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Muldeca

# SOUND / LIGHT CUES!

## Squabbles

ACT ONE

Lights up - Day (July) SCENE I

A July evening in the SLOAN home in Stamford, Connecticut. The living room, with its beamed ceiling, stone fireplace and traditional furnishings, is separated from the kitchen by a breakfast bar. When the curtain rises, JERRY SLOAN, 38, is composing a jingle at a small upright piano. His father-in-law, ABE DREYFUS, 72, is sitting at the dining area table writing postcards.

JERRY. (singing)  
Plotkin's. Plotkin's. The best of all tuna fishes.  
Plotkin's. Plotkin's. It goes in so many dishes.  
Plotkin's. Plotkin's. The taste is really delishes!

ABE. Excuse me for butting in Jerry, but it isn't delishes.

JERRY. Abe, I've been writing jingles for 12 years. People understand when I say delishes, I mean delicious. It's poetic license.

ABE. And I've been eating tuna fish for 72 years, and Plotkin's isn't delish. It isn't delicious; it's rancid. Does your license cover that?

JERRY. What do you mean?

ABE. I mean there's a can in the kitchen. I opened it for lunch. It was rancid. You got a good rhyme for rancid?

JERRY. Abe, the people from the ad agency just shot a TV commercial with that can. No wonder it was bad. It was under the hot lights for hours.

ABE. So that's what a jingle writer gets, huh? Jerry, if you were an architect or a periodontist or something else respectable, people wouldn't try to pay you off with hot poisoned fish.

JERRY. They only gave it to me so I could look at the can and maybe get a little inspiration.

ABE. Maybe they said indigestion. Anyway, what kind of inspiring name is Plotkin's for a tuna fish?

JERRY. I think it was Mrs. Plotkin's idea.

ABE. Chicken of the Sea! Now that's a catchy name for a tuna fish. Plus it's got a nice mermaid on the can. What does Mrs. Plotkin have on her can, you should pardon the expression? A fish wearing a top hat.

JERRY. That's Mr. Finny. He's finicky about good taste.

ABE. Sure, Mr. Finny. A fish wearing a top hat and tails. He's probably out dancing and whoring around till all hours of the night. Is that good taste? A gigolo tuna fish?

JERRY. I give up.

ABE. Aah, you give up too easy. Six weeks I've been living here, and you never get into a good solid argument.

JERRY. Why would I want to get into an argument?

ABE. Because you're a son-in-law. It's your God given right.

JERRY. C'mon, Abe, you don't need me to fight with. You get into an argument with poor old Mr. Wasserman every time he comes over to play cards.

ABE. Wasserman? Wasserman's a pussycat, a retired pharmacist. Jerry, the man couldn't get into a fight with

an armed terrorist.

JERRY. And you?

ABE. Me? I drove a cab in New York City for 50 years. You argue for survival. It becomes part of your health regimen.

JERRY. Arguing is good for your health?

ABE. You didn't know that? Of course it's healthy. It relieves tension and stress. Some people tense up, they take pills; they smoke; they drink; they fool around on the side. I argue and bingo, the tension goes away. No side effects.

JERRY. For you there's no side effects. What about the people you argue with?

ABE. If they'd argue back, they'd be fine. I was married to Louise for 48 years, she should rest in peace. That woman and I would have at least one argument a day. Sometimes just a snide remark; sometimes a little bone to pick; and on a good day, we would fight tooth and nail. For 48 years we were happy and healthy, and then I went and screwed it up.

JERRY. What do you mean?

ABE. Louise got sick, and me like a fool, I made the mistake of being nice to her. For two weeks, I was smiling and pleasant, and poof, she drops dead. I learned my lesson, Jerry. An argument a day keeps the doctor away . . . if you get my gist.

JERRY. And the heart attack you had two months ago . . . that doesn't count?

ABE. What heart attack? I never had a heart attack. I had gas. Gas runs in my family.

JERRY. And they put you in intensive care for gas?

ABE. *They* put me? There was no they. There was one Chinaman doctor. *He* put me in intensive care for gas.

JERRY. Aw c'mon . . . Doctor Soong is one of the top

heart specialists in . . .

ABE. A Chinaman specializes in laundry; in take-out food; in little radios . . .

JERRY. That's Japanese.

ABE. . . . same difference. BUT! A Chinaman does not specialize in hearts. An American specializes in hearts.

JERRY. You are such a bigot. Dr. Soong is an American!

ABE. (*Totally ignoring the previous remark.*) Do you know how my father, he should rest in peace, died? At the age of 84, he fell off a horse. And my grandfather? At the age of 96, he fell off my grandmother.

JERRY. What???

ABE. I wouldn't lie. They were in a hay loft making love. He rolled over; he fell 15 feet. Boom, he was gone.

JERRY. They were making love in a hay loft?

ABE. You think people only do it in bed with the lights out? A sophisticated jingle writer from Stamford, Connecticut like yourself?

JERRY. I mean . . . he was still doing it at 96?

ABE. Forget about what he was doing. The point is, the men in the Dreyfus family don't have heart attacks. They have gas; sometimes they fall; heart attacks, never.

*Action will knock!*  
(*There is a knock on the back door.*)

JERRY. Come in. (*The back door opens and in walks* HECTOR LOPEZ, 40, the gardener, handyman, jack-of-all-trades who comes by every few days to work for the SLOANS. HECTOR is cheerful, outgoing, and as we will soon see, constantly in need of a bathroom.)

HECTOR. Buenos tardes, Mr. Sloan.

JERRY. Hiya Hector.

HECTOR. Mr. Drayfus.

ABE. DRY-fus, DRY-fus, not Drayfus.

HECTOR. I'm almost finished cutting the grass.

ABE. Don't let me stop you.

HECTOR. It's a beautiful day to cut the grass, si?

ABE. Yeah, I saw. I was out this morning.

HECTOR. It's not too hot.

ABE. It's not too cool.

HECTOR. It's just right.

ABE. That covers the weather. You want to move on to sports and politics?

HECTOR. Sorry, I don't have time to chat-chit. I have to cut the grass. (*HECTOR begins walking toward the steps.*)

ABE. Hector, the grass is out there.

HECTOR. Oh sure, but first I have to go to the bathroom. See you later, Mr. Sloan . . . Mr. Drayfus. (*HE exits up the steps.*)

ABE. (*calling after him*) DRY-fus. (*aside*) Damn wet-backs can never think dry. (*JERRY goes back to piddling at the piano. ABE takes a pad and pencil from his pocket and makes some quick calculations.*) \$73.50!

JERRY. Huh?

ABE. I know it's none of my business Jerry, but somebody has to keep track. \$73.50, so far.

JERRY. You lost me.

ABE. I'll make it simple for you. That Hector fellow . . . he comes around every few days to do odd jobs, right?

JERRY. Right.

ABE. You pay him six dollars an hour, correct?

JERRY. Correct.

ABE. Ten cents a minute, yes?

JERRY. I never figured it that way, but yes.

Hector exits

HECTOR exits

ABE. And did you ever notice that whenever he comes here, he always has to use the bathroom? That he spends a lot of time in your bathroom?

JERRY. So?

ABE. So ever since I've been living here he's spent a grand total of 12 hours and 15 minutes up there. Jerry, you've paid the man \$73.50 for sitting on your toilet.

JERRY. Aw c'mon, Abe . . . Hector doesn't charge me for the time he's in the bathroom.

ABE. You know that-for a fact?

JERRY. Well . . . no . . .

ABE. I rest my case. Incidentally, if you ever want to cut back on your expenses, I'd be happy to sit on your toilet for \$4.00 an hour.

JERRY. I give up.

ABE. I have years of experience.

JERRY. I already gave up.

(ALICE SLOAN enters through the front door. SHE is about 35, dressed in a business suit, carrying an at-tache case.)

ABE. \$3.50 an hour plus carfare. My final offer.

JERRY. (Ignoring ABE) Hi ya, honey. (HE kisses her.)

ALICE. I thought you had a late recording session.

JERRY. We cancelled. The agency and the client couldn't agree on the lyrics. I got home early. By the way, where were you?

ALICE. What do you mean?

JERRY. I called your office this afternoon. Your secretary said you were out.

ALICE. (vaguely) I guess I was out. (Turning quickly to ABE.) And how are you old man? What did you do today?

ABE. Let's see. In the morning I read the paper. In the afternoon I had a near brush with death. A certain Mrs. Plotkin tried to kill me. Attempted poisoning.

ALICE. (SHE sees the postcards on the table.) Are you sending more postcards?

ABE. She had an accomplice, a Mr. Finny. Slippery fellow. Will you represent me in court?

ALICE. Daddy . . . you promised you wouldn't send any more postcards.

ABE. I promised I wouldn't buy any more postcards. I still had 50 left. What am I supposed to do with 50 postcards? Write recipes on the back?

ALICE. And what am I supposed to do when a client calls me on the phone? How do I explain W . . . W . . . Whatever?

ABE. It's not W . . . W . . . Whatever. It's WCNW. Like Country 'N' Western. C.N.W. When the phone rings, you pick it up and you say, "WCNW plays the country hits y'all want to hear." Then Big Tex Winslow comes on and tells you how much money you've won. The jackpot is \$1180 already. It goes up \$10 every time some jerk picks up the phone and says hello.

ALICE. Well if our phone rings, I promise you this jerk is going to say hello.

ABE. Excuse me, while I mail my postcards. (HE starts for the door.) I'll walk the long way so you can have time to talk about me.

ALICE. What makes you think we're going to talk about you?

ABE. You talk about me every night when you come home. Tonight you're home early; you can talk about me early. Believe me, I'm flattered. (HE exits.)

ALICE. (Calling after him.) We are not going to talk about you. (The DOOR SLAMS. To JERRY.) We've got to talk about him.

ALICE  
ENTERS

ABE EXITS

JERRY. A Serious Abe Talk or a Regular Abe Talk?

ALICE. Serious.

JERRY. I'll make us a drink. (*HE starts making drinks.*) Why do you want to put yourself through this again? I thought we decided he was staying.

ALICE. I know, but did we decide he was staying with us forever?

JERRY. Honey, you promised your mother you'd take care of him.

ALICE. I can't believe this. He's *my* father, and you're the one who's willing to put up with him.

JERRY. Actually, I like him. But then, I didn't have a father most of my life. Your problem is that you let him get to you.

ALICE. He "gets" to everybody. It's what he lives for. Doesn't he ever get to you?

JERRY. Sometimes. But for the most part I think I'm used to it. He's like my mother. It's a defense mechanism.

ALICE. My father and your mother.

JERRY. Like two peas in a pod.

ALICE. Killer peas, maybe.

JERRY. (*A la W.C. Fields.*) Ah yes, the wedding day. I vaguely recall a little squabble between the new in-laws.

ALICE. (*brightening up*) A little squabble? Your mother came after my father with a carving knife.

JERRY. (*Playing defense attorney.*) Objection, your honor. It was not a knife. It was a cake cutter.

ALICE. Well, she thought it was a knife.

JERRY. Objection. Hearsay.

ALICE. I still don't know what he said to make her come after him with a knife . . .

JERRY. Uh, uh, uh.

ALICE. . . . sorry, your honor. Cake cutter. Anyway,

it was a good thing the caterer grabbed it out of her hand.

JERRY. It was his best cake cutter. (*HE suddenly remembers.*) Hey . . . by the way . . . do you know how your great grandfather died?

ALICE. Sure. He fell off Great Grandmother. They were doing it in a hay loft.

JERRY. You never told me that.

ALICE. I was waiting for a chance to work it into the conversation. Anyway, my great grandfather isn't the problem. It's my father.

JERRY. Honey, what choices did we have? After the heart attack, we couldn't leave him in that rat hole he was living in.

ALICE. And an old age home is out of the question, right?

JERRY. People live longer if they move in with family.

BOTH. Time Magazine.

JERRY. Look, this doesn't have to be a forever decision. We said we'd play it by ear. But that was just a few weeks ago. He hasn't been that bad. Why are you dredging this all up again?

ALICE. You really want to know?

JERRY. (*A la Bogart.*) I bought you a drink, lady. The least I could get is a little straight talk.

ALICE. Hmmmm, how shall I put this?

JERRY. I prefer direct and to the point, but I'll settle for the inimitable beat around the bush style we all know and love.

ALICE. (*Not hearing the last comment, because SHE's been searching for the words.*) Remember last month?

JERRY. June. One of my favorites.

ALICE. Remember we spent the night at Brian and Sharon's apartment? And we drank all that wine?

JERRY. I don't remember . . . we drank all that wine.



ALICE. Jer . . . about that night?

JERRY. Yeah? (*ALICE doesn't answer. Suddenly it dawns on him.*) Oh my God, you're pregnant. Are you pregnant?

ALICE. (*Not sure what to say.*) Well . . .

JERRY. (*excited*) Of course. You said you could get pregnant, and you got pregnant. *That's* what this whole Abe Discussion is about. You're pregnant . . . are you pregnant?

ALICE. Well . . .

JERRY. Alice, if this were the Gallup Poll, you'd be entitled to a "No Opinion."

ALICE. (*Having lost her normal bravado.*) Would you be upset if I were pregnant?

JERRY. Upset? Are you crazy? It would be terrific. We both want kids . . . you *do* want kids, don't you?

ALICE. Eventually.

JERRY. Sweetie, you're 35 years old . . . eventually is right around the corner. You do want to have a kid don't you?

ALICE. Of course.

JERRY. (*Thinking a little levity will loosen her up.*) Whew! That's a relief. For a minute there, I thought I screwed up and married the one that didn't want kids. No . . . Cynthia Hackley was the one who didn't want kids. I distinctly remember, she had a Great Dane and she wanted a monkey. No kids. You, on the other hand, are Alice. You're the one that wanted kids. No monkeys. That's why I married you. It all comes back to me. (*This is not working. Frustrated, HE changes direction.*) For God's sake, Alice, why would I be upset if you got pregnant?

ALICE. Well, we wouldn't have planned it.

JERRY. Alice, I promise if you're pregnant, we'll start



planning right now.

ALICE. That's another giant step forward for Planned Parenthood.

JERRY. Then you're pregnant.

ALICE. I didn't say that.

JERRY. (*Humoring her.*) OK. Let's just *pretend* you're pregnant. There are certain things we should plan. I mean, I know you want to keep on working. We'll get a nurse . . . or a housekeeper. Nothing will change, except we'll have a baby . . . and, and a housekeeper.

ALICE. And, and my father. A few minor changes.

JERRY. Alice, are you pregnant? Yes? Or no?

ALICE. (*reluctantly*) Maybe.

JERRY. Maybe?

ALICE. Probably.

JERRY. (*Stating the fact.*) You are probably pregnant.

ALICE. I'm pregnant.

JERRY. You are?

ALICE. Well, I don't know for sure, but a woman knows. I'm pregnant.

JERRY. (*Gingerly, calmly, knowing SHE is upset.*) Well, sweetheart, when will you know for sure.

ALICE. Six o'clock. (*Not quite understanding, JERRY nods his head as if HE does. Just then, the clock on the mantle chimes. DONG. DONG. DONG. DONG. DONG. DONG. JERRY counts each chime patiently on his fingers. When the sixth chime rings out, HE turns to ALICE and smiles tenderly.*)

JERRY. Are you pregnant?

ALICE. Dr. Porter said he'd *call* me at six o'clock. I went to see him this afternoon.

JERRY. I wondered where you were this afternoon.

