm)

Good boy.

(TIMOTHY gasps, slaps him back)

TIMOTHY

You're it!

JOSEPH

Doesn't matter, I'm not playing. Just because I go like this

(HE touches TIMOTHY's arm)

doesn't mean I'm playing.

(TIMOTHY slaps him back)

TIMOTHY

You're it!

JOSEPH

I said I'm not playing. And you're hitting me. I'm barely touching you. All I did was this:

(HE touches TIMOTHY's arm. TIMOTHY slaps him back)

TIMOTHY

You're it!

(JOSEPH jumps up from the table. TIMOTHY jumps up, runs away, giggling. JOSEPH goes after him, pins him down, slaps him on the top of his head repeatedly)

JOSEPH

You're it, you're it, you're it, you're it, you're it, you're it!

(HE lets him go and moves back to the table. TIMOTHY slaps him on the back.)

TIMOTHY

You're it!

(JOSEPH turns around, slaps his face. A pause)

Owww.

JOSEPH

Had enough?

(HE goes back to the table, resumes his work. TIMOTHY sits on the floor. Lights come up on BEA and TIMMY, sitting at the kitchen table. TIMMY has a coloring book and crayons. HE colors with great attention to his work. BEA reads a newspaper. Lights stay up on TIMOTHY and JOSEPH)

TIMOTHY

Oh, jeez...

(A pause)

Lord, oh lord.

JOSEPH

I'm ignoring you.

TIMOTHY

No, I'm just thinking.

JOSEPH

Congratulations.

TIMOTHY

I wonder what Mommy would say if she were here. She hated me talking about the past.

(BEATRICE, 65 years old, enters. SHE looks at TIMOTHY)

BEATRICE

Tell me what I've done to you lately. Don't give me this stuff about "when I was five years old."

TIMOTHY

It was on my mind.

BEATRICE

Ach. Ancient history. What am I supposed to do about it now, would you tell me? Nothing to be done; we can't turn back time. You do that a lot, you know? Let it go. Think about tomorrow.

TIMOTHY

Can't we have a simple conversation? What's the problem?

BEATRICE

Why do you wait twenty years to talk about something?

TIMOTHY

Because it's only just occurred to me...

BEATRICE

Why didn't you say something then, when I could actually do something about it?

TIMOTHY

Listen, if I had been capable of...

BEATRICE

I mean, really. You just want to make me feel bad? Tell me what a bad mother I've been?

TIMOTHY

Will you let me talk? How was I supposed to say something then? I was barely fluent and you expect me to protect myself from your kind of warfare? Look.

(HE points to BEA and TIMMY at the table)

BEATRICE

I don't want any part of this.

(SHE exits. TIMMY finishes a section of his coloring book, shows it to BEA)

TIMMY

Look, Mommy. A man in the kitchen.

BEA
(Looks up from her paper:) Oh, that's pretty.

(SHE goes back to the paper. A pause.
TIMMY sits dejectedly. TIMOTHY gets up,
goes to TIMMY. HE puts his hands on
his shoulders, whispers in his ear)

TIMMY
You barely looked at it.

BEA
Huh?

TIMMY
How could you tell if it's pretty? Maybe it's hideous.
Look at it.
(TIMOTHY whispers in his ear)
What's so important in that paper, anyway? Is there
something in there that you find more important than me?
(HE leans over, looks at the paper)
A chicken recipe? That's more important?

BEA
Of course not. I saw the picture. It was pretty.

(TIMMY looks at TIMOTHY. TIMOTHY
whispers in his ear)

TIMMY
Then what's it a picture of?

BEA
Huh?

TIMMY
What is it? What did I draw?

(A pause)

BEA
I don't remember.

TIMMY
I showed it to you ten seconds ago! You've forgotten
already?

BEA
It was a man.

TIMMY
Yeah? Doing what?

BEA
He was... He... He was taking his dog for a walk. In the
park. Someplace.

THREE RINGS III-94

(TIMMY makes a sound like a game show buzzer)

TIMMY

Wrong.

BEA

I'm sorry, Timmy.

(SHE reads. A pause. TIMOTHY whispers in TIMMY's ear)

TIMMY

Well don't just say "I'm sorry"! Look! Look at the damn picture again!

(HE shoves the coloring book at her.

SHE looks at it)

See here? He's in the kitchen, making breakfast. See? Eggs? Bacon? They didn't even have those in there, I made that up by myself. And I gave him a moustache. He didn't have one in the outline, but I gave him one.

BEA

(What else do you want me to do?:) It's very nice.

(SHE hesitantly goes back to her paper. TIMOTHY whispers furiously into TIMMY's ear)

TIMMY

Well talk to me! I'm sorry to take so much of your precious time, but a few more words would be nice. Maybe I should go away, if I'm too much of a bother. Maybe you'd rather have given birth to the Daily News.

BEA

Okay, okay, I'm sorry.
(SHE folds up the paper)
Let me see.

TIMMY

Not if it's too much trouble.

BEA

Come on, come on. Lemme see.
(A pause)
Please.
(SHE takes the coloring book. Looks)
Now this is very nice, Timmy.

TIMMY

Thank you.

BEA

Very good.

(A pause)

But... you've gone over the lines here. See? It's a little sloppy.

(A pause)

Also, there's no reason to color everything in solid. You can use the crayons for shading as well.

TIMOTHY

He didn't ask for a critique, he just wanted you to appreciate it.

BEA

See, this part here, you've colored it in so dark it just looks like a blob. When I was your age, I'd make the basic lines a solid color and then shade in the rest, like this:

(SHE takes the crayon out of his hand)

Now, with this lady's dress, you color in the outlines with a solid line like this...

(TIMOTHY is furious. HE whispers violently into TIMMY's ear)

...and then inside those lines, you rub very lightly with the crayon like this. See? Or you can even use a different color. That's more interesting.

TIMMY

Oh, yeah. That's just beautiful. Just like Lora Borden does it. Just like everyone else on the block does it.

BEA

You asked me...

TIMMY

Everybody colors like that! I was just trying to be a little different, but I guess you just want me to be like everybody else. Lora Borden probably did it differently too, until her mother (who's even worse than you) told her how. Now she colors just like everyone else. Why can't you be like Bobby Morgan's mother? He gives her a piece of toilet paper that he's used to wipe his ass and she sticks a frame around it and hangs it in the living room!

BEA

You don't have to get wise with me, I'm just showing you...

TIMOTHY

Who asked you to show him? All he asked for was a few words out of you, not just a grunt. Don't just grab the crayon out of his hand.

(HE grabs the crayon from her, gives it back to TIMMY)

Here. You color any way you want. I think it's terrific.

TIMMY

I was just trying to be different. You didn't even notice the ham and eggs. Forget it. I won't show you anything ever again. I won't even color anymore. I'll just sit in a chair and do anything or say anything, like a newspaper. How's that? Is there something wrong with the way I did it? It doesn't look wrong. It's just a coloring book, for Christ's sake! You make it sound like I committed a sin.

TIMOTHY

All he wanted was some attention. But you have to turn it into a seminar on coloring. Would it have killed you to say nice things about it? Or does everything have to be a life lesson? He can get criticized in school, he can get it in the playground. Wouldn't it be nice if he could come home to a place where everyone thought he was great? God, you're impossible!

(TIMOTHY leaves the scene, goes back to the table with JOSEPH. TIMMY continues to yell. BEA sits dumbfounded, shaking and frightened, tears of regret and self-loathing quivering in her eyes, as lights go down on them)

JOSEPH

What is this? Didn't you give me a big spiel about not wanting to dredge up the past?

TIMOTHY

That felt good. Don't stop me now, I'm on a roll.

JOSEPH

Can't we talk about anything else? Isn't anything else important? We've been here all day; do you know that we haven't talked about anything but this... family? Ourselves? I mean, the reason we're here today is because of Lou's business. If it hadn't been successful, we wouldn't have anything to fight about. We wouldn't be here. It was his whole life; we haven't mentioned it.

TIMOTHY

It's not important.

JOSEPH

Why not?

TIMOTHY

Well... because I say so. It might be important that he wanted us to take over the business and neither one of us did, but we don't have the time to get into THAT.

JOSEPH

But there are other things. What you do for a living, what I do, our friends. Other relatives. We DO have family besides these two people, you know. We have lives outside of this family.

TIMOTHY

No. None of it matters, except this. Some other time, maybe, but today, this is all that counts. This is why we're here, after all. Let's work this out before we take on the rest of the world.

(A pause)

What you do for a living. That's rich. Okay, I'll make an exception here. Let's talk about what you do for a living. I'd like to know myself.

JOSEPH

Forget it.

(TIMOTHY laughs)

No, you made up the rules. Let's stick to 'em.

(A pause. TIMOTHY sighs)

What?

TIMOTHY

I don't think I can go through too much more of this. I mean, we've been at it for almost a month and there's still so much left to do.

JOSEPH

This is the last bank. Which I still can't believe; there's got to be more. Anyway, it'll be over soon.

TIMOTHY

No. No, it won't. We still have to deal with the houses. Are we going to sell them, keep them? And then there's what's inside the houses. Jesus, I don't even want to think about it. Arm-wrestling over every little piece of bric-a-brac. Death threats over a pickle dish.

JOSEPH

Well, you don't have to worry about it. I can manage, if you're tired of it. If you're sick of doing this, I can do it, I'm not incompetent. I'll split everything up.

TIMOTHY

Over my dead body.

JOSEPH

Why not?

TIMOTHY

Well then, why not let me take care of it all? I'll split everything up; I'll let you know what's going on, you won't have to worry about a thing.

(A long pause)

JOSEPH

I'm not the one who said I was tired of it.

TIMOTHY

I see.

(A pause)

I'm worried about the summer house.

JOSEPH
Worried? How?

TIMOTHY
Well, what do you want to do with it?

JOSEPH
What do you mean? We'll get an appraisal.

TIMOTHY
Then what?

JOSEPH
Well... I guess one of us buys the other one out. I don't want to sell it.

TIMOTHY
Well, I can tell you right now, if we put it on the market, offers are gonna be tens of thousands of dollars higher than any appraisal.

JOSEPH
Well, then we should get a written offer.

TIMOTHY
Oh, I see. And who's going to do the buying out here?

JOSEPH
Well, I'd like to keep it.

TIMOTHY
Oh, you'd like to keep it. Well, so would I.

JOSEPH
I'd get more use out of it than you would.

TIMOTHY
How do you figure?

JOSEPH
Look, after you get your half shares of all the other real estate, you'll be able to afford a house right down the street. Probably a much nicer one.

TIMOTHY
That's not the point. I want that one.

JOSEPH
Well, look, we can still keep it. We can share it.

TIMOTHY
No way.

JOSEPH
Why not?

TIMOTHY

You mean I take care of everything, do all the maintenance on the house and you come in whenever you feel like it and mess it up, is that how it works? No thanks.

JOSEPH

What are you talking about? We'd share all the work too. And if you had to do some work, I'd pay for half.

TIMOTHY

I'm sorry, but no. I can see the way this is shaping up already. "Whatever work you do." In other words, I'm on my back fixing the toilet and you're on your back, improving your tan.

JOSEPH

So then what? You want me to just give it to you, is that it? Selfish, as usual.

TIMOTHY

Don't you fucking dare call me selfish or I'll walk the fuck right out of this room.

(A pause)

JOSEPH

My, my.

TIMOTHY

I should sell you the house. It'd serve you fucking right. The way you take care of things, I can see the value of the house descending by the week. In five years' time, you won't be able to sell it as an outhouse.

JOSEPH

Oh, please.

TIMOTHY

I'm sorry, but it's true.

JOSEPH

It is NOT true. And if it is, you should give it to me so you can prove your point.

TIMOTHY

Sell it to you.

JOSEPH

Pardon me. Sell it to me.

