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“The trouble with family is, it’s worth the trouble.”

—Anonymous

Cast of Characters

ELLEN (PAZINSKI) FRONZAK, early 60s

Ellen's Children

RUDY, 30

GEORGIE, 31

EDDIE, 33

ANNIE, 34

Setting

The action of the play takes place in the bar room of “Chet’s Bar & Grill” in Buffalo, New York. Winter, 1977.

Production Notes

It is advisable to prepare a duplicate set of coats and boots for the ensemble. One for wearing, one for visibly hanging on set at appropriate times.

The end of Act II, Scene 3 ends with Eddie about to paint his mural as the lights fade to black. It is strongly advised that, just as the lights begin to fade, the “Man on the Street Interview” begins. It should start before the lights are completely out. Reason: in past productions, when lights faded to black, the audience thought the play was over.

If the scene change between Act II, Scene 3 and Scene 4 is done quickly, a shorter “Man on the Street Interview” may be desired. One is provided in the Appendix.

With regards to Eddie’s Mural, a line drawing sample is included as a guide, after the Appendix. This may be used outright, traced on the wall with the aid of an overhead projector. Or it may be simply used a model to guide your production artist with his/her own rendering.

Acknowledgments

The Last Mass at Saint Casimir's was first presented under its original title, *Lake Effect* by Studio Arena Theatre in Buffalo, New York on November 25, 2001 with the following cast:

DINTY SHANAHAN..... Dane Knell
RUDY Karl Kenzler
GEORGIE Ryan Patrick Bachand
ELLEN Eileen Schuyler
ANNIE..... Babo Harrison
EDDIE Sean Dougherty
AUNT MARGE..... Darleen Pickering Hummert

Lake Effect was directed by Terence Lamude. Scenic design by Douglas Huszti, lighting design by Tom Sturge, costume design by Martha Hally, sound design by Tom Gould, choreography by Lynn Kurdziel-Formato, and the production stage manager was Jessica Berlin.

The Last Mass at Saint Casimir's subsequently had its West Coast Premiere at La Mirada Theatre for the Performing Arts in La Mirada, California on June 1, 2007 with the following cast:

RUDY Marc Valera
GEORGIE James Leo Ryan
ELLEN Robin Pearson Rose
ANNIE..... Erin Bennett
EDDIE Robert Della Cerra

The Last Mass at Saint Casimir's was directed by Glenn Casale. Set design by Gary Wissman, costumes by Judy Jou, lighting by Kent Sheranian, sound by Josh Bessom, and the production stage manager was Gina Farina.

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.

THE LAST MASS AT SAINT CASIMIR'S

by Tom Dudzick

ACT I

Scene 1

(Setting: Buffalo, NY. Late January, 1977.)

(We are in the bar room of "Chet's Bar & Grill", a typical neighborhood watering hole established about 40 years ago by the late Chet Pazinski. For the past eight years it has been owned and operated by his wife, ELLEN, and her husband of seven years, Walter Fronzak. Walter is now deceased and the bar is closed for business.)

("Chet's" is set in the middle of a once thriving inner-city neighborhood. In its hey-day this area boasted Mom & Pop Delicatessens on every other corner, candy stores, hardware stores and homes filled with kids and dogs. Now there are boarded up windows and "for sale" signs. It is a neighborhood fallen prey to that insidious late 20th Century disease known as "shopping mall-itis.")

(The defunct tavern's bar runs up stage left, flanked by bar stools. These stools have seen lots of backsides over the years. They sag and are patched here and there with tape. Behind the bar is the cash register and rows of liquor bottles. On the wall above these hang all sorts of paraphernalia and memorabilia: liquor license, funny hats, framed photos and slogans ["Your language tells what you are."], sports awards [with an emphasis on bowling trophies], first dollar bills earned, lunch menu with prices [beef on weck \$1.35, kielbasa on roll \$1.25] and high over the cash register, "Chet's passes on the profits with draught beer! 15 oz. glass \$.45, 11 oz. glass \$.35." Downstage of the bar is a door to the bar's backroom kitchen.)

(Down Center are tables and chairs. Up Stage are a juke box and a dart board. A door far Stage Right, which we will call the "apartment door", leads to the 2nd floor apartment. When the door is open, steps can clearly be seen.)

(Further Upstage of the apartment door is the "front door" to the tavern with windows on either side of it. "Chet's Bar & Grill" is painted on the glass. Neon spells out names of local brews.)

