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To:

Mom

Dad

Carol

Joan

Mike

and all the Sister Clarissa's in my life.

“Pretty much all the honest truth-telling there is in the world is done by children.”

—*Anonymous*

Cast of Characters

CHET PAZINSKI, mid-40s

ELLEN PAZINSKI, early 40s

Their Children:

RUDY, 12 years old

GEORGIE, 13 years old

EDDIE, 15 years old

ANNIE, 16 years old

A Nun:

SISTER CLARISSA, 70-ish

Time

Autumn, 1959.

Place

The main action of the play takes place in the Pazinski apartment, above “Chet’s Bar & Grill” in Buffalo, New York.

Production Notes

There is a DVD featuring a compilation of Ed Sullivan impersonators that is available to production groups who wish to use it as support material for the actor playing Rudy.

There are also photos of the people and places that the play is based on for use in programs, publicity, etc.

Please contact Playscripts, Inc. to request any of the above materials.

A pronunciation guide can be found at the end of this script.

Acknowledgments

Over the Tavern was first presented by Studio Arena Theatre, Buffalo, New York on December 6, 1994 with the following cast:

RUDY Yvon Pasquarello
SISTER CLARISSA.....Jeanne Cairns
ELLENSusanne Marley
GEORGIE Chad Vahue
EDDIEJamie Bennett
ANNIE..... Fleur Phillips
CHETTom Bloom

Over The Tavern was directed by Terence Lamude. Set design by Russell Metheny, lighting design by John McClain, costume design by Maureen Carr, sound design by Rick Menke, choreography by Lynne Kurdziel-Formato, and the production stage manager was Nancy N. Doherty.

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program, in a type size no less than 50% of the type size used for designer credits:

Originally produced by STUDIO ARENA THEATRE, Buffalo, New York. Gavin Cameron-Webb, Artistic Director.

OVER THE TAVERN

by Tom Dudzick

ACT I

Scene 1

(Buffalo, New York. Autumn, 1959.)

(A second floor apartment above “Chet’s Bar & Grill” in an old brick building on a noisy street of merchants, cars and kids. It is the home of Chester Pazinski, his wife Ellen and their four children.)

(The place is cramped, with ratty furniture handed down from in-laws. An attempt has been made to give the place some cheer, but it’s clear we are not entering the pretty world of “Father Knows Best” or “The Donna Reed Show.”)

(The main playing area is a kitchen. There is also a living room and a child’s bedroom. A toy chest fits snugly in one corner of the kitchen. Doors lead off to unseen bedrooms and a bathroom. A doorway, the “tavern door”, leads to an unseen staircase which goes down into the tavern. It is this staircase that Chet Pazinski climbs each evening after a day of tending bar. A “back door” in the kitchen leads to an unseen staircase that goes down to the backyard.)

(The living room faces the street, and through the windows a fire escape and the top of Chet’s neon sign can be seen.)

(The bedroom window overlooks a tree-filled backyard. This bedroom is shared by Rudy and Georgie. Comic book covers, a portrait of Alfred E. Neuman, movie monster pictures and celebrity photos clipped from magazines [mostly comedians] fill the walls.)

(Occasionally, set pieces will travel into the area and will be isolated with lighting. These will represent other settings in the play. In fact, the play opens in one of these—a schoolroom.)

(AT RISE: It is dark. We hear a children’s choir, less than perfect, singing a hymn, accompanied by an imperfect church organ. Presently the song is interrupted by a rude tap-tap-tap of pencil on microphone, followed by a woman’s voice speaking over a public address system.)

NUN'S VOICE. Attention, students. Attention, please. Attention. This is Mother Athanasius Marie with some announcements before we close our day at St. Casimir's. I would like to remind everyone that tomorrow begins our annual Pagan Baby Adoption Drive. Boys and girls, the next time you want a candy bar or Popsicle, stop and consider that that five cents could mean the difference between salvation with Jesus, or eternal damnation in the fires of hell for a child less fortunate than yourself. With the thought of those suffering children, can you really enjoy that Baby Ruth?

The following students are to remain after school...Louis Kaminski, Steven Sowinski, Michael Zalinski, and Rudolf Pazinski. Please stand. Let us pray. Oh my God, I believe in you and all Your Church does teach, because You have said it, and Your word is true. In the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Amen.

(Halfway through this prayer the NUN'S VOICE fades out and THE LIGHTS COME UP ON RUDY PAZINSKI, twelve years old, as he sits in a classroom in St. Casimir's Parochial School, squirming at his desk, deep in painful concentration. He is dressed in a white shirt, a tie with an SCS emblem sewn on it, faded baggy corduroy pants, shiny at the knee, and scuffed brown shoes.)

(Behind RUDY, with her back to us, stands a nun, SISTER CLARISSA. We'll come to find that she is elderly, going on ancient, and walks with the aid of a cane.)

RUDY. The Chief Spiritual Works of Mercy are seven. One. To feed the hungry. Two. To give drink to the thirsty. Three. To clothe the negged.

SISTER. "Naked."

RUDY. Naked.

SISTER. *(Turns to RUDY:)* And what on earth are you doing, Mr. Pazinski?

RUDY. Saying the Chief Spiritual Works of Mercy.

SISTER. Those are the Chief *Corporal* Works of Mercy.

RUDY. Oh, yeah.

SISTER. (*Whacks his chair with her cane:*) Pay attention, Rudolph.

RUDY. The Chief *Spiritual Works* of Mercy are seven. One... (*Not so sure of these:*) Um...to astonish the sinner...

SISTER. “Admonish”

RUDY. To admonish the sinner. Two. To instruct the ignorant. Three. Um... To, uh...

SISTER. (*Wearily; it's been a long day:*) Counsel, counsel, counsel...

RUDY. To counsel the doubtful. Four. To, uh... To, uh...

(Losing all patience, SISTER grabs RUDY's shirt sleeve and shakes him violently.)

SISTER. *Comfort the sorrowful, comfort the sorrowful, comfort the sorrowful!*

(RUDY holds his arm painfully.)

SISTER. You'll be the death of me, Mr. Pazinski. Do you hear me? (*Digging in her sleeve:*) Do you see these? Do you see these pills? (*Produces a tiny pill box:*) I have these because boys like you refuse to learn. You drive me to heart failure. You put one of these under my tongue just as you drive a nail into Christ's hand every time you sin.

RUDY. Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. Why can't you learn your catechism? Why can't you?

RUDY. (*Mumbles:*) I dunno.

SISTER. “I dunno, I dunno.” Enunciate! I—don't—know!

RUDY. I don't know.

SISTER. What do you mean you don't know? ...I'll tell you why you can't learn. Because you're too busy out there making your friends laugh. On the school steps making a spectacle of yourself. What is it you're doing out there? (*No answer. She thumps her cane.*) Why is it they're laughing? What are you doing out there?

RUDY. (*Quietly:*) ...Ed Sullivan.

SISTER. Ed Sullivan. What does that mean, Ed Sullivan?

RUDY. (*Mumbles:*) Just doin' him.

SISTER. (*Whacks his chair:*) Speak up!

RUDY. I was *doing* him. Doing an imitation.

SISTER. I see. Do you think Jesus went around doing Ed Sullivan?

(*RUDY grins at the thought.*)

SISTER. Stop that! ...Did Ed Sullivan die on the cross for your sins?

RUDY. No, S'ter.

SISTER. Sis-ter! Sis-ter! Not *S'ter!*

RUDY. Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. Your father didn't do Ed Sullivan. Your father loved Jesus. He wanted to get into Heaven, he learned his catechism. He didn't waste his time with Ed Sullivan.

RUDY. Ed Sullivan was only *two years old* when my father—

SISTER. (*Suddenly the air is pierced with the sound of SISTER's "clicker:"*) Silence! Bold as brass. Just like your brother before you. How are you going to be confirmed if you don't learn your catechism? Don't you want to be a soldier for Christ?

RUDY. (*Mumbles:*) Guess not.

SISTER. *What did you say?* Rudolf Pazinski, what did you just say in front of that crucifix? (*RUDY is silent.*) Stand up. (*Knowing what's coming, he reluctantly gets to his feet. SISTER reaches into the folds of her habit and pulls out a wooden ruler.*) Your hand.

RUDY. I'm sorry, Sister.

SISTER. Put out your hand.

RUDY. I'm sorry, Sister. I *do* want to be confirmed.

SISTER. Rudolf!

(*Wincing, RUDY slowly extends his hand, palm up. SISTER lines up the ruler for the big blow. She pulls back to strike and RUDY flinches ever so slightly.*)

SISTER. You flinched. The more you flinch, Rudolf, the harder I hit.

(He returns his hand. She strikes—WHAP! It stings like hell. His mouth is wide open but nothing comes out.)

SISTER. Offer up the pain, Rudolf. Offer it up.

RUDY. *(Sits, wincing:)* Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. Now, starting tomorrow you will remain one hour every day after school. You will continue to remain after school until your entire catechism is memorized. No student of mine ever missed his confirmation because he went off to be a soldier for Ed Sullivan.

RUDY. Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. Sis-ter.

RUDY. Sister.

SISTER. *(Sounds her clicker:)* Dismissed!

(As RUDY quickly exits, we.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 2

(A small church kneeler is lit elsewhere on the stage. RUDY runs in and kneels in the pew. Oops, he forgot to genuflect. He jumps out of the pew, genuflects quickly and jumps back in. He makes a quick sign of the cross and folds his hands, pointing them to Heaven.)

RUDY. Please, please, please Dear Jesus, please make her ease up on me. I promise I'll learn my catechism and get confirmed and all that, but please, I mean, c'mon, *look at that!* *(Shows the stinging palm of his hand to heaven.)* Please just make her not so mean, that's all. And I'll be a soldier for you, I promise. Whatever that means, I'll do it. Thank you. *(Makes a quick sign of the cross, gets up, then suddenly kneels again.)* And the spaghetti! *(Quick sign of the cross.)* The spaghetti! Please don't let Daddy forget the spaghetti tonight. Please, please, that's very important. The spaghetti. Don't let him forget the

spaghetti. Okay? The spaghetti. Very important. So, it's Sister Clarissa and the spaghetti. Thank you.

(Makes a quick sign of the cross, gets up, genuflects, almost makes it out, but he runs back again, rushes a genuflection, kneels and makes the sign of the cross.)

RUDY. And the bad mood! Ple-e-eze dear Jesus, don't let Daddy be in a bad mood tonight. Please, just no bad mood! Supper would be great without that. No bad mood, please. And I'll learn my catechism and get confirmed. Okay, so it's a nicer Sister Clarissa, the spaghetti, and no bad mood, and I'll get confirmed. Okay, thank you, dear Jesus, thank you!

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 3

(LIGHTS COME UP on the apartment. In the living room a boy sits on the floor much too close to the screen of a TV set. He sucks his thumb. This is GEORGIE, 13 years old and severely retarded, his mental age being that of a 3-year-old. Consistently good natured, GEORGIE communicates with gestures, grunts and an occasional real word.)

(Right now he is engrossed in a shoot 'em up Western. We can't see the TV screen, but we hear lots of gunfire.)

(ELLEN PAZINSKI, an attractive woman in her early forties, enters through the back kitchen door with a wicker basket full of laundry. On her way to one of the bedrooms she hears the "crap" GEORGIE is watching. She makes a beeline for the TV set.)

ELLEN. None of that junk!

(She changes the channel to a cartoon show.)

(We now hear one of those 1930s theatrical cartoons that dominated kids' TV in this era.)

ELLEN. Not so close to the screen, Georgie.

(She exits into one of the bedrooms.)

GEORGIE. Nnn.

(He ignores her and stays where he is.)

(ELLEN returns with the empty basket and stops at GEORGIE's side.)

ELLEN. Georgie, not so close, you'll go blind.

GEORGIE. *(Noncommittally:)* Nnn.

ELLEN. Georgie, move back.

GEORGIE. Nnn.

ELLEN. *(Squats down close to him, lowers the TV volume; speaks gently but firmly:)* Georgie, move back.

(He grudgingly moves back about a quarter of an inch.)

ELLEN. More.

(His eyes never leaving the TV screen, he moves back another smidgen.)

ELLEN. More.

(Another ¼ inch. Now, just to see how far he'll take his little game:)

ELLEN. More. ...More. ...More. ...More. ...More. ...More.

(With a little movement each time, he is now back a full two inches. The fun over, ELLEN puts down the clothes basket, gets up and grips GEORGIE under the arms. She drags him back across the room while he kicks and screams. When she's got him quietly where she wants him:)

ELLEN. You can see it from here.

(GEORGIE puts his thumb in his mouth. She removes it.)

ELLEN. No thumb.

(He puts it back. She removes it.)

ELLEN. No thumb.

(He puts it back. She removes it.)

ELLEN. No--thumb.

(He keeps it out. She gets up and retrieves her basket.)

ELLEN. Spaghetti tonight, Georgie. Daddy's bringing home spaghetti from Chef's Restaurant. How about that?

GEORGIE. (*Watching TV:*) Nnn.

ELLEN. (*Taking laundry basket to kitchen:*) So be a good boy.

(The moment ELLEN is out of sight, GEORGIE scurries back to his original spot and resumes sucking his thumb.)

(RUDY enters through the back door with his school books.)

RUDY. Mom—!

ELLEN. Where have you been?

RUDY. Mom, where's Eddie's comic books?

ELLEN. Where have you been?

RUDY. I had to stay after. Mom, his comic books were always in the garage, now they're gone!

ELLEN. Why did you have to stay after?

RUDY. Because of the Spiritual Works of Mercy. Mom, if Eddie sees his comic books gone he'll blame me. They were his good ones! Vault of Horror. Chamber of Terror.

ELLEN. So what do you want me to do?

RUDY. Help me!

ELLEN. When's someone going to help *me* around here? I can't keep track of everything.

RUDY. Oh man, I'm dead!

ELLEN. Wait. I saw a kid in the bar with comic books today. Maybe your father traded them away.

RUDY. (*Sudden alarm:*) What kid?

ELLEN. I'm just saying maybe.

RUDY. *What kid?*

ELLEN. A kid, I don't know. I was busy.

RUDY. Did he have green teeth?

(She looks at him, revolted.)

RUDY. *Did he?*

ELLEN. I didn't look!

RUDY. Man, I hope it wasn't Ronnie Malicki.

ELLEN. Why?

RUDY. He's a crook. He's a smooth talker who tries to get your valuable comic books and stick you with his crummy Caspers and Scrooge McDucks. I hate him! Especially after what he called us.

ELLEN. What did he call us?

RUDY. ...Nothin'.

ELLEN. What did he call us?

RUDY. *(Barely audible:)* Hellbound.

ELLEN. What?

RUDY. Hellbound.

ELLEN. Hellbound? Bound for Hell?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. All of us?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. For what?

RUDY. ...He didn't say.

ELLEN. If I'm going to Hell I'd like to know why.

RUDY. 'Cause Daddy's left-handed.

(ELLEN waits for an explanation.)

RUDY. Ronnie's father used to play ball with Daddy, and he said Daddy pitched left-handed. And Sister says the Devil's left-handed.

ELLEN. Your father pitched left-handed because of an accident. The Devil was born that way. The Devil has green teeth, tell that to the little creep.

(She exits into one of the bedrooms with some clean laundry.)