TIMOTHY

I'm not that big a sport.

JOSEPH

I deserve that house!

TIMOTHY

How do you figure that?

JOSEPH

You've spent way more time there than I have. I've hardly been there at all.

TIMOTHY

What does that have to do with anything?

JOSEPH

By the time they were finally able to afford a summer house, I'd already moved away from home. You spent EVERY summer there as a kid. I was lucky if I was able to afford a three-day weekend. You've had your time there already. My turn.

(Lights come up on BEATRICE, LOUIS, 55 years old and TIM, fifteen years old, at the kitchen table in the summer house. ALL hold playing cards. THEY look towards the table in the bank)

LOUIS

What the hell is he doing?

BEATRICE

Joe, we're waiting.

TIM

(Overlapping:) Joe?

LOUIS

Come on, come on.

(TIMOTHY looks at JOSEPH. JOSEPH gets up from the table, goes to them)

JOSEPH

I... I can't find my blue shirt. Did you wash it?

BEATRICE

I haven't seen it.

LOUIS

Come on, finish the game, then you can do whatever it is you're doing.

JOSEPH

I don't wanna play anymore.

LOUIS

Jesus, you see us sitting here with cards in our hands...

BEATRICE

We were waiting for you.

JOSEPH

Play without me. I hate cards.

He's losing, anyway. TIM

Can I borrow your belt? JOSEPH

Which belt? TIM

The one you've got in there. JOSEPH
The silver one.

(TIM sighs. A long pause. HE looks at
LOUIS. HE looks at BEATRICE. A pause)

Yes. TIM

(JOSEPH exits)

You're leaving NOW? BEATRICE
So late?

Let him go, for Christ's sake. LOUIS
Get him outta here. We can
finish this game.

(To TIMOTHY in the bank:) JOSEPH
I told you. I've got a lot of
work to do when I get home.

I'll re-shuffle. TIM

(HE takes the cards out of everyone's hands)

Hey, wait a minute. LOUIS
We could've just put his cards back in
the pile.

No, everything's been thrown off. TIM

And I had a good hand, too. LOUIS

I didn't. TIM

(HE shuffles, deals)

I don't understand why he has to be running out all the BEATRICE
time. We hardly see him anymore. His one vacation he
doesn't have something planned, you'd think he'd want to see
us for more than five minutes. But no...

TIMOTHY
You see? Even when you were there, you weren't there.

JOSEPH
Shhhh...

TIMOTHY
What? That's my point.

JOSEPH
Shut up. I'm listening.

TIM
Well, he said he wants to come out again next weekend, so you'll see him then.

LOUIS
Oh, goody.

BEATRICE
Next weekend it'll be more of the same. Forgetting to make his bed, forgetting to do the dishes. Ask him a simple favor, he gives a half-hour explanation of why he can't do it. The time it takes to explain, he could've done it already. What is it with him?

(TIM shrugs)

LOUIS
Why does he have to spend all of his time primping just to spend an hour and a half on the long Island Expressway?

TIM
That's Joe.

LOUIS
Ridiculous. Who does he expect is gonna look at him? Some truck driver on the Expressway is gonna notice he didn't wash his hair? Whose turn is it?

TIM
Yours.
(LOUIS picks a card. A pause)
You know, what I can't understand... never mind.

BEATRICE
What?

TIM
No, never mind. I don't wanna talk behind his back.

LOUIS
Oh, go on.

BEATRICE
What is it? We won't tell.

TIM

Are you ever going to discard?

LOUIS

Just let me figure out what I got here. I don't wanna give you something that's gonna help you. Okay. Here. A measly three.

(HE discards. TIM picks it up)

TIM

Just what I needed.

(HE lays down cards)

Get this stuff out of my hands before you go out. Okay.

(HE discards. Looks at BEATRICE)

Well? Your turn.

BEATRICE

Not until you tell me what you were going to say.

TIM

Oh, really. Nothing important.

BEATRICE

Well then, I'm not playing.

(SHE puts down her cards)

TIM

Oh, come on! What are you, five?

LOUIS

Come on, Bea. Don't get ridiculous now.

BEATRICE

I'm not gonna play this game until you tell me.

(A pause)

I'll tell you what. If you tell me, I'll make fried chicken for dinner next weekend. Doesn't that sound good?

TIM

Oh, all right, all right. Pick up your cards. I was just going to say that Joe is saying he needs to get back to the city. I mean, like he's got so many important things to do. And that he's leaving late to beat the traffic. Pretty flimsy, if you ask me. I mean, even I can see through it and I'm not even old enough to know better.

BEATRICE

What are you talking about? Here. Ace on your King.

(SHE lays down a card)

LOUIS

What'd you do? Deal yourself and your mother all the good cards? I got shit here.

Well? Talk. BEATRICE

It's nothing. TIM

(To JOSEPH:) I told you, I don't like talking about this stuff. TIMOTHY

Well, we're not leaving until you do. JOSEPH

(BEATRICE puts her cards back on the table: a challenge)

All right! I was just going to say that it's so obvious that he doesn't have any work to do. Have you ever known Joe to get this piqued about work? Spend an hour in the bathroom to go home and work on a term paper? Make you launder and iron his favorite shirt so he can sit in front of a desk? Borrow my belt so he looks good in the car ride? We're not leaving this late on a Saturday night so he can dash off deathless prose on Kant's philosophies. Come on. TIM

Okay. So where are you going? BEATRICE

You two must be both deaf and blind, not to mention dumb. Did you take your turn? TIM

Are you going to tell me, or do I thrown down my cards again? BEATRICE

Did you discard? TIM

No. Don't rush me here. All this talking, I can't think. LOUIS

Are you laying anything down? TIM

No. LOUIS

Well then, discard. Come on. TIM

Now wait a minute. LOUIS

You know you're gonna lose. I've already laid down all the aces. TIM

LOUIS

I've still get some things up my sleeve, Buster. Don't be so quick to bury me. Here.

(HE discards. TIM takes his turn)

BEATRICE

I'm waiting.

TIM

No, I can't. 'Cause if he finds out, I'll never hear the end of it. Here. Five and six on the end of your run.

(HE puts down cards)

BEATRICE

I won't say a word.

TIM

I don't mean you'd tell him intentionally, but you'll let something slip. Like that time I told you he broke the knob on the washing machine. And then he'll know it was me.

BEATRICE

I won't. I promise.

TIM

No, because you'll start worrying about it and you won't let him have the car and he'll take it out on me.

BEATRICE

Oh, come on. What is it?

TIM

Take your turn.

BEATRICE

I forgot where I was.

LOUIS

Pay attention here, instead of all this talking. This is a tie-breaker here. You had all day to talk about this, do you have to do it now?

BEATRICE

All right, Lou, so shut up so I can play. Here.

(SHE lays down cards)

LOUIS

Oh, Christ. Are there any wild cards left at all?

TIM

Well, there's two down, so that must mean there's two left. Right? Makes sense, doesn't it?

LOUIS

Snotty.

BEATRICE

So don't tell me, if you're gonna make such a big deal out of it. I don't care anymore.

TIM

Yeah, sure. I know you. You won't leave me alone until I tell.

BEATRICE

I'm leaving you alone. Your turn, Lou.

LOUIS

Oh, what's the point anymore?

(HE plays. TIM plays)

TIM

Oh, you're gonna give me the silent treatment, is that it?

(BEATRICE plays)

BEATRICE

No.

(LOUIS plays. TIM plays)

TIM

Then why aren't you talking?

BEATRICE

Nothing to say.

(BEATRICE plays. LOUIS plays)

TIM

Well, look, if I tell you, you have to one: promise me you won't say anything and two: if you slip and he finds out, you have to make it look like found out from somebody else. And three: if he STILL blames me for telling you, you have to buy me that windbreaker we saw in Macy's the other day.

BEATRICE

I told you, I don't care. Don't tell me. It's not worth it.

TIM

Okay, fine. If you don't wanna know. My turn?

LOUIS

For the past ten minutes.

TIM

Sorry.

(HE plays. A pause)

BEATRICE

Which windbreaker?

TIM
The red one. The satin one.

BEATRICE
That tacky thing?

TIM
I like it. This Jack goes on your Queen, and I'll put this down. The deuce is a nine of hearts. By the way, that's another wild card.

LOU
Shit, shit.

TIM
Haven't you put anything down yet?

LOUIS
Nothing to put down, Wise-guy. You dealt yourself all the good stuff.

TIM
Yeah, bull.

LOUIS
Language. You did. You fixed it.

TIM
That's a good way to explain why you're losing.

BEATRICE
Listen, what's the point? If I buy you the jacket, it'll wind up with Joe borrowing it from you all the time.

(SHE laughs)

TIM
Good point. I won't wear it when he's in the immediate vicinity.

BEATRICE
You know, if YOU wanted to know something, I'd tell you. I wouldn't do all of this bargaining stuff. Not to my own son. I'd tell you.

TIM
How much money do you make per week?

BEATRICE
Forget it. Is it my turn?

LOUIS
(Laughs) Very good. You got her there.

BEATRICE
It's not the same thing.

TIM

You asked me.

BEATRICE

How much money I make is none of your business. But this IS my business. He's my son. And it's my car he's driving. If he's in danger, I have a right to know.

TIM

Fine. Then ask Joe.

BEATRICE

He won't tell me, you know that.

TIM

Tell him that. You have a right to know.

BEATRICE

Oh, I give up with you. My turn?

TIM

Uh-huh.

(SHE lays down cards)

Oh, you're the bitch was holding all the tens. Are you going out?

(SHE shakes her head. Discards. Looks at LOUIS.)

BEATRICE

Go.

(LOUIS picks up a card)

LOUIS

Ha-ha!

(HE lays down cards)

TIM

Big deal.

LOUIS

That's just for openers. I'm saving all the big stuff for a finale.

TIM

Oh, I see.

LOUIS

Well, go ahead. Top it.

(TIM plays)

TIM

(To BEATRICE:) How many cards you got?
 (BEATRICE holds up three cards)
 How many?
 (SHE holds out her cards)
 How many are there?!

BEATRICE

Three, three.

TIM

Just asking. Jeez.
 (BEATRICE plays, quickly. LOUIS takes his turn. HE looks at TIM to play. A pause. As TIM takes his turn:)
 We're going to a bar, all right? We so to a bar on the South Shore every Saturday night. Saturdays are two-for-one. We get there around midnight. Joe goes in, I usually stay in the parking lot. He stays for a few hours. I take a nap. He comes back, usually drunk, he gets in the back seat and falls asleep and I drive back to the city. Sometimes we stop for coffee. At least there's no traffic that time of night. No other cars on the road. It takes half the usual time to get home, even with me driving slow as molasses. I'm usually in the driveway by sunrise.
 (A pause. HE looks at BEATRICE)
 There. You happy?

BEATRICE

I knew it.
 (TIM finishes his turn)
 (To LOUIS:) I told you it was something, didn't I? I said it was something like this. I won that bet.

LOUIS

What, he makes you drive?

TIM

What, you'd rather have him driving around after five vodka on-the-rockses?

LOUIS

You don't even have a license.

TIM

Learner's permit.

LOUIS

You're not supposed to drive after dark with that.

TIM

All right, fine, next time I'll make him drive and we'll wind up wrapped around a telephone pole.

LOUIS

Yeah, it's just if YOU'RE driving and crash into a telephone pole, my insurance won't pay me a cent to get the car fixed. You ever think about that?

BEATRICE

Well, I'll put a stop to this.

TIM

No! No, you can't! He'll kill me.

BEATRICE

You expect me to let this go on? You driving illegally? Him drunk? I'm supposed to say nothing?

TIM

You have to. You see? I shouldn't have told you. We'll be fine. Look at it this way: it's only for a few more weekends. The summer'll be over by then.