(Above the juke box is a large expanse of wall that hosts over a dozen framed photos and news articles of local interest, including the ever popular painting, "Dogs Playing Poker.")

(At Rise: We begin in darkness. Out of the black comes thumping disco music circa 1977, accompanied by the voice of a radio disc jockey.)

DISC JOCKEY. Yes, children, the disco beat keeps drummin' and that white stuff keeps on comin'! We've got twenty-two inches of snow out there right now, and Mr. Weatherman tells me there is no relief in sight. So I suggest you stay put, throw another log on the fire, and just keep it tuned to fifteen-twenty, WKBW, where disco will live forever!

(As lights slowly come up on the scene, the disco music fades away and is replaced by the sound of the howling winter wind. It is late afternoon, dark out already, and snow is blowing furiously outside Chet's windows.)

(Now, as the scene becomes fully lit, the sound of the wind fades to nothing and we just see the blowing snow outside.)

(Presently, a young man and woman emerge from the blowing snow and approach the front door. She is hopping painfully on one foot while holding a handkerchief over her nose. He begrudgingly supports her while searching his pocket for a key. He is EDDIE PAZINSKI, 33. She is his sister, ANNIE, 34.)

(We hear them through the door.)

ANNIE. Hurry up!

(He finds key, struggles with lock.)

I'm freezing, open the door!

EDDIE. Whattaya think I'm trying to do?

(The door opens. ANNIE hops into the darkened barroom with great difficulty, wincing with every hop. She supports herself on the wall with one hand while she holds a bloody hankie to her nose with the other.)

ANNIE. Chair, chair!

EDDIE. Willya wait a minute?

(Closes door behind them, flips on a light switch. Some lights come on.)

ANNIE. I think it's broken.

EDDIE. The light? It's workin'.

ANNIE. My nose! And my ankle!

(Checks hankie.)

I'm bleeding like a stuck pig. Please get me a chair.

(He pulls a chair out from a table and holds it for her.)

Help me. I won't make it.

(Rolling his eyes, he lazily moves to her.)

Please, before I fall and break something else.

EDDIE. Fall on your mouth; it's indestructible.

(He supports her arm as she hops to the chair.)

ANNIE. *(Hopping painfully:)* Ooh-oo-ah-ah—!

(Suddenly she stops and listens.)

SHHH! Quiet!

(She listens carefully to the upstairs.)

Is that them?

(He waits, confused.)

Okay.

(Satisfied that all is well, she carefully sits.)

Ow-w-w-w! What do I do? I've never had a double injury before. What do I take care of first, my nose or my ankle?

EDDIE. Neither of them are going anywhere.

ANNIE. This is all your fault, you know.

EDDIE. How is it my fault? You jumped out of the car!

ANNIE. Because you turned it into a death machine!

EDDIE. I'm not even parked and you go leaping through the air.

ANNIE. I couldn't stand being trapped in there one more second with you. You could've got us killed, running lights, running stops signs—

EDDIE. That's the way you drive in this. If there's an opening you plow through. You stop, you're dead. Drive like you, we'd be in a snow bank somewhere.

ANNIE. What do you mean, drive like me?

EDDIE. *(A nervous Nellie clutching the wheel:)* "Oh dear, oh dear...!"

ANNIE. I'd kick you if I had the use of my feet. ...God, it's freezing in here. Did Mom turn the heat off?

EDDIE. *(Works thermostat on wall.)* Sure did. Not very smart. That's how pipes freeze.

ANNIE. Should I take off my boot? What if my ankle swells up and I can't get it back on?

EDDIE. Gotta do it. Gotta elevate it and put ice on it. I'll get Mom.

ANNIE. Don't! *(Whispers:)* SHH! Don't!

EDDIE. You need ice.

ANNIE. We don't want her down here yet. Are you crazy? Just please, get that chair and help me lift my foot.

(He lazily goes to her, draws up a chair and grasps her foot.)

Ow! Gently! It's not a carburetor!

EDDIE. Then you do it!

ANNIE. Just go easy. It's attached.

(He gently places her foot on the chair.)

Thank you.

(She tips her head back.)

(Groan:) My nose! There's gotta be ice down here, it's a bar.

EDDIE. *(Goes behind bar.)* If she turned off the heat, she probably turned off the freezer, too.

(Bends down, checking doors.)

Yep. ...Hey, cooler's working.

(Comes up with a bottle of beer, twists off cap.)

Want one?

ANNIE. No! And you don't either. We're going to need clear heads for this.