RUDY. Mom, please say Daddy didn't trade the comic books to this kid. Please!

ELLEN. *(Off:)* What do I have, a crystal ball? I can't see everything that goes on.

(RUDY opens cupboard and grabs a cereal box.)

ELLEN. Put it back.

RUDY. *(Puts it back:)* Do you think Daddy'll take us to miniature golf tonight?

ELLEN. *(Re-enters:)* I don't know, depends on his mood.

RUDY. Georgie!

GEORGIE. Ruggy!*

(RUDY waves "follow me" and GEORGIE jumps up and turns off the TV. He runs through the kitchen and follows RUDY into the bedroom.)

ELLEN. Daddy's bringing spaghetti home from Chef's—

RUDY. I know!

ELLEN. —so don't stray too far. And it's your turn to sweep the alley. *(Exits out the back door.)*

RUDY. I know! ...Georgie, sit.

GEORGIE. Ruggy!

(GEORGIE sits on the bed and giggles in anticipation.)

RUDY. Ruggy's got new stuff, Georgie! All new stuff! I just thought it up on the way home.

(RUDY hooks up some makeshift curtains, stringing them across a small area of the room. He now conceals himself behind them.)

RUDY. And now, ladies and gentlemen, live from New York, it's the Ed Sullivan Show!

* *Roo-gee.* Hard g. His word for "Rudy."

(GEORGIE *applauds and cheers.*)

RUDY. Tonight join Ed and his—quiet, Georgie—join Ed and his guests Gizelle McKenzie, Wayne and Shuster, Señor Wences, Tennessee Ernie Ford, and Ed's very special guest—Jesus Christ! And now, here he is, toast of the town, and syndicated columnist for the New York Daily News— Ed Sullivan!

(GEORGIE *cheers and applauds. Through the curtains, wearing a handsome suit jacket, steps a stiff-necked, round shouldered RUDY. He launches into a pretty decent Sullivan impression.*)

RUDY. Well, thank you, thank you, ladies and gentlemen. We have a r-r-really big shew for you tonight. But before we begin, out there in our audience is a lovely and talented nun. All the way from the 7th grade of Saint Casimir's Elementary School— let's have a nice hand for *Sister Clarisser!*

(GEORGIE *cheers.*)

You look lovely tonight, Sister. Now I don't want to say the good sister is old. But when Matthew, Mark, Luke and John wrote the New Testament, who do you think corrected their spelling? ...But on with our show. Here's my first guest tonight, all the way from Judear. Let's r-r-really hear it for a great guy, my pal—*Jesus Christ!* *Let's hear it!*

(GEORGIE *applauds. RUDY turns his back to us for a moment. Now he turns front as a laid-back, Bing Crosby-like Jesus.*)

Well, it's been a couple thousand years now and I'm looking down and what do I see? You know what I see? I'll tell you what I see. I see— (*Now angry, a la Ralph Kramden:*) —*CATECHISM!* Two hundred and fifty million nuns driving little kids crazy with rules, rules, rules! Whackin' them over the knuckles with sticks! When did I say *this?!*

(*A pause as GEORGIE stares, not realizing it's over.*)

That's the end, Georgie.

(GEORGIE *applauds.*)

(Through the back door enters EDDIE PAZINSKI, 15 years old, wearing a high school letter jacket. He heads straight for RUDY's room.)

RUDY. *(Taking down his curtains:)* You know what's great, Georgie? Nobody knows what Jesus really sounded like, so my imitation could be perfect!

(EDDIE enters bedroom and makes a beeline for RUDY's dresser.)

EDDIE. Where's your catechism?

(EDDIE rudely plows through the mess.)

RUDY. *What are you doing?*

EDDIE. Where's your catechism?

RUDY. Get outa there!

EDDIE. I gotta look up something. *(Sees something on RUDY's desk:)* Hey! My good cartooning pen! I'll kill you, taking my stuff!

RUDY. I only borrowed it! It doesn't work anyway.

EDDIE. Moron, because it's not a regular pen. *(Gets RUDY in a headlock:)* You have to dip the point very carefully into a bottle of Higgins Black Waterproof India Ink, like the professional cartoonists!

RUDY. Which you'll never be!

(EDDIE plants "nuggies" on RUDY's skull until he notices something.)

EDDIE. Wait a minute! Man, are you nuts? *(Re: nail in the wall:)* You can't be putting holes in the wall! Daddy's gonna kill you!

RUDY. They're small.

EDDIE. That's a railroad spike.

RUDY. *(Takes genuine article from desk top:)* That's a railroad spike.

EDDIE. You're gonna get creamed.

RUDY. *(Realizes EDDIE's right:)* Aw, man.

EDDIE. Jeez, aren't things bad enough? You gotta *look* for things to put him in a bad mood?

RUDY. This stinks!

EDDIE. Where's the catechism? (*Picks it up, leafs through it:*) Is an impure thought a venial sin or a mortal sin?

RUDY. I guess I can forget about miniature golf tonight.

EDDIE. He wouldn't take you to a miniature car wash. Is an impure thought a venial sin or a mortal sin?

RUDY. Louie Kaminski is so lucky, man.

EDDIE. *Venial or mortal?*

RUDY. Is that all you care about? Louie will be playing miniature golf with his father tonight, and I'll be sitting home like a goofus!

EDDIE. Yeah, but at least the goofus doesn't get beat up after the game. Come on, impure thoughts! What's the official ruling?

RUDY. Beat up?

EDDIE. You heard me.

RUDY. Louie doesn't get beat up.

EDDIE. Are you moronic *and* blind? Didn't you ever see Louie with his shirt off? He didn't get those bruises from being clumsy.

RUDY. (*Throws pillow:*) You're lyin'!

EDDIE. Open your eyes, willya? I've seen Louie's father go after him with a belt. Normie Saluzo, too. And you're crying about miniature golf. Just be glad you've got a father who's only thing is he doesn't give an s-h-i-t about us. Now shut up and tell me what you know about impure thoughts.

RUDY. We haven't gotten to impure thoughts yet. That's after Christmas vacation. (*Out of habit:*) Georgie, no thumb.

GEORGIE. (*Ignores him:*) Nnn.

EDDIE. (*Pages through book:*) You are totally useless. ...Georgie, no thumb.

GEORGIE. Nnn.

EDDIE. (*Finds something:*) Okay, here it is. “What are the three conditions that must be present in order for a sin to be considered mortal?”

RUDY. Oh, I hate this question!

EDDIE. “First, the action must be seriously wrong or considered seriously wrong. Second, the sinner must give sufficient reflection to the serious wrong. Third, the sinner must have full consent of the will.”

RUDY. They really know how to take the fun out of sinning.

EDDIE. (*Slams book to floor:*) Why can't they say it in English?!

RUDY. Careful! (*Runs for book.*)

EDDIE. How am I supposed to know if it was seriously wrong? They think everything is serious.

RUDY. Well, if you're so worried, go to confession.

EDDIE. I'm not telling this to a priest! (*Thinks hard.*) Except if I die with a mortal sin on my soul I go to hell. But if it was only venial, I just go to Purgatory. (*Grabs book from RUDY:*) Is there fire in Purgatory? (*Quickly finds something:*) Okay, there's fire. But it's not as hot as hell.

RUDY. Where does it say?

EDDIE. There's pictures. The flames are smaller.

RUDY. (*Looks:*) That's a drawing.

EDDIE. Whattaya think, they take cameras to hell?

RUDY. Well anyway, maybe there is no hell.

EDDIE. (*Stunned, he runs and shuts the door.*) Are you completely nuts?! Saying something like that out loud?!

RUDY. It was just an idea.

EDDIE. Public school kids have those ideas. That's why they're there. 'Cause they're gonna wind up in hell anyway!

RUDY. Aw, man! I'm gonna start my own religion. No uniforms, no catechism and no rules—except you *have to* eat spaghetti on Friday. Pazinski-ism!

EDDIE. (*Awed:*) Man, Satan's having your room painted right now!

RUDY. What was your impure thought about?

EDDIE. None of your bees wax!

RUDY. Just give me the subject matter.

EDDIE. Well... I guess that'd be alright. Okay, Vinny Carducci said—

RUDY. Who's Vinny Carducci?

EDDIE. Who cares? He's new, I haven't met him yet. So, Vinny Carducci told Iggy Sabadasz that there's this girl around here who leaves her shade up at night and gets *bare* in front of her window! (*"Bare" is sotto voice.*)

RUDY. Wow! Who is it?

EDDIE. That's the thing, Carducci won't tell.

RUDY. Did you see her?

EDDIE. No, stupid, I'm telling you, I only had the impure thought! Now shut up, willya? This is Hell we're talking about! I gotta think! (*Racks his brain:*) ...Seriously wrong. ...Full consent of the will.

RUDY. Wait, that's it!

EDDIE. What?

RUDY. You didn't have full consent of the will! Vinny's description of the girl in the window was so good that you became, like...possessed by Satan!

EDDIE. Yeah! Yeah! Beautiful!

RUDY. (*Laughs:*) I can't believe they let you into high school with that brain!

EDDIE. (*Calmly:*) Y'know, you're right. I need to study more. (*Starts to rip page from book:*) Like this page right here...

RUDY. Hey, cut it out! I'll get killed for that!

EDDIE. Get away!

RUDY. I gotta take that to school, stop it!

EDDIE. Beat it!

RUDY. Stop it, willya?

*(EDDIE folds the page and pockets it; he tosses the book aside.
RUDY picks up book and examines the damage, holding back tears.)*

RUDY. Why'd you do that?

EDDIE. I felt like it.

RUDY. I was helping you.

EDDIE. So?

RUDY. You always do that. You pretend to be friends with me, then do something rotten.

EDDIE. So?

RUDY. I hate you!

EDDIE. Ooh, wow.

RUDY. *(Beats his pillow with his fist:)* I hate you, I hate you, I hate you, I hate you!

EDDIE. I'll live.

RUDY. Alright, then, here goes. I didn't want to tell you this, but you made me. *Daddy traded your good comic books to Green Teeth Mallick!*

EDDIE. Yeah, right.

RUDY. He did!

EDDIE. Nobody's that stupid. Nice try, though. *(Starts to leave.)*

RUDY. *(At a loss, he lashes out at GEORGIE:)* Georgie, no thumb!

GEORGIE. Shit!

(Apparently this is something new, for the boys stare at GEORGIE, horrified.)

EDDIE. What?!

GEORGIE. Shit!

RUDY. GEORGIE!

(GEORGIE laughs, delighted at the effect.)

GEORGIE. Shit.

EDDIE. We're gonna get killed!

RUDY. But we didn't teach him.

EDDIE. They'll say we did.

GEORGIE. Shit.

EDDIE. Georgie, no!

(GEORGIE laughs.)

RUDY. No, Georgie! That's bad!

GEORGIE. Shit.

EDDIE. Stop it!

RUDY. Who taught him that?

GEORGIE. Shit.

EDDIE. *(Thinks a moment:)* Butchie Travis!

RUDY. Yeah, Butchie! He's always talking dirty, plus he chews the Host!

EDDIE. *(Runs for the door:)* I'll kill him!

RUDY. I wanna see this. *(Follows him out.)*

GEORGIE. *(Right on their tails:)* Hey!

(At this point, ANNIE PAZINSKI enters through the back door with her school books and meets the boys running out. She is 16 years old and a little over-weight. She wears a blazer with a high

school emblem, a plaid skirt, a white blouse, knee socks and saddle shoes.)

(One by one, the boys plow into her.)

EDDIE. Move it!

ANNIE. Hey, stupid!

RUDY. Watch out!

ANNIE. *You* watch out!

GEORGIE. Shit!

(Everything stops.)

ANNIE. *(Gasp!)* Georgie Pazinski! Oh, you guys are dead!

RUDY. We didn't teach him.

EDDIE. It was Butchie Travis!

RUDY. Eddie's gonna go kill him!

(EDDIE and RUDY exit. GEORGIE remains behind, laughing at all the fuss he's caused. ANNIE exits into her room with her books.)

GEORGIE. Ha ha ha ha...ha ha ha... *(Notices he's all alone:)* Hey! *(Quickly exits after his brothers.)*

(ANNIE returns and looks around furtively. Apparently, when school lets out, ANNIE shortens her skirt by rolling it up at the waistband. For now she tugs at the skirt and returns it to its original mid-calf length.)

(Now she looks around to make sure she's alone, then sneaks into RUDY's room and silently shuts the door behind her.)

(ANNIE sits on the bed and from her pocket she pulls a package of Hostess Twinkies. She eagerly opens the package, removes one and takes a bite. Ah, bliss!)

(Now the back door opens and ANNIE reacts with alarm. It's ELLEN entering the kitchen!)

(ELLEN sets down her clothes basket and quite absently walks toward RUDY's room. ANNIE hears her, panics, shoves the

remainder of the Twinkie in her mouth and buries the other one under the pillow just in time.)

(ELLEN opens the bedroom door and, giving no acknowledgment of ANNIE, walks to the bed. ANNIE tries to look innocent despite a face bursting with food.)

(With simple non-judgmental movements, ELLEN goes to the bed, lifts the pillow, exposes the hidden Twinkie, puts the pillow back down and walks out of the room, closing the door after her. She begins some work in the kitchen.)

(ANNIE sits stunned for a moment, and then the waterworks begin. She sits and sobs, trying to chew and swallow the Twinkie.)

(The phone in the kitchen rings.)

ELLEN. *(Into phone:)* Hello? Just a minute. ANNIE, phone!

(ANNIE wipes her eyes and swallows her snack the best she can, dumping the remainder into RUDY's waste basket. She sheepishly enters the kitchen.)

ELLEN. It's Tina.

(ANNIE hesitates.)

ANNIE. *(Picks up phone:)* Hi. ...No. ...No, I can't. ...I can't. ...'Cause I can't. ...'Cause my father's bringing home spaghetti. ...Of course from Chef's, whattaya think, Franco American?

(ELLEN leaves her work and moves to RUDY's room. The moment she is out of sight, ANNIE speaks urgently.)

ANNIE. Listen, no, shut up, listen! What did Vinny Carducci say about me? Yes you *can* tell me; you'd *better* tell me!

ELLEN. *(Calling out RUDY's window:)* Rooo-deee!

RUDY'S VOICE. *(From a block away:)* Wha-at?

ELLEN. *(To herself:)* What, he says. *(Calls:)* Sup-per! Tell Eddie and Georgie!

(ELLEN moves to kitchen.)

ANNIE. (*Into phone, Gasp!*) He's lying! Vinny Carducci is lying! Tina, how can you trust him, he's *new!* Look, do you actually think I'd do that and risk going to hell for eternity?! He's lying, I swear on my first Communion dress!

(*Sees ELLEN coming.*)

ANNIE. I gotta go. ...I gotta go.

ELLEN. Annie, set the table.

ANNIE. I gotta go. 'Bye.

(*ANNIE hangs up, goes to cupboard and pulls out some plates. She proceeds to set the table.*)

ELLEN. How's Tina?

ANNIE. I know you don't like her.

ELLEN. I didn't say anything.

ANNIE. She's nice.

ELLEN. I hardly know the girl. I just know how she presents herself. I hope *you're* not thinking of teasing your hair like that.

ANNIE. I think it looks pretty.