ALICE. I know I should have told you I was going, but

SOUND  
★  
CLOCK  
CHIMES  
6 TIMES

I knew you'd be happy about it, and I couldn't deal with you being happy, while I was so confused. (*SHE starts getting teary.*) . . . Jerry . . . do you love me?

JERRY. (*Taking ALICE in his arms.*) Sweetheart, what kind of question is that to ask the father of your child. Of course, I love you, and we're going to have a wonderful baby . . .

ALICE. . . . and an eccentric old man . . .

JERRY. . . . and we'll all live together in a crooked little house.

ALICE. Happily ever after?

JERRY. I promise.

ALICE. I'm a lawyer. I can sue you for breach of promise.

JERRY. Better yet, I guarantee it. You can sue me for breach of guarantee. (*THEY kiss passionately, as ABE enters the front door carrying a newspaper. HE smiles, taking in the scene. Just then, the telephone rings.*)

ABE. I'll get it. (*HE picks up the phone and speaks in a sing-songy voice.*) WCNW plays the country hits y'all want to hear. (*There is no answer. HE tries again.*) Hello? (*There is still no answer. In disgust, HE hangs up. HE shrugs.*) They hung up.

ALICE. Damn it. They always hang up when you do that. They think it's a wrong number. Please, I'm expecting a very important call.

ABE. Well I too am expecting a very important call from Big Tex Winslow. I thought that was my important call.

ALICE. It was mine, and when they call back, don't you dare touch this tele . . . (*The phone rings. ALICE is startled, but quickly grabs it.*) Hello. This is Mrs. Sloan.

ABE. (*Shouting over her shoulder toward the phone.*) WCNW plays the country hits . . .

ABE  
ENTERS  
SOUND  
PHONE RINGS  
TIL ABE  
ANSWERS

A SOUND  
PHONE  
RINGS  
ALICE ANSWERS

ALICE. (*Loudly, to be heard over ABE.*) Yes, hello, Dr. Porter. This is Alice. (*Realizing it's not the radio station, ABE shuts up. JERRY watches intently as ALICE walks with the phone and crosses to the coffee table.*) Yes . . . are you sure? . . . March 22nd . . . is there anything I should be doing before then, or not be doing . . . Oh, yes I have a million questions. OK. I'll see you then. Wait . . . I'm having a drink . . . is that all right? I'll see if we have any in the house. What? Oh . . . thank you very much . . . I think. (*SHE hangs up the phone and sets it on the coffee table.*) It's official. I'm pregnant.

JERRY. (*Letting out a hoot.*) All right! (*HE kisses her.*)

ALICE. Dr. Porter prescribed a mild dose of champagne.

JERRY. I know there's a bottle of champagne in here somewhere. (*HE heads for the liquor cabinet in the kitchen.*)

ABE. (*Slightly dumbfounded.*) You're pregnant? (*ALICE nods her head. Smiling at her.*) I didn't know you could get pregnant from a telephone. A toilet seat, yes.

ALICE. (*laughing*) That was the doctor. The test results came in.

ABE. I know. I was only making a joke. (*HE kisses her on the cheek.*) My little girl is going to have a baby. Congratulations. (*HE hugs her.*) I'm sorry your mother . . . (*HE chokes up.*)

ALICE. Oh, Daddy.

ABE. (*Regaining his composure, HE breaks the hug.*) Enough hugging. You'll squish the baby. You going to let me teach him to play pinochle?

ALICE. As long as you don't teach him to cheat at pinochle.

ABE. I'll do better. I'll teach him how not to get caught cheating at pinochle.

(The toilet flushes.)

A SOUND  
TOILET FLUSHES

*Abe*

JERRY. (*Bringing in a tray of champagne and 3 glasses.*) It's warm. But it's champagne.

(*HECTOR comes down the stairs and enters the room.*)

*HECTOR  
- ENTERS*

JERRY. Hector, grab a glass. My wife is going to have a baby. Have some champagne.

HECTOR. Congratulations. (*HECTOR grabs a coffee mug and pours himself some champagne.*)

JERRY. (*toasting*) Here's to March 22nd . . . is that what he said? March 22nd? (*ALICE nods.*) Here's to March 22nd, and a happy healthy baby. (*JERRY kisses ALICE. THEY ALL drink.*)

HECTOR. Here's to the new baby, the new papa, the new mamacita linda, and the new Grandpapa, Senor Drayfus.

ABE. Dry. Dry. Dry.

HECTOR. (*Referring to the champagne.*) Very dry. It's good. Hey . . . what you going to call the new baby?

ALICE. I haven't even thought about it.

HECTOR. How about Pepe?

ABE. How about Louise?

HECTOR. That's great. My son is named Luis.

ABE. Not Luis. Louise. My wife was named Louise.

HECTOR. My wife is named Isabella.

ABE. We'll keep it in mind.

HECTOR. (*Finishing off his champagne.*) But you got plenty of time to figure it out. Right now, I have to use the bathroom. This champagne goes right through me. Congratulations. (*HE exits up the stairs.*)

*HECTOR  
- EXITS*

ABE. (*Looking at his watch and humming.*) \$74.50.  
ALICE. I'm going to fix dinner. (*to JERRY*) Will you help with the salad?

JERRY. Sure. (*THEY BOTH begin preparing dinner in the kitchen.*)

ALICE. Daddy, would you do me a favor?

ABE. It's hard for me to say no to a pregnant lady. What can I do?

ALICE. I'm thinking about fixing up a bedroom for the baby.

ABE. She's pregnant five minutes, and she's nesting already. You're just like your mother. (*HE sits in the armchair with his newspaper.*)

ALICE. I think the baby should have the bedroom next to ours.

ABE. My room?

ALICE. Don't you agree, Jerry?

JERRY. Makes sense to me.

ALICE. Would you mind moving into the guest room?

ABE. The little room?

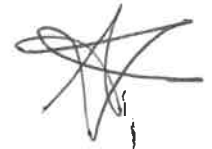
ALICE. It's not *little*. It's cute. Besides, it separates you more from the baby. You'll get some peace and quiet.

ABE. Maybe I should just move out altogether before he's born.

ALICE. (*Giving a long hard "help me" look at JERRY, then turning to ABE.*) I thought we decided that you're staying.

ABE. You're sure you need an old man around here?

ALICE. (*Crossing to the armchair, SHE puts her hands on his shoulders.*) Not just any old man. I'm looking for a very special one. One that capped my teeth, bought my prom dress, taught me to cheat at cards, convinced me to go to law school and then worked double shifts to pay my way through.





ABE. And now you're going to hold all that over my head?

ALICE. You want the job, old man?

ABE. Have I told you lately that you're an awful lot like your mother?

ALICE. Then we can fix up the cute little room for you?

ABE. You'll move the TV set?

ALICE. Of course we'll move the TV.

ABE. It'll fit in that tiny room?

ALICE. We'll get a crowbar.

ABE. Then it's settled. I'll move to the cute tiny little guest room with the television squeezed into a corner. I'll pack tonight.

ALICE. Done! (*SHE crosses back to the dining area.*)

ABE. Chiseled in stone! (*The phone, which is still on the coffee table in front of ABE, rings. ABE grabs it.*) WCNW plays the country hits y'all want to hear . . . hello . . . (*HE waits for a reply. There is none. HE hangs up.*) They hung up.

JERRY. Maybe we should get him his own phone.

ABE. In that little room? Maybe a wall phone.

ALICE. Was it the doctor again? Did they say anything?

ABE. (*Crosses to the desk and puts the phone on it.*) It definitely wasn't the doctor. It sounded like a woman crying.

ALICE. How could you do that? Jerry, what woman would be crying?

ABE. (*Crossing to the sofa, HE sits down with his newspaper.*) Listen, you'd be crying if I just said hello, and we lost \$1180. Anyway, if it's important, they'll call back.

ALICE. Crying is important. (*The phone rings.*)

★  
SOUND  
phone rings  
= ABE answers

★ SOUND  
phone rings  
Jerry grabs it.

★  
NOT a sound  
cue

← MILDRED  
on phone  
OFFSTAGE

JERRY runs to the desk and grabs it.)

JERRY. Hello.

MILDRED. (*offstage, slightly teary*) Hello, Jerry.

JERRY. (*to ALICE*) It's my mother. (*into phone*) Ma, why are you crying?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) My house is on fire.

JERRY. Don't call me. Quick, call the Fire Department. (*to ALICE*) Her house is on fire!

MILDRED. (*offstage*) I did call the Fire Department. They're washing down the ashes. I have no house, but clean ashes.

JERRY. It burned to the ground?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) It started on the ground. It burned to the roof.

JERRY. (*to ALICE*) It burned to the ground.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Everything went up in flames. My beautiful Steinway . . . gone.

JERRY. The Steinway? Our good Steinway?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) No, darling, I rented a bad one special for the fire.

JERRY. That's the piano I grew up with.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Would you care to inquire about the mother you grew up with, Jerry?

JERRY. I'm sorry. Ma, are you O.K.?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Yes. But . . . but . . . my little budgie bird is dead, and I feel very guilty.

JERRY. Your parakeet?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) My little parakeet, Peter. Fried to a crisp.

JERRY. Aw, Ma, I'm sorry. (*to ALICE*) She's O.K. Her parakeet died. (*to MILDRED*) Ma, how did the fire start?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Jerry, if I wanted to talk about the fire, I'd sit here and talk to the Fire Chief. I have no

place to live, so I called my son.

JERRY. Just a second. (*to ALICE*) She has no place to live.

ALICE. (*hesitantly*) Well . . . I guess she could move in with us for a while.

ABE. Oh no!

JERRY. Mom, why don't you move in with us? Temporarily.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) I was hoping you'd offer. Could I ask the nature of the phrase "temporarily?" The house isn't going to grow back-you know.

JERRY. Mom, you can rebuild. You're insured aren't you?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) I'm insured for the full purchase price.

JERRY. That's great. (*to ALICE.*) She's covered.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) We purchased it in 1947.

JERRY. (*to ALICE*) She's not covered. (*to MILDRED*) O.K. You'll move in here . . . for the time being. You can stay in the baby's room.

ABE. That's my room! (*ALICE shushes him.*)

MILDRED. (*offstage.*) You have a baby? When did you have a baby?

JERRY. We're going to have a baby. We just found out tonight. I was going to call you.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Congratulations! I can't believe it. A baby! Oh Jerry, if I weren't so miserable, this would be the happiest day of my life.

JERRY. Look, Ma, tomorrow morning, throw some things in a bag, and . . .

MILDRED. (*offstage*) What things? I have no things. I have wet ashes and a dead bird.

JERRY. I'm sorry. Mom, why don't you fly down here tomorrow. Call us when you know what flight you're on

and we'll pick you up at the airport.

MILDRED. (*offstage*) Oh Jerry, I knew I could count on you.

JERRY. We'll see you tomorrow. Try to get it together, O.K.?

MILDRED. (*offstage*) O.K. Goodbye darling. ✓

JERRY. Goodbye, Mom. (*HE hangs up the phone and turns to ABE.*) Abe . . .

ABE. I heard.

JERRY. Did you hear it was only temporary?

ABE. Could I trouble you to define temporary.

JERRY. A couple of weeks, a month, whatever it takes for her to get back on her feet and find a place to live. I couldn't exactly throw her out in the cold.

ABE. It's the middle of July.

ALICE. Abe Dreyfus, you have no right to be so unreasonable! And you, Jerry . . . don't defend yourself. You did the right thing.

ABE. Am I to understand she's getting my room . . . excuse me, the baby's room, the one I just graciously volunteered to vacate.

ALICE. Yes. I'd rather you move now into the room you're going to live in permanently. Let Mildred have the baby's room. Please?

ABE. I can't believe it. Mildred the Ripper is getting my room.

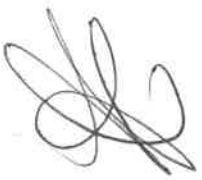
ALICE. Daddy, have a little compassion. Her house burned down. She has no place to go.

ABE. Speaking of places to go I suppose I'll have to share a bathroom with her.

ALICE. You suppose right.

ABE. Then I'd better go and use my bathroom now, before she shows up and tries to take over. (*HE starts to go upstairs.*)

*Mildred hangs up!*



JERRY. I . . . I think Hector is still in the bathroom.

ABE. The hell with it then. I'm going out to cut the grass!

ALICE. Are you crazy? In your condition?

ABE. You put me under the same roof with a woman who tried to murder me with a butcher knife, and you're worried about my condition? Do me a favor; don't worry. I can assure you, I will be fine . . . if you get my gist!

ABE EXITS!

(ABE storms out of the kitchen door. JERRY and ALICE look at each other silently, understanding together the enormity of the problems that lie ahead. THEY each pick up their drink as the lights go to black.)

Jerry + Alice [look at each other.] (drinks?)

A  
Light  
one  
SLOW TO  
BLACK!

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

The SLOAN living room in the early afternoon of the next day. ABE and WASSERMAN, about 70, are playing gin rummy. ABE is very half-hearted as HE throws a card into the discard pile.

WASSERMAN. You're giving me the four of diamonds.

ABE. (Studying the card.) Let's see. Four little red boxes standing on their points. Yup. That's it, Wasserman. The four of diamonds. Who says you're getting senile?

WASSERMAN. Gin.

ABE. Gin? Gin already?

A  
Light  
ABE + Wasserman  
at table  
S.L.  
Seated!

DAY - July

Jerry  
on  
phone

WASSERMAN. It was a bad play. You knew I was saving diamonds.

ABE. I knew? I'll tell you what I knew. I knew we should have played pinochle this afternoon.

WASSERMAN. Today's Tuesday. Thursdays we play pinochle.

ABE. Wasserman, Wasserman, Wasserman, is there no adventure in that pharmacist's soul of yours? Didn't you ever secretly yearn to play a little pinochle on a Tuesday?

WASSERMAN. You're playing so lousy this afternoon, what's the difference if we play gin rummy or pinochle?

ABE. I can cheat better at pinochle.

WASSERMAN. What's bothering you today, Dreyfus? (ABE shrugs his shoulders.) Is it that your daughter is pregnant?

ABE. My daughter is married. Why should it bother me that she's pregnant?

WASSERMAN. Well, something is bothering you.

ABE. I guess I'm just not my old self today. Who knows?

WASSERMAN. Maybe you should take a laxative.

ABE. Once a pharmacist, always a pharmacist, hey, Wasserman? (The telephone rings. ABE answers it.) WCNW plays the country hits y'all want to hear.

JERRY. (offstage) ABE, it's me, Jerry. Did anyone call?

ABE. Someone did, but they hung up.

JERRY. (offstage) Listen, my mother told me to pick her up at JFK. But apparently there was some mix-up and her plane landed in Newark about an hour ago. I had her paged and told her to take a taxi to our house.

ABE. That's nice.

JERRY. (offstage) Look we're almost home. We're at

made score  
shuffle + deal

A  
SOUND

phone  
rings  
ABE

ANSWER  
Jerry  
OFFSTAGE

the gas station on the Connecticut state line. But she'll probably get there ahead of us. I know it isn't easy, but please be nice to her.

ABE. I'll welcome her with open arms.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Abe . . .

ABE. On the way home, you pick up a cake. I'll have a cake cutter ready.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Abe . . .

ABE. Better yet, the minute she walks through the door, I'll show her the silverware drawer.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Please, Abe, give me a break.

ABE. By the time you get home, she'll be armed to the teeth.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Abe, I'm hot; I'm tired. Please?

ABE. (*giving in*) I will do my best to be charming and gracious.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Just don't kill each other. Alice and I will be home soon.

(*THEY BOTH hang up.*)

WASSERMAN. Who's coming?