EDDIE. One little beer. *(Takes a sip.)*

ANNIE. *(Re: her nose:)* I bet it's broken. I'm going to look like Danny Thomas.

EDDIE. *(Moves to her.)* It's not broken. If it was broken you'd know it.

ANNIE. What do you mean? Maybe I know it. Maybe this is me knowing it. What a stupid thing to say.

EDDIE. Let me see.

(She tentatively removes hankie.)

It's not broken.

ANNIE. My face hurts.

EDDIE. It's killin' me.

(Chuckling at his joke, he moves to back of bar. There, he produces a push-button telephone, places it on the bar and begins dialing.)

ANNIE. *(Checks hankie; bleeding has stopped.)* These blizzards are going to be the death of me.

EDDIE. So, move.

ANNIE. Move, yeah right. As if Bill would ever leave this. He loves it. Makes him feel like Paul Bunyan. Probably out there now, happy as a clam, with his snow blower, Babe the Blue Ox. Doing the neighbors, too. What is it with men?

EDDIE. *(He receives busy signal, hangs up phone.)* Have you tried putting weight on that yet?

ANNIE. I'm afraid to.

EDDIE. Come on, try.

ANNIE. No.

EDDIE. *(Moves.)* I'll get some ice from Mom.

ANNIE. No!

EDDIE. Whattaya gonna just sit there 'til it heals?

ANNIE. I'll sit here until Rudy comes.

EDDIE. He's not coming! How many times I gotta tell you?

ANNIE. SHHH! *(Whispers:)* He'll be here!

EDDIE. How?

ANNIE. When Rudy says he's going to do something, he does it.

EDDIE. They closed the airport. What's he got, a dogsled?

ANNIE. We're not doing this without him. In unity there is strength. He'll find a way here.

EDDIE. *(Returns to phone.)* I'll give him ten more minutes. Then we march upstairs. I march, you hop. *(Dials.)*

ANNIE. Who are you calling?

EDDIE. Home. *(Hangs up.)* Busy.

ANNIE. *(She turns and looks out window.)* Look at it. It just comes and comes and comes. Why did God pick this city to put all the snow in? Why is this part of his plan? What does it all mean?

EDDIE. What are you yammering about?

ANNIE. God's plan. The years I've spent trying to figure it out. I mean, we make a plan, like tonight's. Then God does something like this because he's got a plan. But it affects our plan. So does that mean he wants us to change our plan because he doesn't approve of it?

EDDIE. It snows 'cause we're on a lake.

ANNIE. Who put the lake here? ...Come on, you still go to church. You must think about something in that pew.

EDDIE. How I want my eggs. *(Sips his beer.)*

ANNIE. No thoughts about the Plan?

EDDIE. You mean you really think God works that way? He caused this whole big blizzard just to keep our brother from visiting?

ANNIE. The Lord works in mysterious ways.

EDDIE. Okay, this is good, let me get it straight. There's people out there praying, right? "God, please stop the snow!" And God's goin'...

(As God, speaking through cupped hands:)

No.

(The mere mortal:)

Why not?

(God:)

I don't like the Pazinski's plan.

(The mortal:)

Who are the Pazinski's?

(God:)

They live on the East Side. You don't know 'em.

(The mortal:)

But what about all this snow I've got to shovel now? What about me, Lord?

(God:)

Lift with your legs.

(He dials phone again.)

ANNIE. Okay, fine, there's no plan. Eddie declares, no plan. Everything's just random. No rhyme or reason. Even Georgie.

EDDIE. Georgie?

ANNIE. You've never wondered why we're the ones God sent Georgie to?

EDDIE. When you hit that lamppost, did you hear something rattle?

(Suddenly, with phone:)

Shh! Hi, I've been trying to reach you, how'd it go?

(ANNIE uses a chair as a walker and gets herself to a radiator on the other side of the room. She feels it for heat, then sits on it. Meanwhile, EDDIE receives some disturbing news.)

Oh, no. Oh, you're kidding. Oh, God.

(A growl of frustration.)

What else? *(Si-i-igh!)* Alright, we'll talk to him. I don't know what good it'll do, but— Yeah, I know. Where is he now? Well, get him home, it's getting bad out there. I will, I gotta do this first. No, he never made it. Airport's closed, flights cancelled. Annie and I will handle it. Mom's a level-headed woman, she'll listen to reason.

ANNIE. Ha!

EDDIE. See you soon. I will. Me, too. 'Bye.