ELLEN. You know what I read about a girl who had one of those beehives? She wondered why her head kept itching. A spider got in there and made a nest. Laid eggs. They were biting her. Ended up going to the hospital. Is that what you want?

ANNIE. (*Aloof:*) Are we having milk or Kool-Aid?

ELLEN. Did you hear me?

ANNIE. Yes, are we having milk or Kool-Aid?

ELLEN. Milk.

(*ANNIE goes to fridge.*)

ELLEN. Annie, maybe you can help me figure out something. Have you ever seen one of these? (*Pulling a long register tape from her pocket.*)

ANNIE. (*Stops and looks:*) No.

ELLEN. Well, this is an adding machine tape from Winkler's. Mr. Winkler sends it with our grocery bill every month, to show our purchases. See?

ANNIE. *(Suspiciously:)* Uh-huh.

ELLEN. Now, it's this part I can't quite figure; all these ten cent purchases. Here, see? Ten cents, ten cents, ten cents, ten cents—about thirty of them. See, because I don't remember buying anything for ten cents that many times; looks to be about one every day. Now, what do we eat every day around here that costs ten cents? Hmm?

ANNIE. *(Holding back tears:)* I don't know.

ELLEN. Think.

(ANNIE's face starts forming into a big silent cry. Finally the dam bursts.)

ANNIE. *Twinkies!*

(ANNIE tries to bolt from the room but ELLEN grabs her arm and holds on.)

ELLEN. C'mere, c'mere, c'mere, c'mere...

ANNIE. *(Gives up running, stands there overcome with sobbing:)* I'm sorry!

ELLEN. Okay, honey. Okay.

(ANNIE's on a jag now. ELLEN strokes her head.)

ELLEN. Okay, sweetie, it's okay...

ANNIE. *I try!*

ELLEN. I know you do, sweetie. I know you do. Just keep on trying, that's all. Just keep trying. And pray.

ANNIE. I pray every day!

ELLEN. Okay, shh-shh...

ANNIE. Every day, the same prayer. "Please dear God, just grant me two things. Help me stop eating so much, and please don't let Daddy ruin dinner again tonight!" *(Instantly regrets that last remark:)*

Oh, I'm sorry! Mama, I'm sorry. (*An awkward moment. She returns to the table.*) I'll finish up.

ELLEN. No, that's okay, honey.

ANNIE. No, I want to do it.

ELLEN. Honey, go do your homework. I'll call you for supper.

ANNIE. (*Leaving:*) Thank you. (*Afterthought:*) I won't eat much.

ELLEN. Stop that. I feel bad enough.

(*ANNIE exits. EDDIE comes in the back door.*)

ELLEN. Eddie, set the table.

EDDIE. Why?

ELLEN. (*Snaps like a whip:*) Because I said so!

EDDIE. (*To himself:*) Jeepers! (*Lazily starts to set the table, making a face.*)

(*RUDY enters through the back door.*)

RUDY. Eddie, Iggy Sabadasz is outside. He wants to pay you for helping him with the paper route.

(*EDDIE looks anxiously to ELLEN.*)

ELLEN. Alright, go. But you get the whole three dollars. Don't let him gyp you.

(*EDDIE runs out the back door. RUDY heads for his room.*)

ELLEN. Freeze.

(*RUDY stops.*)

ELLEN. Set the table.

RUDY. (*Picks up setting where EDDIE left off:*) Think Daddy'll take us to miniature golf tonight?

ELLEN. Please, ask *him*, don't ask me. Where's your brother?

RUDY. Which one?

ELLEN. (*Sigh.*) We know where Eddie is, don't we?

RUDY. Oh, yeah. Georgie's in the backyard.

ELLEN. Thank you. You don't think sometimes, Rudy.

RUDY. I know.

(A quiet moment as they both work.)

ELLEN. Tell me a joke, Rudy.

RUDY. Um ...Joseph and Mary are in the stable on Christmas Eve, getting ready for the birth, and Joseph's going around collecting straw, and he stubs his toe, and he says, "Jesus Christ!" And Mary looks up and says, "That's a good name."

ELLEN. Rudy!

RUDY. What do you get when you freeze holy water? ...Popesicles!

ELLEN. Where did you hear those jokes?

RUDY. Father Mike.

ELLEN. The new pastor?

RUDY. He visited our class today. Sister Clarissa didn't like the jokes either. But she had to laugh 'cause he's the boss.

ELLEN. Well, cut out that Father "Mike" business. It's Michael.

RUDY. He *told* us to call him Father Mike. He's real nice.

ELLEN. Really? I hear he's young.

RUDY. He's like *my* age!

(EDDIE comes in the back door and tries to inconspicuously get to his room.)

ELLEN. Did he pay you?

EDDIE. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. Freeze.

(EDDIE stops.)

ELLEN. The whole three dollars?

EDDIE. ...Yeah.

ELLEN. Let me see it.

EDDIE. He paid me!

ELLEN. Let me see the money.

EDDIE. Really, it's okay, he paid me.

ELLEN. (*Approaches him:*) If he paid you, let me see the money. (*He maneuvers so he's always facing her.*)

EDDIE. No, it's okay.

ELLEN. Come here.

EDDIE. It's okay, really.

ELLEN. Come here.

(He slowly moves to her.)

ELLEN. Let me see the money.

(A pause.)

EDDIE. He was short this week. He promised next week he'd—

ELLEN. What did he pay you with?

(EDDIE is silent.)

ELLEN. You said he paid you. What did he pay you with?

(More silence.)

What's in your shirt?

EDDIE. Nothing.

ELLEN. Lift your shirt.

EDDIE. There's nothing.

ELLEN. *Lift your shirt! ...Now!*

(A tense moment. Finally EDDIE lifts his shirt. ELLEN doesn't see, but RUDY and we see a bare breasted covergirl on a magazine tucked into the back of EDDIE's pants.

(ELLEN takes note of RUDY's anything but subtle reaction.)

EDDIE. See? (*Lowers his shirt.*)

ELLEN. (*Quietly:*) Rudy, go to your room.

RUDY. No, that's okay.

ELLEN. *Get the hell to your room!*

(RUDY runs to his room. Once inside he shuts the door and sits behind it, listening.)

ELLEN. Give it to me.

EDDIE. Give what?

ELLEN. (*Wrestles it out of his pants:*) I'm through fooling around with you!

(She has the magazine and she stares at it.

(EDDIE stands there mortified as she leafs through it silently. Oh, how she keeps her cool! She's been waiting for something like this to hit one of her offspring and now she's ready and in control.)

ELLEN. I see. I see. So this is what you like to look at? Is it, Eddie? I see. You like looking at these women? Hmm? Well, here's one who eats her vegetables!

(EDDIE can't speak. Now ELLEN's composure starts to slip.)

ELLEN. How would you like it if your sister was in one of these magazines? Or your mother? (*She's losing it.*) Huh? Is that what you want? Is it? Huh? Answer me. Should we all run around here naked?

(Humiliated beyond words, EDDIE runs out of the room, slamming a door behind him. Alone, ELLEN sighs.)

ELLEN. Well, I don't think I could have handled that any worse.

(She opens a door under the sink and throws the magazine into a garbage pail.

(Now GEORGIE enters through the back door and goes directly to his place at the dinner table. They stare at each other for a moment.)

ELLEN. And how can I help *you* through these magical years?

GEORGIE. *(With knife and fork:)* Oh boy!

(Now ELLEN picks up a metal pot and starts banging it with a ladle.)

ELLEN. *(Calls:)* Alright, everybody in! Let's go, let's go! Ally-ally outs in free! Come on, come on, come on, come on—

(ANNIE, EDDIE and RUDY come out of their respective hiding places and enter the kitchen.)

ELLEN. Sit. *(Snatches EDDIE by the shirt:)* Except you.

EDDIE. *Why?*

ELLEN. Get on the phone. Tell Iggy Sabadasz you want three dollars of American currency.

EDDIE. I can't call.

ELLEN. Don't argue with me!

EDDIE. I can't call!

ELLEN. Pick up the phone!

EDDIE. I can't!

ELLEN. Why can't you? And make it good!

EDDIE. *(Quickly:)* Because it's dinner time and Iggy's father has a metal plate in his head, and his chair is right next to the phone, and when the phone rings it's like a cannon going off in his head!

ELLEN. *(Stares at him, then wearily:)* Sit down.

(He does. ELLEN puts salad and bread on the table.)

ELLEN. Now, we are going to have a pleasant dinner. Aren't we? ...*Aren't we?*

KIDS. Yes.

ELLEN. Because we all love this special time of day, and we certainly all love spaghetti. *(Pouring milk into RUDY's glass:)* Rudy loves spaghetti, right?

RUDY. Right-o.

ELLEN. (*Pouring into ANNIE's glass:*) And Annie loves spaghetti, right?

ANNIE. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. (*Pouring into EDDIE's glass:*) And Eddie loves spaghetti, right?

EDDIE. (*Glumly:*) Yeah.

ELLEN. (*Pours for GEORGIE:*) And Georgie loves spaghetti.

GEORGIE. Shit!

(Stunned, ELLEN spills some milk onto the floor.)

GEORGIE. Shit!

ELLEN. Who taught him that? *Who taught him that?*

KIDS. (*In unison:*) Not me!

ELLEN. Well who?!

GEORGIE. Shit.

ELLEN. GEORGIE!

EDDIE. Butchie Travis!

ELLEN. And who the hell is Butchie Travis?

RUDY. The neighborhood delinquent.

EDDIE. I was gonna beat him up for it, but I couldn't find him.

GEORGIE. Shit.

ELLEN. *Stop it!* Well, that's just dandy. Something else your father will blame on me.

RUDY. No, we'll tell him the truth.

ELLEN. You really don't pay attention around here, do you? This will get twisted around, and somehow I'll get the blame.

GEORGIE. Shit.

ELLEN. Okay, now, Georgie, nice spaghetti's coming. From Chef's. So no more shit, okay Georgie? No shit. It's not nice. Just eat the

nice spaghetti and keep quiet. You'll do that for me, won't you, sweetie? Willya, honey?

GEORGIE. Shit.

ELLEN. GEORGIE!

(Now footsteps are heard on the front stairs. All heads turn at once to the sound. As the steps get closer, ELLEN tries to adopt an air of nonchalance.)

(The kids become statues.)

(Through a door in the living room comes CHET PAZINSKI, late forties. He's carrying a news-paper and a large, heavy paper bag. A cigarette dangles from his lip. CHET is a tired man. Any enthusiasm he had for the tavern business faded long ago. He plods into the kitchen.)

RUDY, EDDIE & ANNIE. *(Dull and routinely:)* Hi, Daddy.

CHET. *(Wearily:)* Hiya-hiya-hiya-hiya... *(He moves to ELLEN and hands her the paper bag. He reaches into it.)* Here, Eddie. Comic books. *(And indeed, that is what the bag contains, and not spaghetti. He pulls out a couple.)* Casper...Scrooge McDuck...Little Lulu...all y'want. *(EDDIE's insides slowly ignite. CHET waits for a "thank you.")* Well?

EDDIE. ...Thanks.

CHET. Gee, don't mention it. *(Removing his bar apron:)* I am beat. What a day. How are ya, Georgie?

GEORGIE. Nnn.

CHET. *(Notices the milk on the floor:)* What's all this?

RUDY. *(Quickly:)* I spilled the milk.

CHET. Well?

(ELLEN throws RUDY a dishtowel. He begins cleaning the mess. ELLEN leans back against the cupboard and waits, almost eagerly, for CHET to notice that there is no main course.)

CHET. *(Putting out cigarette:)* So, you like comic books, huh Eddie? Funny stories? Here's one for your comic books. Guy comes in today. Buys a shot 'n a beer. He starts asking me about my baseball

pictures behind the bar. So I started telling him how I pitched ball in the 30's, started telling him the stories, y'know. Then he says, "How come you never went with the majors?" So, okay, I tell him how I broke my hand when I was little, playing around the railroad tracks. And he says, "Ah well, what the hell, I'll give you ten bucks for the bunch, anyway." I say, "Bunch of what?" He says, "The pictures." Then Pop tells me who the guy is. He's the guy who just bought Hank Nowak's place on Fillmore and Clinton. He wanted to give color to *his* gin mill with *my* pictures. I told him my memories weren't for sale, and I threw him out. Pop held me back, I wanted to flatten him. I had to take a walk around the block I was so upset. Pop tended bar 'til I cooled off. Thank God for Pop, that's all I can say. I'd have been up on murder charges. *(Sits:)* Yep, thank God for Pop. Every night I say a prayer. Thank God for Pop. *(Looks at the kids:)* What's the matter with this group? Y'at a funeral or what? A man comes home from work, he likes to see some happy faces.

(The kids half-heartedly grin. CHET rolls his eyes and opens his newspaper. Now ELLEN sits at the table and calmly awaits developments.)

CHET. *(Into his paper:)* Look at that. Look at that. Why, those bums, they don't know from Shinola. From Shinola! They can all take and rub rock salt.

ELLEN. Chet, pass me a meatball.

(CHET folds his paper and makes a move toward the "meatballs.")

CHET. ...Where are they? Annie, get the meatballs, willya? You expect your mother to do everything?

(ANNIE looks to her mother for help, but ELLEN just stares at CHET.)

CHET. *(To ELLEN:)* What? *(Looks at table more closely:)* What's going on? Where's supper?

ELLEN. Does anybody know? Eddie, do you know where supper is?

EDDIE. At Chef's.

CHET. *(Still puzzled:)* Chef's?

ELLEN. Yes, you see, you and I decided last night that you were—

CHET. —supposed to pick it up— *Damnit!* (*Slams his newspaper on the floor. Stands.*) Damn it all to hell!

(The kids begin to sink into their chairs. Except GEORGIE, who remains cheerful throughout.)

CHET. Why didn't you remind me?

ELLEN. Me?!

CHET. Yes!

ELLEN. Why didn't you remember?

CHET. Remember? I got a lot of things on my mind!

ELLEN. So do I!

CHET. *(The martyr:)* I'll go pick it up now.

ELLEN. You can't. You have to get your order in early.

CHET. You got anything else in the house?

ELLEN. No.

CHET. No? Why not?

ELLEN. Because I plan my dinners.

CHET. You don't plan on emergencies?

ELLEN. No. I plan on you.

CHET. Well, now you know not to plan on me. I can't remember things. I'm dim-witted.

ELLEN. Oh, cut it out.

CHET. You're not sitting there and telling me that there's nothing in this whole house to eat!

ELLEN. That's what I'm sitting and telling you. Tomorrow's my shopping day.

(CHET fumes for another moment. The kids grow more uncomfortable.)

CHET. There's got to be something to eat in this house.

ELLEN. You're welcome to look.

CHET. I will. I'll find us something. Doesn't have to be fancy. When the guys and I go hunting we live on beans and baloney.

(ELLEN says "beans and baloney" with him.)

CHET. That's right, and it's like we were at a banquet. I'll find us something to eat. *(Opens fridge:)* Here, see? Here we go. *(Stares at nothing for a while, then shuts door:)* I'll find something. *(Starts opening cupboard doors:)* Alright, now we're cooking.

ELLEN. Chet, I will run down to Winkler's and get something.