ABE. Jerry's mother.

WASSERMAN. I think I see what's bothering you.

ABE. They gave her my room.

WASSERMAN. It's their house.

ABE. Their house. My room.

WASSERMAN. Is she staying long?

ABE. Her house just burned down.

WASSERMAN. She's staying long. (*HE perks up.*) Maybe she's a nice person.

ABE. That's the trouble with you, Wasserman, always trying to find good in something.

WASSERMAN. Still and all, she could be a nice person.

ABE. I met her.

WASSERMAN. And?

ABE. Remember from the Wizard of Oz movie, there was a wicked witch?

WASSERMAN. Yes.

ABE. She's not that nice.

WASSERMAN. Her husband, when did he die?

ABE. He's not dead.

WASSERMAN. She's a divorcee?

ABE. No.

WASSERMAN. Not a widow, not a divorcee, what's left?

ABE. You want to know what's left? I'll tell you what's left. One night about 30 years ago, her husband said he's going out for a walk. She said, "Are you going out for cigarettes?" He said, "No. I'm walking out the door, and I'm never coming back."

WASSERMAN. So?

ABE. So he walked out the door and never came back.

WASSERMAN. What about his clothes? His things?

ABE. Ooooh, Wasserman, you're so practical. He probably bought new clothes, new things.

WASSERMAN. But how does she support herself? How does she eat?

ABE. She's a piano teacher. And she probably eats with a fork. Who cares?

WASSERMAN. O.K. So her husband left her. Does that make her a bad person?

ABE. Don't you understand? She already was a bad person. That's why he left her! You want to hear something else? At Alice and Jerry's wedding reception, she came at me with a knife.

WASSERMAN. A knife?

ABE. A knife, Wasserman!

WASSERMAN. What could happen that would make her lift a knife to you?

ABE. Nothing happened. I said one thing. One little thing.

*★ SOUND*  
 (The doorbell rings.)

*ACTOR cue! ★*

WASSERMAN. (*enthralled*) Yes? What did you say to her?

ABE. I have to answer the door.

WASSERMAN. (*puzzled*) She took a knife to you when you said, "I have to answer the door"?

*Door ring eye Mildred enters*  
 ABE. (*Walking toward the front door.*) No, now I have to answer the door. Didn't you hear the bell? (*The bell rings again.*) Alright, alright. I heard it the first time. (*ABE swings open the front door and there stands MILDRED SLOAN, an attractive, well-dressed, well-kept woman of 66. SHE is carrying two shopping bags and a brand new oversized stuffed monkey. ABE stands in the doorway, holding the door open with one hand and blocking the doorway with his body.*) Good afternoon, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. (*Surprised to see him.*) Mr. Dreyfus?

ABE. One and the same.

MILDRED. What are you doing here?

ABE. I live here.

MILDRED. You're staying with Jerry and Alice?

ABE. I live here.

MILDRED. Jerry never told me you were visiting with them.

ABE. I live here. Not visiting. Living.

MILDRED. How long are you staying?

ABE. It depends on how long I live. If I drop dead this afternoon, I'm sure they'll have me out by five, six

o'clock. Seven at the latest. How long are you staying?

MILDRED. We didn't discuss it.

ABE. Well, the baby is due in March. You're in the baby's room. (*ABE slams the door definitively. MILDRED ignores the insult and enters the room.*)

*Rise* - MILDRED. (*to WASSERMAN*) How do you do. I'm Mildred Sloan.

WASSERMAN. Sol Wasserman. Nice to meet you.

MILDRED. You live here too?

WASSERMAN. No, no, I'm just visiting.

MILDRED. How long are you staying?

WASSERMAN. I'm not staying. I live down the street. I just came to play cards. I was just leaving.

ABE. Wasserman, where are you running? Stay. Visit. (*Turning to MILDRED and referring to the two shopping bags.*) Mrs. Sloan, let me take your "luggage." (*to WASSERMAN*) Very handsome, don't you think? (*HE lifts them with a flourish, then sets them down a few feet away in the middle of the floor.*) There! (*Then HE "notices" the stuffed monkey.*) Now, can I take your wrap?

MILDRED. Very funny, Mr. Dreyfus.

ABE. (*Looking "closer" at the monkey.*) Oop. My mistake. Can I take your gorilla?

MILDRED. It's a monkey. It's for the baby.

ABE. Ah yes; well the baby won't be here for another eight months. Shall I take it, or would you like to carry it around till then?

MILDRED. I'd forgotten just how "funny" you were. (*Setting the monkey on the sofa.*) I'll put it here, if that's alright with you.

ABE. (*innocently*) Alright with me? This is Alice and Jerry's house. I only LIVVVVVVVVVVE here.

WASSERMAN. (*Uncomfortable at the goings-on.*) I

think I'd better be going now. Goodbye, Mrs. Sloan. A pleasure to meet you. Goodbye, Dreyfus. I'll see you Thursday for pinochle, yes?

ABE. Of course, of course. *MY* life is not changing. Same as always. If you get my gist.

WASSERMAN. (*With a knowing inflection.*) Mmmm hmmm. (*WASSERMAN exits.*)

ABE. A wonderful man.

MILDRED. I'm sure.

ABE. Devoted husband.

MILDRED. That's nice.

ABE. Even when he comes over for a few hands of cards, he calls his wife Esther two, three times. (*MILDRED turns slowly toward ABE, guessing what HE's up to.*) I guess some men just can't leave their wives, even for a few hours. But then, who would walk away from a wonderful woman like Esther Wasserman? (*MILDRED is aware that HE is baiting her. SHE glares and is about to speak, but ABE heads her off.*) So! How was your flight from Buffalo? (*At this, ABE walks to the breakfast bar and pours himself a cup of coffee.*)

MILDRED. Rochester.

ABE. Buffalo, Rochester . . . I'm a city person. To me New York is five boroughs, and I'm not too thrilled with Staten Island or the Bronx. So . . . how was your flight from Rochester?

MILDRED. It was terrible.

ABE. I'd love to hear about it.

MILDRED. For one thing, we landed in Newark instead of JFK.

ABE. Did they mention why?

MILDRED. They gave several reasons. None to my satisfaction.

ABE. Maybe they were hijacked and they were trying to keep it quiet.

MILDRED. Hijacked to Newark, New Jersey?

ABE. (*Ignoring her, HE sips his coffee.*) Mmmm! This is good coffee.

MILDRED. Is it?

ABE. The best! Wasserman made it. You remember Wasserman, don't you? Tall fellow. Lives down the street. (*MILDRED ignores this obvious insult.*) Whenever he comes over he makes a whole pot. I can never make coffee like Wasserman. I use the same water, the same coffee, the same pot, but he has the touch. Excellent.

MILDRED. I enjoy good coffee myself.

ABE. Then you'd love this. (*There is a small pause. Finally, MILDRED gives in.*)

MILDRED. Do you think Mr. Wasserman would mind if I had a cup?

ABE. (*Hits his head in an exaggerated gesture.*) What kind of a host am I? Can I get you a cup of coffee?

MILDRED. By all means. (*ABE gets up to pour a cup of coffee for MILDRED.*)

ABE. Milk and sugar?

MILDRED. Black. No sugar.

ABE. Black. No sugar. Would you like a little something to go with the coffee?

MILDRED. As a matter of fact, I am a little hungry.

ABE. The specialty of the house is Tuna Surprise. I'm sure Jerry must have another can around here somewhere.

MILDRED. Oh nothing that elaborate.

ABE. (*Searching for the tuna.*) No problem.

MILDRED. Please. A few crackers would be fine.

ABE. Sweet or salty?

MILDRED. I beg your pardon.

ABE. Sweet crackers or salty crackers? Am I going too fast for you?

MILDRED. Sweet crackers.

ABE. (*Searching in kitchen cabinet.*) I only have salty.

MILDRED. How apropos. Salty will be fine. (*ABE grabs the entire box of crackers and brings it over with the coffee. HE set them both down on the coffee table with mock deliberation.*)

ABE. Enjoy yourself.

MILDRED. (*Suddenly "realizing" something.*) Isn't that amazing?

ABE. Isn't what amazing?

MILDRED. My dream. I had a dream last night, and now it all comes clear to me.

ABE. You're a dreamer, huh?

MILDRED. I dreamt I was walking through a forest, when I came to a field.

ABE. Fascinating.

MILDRED. In the middle of the field was a horse. But as I got closer, I could see that only the horse's head and his front legs were there. The rest was missing. I wondered . . . whatever became of the back end of that horse. And now I know. (*SHE sips her coffee.*) Mmmm, this is good coffee.

ABE. (*Knowing when to change the subject.*) You didn't touch your crackers. (*MILDRED just smiles her victory smile.*)

(*The toilet flushes upstairs. ABE checks his watch.*)

MILDRED. What was that?

ABE. You mean that noise that sounds like a toilet flushing?

MILDRED. Yes, what was that?

ABE. That was the toilet flushing.

MILDRED. I know. What I don't know is who flushed.

A SOUND  
[ TOILET  
Flush ]

ABE. Oh, that's Hector, a Puerto Rican fellow.

MILDRED. What is he doing upstairs flushing the toilet?

ABE. He used it. No matter what else you might say about the Puerto Ricans, they flush.

MILDRED. I mean what is he doing upstairs? Does he live here too?

ABE. No, Jerry just pays him to come over and use the toilet.

HECTOR  
ENTERS

(*HECTOR enters the room.*)

HECTOR. Hello, Mr. Drayfus, I'm going to move . . . (*seeing MILDRED*) oh hello.

ABE. Hector, this is Mrs. Sloan, Jerry's mother.

HECTOR. Hector Lopez. Is my pleasure to meet you.

MILDRED. How do you do?

HECTOR. As I was saying, Mr. Drayfus, I'm going to move . . .

ABE. Hector, Hector. There's no sense talking about your movements in front of everyone. Come outside and we'll discuss it in private.

HECTOR. Huh? (*ABE nudges HECTOR toward the door, but MILDRED is too smart for him.*)

MILDRED. What are you planning to move, Hector?

ABE. Don't tell her.

MILDRED. Hector, dear. What are you going to move?

ABE. It's none of her business. Don't say anything.

MILDRED. Hector, how does Jerry pay you to work here?

HECTOR. Mr. Sloan.

MILDRED. Well, I see Mr. Sloan's mother. I'm sure he won't mind if you tell me what it is you're going to move.

steward

ABE. I'm Mr. Sloan's father-in-law. Don't tell her.

MILDRED. I'm his mother by blood.

HECTOR. Please, Mr. Drayfus. Is no big deal to tell her, right? (*ABE doesn't answer, but defeat is written all over his face.*)

MILDRED. Yes, Hector. What are you going to move?

HECTOR. The TV set. Mr. Sloan told me to take the TV set from the new baby's room and put it in Mr. Drayfus' new room.

MILDRED. You're moving the TV from *MY* room?

ABE. It's *MY* TV set. He's moving it from my *old* room to my *new* room. If you want a TV in your room, you can go out and buy one.

MILDRED. What kind of TV set is it, Hector?

HECTOR. Is a 19 inch color SONY. Very nice.

MILDRED. Isn't that a coincidence. That's the one I bought for Jerry and Alice when they got married.

HECTOR. No kidding. You bought them a color SONY? When I got married my mother gave us a crucifix to hang in the bedroom. Is very beautiful, but you can't watch it all night.

MILDRED. Well, as long as I already went out and bought a TV set, you may as well just leave it in my room.

ABE. You bought it; you gave it away and now Alice and Jerry gave it to me.

MILDRED. I distinctly remember telling them that I wanted it back when they were finished with it.

ABE. A likely story. Move the TV set, Hector.

MILDRED. Leave it.

ABE. (*Putting his arm around HECTOR and directing him to the bedroom.*) Enough is enough. Move it.

MILDRED. (*Deliberately and menacingly.*) Don't . . . you . . . dare. (*HECTOR and ABE stop dead in their tracks.*)

HECTOR. Mr. Drayfus. I can't move the TV set now.

ABE. You're siding with her?

HECTOR. No, I got cramps. I got to go to the bathroom. You two decide and I'll be down in a few minutes. (*ABE glares at MILDRED. SHE smiles back.*) Just don't try to move it yourself. Not with your condition. (*HECTOR exits up the stairs.*)

MILDRED. You have a condition?

ABE. You're a doctor?

MILDRED. Just curious.

ABE. OK, Mrs. Curious. I have a condition. Very rare. The only known cure is massive doses of television programming three times a day.

MILDRED. Then I guess you're going to die.

ABE. You're a very humorous woman, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. It's part of my charm. Ordinarily, it drives men wild.

ABE. Really? I heard out.

MILDRED. It sounds like you're worried.

ABE. Me? Worried? Don't worry, I'm not worried. Nobody's driving me out. I live here.

MILDRED. Nice to meet you. So do I.

ABE. You're visiting!

MILDRED. Listen to me, Mr. Dreyfus. My house burned down. I have no place else to live. I am moving in with my son and his wife. The case is closed. (*SHE sits down on the sofa and fluffs up the stuffed monkey.*)

ABE. The case is definitely open. Wide open.

MILDRED. (*to the monkey*) Do you hear anything? I thought I heard something. No, it must be the wind.

ABE. Don't you not listen to me!

MILDRED. (*still to monkey*) The wind, yes. Or maybe just some hot air.

ABE. Not listening is in violation of the first rule of arguing.

HECTOR  
EXIT

ABE  
HECTOR



MILDRED. (*to the monkey*) Maybe it was another monkey.

ABE. Stop talking to the monkey and fight it out like a man.

MILDRED. (*to the monkey*) On second thought, it sounds more like a baboon.

ABE. Don't you call me a baboon!!

MILDRED. (*to ABE*) Then stop acting like one!!! (*Silence. THEY BOTH need to catch their breath and regroup. ABE sits down in the armchair.*)

ABE. (*calmly*) How did your house burn down?

MILDRED. It's a long story.

ABE. I have all the time in the world. I'm not going anywhere, you know.

MILDRED. Why do you want to know how my house burned down?

ABE. When you're living under the same roof as a person who is prone to house burning, your sense of self-preservation takes over.

MILDRED. Then you accept that we are living under the same roof.

ABE. As I overheard Jerry say on the phone last night, "temporarily."

MILDRED. Temporarily can be a long, long time.

ABE. I'm a survivor.

MILDRED. So am I, Mr. Dreyfus. So am I. (*Silence again. Finally, MILDRED gives it another try.*)  
Chicken soup.

ABE. I beg your pardon.

MILDRED. You asked how the house burned down.  
Chicken soup.

ABE. Ah yes, a major cause of so many fires. As Smokey the Bear was saying just the other day . . .

MILDRED. I told you it was a long story.

ABE. I'm all ears.

MILDRED. Mouth maybe. Ears I find hard to believe. (*ABE smiles. HE taps his ears to show that HE is listening; then puts his hands over his mouth to indicate his silence.*) I was making a pot of soup.

ABE. Chicken soup.

MILDRED. You've heard the story before?

ABE. Go ahead.

MILDRED. I was making a pot of chicken soup. The phone rang. It was my friend Mrs. Myerson. Her husband, Mr. Myerson was in an accident.

ABE. What happened to him?

MILDRED. He slipped on the ice and hurt his back.

ABE. In the middle of July? It's a good thing I'm not from the insurance company, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. He slipped on the ice in December. If you'd stop interrupting, you would know that Mr. Myerson slipped in December, and now in July his back was acting up again. So he asked his wife to go to the drug store to refill his prescription for pain killer. However, their car was in the shop, because last week the garbage truck dented their fender—at least, that's what Mrs. Myerson says—

ABE. You don't believe her?