(Hangs up.)

Is it part of God's plan that my son become the Milton Berle of Saint Gregory's?

ANNIE. *(Tickled:)* What?

EDDIE. Gary has nabbed the official title of Class Clown of the Third Grade.

(ANNIE laughs.)

Oh, it's real funny. Real comical that Maureen got called in to the Mother Superior's office.

(ANNIE can't suppress her laughter.)

Laugh it up. I hope Rudy does show up today, I'll flatten him. Gary keeps taking this junk to school that Rudy sends him in the mail. Fake throw-up. Fake dog turds.

(ANNIE pulls her coat over her face to muffle her laughter.)

Squirting camera—shut up! ...I could take the stuff away but he'll just find some other way to get laughs. Then he mouths off during religion class. "Why does God want us to memorize this? God really keeps track of every little sin? Is that all he's got to do?" The problem is the nuns can't hit them anymore, that's the problem. All their rulers have been revoked. What is so damned funny?

ANNIE. He's just like his Uncle Rudy!

EDDIE. And that's part of the Big Plan, is it? That my son gets Rudy's traits instead of mine?

ANNIE. He could get worse traits.

EDDIE. Yeah, yours. He could be the class nervous nut.

ANNIE. Poor little Gary. Isn't going to get a dodgeball trophy like his Dad.

EDDIE. I didn't get a dodge—

(EDDIE stops short when the apartment door suddenly opens and GEORGIE PAZINSKI enters. GEORGIE is 31 and has been mentally retarded since birth. He is generally good natured and cheerful, communicating with noises, grunts and pointing. We'll discover that he tends to become lost in his own thoughts at times, putting himself miles away from the action.)

(He's wearing a policeman's hat and is carrying a G.I. Joe doll. He's shoeless and his socks don't match.)

(As EDDIE and ANNIE speak to GEORGIE, they are on the alert for any unusual behavior.)

GEORGIE. *(With a smile:)* Hey!

ANNIE. Hey, Georgie.

EDDIE. Hi, Georgie.

GEORGIE. *(Takes ANNIE's hand and shakes it vigorously.)* Hiya-hiya-hiya!

ANNIE. Okay, easy, Tiger. Watcha got there?

GEORGIE. *(Ignores the question, goes to EDDIE, shakes his hand the same way.)* Hiya-hiya-hiya!

EDDIE. Officer Georgie. Got a G.I. Joe, huh?

GEORGIE. *(Pointing upstairs:)* Mama.

EDDIE. Mama's upstairs?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

ANNIE. Hey, wait, is Rudy upstairs?

GEORGIE. Ruggy!

ANNIE. Upstairs?

GEORGIE. Nahhh—

EDDIE. Where's your shoes? It's cold down here.

GEORGIE. *(Points to the blowing snow.)* Hoo-hoo!

EDDIE. Yeah, pretty bad, huh?

GEORGIE. Da-Kween!

ANNIE. Dairy Queen? A little cold for Dairy Queen.

GEORGIE. *(Goes to front door as if to open it and leave.)* 'Bye! Da-Kween!

EDDIE. Hold on, big fella!

ANNIE. Georgie!

GEORGIE. *(Delighted his joke paid off:)* Ha ha ha—!

ANNIE. Very funny.

GEORGIE. *(And if they laughed once...)* Da-Kween! *(Starts to open door.)*

EDDIE. Alright, alright, funny guy...

(Giggling, GEORGIE moves to center of room.)

Leave the jokes to Rudy, huh?

GEORGIE. Ruggy!

EDDIE. No. No Rudy today.

ANNIE. Not this time, hon'. Too much snow.

GEORGIE. Nnn... *(Heads for back room door.)*

EDDIE. Where y' goin', Georgie?

GEORGIE. 'Tay chip.

EDDIE. Potato chips?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

EDDIE. Not too many.

ANNIE. Don't spoil your appetite for dinner. Spaghetti, Georgie.

(But GEORGIE is gone already, into the backroom. Alone now, EDDIE and ANNIE exchange a look. She shakes her head sadly.)

(Now a figure appears at the front door, carrying a duffel bag over his shoulder.)

(It is RUDY PAZINSKI, a friendly looking man of 30. He strides in and puts down his bag.)

RUDY. A shot n' a beer, bartender! With a beef on weck, don't be shy with the horseradish!

ANNIE & EDDIE. SHHH!

ANNIE. *(She wriggles in excitement and holds out her arms for a hug.)* C'mere, c'mere, c'mere—! *(To EDDIE:)* See, I told you!