CHET. What the hell's this? Nine boxes of cereal. We only got four kids! Sugar Pops, Sugar Jets, Sugar Smacks, Sugar Rice Krinkles, Sugar Crisp—

ELLEN. Chet—

CHET. This is how you run a household? Supposing we had surprise guests pop in? What would you do?

ELLEN. I'd say unless you want diabetes, go home.

CHET. Yeah, you would, too.

ELLEN. Look, Chet, just sit down and I'll—

CHET. Canned beets, canned beets, canned beets—two hundred and twenty-three cans of canned beets and we never eat them. I can't remember ever having one canned beet in this house. I will get out my first communion suit and swear on it that we've never had one of those five hundred thousand cans of canned beets!

ELLEN. *(Quietly:)* We had them Sunday.

(The tiniest laugh escapes from EDDIE. CHET notices.)

CHET. Why can't anything ever go right in this house?

ELLEN. Must be my fault.

CHET. Do you think we ever ran out of food in my mother's house? Even when other families were starving, we ate. My father held down three jobs. He wallpapered for every family in this crummy

neighborhood. If they were broke, they'd pay him with kielbasa and sauerkraut. That's how you keep a family fed.

ELLEN. Chet, let's not blow this up. Okay, you forgot the spaghetti, so I'll—

CHET. So I forgot! So what?

ELLEN. That's what I'm saying, it's not a big—

CHET. Everything's my fault. You know why I go hunting? To be someplace where things like remembering spaghetti don't matter. Out in the woods you don't get criticized for every little foolish thing.

ELLEN. Okay, Chet, we can figure out tonight's dinner or we can hear about life in the woods. You pick.

CHET. Out in the woods a man doesn't have to put up with this kinda shit.

GEORGIE. Shit!

(Everything jerks to a halt. CHET turns to GEORGIE in shock. The kids hold their breath.)

ELLEN. *(To CHET:)* Happy?

CHET. You're gonna blame that on me, too?

ELLEN. I don't want to blame anything on anybody. I want to eat!

(ANNIE is in tears by now. RUDY is on the verge.)

CHET. You want to eat? Okay, let's eat! Call the neighbors, we'll have them in, too. *(Starts tossing things out of the cupboard and onto the floor:)* Why should they miss out? Here y'are folks, have some Sugar Pops! If you want sugar you've come to the right place, yessir. Sugar Smacks, Sugar Jets—

(ANNIE bursts out crying, jumps from her chair and runs out of the room.)

ELLEN. *Chet, stop it!*

CHET. Wait, how'd this get in here—*corn flakes!* *(Tosses it.)*

EDDIE. *(Gets up:)* Well, gotta get at that homework.

CHET. Come on, Eddie, have some beets. I'll put sugar on 'em for you.

EDDIE. That's okay, I had beets for lunch. *(Hurries from the room.)*

ELLEN. Georgie, Rudy, come on. Let's go for a walk. We'll get some hamburgers. Come on. *(Gets GEORGIE to his feet:)* Come on, kids, let's go. We'll go get a milkshake.

(RUDY gets up and stands before CHET, fists clenched, about to explode.)

CHET. What's on your mind?

RUDY. WHY CAN'T YOU BE LIKE ON TV?! *(Runs out the back door.)*

CHET. What did you say to me?! *(Runs to door.)* What did you say to me?! *(To ELLEN:)* What'd he mean by that? TV!

ELLEN. You've got to stop this, Chet. *(Starts picking things up.)*

CHET. You're spoiling that kid rotten.

ELLEN. Is it worth all this carrying on? It's dinner, not the end of the world!

CHET. Fine, sure, Ellen, okay.

ELLEN. I tend bar, too. I meet the same people you do.

CHET. You know all about it.

ELLEN. They're just people. Why do you let them get to you?

CHET. *(Pulls bills from his wallet:)* Here, take the kids for beef on weck. Take them wherever you want. The Hotel Statler. *(Starts for the door.)*

ELLEN. Don't leave in the middle of an argument! I can't stand that!

(He exits.)

ELLEN. CHET!

(There is silence.)

GEORGIE. *(A smile.)* Shit!

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 4

(A LIGHT COMES UP on the church pew. RUDY rushes in, genuflects and kneels in the pew, dispensing with the sign of the cross.)

RUDY. *(Out of breath and sobbing:)* Jesus, I hate him, I hate him! I know I'll go to hell for saying that, but I can't help it, I do. Why does he have to be that way? You could do something, why don't you? Couldn't we have Robert Young for just one day? ...Jesus, I never hear from you. I pray every night for things to get better. If you could just let me know that you're listening. A sign. Nothing big. Just something so I'll know you're working on it. Here, I'll watch that candle. *(Somewhere off in the distance.)* If you make it light up I'll know everything's going to be fine. Ready? Okay, I'm watching. Go.

(RUDY watches intently for a while. Nothing happens.)

RUDY. The one on the end there. On the left.

(More watching. Nothing happens.)

RUDY. Okay, I'll close my eyes.

(Hands over his eyes. Then he slowly peeks at the candle.)

RUDY. Okay, you probably want to give me a better sign. I understand. Like when the angel appeared to Mary. Okay, so I'll wait. I'll wait until tomorrow morning. We had a deal, Jesus. I said I'd be a soldier for you. Please, let me know you're listening. Please. If you don't... I don't know. I guess I'll have some thinking to do.

(LIGHTS FADE TO BLACKOUT.)

Scene 5

(It's late that evening. The tavern sign is dark. RUDY and GEORGIE are asleep in their beds. The only light comes from the TV. ELLEN has fallen asleep in front of Jack Paar's talk show. As Jack chats with his guest, tired footsteps are heard on the front stairs.)

CHET *comes through the door carrying something bundled up in a bar apron. He sees ELLEN, but proceeds to the kitchen.*)

(At the sink he unrolls the apron, removing a pair of men's trousers and underwear. He puts them into a dishpan and turns on the water faucet.)

(Now he accidentally knocks the dishpan off the sink. It falls to the floor with a noisy clang.)

CHET. Ah, shit...!

(The noise wakens ELLEN. She turns off the TV and goes into the kitchen, turning on the light.)

CHET. I wake ya'?

ELLEN. What's that?

CHET. Pop wet his pants again. I gave him a pair of mine to wear home.

ELLEN. Well, not in the *kitchen* sink.

(Exits into the bathroom with the dripping bundle.)

CHET. He won twenty-two bucks on the Canisius-Bonaventure game. A man's got a right to celebrate.

(CHET stands in the empty kitchen feeling awkward. ELLEN returns from the bathroom. With his foot and a dish towel he wipes the floor.)

CHET. Still mad at me?

(Ignoring him, she proceeds to clear off the table.)

CHET. *(Re: her robe:)* Hey, that's pretty. Is that new?

(After a withering look, she continues clearing.)

(CHET turns on the kitchen radio. A loud polka comes on. He quickly turns the dial until he finds soft, romantic music.)

CHET. Hey, let's dance.

(She keeps working.)

CHET. Come on. How long's it been?

(CHET goes to her and takes her hand—she pulls it back. He takes it again.)

CHET. Come on, Ellie.

ELLEN. *(Pulls it back:)* Stop it. *(An awkward moment.)*

CHET. Hey, did y’hear what that goofball Pete Sendecky did? Went to Sattler’s men’s department, tried to return a necktie ‘cause it was too tight. *(No response. He helps clear the table.)* Pete Sendecky. Remember Pete’s wedding? We danced *that* night. Couldn’t stop. Well, it was a good band. First class polka band. ‘Course, her folks had the dough, why shouldn’t it be? Remember how we wowed everybody with our dancing? They couldn’t keep up with us. ‘Member? Then we snuck off. Found that little room off the coat-room where they hid the beer cases? ‘Member?

(ELLEN keeps cleaning.)

CHET. Come on, Ellen, stop it. The worst feeling in the world is when you’re mad at me. I can feel it right here, like I want to throw up.

(ELLEN reaches into a cupboard, pulls out a blue Milk of Magnesia bottle and sets it on the table.)

(Now, meaning business, CHET takes her hand and puts it tightly around his waist.)

ELLEN. What’s this? Tarzanski?

(He leads her around the room to the romantic music.)

CHET. Like getting back on a bicycle.

ELLEN. *(Backs away:)* Maybe I’d better walk.

(She turns to go. CHET quickly reaches for the radio dial and gets that Polka station back on the air. The band is in full swing and CHET grabs ELLEN and spins her around. But she remains lifeless.)

(CHET goads her with one step and another. Finally she surrenders and soon they are flying around the kitchen at a dizzying speed, demonstrating why everyone was “wowed” at Pete Sendecky’s wedding.)

(In his room, RUDY is awakened by the rumpus. He gets up and groggily moves into the hallway. In the shadows he stands and watches his parents.)

(They dance with all their hearts until the song comes to a rousing finish, leaving them breathless.)

(Now the radio announcer comes on and starts rattling off some Polish. CHET reaches out and clicks off the radio.)

ELLEN. I'm getting too old for this!

CHET. Old? No! We should do it more often.

ELLEN. You want to be a widower so soon? Why, you got someone else lined up already?

CHET. Who'd have me? Wait, now—wasn't it right around here that we snuck off and found that hidden room in the back?

ELLEN. I want to know how you found it so quickly. I think you'd been there before.

(CHET laughs.)

ELLEN. Yeah, big baseball star with your harem.

CHET. You were the first, baby. The first, last and only.

(Kisses her passionately. He notices RUDY watching them. CHET waves him away. RUDY disappears into the bathroom.)

ELLEN. Mr. Pazinski! The children.

CHET. For one hour, let's forget about the children.

(He kisses her.)

ELLEN. The trick is getting you to remember them for one hour.

CHET. Ha! How can I forget?

ELLEN. You manage somehow. Now, where is it you hide those beer cases?

CHET. Except...

(She kisses him.)

CHET. Except...what do you mean?

ELLEN. Hmm?

CHET. I mean, what do you mean?

ELLEN. About what?

CHET. I manage somehow? To forget? Do you mean something or what?

ELLEN. It was a joke.

CHET. But you said it twice.

ELLEN. I was joking.

CHET. Well, do you have something on your mind, or...?

ELLEN. No.

CHET. Then what did you mean?

ELLEN. It was a joke. I make bad jokes every once in a while, okay? I'm not a professional like Rudy. Come here.

(She leads him by the hand to the radio, switching to something soft and dreamy. She gets him to dance.)

CHET. *(After a few steps:)* When do I forget I have kids?

ELLEN. Oh, would you forget it?

CHET. When?

ELLEN. Chet.

CHET. Do *you* take them to miniature golf?

ELLEN. You really have to go into this now?

CHET. I want to know when you think I forget my kids.

ELLEN. I didn't mean you forget.

CHET. Then what?

ELLEN. I mean... *(Sigh.)* Oh God, who knows what I meant.

CHET. Come on.

ELLEN. I mean they're not uppermost in your mind.

CHET. Uppermost? I've got a business to run.

ELLEN. Alright.

CHET. Uppermost. You know what's uppermost? This right here. *(Taps table top.)* Keeping food on it.

(ELLEN goes to radio, turns dial looking for that polka music again.)

ELLEN. *(To radio:)* Come on, Stan Yashinski...

CHET. You think they're so bad off, our kids, don't you? I know you do. Well, are they starving? Huh? I notice they never go to school naked.

(ELLEN finds the polka station. She turns to CHET, offering herself for the dance.)

CHET. You should've seen the way I went to school. Had to make a pair of pants last three years.

(Undaunted, ELLEN remains poised to dance.)

CHET. That was unfair what you said. I got a lot on my mind, y'know.

(Resignedly, ELLEN lets her arms drop. She sadly moves to the radio and turns it off.)

ELLEN. Okay.

CHET. You think that's some kind of magic staircase, I can just forget everything on the way up? ...Business falling apart.

ELLEN. What?

CHET. Getting charged twice for the same beer order...

ELLEN. When did that happen?

CHET. *(Catches himself:)* Oh...uh...today. My own fault. I let Pop handle it. I thought I'd give him more to do. Should've known better. He's too old for detail work.

ELLEN. No, you need a clear head.

CHET. Jeez! A guy celebrates a little, you make a federal case out of it. Alright, I won't bring up his dirty laundry anymore. I'll wash it myself downstairs.

ELLEN. It's not his laundry...

CHET. Christ...

ELLEN. Dinty Shanahan walked out Monday night because your father started name calling.

CHET. Dinty Shanahan, that potato eater.

ELLEN. Rexie Geblein walked out with him.

CHET. Well, two goofballs in a pod.

ELLEN. How many goofballs can you afford to lose?

CHET. Boy, you really got it in for Pop, don't you?

ELLEN. He drinks.

CHET. He has a right to. Yes. Once in a while, and that's all it is.

ELLEN. Will you talk to him?

CHET. He is fine! I'm fine! The kids are fine! Everything is fine! Forget about it!

(CHET exits into their bedroom, slamming the door.)

ELLEN. *(Quietly.)* ...Fine.

(THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

Scene 6

(In the darkness we hear an announcement over the P.A. system in St. Casimir's School.)

NUN'S VOICE. Attention, please. Attention, please. This is Mother Athanasius Marie. The following students are to remain after school: Rudolf Pazinski, Robert Sowinski... Joseph Janiszski, Michael Padereski... Andrew Gorski, Steven Malorski... *(They rhyme.)* Gerald Nowecki, Arthur Sendeki... Richard Ragowski, Terence Flanagan. Let us pray...

(THE LIGHTS COME UP on the classroom in Saint Casimir's School. SISTER CLARISSA stands over RUDY who sits at his desk.)

(RUDY is much more at ease than the last time we saw him here.)

SISTER. (*Catechism in hand:*) Question number one. Who made us?

RUDY. God made us.

SISTER. Number two. Who is God?

RUDY. (*Easily:*) God is the supreme being, infinitely perfect, who made all things and keeps them in existence.

SISTER. Well, now. It looks like someone is finally taking his religious training seriously.

RUDY. Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. That's the kind of good work that could get you home at a decent hour.

(RUDY brightens.)

SISTER. If only you hadn't thrown that water balloon at Louis Kaminsky. Question number three. Why did God make us?

RUDY. Okay, I've been thinking about that. And I think God meant it as a science experiment.

SISTER. Here, here!

RUDY. Yes?

SISTER. No improvising. (*Re: book:*) Have you memorized this answer or not?

RUDY. Yes.

SISTER. Then say it. As written.

RUDY. God made us to show forth His goodness and to share with Him His everlasting happiness in heaven.

SISTER. Better.

RUDY. But I see it as kind of a science experiment—

SISTER. (*Hits his desk with her cane.*) Enough of your science experiment!

RUDY. But it's so interesting. Here's what I see—

SISTER. I am not interested in what you see! I am interested in the teachings of the Holy Church as they have come down to us through Jesus Christ.

RUDY. Then maybe it was more like a science *fair*. Yeah! (*Stands on his chair.*) God creates planet Earth, the most perfect planet in the universe, and then He awards Himself first prize!

SISTER. (*Pulls him down.*) Get down from there! Where on earth are you getting such a picture of creation?

RUDY. From my head.

SISTER. Well, confine it there. It pains me, Rudolf, when I see you wasting your God-given imagination on such foolishness. You've been given a gift. Truly! Why, your short story that you read aloud this morning was enchanting. The young girl standing in the window in the moonlight, leaving her shade up—

(RUDY grins to himself.)