MILDRED. Of course not. I was with her when she dented it. She backed into one of those little Fotomat booths at the shopping center.

ABE. Go on.

MILDRED. Where was I? Oh yes, she asked me to drive her to the drug store to pick up the prescription.

ABE. Excuse me, but they don't deliver?

MILDRED. The boy was sick! And me . . . I left the coupons on the table!

ABE. What coupons?

MILDRED. I was clipping grocery coupons from the newspaper. You know . . . 8¢ off on Brillo, 10¢ off on Downy Fabric Softener . . . you know, coupons. To make a long story short . . .

ABE. A little late for that.

MILDRED. Anyway, the fan, according to the firemen . . .

ABE. What fan?

MILDRED. The little electric fan from Sears Roebuck that was in the kitchen! It blew some of the coupons from the newspaper into the fire that was under the chicken soup, and while I was out getting pills for Mr. Myerson's back, the house burned down. I lost everything and my poor little budgie bird died!!!

ABE. (*Looking at his watch.*) Alice and Jerry should be home from the airport soon.

MILDRED. That's it?

ABE. That's what?

MILDRED. That's your response?

ABE. What response?

MILDRED. You asked me how my house burned down. I tell you the whole story, and when I'm finished, you look at your watch and poof, you change the subject.

ABE. I didn't "poof, change the subject." The story was over. You just said so yourself.

MILDRED. *My* side of the story was over.

ABE. (*HE looks at her like SHE's crazy.*) I have a side to your story?

MILDRED. You could say something. A woman pours her heart out to you about a personal tragedy, you could at least say something.

ABE. What am I supposed to say?

MILDRED. I don't know. I'm sorry your house burned down, Mrs. Sloan. I'm sorry that your poor little budgie bird died in the fire, Mrs. Sloan.

ABE. When you were making soup, did you feel bad for the dead chicken?

MILDRED. My little Petie bird was a pet. Only you would compare a pet parakeet to a soup chicken.

ABE. The Lord works in mysterious ways. An eye for an eye . . .

MILDRED. I should have known better.

ABE. . . . a wing for a wing . . .

MILDRED. I thought I was talking to a normal person.

ABE. . . . a bird for a bird! (*MILDRED just stares at him.*) Look, the next time your house burns down, I won't ask. I was only trying to make small talk. <sup>up</sup>

MILDRED. (*incensed*) SMALL talk? Maybe to you a house going up in flames is small talk. To me, Mister, it's big talk. It's one of the biggest talks of my life. When you want small talk, talk about the weather.

ABE. You think the rain will hurt the rhubarb?

MILDRED. Mr. Dreyfus, can I be frank with you?

ABE. By all means.

MILDRED. You are without a doubt the most miserable son of a bitch I've ever come across.

ABE. Sticks and stones, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. I didn't like you at the wedding, and I certainly don't like you now.

ABE. Then I suggest you leave. Perhaps a nice senior citizen's home. Fireproofed!

MILDRED. Listen, buster, if you think you can drive me out by being insulting and obnoxious and condescending, you've got another think coming. I'm staying!

ABE. Don't unpack your shopping bags, Mrs. Sloan.

*Alice + Jerry*  
*enter* (At this point ALICE and JERRY walk through the door. When THEY see what is going on, THEY stop dead in their tracks. ABE and MILDRED are

*Alice + Jerry enter* going at it too hot and heavy to notice the CHILDREN.)

MILDRED. (*shouting*) I'm staying, bucko! So help me God, I'm staying if it kills me.

ABE. (*shouting louder*) To spite me. That's why. That's the kind of person you are. You would stay where you're not wanted, just to . . .

JERRY. What the hell is going on here? (*to ALICE*) I knew we wouldn't get here on time. Mom?

MILDRED. Stay out of it, Jerry. Just let me get this off my chest. (*to ABE*) To spite you? You insensitive, self-centered . . .

JERRY. Mom, let me talk.

ABE. You can't talk to her. She's nothing but a . . .

ALICE. Daddy!

ABE. Stay out of it, Alice.

JERRY. Mom!

MILDRED. Stay out of it, Jerry.

JERRY. What the hell is this about???

MILDRED. You want to know what this is about. I'll tell you what this is about. This is about a man who has no consideration, who insults my intelligence . . .

ABE. She was here five minutes and she commandeered my television set!

MILDRED. . . . and who has no basic human decency. Look at me. I lost my house; I lost the clothes off my back; I lost every stick of furniture; I lost . . . (*SHE chokes up.*) I . . . lost . . . my bird.

ABE. (*Puffing himself up for the kill*) Madam . . .

ALICE. Daddy, I know what you're going to say and don't. It's not worth it.

ABE. Don't tell me what's worth it, Alice. I'm 72 years old. A straight line like that from a person like this may

never come again. (*HE turns to MILDRED.*) So! Madam . . .

ALICE. Daddy, I asked you, please.

ABE. Alice, if God would come down right now, right this instant, and promise me one more opportunity like this in my entire lifetime, I would be glad to accommodate you. (*to God*) Well, God? Sorry, Alice. (*HE turns to MILDRED, the killer stalking his victim.*) Madam, to look at you, one would never know that you are a woman who has lost her house. One would never know that you have lost your clothes, your furniture or any of your possessions. But it has been apparent to me, from the moment you set foot in this room, that you, Madam, have lost your frigging bird!!!!

MILDRED. ~~That does it.~~ (*SHE grabs the stuffed monkey which has been sitting on the sofa and raises it over her head to swing at ABE.*) I'll show you, you stupid son of a . . .

JERRY. (*Raising his voice to a shout for the first time.*) FREEZE! (*EVERYONE stops in their tracks.*) I don't know when the parents became the children around here, but if that's the way it is, that's the way we'll treat you.

ALICE. If you're both going to live here, you're going to learn to live by our rules.

JERRY. Good idea. We will sit you down and give you rules for co-existing under the same roof, if that's what we have to do. And if you can't do that, so help me, we will lock you in your rooms on alternate days.

ALICE. This is not a freshman dormitory!

JERRY. Right!

ALICE. This is a civilized home in suburban Connecticut!

JERRY. Right!

ALICE. And you'd better start acting like civilized Connecticutters!

JERRY. Connecticutters?

ALICE. Whatever. Just behave yourselves. Dad! Right now, I want you to shake Mildred's hand and welcome her to her new home.

ABE. Are you . . . ?

ALICE. I am dead serious. (to MILDRED) Mildred, you meet him halfway.

MILDRED. Jerry . . . ?

JERRY. Do it, Mom. We're not kidding.

MILDRED. I was willing to meet him halfway when I got here. But now . . .

JERRY. Do it.

ALICE. (to ABE) You too.

ABE. I'm going. (ABE takes one small step toward c.s., looks over at MILDRED, and extends his hand for a handshake. JERRY looks at MILDRED and waves her on with a hand signal. MILDRED realizes SHE has no choice, and with the stuffed monkey still dangling from her left hand SHE walks slowly toward c.s., stopping a handshake's distance from ABE. Very slowly SHE raises her hand. Finally, SHE makes the decision and thrusts her hand toward his. But just as SHE commits, ABE pulls his hand away in the classic "thumb jerk" motion.) Blow it out your ear, bird lady!!!!

(ALICE and JERRY are in shock, but MILDRED is quick to react. SHE swings the stuffed monkey high in the air, as ABE scoots away laughing, and . . .)

THE CURTAIN FALLS

A Light  
Quick BLACKOUT

Window + DOOR

OUTER lights  
are DARK  
OR  
very Dim

Late in Day  
March

ACT TWO

SCENE 1

Room is  
lighted but DOWN  
a bit from  
July

It is seven months later; early March. It is 5:30 in the evening. ALICE, eight-plus months pregnant, is in the kitchen preparing dinner. MILDRED is sitting in the living room reading a magazine and listening to JERRY as HE bangs out a tune on the piano. As the curtain rises, ABE enters the room.

ABE  
Enters

JERRY. (Singing with gusto.) Freedom. We want freedom. Free-ee-doom. Freedom! (Turning to the GROUP.) Well, what do you think?

ALICE. Inspirational.

MILDRED. It brings tears to a mother's eyes.

JERRY. Abe? Pretty good, huh?

ABE. Not bad. I only heard the end of it. But I must admit, not bad at all. So you're finally writing a show tune?

JERRY. It's a jingle.

ABE. Freedom, freedom is a jingle. We now need jingles for our inalienable rights?

JERRY. It's for tampons.

ABE. Oh God. I know you have to make a living. I can understand you write songs about garbage bags and underarm sprays, even toilet bowl cleaners, but . . . but . . . (HE can't say it.)

ALICE. Tampons.

ABE. Thank you, Alice. We all know the word. Jerry, where do you draw the line?



MILDRED. Excuse me for butting in, Jerry, but . . .

JERRY. Uh, uh, uh, uh. Rule 12. When it's between him and me, you stay out.

MILDRED. There should be exceptions to Rule 12. A mother shouldn't have to sit by and listen to him . . .

JERRY. No exceptions. No breaking the rules.

MILDRED. I wasn't going to break it. Just bend it, maybe.

JERRY. (*Changing the subject.*) I think I'll open a bottle of wine for dinner. What'll it be? Red or white?

MILDRED. Red.

ABE. White.

MILDRED. White's fine with me. Go open a white.

ABE. Wait a minute. If white is fine with her, then she wanted white all along.

JERRY. What's the difference? You wanted white.

ABE. Now I'm not so sure. I need a minute to think.

ALICE. Stop thinking. We're having steaks. Open a red.

ABE. That's fine with me.

MILDRED. Good. That's what I asked for in the first place.

(*JERRY goes for the wine. MILDRED thumbs through a magazine. ABE stands near a picture which is hanging on the wall. When HE thinks nobody is watching, HE tilts it slightly askew.*)

MILDRED. (*jumps up*) Ah-hah! Got you! Every day for a month the pictures have been crooked, and now I caught you red-handed.

ABE. (*innocence personified*) My dear woman. Me? Tilt pictures? Surely you must realize I have better things to do.

(*JERRY brings the wine bottle to the kitchen area and opens it. ALICE motions to him to help her set the table, and throughout the ensuing argument, THEY work quietly, trying to stay out of it.*)

MILDRED. Did you, or did you not, just move that picture?

ABE. I was straightening it.

MILDRED. Straightening my foot. Look at it. It's crooked now.

ABE. What am I, an interior decorator? Next time I won't help.

MILDRED. (*turning to ALICE*) Alice, did I tell you about the dream I had last night?

ABE. Don't pay any attention to her cockamamie dreams, Alice. It's a set-up.

MILDRED. I was in a cab going about 70, 80 miles an hour . . .

ABE. A cab, huh? Alice!

ALICE. Mildred, he's right. Rule 6. Don't drag me or Jerry into your arguments.

MILDRED. Darling, this isn't an argument. It's a dream. Anyway, the cab stopped short, but even so, there was no jerk . . .

ABE. Alice!

ALICE. Mildred!

MILDRED. . . . and I thought . . . where was the jerk? . . .

JERRY. Mom! (*MILDRED just smiles and shrugs her shoulders. Just then, the telephone rings. ABE and MILDRED spring to answer. But it's a lop-sided race. ABE, caught at the wrong end of the room is easily beaten, as MILDRED gets it after one ring.*)

MILDRED. (*Sweet and sing-songy, playing it for all it's*

*★ SOUND  
phone rings  
MILDRED  
ANSWER*

worth.) Hello. This is Mildred Sloan. I'm sorry, but we don't listen to country music in this house. (*ABE hovers near the phone, fuming.*) Oh hello, Esther. I'm fine. And you? Good. Tomorrow afternoon? I'd love to play. Why don't you and the girls come over *here*?

ABE. Wasserman's coming over to play pinochle tomorrow afternoon.

MILDRED. Oh, and Esther, why don't you bring your husband, *Mister* Wasserman to play Password with us.

ABE. Hey!!

MILDRED. Yes, intelligent people find word games so much more stimulating than card games. Goodbye, Esther. See you tomorrow. (*SHE hangs up with great flourish. Then, in an apparent victory move, SHE turns to ABE.*) Excuse me, but my friends are coming over tomorrow to play Password. Why don't you play solitaire in your room. Unless you'd rather spend your time "straightening" pictures. (*SHE exits triumphantly up the stairs, leaving ABE fuming.*)

ALICE. (*to ABE*) Don't look so mad. If you insist on playing a constant "gotcha" game, sometimes you're going to wind up being the "gotchee." This wouldn't happen if, oooh . . . (*SHE puts her hand on her stomach and gives a little grunt.*)

ABE. What's the matter?

JERRY. You alright?

ALICE. It's just gas. I've had it all afternoon.

ABE. I know. She gives me gas too. A "gotcha" game, huh? I'll give her a "gotcha" game. Excuse me while I go plan my revenge. (*HE begins to walk up the stairs.*)

ALICE. Daddy! Rule 14! No revenge.

ABE. Rules were made to be broken. Especially Rule 14. (*HE exits before Alice can respond.*)

ALICE. (*Calling after him.*) Dad! (*Exhaling with ex-*

*asperation.*) Jerry, we have put this off long enough. Tonight is definitely the night.

JERRY. How are we going to break the news?

ALICE. What's the difference? Whatever we say they'll have an answer. Especially my father. Let's just wing it.

JERRY. Oh no. We should know how we're going to do this.

ALICE. How about if I cry and you beg?

JERRY. Why don't we do a dry run?

ALICE. What do you mean?

JERRY. Like rehearse. Get the feel of what we're going to say. It'll make it easier when we do it for real.

ALICE. You think so?

JERRY. Sure, We'll have some fun. Come on. You be you. (*imitating ABE*) I'll be Abe.

ALICE. O.K. Let's see . . . Abe . . . No, no. (*SHE tries again.*) Daddy, these past few months have been unbearable. When Mildred first got here, I thought I could deal with it, but . . .

JERRY. (*Imitating ABE's voice and mannerisms.*) Sure, you thought she was temporary. You didn't know her insurance would be peanuts, and she'd move in lock, stock and big mouth.

ALICE. Daddy, it's the both of you. The bickering has gotten out of hand. We can't live like this any more, so Jerry and I have come up with a solution.

JERRY. I like Jerry. I know I never give him credit, but he's a nice boy. Good looking too.

ALICE. Jerry, please.

JERRY. (*as JERRY*) Sorry, couldn't resist it. (*as ABE*) So! You have a solution. Is this another one of those cockamamie deals like The Labor Day Treaty?

ALICE. The Labor Day Treaty was a failure because you broke it.

MILDRED  
EXITS

ABE  
EXITS

JERRY. Me? It was her. She bit me. I still have the mark.

ALICE. You hid her dentures. When she found them, she bit you. Whose fault is that?

JERRY. Hers.

*ABE ENTERS*  
(At this point ABE starts to come through the doorway. Taking in the scene, HE stops. ALICE and JERRY don't notice him.)

ALICE. Fine. I'll give you that one. But ever since then it's been one argument after another. (SHE stops abruptly as SHE catches sight of ABE. As a signal to JERRY, SHE gestures toward ABE with her thumb, but there's no stopping JERRY.)

JERRY. Alice, as I used to say to your mother, she should rest in peace, a little argument is good for your health. To live is to argue; to argue is to live. (ALICE snaps her fingers as a sign for JERRY to cool it.) Don't you snap your fingers at your father, young lady. It's not nice.

ABE. (Coming up behind JERRY.) Very good! Can you do Bogart?