LOUIS

Yeah, and what if a cop stops you?

TIM

I doubt it. First of all, I go all of twenty-five miles an hour.

(A pause)

Actually, I DID get stopped once. I told the policeman the truth. That Joe was drunk and I was taking him home. And he let me go. I guess he figured, rightly, that it was better to have me driving illegally and sober than JOE driving legally and drunk.

LOUIS

Why did he stop you?

TIM

Oh, um... I don't remember. A tail-light was out, or something.

JOSEPH

Well, that's a lie. We were never stopped.

TIMOTHY

I know, but I had to say something, otherwise they'd have told you.

LOUIS

Well, you were just lucky that time.

TIM

Yeah, maybe. Look, are we going to finish this game? Or are you just trying to take my mind off my big win?

BEATRICE

Forget the cards for a minute. What is this place? Don't you go in with him?

TIM

Honestly, I tried once, but they carded me. So I've been sitting in the car ever since.

BEATRICE
And you don't mind?

TIM
Mind?

BEATRICE
Sitting in the car for hours, doing nothing, waiting for him?

TIM
I never really thought about it. With Joe... you just do it. If he asks me to do something, no matter how ridiculous or inconvenient, I do it. He can make it sound like it makes sense, even if it doesn't. You know Joe. I always think, oh well, I'll just do this one thing. Because someday, further down the line, I'll need a favor and he'll help me. But I know that's laughable, 'cause he never will. He has a knack for good excuses. Great ad-libber. And I can never seem to think up one of his great excuses when he asks a favor of ME. Whenever he talks me into something really outrageous, I think, how'd he do it? I could never get away with that. But then I remember. I know Joe.

LOUIS
I don't know what you're talking about.

JOSEPH
Yeah, neither do I.

TIM
You really don't?

LOUIS
No. If I don't want him to do something, I tell him "no." You think all these fights we have are because we agree? Come on.

TIM
Well, no, you put up more of a struggle. And then you cave.

LOUIS
I don't.

TIM
Oh, you do so.

BEATRICE
You're wrong, Timmy. They're always fighting.

LOUIS
Yeah, gimme an example.

TIM
An example. Um... let's see. Gee, it's like being in a candy store with only a nickel. With so many to choose from, I wanna make sure I pick the best.

LOUIS

Oh, go on.

TIM

Okay, I'll pick a recent one. When... um, when the semester was over at school, you drove up to the dorm to pick up all of his stuff.

LOUIS

So?

TIM

Well, you didn't want to do it.

LOUIS

Well, no, nobody wants to do something like that. But he needed help. That's a bad example.

TIM

I don't think so. Why couldn't he have rented a van and driven himself?

LOUIS

He explained it. And it was easier for me to do it. Cheaper, too.

TIM

See? I'm saying he makes his explanations sound like truth. He makes you believe him, no matter what nonsense is coming out of his mouth. It's easier for you to drive two hundred and fifty miles one way, pick up his stuff and then drive two hundred and fifty miles back? "Gee, Joe, I don't think so, but if you say so..."

LOUIS

It costs money to rent a van!

TIM

And it doesn't cost money for you to drive all over the place? Is gasoline free in your world? With you, it's always best to use numbers. Make it look like you'll be saving money somehow, and you'll jump at it, no matter how illogical.

LOUIS

You know how much I would've had to spend to rent a van? The Hertz place was gonna charge him over a hundred dollars a day. Believe me, we saved money.

TIM

He made those numbers up. He told me so himself, he never went to Hertz. Plus, you said when you got there that he hadn't packed anything and you had to do all the packing for him. So you were late heading back and had to stay in a motel overnight. So the whole thing cost more in the end. All in all, you lost.

(A long pause)

LOUIS

All right, so why would he do it? Just to make me lose money? That doesn't make sense. We still fought like cats and dogs.

TIM

No, it's just that he couldn't be bothered with the inconvenience of having to go to the rental place, get the car, return it by a certain time. Much easier to pick up the phone, call the chauffeur and have you do all the work for him. That's the way it is. You know Joe.

BEATRICE

Well, what are we supposed to do? Hang up the phone on him?

TIM

I don't know. That's your problem. All I know is you let him walk all over you. I do it too, I know, but at least I'm not his parents. I have an excuse.

BEATRICE

I can't help it. He's my son.

TIM

Well, so am I! But you wouldn't let me get away with half the things he does.

BEATRICE

Well... you're different. We expect better of you. I've learned to expect nothing from Joe but the worst.

TIM

Oh, I see. I have to suffer because he's a shit and I'm not?

LOUIS

Stop that. He's your brother.

(A long pause)

TIM

Well. Let's finish this game, already. We have to go. Whose turn?

BEATRICE

Don't misunderstand. We love you.. That's why...

TIM

Oh, I understand. I understand completely.

(A long pause. BEATRICE takes her turn. Then LOUIS. Then TIM. All in silence. BEATRICE waits before taking her turn again)

BEATRICE

We'll make it up to you.

TIM
Yeah, sure. Take your turn.

BEATRICE
We will.

(A pause)

TIM
How?
(A long pause)
Go.

(BEATRICE takes her turn. A pause)

BEATRICE
Well, listen. Tonight I want you to tell him you don't feel well and have him take you straight back to the city.

TIM
I can't. I used that one last weekend. If I do it again, he won't believe me. And be furious.

BEATRICE
Oh. Well, then... let me think... this time, tell him...

TIM
I'm not going to tell him anything. I have to go tonight. Next weekend, maybe not. But tonight, yes. If you don't let us go tonight, he'll find out I told you and then I'll never be able to tell you anything else. I'll never tell you anything again. So: the choice is yours.

(A long pause)

BEATRICE
Well then, I guess you don't give me a choice. Okay. On one condition. As soon as you get there and he goes inside, you find the nearest pay phone and you give me three rings. Here's a dime.

TIM
When we get there? Nothing's going to happen on the way there.

BEATRICE
The way Joe drives? Don't make me laugh. I worry if he drives to the corner deli.

TIM
I don't know how I'm going to find a pay phone.

BEATRICE
Find one. Then, when you finally get home, give me three rings again.

TIM
It'll be five o'clock in the morning when we get home.

I'll be up.
BEATRICE

TIM
You want me to call at five in the morning?

BEATRICE
Yes, yes. Three rings. Then hang up. I won't sleep until I hear three rings.

TIM
You asked for it. Whose turn?

LOUIS
Jeez, with all this yakking, I don't even know anymore. I think it's yours.

BEATRICE
I'm going to make some coffee, as long as I'm going to be up all night.

LOUIS
See how your mother cares about you? What she goes through for you... kids.

TIM
Not my doing.

BEATRICE
I wish you hadn't told me this.

TIM
Well, YOU had to know. You forced me. Did you think it was going to be good news? After that runaround, what did you think I was going to say? Joe's secretly working nights at the gas station to send you on a trip to Bermuda?

BEATRICE
I just don't like worrying.

(TIM snorts)

TIM
It's your life's blood.

LOUIS
Did you go?

TIM
I'm going now.

(HE picks a card)

Finally!

(HE lays down his cards)
Eight nine and ten of spades. Ace of clubs on your King.
And I'm out.

LOUIS
You cheated!

TIM
Tell it to the Marines. Gimme your cards.
(HE takes LOUIS' and BEATRICE's hands)
Why were you holding all of this stuff? You could've put
down half this hand.

LOUIS
I thought I'd go out next turn.

TIM
Boy, that was dumb.

BEATRICE
What'd you get?

LOUIS
Fifteen shitty points.

BEATRICE
You?

TIM
I'm counting, counting.
(A long pause while HE counts)
Now the big question is: why does he go there?

BEATRICE
What?

LOUIS
So what's wrong with the tail light?

TIM
Huh?

LOUIS
The cop who stopped you. I didn't notice any problem with
the tail light.

TIM
Oh...

BEATRICE
Come on, what? Why does he go there?

TIM
Nothing. Forget it.

LOUIS
Is it broken?

TIM
No, it must've been something else. The... uh... the trunk
was open.

BEATRICE
You've told me this much already.

TIMOTHY

Christ, how the hell should I remember?

JOSEPH

Try.

TIMOTHY

Oh, come on. Do you remember everything you told them about me?

JOSEPH

Yes. Because I never said anything about you behind your back, as far as I can remember.

TIMOTHY

Then your memory is convenient.

JOSEPH

Gimme an example. I swear, I never did.

TIMOTHY

We'll have you canonized, then. I need a drink; I'm sounding the bell. Remember where we were. I'll be right back for the next round.

(HE exits. A pause. JOSEPH goes to the table. Sits. Cracks his knuckles. Stands. Stretches. Shakes out his arms. Bends over, relaxes his back. Deep-breathes. Goes to the table, looks over the loot. Eyes TIMOTHY's briefcase. Picks it up. Puts it on the table. Looks at it. Touches it. Lights dim on him, come up in another area. JOE sits on a footlocker, putting on sneakers, tying the laces. BEA enters)

BEA

Have you seen him?

JOE

Who?

BEA

Who. Your father. We're playing hide and seek. Who do you think? Your brother. He got away from me.

JOE

Nope. Last time I saw him was at breakfast.

BEA

All right. Well, look. If you see him, send him to the kitchen. Tell him I've made some brownies. Tell him I've got a surprise.

(SHE exits. JOE watches her go, stands and opens the footlocker. TIMMY pops out)

JOE

She's gone.

(TIMMY tip-toes around, looks offstage)

TIMMY

What'd you tell her?

JOE

I told her I didn't know where you were.

(HE lights a cigarette)

What's the matter? Why are you hiding?

TIMMY

They want to cut off my hair.

JOE

Why? Did you do something wrong?

TIMMY

I don't think so. Just Daddy looked at me this morning and said I looked like a girl.

JOE

You do not.

TIMMY

I don't care.

JOE

Just hide out here for another couple of hours. They'll forget all about it. I'll take care of you.

TIMMY

Good.

JOE

I don't like this shirt. Do you like it?

TIMMY

It's pretty.

JOE

Nah. I like the red one better, I think. Which do you like better?

TIMMY

The red one.

JOE

Yeah. Here, hold my cig.

(HE takes off his shirt, exits. TIMMY sits, puts the cigarette in his mouth, blows. JOE re-enters, wearing the red shirt)

What in the world are you doing?

TIMMY

I'm smoking.

JOE

That's not how. Look.

(HE takes the cigarette)

You suck in, like a straw. Pretend it's chocolate milk.

(HE gives TIMMY the cigarette, who inhales and, of course, erupts into a spasm of coughing. JOE laughs)

JOE

You'll get used to it.

TIMMY

Eeeeeuuuu!

JOE

Shhh! Stop it, they'll hear you!

(TIMMY grabs JOE's discarded shirt, puts it over his mouth and coughs into it. JOE laughs. TIMMY's coughing subsides)

TIMMY

I want my hair to grow as long as your hair. How come they don't make YOU get YOUR hair cut?

JOE

'Cause they know if they tried, I wouldn't hide in the footlocker, I'd hide in Arkansas. Why don't you wanna get your hair cut?

TIMMY

'Cause then I'll be like Marty Nussbaum.

JOE

Who's Marty Nussbaum?

TIMMY

He's this kid who's a retard. And every day he come in and he's got that stuff in his hair they give you when you get a haircut. You know, that hard stuff?

JOE

Uh-huh.

TIMMY

It's like his mother brings him to the barber shop every day before he comes to school. Also, his hair always stays the same size. So, every time somebody get their hair cut,

everybody calls him "Marty" until that hard stuff washes out. Sometimes they call you "Marty" even after the stuff is gone. Just when they feel like it.

JOE

Ask them not to put the stuff in your hair.

TIMMY

It doesn't matter, they always do. They must have a lot they have to get rid of.

JOE

Your hair'll grow back.