SISTER. —as a signal to the Holy Ghost to enter her life. I could see you someday standing among our other great Catholic writers. (*Has to search for one.*) ...Joyce Kilmer. Yes. "I think that I shall never see, A poem lovely as a tree."

RUDY. "Poems are made by fools, I fear. But only Schlitz can make a beer."

(She turns to him, fuming.)

RUDY. ...Mad Magazine.

SISTER. Question number three: Why did God make us?

RUDY. To have fun.

SISTER. Are you trying to make your detention permanent?

RUDY. I'm just trying to think things out.

SISTER. Well, stop thinking. Your instructions were to memorize. It's that thinking that gets you into trouble. If there is something you cannot understand I will explain it.

RUDY. Okay, why *did* God make us?

SISTER. God made us because He loves us. It's all in here. You can't out-think the Baltimore Catechism.

RUDY. And you're sure God loves us?

SISTER. I am as certain of that as I am of life itself. ...Don't you believe that God loves us?

RUDY. Well, I think he *likes* us. But if he loved us, why would he let all this stuff go on?

SISTER. Stuff?

RUDY. Yeah, stuff. Like Kenny Bower. His mother just had a baby, then his father goes and dies. That didn't have to happen. And stuff like people stealing change from Blind Elmo's news stand; why doesn't God stop that? And kids throwing things at my brother Georgie, and making fun of him just 'cause he's retarded. And why was my brother born retarded?

(SISTER is stunned for a moment.)

RUDY. Why?

SISTER. Give me the names of those boys who hurt Georgie. I'll see their parents.

RUDY. No, no, then they'll beat me up for squealing! See, stuff like that. Why does God let me get beat up if He loves me?

SISTER. Rudolf, you must understand—

RUDY. And then while I'm trying to learn about how He loves me I'm getting hit with a ruler.

SISTER. Part of being a Catholic is believing in the unknowable. What you and your classmates have yet to learn is that faith is your greatest resource.

RUDY. That's not going to make Louie Kaminski feel any better.

SISTER. A lot you care about Louis. You threw a water balloon at him.

RUDY. So he'd take his shirt off. I wanted to see.

SISTER. See what?

RUDY. The bruises. Eddie was right. His father does hit him.

SISTER. Preposterous! Number four. If we are to gain the happiness of heaven, what must we do?

RUDY. Come up with a better answer for number three.

SISTER. Blasphemer! I don't know what you think your behavior can accomplish, but the fact remains that if you are to be confirmed as a soldier for Christ, a defender of the Catholic Faith, then this catechism will be learned, exactly as written.

RUDY. Sister? Cards on the table? I'm twelve years old. What does Christ want with me?

(SISTER sees red. She slaps RUDY hard across the back of the head with the catechism.)

RUDY. You have a point. Still, who's attacking the Catholic Church that I'm going to be any help? Eleven-year-old Protestants?

(Again, SISTER slaps RUDY across the head.)

RUDY. Food for thought. But why is the Church drafting 7th graders? Even the army waits 'til after high school.

(SISTER swings back for slap number three, but he interrupts:)

RUDY. Once more and we sue!

SISTER. In all my years of teaching, no child has ever dared talk to me this way.

RUDY. I'm not used to it either.

SISTER. I will give you just one more chance to get down on your knees, right now, and beg God for His forgiveness.

RUDY. What, then you hit me while I'm begging? *(He stands.)* No, Sister, I don't think I'm cut out to be a soldier. So, no hard feelings,

but I'm afraid the Catholic Church is going to have to defend itself without me.

(RUDY walks out of the classroom LIGHT and disappears into the darkness. SISTER CLARISSA falls into RUDY's desk chair, dumb-founded, as.)

(THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

Scene 7

(The Pazinski apartment, later that day. The apartment is quiet and empty, except for RUDY in his room, busy at his desk.

(Now EDDIE enters all in a sweat and plows into RUDY's room, shutting the door behind him.)

EDDIE. SISTER CLARISSA'S COMING!

RUDY. *(A cue for Ed Sullivan:)* Sister Clarisser? Now, I don't want to say she's old. But when Matthew, Mark, Luke and John—

EDDIE. Will you shut up?! She's coming here! This minute, hobbling on her cane!

RUDY. How come?

EDDIE. Because of my dirty little mind, that's how come!

RUDY. What did you do?

EDDIE. I drew a picture on the wall by the church dumpster. A *dirty* picture, of course. What else would come out of my stupid brain?

RUDY. How do you know she's coming about the picture?

EDDIE. Louie told me. He saw her looking at it real hard. Then she starts gimping down South Division. Alone! So he figures it's gotta be trouble, 'cause they always travel in pairs. Man, I can't believe that woman still gets to me. When will it end? I hear her clicker in my nightmares!

RUDY. What did you draw, anyway?

EDDIE. (*Groan:*) ...Me and the guys, see, we're always saying how Debbie Ronski is as flat as a board. Y'know, 'cause she is. She doesn't have anything up here yet. So I drew this long skinny board with Debbie Ronski's head on it.

RUDY. That's dirty?

EDDIE. *Sister Clarissa was gawking at it, so it must be!* What am I going to do?

RUDY. Well, if you want something to say, I'll give you something.

EDDIE. Anything!

RUDY. Say that you're sorry you drew on the church wall and that you'll gladly clean it off 'cause you meant no disrespect to the church or to Debbie Ronski.

EDDIE. (*Amazed:*) Beautiful!

RUDY. But that you want no more of being made to feel guilty and unclean just 'cause you have thoughts about sex, which at your age is natural.

EDDIE. *What?!*

RUDY. And that maybe this wouldn't be a problem if parents and teachers didn't treat sex like it was dirty. And that you'd actually like to discuss what's on your mind if everyone didn't get so nervous about it.

EDDIE. And then I'd like the Pope to get me a date with Kim Novak. Are you nuts?! Where'd you get that?

RUDY. From the grown up section of the library. There was this book called, "Telling Kids What They Want to Know." They wouldn't let me take it out, so I'm going back there every day and read it.

EDDIE. Jeez, I'm not in enough trouble, you want me to say something crazy like that? I'm going to the bathroom. You're nuts.

RUDY. Wait. Did you get confirmed?

EDDIE. Of course.

RUDY. What's it like?

EDDIE. What's it like? It's lame. You answer a bunch of questions and the bishop slaps your face.

(He leaves, and RUDY returns to his work.)

(At the bathroom door, EDDIE slips another girlie magazine out from the back of his pants. Suddenly he hears someone coming and he dives through the bathroom door.)

(ELLEN and GEORGIE enter through the back door. She has some things in a grocery bag. GEORGIE is laughing.)

ELLEN. So what do I have to do, keep you locked in the house now?

GEORGIE. *(Joyously:)* Shit!

ELLEN. I just thank God Mr. Winkler is hard of hearing, that's all.

(Opening a cupboard door, she finds a crumpled piece of red cloth.)

ELLEN. Georgie, you've been looking for this.

(GEORGIE takes it and lets it unfold. It's a homemade Superman cape with a big S painted in a triangle.)

GEORGIE. Hey! *(Slips it over his head and "flies" across the room.)*

(At this point CHET emerges from the bedroom wearing an undershirt, boxer shorts and black knee socks. GEORGIE almost bumps into him.)

CHET. Hey, watch it there, Superman, slow down. Even Superman's gotta obey the speed limits.

(GEORGIE "flies" to his toy box. CHET goes to the living room for a section of newspaper.)

CHET. How long before we eat?

ELLEN. Not for an hour yet. What are you doing up here?

CHET. I sleep here. *(She gives him a look.)* I closed up for the night.

ELLEN. Why?

CHET. Pop didn't feel too good. I sent him home.

ELLEN. What's wrong with him?

CHET. He doesn't feel too good.

ELLEN. Something he drank?

CHET. Don't start, 'cause you don't know shit from shinola.

ELLEN. *(Re: GEORGIE:)* Shh!

CHET. You don't! *(Knocks on bathroom door:)* Who's in there?

EDDIE. *(From the bathroom:)* Me!

CHET. Great. Hey, Superman, can you see through walls?

GEORGIE. Nnn.

CHET. See how long Eddie's gonna be.

(Suddenly ANNIE enters all excited through the back door.)

ANNIE. SISTER CLARISSA'S COMING!

(Her hair is teased into a beehive fit for "Mysterious Island." It is HUGE.)

ELLEN. *What did I tell you about that hair?*

ANNIE. Oh! Well, I know, but—Sister Clarissa's coming!

CHET. Whattaya mean, Sister Clarissa? From school?

ELLEN. What did I say about that teasing?

ANNIE. Well, it's my hair!

ELLEN. It's my hair until you're twenty-one!

CHET. From school, Sister Clarissa?

ANNIE. From school!

CHET. What's she coming here for?

ANNIE. I don't know. But she's almost here!

CHET. *(Calls:)* Eddie, hurry up, willya? *(To ANNIE:)* How do you know she's coming *here*?

ANNIE. Tina told me. Sister just grabbed her in Winkler's yard. She asked if the Pazinskis live over the tavern or behind it. *She'll be here any second!* *(Dashes into her room.)*

CHET. EDDIE!

EDDIE. *(Comes out of bathroom:)* Okay! Jeez!

CHET. Hey, watch it!

EDDIE. Watch what?

CHET. You almost said Jesus. And with Sister Clarissa coming.
(Exits into bathroom.)

(EDDIE starts for his room and meets ANNIE coming out of her's. He has just pulled out the girlie magazine and ANNIE gets a wicked glimpse of it. She gasps in horror! EDDIE dashes for the safety of his room. ANNIE blesses herself and stands there with mouth agape!)

ELLEN. *(Re: ANNIE's hair:)* If you don't care about yourself, think of me! Honestly, Annie, it looks like the Pope's hat!

ANNIE. Okay, okay, but what are we going to do? A nun's never been here before. We've got no holy pictures hanging up. How's she going to get up here? She can't come through the tavern entrance. How would it look, a nun going into a bar!

ELLEN. Annie, please!

ANNIE. Well, how's she going to find the back door? She'll have to walk through the alley. And there's dog turds all over the place 'cause— *(For RUDY's ears:)* —it was RUDY'S TURN TO SWEEP!

(In his room RUDY turns and sticks out his tongue, then blithely goes back to his writing.)

ELLEN. Will you calm down?

ANNIE. Why can't we have a normal house?

ELLEN. Never mind. Why is Sister coming here?

ANNIE. I told you, I don't know!

(EDDIE enters.)

ELLEN. What did you do?!

EDDIE. *Nothin'!*

ELLEN. Don't lie to me!

EDDIE. I didn't do nothin'! Gee, I get blamed for everything around here! (*Storms for the door.*)

ELLEN. (*Grabs him:*) Don't you run away! You sit there and face the music.

EDDIE. I didn't play any music! (*Angrily sits in living room.*)
(*There is a rap on the back door.*)

ELLEN. (*To EDDIE:*) And if you move one inch from there...!

(*ELLEN almost makes it to the door when ANNIE starts gesturing frantically.*)

ELLEN. *What!?*

ANNIE. (*Sotto:*) *Daddy's in his underwear!*

ELLEN. Well, go and get his pants!

(*ANNIE runs for her parents bedroom. ELLEN primps a little and opens the back door. SISTER CLARISSA is on the landing.*)

ELLEN. Oh! Sister Clarissa! Hello!

SISTER. Hello, Mrs. Pazinski.

ELLEN. What a nice surprise! Come in, please!

SISTER. Thank you. How are you?

(*EDDIE sinks into the easy chair, hoping to become invisible.*)

ELLEN. Well, I'm just fine, and yourself?

SISTER. A little exhausted, I'm afraid. May I sit down?

ELLEN. Oh, of course, please. Here.

SISTER. Hello, Georgie.

GEORGIE. (*Sitting on floor at his toy chest:*) Sissa!

SISTER. And how is Georgie today?

(*In response, GEORGIE does Woody Woodpecker's laugh.*)

SISTER. I recognize that. Woody Woodpecker. That was wonderful, Georgie! (*To ELLEN:*) Wonderful!

ELLEN. Yes, he's very talented.

(She gives GEORGIE a private "keep quiet!" signal.)

ELLEN. Sister, may I get you something?

SISTER. A glass of water, if it's no trouble.

ELLEN. *(Goes to fridge:)* Of course. I've got some nice and chilled.

SISTER. Georgie, would you come here, please? I have something for you.

GEORGIE. *(Goes to her:)* Hey!

SISTER. *(Gets GEORGIE to kneel.)* Something very special. *(Produces a medal on a thin chain.)* Here now. Do you know what this is? It's called a Miraculous Medal.

GEORGIE. Hey!

SISTER. See this lady? That's the Blessed Mother.

ELLEN. Oh, Georgie! How beautiful!

GEORGIE. Oh boy!

SISTER. It has special powers, Georgie. It's been blessed by the Bishop. *(Slipping chain over his head:)* There we are. Now, I want you to wear this always. Every day. Never take it off. Do you hear me? And whenever those nasty boys around here give you any trouble, you just take it out and show it to them. You see? You show them you're protected by the Blessed Virgin Mary.

GEORGIE. Hey!

SISTER. Yes. ...Then run like the dickens!

GEORGIE. Wow!

SISTER. Alright, go play now.

(GEORGIE returns to his toy box.)

ELLEN. That's lovely. Thank you, Sister.

SISTER. Quite alright. Oh...my heavens!

ELLEN. Are you alright?

SISTER. My heart is still going a mile a minute.

ELLEN. Oh! Here, Sister. *(Hands her glass of water.)*

SISTER. Thank you kindly. When you're only used to walking between the convent and the school...

ELLEN. Oh, and that staircase of ours, I'm sorry.

(ANNIE hurries from the bedroom hiding a pair of CHET's pants. She scurries to the bathroom door, opens it a crack and throws the pants in.)

ANNIE. *(Nonchalantly:)* Oh, hello Sister, how are you?

(She still has something hidden in the folds of her uniform. And now she performs a rather pathetic bit of chicanery.)

ANNIE. Oh, look, Mama, this fell down.

(ANNIE stoops over near the fridge and "picks up" a framed portrait of Jesus.)

ANNIE. We should be more careful! *(Now she's stuck, for there is no place to logically return it. She settles for the fridge door handle.)* Isn't it a lovely Indian Summer?

SISTER. Blast Indian Summer, what did you do to your hair?

ANNIE. I teased it.

SISTER. You persecuted it. It will retaliate.

(ANNIE self-consciously sits near GEORGIE on the toy chest.)

ELLEN. Does your visit concern one of the children, Sister?

SISTER. Yes. And I'd prefer to speak to both you and your husband. Is he available?

(We hear the toilet flush.)

CHET. *(From the bathroom:)* Right away, right away, right-o. *(Enters wearing pants:)* Hello, Sister, hello.

SISTER. Hello, Chester.

CHET. *(Takes her hand in both of his; loudly:)* How nice to see you. It's been a long time.

SISTER. I'm lame, Chester, not deaf.

CHET. Oh. Heh, sorry. Can I get you something?

SISTER. I'm fine, thank you.

CHET. Water? Gee, we can do better than that. *(To ELLEN:)* Haven't you got any wine or anything around here; what's the matter with you?