JERRY. Oh, hiya, Abe. We were just . . . um . . .

ABE. You were not just "um." You were rehearsing to get rid of me. (ALICE and JERRY look at him sheepishly.) I may be old, but I'm not senile. There are three bedrooms in this house. One is the master bedroom. You live there. The second has brand new wallpaper with little bunny rabbits on it. In three, four weeks the baby will live there. That leaves one tiny guest room and two guests. Something's got to give.

ALICE. Daddy, even if we had forty bedrooms, I don't think we want to bring up our baby in a house where

two grown people are constantly picking at one another. It's not healthy.

ABE. (hurt) I see. I'm bad for the baby's health.

ALICE. Jer . . .

JERRY. Abe, we were going to broach this subject with you tonight.

ABE. Why wait until tonight? Go ahead, Jerry. Broach away.

JERRY. (Looking at ALICE, then clearing his throat nervously.) Abe, as you know, it hasn't been easy . . . the four of us living together.

ABE. Are they voting for Understatement of the Year?

JERRY. Alice and I have talked this over, and the way we see it, there are three options. Option One, you move out. Option Two, my mother moves out. Option Three, Alice and I move out.

ABE. I opt for Option Number Two.

ALICE. We sort of figured you would, but could we talk about Option One for a minute.

ABE. Option Two makes more sense. First of all, the woman is living in the baby's room. She could move out; the baby could move in. No fuss, no commotion, no hubbub. Trust me, Alice, the last thing a new baby needs is hubbub.

ALICE. Could we get back to Option One?

ABE. Second of all, who was here first? Yours truly. And don't forget why I moved in. I'm a man with a serious heart condition. You start moving me around like a hot potato and bingo, it's all over.

JERRY. This is the first time you ever admitted you have a heart condition.

ABE. I didn't want you to worry.

ALICE. But now that you can use it to make us feel guilty, you admit to having a heart condition.

ABE. A heart condition. I have the worst kind. They did a program on "60 minutes," and do you know where they send the absolute *worst* heart cases?

ALICE. I give up.

ABE. Chinamen doctors. It's what is known in the medical profession as giving the patient a Chinaman's chance.

ALICE. Daddy, we are trying to have a serious discussion!

ABE. You are trying to have a serious discussion about Option One. I don't wish to discuss Option One. If you will check the ballot box, you will recall that I voted for Option Two.

JERRY. Abe, you know that garden apartment complex on . . . on Westover Road . . . a few miles from here? You know . . . They have a pool . . . tennis courts . . . it's nice . . .

ALICE. It's very nice. It's safe. They have a game room. Ping pong . . .

ABE. Not my game.

JERRY. Shuffleboard.

ABE. They have shuffleboard?

JERRY. Yeah. Four courts. You like shuffleboard?

ABE. I hate shuffleboard. I broke my toe once playing shuffleboard.

JERRY. Well, you don't have to play . . .

ABE. I'm already happy not playing shuffleboard here. You want me to move someplace else to not play shuffleboard?

ALICE. Daddy, we rented a one bedroom apartment there . . . furnished. It starts the first of next month.

ABE. And you want me to move in there?

ALICE. Would you?

ABE. Do I have a choice?

ALICE. Yes. We said this was a discussion. We haven't decided one way or the other. We just know that one of you has to move out.

ABE. And what if I say no?

ALICE. Then we'll ask Mildred.

ABE. Sounds good to me. No!

ALICE. Daddy, the reason we asked you first was because we thought you might even like the idea. You'd have your privacy. You wouldn't have to put up with a baby crying night and day.

ABE. The baby won't bother me. Wasserman and I can take him to the park. I'll teach him to drive a car. I love babies. You're comparing your own baby to shuffleboard? I'll take a baby any day of the week.

ALICE. Will you do us a favor? At least think it over. It's not as bad as it sounds.

ABE. OK. I'll think it over. Will you do me a favor?

ALICE. What?

ABE. Will you discuss Option Two with the party of the second part?

ALICE. Yes.

ABE. (*overly cooperative*) You want me to go get her?

JERRY. No way. I'll get her. Why don't you just go to your room and think about it seriously.

ABE. Fine with me. It's a great room for serious thinking. I love that little room, if you get my gist.

ALICE. We got your gist. I'll call you for dinner.

ABE. (*HE starts walking up the stairs.*) Wonderful. Love a family dinner. Hate eating alone. See you later. (*HE exits, his voice trailing.*)

JERRY. "Love that little room." "Hate eating alone." I take it subtly was never one of his strong suits.

ALICE. Jerry, for my father, that was subtlety. Well, what do we do now?

ABE  
EXITS



JERRY. I guess we talk to the party of the second part.

ALICE. Neither of them is going to want to take the apartment because they'll both feel whoever stays here winds up the winner.

JERRY. Why don't we take the apartment?

ALICE. Jerry, it's not funny. We have three weeks to make a decision . . . (SHE stops abruptly as MILDRED enters the room.)

MILDRED. Were you talking about me?

ALICE. Uh . . . no. Why would you think we were talking about you?

MILDRED. You stopped talking the minute I walked into the room. You were either talking dirty or you were talking about me. Were you talking dirty?

JERRY. Of course not.

MILDRED. Then you were talking about me.

JERRY. Mom, we weren't talking about you, but what we were talking about concerns you.

MILDRED. Same difference. (ALICE and JERRY look at each other. There is an awkward silence.) Well?

JERRY. Mom . . . (HE clears his throat.) . . . as you know, this living arrangement . . . the four of us living together . . . especially you and Abe . . . well, it's been difficult to say the least.

MILDRED. It's been pure hell. I know the man is your father, Alice, but . . .

JERRY. Mom, please. We're not here to re-hash the problem. What we'd like to talk about is a possible solution.

MILDRED. I'll give you a solution. It's against the law . . .

JERRY. Alice and I have been talking it over, and the way we see it, there are three options.

ALICE. Jer . . . I don't think options worked out so

well for us the last time. Why don't you just get to the point.

JERRY. Right. OK, Mom, here's the point. We rented a one bedroom apartment a few miles away on West-over Road. It's furnished. Very nice.

MILDRED. Wonderful! (applauding) When does he move in?

JERRY. Um . . . (painfully) He doesn't want to move in. He thought we should talk to . . . uh . . . you . . . uh . . . about moving in.

MILDRED. Me? (SHE laughs out loud.) He wants me to move into a furnished apartment? (SHE laughs louder and louder.)

JERRY. It's really very nice. They have a swimming pool, ping pong . . .

MILDRED. He's staying here, and he wants me . . . (SHE starts laughing uncontrollably now. It's so infectious that ALICE and JERRY join in. Suddenly, in mid-laugh, SHE snaps out-of it.) Over my dead body!

ALICE. (defeated) Oh, Jerrrrry. I can't take much more of this. I'm tired. I don't feel well. I'm going to have a baby in three weeks and who cares? Everyone just cares about themselves around here. (JERRY takes her in his arms.)

MILDRED. Would you look at what that man has done to his poor daughter? (MILDRED walks over to ALICE, pries her loose from JERRY, walks her to the sofa, and assumes the role of the comforting mother-in-law.) Alice. Darling. I'm a woman. I'm a mother. What was your father? A cab driver? When you go back to work, what will the baby need? A taxi? No, darling, it will need a woman's touch. A woman's love.

ALICE. (Regaining her composure.) But we're hiring a woman to come in during the day. Mrs. Fisher.

Mildred  
enters

MILDRED. Sweetheart, if you and Jerry want to pay good money to a stranger, that's your business. Who am I to interfere? But at least I can be the back-up if your Mrs. Fisher is unreliable.

ALICE. Mrs. Fisher is very reliable. We were lucky to get her. We interviewed a lot of women . . .

MILDRED. This Mrs. Fisher, she's met your father?

ALICE. No. Of course not.

MILDRED. This Mrs. Fisher, she's prepared to deal with your father?

JERRY. Mom, she's a governess. We hired her for the baby.

MILDRED. Mark my words, Jerry, that man will drive her out just the way he's tried to drive me out. Insulting me, tilting pictures, short-sheeting my bed . . .

JERRY. (*snatching a laugh*) He short-sheeted your bed???

MILDRED. Jerry, Jerry, darling. I try not to complain. I would rather suffer in silence than upset you and Alice. But do you think your Mrs. Fisher will put up with that man and his actions? No, Jerry, blood is stronger than water.

JERRY. Mom, we got off the track. The point is not whether Abe and Mrs. Fisher can get along. The point is that we've rented this furnished apartment . . .

MILDRED. A furnished apartment! Jerry, do you know what kind of people live in furnished apartments? Drifters. Vagabonds. Gypsies. People with no roots.

JERRY. Mom, if you want roots, forget about the apartment and move in with Aunt Shirley.

MILDRED. *Shirley?* Now you're wishing me on *Shirley?* Alice, do you know that the woman never dusts, never sweeps; she doesn't even own a vacuum. And God forbid I should go to wipe down a sink or boil

out a stained coffee pot, so it should be clean . . . she carries on like I was a common housebreaker.

JERRY. Oh, Mom, it's not nearly like that. It's just that you're so compulsively clean.

MILDRED. Me? Compulsively clean? Shirley is the compulsive one. The woman is compulsively dirty. Even when she was a little girl, she . . .

(Suddenly ALICE gasps sharply and loudly as SHE grabs her lower back with both hands.)

JERRY. Are you OK? What's the matter?

ALICE. (*Feeling her back, then her stomach.*) I'm not sure.

MILDRED. She's in labor.

ALICE. (*Sitting back on the sofa, breathing heavily.*) I'm not in labor. It's a Braxton-Hicks contraction.

MILDRED. It's what? A box of what?

ALICE. (*Beginning to breathe normally.*) A Braxton-Hicks contraction. It's a mild contraction that a lot of women get during their ninth month. We learned about it in natural childbirth class. It's perfectly normal. I've been having them on and off all afternoon.

MILDRED. That was a mild contraction?

JERRY. She's right, Alice.

ALICE. (*Whatever it was, has passed.*) Well, maybe that one had a little extra kick to it, but . . .

MILDRED. But nothing, sweetie. That was a labor pain. And when you grabbed your back there, that looked like back labor to me. We didn't have contractions with fancy names when I was pregnant. We had labor pains. I'm telling you, Jerry, that girl has got labor pains.

ALICE. But I'm not due for three weeks.

MILDRED. What are you gonna do? Sit there for three weeks with your legs crossed? Honey, trust me, you're in labor.

JERRY. I'm calling Dr. Porter. Alice, is it OK if I call Dr. Porter?

ALICE. But I'm not due for three weeks. What if it's not real labor? I'll be embarrassed.

JERRY. Alice, we're paying the man a small fortune. If it's false, it's false. I'm calling. I won't be embarrassed.

ALICE. Wait a minute. You don't call on one contraction.

JERRY. But you said you felt like this all afternoon.

ALICE. Wait. At least wait till the next one. He's going to ask how much time between contractions.

JERRY. Well, how long has it been since the last one?

ALICE. I don't know. Two, three minutes.

MILDRED. Say two. Always be on the safe side. (MILDRED carefully studies her wristwatch.) Go ahead, honey. I'm timing.

ALICE. Well, I can't just make them happen. I have to wait.

MILDRED. I know, I know . . .

(The doorbell rings anxiously several times. JERRY doesn't move.)

ALICE. Honey, will you get the door. I'm busy here, and Mildred is timing.

JERRY. Right. (HE runs to the door, and there stands HECTOR in a heavy winter coat and hat, covered with a light covering of snowflakes. Outside, the snow is falling.)

HECTOR. Buenos tardes, Mr. Sloan. She's gonna snow like a bandit.

JERRY. Oh no. Honey, it's snowing.

HECTOR. Buenos tardes, Mrs. Sloan, I just tell Mr. Sloan, she's gonna snow like a bandit.

MILDRED. Hector, don't bother Mrs. Sloan. She's in labor.

HECTOR. Now?

ALICE. Now!

MILDRED. (Checking the watch.) Now?

ALICE. No, not now for you. Now for him. I'm in labor now, but nothing is happening.

HECTOR. Gee, Mrs. Sloan, my wife always had her labor in a labor room in the hospital. It's expensive, but it's much better. They have all kinds of doctors and nurses. You should really go to the hospital.

ALICE. I am going to the hospital.

HECTOR. Oh good. When?

ALICE. I don't know. We were just sitting around waiting for this next contraction.

HECTOR. Which hospital you going to?

MILDRED. Hector, please. Can't you see the poor woman can't talk. She's not waiting for a bus, you know. She's waiting for a contraction.

HECTOR. I'm sorry.

ALICE. It's OK, Mildred. I'm going to New York Hospital.

HECTOR. (concerned) In New York City?

MILDRED. No Toledo! Alice, I don't think you should be answering silly questions.

ALICE. I'm fine. Honest.

HECTOR. Is just that if you going to drive to New York City tonight, I think you should go soon. The snow, she's gonna come down like crazy.

JERRY. That's it. I'm not waiting for any contractions. I'm calling Dr. Porter. What's his number?

ALICE. It's in my little address book in my purse. (JERRY goes to get the address book.)

★  
SOUND  
DOORBELL

HECTOR  
ENTER

ACTOR SHOULD DO IT!

SNOW  
FALLING

light on → BLUE IS IT!  
light in WINDOW?

HECTOR. (*to ALICE*) You should always write down the number of the doctor. I remember one time my sister had this rotch. Very bad.

ALICE. A what?

HECTOR. A rotch. You know, her skin got all red. She broke out in a rotch.

ALICE. Ohhh. A rash!

HECTOR. You got it.

JERRY. Alice, Dr. Porter isn't in this damn phone book.

ALICE. Are you looking under "P" for Porter or "D" for Doctor?

JERRY. "P." Is he under "D"?

ALICE. No, "G."

JERRY. What?

ALICE. For gynecologist.

JERRY. I don't believe it.

HECTOR. (*to ALICE*) I don't think this is a good time to tell you about my sister's rotch.

MILDRED. I think you're right.

JERRY. Alice I don't believe this book. Nothing is under the right letter.

ALICE. For heaven's sake, Jerry. It's my personal address book.

JERRY. (*Looking at the book.*) Who the hell is Derek?

ALICE. What letter is he under?

JERRY. He's right here under "G" with Dr. Porter.

ALICE. Oh, that's the grocery store number. Derek is the delivery boy. He's only fourteen. Are you jealous?

JERRY. I'm jealous of anybody named Derek. Especially if he's in my wife's address book. Keep quiet. I'm dialing Dr. Porter. (*HE begins dialing a ten digit number.*)

ALICE. What are you going to say to him?

JERRY. I'm going to tell him that you're in labor, and that she's gonna snow like a bandit, and that if we don't leave soon, we're going to have the baby on the Hutchinson River Parkway.

HECTOR. Don't take the Hutch, Mr. Sloan. I-95 is much better.

JERRY. Hector, what are you doing over here anyway?

HECTOR. I came to borrow your car.

JERRY. *What???? (into phone)* Hello. Is Dr. Porter there? This is Mr. Sloan. My wife is one of his patients. Alice. Alice Sloan. Oh, there's no problem. It's just that we think she's in labor. OK. I'll hold. (*to ALICE*) It's a miracle. He's still in the office.

MILDRED. You can't play golf in the snow.

JERRY. Hector, you can't borrow my car. It's out of the question.

HECTOR. I only have to jump the battery on my car, Mr. Sloan. We'll drive to my house. It'll take a minute. I got cables.