TIMMY

I don't know. I'm scared. I've been lucky up 'til now, but I'm afraid one day it'll get cut, they'll put that stuff in, and it'll just stay that way for the rest of my life. I'll turn into Marty Nussbaum.

JOE

That's stupid.

TIMMY

No, it's not. Like Mr. Vedder across the street. His hair always has sticky hard stuff in it and it never seems to get any longer, as far as I can tell. Could I play a record?

JOE

Sure.

(TIMMY puts on a record. Music)

TIMMY

Can we go somewhere today?

JOE

Where do you wanna go?

TIMMY

Palisades!

JOE

Not today.

TIMMY

Rockaway!

JOE

No, we can't, I'm going out tonight. Sorry, Timmy.

TIMMY

Where are you going?

JOE

To a party.

Where?
TIMMY

Cut it out, you sound just like Mommy.
JOE

What am I gonna do?
TIMMY

Gee, I dunno. Watch T.V. Maybe a good movie's on. Chiller Theatre.
JOE

"Attack of the Crab Monsters" is on.
TIMMY

That's a good one. Watch that.
JOE

Not by myself. I don't wanna watch it alone, that's no fun. Can't you stay home and watch it with me?
TIMMY

I can't.
JOE

I thought it was your favorite.
TIMMY

Look, Timmy, you've gotta get used to doing stuff by yourself, 'cause I'm not gonna be here too much longer.
JOE

What's that mean?
TIMMY

I'm going to college soon. I have to go away.
JOE

Where?
TIMMY

As far as I can get. I hate it here. I like you, you know that. But I don't like it here.
JOE

Can't I go too? I could help you pick out shirts to wear. I could pick out records you wanna buy and stuff.
TIMMY

No, I have to pick that stuff all by myself now. I'll just be gone for a while. I'll come home for Christmas. You'll see me then.
JOE

But if you like me, why do you have to leave?
TIMMY

JOE
Because Mommy and Daddy hate me.

TIMMY
No they don't.
(A pause)
Mommy doesn't.

JOE
No, maybe Mommy doesn't, but Daddy hates me. So I can't live here anymore.

TIMMY
Daddy hates me too, I think.

JOE
He likes you more than me.

TIMMY
Yeah, but if you go, he won't have you around anymore, so he'll start hating me.

JOE
Well, it's not until September, so don't worry about it.

TIMMY
That's what I am: I'm worried.

JOE
You'll be starting school again and you'll have all of the fall T.V. shows to look forward to.

TIMMY
I don't know.

JOE
You'll make friends in school. You'll get more Christmas presents with me not here.

TIMMY
Don't leave me here.

JOE
Stop it. Don't whine about it, or I'll tell them you're in here.

TIMMY
Please.

JOE
I will! They'll come up and shave your head.

TIMMY
No.

(HE cries)

JOE

Think about this: you'll get my room when I leave.

TIMMY

I don't want it.

JOE

I'm gonna leave most of my records here and you can play them. And my bed is bigger than yours. And at night, when you look out this window, you can see the lights from the World's Fair.

TIMMY

Can I keep your records?

JOE

No. But you can play 'em as much as you want. Make sure to hold 'em by the edges. You have to watch 'em, take care of them for me. But they're still mine.

TIMMY

What else are you leaving?

JOE

Oh, lots of stuff.

TIMMY

I want your shirt.

JOE

What shirt?

(TIMMY exits, comes back with a loud print shirt)

TIMMY

This one. Can I wear it?

JOE

Sure.

(TIMMY puts on the shirt. A pause. JOE takes him, sits him on his lap)

It's only gonna be for a little while. When I finish school, I'll start making money. I'll get an apartment just for myself. And maybe you can come and live with me. And we can do whatever we want.

TIMMY

I can?

JOE

Sure. You'll have to learn how to cook, though. You can make dinner for us. We'll have our own kitchen. We can have whatever we want.

TIMMY

No asparagus.

JOE
 No, none of that stuff.

TIMMY
 You'll probably have to get married, or something.

JOE
 No I won't.

TIMMY
 Can we make popcorn?

JOE
 Sure, it's our kitchen. We can make whatever we want.

TIMMY
 No, I mean can we make popcorn now?

JOE
 It's too early for popcorn. We'll make some tonight.

TIMMY
 You're going out. You won't be here.

LOU
 (Offstage:) Joe?

JOE
 It's Daddy! Hide!
 (TIMMY scrambles into the footlocker at the speed of light. JOE slams the lid, sits on it. Ties his sneaker. LOU enters)
 You said you would knock from now on, remember?

LOU
 Never mind that stuff. Where's your brother?

JOE
 I haven't seen him.

LOU
 You sure?

JOE
 What do you mean, am I sure? Of course I'm sure. He's probably over at the Borden's.

LOU
 Oh.
 (A pause. LOU looks around the room)
 This place really is a mess, you know that? I can't stand coming in here.

JOE
 Don't come in here.

LOU
Remember: you're helping me with that backyard tomorrow.
The plums have started to fall; it's a mess back there.

JOE
Yeah, yeah. No, wait a second. I can't.

LOU
What now?

JOE
No, I'm supposed to go over to Barbara's tomorrow. We're
supposed to study.

LOU
Come on. Study.

JOE
We are. We have a big test on Monday. I forgot.

LOU
Jesus H. Christ. A simple thing...

JOE
We'll do it tomorrow night, when I get home.

LOU
What time is that, do you think?

JOE
I should be home by eight.

LOU
Eight o'clock. We're gonna clean the goddamn backyard in
the pitch black?

JOE
I'm sorry. I forgot all about it.

LOU
Yeah, you got a way. Look. You got a lit cigarette over
there. You're gonna burn down the goddamn house one of
these days.

(JOE jumps up, runs to the ashtray)

JOE
I just lit it. I forgot.

LOU
You'd forget your head.

(LOU goes to the footlocker, throws it
open. TIMMY screams. LOU grabs him,
pulls him out)
There you are, you little sneak. What the hell is this, you
hiding him?

TIMMY
Joe, help me! Oh, Joe!

(TIMMY cries/screams)

JOE
Oh, for Christ's sake, leave the poor kid alone.

LOU
You knew we wanted him, what are you trying to do?

JOE
What do you wanna torture him for?

LOU
You stay out of this. We do what we want.

TIMMY
Help me Joe, please! Don't let 'em take me!

JOE
You can't take him.

LOU
What are you talking, I can't? He's mine.

JOE
No, wait a minute.

(HE grabs one of TIMMY's arms)

LOU
Hey, what is this?

JOE
You can't. I'm supposed to take him to the dentist today.
I forgot all about it.

LOU
What kind of bullshit...?

JOE
No, really. Ask Mommy. She asked me to, I just remembered.
What time is it? Quarter after one. And I think the
appointment's for one-thirty. We better get going.

LOU
And you'll be late, like you usually are. I don't believe
you.

JOE
Well, go on. Ask her. Go on.

LOU
Okay, well then, you bring him back here the minute he's
done. Then he gets his hair cut.

JOE
Okay. But we may have to get him some ice cream first,
right Timmy?

TIMMY
(Utterly confused:) Yeah...

LOU
Never mind that shit. You just...

JOE
Can I have the keys?

LOU
What is it now?

JOE
The keys to the car. Come on, we're late.

LOU
Oh, yeah, here.
(HE gives him the car keys)
Jesus. His hair, his teeth. What next?

(HE exits)

JOE
See ya later!

LOU
(Off:) Yeah.

(A pause)

TIMMY
I think I'd rather get my hair cut than go to the dentist.

JOE
We're not going to either.

TIMMY
Huh?

JOE
I made that up. Come on, we better get outta here before he
asks her. Where do you wanna go? Wanna go to Alley Pond
Park?

TIMMY
Oh, boy!

JOE
Come on!

TIMMY
You're so smart. I wanna grow up and be your age. I wanna
be just like you.

(Lights out on THEM and lights come back up on JOSEPH, in the bank. TIMOTHY's briefcase lies open on the table, its contents scattered about. JOSEPH holds a sheaf of papers. TIMOTHY re-enters, holding several paper bags. HE sees JOSEPH. HE sees the open briefcase. A pause)

TIMOTHY

Oh God.

(HE drops the bags, runs to the table, starts shoving the papers back in the briefcase)

JOSEPH

What's the point? I've seen most of it already.

TIMOTHY

Oh, shit. Shit, shit.

(HE slams the lid shut)

JOSEPH

I've seen it.

TIMOTHY

Who the hell are you to go through my stuff? The minute my back is turned? My personal stuff, and you go through it. You've got one hell of a goddamn fucking nerve. You stupid jerk; why'd you have to go and do that?

JOSEPH

Why'd you bring it with you in the first place?
 (A long pause. TIMOTHY shrugs, smiles, sits. Puts his head in his hands. Then HE takes a bottle of vodka, a bottle of wine, some plastic cups, a bag of Doritos and a bag of ice out of the bag he brought with him, HE pours some vodka over ice for himself and opens the bag of Doritos. HE pours a glass of wine for JOSEPH)

Did you really think you could get away with this?

TIMOTHY

I could've. If I wanted to.

JOSEPH

There's over five hundred thousand dollars in there, from what I can tell. There's lawyers, you know. There's an executor. Somebody would've stopped you.

TIMOTHY

Nope. Nobody knew about this but Daddy and me. These are joint accounts. And I had all the paperwork. As far anybody can tell, this is mine. That money is mine.

JOSEPH

He opened joint accounts in your name?

TIMOTHY

Well, my income was... irregular. He reported these accounts to my Social Security number, so his taxes wouldn't be so high.

JOSEPH

Well, I had no income to speak of. Why didn't he open them in my name?

TIMOTHY

(Laughs) Why.

JOSEPH

Why'd he pick you.

TIMOTHY

Because I was a good boy.

JOSEPH

Fuck you.

TIMOTHY

Well, think about it. You were always borrowing money, giving phony reasons for needing it, lying to him. Do you think he'd trust you with five hundred thousand dollars?

JOSEPH

He told me everything was to be split down the middle. Share and share alike.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, well. So the lesson you learned today is don't trust anyone.

JOSEPH

Fuck that. Who do you think you are? I'll get the lawyers in here, I'll sue the shit out of you. You won't get away with it now. I'm entitled to it.

TIMOTHY

What makes you entitled?

(A pause)

Tell me.

JOSEPH

I'm their son.

TIMOTHY

Just a word. A title you give yourself for identification purposes. "Hello, my name is: Son." Some son.

JOSEPH

Daddy would have wanted me to have half of that.

TIMOTHY

Would he really? Then why did he make it so accessible to me?

JOSEPH

Because he trusted you! He knew you'd do the right thing. I guess you're right; I wouldn't be able to handle it. But he knew you'd be fair.

TIMOTHY

Well then, I guess he figured wrong.

JOSEPH

I deserve that money!

TIMOTHY

Why? Because of an accident? Because Bea happened to give birth to you?

JOSEPH

Well, you know MOMMY would've wanted me to have that money.

TIMOTHY

Yes, but it's out of "Mommy's" hands. Bea can't do anything about it.

(A pause)

If only you'd been smart; used your head a little. Of course, I couldn't foresee it was going to end up this way, but you knew they were going to kick pretty soon. You might have tried to be more of a son. Other than the one who bears his title like a cross and shows up on occasion to ask for money. If you'd been smart, you'd've changed.

JOSEPH

It's too late for some kind of goddamn lecture. Give me that money.

TIMOTHY

Over my dead body.

JOSEPH

Bad choice of words. Right now, I could kill you and enjoy it.