SISTER. Wine! Good Lord.

CHET. *(Going to fridge:)* Well, pop or something. Chocolate milk, anything.

SISTER. *(Holds her stomach:)* What are you trying to do to me?

ELLEN. Sister *asked* for water, Chet.

CHET. I'll find something.

SISTER. I'm fine, Chester. Sit down. *(Drinks.)*

CHET. *(Backing toward fridge:)* Ellen wants everybody to think we're paupers around here. I'll find something. I'm a tavern owner, for Christ's— *(Startled by Christ hanging on fridge:)* —for cryin' out loud. You'd think we'd have something nice to serve our company.

(He removes Jesus and, puzzled, gently sets Him on the counter.)

ELLEN. Chet—

SISTER. Mrs. Pazinski, may I have another glass of water?

ELLEN. Sure, Sister.

(She passes CHET and opens fridge.)

CHET. Annie, go downstairs. Behind the bar, in the second cooler door to the left there's bottles with gold paper on them. Bring—

(Suddenly a sharp noise pierces the room. SISTER has sounded her "clicker".)

(This sound from his past stops CHET cold. He straightens up.)

SISTER. SIT DOWN!

CHET. Yes, S'ter. *(He sits.)*

SISTER. Now, I would like to— Don't slouch.

(CHET straightens. Everyone straightens.)

SISTER. I would like to speak with you about a streak of creativity that has emerged in this family of which you may not be aware.

ELLEN. Creativity...?

SISTER. Properly channeled, of course, a creative imagination can do tremendous good in the world. But I am afraid that what I've witnessed recently is a classic example of the moral disintegration brought about by an active imagination running unchecked in the wrong direction.

ELLEN. *(Quietly:)* Holy Christmas!

CHET. Er...I'm not sure what you're getting at, Sister.

(In the living room, EDDIE leaps to his feet.)

SISTER. What I'm getting at, Mr. Pazinski, is that your son has demonstrated to me that he is—

EDDIE. *(At the kitchen door he blurts out:)* I'll clean the stupid picture off the stupid wall, 'cause I didn't mean any disrespect to the building or to the dumpster or to Debbie Ronski. But I'm not gonna feel ashamed and dirty just 'cause I'm thinking about dirty things all the time! ...I mean, y'know, thinking about...s-e-x all the time. Which I'm supposed to 'cause I'm fifteen. If everybody just wouldn't get so nervous about it, then we could all just sit down and relax and have a friendly talk about it. ...Y'know...about s-e-x.

(They stare at him like he has two heads.)

EDDIE. Who wants to start?

ELLEN. *(To SISTER:)* Would the Jesuits take him?

SISTER. Did *you* draw that picture near the dumpster?

EDDIE. I—I thought you knew.

SISTER. I stared at it a full ten minutes, I couldn't understand it. What does it mean?

EDDIE. Well...er...Debbie Ronski is very boring. So it was a board with her head on it.

SISTER. I see.

EDDIE. You do?

SISTER. That was a nasty thing to do, Edward.

EDDIE. Yes, S'ter.

SISTER. And what does that have to do with sex?

EDDIE. Not much, I suppose. *(Sits at table:)* Guess it's just that imagination running unchecked again.

ELLEN. Sister, is this what your visit is about?

SISTER. Certainly not; I'm here about Rudolf.

(Defeated, EDDIE drops his head onto the table.)

ELLEN. *Rudolf?*

SISTER. He said some disturbing things to me today. If it were the usual childish nonsense I could deal with it myself. But his remarks were of such a blasphemous nature that I—

ELLEN. Blasphemous?

SISTER. Oh, yes.

ELLEN. Rudy?

CHET. I'll hang him up by the thumbs.

SISTER. It didn't sound like Rudolf at all. It came out of a clear blue sky, really. Completely unprovoked. You're not aware of any sudden change in behavior?

ELLEN. No.

SISTER. Then you're not aware that he's refused to be confirmed.

CHET. *What?*

ELLEN. Oh, brother!

CHET. *Rudy! Get out here!*

ELLEN. Chet...

(In his room, RUDY calmly gets up and heads for the kitchen.)

CHET. I'll hang him up by the thumbs.

SISTER. Don't repeat yourself.

(RUDY enters the kitchen.)

RUDY. Hello, Sister Clarissa.

SISTER. Hello, Rudolf. I don't suppose you expected to see me again so soon.

RUDY. No, but it's nice to see you anytime.

EDDIE. *(To himself:)* Ho-ly!

(ELLEN nudges EDDIE to cut it out.)

SISTER. Rudolf, I'd like to talk about that interesting discussion we had this afternoon.

RUDY. Which one?

SISTER. Oh, you know, the one about creation, and God's science fair.

EDDIE. Science fair?

SISTER. Oh, yes. It was enlightening. In fact, there was a certain point of theology on which Rudolf was positively illuminating. That question which has vexed mankind since the beginning of time. "Why are we here?"

CHET. "We are here to show forth God's goodness and to share with Him everlasting happiness in heaven."

SISTER. *(Impressed:)* Well now!

CHET. *(Taken aback:)* How'd I remember that?

SISTER. The truth is indelible. But still, that answer didn't satisfy Rudolf. Tell them your answer, Rudolf.

RUDY. Well, it just seemed to me that God put us here to have fun.

CHET. *Fun?*

RUDY. (*Shrugs:*) It's just the way I see it.

CHET. You think we're here to have *fun*?

ELLEN. Well, it's different.

CHET. You think I'm having fun? You call what I do downstairs fun?

RUDY. No.

CHET. You're darn right, no.

RUDY. Then how come you do it?

CHET. Hey, smart aleck—

ELLEN. (*To CHET:*) Okay, okay. ...Now Rudy, what's this about you not wanting to be confirmed?

CHET. (*Interrupting:*) I do it to keep you in clothes and food and Sugar Pops, and so you can go to a nice Catholic School instead of P.S. 40 with the hoodlums and deadbeats, that's how come.

ELLEN. Chet.

CHET. And don't you forget it.

ELLEN. Alright, Chet.

CHET. Piss-pot.

ELLEN. Enough!

SISTER. (*Re: piss-pot:*) *Well!*

CHET. (*To SISTER:*) Sorry.

ELLEN. Rudy, I understand. You're a little boy, so you want to have fun all the time. And that's normal.

CHET. Will you just memorize the right answer and say it?

ELLEN. (*To RUDY:*) But the fun can't last forever. Someday you'll grow up and get a job and—

RUDY. So I'll get a job that's fun; I don't see the problem.

CHET. Fun! Oh, you mean like I found baseball?

RUDY. Yeah.

CHET. Yeah. And now I run a gin mill that I'm thinking of burning down for the insurance money. See how it works?

RUDY. No, so now you have to find something else that's fun.

CHET. Oh! Okay, Rudy, I'll be a cowboy! Now there's fun for ya'. Yessir, I'll slip on my chaps at eight-thirty, rope steers until lunch, then shoot desperadoes on Seneca Street until five. Now cut out the nonsense and learn the answer that's in the— *(Pounds table.)* -- Goddamn book!

SISTER. Calm down, Chester, calm down. Your profanity will get us nowhere.

CHET. I'm sorry, Sister. I hear it so much on the job, y'know...

SISTER. Yes, yes, well, see that you take yourself to confession. *(Takes a drink of water.)*

CHET. Yes, Sister, you're right. Thank you.

GEORGIE. Shit!

(At this, SISTER does a "spit take" that is pure poetry in motion.)

(At the sight of it, GEORGIE howls uproariously, and RUDY and EDDIE turn away in silent fits of laughter.)

(Shocked, ANNIE leaps to her feet. ELLEN throws her a dishtowel and she wipes the floor in front of SISTER. She then dashes back to the toy chest, stifling her laughter.)

SISTER. George Pazinski!

ELLEN. Sister —Sister, we're trying to ignore it.

SISTER. Eh?

ELLEN. He came home with it. We're hoping it dies a natural death.

SISTER. Oh...!

CHET. *(To himself:)* A job that's fun. Where does he get this stuff?

SISTER. Rudolf, I want you to listen to me carefully. The reason you were *not* put on this earth simply to have fun is that you are not worthy of such a life. Heaven is the place for joy and happiness and fun. But you are as yet undeserving of heaven. By your very nature you are flawed. Do you understand? You are imperfect in God's eyes. If you lead a good life, take advantage of the holy sacraments and follow the rules of the Church, you will one day have your "fun" in heaven. But, I daresay, not without a lengthy cleansing in the fires of purgatory.

(A thoughtful moment.)

RUDY. *(To ELLEN:)* Can I go to public school?

CHET. *(Slams something:)* That's it!

SISTER. *(Struggling to her feet:)* I cannot believe my ears!

CHET. You sit here and insult this holy woman?!

RUDY. I didn't mean anything. I just don't get that kind of thinking.

SISTER. That kind of thinking! Without that kind of thinking, young man, you will spend an eternity in hell!

RUDY. Oh, I forgot to tell you. I don't believe in hell.

(SISTER recoils in horror and makes a quick sign of the cross.)

EDDIE. *(Stands:)* Well, I've got that homework to get to.

CHET. Sidddown! *(EDDIE sits. To RUDY:)* Where are you getting this stuff?

ELLEN. Rudy, those aren't your words. Who have you been talking to?

RUDY. Nobody.

CHET. Those Ukrainians next to the bowling alley.

RUDY. No, it's just the way I feel.

CHET. Oh! The way you feel. Okay, you hear that, everybody? It's the way he feels. So, from now on we'll just forget everything we

ever learned, we'll just go around saying what we feel. How will that be?

ANNIE. (*Dreamily:*) Wouldn't that be wonderful?

(*As everyone turns to ANNIE, she catches herself with a little gasp!*)

CHET. You got a problem, too?

ANNIE. No, I like being Catholic.

CHET. Well, hooray for our side.

ANNIE. It's just that... (*She hesitates.*)

CHET. What, what? Your brother says it's open season, c'mon. What?

ANNIE. No, just...it would just be nice if... Well, when I go over to Tina's house, her and her family...talk.

CHET. Talk?!

ANNIE. I'm sorry, never mind.

CHET. Everybody wants to talk now. Like on TV. I had to go and buy that TV. All I wanted to do was watch the fights. Alright, go ahead and talk, who's stopping you?

ANNIE. I'm sorry.

CHET. No, talk all you want to. What do I care if you talk? Should be a great conversation. In case you haven't looked close, I'm not Jack Paar. But go ahead, start talking.

ANNIE. I'm sorry.

CHET. I said talk, damnit. *Talk!*

(*ANNIE starts to cry.*)

ELLEN. Chet!

EDDIE. (*Rushes for back door:*) Annie, forget it, willya? Just forget it!

CHET. Get back here! I'm sick of everybody running for a door whenever they get mad!

EDDIE. Where do you think we get it from!

ELLEN. Eddie!

CHET. Alright, get out, I don't care.

EDDIE. You sure as heck *don't*.

ELLEN. Eddie, stop it!

EDDIE. Not about us you don't.

ELLEN. EDDIE!

EDDIE. He doesn't! Look what he does. He yells at you in front of us. Makes Annie cry in front of us. Look at her. Says Hail Mary's all day so he won't come upstairs in a bad mood. He doesn't care.

ELLEN. (*Moves toward him:*) So help me—

CHET. No, let him go.

EDDIE. And Rudy. You don't even know him. You don't know he's funny. You don't know he does the best Ed Sullivan in the whole school. He's like a mouse when he's around you. We're all like mice around you. You don't care. The only one you care about is Georgie, 'cause he's retarded. Well, I'm sorry we're only normal!

(*EDDIE bolts out the back door.*)

SISTER. (*Turns to RUDY:*) Do you see what you have caused? (*Stands:*) Now I want you to stand up and tell your mother and father that you will be confirmed.

RUDY. I'd rather not.

SISTER. (*A slap across the back of the head:*) Do it!

ELLEN. (*Shocked:*) Sister...!

RUDY. (*To ELLEN:*) I'm used to it.

SISTER. Your parents have received enough heartache for one day. Stand up!

(*RUDY stays put. She whacks him again.*)

SISTER. Stand up, young man!

ELLEN. That will be just about enough of that!

SISTER. This one understands only one thing.

ELLEN. Well, please, let me get you the baseball bat!

CHET. Ellen!

ELLEN. From now on nobody hits this kid but me.

SISTER. I'll remind you, Mrs. Pazinski, that you left your children's religious upbringing in my hands.

ELLEN. Well, start keeping them to yourself.

(SISTER sputters!)

CHET. Are you nuts or somethin'? I'm sorry, Sister.

ELLEN. Whose side are you on?

CHET. She is doing her job. Don't tell me you never got hit.

ELLEN. As a matter of fact I didn't.

RUDY. Girls never do.

ANNIE. Ha!

SISTER. Mrs. Pazinski, my methods may seem harsh to you, but they are effective. Of course, if you insist, your son could be transferred to Sister Mary Ann's class. Young, progressive, interested in the child's self-expression.

ELLEN. *(Considers it:)* Well...

SISTER. Sister Mary Ann also averages three suspended children per semester. Her daily detention class is standing room only and last April one of her charges self-expressed himself right into juvenile court. But it is up to you.

(A moment. ELLEN says nothing.)

SISTER. Very well. Now for the last time, young man, will you stand up and be a soldier for Christ?

RUDY. *(Stands.)* I read where there are over thirteen hundred religions in the world.

SISTER. So?

RUDY. I'd like to shop around.

SISTER. *(Pulls out ruler, moves to hit him:)* Is there no end to your blasphemy? Rudolf, your hand!

ELLEN. Freeze!

(Stunned, SISTER halts in her tracks. ELLEN grabs the ruler out of her hand and breaks it over her knee.)

(Everyone stares at ELLEN in disbelief.)

CHET. You've lost your mind!

SISTER. Mother of God!

CHET. This is a holy woman! *(Pulls RUDY:)* Go get Sister another ruler.

ELLEN. I'll yank him out of that school first!

CHET. What is the matter with you? He has to learn!

ELLEN. Learn what? Learn what you learned? That if you make a wrong move you get your fingers broken?

CHET. What are you talking about?

ELLEN. You know what I'm talking about.

(At this point SISTER experiences a seizing pain in her chest. No one notices her yet.)

RUDY. I thought you broke them in an accident.

CHET. Get to your room! You are grounded!

RUDY. I just asked a question!

(ANNIE screams, for SISTER is now falling to the floor.)

ELLEN. Sister! My God!

CHET. Sister, you alright? What's the matter?

(They run to her aid.)

ELLEN. Oh, Jesus! Unloosen that collar thing.

CHET. Sister, hang on, hang on! ...Where the hell do you undo it?

RUDY. Wait!

(RUDY dives for her sleeve and pulls out the little pill box. He pries it open and puts a pill in her mouth.)

RUDY. Gotta get it under her tongue...

(A tense moment. ANNIE gets on her knees and prays fiercely.)

CHET. *(Re: the pills:)* How'd you know about that?

RUDY. She tells us every day.

(Another moment and SISTER starts to stir. ELLEN breathes a big sigh of relief.)

CHET. Y'alright? *(Takes her shoulders:)* Up we go...

SISTER. No, no...

ELLEN. Let her rest.

CHET. Okay, okay...take it easy.