JERRY. Jesus, we've got to go to the hospital. We can't go around jump starting cars. Why don't you call the Triple A or something . . . or, hello? Dr. Porter? Yes, I'll put her on. Just a minute. I am calm. Hold on. (*HE carries the phone over to ALICE who is sitting on the sofa.*) Honey, it's for you. Dr. Derek.

ALICE. (*into phone*) Hello. Well, I thought I was having gas all afternoon, and then a few minutes ago, I had this real doozy of a contraction. I felt it in my back and everything. Oh, I don't know. (*to MILDRED*) How many minutes, Mildred?

MILDRED. Approximately six.

ALICE. (*into phone*) About six. (*pause*) Well, we haven't actually timed the space between contractions, because right after I had the first big one, Hector, our

handyman, came over to borrow our car, and we found out that it was snowing. So my husband got worried . . . oh, sure. *(to JERRY and MILDRED)* He's going to look out the window.

JERRY. Alice, tell him he can call "Weather" after you hang up. Doesn't he understand that you're going to have a . . .

ALICE. *(to JERRY)* Shhh. *(into phone)* Yes? It's snowing in New York too? Well, that's why we didn't time the space between contractions. We wanted to get going before the snow got too heavy. *(pause)* Oh you will? OK. Sure. *(to JERRY)* He's putting his nurse back on.

JERRY. His nurse? For the money we're paying, we should be getting the Chief of Staff of New York Hospital. Why the hell is he putting on a nurse?

ALICE. He wants to know how much time till the next contraction. Doctors don't hold, Jerry. Nurses hold. *(into phone)* Oh, hello. Jo-Ann? Hi. This is Alice. Do you mind if I talk with my family while we're waiting? Thanks. *(to JERRY)* Don't you think you should pack?

JERRY. Me? You're the one going to the hospital.

ALICE. I packed a week ago, but if we get snowbound in New York, you're going to need clean clothes.

JERRY. You're right. What'll I do if I get stuck in the city? *(to himself)* I can stay with Brian and Sharon. But I better pack. *(HE heads for the stairs.)* Wait. I have a recording session Wednesday and two . . . no, three meetings. I better take clothes for a couple of days. I'll be right back. *(to ALICE)* I'll be right back. *(HE runs up the stairs.)*

ALICE. *(yelling after him)* Honey, will you bring my suitcase down with you. It's in my closet . . . closet . . . whoa . . . *(into phone)* here it comes Jo-Ann. *(SHE*

*starts breathing her natural childbirth breathing technique, as MILDRED takes the phone from her hand.)*

MILDRED. *(into phone)* Jo-Ann. This is Mrs. Sloan's mother-in-law. I'm the official timekeeper. Seven and a half minutes. Yes, we'll hold.

JERRY. *(Racing halfway down the stairs.)* Alice, where are my brown over-the-calf socks? *(ALICE still breathing, looks at MILDRED in desperation.)*

MILDRED. *(answering JERRY)* She can't talk now. She's breathing. *(JERRY races back upstairs, as MILDRED talks into the phone.)* Hello, doctor. She'll be with you in a moment. She's breathing. *(SHE puts the phone near ALICE'S lips, then SHE talks back into the phone.)* Can you hear that? *(JERRY comes thundering down the stairs.)*

JERRY. *(to ALICE)* Keep breathing. I'll be down in a second. I won't wear socks. *(HE runs back upstairs. ALICE'S contraction subsides and SHE takes the phone.)*

ALICE. *(into phone)* Hello. That was no Braxton-Hicks, Dr. Porter. That was the real thing. No, I'm fine. Seven and a half minutes. Right. We're on our way. As soon as my husband finishes packing.

HECTOR. *(Jumping up and waving frantically.)* Mrs. Sloan, por favor!

ALICE. Oh, and we just have to jump start a friend's car. It won't take long. Yes, I'll meet you at the hospital. Thanks. Goodbye. *(SHE hangs up the phone, setting it on the coffee table. JERRY comes racing down the stairs with two small suitcases. HE puts them down c.s. MILDRED crosses to the bags and stands next to them, ready to help.)*

JERRY. What did the doctor say?

ALICE. He said we better get to the hospital before the snow gets any worse. *(JERRY runs to the coat closet,*

where HE grabs both his and ALICE's coat.)

HECTOR. That's what I said five minutes ago. We wasted all that time. We could have jumped my car already.

(JERRY hands ALICE's coat to MILDRED, so that HE can first put on his own.)

JERRY. (to MILDRED) Here, hold this. (to ALICE) You realize I'll be wearing blue socks and a brown suit.

ALICE. Right now that's the least of my problems.

(At this point, ABE enters the room. His eyes light up as HE sees MILDRED standing with a coat over her arm and two suitcases at her feet.)

ABE. (clapping his hands together) Hah! She's moving out. (HE dances around in sheer ecstasy.) Ding-dong, the witch is dead. Dum, dum, dee dum dum dum.

(ALICE stands up and takes the coat from MILDRED. JERRY helps her put it on.)

ALICE. Daddy, I'm the one who's moving out. I'm going to the hospital to have the baby.

ABE. I was in my room for three weeks?

ALICE. I'm early.

JERRY. You were early. Now you're late. Let's go. I'm going to start the car.

HECTOR. Mine too? Please. Mrs. Sloan promised.

JERRY. Yes, yes. Just grab a bag. (JERRY and HECTOR each scoop up a bag. As JERRY opens the front door a flurry of snow blows in.) Alice, no long good-byes. Goodbye, Mom. Goodbye, Abe. I'll call you from the hospital. (HE slams the door as HE and HECTOR

exit.)

MILDRED. (Yelling after him.) Don't forget to call us from the hospital.

ABE. (to ALICE) Before you go . . . did you discuss you know what with you know who?

ALICE. We never resolved anything. We'll work it out when I get back from the hospital. (From outside we hear the sound of a car engine turning over.) Daddy, Mildred, please promise me one thing. No fighting, no bickering. Just be nice. It's very important to me. (SHE starts to choke up.) Please. For the baby. (Outside the horn is honking impatiently.) I have to go. Promise?

MILDRED. (Caught up in the emotion, SHE hugs ALICE.) Promise. Good luck.

ALICE. Daddy? (Outside the horn honks again.) I can't go unless you promise. (ABE walks up to her, puts his arms on her shoulders and kisses her forehead.)

ABE. (softly, reluctantly, but lovingly) Scout's honor. (ALICE kisses him, rushes to the door, opens it, and calls back to MILDRED.)

ALICE. Freeze two of the steaks. Make dinner for yourselves. I love you both. (ALICE exits out the front door.)

ABE. (Softly, and too late for ALICE to hear.) I love you too.

FADE TO  
BLACK (The lights fade to black.)

ACT TWO

SCENE 2

It is later that night. The dinner table has been cleared. ABE is sitting on the sofa and MILDRED is sitting

light \*  
EVENING . DARK OUTSIDE  
(BIKE IN WINDOW?)

ROOM DIMLY LIT?  
FIREPLACE VERY LOW LIGHT.



70 SQUABBLES

*in the armchair. There are two coffee cups on the coffee table in front of them. The telephone is also on the table, just where ALICE left it several hours before. A fire is blazing brightly in the fireplace. As the lights come up, the clock on the mantle is chiming. On the eleventh ring, MILDRED speaks.*

A  
SOUND  
CHIMES  
ELEVEN  
TIMES!

MILDRED. It's eleven o'clock.  
ABE. I can count.  
MILDRED. Uh, uh, uh. I thought we were being civil to one another.  
ABE. You're right. (*He pauses.*) Do you happen to have the time?  
MILDRED. It's eleven o'clock.  
ABE. Thank you, that was very civil of you.  
MILDRED. Do you want to turn on the eleven o'clock news?  
ABE. They won't have news of the baby. (*HE points to the telephone on the table.*) The phone will have news of the baby.  
MILDRED. I meant for news about the storm.  
ABE. I just looked out the window. The news is it's still snowing.  
MILDRED. I thought you were very civil at dinner.  
ABE. I promised my daughter.  
MILDRED. You've promised your daughter before. But this was the first dinner we didn't argue about something. Anything.  
ABE. It was the first dinner I ever drank half a bottle of wine. With coffee I can argue. Wine works just the opposite.  
MILDRED. Then don't drink any more coffee.  
ABE. You would leave a man defenseless? (*He crosses to the counter to pour himself another cup of coffee.*)

SQUABBLES 71

MILDRED. That was a very touching story you told about your wife.  
ABE. You mean the one about the night she gave birth to Alice?  
MILDRED. Yes.  
ABE. That was some adventure. I haven't thought about that night in years.  
MILDRED. You probably thought about it because tonight the story comes full circle. Tonight your little baby is having a baby.  
ABE. Yes, if my little baby ever finished jump starting Hector's car. It's too bad. Years from now it will be hard for Jerry to have a touching story to tell. (*HE returns to the sofa.*)  
MILDRED. Why is that?  
ABE. If they were jump starting an Eskimo's car, then the story would have a little romance to it. But Puerto Ricans are always jump starting their cars. No romance.  
MILDRED. Were you romantic when you were younger?  
ABE. Who wants to know?  
MILDRED. Just curious.  
ABE. Well, Mrs. Just Curious. I'll tell you. I was probably the second most romantic guy in the neighborhood.  
MILDRED. Who was first?  
ABE. Manny from the fruit store. All the women loved Manny. He was a real hot-blooded fruit man.  
MILDRED. I didn't mean a woman charmer. I meant a romantic soul. A romantic spirit.  
ABE. Are you kidding? I was a cab driver. All cab drivers are romantics. It goes with the territory. For ten, twenty minutes you're part of somebody else's life. You see it all. Lovers fighting. Lovers kissing. Drunks who want you to know their life story. You take people to

weddings, funerals . . . you even . . . (*HE thinks back.*) you even take women in labor to the hospital. And the husband is in the back seat yelling go faster, go through that red light . . . ahhh, those were the days.

MILDRED. Did you ever have a baby born in your cab?

ABE. Three. Two boys and a girl.

MILDRED. It must be a beautiful experience.

ABE. Ach, it's a mess. (*HE crosses to the fireplace.*)

MILDRED. I thought you were a romantic.

ABE. You wouldn't be so romantic if you had to clean up afterwards. You think the mother and father stay around? Still and all, you can't turn down people when they say "Quick, take us to the hospital" in the middle of the night. (~~*HE picks up a fireplace poker.*~~)

MILDRED. I thought you drove days. You said your wife was always waiting when you came home at night.

ABE. I drove days, nights, weekends. We were poor; I drove. Whatever time I came home, for me that would be night. (~~*HE stokes the fire.*~~)

MILDRED. And your wife would be waiting.

ABE. Where else would she be?

MILDRED. Did you ever fight?

ABE. With Louise? All the time. She was one of the best.

MILDRED. That sounds like a compliment.

ABE. Of the highest order, may she rest in peace. So! What did your husband do?

MILDRED. Jerry never told you?

ABE. He did, but I forgot. (*HE sits back down on the sofa.*)

MILDRED. Leonard worked for the Department of Water in Rochester.

ABE. Oh yes. Now I remember why I forgot. Not quite as romantic as selling fruit or driving a hack.

MILDRED. Leonard was as romantic as vanilla pudding.

ABE. Why did you marry him?

MILDRED. When I was younger, most of the men I dated were musicians. They drank, they carried on, even then they were smoking marijuana. By the time I met Leonard, I guess I was ready for pudding.

ABE. If it's not too personal . . . why did he leave?

MILDRED. He left because one day I said, "Leonard, I can't stand it anymore. I'd like you to leave."

ABE. You *asked* him? I heard one night he just walked out.

MILDRED. Who told you that?

ABE. Some fellow at the wedding said he just walked out. Vanished.

MILDRED. Vanished? He packed his bags and moved to San Francisco. The Ansonia Hotel. Room 314.

ABE. He packed his bags? It's funny, Wasserman wondered what happened to his clothes.

MILDRED. Tell Mr. Wasserman the clothes are safe and sound in San Francisco with Leonard.

ABE. You think he's still there? After all these years?

MILDRED. I send him money every few months. Somebody's cashing the checks. . .

ABE. You send him money? Why? They don't have a Water Department in San Francisco?

MILDRED. He gets Social Security. That pays for his room and board. (*SHE pauses.*) I make a small contribution to his . . . habit. (*SHE pauses.*) He gambles.

ABE. And that's why you kicked him out.

MILDRED. I didn't exactly "kick him out." You live for ten years with a compulsive gambler and you beg him, you plead with him, you reason with him, and then one day, you can't take it anymore. It wasn't easy. But look-



ing back, it was the right thing. I had my piano teaching. I had Jerry. We had a much happier life after Leonard.

ABE. If it's not too personal . . . why do you *still* send him money?

MILDRED. I don't know. I ask myself the same question every time I write a check. The man's a bum, but . . . he's not a bad man. He just has a sickness. I don't know, Mr. Dreyfus. Some people give to charity. I guess Leonard is my charity.

ABE. It's amazing. You live up the same house with someone seven months and you realize how little you know about them.

MILDRED. (smiling) You never asked.

ABE. Maybe I shouldn't have asked at all. I didn't mean for you to get upset.

MILDRED. Well, it's not my favorite subject, but like I told you the first day I moved in, I'm a survivor.

ABE. That was some day, the day you moved in.

MILDRED. Every day has been some day since I moved in.

ABE. But for now . . . a truce.

MILDRED. Truce.

ABE. By the by, as long as we're being so civil, did Alice and Jerry mention about the lovely apartment they rented?

MILDRED. Yes, they said they fixed it up very nice for you.

ABE. You're a funny lady, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. A survivor can't survive without a sense of humor, Mr. Dreyfus.

ABE. I told them I wouldn't take the apartment.

MILDRED. Me either.

ABE. It has shuffleboard. You could have the Wassermans over for coffee and shuffleboard.

(Suddenly the lights in the entire house flicker.)

MILDRED. You see? A sign from God. He definitely doesn't want me to take the apartment.

ABE. How do you know He was giving you a signal? Maybe it was for me. (The lights flicker again.) I don't think it's God. I'm afraid it's the power company. It must be this storm. Do you know if Jerry has a flash . . . (The lights go out. MILDRED and ABE are in near darkness, lit only by the glow from the fireplace.)

MILDRED. (a little ticky) Mr. Dreyfus, are you there?

ABE. Of course I'm here. I told you I'm not moving out didn't I?

MILDRED. Please, don't joke. I get nervous. Where are you? (MILDRED gets up from the chair and starts to inch her way toward the sofa.)

ABE. I'm right over here on the sofa, where I was two seconds ago. (MILDRED reaches the sofa and "finds" ABE.)

MILDRED. Is that you?

ABE. If it's not me, it's someone else. And if it's someone else, then I'm the one who's going to get nervous. (MILDRED sits down on the sofa.) Now you stay right here. (ABE gets up from the sofa.)

MILDRED. (panicky) Where are you going? Don't leave me alone.

ABE. I'm not going anywhere. I'm going to look out the window, so I can find out if it's the whole neighborhood or just this house. (Carefully, ABE starts inching his way to the window using the light from the fireplace to see by.)

MILDRED. Please keep talking. I don't like being alone in the dark. Ever since I was a little girl . . . please.

\* Light flicker  
lights flicker  
low + back up!

Lights  
flicker  
again  
Lights  
Blackout

fire is low  
blue in  
window

WHE ABE  
STOKES

Fire BRING-UP FIREPLACE - add red  
to couch

ABE. What should I talk about?

MILDRED. I don't know. Hum . . . sing . . . make noise . . . anything.

ABE. (*singing*)

Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.

Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.