(Deadpan, EDDIE twirls his finger, yippee-style.)

RUDY. *(Moving to ANNIE:)* Why are we whispering? Is this a holdup in progress?

ANNIE. *(Reaches up and hugs him.)* I knew you'd make it.

RUDY. You greet me with blood? What happened?

EDDIE. It was God's plan that I deck her.

ANNIE. I had an accident.

EDDIE. A lamppost jumped out in front of her.

ANNIE. And I think my ankle's broken.

EDDIE. If it was broken you'd know it.

ANNIE. How do you know I don't know it?

EDDIE. (*Mocking her:*) SHHH!

RUDY. (*Re: their bickering:*) I see things haven't changed.

(Looks around.)

And neither has this. What's going on? You told me we were selling.

ANNIE. We are selling; it's sold.

RUDY. So, where's the bare walls and the packing crates?

ANNIE. She sold it "as is."

RUDY. As is?

ANNIE. That's the way the new people wanted it.

EDDIE. You think Mom wants to take this junk to her new apartment?

RUDY. Yeah, but I already said a very emotional mental goodbye to this junk. I gotta do it all over again? These goodbyes are killing me. Last year, Winkler's Groceries. Year before that, Benny Miller's candy store. Each one a little piece of my heart.

ANNIE. We didn't think you'd make it. They closed the airport.

RUDY. Did they? We didn't use it. We touched down in Syracuse and skid the rest of the way. Stopped in a snow bank on Bailey Avenue.

(Goes to bar stools.)

Let's see if the ol' bar stools still work. Four revolutions was my highest score.

(He pulls out a bar stool and sits on it.)

I used to sit right here. With pretzels and Squirt, telling jokes to the customers until Dad chased me upstairs. Nanuk of the North sat right next to me.

(He spins himself; barely makes it around once.)

Pathetic.

(Goes to window, looks at snow.)

Well, this doesn't change. Y'know, I saw a cop standing in a snow bank out there, buried up to here.

(His chest.)

I said, "I sure feel sorry for you." He said, "Don't feel sorry for me, pal, feel sorry for my horse."

(ANNIE giggles. EDDIE doesn't. He walks over to EDDIE.)

Hey, that was a good joke. Johnny Carson told it last night. A joke about your personal snow. You're famous now. So, how ya' doin'? How's the cartooning business?

EDDIE. Illustration.

RUDY. That's right, I always get them mixed up. Illustration, that's cartoons without the humor, right?

EDDIE. Quit sending novelty items to my son.

RUDY. He doesn't like them?

EDDIE. They're not good for his development.

RUDY. An all-American whoopee cushion not good for an 8-year-old's development?

EDDIE. That's right.

RUDY. I've got something for him in my bag; you mean I can't give it to him?

EDDIE. Not unless it's constructive.

RUDY. If a stink-bomb kit isn't constructive, then I don't know what is.

(EDDIE stares at him. RUDY shrugs.)

Try to be a good uncle.

(He moves to juke box, sees pictures on wall.)

Well, nobody's getting these. I want 'em all.

EDDIE. Not so fast. I want Dad in his baseball uniform.

ANNIE. I want Mom and Walter on their honeymoon. We can divide them up after Sunday mass.

RUDY. So, they're really going to go through with it. Tear down an entire church and a school.

EDDIE. If the neighborhood can't support them...

RUDY. Such a waste! They could turn them into profitable museums. The Catholic version of Madame Tussaud's torture chamber. ...How's Mom taking it?

ANNIE. To her it's God's personal nudge to move on.

EDDIE. Now that she found a buyer she can't wait to get out.

RUDY. Who bought it?

EDDIE. A Vietnamese family.

RUDY. A who?

EDDIE. A Vietnamese family.

ANNIE. It's going to be a Vietnamese restaurant.

RUDY. You're kidding.

EDDIE. Is there a problem?

RUDY. We can't get regular people to come in here, we're going to get Vietnamese people?

ANNIE. No, we're going to get people who like Vietnamese food. They want to give it a try. I think they're very brave.

RUDY. There'd better be Vietnamese kielbasa on the menu. *(To EDDIE:)* How are you going to feel about this? You were shooting at them a few years ago.

(EDDIE shakes his head hopelessly.)

ANNIE. What has New York done, turned you into a racist?