(A quiet moment now as they watch over the nun lying on their kitchen floor.)

(Now SISTER opens her eyes and looks at RUDY, kneeling at her side.)

RUDY. Hi.

SISTER. *(Weakly:)* ...You remembered.

(As SISTER lies resting at the Pazinskis' feet, the LIGHTS FADE, and we hear an ambulance siren in the distance.)

(THE CURTAIN FALLS.)

End of Act I

ACT II

Scene 1

(Late that night. CHET's neon sign is off. The apartment is dark, quiet and still. All is picture perfect—except for the odd sight of GEORGIE standing all alone in the dark kitchen in his pajamas.)

(Very still, he sucks his thumb, standing on the spot where SISTER CLARISSA had her collapse.)

(Without warning GEORGIE does a melodramatic clutch of his heart, staggers about and swoons to the floor; a rough re-enactment of SISTER's attack. He lies there for a while, then sits up. He stands, thumb in mouth, and thinks things over.)

(Now he repeats his performance, clutching his heart and “fainting.”)

(ELLEN, having heard something, comes out of the bedroom wearing her robe and slippers. She clicks on the kitchen light and is startled to find GEORGIE lying there.)

ELLEN. Georgie? Georgie!! *(She runs to him.)* Georgie, Georgie, what's wrong? Georgie, honey!

(Mindless of ELLEN, GEORGIE stands, sucking his thumb.)

ELLEN. Are you alright?

(And here he goes again into his Sarah Bernhardt swan dive.)

ELLEN. Georgie!

(From the floor, GEORGIE laughs.)

ELLEN. What are you doing? Are you playing? I'll kill you! Stop that!

(She gets him back to his feet.)

ELLEN. Are you trying to scare Mommy to death; what's the matter with you?

GEORGIE. Nnn...

ELLEN. You should be in bed. Come on. God Almighty!

(She takes his hand, but he won't move.)

ELLEN. Georgie, bed.

(He is steadfast.)

ELLEN. What's the matter, honey?

(For the first time since we've met him, GEORGIE looks troubled.)

ELLEN. Georgie? What's wrong?

(With a little sob, GEORGIE fingers the Miraculous Medal he wears around his neck.)

GEORGIE. Sissa!

ELLEN. *(Hugs him:)* Oh, Georgie, Sister's alright. She's just sick. She'll get better. Okay? *(Takes his hand:)* Come on, sweetie.

(She pulls him toward the bedroom but he simply won't be moved.)

ELLEN. Georgie, what is it?

GEORGIE. *(Angrily stamps foot:)* Ruggy!

ELLEN. Rudy? Are you mad at Rudy?

(GEORGIE gives a Bronx cheer.)

ELLEN. No, no, that's not fair. This wasn't Rudy's fault. Entirely. Sister just fell down, that's all. She's going to be fine. Come on.

(ELLEN manages to gently lead GEORGIE into the bedroom. She seats him on the foot of his bed while she turns down his covers.)

(Suddenly GEORGIE springs and starts pounding the life out of the sleeping RUDY.)

RUDY. Ow! Ow!

ELLEN. Georgie!

RUDY. What'd I do?!

ELLEN. Georgie, stop that!

GEORGIE. Sissa!

RUDY. What's he doing? Stop it!

(RUDY swings back at GEORGIE.)

ELLEN. Hey, hey! You don't hit your brother!

RUDY. He started it!

ELLEN. *(Separating them:)* But you know better. Now cut it out!

GEORGIE. Sissa!

RUDY. What's he mean?

ELLEN. Stop it! *(The boys stop swinging.)* He means things are not going to be right around here until you make peace with that woman!

RUDY. What woman?

ELLEN. Mamie Eisenhower! You know what woman. Tomorrow you're going to that hospital and pay her a visit.

RUDY. What?!

ELLEN. *(To GEORGIE:)* Into bed.

RUDY. The hospital?

ELLEN. You heard me.

RUDY. You mean just me? In a room? With her? No, it's too creepy!

ELLEN. Stop that!

RUDY. What would I say?

ELLEN. You're the clever one. You'll think of something.

(She tucks GEORGIE in.)

RUDY. This isn't fair. It's not my fault she keeled over.

ELLEN. I didn't say it was.

RUDY. What if I catch something?

ELLEN. You'll catch something if I hear one more word about it! Go to sleep!

(RUDY throws himself onto his pillow and broods.)

GEORGIE. *(Sadly:)* Sissa...

ELLEN. *(Strokes his head:)* Okay, shh-shh. Everything's going to be fine now. Goodnight, sweetie.

(ELLEN leaves the room and quietly shuts the door behind her.)

(Now, while she gets herself a beer from the fridge, RUDY sneaks out of his bed, tip-toes to his dresser and pulls something from his drawer. Concealing the object, he takes a flashlight from his dresser and tip-toes to GEORGIE's bed.)

(He taps GEORGIE on the shoulder, puts a Halloween horror mask over his face and lights it with the flashlight. GEORGIE turns over and when he sees the monster he lets out a scream and throws the covers over his head!

(RUDY leaps back into bed as ELLEN swiftly moves to their door and listens. All is quiet again so she returns to the kitchen table where she sips her beer and pages through a newspaper.)

(Presently EDDIE bursts through the back door; a hole in his pants knee and his shirt torn. He is flustered, upset and out of breath. Seeing ELLEN, he stops short...and waits.)

ELLEN. *(With hardly a glance:)* You missed all the fun. It's not every day we load a nun into an ambulance. ...If you've come for your belongings, I've given them to St. Vincent de Paul.

(EDDIE says nothing.)

ELLEN. Well?

EDDIE. I'm over at Iggy Sabadasz's.

ELLEN. Back to add a few stab wounds to your father?

EDDIE. I forgot something.

ELLEN. *(Sips her beer:)* You did not.

EDDIE. Yes I did.

ELLEN. You did not.

EDDIE. Yes I did!

ELLEN. Then get it.

(EDDIE darts into his room. He instantly reappears with apparently the first thing he could grab, a shoe shine kit, the kind with the foot rest. He stands there for a while feeling silly.)

ELLEN. Gonna shine up the ol' metal plate in Mr. Sabadasz's head?

EDDIE. No, I just, y'know, thought I'd... *(He has no story.)* Well, goodnight. *(Starts for door.)*

ELLEN. *(Back to her paper:)* Sweet dreams.

(At the door, EDDIE suddenly stops, returns and drops the shoe-shine kit on the table.)

ELLEN. Yes?

EDDIE. Vinny Carducci told me something tonight and I beat him up for it.

ELLEN. Who's Vinny Carducci?

EDDIE. He's a filthy pig and I made him tell everyone it was a lie. But I thought I'd better tell you. 'Cause it was about Annie.

ELLEN. Annie?

EDDIE. He said... He...

(Hesitates; can't say it.)

ELLEN. Tell me, damnit.

EDDIE. He said Annie undresses in front of her window and doesn't pull the shade down. On purpose.

ELLEN. He was lying.

EDDIE. No. They say he's reliable on this stuff.

ELLEN. *You're lying.*

EDDIE. I wish I was.

(With no more to say, EDDIE exits into the night.)

ELLEN. *(Upset and utterly confused:)* Annie... Oh, Jesus...

(She rises and starts a move to ANNIE's door, but reverses when she hears CHET emerging from the bedroom.)

(He enters in his underwear.)

CHET. Who was that?

ELLEN. The Chatanooga Shoe Shine Boy. *(Returns shoe shine kit to EDDIE's room.)*

CHET. It was Eddie. Where'd he go?

ELLEN. He took a room at the Y.

CHET. You think they'd let him in? It's the Young Men's *Christian* Association, remember. You going to tell me where he is or do I get out the Ouija Board?

ELLEN. He wanted to stay over at Iggy Sabadasz's.

CHET. And you let him.

ELLEN. Yes.

CHET. Just like that.

ELLEN. Call it a short parole.

CHET. A short parole, huh? Well, the warden's got an announcement. Things are going to be different around here, starting tomorrow. All this mollycoddling, all this lack of respect for the Church. It's all over. Starting tomorrow, our kids are going to attend mass every morning.

ELLEN. Every morning?

CHET. They're going to learn some respect for their religion.

ELLEN. And who's going to get up an hour earlier and make their breakfast, you?

CHET. Well, they need *something*. Special religious classes after school.

ELLEN. No, no, no...

CHET. Why?

ELLEN. Not *more* school, Chet. They're kids, they should be enjoying themselves.

CHET. Look, this is a whattayacallit, a crossroads here. They could go either way. Do you want them to wind up like some of the lost souls in this neighborhood?

ELLEN. No, and I don't want them to wind up like me, either.

CHET. You?

ELLEN. Yes. I'm thinking in the other direction. Thinking maybe we should ease up a little bit around here. Make things a little more pleasant.

CHET. What do you mean wind up like you?

ELLEN. Not as anxious to leave home as I was. I like our kids, I'd like them to stick around for a while.

CHET. Leave home? You're bugs.

ELLEN. If we keep making things ugly around here now, why will they want to come back and visit later? How often do you see *me* running back to the farm?

(ANNIE emerges sleepily from her room wearing a nightgown, a robe, and protective tissue pinned to her beehive. On seeing her parents she stops short. They stop, too, and for a moment everyone just stares. Then ANNIE continues to the bathroom.)

ELLEN. *(Waits until door shuts:)* I'm just asking, can't we make it a little better for our kids than what we had?

CHET. What was so terrible?

ELLEN. You liked being ignored?

CHET. Who says you're supposed to like it? I got news for you; that's life. *(Heads for bedroom:)* No, a little fear of God, that's what's needed around here. Knock some respect into 'em. Worked for me.

(He exits.)

(ELLEN sighs and goes back to her newspaper.)

(Now ANNIE comes out of the bathroom and quietly passes ELLEN.)

ELLEN. *(Without looking up:)* Honey, would you like Daddy to fix your shade so it stays down while you're undressing?

(A beat, then ANNIE turns to ELLEN in utter shock. They stare each other down for a moment, then ANNIE cracks. Her face turns into the big cry.)

ELLEN. Alright, now hold it!

ANNIE. *(Too late:)* I only did it once!

ELLEN. Hold it right there! Stop it!

(ANNIE wails pitifully.)

ELLEN. Annie, stop! Stop it!

ANNIE. *(Runs for the door:)* I'm sorry!

ELLEN. *(Grabs hold:)* No, damnit, no! Come here, come here!

(She's dragging ANNIE to the table.)

ANNIE. Don't tell Daddy!

(RUDY is awakened by the voices. He staggers out into the hallway to eavesdrop.)

ELLEN. I won't tell Daddy! Sit! I'm not mad.

(ANNIE sits. Re: ANNIE's crying.)

ELLEN. Can you stop that?

ANNIE. I'm so ashamed!

ELLEN. Well, knock it off or we're not going to get anywhere.

(ANNIE keeps sobbing.)

ELLEN. Will a Coke help?

ANNIE. *(Sob:)* 'Kay.

(On her way to the fridge she sees RUDY watching from the hallway and she waves him away. He exits into the bathroom.)

ELLEN. *(To ANNIE:)* You're going to have an ulcer before you're seventeen.

(Takes out a Coca-Cola, opens it and hands it to ANNIE. She pours herself some more beer and sits down across from her daughter.)

ELLEN. Now, honey, why? What on earth possessed you? Was it Tina? Did she put you up to it?

(ANNIE gestures no.)

ELLEN. Then tell me. Come on, I'm not going to yell.

ANNIE. The other day...me and Tina...we sort of took a long lunch hour at school.

ELLEN. How long?

ANNIE. About the length of a movie. Tina said that these two boys would meet us at the theatre. From Bishop Cleary. They take long lunch hours, too, sometimes. It didn't seem like a great idea, but since boys haven't exactly been beating down my door... Anyway, they never showed up. They got caught by the school janitor. So, me and Tina went in. And, this movie, it was sort of...artistic. Foreign, actually. I don't think it was on the Legion of Decency list.

ELLEN. You saw a dirty movie?

ANNIE. But it wasn't dirty! It was beautiful. It really was! And so romantic, I just wanted to die! It took place in this little town in Italy. And there was this one part where this girl's father forbids her to see her lover and he locks her in her room. So, that night, while her lover is outside, she goes to her window and, sort of... gets ready for bed. *(She takes a swig of Coke.)*

ELLEN. Annie...

ANNIE. But they didn't show anything. They covered most of it with trees and stuff...and showing his face looking up at her. It was so...artistic! And, so anyway, all day I couldn't stop thinking about that part. And that night I couldn't sleep 'cause all I could think about was how she loved him so. And him outside all alone. And then, lying there in bed, thinking, I just sort of...became the girl. I got up out of bed, and... Oh, Mama, I never thought anybody would be watching. I swear! *(Sobs.)*

ELLEN. Annie, Annie... *(Sits on table next to her:)* Why couldn't you have seen Dumbo?

ANNIE. I'm sorry!

ELLEN. Alright, now look. The hookey playing is out.

(ANNIE nods in agreement.)

ELLEN. And meeting boys at a movie like that? Dirty old men hang around those places, Annie. Is that the kind of boy you want? Am I going to have to forbid you seeing Tina?

ANNIE. No. You can't blame Tina. Mama, it's me. I think something's wrong with me. When I did what I did in front of the window, I secretly wanted someone to be watching. I think I'm going to hell!

ELLEN. Are you going to confession on Saturday?

ANNIE. Yes!

ELLEN. Then shut up about Hell.

ANNIE. But I have all kinds of awful thoughts like that, all the time! Am I becoming one of *those* girls? Like Maureen Blake? She meets boys under the train trestle on Swan Street. They call her...Easy Make Blake.

ELLEN. Well, I don't know about Miss Blake, but you're not becoming anything, except a woman. Honey, you're changing. Remember we talked? Your body's going haywire. That's what's causing those thoughts. You're not bad.

ANNIE. The Sisters would think so.

ELLEN. You don't think they were young once?

ANNIE. A couple of them, no.

ELLEN. Don't you think I had the same awful thoughts when I was your age? And on a farm it wasn't easy. I didn't have movies to inspire me. I had goats and cows and they weren't terribly artistic. So, nobody's going to Hell. And pretty soon you won't have to make up schemes to meet boys, either. Or dream about them waiting outside your window. Because they're going to be calling you up on the phone any day now.

ANNIE. Yeah, right.

ELLEN. I promise.

ANNIE. It's okay, Mom. You don't have to be nice.

ELLEN. Look at me. (*ANNIE turns away. ELLEN takes her face in her hands.*) You are so damn pretty. (*ANNIE starts to cry.*) You are. I forget to look at you sometimes. ...Look, I know it's all confusing right now. And the last person you'll want advice from is me, because I was never young. But come to me anyway, once in a while. Please. Even if it's just to say, Mom, I'm scared. Will you?

(ANNIE throws her arms around ELLEN. ELLEN finds her face in ANNIE's beehive. After a pause.)

ELLEN. You're going to scrape me raw with this hair.

ANNIE. I'm sorry!

ELLEN. No, no, shh! It's...pretty.

ANNIE. (*Starts back to her room, but then:*) Oh, Mama! Does everyone know about the window? How can I ever leave the house again?

ELLEN. No, no, don't worry, your reputation is saved.

ANNIE. How?