TIMOTHY

Not on YOUR life, then. Not for love of money, then. In a pig's eye. Au contraire. No way, Jose. It's mine. I deserve it. I was their son. Maybe this'll teach you the lesson they never could. You skipped town when I was seven years old, rarely to be heard from again. You abandoned me in that House of Horrors. And right at the most treacherous part, too. You went out the escape hatch and locked me in. I had to fend for myself. And it was tough... because... you had ruined them for me. You had them when they were young. When they still had some joy left in them. Some spirit. Wonder. Some life!

TIMOTHY (CONTINUED)

You got taken to the circus, the park, the zoo. LOU played ball with you. Bea taught you to swim. You rode on roller-coasters. You had relay races on the beach. By the time they got around to me, they were completely used up. They were leftovers. They were too worn out for anything but sedentary activities. Give him a book, play a record, plunk him in front of the television set, we're too tired. If he starts getting rambunctious, showing the slightest desire for attention of any kind, shove him out the door and lock it. Tell him to play with his friends. The Lou/Bea School. My friends - they only kids in the neighborhood my age - were all fat little girls who sat around dressing up Barbie in the latest creations. But we won't get into that.

(A pause)

They were so afraid that I was going to become the maniac you were. So they... did nothing. Whenever I'd start to show a little excitement, a little spunk, whenever I tried to be like YOU, I'd get "The Look." "The Look" was a mixture of dashed hopes, hurt feelings, disappointment. Nothing was said. Just "The Look," then silence. For BEA, "The Look" was always the same. With LOU though, there was sometimes something behind "The Look." An anger. An impulse to retaliate. But then he would bring himself in check. And turn away.

(A pause. His voice gets very soft)

So, I guess they raised me exactly the way they wanted to. When my mischief, my spirit was ignored I had no choice but to submit. If I wanted attention, and did I, oh God, did I ever, I had to be a good boy. So I was. I was a good boy and they got what they wanted. That's what you did to me.

JOSEPH

What I did to you? Listen, if you're done...

TIMOTHY

(Shouting:) I'll let you know when I'm done, so don't interrupt me! I'm through listening to you when I have things to say. You listen to me, listen to me!

(A pause)

JOSEPH

God.

TIMOTHY

Do you see what I'm saying? They wasted all their caring on you. You! Who didn't deserve it. You just happened to come first. It was all a fucking accident. When I showed up, they expected nothing but the worst from me. They just put me in the spare room to diddle with myself until the age of consent. They were too tired to pay attention. You wasted them.

JOSEPH

I sailed uncharted waters for you! And I had no choice in the matter. You talk about accidents. You are the beneficiary of all my bad experience. They tried out all their screwy ideas on child rearing on me and then you come along and sail through while I'm a basket case. Be fucking grateful! Be grateful they left you alone. I hope I'm not interrupting your valuable train of thought here, you little shit. When I came along, they were both turning twenty-three. Younger than you, even. They didn't know what the hell they were doing. Would you know what to do with a baby if I dropped on in your lap right now? So they experimented. Trial and error. What happens when we pinch it? What happens when we lock it in the bedroom overnight? Let's try feeding it nothing but bologna sandwiches for a week. What happens when it falls down the stairs? How hard can we hit it before it shows a bruise? By the time you put in your appearance, they had all the answers. You didn't have to go through the acid test. So, now the results of their testing are starting to come in and they're not even here to witness it! But I have to live with them. I can never forget what happened in the summer of '53, the winter of '55, years you only know as meaningless numbers, something B.T. - Before TIMOTHY. But I know. They show on my skin. And I want - I deserve - reparation for all that. An apology. And now, money is as good an apology as I can think of.

TIMOTHY

And me? Don't I deserve something for all the years of service when you were nothing but a graduation photo on the mantle and an empty room with Beatle posters on the walls? I mean, I feel like goddamn Chicken Little here. Where were you when the ceiling needed repainting? When they sold the house and LOU was too cheap to hire moving men? When they had one of their ubiquitous garage sales? When they put the new deck on the summer house, where were you? After you left, I was butler, decorator, moving man, secretary, analyst; spending most of my time trying to explain why you were nowhere to be found. I became their personal, live-in, hired hand. No, that's wrong. Hired means paid. What do you call someone who works for nothing? Slave, I guess. All this while you were probably spread out on the beach in St. Moritz. Or having an existential debate in a café on the Champs-Élysées. Or picking out a tie on Carnaby Street. Well, I think I've deferred my salary long enough. I worked hard for all of this. Why should I have to divide the spoils because you show up, waving a birth certificate?

JOSEPH

You've been paid back, you were paid back all along, you've been paid back a hundred times over.

TIMOTHY

What's that supposed to mean?

JOSEPH

You got an allowance, didn't you?

TIMOTHY

So did you.

JOSEPH

Not one cent. Never. Whatever money I had came from my paper route.

TIMOTHY

Well, pardon me, but I don't believe that.

JOSEPH

Believe it or not, it's true. You forget that I left home before Lou's business started to pay off. We were poor then. Okay? Point one.

TIMOTHY

So what?

JOSEPH

They put you through college.

TIMOTHY

Oh, please.

JOSEPH

Well, they did. I'm still paying off a fifteen-year student loan. Point Two.

TIMOTHY

Just a minute. Lou gave you five thousand dollars to pay that off. He told me so.

JOSEPH

Yeah, but only after a big harangue and by that time I needed that money to pay for something else.

TIMOTHY

A new wardrobe? Membership to the gym? Nose candy?

JOSEPH

To eat! To live!

TIMOTHY

The point is that he intended to pay it off for you.

JOSEPH

No, the point is that you didn't have to go to school dressed in thrift shop goodies. You didn't have to plan a week in advance if you wanted to use the car. You got a summer house. You didn't have to spend three hours in a traffic jam in an un-air-conditioned car on the way to Jones beach only to lie on a crowded, littered strip of sand like a roasted peanut. You had your own bedroom; you didn't have to share it with a brat who screamed about the boogeyman in the middle of the night. You had color T.V.! Air conditioning! That's Points Four through Eight. You want more?

TIMOTHY

You're just talking about material things. You're just talking about money.

JOSEPH

What all this about, if not money?

TIMOTHY

I'm talking about duty. You know what that means? Responsibility. And, at this point in time, accountability. Adding it up. Understand? A reward for going above and beyond. Redeeming my pledge.

JOSEPH

I'm talking about love. Do you know what that means?

TIMOTHY

Love?

JOSEPH

It's a word in English. It's in the dictionary; look it up.

TIMOTHY

All right, all right, Ha-ha. Love. I thought you just said it was about money.

JOSEPH

It amounts to the same thing as far as our parents were concerned. They're practically synonyms.

TIMOTHY

Oh, brother.

JOSEPH

No, really. Ever talk to Mommy on the phone and tell her you're really depressed? Next week, you get a check in the mail with a note saying, "Take yourself out for a steak dinner." After Grandpa died, I wouldn't come out of my room for two weeks except to go to school. So they bought me a bicycle. That was just the way they were. I've puzzled it out in my head so many times I don't even understand it anymore. But you got it all. All the love they couldn't afford to give me.

TIMOTHY

That's bullshit.

(JOSEPH shoves him down into his chair)

JOSEPH

Not if I say so, it isn't.

(A pause. JOSEPH hyperventilates)

TIMOTHY

Have some of the wine I bought you. It'll calm you down.

(HE pours a glass, offers it to JOSEPH.
JOSEPH stares at him with hatred. Then
HE takes the glass)

JOSEPH
You want me drunk? So I'll forget about all this?

TIMOTHY
I'm drunk myself.

JOSEPH
Anyway, do you know what I mean? Do you understand what I'm
trying to say?

TIMOTHY
No.

(HE laughs)

JOSEPH
I'm talking about love! You got more. Better presents,
bigger presents. In life, Daddy hated me. He was always
partial and unfair as far as we were concerned. But I
always assumed that in death the love would be distributed
evenly. But now I find out that's not the case?

TIMOTHY
Where's my violin?

JOSEPH
I deserve one!

TIMOTHY
Listen, you had things, lots of things, that I never had.

JOSEPH
Yeah? Like what?

TIMOTHY
You had a grandfather. To stick up for you. Take your
side. Take you places. I didn't.

JOSEPH
You had ME.

TIMOTHY
But then you left.

JOSEPH
God, you're gonna start this again?

TIMOTHY
Well, really, you knew I was around to take care of them, it
left you free to roam the globe without a care.

JOSEPH
If I ever felt that they had wanted me close...

TIMOTHY

They got more and more hopeless towards the end. I've never gone more than forty miles away from home my whole life.

JOSEPH

They took you on cruises of the Caribbean.

TIMOTHY

I meant by myself.

JOSEPH

You went to Italy in high school. And I bet they paid for it.

TIMOTHY

I meant for an extended period of time.

JOSEPH

Did you stay in the Florida condo for a whole summer?

TIMOTHY

Yeah, but Bea called every other day; I might as well have been next door. You went to Switzerland.

JOSEPH

You lived in their house all by yourself. And I'll bet you didn't pay any rent.

TIMOTHY

You wanna live there? It's all yours.

JOSEPH

I'm paying five hundred dollars a month for a cracker box.

TIMOTHY

Living in their house, I couldn't change a lightbulb without a discussion. I wanted to repaint, and Bea took it as a personal assault.

JOSEPH

You've got ten rooms and a backyard. And central air conditioning.

TIMOTHY

You can come and go as you please. You don't have to sign in and out.

(Lights come up on LOUIS and BEATRICE in their Florida condominium. LOUIS sits at a dining table, reading a newspaper. HE wears BEA's glasses. BEATRICE sets the table for dinner. SHE looks at the two boys)

JOSEPH

Well, now they're gone so you won't have to account to them anymore.

TIMOTHY

You've been free of them for years. As far as you're concerned, they could've died a decade ago.

JOSEPH

Well, I'm older.

TIMOTHY

Oh, Jesus, that's another thing!

BEATRICE

(To LOUIS:) Listen to them!

TIMOTHY

Why is it that your advanced age, just ten crummy years, is always your excuse for being a shithead?

BEATRICE

We can sell the house, send them off to school, changes everything around them, but that's the one thing that never changes.

LOUIS

Yeah.

(HE shakes his head)

JOSEPH

Why don't you make an attempt to grow up?

BEATRICE

Hey, you two!

TIMOTHY

What, grow up like you? You're a great example. I'll stay right where I am, thanks.

BEATRICE

Hey, cut it out, already. You'll only be here two more days. Try and stick it out.

(JOSEPH and TIMOTHY stop, look at her.
A pause)

JOSEPH

I wasn't doing anything! I was sitting here reading. He started in.

TIMOTHY

Oh, God. What are you, five?

BEATRICE

At least come in here where I can referee.

(TIMOTHY puts down his drink and stalks
over to the table)

TIMOTHY

Can I help you with anything?

BEATRICE

I'm almost done here. You can arrange the silver while I get the plates.

(SHE exits)

JOSEPH

I thought only women could be old maids. That's what you're turning into: an old maid. An old bitch.

TIMOTHY

I'm an old maid because I don't want to go drag racing on Christmas Eve?

JOSEPH

Drag racing. I just wanna go out. There's nothing to do here.

TIMOTHY

There's nothing to do in town, either. Normal people stay home on Christmas Eve.

LOUIS

It's Christmas Eve.

TIMOTHY

Yeah? We know.

LOUIS

So you might try and be a little... you know. You two used to get along so well.

(A long pause. LOUIS goes back to his paper)

JOSEPH

Listen, if I'm going to go out...

TIMOTHY

What, you wanna borrow my underwear this time?

JOSEPH

God, no.

TIMOTHY

(Overlapping:) If you really wanna appear attractive, you'd do better to borrow my hairline.

JOSEPH

See? He's a bitch.

LOUIS

Stop it now.

(HE goes back to his paper)

JOSEPH

Really. He's always got something to say.

TIMOTHY

Come on, Joe. Stop. Not in front of him.