Jimmy crack corn and I don't care.

My master's gone away. (*HE stops. There is silence.*)

MILDRED. Keep singing!

ABE. I don't know the rest of the words.

MILDRED. Then make some up!

ABE. Is that how Jerry got started?

MILDRED. Please, no jokes.

ABE. It's O.K. I'm at the window.

MILDRED. And???

ABE. And it's the whole neighborhood. Maybe the whole state of Connecticut for all I know.

MILDRED. Thank God.

ABE. Thank God for a power failure?

MILDRED. Better the whole state than one house. If it's the whole state, they'll send someone to fix it.

ABE. I'm coming back to the sofa. Any requests? How about "Lady of Spain"? That one I know most of the words to. (*Just then, the telephone rings. Startled, MILDRED lets out a loud shriek.*) Don't answer it. It might be the radio station. I'll get it. (*ABE lunges forward in the dark, only to run into the sofa.*) Oh, my knee, my knee. (*The phone rings again.*)

MILDRED. It's Jerry. I know it. (*SHE fumbles for the phone in the dark. It rings again. Finally, SHE picks it up.*) Hello?

JERRY. (*offstage*) Hello, Mom.

MILDRED. Jerry? What is it?

ABE. (*Loud and in pain.*) Oh . . . my knee.

A  
Sound  
Phone rings twice  
Mildred answers!

JERRY. (*offstage*) Mom, what's going on? Are you two fighting?

MILDRED. No, the lights went out. Connecticut is having a power failure.

ABE. Ohhhhhh . . .

JERRY. (*offstage*) What's the matter with Abe? Is he alright?

MILDRED. He tripped in the dark. He's fine. Did you have the baby?

ABE. Don't tell him I'm fine. Tell him I'm not fine.

MILDRED. Jerry, did Alice have the baby???

JERRY. (*offstage*) YES!!! It's a boy!!!

MILDRED. It's a boy! (*ABE hobbles over to the sofa and sits next to MILDRED, still rubbing his knee.*)

ABE. Congratulations. Tell him his grandfather is a cripple.

MILDRED. Is Alice OK?

JERRY. (*offstage*) She's fine. Exhausted. But fine.

MILDRED. (*to ABE*) Alice is fine.

ABE. Good. That makes one of us.

MILDRED. Jerry, were you in the room the whole time?

JERRY. (*offstage*) Yeah, Mom. Natural childbirth all the way. It was beautiful. The baby just sort of popped out . . . and the doctor held him up and said, "It's a boy. A fine healthy baby boy."

MILDRED. And then what happened?

JERRY. (*offstage*) And then the baby started crying, and then I hugged Alice, and then Alice started crying, and then I started crying . . .

MILDRED. Oh, Jerry, now I'm crying.

ABE. You're crying? My damn knee is broken.

MILDRED. Shhh. Go on, Jerry.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Well, he's 6 pounds, 2½ ounces.

Kinda big, considering he's 3 weeks early.

MILDRED. Wonderful!

JERRY. (*offstage*) Mom, I have to get back to Alice. Will you and Abe be alright with this power failure?

MILDRED. Yes, darling. I'm sure Connecticut will fix it right up.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Good, because I think I'm going to spend at least two nights in the city with Brian and Sharon.

MILDRED. Don't worry about a thing.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Mom, I've got to go. Will you tell Abe the news?

MILDRED. Yes. Congratulations, darling.

JERRY. (*offstage*) Congratulations, yourself. You're a grandmother. I gotta go. Goodbye.

(*THEY BOTH hang up.*)

\* MILDRED. (*to ABE*) Congratulations, you're a grandfather. I'm a grandmother.

ABE. So I gathered.

MILDRED. Six pounds, two and a half ounces. Alice is OK. Is your knee alright? (*SHE sits next to him on the sofa.*)

ABE. If it's not broken, I'm sure it will be fine.

MILDRED. Let me feel it. Where is it?

ABE. Owwww!

MILDRED. You should put some ice on it.

ABE. I'm liable to get killed just looking for ice. What's the matter with you? You're shaking like a leaf. Are you still afraid of the dark?

MILDRED. A little. Mostly, I'm shaking from happiness.

ABE. You want me to look for a flashlight?

MILDRED. No! Don't go! Just . . . would you be a gentleman and hold . . . for just one second before I fall in a million pieces?

ABE. (*in disbelief*) And you?

MILDRED. Please. . . . *slowly, almost awkwardly, ABE puts his arm around MILDRED. After a few seconds, SHE lets out a long, slow sigh.*

ABE. Are you OK?

MILDRED. I'm so relieved. I didn't say anything, but when Alice went into labor, I was worried that maybe it was induced from too much emotion. I blamed myself for upsetting her.

ABE. I think maybe I upset her also.

MILDRED. I know. I blamed you too.

ABE. Thanks.

MILDRED. How's your knee?

ABE. Let me stand up. I'll let you know. (*HE tries to stand up.*)

MILDRED. Don't! Don't put any unnecessary pressure on it. (*As HE tries to stand, SHE pulls him back. HE falls back down into the same position, with his arm still around her. Only this time, SHE snuggles in closer. HE looks surprised. SHE doesn't. A few seconds pass, then . . .*) Mr. Dreyfus . . .

ABE. Yes?

MILDRED. You had just congratulated me on becoming a grandmother.

ABE. Congratulations.

MILDRED. Mr. Dreyfus, I waited 66 years for my first grandchild. I think the occasion calls for a little more than that.

ABE. You want to shake hands?

MILDRED. A little more than that.

ABE. Mrs. Sloan! We're in-laws.

MILDRED. So? We're not outlaws. We're in-laws.

ABE. In-laws are natural enemies.

MILDRED. If we're natural enemies, then how come you're sitting in the dark with your arms around me?

ABE. I was thinking it could be the wine.

MILDRED. The truth is, Mr. Dreyfus, I'm a woman and you're a man, and that makes us natural friends.

ABE. Then how come we've been fighting like cats and dogs for the last seven months?

MILDRED. Because we've both been petty and childish and immature. We put the poor kids through hell, and for what? To prove that they love one of us more than the other? ~~Tonight I learned a lesson. Our fighting has caused a lot more pain than I ever realized.~~ If anything had happened to Alice or the baby, I don't know how I'd ever live with myself.

ABE. Maybe we should . . . (*HE hesitates.*)

MILDRED. Maybe we should what?

ABE. (*slowly, almost painfully*) Maybe we should not fight so much . . . at least, not so hard . . . at least, not in front of the children.

MILDRED. I can see this won't be easy for you.

ABE. I was born to squabble. It'll be like giving up part of my charm.

MILDRED. I'll tell you what. If you promise to give up the ugly, hating kind of fight, I promise to give you a nice, friendly healthy disagreement at least once a day. (*sweetly*) After all, to argue is to live, if you get my gist.

ABE. You know, you're not really as terrible as I said you were.

MILDRED. You're not so bad yourself.

ABE. I'm not exactly Manny the fruit man.

MILDRED. But you have some good qualities. I noticed.

ABE. Like what?

MILDRED. Strong arms. A nice after shave lotion.

ABE. I've been noticing some of your qualities, myself.

MILDRED. You have?

ABE. No matter what else, you are an attractive woman, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. Mildred.

ABE. Mildred.

MILDRED. What else?

ABE. You give a first class argument, Mildred.

MILDRED. Mr. Dreyfus.

ABE. Abe.

MILDRED. Abe, you had haven't congratulated me on becoming a grandmother.

ABE. Mrs. Sloan! Mildred! If I didn't know better I'd swear you were flirting with me.

MILDRED. And what if I were?

ABE. A man my age . . . I wasn't very good at this business when I was 17, and I don't think I'll be any good at it now. You should have caught me somewhere in the middle.

MILDRED. You're never too old.

ABE. I'm 73.

MILDRED. It's like riding a bike. Once you learn, you never forget.

ABE. I fall off bikes.

MILDRED. (*tenderly*) Abe . . .

ABE. (*Avoiding the issue.*) There's a history of falling in my family . . .

MILDRED. Abe . . .

ABE. My grandfather, he should rest in peace, fell off my . . .

MILDRED. Congratulations, Abe.

ABE. (not quite sure) Congratulations . . . Mildred.  
MILDRED. Millie . . . call me Millie.

(There is a moment's pause. Then the lights fade to black.)

ACT TWO

SCENE 3

*Mid-morning, four days later. ABE and MILDRED are at the dining room table. SHE is pouring coffee. HE is reading a newspaper. When they speak, we sense their relationship is strained.*

MILDRED. Jonathan Louis Sloan. It's a nice name for a baby, don't you think?

ABE. Wonderful. Almost as catchy as Muhammad Ali.

MILDRED. Abe Dreyfus . . .

ABE. Another wonderful name.

MILDRED. . . . I don't think we should be fighting when the children get home.

ABE. I am not fighting!

MILDRED. You haven't said a pleasant thing to me all day.

ABE. Merry Christmas. Let me know when I'm getting too pleasant for you.

MILDRED. I had a dream last night. I was walking down the street, and I met six dwarfs. I thought . . . wait a minute . . . there should be seven. Where in the world is . . .

ABE. Alright, alright! We'll discuss it.

MILDRED. Thank you.

ABE. We've been over this fifty times already.

MILDRED. Then listen this time. I think it would be best for everyone if I took the apartment. You should stay here. You have a heart condition.

ABE. My heart is fine. And to show you it's in the right place, I'm taking the apartment. You are staying. Are you happy? Now we've been over it 51 times. Should we go for 52, or do you want to let Alice and Jerry make the decision?

MILDRED. I don't think we should put the burden on them.

ABE. That's my whole point. *I'm* the burden. They're young; they have a baby. What do they need an old man around . . .

(A horn honks in the driveway.)

MILDRED. Shush. They're home.

ABE. Don't shush me. I'm trying to do something nice for Alice and Jerry. I'm moving out.

MILDRED. I'm moving out. I'm practically out the . . .

(The front door opens and in walks ALICE, carrying a "Good Luck On Your New Baby" plant; JERRY, carrying the luggage; and MRS. FISHER, a nonsense woman of 55 who is wearing a white nurse's uniform, and carrying the baby, who is swaddled in blue bunting. ABE and MILDRED snap into their best social behavior and run to the door to greet the family. THEY hug and kiss JERRY and ALICE. Then MILDRED sees the baby.)

*ASOUND  
can hear  
top volume*

*Morning March  
full lights  
inside &  
outside*

*lights  
fade to black*

MILDRED. Ohhhh, the baby! (*As SHE reaches for the baby, MRS. FISHER pulls him away. Sensing the confrontation to come, ALICE takes the lead.*)

ALICE. Mrs. Fisher, my father, Mr. Dreyfus. My mother-in-law, Mrs. Sloan.

MILDRED. Call me Mildred. And what is your name, Mrs. Fisher?

MRS. FISHER. Mrs. Fisher.

(*ABE grunts a hello, but obviously has taken an immediate dislike toward MRS. FISHER. MILDRED holds her arms out to take the baby.*)

MILDRED. Can I see the baby, Mrs. Fisher?

MRS. FISHER. He's wet.

ABE. (*politeness to the winds*) He's invisible wet?

MRS. FISHER. (*Ignoring him, still talking to MILDRED.*) He's a Pisces. Pisces are always wet.

ABE. I thought all babies were wet. It's your medical opinion that the ones born in March are extra wet?

MRS. FISHER. (*turning to ALICE*) Madam, if you don't mind, I would like to change Baby, and then people may see him.

ALICE. Daddy, please. It'll only take a minute.

MRS. FISHER. (*vindicated*) Thank you, Mrs. Sloan. (*to ABE*) You waited nine months. Another minute won't kill you.

JERRY. (*Grabbing the luggage and hurrying to avoid further confrontation.*) Follow me, Mrs. Fisher. The changing table is in the master bedroom. (*HE clears his throat.*) Temporarily.

MRS. FISHER. (*to MILDRED and ABE*) I'll call you when Baby is ready. (*MRS. FISHER and JERRY exit up the stairs.*)

ABE. What's the matter, Alice? You felt bad for the baby that he missed World War II? You had to bring back the Gestapo?

ALICE. She is a little stern.

ABE. Stern? No, Alice. Atilla the Hun was stern. That woman is a barracuda. And you side with her over your own father?

ALICE. Dad, she's been a governess for 20 years. She must know what she's doing.

ABE. You know how long Franco was a dictator? You know how long McCarthy was a Senator? Did they know what they were doing?

ALICE. If she doesn't work out, we'll get someone else, but at least give her a chance.

ABE. I gave her a chance. She's not working out. She doesn't even know his name. (*imitating MRS. FISHER*) I'll call you when "Baby" is ready!

(*JERRY returns to the room*)

ALICE. (*to JERRY*) Everything OK?

JERRY. Yup. Except she doesn't like the wallpaper.

ALICE. In our room?

JERRY. No. She's changing him in our room, but she took a quick look at Jonathan's room first. Hates the wallpaper.

MILDRED. The one with the little bunnies?

JERRY. She says it's too busy.

ABE. You see, Alice, the woman doesn't even like little bunnies. Maybe she'd prefer little barracudies.

ALICE. (*changing the subject*) So . . . I was away for four days. Did you guys behave? (*ABE and MILDRED exchange a quick glance.*)

ABE. What do you mean behave?

Mustish  
Jerr  
exit

pl  
out

ALICE. "Behave:" to comport one's self in the proper manner; to refrain from ~~outing~~ while Alice is in the hospital.

ABE. We promised didn't we?

ALICE. Dad, I'm the lawyer. Don't answer a question with a question.

*(MRS. FISHER appears, standing on the landing.)*

MRS. FISHER. Baby is ready to see you now.

ABE. Good, I was hoping to meet him before he left for college. (to ALICE) Excuse us, counselor.

MRS. FISHER. (to ABE) Try not to over-stimulate him. (MILDRED and MRS. FISHER exit toward the bedroom.)

ABE. What would I do? Show him dirty pictures? (HE exits.)

ALICE. (Settling down into a chair.) It feels good to be home. It'll feel better when we get this business over with. You said you would bring it up as soon as we got home.

JERRY. I thought I should at least give them a minute to see the baby. Give Abe and Mrs. Fisher a chance to become fast friends. (HE looks at ALICE questioningly.)

ALICE. (SHE looks back understanding.) Yes. We are definitely doing the right thing. Are there any other questions? (HE looks at her again.) Yes. I love you very much.

JERRY. (smiling) That wasn't the question. But it was a good answer. (MILDRED and ABE come bursting back into the room.)

MILDRED. Alice, he's beautiful. He looks just like you, except he's darker, like my mother's side of the family.

*MIT  
FISH  
→ M  
→ ABE*

*Enter  
M ABE*

ABE. I beg to differ. But he's the spitting image of Jerry. And if the Bride of Frankenstein would turn on a few more lights in there, he wouldn't look so dark.

MILDRED. You think he looks like Jerry? I'm Jerry's mother, and I can tell you, point blank, he doesn't look anything like Jerry.

ABE. Are you kidding? He has the same big ears . . .

JERRY. Hey!

MILDRED. Jerry does not have big ears!

ALICE. Neither does Jonathan! Jerry, do you think Jonathan has big ears?

JERRY. I don't think anybody has big ears. Me or Jonathan.

ABE. Look, beauty is in the eye of the beholder. I beheld big ears. He's a cute kid. So he'll grow his hair long.

MILDRED. And when did you become an expert on beauty and fashion? Who are you? Vidal Sassoon? Go back in and put on your glasses and you'll see that . . .