ELLEN. Your brother.

ANNIE. Rudy?

ELLEN. Eddie.

ANNIE. EDDIE? What did he do?

ELLEN. He made that boy tell everyone he was lying.

ANNIE. Eddie did that? I thought he hated me.

ELLEN. Now why on earth would he hate you?

ANNIE. (*Shrugs:*) Just 'cause.

ELLEN. (*Kisses her:*) Goodnight.

ANNIE. Goodnight. (*Starts to leave, stops at her door:*) Oh, no!

ELLEN. What?

ANNIE. Now I'm going to have to be nice to Eddie.

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 2

(The next day. THE LIGHTS COME UP on RUDY kneeling in the church pew.)

RUDY. Boy, thanks a lot! I just asked that you make her ease up on me, I didn't say rub her out! ...And now Daddy's bad mood is worse. And we never did get the spaghetti. Is this a punishment? All 'cause I'm looking for something else? How can you blame me, Jesus? All I get from you is rules. No miracles, no fun, just rules. And *crazy* rules! Like don't eat meat on Friday. I can't believe you came all the way down to Earth to say that. What's it for? Eddie says you might've done it for the Apostles, to help their fish business. That I could see. But, okay, they're dead now, and I'm still eating fish sticks on Friday. And I hate fish sticks!

And other stuff, like giving up things for Lent. Last year, because you died on the cross, I gave up TV for a month. I'm not complaining. But in the end you came back from the dead, and I saw everything on reruns anyway, so what was the point? ...I've got to keep looking, Jesus. But you understand. I know this kid, Arnie Silverman; I always see him at the Sunday matinees. And he says you switched religions, too. You started out Jewish! And you said it yourself— "Go thou and do likewise!"

(BLACKOUT.)

Scene 3

(IN THE DARKNESS we hear the voice of a female hospital operator over a public address system, accompanied by those familiar "bongs.")

OPERATOR'S VOICE. *(Bong...bong:)* X-ray technician, please report to three West. X-ray technician, to three West. *(Bong...bong:)* Father Clementi, you're wanted in chapel. Father Clementi, to chapel. *(Bong...bong:)* Would the student nurse who lost her thermometer please report to Sister Superior's office?

(LIGHTS COME UP on SISTER CLARISSA sitting in a wheelchair. All her nun vestments have been replaced with white hospital garb, a headcloth covering her hair. A small metal stool is nearby.)

(Presently, RUDY enters the area, carrying a shopping bag.)

RUDY. Shalom!

(He gives a formal bow, showing off a black yarmulke.)

SISTER. *(Horrified:)* Where did you get your hands on that?!

RUDY. It's my old Mickey Mouse hat.

SISTER. Well, take it off before you give me another heart attack!

RUDY. *(Notices her new white garb:)* Wow! It looks like the Ajax White Knight hit you!

SISTER. Where's your father?

RUDY. I don't know. Guess he's working.

SISTER. He's not with you? I asked him to come see me.

RUDY. Oh.

SISTER. "Oh." ...So, what kind of a hospital is this? How did you get up here all alone?

RUDY. I pretended I was with another family.

SISTER. Clever. Is that how you plan to get into Heaven?

RUDY. No, S'ter. I brought you some stuff.

SISTER. "Stuff." That's lazy speech, Rudolf. Things have names.

(From the shopping bag he produces a large piece of cardboard with a rosary mounted on it. The beads are multi-colored.)

SISTER. Good heavens!

RUDY. It's a rosary.

SISTER. I can see that. ...You made this?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

SISTER. Mother of Mercy! (*Examines it.*) The workmanship. What are the beads made of?

RUDY. Trix.

SISTER. What are tricks?

RUDY. Cereal.

SISTER. A breakfast cereal?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

SISTER. You did this for me?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

SISTER. Why?

RUDY. Well, gee, I almost killed you. And I couldn't find a card for that, so...

SISTER. I normally don't allow gifts, you know. (*An awkward pause.*) Well... thank you.

RUDY. You're welcome.

SISTER. My, my. The Our Fathers, color coordinated... (*Touches it.*) Oh, Mercy, I've broken one off!

RUDY. Don't eat it, there's glue on it!

SISTER. It wasn't my first impulse. ...Trix, you say.

RUDY. The crucifix is two pretzels.

(Digs into bag and comes out with SISTER's broken ruler, carefully mended with tape.)

RUDY. Here, I think it'll still work. (*Hands it to her.*)

SISTER. We won't find out. (*Hands it back.*) Take it. A war souvenir.

RUDY. Are you getting a yardstick?

SISTER. I'm not returning to the 7th grade, Rudolf.

RUDY. (*Alarmed.*) Did you get fired? Did I get you in trouble?

SISTER. Yes, I'm getting the electric chair! ...It's my health if you must know. Father Michael spoke with the doctor. I'll be taking it easy now. Whatever that means.

RUDY. Oh.

SISTER. Will you miss me?

RUDY. (*Awkwardly:*) ...Sure!

SISTER. That's what I thought.

RUDY. I feel bad. Like none of this would've happened if it weren't for me. Me and my stupid questions.

SISTER. They're not stupid.

RUDY. They're not?

SISTER. No.

RUDY. But you said—

SISTER. Never mind what I said.

RUDY. So far they've just made a lot of trouble.

SISTER. Young man, you are part of a long line of trouble makers. The first one started making trouble two thousand years ago. And may I remind you that when he was your age he was confounding the teachers in the temple with his wisdom. So I suggest you get busy.

RUDY. With what?

SISTER. With your Father's business.

RUDY. Tending bar?

(Now CHET enters the area. He sees RUDY.)

CHET. What'd you come to finish her off? ...How'd you get here?

RUDY. Bus.

CHET. Your mother know you're way uptown?

RUDY. She gave me the dime.

CHET. I'll wait outside.

SISTER. Stay, Chester. Rudolf, why don't you wait in the hall for your father. Adopt another family.

RUDY. Yes, S'ter. *(He exits.)*

CHET. I got your message. I was gonna come, anyway, just to—
(Sees RUDY's rosary:) What the hell? —HECK!

SISTER. Please! Make an effort in my presence.

CHET. Sorry. Where'd you get this?

SISTER. Your son's creation.

CHET. You're kidding.

SISTER. I am not. That boy has a gift.

CHET. For the love o' Pete.

SISTER. Edible, too.

CHET. Sister, I feel terrible about this whole mess. Couldn't sleep a wink last night.

SISTER. Now, please, it isn't your fault.

CHET. Oh, yes it is. We got you all excited up there. Ellen—I don't know what got into her. Hollering, destroying school property. And those kids; I'm at the end of my rope. I keep telling Ellen she's wrong; they need a good crack now and then to keep them in line. And Rudy with this "fun" business. I suppose I should sell the tavern now. Go sign myself up with a ball club again.

SISTER. Oh, Lord! The convent windows!

CHET. Hey now, P.J. Murko broke that window with a foul ball.

SISTER. But who was pitching? *(They share a chuckle.)* You did have a passion for baseball, didn't you?

CHET. Yeah. But passion wasn't enough. I didn't have the goods.

SISTER. You had the goods.

CHET. Well, my injury. I tried switching to my left hand. No good; no control. The Devil was luckier, huh? He was *born* left handed.
(Sits on nearby stool.)

SISTER. Let me see your hand.

(CHET holds it up.)

SISTER. Extend the pinky.

(CHET tries.)

SISTER. Still can't do it. Chester, how was it your fingers were broken?

CHET. Got 'em caught in a boxcar door. Down by Kaiser Town. We were playing in the railyard.

SISTER. You were stealing. You and some older boys.

CHET. *(A pause.)* Yeah, well...

SISTER. Tins of maple syrup. You were the only one caught.

CHET. You knew about the syrup?

SISTER. And the boxcar door. There was no accident with a boxcar door. Your father broke your fingers.

CHET. *(A pause.)* No. No, see, Dan Wytkowski, he told me to hold the door open while he—

SISTER. Your father came to see me that day, after the railroad guard dragged you home. He was quite upset. He wanted to know what he should do with this boy of his who steals from trains.

CHET. Pop?

SISTER. I was young, but I had just broken the Lucenti boy's habit of driving other people's cars, so I spoke with your father. I pointed out the dangers of leniency. I even demonstrated my technique with a ruler. He thanked me, went on his way and that was that. A sincere man; I liked him. I wasn't aware at the time that he drank. The next morning I saw your bandages. The novitiate hadn't prepared me for this. After dismissal I ran to Reverend Mother and told her what I'd caused. I didn't think God could ever forgive me. "Tell me what to do!" "Satan is relentless in his pursuit of these children," she said, "so our resolve must be just as strong. Do nothing, Sister. This is how we save their souls." I ran to that chapel and prayed all night. I begged God for some kind of answer.

Silence. As if God were telling me to be silent; just do as I'm told. So I lived with the image that had been burned into my mind—your little bandaged hand. What did your father use? It wasn't a ruler.

CHET. A broom handle.

SISTER. I'm so sorry. I prayed for your recovery. I hope you believe that. I did pray. I kept on praying.

CHET. Uh-huh. Thank you, Sister. I appreciate it.

SISTER. But last night in your home I realized that all the prayer in the world couldn't undo my original sin of silence. Reverend Mother was wrong. I should have said something, done something forty years ago. It's still going on.

CHET. ...Hey, I don't hit my kids.

SISTER. Rulers and broomsticks aren't the only things that damage.

CHET. *(A pause.)* That's a hell of a thing to say. I'm sorry, but that's a hell of a thing. You've got no right. Comparing me to— Look, I gotta get back.

SISTER. Chester—

CHET. I've got deliveries, Pop's all alone. The kids'll be fine, don't worry about them. You just rest up. Give us a call if you need anything. *(An awkward moment.)* So long, Sister.

(CHET exits into the darkness; SISTER watches him leave. Alone now, she holds RUDY's rosary close to her as THE LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK.)

Scene 4

(The apartment, three days later. ELLEN is putting freshly baked cookies into a cookie jar. GEORGIE sits at the toy box, playing. ELLEN approaches GEORGIE with a cookie behind her back.)

ELLEN. Which hand? ...Which hand?

(He points and she gives him a cookie. Now she holds out her hands to him.)

ELLEN. Up. Come on, Georgie. Up. Dance with me. Come on. We've got to cheer this place up. *(She tries to get him to dance. She sings:)*

ROLL OUT THE BARREL
WE'LL HAVE A BARREL OF FUN

ELLEN. Come on, honey, you can do it...

ROLL OUT THE BARREL
WE'VE GOT THE BLUES ON THE RUN

ELLEN. That's it... SING BOOM TA- *Ow!* *(He's stepped on her toe.)*
Ow! Oh, Georgie! *Ow!* Oh!

(RUDY enters in his playclothes.)

RUDY. What's the matter?

ELLEN. He just rolled a barrel over my corn! Oh! Okay, Georgie, that's enough. Oh...!

GEORGIE. *(Sits:)* Nnn...

RUDY. I'll massage it for an allowance. *(She gives him a look.)* You want me to get your slippers?

ELLEN. For how much?

RUDY. Free. You're injured.

ELLEN. Skip it. Go downstairs. See if your father's back from Chef's yet.

RUDY. *(With dread:)* Oh, no...

ELLEN. What?

RUDY. Let's not do this, please...

ELLEN. What?

RUDY. Can't you just *make* spaghetti? It doesn't have to be good.

ELLEN. Will you get down there!

(RUDY heads for the tavern door as ANNIE enters through the back door, looking troubled. She's in her school uniform and her hair is back to normal.)

RUDY. *(To ANNIE:)* Wear protective clothing to dinner tonight. *(He exits.)*

ELLEN. Why are you so late?

ANNIE. Glee club.

ELLEN. Well, let's hear some.

ANNIE. Some what?

ELLEN. Glee! We could use some around this place. Why the puss on you?

ANNIE. Mom, did I tell you our glee club is teaming up with Eddie's school glee club for the autumn concert?

ELLEN. No.

ANNIE. Well, we are. And we've been rehearsing. And there's never enough song books to go around. So, you have to share. And, there's this boy, Frankie Meisner. And he keeps talking to me.

ELLEN. Mm-hmm.

ANNIE. There's nothing wrong with him or anything. He just keeps saying things.

ELLEN. What kind of things?

ANNIE. Oh, just stuff. Like, "I like this song," or, "You sing real good," y'know. And then I don't say anything back.

ELLEN. Why not?

ANNIE. I don't know. I just can't.

ELLEN. Do you like him?

ANNIE. Yeah! ...I mean, he seems nice. And Mary Symanski told me he has an actual job. He's a busboy at Chef's.

ELLEN. Mmm, something about a man in uniform. Alright, so what happened? He said, "I like this song." So, what did you say, "Me, too?"

ANNIE. No.

ELLEN. What did you say?

ANNIE. Nothing.

ELLEN. You didn't say, "Me, too?"

ANNIE. I told you, I can't say anything.

ELLEN. Not even "Me, too?"

ANNIE. Well, don't yell at me.

(She didn't.)

ELLEN. Annie, just open your mouth and say something. Anything.

ANNIE. It can't be just anything. It has to be meaningful.

ELLEN. Since when?

ANNIE. Oh, forget it. I'll just quit glee club.

ELLEN. Annie, you wanted to attract boys, and now that you have—

ANNIE. I didn't attract him. Sister Leonardine stuck him next to me 'cause his voice is high.

ELLEN. Well, he's talking to you so he must like you.

ANNIE. What was the first thing you ever said to Daddy? Do you remember?

ELLEN. Sure. I said, "Hey, Stretch, put on another record, wouldya?"

ANNIE. Why'd you say that?

ELLEN. 'Cause he'd been talking about himself for almost half an hour.

ANNIE. *(Turns and leaves angrily:)* Oh, perfect! I'll say that! Thanks!

ELLEN. Well, you asked me what I—

("Slam" goes her bedroom door.)

(RUDY enters through the tavern door.)

RUDY. *(Ominously:)* Can I eat at Billy Snyder's house tonight?

ELLEN. What? No.

RUDY. Please!

ELLEN. Stop it! You eat with your family.

RUDY. How about in my room?

ELLEN. *(Suspiciously:)* Where's your father?

RUDY. In the back room. With Grandpa. With no visible signs of spaghetti.

ELLEN. Maybe he put it behind the bar.

RUDY. I looked.

(A moment as ELLEN fumes. Now she goes to the phone.)

ELLEN. Get on your bike. Go to Chef's. I'll phone ahead.

RUDY. It's a hundred miles!

ELLEN. Wait. *(Puts phone down:)* Damn it, no! He made his bed, he's going to sleep in it. Set the table.

RUDY. How come you get to swear and I can't?

ELLEN. When you're 21 you can do whatever the hell you want. Now set the Goddamn table. *(Gets her sweater and starts for door. Calls to bedroom:)* Annie! Out here now!

RUDY. Where are you going?

ELLEN. To Winkler's for Italian bread.

(Unseen by RUDY, ANNIE enters.)

ELLEN. You and Annie get that table set by the time I get back. And then I don't want to hear one more word about religion or you'll be rooming with Sister Clarissa.

RUDY. In the convent?

ELLEN. In the hospital.

(She exits out the back door.)

(Unaware of ANNIE's presence, RUDY sneaks to the bathroom door.)

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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