(A pause. TIMOTHY looks at LOUIS.
LOUIS looks up from his paper)

Sorry.

(LOUIS continues reading. TIMOTHY
circles LOUIS, observing him. Then, in
a low voice:)

TIMOTHY

Joe, you're a stupid shit.

JOSEPH

What did you just say?

TIMOTHY

(In the same low tones:) Shhh. I was just testing
something. He doesn't have his hearing aids in. And if you
keep your voice pitched at a certain level, he can't hear a
word. You can say whatever you want.

JOSEPH

You're kidding.

TIMOTHY

Try it.

JOSEPH

(Imitating TIMOTHY's tone:) Lou? Hey, Lou? Can you hear
me? Lou, you're a big fucking asshole.

(A pause)

You're right!

TIMOTHY

He only hears what he wants to hear. Watch this. Daddy,
can I borrow some money?

(Silence. TIMOTHY pitches his voice
higher)

Come on, Joe. Let's hit that bar in town.

LOUIS

Your mother's about to put dinner on the table!

(TIMOTHY and JOSEPH laugh)

What's so funny?

JOSEPH

You.

LOUIS

That's right. Make fun of an old man.

(HE goes back to the paper. BEATRICE
re-enters with plates)

BEATRICE
What are you two laughing at?

TIMOTHY
I was showing Joe how deaf Daddy is.

BEATRICE
Isn't it awful?
(SHE goes to the table)
I'd like to set your place, too, if you don't mind.

LOUIS
So?

BEATRICE
So? So? So move the paper.

(LOUIS grudgingly folds the paper. HE
knocks his glass to the floor)

LOUIS
Now look what you made me do.

BEATRICE
What I did? What do you keep it so close to the edge for?

LOUIS
If you hadn't jumped on me like that, it wouldn't have
happened.

BEATRICE
If you'd keep your hearing aid in, you'd have heard me
coming.

LOUIS
If you wouldn't yell at me all the time, I'd keep it in.

BEATRICE
If you'd read the paper in the living room, on the sofa,
like normal people do, I wouldn't yell at you and this
wouldn't have happened.

LOUIS
Well, when I read the paper in the living room, you yell
that I'm getting newsprint all over that ugly white sofa
that I didn't want you to get in the first place.

BEATRICE
I only got that sofa because it's plastic and I can wash it
off, since I knew you'd be getting newsprint all over it.

TIMOTHY
I hate to interrupt, but the glass didn't break.

(HE holds up the glass)

BEATRICE That's a surprise, considering the way your father sent it flying across the room. And then blames me for it. So stupid.	LOUIS Well! I can't believe it. After your mother jumps on me out of the blue, what did she expect to happen? She must've seen the glass there
--	---

(SHE exits. HE goes back to the paper)

TIMOTHY

Joe, would you get some paper towels so I can mop this up?

JOSEPH

What? Paper towels?

TIMOTHY

Yes.

JOSEPH

What for?

TIMOTHY

So I can mop up this spilled drink.

JOSEPH

Oh. Where are they?

TIMOTHY

In the kitchen!

JOSEPH

I know that. Where in the kitchen?

TIMOTHY

In the paper towel dispenser!

JOSEPH

Where's that?

TIMOTHY

Over the... Oh, for Christ's sake...
(HE jumps up and exits)
(On the way:) Unbelievable!

JOSEPH

I said I'd get it, I only wanted to know where it was!
Jesus!

(A pause. HE looks to LOUIS for
confirmation)

Isn't he ridiculous?

LOUIS

Who, your mother? She's impossible.

(BEATRICE re-enters with a bowl of salad
and plates. TIMOTHY re-enters with a
handful of paper towels, which HE shows
to JOSEPH)

TIMOTHY

There! That was really tough, I'm exhausted from getting them.

JOSEPH

All I asked was where. You don't have to make it such an issue. No, wait, paper towels: you shouldn't make it such a tissue.

(HE laughs like mad)

TIMOTHY

Where do you usually keep paper towels? Whoops, I'm wrong. You probably don't keep them. If you spill something in your apartment, you probably wait for a rat to come by and lap it up, you're such a pig.

BEATRICE

Would you two please? You could try to get along, if only for our sakes. That wouldn't be so difficult. It's Christmas Eve, after all.

(A pause. JOSEPH and TIMOTHY look at each other)

JOSEPH

Sorry. I should've gotten the paper towels. Sorry.

TIMOTHY

It's okay. Sorry I snapped at you.

BEATRICE

Kiss and make up.

(TIMOTHY closes his eyes, puckers his lips, makes loud smacking sounds)

JOSEPH

Let's not go overboard.

(LOUIS laughs)

BEATRICE

Well, it's nice to know I still have a purpose. To bring you two together.

TIMOTHY

Yes, and I exist to get between you and Daddy. We're set for life.

(BEATRICE goes to the table. LOUIS continues reading. TIMOTHY mops up the spill)

JOSEPH

When do we eat?

BEATRICE
Any minute. Make yourself useful. Put on some Christmas carols, or something.

JOSEPH
You don't have a record player.

BEATRICE
Play the radio.

JOSEPH
Where is it?

BEATRICE
In the bedroom.

JOSEPH
Where in the bedroom?

(A pause. SHE stares at him)

BEATRICE
Timmy, show Joe where the radio is.

(SHE exits)

TIMOTHY
What do you need the radio for?

JOSEPH
She wants Christmas carols.

TIMOTHY
Ach.
(HE dismisses it with a gesture. HE looks at the table)
What did she do with my cigarettes?

JOSEPH
I have no idea.

TIMOTHY
What happened to all my stuff that was on the table?

LOUIS
Don't ask me. She always hiding things.

TIMOTHY
Oh, here.

(HE finds his cigarettes, lights one)

JOSEPH
You're smoking a lot these days.

TIMOTHY
Yeah, well. It's something to do.

JOSEPH
You should try to cut down.

TIMOTHY
Well, it's your fault.

JOSEPH
My fault?

TIMOTHY
You taught me how to smoke. Then when I started, you gave them up! Now I'm hooked.

JOSEPH
Can I bum one?

(A pause. TIMOTHY looks at him, smirks, hands him the pack. HE moves to the windows, looks out)

TIMOTHY
You know, there's something perverse about spending Christmas Eve under a palm tree.
(A pause)
You know what I mean?

(BEATRICE re-enters with food)

BEATRICE
Dinner's on. Take your seats. For the last time, put the paper away.
(THEY sit)
I'm sorry, but I mis-timed the meat, so we'll eat the side dishes first, before they get cold. The roast'll be ready in another ten minutes. Sorry, folks.

TIMOTHY
So do you know what I mean?

BEATRICE
What's the matter now?

JOSEPH
No candles?

BEATRICE
What is it?

JOSEPH
We always had candles on the table.

BEATRICE
I DON'T HAVE ANY.

JOSEPH
There's some on top of the T.V.

BEATRICE

Not those. Those are for decoration. They weren't meant to be used.

JOSEPH

Don't be insane. They have wicks in them.
(HE brings the candles to the table,
lights them)
There now.

(HE sits. A pause)

TIMOTHY

Does anybody know what I mean?

JOSEPH

Aren't we having any wine?

BEATRICE

Your father and I don't drink wine.

JOSEPH

What do you mean "don't"?

BEATRICE

(Shrugs) We just don't.

JOSEPH

Don't you want any wine?

TIMOTHY

It makes me sick.

JOSEPH

Aren't you drinking anything?

TIMOTHY

I like to keep my wits about me for these family dinners.
Daddy, do YOU know what I mean?

LOUIS

You talking to me?

TIMOTHY

I give up.

JOSEPH

Well, we need something to toast with.

BEATRICE

There should be a bottle of champagne on the bottom shelf of the icebox, I think.

JOSEPH

Where's the wine glasses?

BEATRICE

With all the other glasses.

(HE exits)

While you're running around sprinkling mistletoe,
everything's getting cold.

(SHE looks at LOUIS, shakes her head in
disapproval)

LOUIS

What's he up to now?

BEATRICE

Getting champagne.

(LOUIS laughs, shakes his head)

LOUIS

What next?

(JOSEPH re-enters with champagne,
glasses. HE opens it and pours it out)

BEATRICE

Who bought us that champagne? Do you remember, Lou?

(HE shrugs)

Somebody did.

LOUIS

It's been in there so long, I've forgotten.

TIMOTHY

The Bordens. When you moved.

BEATRICE

Good memory.

JOSEPH

What is that in the oven, roast beef?

BEATRICE

(Wary:) Uh-huh.

JOSEPH

We always used to have roast goose on Christmas Eve, if I
remember correctly.

BEATRICE

We always used to have Christmas carols too, but you ignored
that request.

JOSEPH

It's hard enough to get Daddy to hear me in silence. I'm
not gonna start shouting over a radio.

BEATRICE

You try to find a goose in a Florida supermarket.

LOUIS

Are we gonna eat, or what?

BEATRICE

Go ahead. Start in. That is, if Joe's through playing the Ghost of Christmas Past.

JOSEPH

I'm just trying to make it nice.

(HE sits. THEY pass food)

LOUIS

What is this, are we vegetarians?

BEATRICE

I said I was sorry. I mis-timed. The roast'll be ready any minute.

LOUIS

Oh, it's not ready yet?

BEATRICE

No.

(A pause)

Why did you buy those things if you won't wear them? It's very inconsiderate you know, having to shout, having to repeat everything twenty times over.

LOUIS

Blah, blah, blah.

(TIMOTHY laughs. LOUIS realizes HE has an audience)

I'll start wearing it when you stop complaining.

BEATRICE

You're just encouraging him.

JOSEPH

What were you saying before?

TIMOTHY

A half an hour later he asks.

JOSEPH

What were you saying?

TIMOTHY

Well, it was me, so it couldn't have been anything too important.

JOSEPH

Gimme a break. What?

TIMOTHY

No, forget it, we're on to something else.

JOSEPH

Well, I'm not going to beg you. Say it or don't.

TIMOTHY

Nothing.

(A pause)

I was just saying it's weird being in Florida for Christmas.

JOSEPH

Yeah? So?

TIMOTHY

So nothing. It's just weird. Wearing short sleeves. For Christmas dinner, we're going to a barbecue. It's not right, somehow. This heat... To finally make it through the summer, only to have another summer.

BEATRICE

Oh, I like it. Going swimming all the time. You don't have to buy overcoats. I was sick of the cold.

JOSEPH

What's wrong with summer?

TIMOTHY

Nothing's wrong with it. I just like for it to be over, is all. And here it never is. Swimming and Coppertone for Christmas. Sand in your shoes. It's sacrilegious.

BEATRICE

Don't worry. Sannie Claus comes to Florida, too. He'll still leave you nice presents. Remember how you used to say "Sannie Claus"?

TIMOTHY

Yeah.

BEATRICE

You're not about to go into that why-did-you-sell-the-house song and dance again, are you/

TIMOTHY

No, you should've sold the house. If that's what you wanted to do.

JOSEPH

Well, I don't, if you want my opinion.

BEATRICE

Can we talk about something else, please? I'm losing my appetite.

JOSEPH

What should we talk about?

BEATRICE

I don't know. Here, pass the asparagus to your father. He hasn't had any.

(THEY eat in silence for a while,
passing food back and forth. JOSEPH
hands a dish to TIMOTHY)

TIMOTHY

Oh my God, I don't believe this!
(HE throws down his fork)
Look at this! Look at what he did!

BEATRICE

What's the matter?

TIMOTHY

He scrapes off all the nice, crispy top part of the
casserole for himself and then leaves all the mushy, watery
glop underneath for me.

BEATRICE

Who did?

TIMOTHY

Who do you think? Look at his plate!

JOSEPH

What'd I do?