JERRY. Mom! Cool it! Alice, we made the right decision. (to ABE and MILDRED) Folks, sit down. Alice and I have something we want to talk to you about. (MILDRED and ABE look at each other.) Please. Sit. I want to say this while I still can.

ABE. (playfully) We're all ears, Jerry.

ALICE. Daddy! (THEY all take seats.)

JERRY. Mom . . . Abe . . . Alice and I have discussed this at great length, and we've come to a decision about the living arrangements around here. We'd like you both to move out by the end of this month.

ABE AND MILDRED. (together) Both?

ABE. A few days ago you said one of us could stay.

JERRY. I know. But in the long run, we think it'll be best for the four of us, if . . .

ALICE. The five of



SQUABBLES

JERRY. Yeah . . . look, I'm sorry. We agonized over this decision . . .

ALICE. We'll do whatever we can to help you get settled, but end of the month, that's it. Both of you. No favorites.

ABE. (*Sizing up the situation.*) Hmmm. Is that furnished apartment still available? The one on Westover Road?

JERRY. Sure. One of you can still have it if you want.

ABE. (*standing*) Good! I'll take it. It's only a few miles away. I'll be able to visit with you and the baby. I'll be able to see Wasserman. Maybe I'll even get to like shuffleboard. Good idea. I'll definitely take that apartment.

MILDRED. (*jumping up*) You'll take it? That's it? Wham, bam, you'll take it. What about me? Don't I get a vote? Am I supposed to just move in with Dirty Shirley from Bayonne, New Jersey? (*crossing to ABE*) What if I only want to be a few miles away so I can see the baby? What if I want to see the Wassermans? What am I supposed to do?

ABE: If you had any brains, you'd live with me!

MILDRED. Live with you? Are you crazy? (*JERRY looks at them in surprise. ALICE looks at them in shock.*)

ABE. I know I'm not easy to live with.

MILDRED. You're the most impossible man I ever met. (*ABE shrugs*) I couldn't live with you. (*Turning to ALICE and JERRY.*) I couldn't live with him. (*Turning back to ABE; softer.*) You're asking me to live with you?

ABE. You seem surprised.

MILDRED. A little.

ABE. I'm a little surprised myself, but considering the past four days . . .



SQUABBLES

MILDRED. (*Emphatically*) *passed, SHE puts her hand to her face and turns away from him.*) Mr. Dreyfus . . . Abe . . . (*almost girlish*) Well, I . . . I'd have to think it over.

ABE. Take your time. We have till the end of the month.

(*The telephone rings. ABE makes a small move to answer it, but MILDRED stops him with her eyes.*)

MILDRED. I'll get it. (*SHE crosses to the phone and answers it in a sing-songy voice.*) WCNW plays the country hits y'all want to hear. (*SHE pauses, waiting for an answer.*) Hello? (*SHE hangs up and smiles at the GROUP.*) They hung up. (*SHE crosses to ABE.*) If it's important, I'm sure they'll call back.

JERRY. What the hell is going on here?

ABE. (*Putting his arm around MILDRED.*) I think your mother just made a decision, Jerry. Call it Option Four.

ALICE. (*stunned*) . . . two are going to live together?

ABE. Apparently.

ALICE. You two can't live together.

ABE. Why not?

ALICE. Because, because . . . because, because . . .

ABE. For this I paid for Law School?

(*The doorbell rings.*)  Hector should do it

MILDRED. I'll get it. (*SHE crosses to answer the door.*)

ABE. (*following her*) I'll go with you. (*to JERRY*) Hey, Jerry. (*JERRY stares at him open-mouthed.*) Your mouth is open. (*MILDRED and ABE open the front door and in walks HECTOR carrying a large,*

★  
Sound  
Phone  
rings  
Mildred!  
answers! →

★  
Sound  
doorbell

Hector  
enters



*hand-made, hand-painted rocking horse and a camera on a tripod.)*

MILDRED. It's Hector. Oh . . . look at that.

ABE. Hello, Hector. I see you came by horse. Your car didn't start again? (*HECTOR puts the horse down in the center of the room. EVERYONE responds positively except ALICE, who is still in shock.*)

HECTOR. (*Shaking hands with ALICE and JERRY.*) Congratulations, Mrs. Sloan. Mr. Sloan. (*HE points to the horse proudly.*) For the baby!

MILDRED. It's beautiful! Where did you ever find it?

HECTOR. I didn't find it. I made it. Myself. My wife, Isabella, she help me paint it.

JERRY. It's terrific. Where did you ever learn how to make something like that?

HECTOR. Upstairs. In the bathroom. I find a magazine up there with the plans. (*HE shrugs his shoulders.*) It was easy. Just take a lot of time.

ABE. You sure you didn't build it up there?

HECTOR. Where is the baby anyway? I want to take a picture to show my family. I borrow this camera from my brother-in-law.

ALICE. (*Realizing this is a good way to clear the room.*) He's in the bedroom. Dad, will you and Mildred take Hector upstairs?

ABE. Sure thing. (*to HECTOR*) C'mon, pardner, get on your horse . . . but watch out for the rattlesnake . . . (*HE looks over at ALICE and JERRY.*) . . . if you get my gist. (*ABE, MILDRED and HECTOR exit carrying the horse and the camera.*)

ALICE. Jerry, I am in shock!

JERRY. Yeah, isn't that incredible? It must have taken him a couple of hundred hours to build . . .

ALICE. Jerrrrry!!! Your *mother* and my *father* are going to *live* together.

JERRY. Oh yeah . . . how about that?

ALICE. What do you think went on here while I was in the hospital?

JERRY. I don't think that's any of our business.

ALICE. But did you hear what he said? "Considering the past four days. . . ." I mean, what do you think went on . . . at their age?

JERRY. (*A la Groucho Marx*) Oh, I don't know. Maybe he slipped some vodka into her prune juice and chased her around the bedroom in his wheel chair. For God's sake, Alice, don't be so naive. They're consenting adults. What do you think went on?

ALICE. Ooooh . . . do you think they . . . did it?

JERRY. Why not? Almost everybody else does it. I can even remember when we used to do it.

ALICE. That's not fair. Doctor Porter said we could do it again in three more weeks.

JERRY. That's easy for him to say. (*Suddenly it dawns on him.*) I just realized something!

ALICE. What?

JERRY. If they're doing it . . .

ALICE. Yes?????

JERRY. (*laughing*) . . . they're doing it more than we are!

ALICE. Oh, Jerry, you're so perverse. I mean, look how old they are.

JERRY. How old was your great grandfather when he fell off your great grandmother?

ALICE. That was different. This is nothing more than a tacky little affair.

JERRY. Alice, I know you're upset, but you're over-reacting.

ALICE. (*over-reacting*) I am not over-reacting.

JERRY. How about a glass of milk to calm you down? (*HE walks toward the kitchen area.*) Maybe some

M ABE  
 ↑ ↑ HECT  
 ↑ ↑ IT

Oreos. I'll bet we have some Oreos in here.

ALICE. (*a touch hysterical*) Jerry, I go away for four days. I come home and I find out that my father and my mother-in-law are doing it under my own roof, and now they're going to live in sin a few blocks away, and you want to fix it up with milk and cookies???? (*ABE and MILDRED come down the stairs, and stop at the landing, unseen by JERRY or ALICE.*) How can you be so cavalier about all this?

JERRY. (*shrugs*) How can you be so upset?

ALICE. (*teary-eyed*) Because he doesn't love her.

JERRY. How can you say that?

ABE. (*interrupting*) Good question, Jerry. Alice, how do you know I don't love her? Because I was married to your mother, she should rest in peace, for 48 years? Do you think my ability to feel something for a woman died when she died?

ALICE. Do you? Love her?

ABE. (*gently*) Let me tell you what love is when you're Abe Dreyfus at 73. It's not bells ringing or sparks flying or pinwheels spinning. (*HE looks over at MILDRED. THEY exchange thoughts.*) Well, maybe a couple of toots and whistles. But basically, it means finding a good, honest, intelligent woman. Someone I can talk with; someone I can joke with; someone I can spend the day with. Someone I can argue with. And if she's the right woman, when the arguments are over, we'll still be able to talk and joke and spend the day together. If that's love, I got it.

ALICE. (*a little sobered*) And now that you're 73 years old, you're going to start living together like a couple of kids out of high school?

ABE. And you'd rather I acted my age.

ALICE. Don't you care what people will think? What they'll say?

ABE. (*fatherly*) Sit down, sweetie. (*ALICE sits down on the sofa.*) Alice, a lot of people my age worry about getting senile. A few years ago, I started to worry about what would happen to me if I *don't* become senile. What do I do if I'm alive and alert and there are still a lot of things I can do that I did when I was younger? What do I do if I don't want to be pigeon-holed into some socially acceptable senior citizen's lifestyle? Would you be happy if I sat on a park bench and tipped my hat to the ladies and went home and ate strained vegetables and watched Lawrence Welk on TV? Is that your idea of the way a 73 year old man should finish out his life? (*HE sits next to ALICE on the sofa.*) What if some night I want to drink half a bottle of wine and go skinny-dipping with Mildred and the Wassermans? If I was 17 you wouldn't say anything. If I was 45, it would still be alright. Why do I have to stop living just because I'm 73? Alice, I may have 20 good years left. I may have 20 minutes. Either way, I'm not going to sit around in a rocking chair waiting for my time to be up. (*HE stands.*) When it's up, I'm sure that God in His wisdom will see to it that I'm the first to know. In the meantime, I'm going to take advantage of every single day He sees fit to give me. (*HE crosses to MILDRED.*) I'm going to live my life, my way, with my woman, and to hell with what anyone else says . . . if you get my gist.

ALICE. What can I say?

ABE. I know it's a reverse on an old tradition, but we were hoping, maybe, you'd give us your blessing.

ALICE. (*Putting her arms around ABE.*) You have my blessing. And my love. (*SHE hugs MILDRED.*) Both of you.

JERRY. Me too. I wish you both the best. (*HE shakes ABE's hand, then kisses MILDRED. The doorbell rings.*) It's open. Come in.

A  
SOUND  
doorbell

actn should do it

*enter*  
SQUABBLES

*enter* WASSERMAN → W

WASSERMAN. Congratulations. How's the baby?

ALICE. He's wonderful. You want to meet him?

WASSERMAN. In two seconds. Esther will be right over with a cake she made—a birthday cake for the new baby—she sent me over to make a quick pot of coffee. (*HE starts fixing coffee in the kitchen area.*) So, Dreyfus. How are you doing now that you're a grandfather?

ABE. Mrs. Sloan and I are moving into an apartment on Westover Road.

WASSERMAN. (*Carrying the coffeepot, HE crosses to ABE.*) Good, good. Makes sense. It's practical. You can share the rent. But Westover Road? A two bedroom over there can run you an arm and a leg.

ABE. It's a one bedroom.

WASSERMAN. (*Looking up at ABE with admiration.*) Heh, heh, heh. Dreyfus, you old dog, you! When are you moving in?

ABE. As soon as we get back from vacation.

JERRY. Vacation? Wait a minute. You guys are going too fast for me. When did you decide to go on vacation together?

ABE. Two minutes ago. In the bedroom. Millie and I figured we could use a change of scenery before we settle down.

JERRY. Where are you and "Millie" going?

ABE. Florida.

MILDRED. Europe. (*ABE looks at MILDRED, then back to JERRY.*)

ABE. Florida.

MILDRED. (*to Jerry*) We haven't quite worked it out yet, but Europe. Probably Rome and Florence.

## QUABBLES

*Heel*  
*enter* ABE. (*to MILDRED*) We have worked it out. Florida. Probably Miami.

MILDRED. Darling, Millie wants to go to Europe.

*F.H.*  
ABE. Sugar, Abie wants to go to Florida. (*Just then, HECTOR comes down the stairs, carrying the camera and dragging along MRS. FISHER and the baby.*)

MRS. FISHER. Please, sir, I do not want to have my picture taken.

HECTOR. Just one. A family picture. Please.

WASSERMAN. (*Walks over to MRS. FISHER and the baby.*) So there he is. Cute kid. I'm not sure who he looks like.

ABE. Check his ears.

WASSERMAN. (*to MRS. FISHER*) How do you do young lady. I'm Sol Wasserman. You look like you could use a nice cup of coffee. It'll be ready in a jiffy. (*SHE is stone-faced.*) Nice talking to you.

HECTOR. (*Setting up the camera and organizing them.*) Come on everybody. One picture. Nurse please. Sit in the chair with the baby.

MRS. FISHER. Please hurry. Baby and I have more important matters to attend to. (*SHE sits in the armchair.*)

HECTOR. Mr. Drayfus.

ABE. Yes, hurry up, Hector. I have to start packing . . . for Florida. (*HE moves behind the armchair.*)

HECTOR. You going to Florida? I have cousins in Florida.

ABE. That I could have guessed.

MILDRED. Ignore him, Hector. He's just upset, because I am going to Europe. (*SHE crosses and stands next to ABE.*)

HECTOR. (*still organizing*) Mrs. Sloan . . . Mr. Sloan, por favor.

ABE. You're going to Europe? You can send me a

postcard. In Miami.

ALICE. Come on Dad. Mildred's right. You'd love Europe.

JERRY. Keep out of it Alice. Besides, it's been a long cold winter. Let them go to Florida and get some sun.

MILDRED. You keep out of it Jerry. They have sun in Europe.

WASSERMAN. (Still carrying the coffeepot, HE joins the GROUP.) Have you thought about Atlantic City?

(The baby starts crying.)

Sound effect Boat  
cup

MRS. FISHER. Madam. Baby is losing his patience.

JERRY. He's wet.

ALICE. He's hungry.

WASSERMAN. Maybe he doesn't like cameras.

MRS. FISHER. Maybe he doesn't like people.

HECTOR. Get closer. Get closer. (ALICE and JERRY cross to the armchair. SHE sits on the arm.)

MILDRED. I can't understand you. Europe has art, music, museums . . .

ABE. Florida has Jai Aiai, dog tracks . . .

WASSERMAN. Atlantic City has blackjack, Keno . . .

(The baby gets louder.)

Sound

HECTOR. Hold on. I'm setting the timer.

JERRY. (kneeling) Come on Johnny Boy; he's setting the timer.

ALICE. His name is Jonathan!

WASSERMAN. Kootchie, kootchie, kootchie.

ALICE. You promised you wouldn't call him Johnny Boy!

HECTOR. I'm ready.

(The baby cries louder.)

WASSERMAN. Kootchie, kootchie, kootchie.

HECTOR. Everybody smiling. (EVERYONE smiles except MILDRED.)

MILDRED. I'm still here; somebody tells me he's taking me to Rome and . . . HECTOR. (EVERYONE stops smiling.)

ABE. I have a niece Florence. In Pittsburgh. We'll stop off on the way to Florida.

MILDRED. Pittsburgh's not on the way to Florida.

ABE. It is the way I drive.

HECTOR. Everybody smiling, smiling.

(The baby gets louder.)

WASSERMAN. Kootchie, kootchie, kootch . . .

MRS. FISHER. Kindly keep your kootchie-kootchies to yourself. (to ALICE) Madam, please . . .

ALICE. Jerry! Do something!

JERRY. Hurry up, Hector!

HECTOR. Hurry up, Hector???

ABE. Yeah, hurry up, Hector. We're driving to Florida.

MILDRED. We are driving anywhere. We're flying. To Europe!!!

(The baby gets louder.)

HECTOR. For crying out loud!!! (EVERYBODY freezes; the baby stops crying.) Will everybody please

SMILE!

Flash - Blackout!