TIMOTHY

You know. You know what you did. You take the best part
and everyone else gets stuck with the shit. Other people
like that crispy stuff too, you know. You probably don't
even know you're doing it. Or maybe you do, you're just
daring someone to catch you. You think you're some kind of
fucking king.

JOSEPH

Jesus, here, take some, if it's going to turn into such a
hassle.

TIMOTHY

No, I don't want any of now, now that you've touched it.

LOUIS

What in the world is the matter with you?

TIMOTHY

Oh, nothing. I'm just being a lunatic, as usual.

LOUIS

Well, cut it out.

TIMOTHY

It makes me mad. Why should I let him get away with
everything?

LOUIS

Because it's Christmas Eve.

TIMOTHY

That makes a difference?

LOUIS

Yes, it does. It's the only time we're all together anymore.

TIMOTHY

But I've been saving this up all year. Perfect time to let it out.

LOUIS

Well, you're finished now, so eat.

TIMOTHY

I'm not hungry anymore.

LOUIS

Then just sit there with your mouth shut and let us enjoy our dinner. Stop trying to ruin it for all of us. Your mother's worked hard for this.

(A pause. LOUIS goes back to eating. JOSEPH eats. TIMOTHY sits, his arms folded. BEATRICE looks around the table)

BEATRICE

(Quietly:) That roast should be ready by now.

(SHE gets up from the table and exits. TIMOTHY gets up from the table, lights a cigarette. BEATRICE re-enters with the radio, plugs it in, tunes in a station playing Christmas carols)

There. That's much better.

(SHE exits. Lights come up on the other side of the stage. A dinner table: Christmas, 1964. LOU sits at the head. JOE and TIMMY sit, waiting. BEA enters with a platter holding a roast goose at the same time BEATRICE re-enters with a platter of meat. THEY place their offerings on the tables simultaneously)

LOU

Keep your elbows off the table.

JOE

Only if you promise to chew with your mouth closed.

TIMOTHY

(To JOSEPH:) Why are we doing this? Once was enough; why go through it again?

JOSEPH
To find an answer, dummy. Don't you wanna know why this happened?

TIMOTHY
Why what happened?

JOSEPH
You know.

TIMOTHY
We're not going to find the answer here.

JOSEPH
Maybe.

TIMOTHY
These ghosts aren't telling us anything. They just do what ghosts do: the pop out when you don't expect them.

JOSEPH
Try keeping your mind open and your mouth closed.

TIMOTHY
I'm scared, Joe. We're being haunted by something that has nothing to do with us.

JOSEPH
Oh no?

BEATRICE
Joe, pass the meat to your father.

TIMOTHY
Listen to me!

JOSEPH
I'm busy.

(HE gives LOUIS the platter of meat)

BEATRICE
See? Just like it used to be. Sort of.

LOUIS
You went through all that trouble with the champagne and you didn't even make a toast.

TIMMY
Can I go look at the Christmas tree?

BEA
We're eating now, Timmy. When you're done eating.

TIMMY
I don't like geeses.

BEA
You've never even had it.

TIMMY
I know. But I don't like it.

BEA
Just try it. It's like chicken.

JOE
It's Baby Huey, Timmy. You're eating Baby Huey.

TIMMY
Eeeewww! I hate Baby Huey.

BEA
Shut up, JOE. Here. Take a little piece.

TIMMY
I don't want it.

LOU
Sannie Claus is watching you. You better try it.

(TIMMY puts the piece of meat in his
mouth)

BEA
There. Isn't that yummy?

TIMMY
No.

TIMOTHY
When do we open the presents?

BEATRICE
Oh, are you still part of this dinner? I thought you
weren't speaking to us.

TIMOTHY
I just asked a question.

BEATRICE
Well come and sit down and eat your dinner and maybe I'll
answer your question.

JOSEPH
You're getting a bag of coal this year.

LOUIS
Meat's a little tough.

BEATRICE
Is it? That supermarket is for the birds. They have
everything under the sun, but none of it's any good.

TIMOTHY

You could at least have gotten a Christmas tree.

BEATRICE

Next year if you wanna stay down here an extra week to help me pick pine needles out of the carpet, we'll get one. Otherwise...

JOSEPH

Next year we'll decorate a palm tree.

TIMOTHY

Next year?

(A pause)

BEA

Looks like it might snow.

JOE

Hear that, Timmy?

TIMMY

What?

JOE

It's gonna snow.

TIMMY

Oh boy!

LOU

Too warm for snow. It'll probably rain, though.

BEATRICE

How's the meat, Lou?

(LOU doesn't hear. SHE looks at the boys, shakes her head, laughs)

LOU

It's good. Greasy, but good.

BEA

Timmy? Eat.

BEATRICE

Go on, eat.

JOE

Oh, if he doesn't want it, don't force him. It's Christmas Eve.

LOU

Look, when you have kids of your own, you can feed 'em any way you like. But 'til then, keep your nose out of it. He's ours.

TIMOTHY

Oh, for God's sake.
 (HE goes to their table)
 I'll eat it for you, Timmy.

BEA

Get out of here! Go sit at your own table. (To BEATRICE:)
 He's your son, can't you keep an eye on him? My son's only
 five and he acts more grown-up. Go sit at your table and
 stop being such a baby.

BEATRICE

Tim, come on. Leave it alone. Come over here and sit down.
 Tell me what I've done to you lately.

TIMOTHY

Never mind. Just put a gag in my mouth and feed me
 intravenously.

BEATRICE

No, I didn't mean... Why does it have to be this way? Why
 can't we be nice to each other?

TIMOTHY

That's a hot one. (To JOSEPH:) You got an answer for that?
 Why can't we be nice to each other?

LOUIS

So, Joe: how's your work coming along?

JOSEPH

Are you starting in on me?

LOUIS

How is that starting in? I asked a question.

JOSEPH

Fine.

LOUIS

Huh?

JOSEPH

Fine! It's fine, I said! Good God, I'll spend the next
 year learning sign language so we can communicate.

LOUIS

Jeez, I didn't mean anything by it.

LOU

Don't let him talk to you like that! He's only your son,
 for God's sake!

(HE comes over to their table)

This is your house, isn't it? Isn't he in your house? You
 paid for that roast, the chair he's sitting in, that table
 he has his elbows on.

(HE pushes JOSEPH's elbows off the table)

LOU (CONTINUED)

Who does he think he is? It's not your fault you have a handicap.

JOSEPH

I'm not gonna stay in the same room with him. I don't want to be in the same state. I'll pack and go back to New York.

BEATRICE

Joe, stop it. He'll calm down in a minute. You know how he is.

LOU

Yeah, come on back to New York. I'll be waitin' for ya.

(JOE gets up from his table, goes to JOSEPH)

JOE

If I were you, I'dve left years ago. It's too late to do anything about it now. I'dve packed and moved to the other side of the planet and not looked back. I'dve enjoyed it, too. I'd live my life.

JOSEPH

And when the money runs out? What would you have done then, Smartie-pants? You don't have any friends.

JOE

I'dve done something else.

JOSEPH

Yeah? Like what? I'm waiting. Give me answers!

LOU

I'll tell you what you'd've done. You'd've gone crying to your Mommy. "Mommy, I'm in trouble. Help me, Mommy. Boo-hoo-hoo!"

JOSEPH

Shut the fuck up.

LOU

You wanna leave? There's the door. Hurry up, so I can nail it shut behind you. Good riddance.

LOUIS

He's your son, don't talk to him like that. Your own son, for God's sake. You talk to him like an employee. Like you pay him a salary. Like he's a stranger. Makes me sick.

LOU

Well, Timmy's my son too, and he's never any trouble.

(TIMMY beams angelically)

LOUIS

Well, Joe's your son too. You shouldn't be partial; playing one against the other.

TIMOTHY

Hold on a second, can I say something here?

(TIMMY jumps up, runs to him)

TIMMY

No! Don't say anything! Just sit there and count the peas on your plate. That's the best thing to do. If he knows you're here, he'll take it out on you. Joe's always been bad; why should you take the blame?

(TIMOTHY pushes him away)

TIMOTHY

God, no wonder they make fun of you on the playground. You're such a fucking wimp.

(BEA runs over, slaps TIMOTHY in the face)

BEA

He's just a baby; you leave him alone.

TIMMY

See? I told you.

TIMOTHY

(To BEATRICE:) These people are, like, nuts.

LOU

Don't give me any of this bullshit. Who pays the bills? Whose house is this? You tell them what you want them to do; if they don't, they can pack.

BEATRICE

Just a minute. I worked, too. This is my house, too, you loudmouth.

BEA

Honey, honey, listen to me.

BEATRICE

I like you better deaf.

BEA

Look, it's gonna blow over soon. You know the way they are. Let the men get it out of their system.

BEATRICE

This concerns me too.

BEA

Wait 'til they're talking rationally again. In the meantime... I made a terrific London Broil the other day. Now, the secret is, you have to marinate it overnight. You let it sit... Sit down, sit.

LOUIS

You learn from experience. I'm older than you...

LOU

God, you sound like my father. And he was a real jerk.

JOE

(To JOSEPH:) aren't you going to say anything? You're older. You're stronger. If he hits you, you could beat him up.

JOSEPH

I've had enough. I'm tired. You take over for me.

(HE moves away to the other table. HE pulls a leg off the goose, nibbles on it)

JOE

All right, I'll move out. Is that what you want?

LOUIS

No, no...

LOU

Fine with me. Say goodbye to your mother.

LOUIS

Cut it out. Let's talk this over. I'm calm now.

LOU

You stay out of this, old man.

BEATRICE

(To BEA:) Would you shut up? I can't hear.

BEA

You take half a cup of brown sugar...

(TIMOTHY moves over to JOSEPH at the other table)

TIMOTHY

Well, this hasn't solved a damn thing.

JOSEPH

Oh, my toast! I forgot the toast.

(HE takes a glass off the table, raises it high)

To next year!

TIMOTHY
Joe, don't. Stop it.

(JOSEPH moves into the center of the
combat zone)

JOSEPH
To next year: May we each get our secret heart's desire.

(A pause)

BEATRICE
Amen.

(SHE drinks. The lights go out. In the
darkness, a phone rings. Lights come up
on TIMOTHY at one side of the stage,
holding a receiver. BEATRICE, holding a
receiver, is on the other side)

BEATRICE
So what did he say?

TIMOTHY
What DIDN'T he say? That's the way it goes. He spills his
guts, and I go "Uh-huh, uh-huh."

BEATRICE
He needs someone to talk to. He's lonely.

TIMOTHY
He's got you. Isn't that what mothers are for? And
besides, he doesn't want to talk. He only calls when he
wants something. I'm sick of it. Not only sick, I'm bored.
I don't wanna talk to him anymore.

BEATRICE
So what are you gonna do when he calls? Just hang up?

TIMOTHY
Sure. No. I don't know. We'll have to talk it out, I
guess. But now is not the time.

(Lights up on LOUIS, holding a receiver)

LOUIS
What's going on?

TIMOTHY
Hello?

BEATRICE
It's your father. He picked up the extension.

TIMOTHY
Hi, Daddy.

BEATRICE
He doesn't want to talk to Joe anymore.

LOUIS
What's the matter?

BEATRICE
I can't figure it out. He's not making any sense.

LOUIS
What's he done?

TIMOTHY
He hasn't done anything. I just don't want to talk to him anymore. Simple as that. I just don't like him.

LOUIS
That's a terrible thing to say. He's your brother.

TIMOTHY
So what? I should like him, even though he clearly doesn't care about me, even though he's a shit?

LOUIS
I don't like you talking like this.

TIMOTHY
Don't listen in.

BEATRICE
What can we do? There must be something we can do.

TIMOTHY
No, there's nothing. You can't make him change. Let's talk about something else, this is pointless. How was the Geiger's barbecue?

(TIMOTHY hands the received to JOSEPH,
exits)

JOSEPH
No, but he just sits there, going "uh-huh, uh-huh." Like he's turned on a tape recorder and left the room. He's cold as a fish.

BEATRICE
He's distant with us, too. You have to reach out to him.

JOSEPH
How can I? Every time he answers the phone and realizes it's me, I can feel him wanting to slam down the receiver. Like I did something wrong to him. I haven't done a damn thing.

BEATRICE
Maybe if you were a little more patient with him. You're older; try to be more understanding.

JOSEPH

He's not a baby. Well, fine. I won't call him. I'll wait for him to call me.

BEATRICE

Why don't you ask him out to dinner? I'll send you a check.

JOSEPH

Why should I? Let him ask me. I'm always going to him. Well, I can't be bothered. I have work to do.

(A pause)

Is Daddy there?

LOUIS

Yeah, I'm here.

JOSEPH

Don't you have anything to say on the subject?

LOUIS

Did you ask him for something? A loan, or something?

JOSEPH

Oh, forget it.

(Lights up on TIMOTHY, holding another receiver)

TIMOTHY

I wish he had. Then at least I'd have reason to be mad. Now I just feel stupid. But I can't help it.

JOSEPH

I think he's just spoiled. If I don't call and don't say I'll take him on a Caribbean cruise or that I got him a present, he's disappointed. He doesn't talk.

LOUIS

He's your brother.

TIMOTHY

Why do you keep saying that like it's an answer? He's your son. I don't see you throwing your arms around him, giving him a smooch.

LOUIS

Well, that's me. I'm just not that kind of person.

TIMOTHY

Well, I'm your son. I'm not either.

BEATRICE

What can we do?

JOSEPH

Nothing. You already made the mistake. You should've realized the problem after you had me.

BEATRICE

Stop it.

TIMOTHY

Stop trying to push us together all the time. It doesn't feel right. Let nature take its course.

LOUIS

Two brother should be together, not split apart. You're all you've got. We're just trying to give nature a helping hand.

JOSEPH

I should've been an only child. Then there's be no problem.

LOUIS

Try to act like a grown-up, Tim. That's all I'm saying. So what if he only calls to tell you his problems? Does it take that much time out of your life?

TIMOTHY

When's he gonna listen to MY problems?

BEATRICE

There must be something we can do.

JOSEPH

Just don't do all of this "brothers" shit. There's ten years between us; it's like we're both only children anyway. We'll get together. I just can't say when.

TIMOTHY

We'll work it out. But I'm not ready now. But someday. Someday.

JOSEPH

(Overlapping:) Someday.

(Lights out. In the darkness, a phone rings three times. Lights up in the bank. The wine bottle is empty and tipped on its side. JOSEPH peels the label. TIMOTHY pours another vodka for himself. HE picks up a crumb and pops it into his mouth. The table is a mess)

TIMOTHY

That was the last time I saw them. They asked me to come down to help them with the garage sale and I figured it would be less trouble to just go, rather than try to think up some elaborate excuse. I couldn't understand why they wanted to have a garage sale, unless it was to get rid of some junk to make room for more junk. But when I got down there, the stuff they were selling... I mean, good stuff. Stuff that had been in the family. Grandma's tea service, Grandpa's clock, gold jewelry... And the prices they were asking were like... nothing. I mean, three fifty for a topaz ring. And I don't mean three hundred fifty, I mean

three dollars and fifty cents. Stuff jewels would have bought for a hundred times the price. And whenever I'd ask why, Mommy'd say "You want it?" I saved as much of it as I could, but there was just so much I could bring back on the plane. I had to let the big stuff go. I mean, by rights it WAS theirs; I couldn't stop them. And the people who came were like vultures, vultures on speed, vultures gone mad. It was all gone in less than two days. They were... moody, I guess, but I just... Well, I figured it was the weather. It rained a lot. And it was cold. Especially for Florida.

JOSEPH

Yeah, they asked me, but I couldn't go. I had a meeting.

TIMOTHY

Yeah, that's what they said. They asked me about you, but I said we hadn't spoken in months.

(A pause)

I wasn't going to lie.

JOSEPH

No.

TIMOTHY

So, I got home and I gave them three rings. I didn't know they weren't even listening.

(A pause. HE clears his throat)

Well, listen. It's late. This joint closes in fifteen minutes. We better... straighten up.

JOSEPH

There's still a lot of unresolved stuff. Should we go to my place? We can take a taxi, order some Chinese food.

TIMOTHY

No, no. Look. I want everything done. Before we leave.

JOSEPH

Not possible.

TIMOTHY

Listen, I... I got a deal for you here. You listening?

JOSEPH

Uh-huh.

TIMOTHY

This stuff, this money... I guess I really did want you find it. I wasn't really trying to hide it from you. I couldn't have gone through with it. Anyway, I'm willing to split it with you. Down the middle. Share and share alike, like you said.

JOSEPH

Well... I should hope so.

TIMOTHY

But I have two conditions. And they have to be followed to the letter.

JOSEPH

Yes?

TIMOTHY

First, I want you to understand that this is mine. It's in my name. It would be very hard for you to prove otherwise. Also, I can now afford to hire better lawyers, so if you try to fight me, your chances of getting anything are even slimmer. So if you turn me down, you wind up with nothing.

(A pause)

JOSEPH

Well? What are you waiting for, a drum roll?

TIMOTHY

No, no, I'll give you half. But first, you must promise never to contact me again. I mean ever. No phone calls, no visits, no nothing. If you call, I'll hang up. If we meet by chance on the street, you can say hello if you like, but I'll ignore you. I want to live the rest of my life without ever seeing you again. And I'll have papers drawn up to this effect: if you break the rules, you suffer the consequences. You forfeit everything. All unresolved matters regarding the estate will be handled through my lawyer to you, your lawyer, whomever. Is this all clear?

JOSEPH

Perfectly.

TIMOTHY

Condition number two: You must make your decision today, before the bank closes. No extensions, no waivers, no exceptions. Immediately. After six o'clock there's no turning back. I won't even ride down in the elevator with you. Okay.

JOSEPH

Okay. You mean, do I understand?

TIMOTHY

Yes.

JOSEPH

Yes, I understand.

(A pause)

TIMOTHY

Well?

JOSEPH

I still have ten minutes.

(A pause. JOSEPH sits at the table, starts to look through the contents of TIMOTHY's briefcase. TIMOTHY lights a cigarette, paces the room. Lights fade to half on them. Lights up on LOUIS, sitting on the sofa in the condominium. Behind the sofa is a table which supports an 8 millimeter movie projector. A reel of film is threaded, ready to go. LOUIS is dressed nicely; a jacket and tie. After a pause, BEATRICE is heard from offstage)

BEATRICE

(Off:) All set?

(SHE enters, holding a silver tray with a crystal decanter, half full of red wine, and two wine glasses. SHE's had her hair recently done and SHE wears evening dress. LOUIS jumps off the sofa)

LOUIS

Here, let me help you with that.

(HE takes the tray from her. SHE sits on the sofa as HE places the tray on a coffee table)

Well, how's this?

(HE stands in front of her, turns in a circle)

BEATRICE

Much better. You look... Lou.

(SHE points to the floor)

Brown shoes.

LOUIS

So? These are my best shoes.

BEATRICE

You're wearing a blue suit. Go change.

LOUIS

Oh, who cares?

BEATRICE

I care; isn't that enough?

(LOUIS sighs, exits. BEATRICE unstops the decanters, pours wine into both glasses. SHE thinks of something, exits. LOUIS re-enters)

LOUIS

How's this, Mommy? Where'd she go?

(BEATRICE re-enters, holding a framed photograph of JOSEPH and TIMOTHY)

BEATRICE

Just something.

(SHE puts the photo on the coffee table)
Now let me look at you.

(SHE looks)
Very nice. Very handsome.

(SHE brushes something off his shoulder)
How 'bout me?

(Before HE can say anything, SHE interrupts)
I like my hair like this. I hope they don't change it.

(SHE takes his hand, THEY sit on the sofa. SHE gestures to the wine)

LOUIS

That's it?

(SHE nods. HE looks at her. A pause. HE takes her in an embrace, kisses her deeply. The kiss breaks, but THEY continue to hold each other. Finally, THEY separate. THEY each pick up a glass, clink them. LOUIS downs his wine in one gulp. BEATRICE sips. Finally, SHE drains the glass)

LOUIS

Get the lights.

(BEATRICE stands and exits. LOUIS stands, goes to the projector. The lights go out. In the overspill from the bank, we can see BEATRICE return to the sofa)

Ready?

(A pause)
Here we go!

(HE flicks on the projector; a flickering white beam of light. LOUIS sits back on the sofa as light come back up full on the bank)

JOSEPH

Wait a minute. You've got something else in here.
(HE takes a ring out of TIMOTHY's briefcase)

How do we split this down the middle?

(TIMOTHY goes over to him, takes the ring)

TIMOTHY

Oh, this.

JOSEPH

What is it?

TIMOTHY

Don't tell me you don't recognize it. It's your cub scout ring. I found it in Florida. Nobody bought it. I took it.
(A pause)
You can have it back, if you want it. Here. You can keep it.

JOSEPH

Now I remember. Think it's worth anything?

TIMOTHY

To anybody but you and me? I doubt it.
(A pause)
Well?

JOSEPH

Well what?

TIMOTHY

What's your decision?

(JOSEPH looks at his watch)

JOSEPH

Five minutes.

(A long pause. TIMOTHY stares at him)

TIMOTHY

Joe?

JOSEPH

Yeah?

TIMOTHY

Even if we were able to add it all up and found a reason for what happened, would it matter?
(JOSEPH shrugs)
Have you found a reason?

JOSEPH

I don't know.

(A pause. HE looks at TIMOTHY)
Well, I've found a reason that makes sense to ME. I don't know.

(A long pause)

TIMOTHY

Well? Care to tell me? Want to share it with the rest of the world?

(A pause. JOSEPH shrugs)

JOSEPH

You'll laugh.

(Lights out on them. LOUIS and BEATRICE sit on the sofa, motionless, holding hands. The projector clicks away. Lights come up on TRIXIE, sitting on a blanket, movie camera to her eye, laughing. SHE follows and object with the camera, moving from left to right.

Lights up on LOUIE, on a beach. JOEY pulls on his pants leg)

LOUIE

What, you want up?

(HE lifts JOEY into the air, looks up into his face and laughs)

Okay, up we go! You like it up there?

(Lights up on LOU, with TIMMY on his lap)

LOU

We learned trust. You have no choice but to trust each other, or somebody's gonna get hurt. You probably don't understand this now, but you will. One day you will.

(Lights up on BEA, at the kitchen table with JOE)

BEA

Everything seemed to be going against us right from the start. But. Luckily for you, we plodded on.

(Slowly, a movie screen descends, obscuring LOUIS and BEATRICE. On the screen, we see part of a home movie. The outside of a church: a small crowd stands in wait. The doors open, LOUIE and TRIXIE emerge from the church. The crowd pelts them with rice. THEY laugh. The camera follows TRIXIE as she runs to the bottom of the church steps and tosses her bouquet in the air. The film cuts. We see LOUIE holding a car door for TRIXIE as SHE climbs into a sedan, circa 1941. LOUIE climbs in after her and the door shuts.

The film cuts again. We see the rear window of the car, a hand-lettered "Just Married" sign taped to the trunk, several rusty tin cans tied to the bumper. LOUIE and TRIXIE look out the back window, grinning ear-to-ear. THEY wave energetically at the camera. The car starts to pull away. THEY continue to wave and smile.

The film jams in the projector. The film stutters, flickers and stops, frozen on a frame of LOUIE and TRIXIE, smiling and waving.

Slowly, the film melts and burns in the projector. The screen goes white.

A telephone rings three times.

The projector bulb burns out. The screen goes black)

END OF PLAY.