RUDY. No, I just— *(Sigh.)* I guess I just don't want anybody in here. Up there. Sitting in our kitchen. Waiting for their father to come upstairs in a bad mood. *(To ANNIE:)* Hiding junk food in their underwear drawer. *(To EDDIE:)* Dirty magazines under their mattress. Is Mom's new place nice?

ANNIE. I'd retire there now if I could.

EDDIE. Tennis courts, trees...

ANNIE. A widower every two feet. She'll have husband number three in a year.

RUDY. That's Mama.

ANNIE. And she'll be down here any minute looking for Georgie, so come on, sit. Over here, you're hurting my neck.

(RUDY sits. ANNIE digs in her pocket for a folded letter.)

EDDIE. How much does he know?

RUDY. I know about the memory problem.

ANNIE. There's more now. Mom took him to Dr. Filsinger. Here.

(She hands RUDY a letter. He reads.)

RUDY. "...Senile Dementia"?

EDDIE. Senility.

RUDY. At thirty?

EDDIE. Thirty-one.

ANNIE. The doctor said sometimes with people like Georgie it comes on early. Then once it hits it accelerates. What scares me is, it reminds me of Uncle Belmont.

RUDY. We have one?

ANNIE. *(Stares.)* Mom's Uncle Belmont? He got sick? Jeez—!

EDDIE. That is so you. You don't know Uncle Belmont but you know things like the name of Tonto's horse.

RUDY. Because that's important.

EDDIE. More important than Mom's uncle?

RUDY. To Tonto.

EDDIE. God—!

RUDY. Alright, I was absent the day it was announced that Mom had an Uncle Belmont. Shoot me.

ANNIE. Alright, alright...

(Suddenly GEORGIE enters from the backroom with a bag of potato chips.)

ANNIE. *(Quietly:)* Oh my God, I forgot all about him! He could've blown up the building!

EDDIE. We don't keep dynamite.

GEORGIE. *(Gasp!)* Ruggy!

RUDY. There he is! The man of the hour!

GEORGIE. Ruggy! Ha ha ha—!

(Runs to RUDY.)

Ruggy-luggy!

RUDY. Georgie-peorgie!

GEORGIE. *(Grabs RUDY's hand and shakes it vigorously.)* Hiya-hiya-hiya!

RUDY. Hiya-hiya! How ya' doin', pal? You look good. Y'feel good?

GEORGIE. Yeah.

RUDY. Everything okay?

GEORGIE. Yeah.

RUDY. How are the ol' memory cells?

(Mock dramatics.)

What's my name?

GEORGIE. *(Matches his tone:)* Roo-gee!

RUDY. Good! (*Points to spot on Georgie's shirt.*) And what's this?

(*GEORGIE looks down and RUDY flicks his nose.*)

Ha!

GEORGIE. (*Laughs, shows him G.I. Joe.*) Hey!

RUDY. Hey, nice. Looks like Eddie when he was in the army. Lotta rain over there in Nam. He shrunk.

GEORGIE. (*Remembers something:*) Oh-oh-oh—!

RUDY. What?

GEORGIE. (*Plops down onto a bar stool on his belly, arms spread in front of him. He is Superman, complete with flying sound effects:*) Shhhh-shhhh—!

RUDY. (*Falls into an old routine:*) Look, up in the sky! It's a bird, it's a plane, it's Georgie-Man! Yes, it's Georgie-Man—

(*GEORGIE stands up and takes the heroic Superman pose from the old TV show, fists on his hips.*)

—strange visitor from another parish who came to St. Casimir's with powers and abilities far beyond those of mortal Catholics...

ANNIE. (*Through this, to EDDIE:*) Take him in the other room.

RUDY. (*Continuing:*) Georgie-Man, who can change the course of holy water...

EDDIE. (*Takes GEORGIE's arm.*) Come on, Georgie-Man, here we go.

RUDY. ...bend holy cards in his bare hands...

(*GEORGIE holds his heroic pose as EDDIE pulls him into the backroom.*)

And who, disguised as George Pazinski (mild-mannered altar boy on Sister Clarissa's payroll), fights a never-ending battle for—

(*And GEORGIE disappears, laughing, into the backroom with EDDIE. RUDY turns to ANNIE.*)

Nothin' wrong with his memory!

ANNIE. Those are the old routines. Don't be fooled.

RUDY. I see. ...Well, okay, you got me here. What's this big family decision?

ANNIE. It's been made.

RUDY. Made? I flew through the storm of the decade? Risked my life? Ate airline food?

ANNIE. I'm sorry, but things have been happening really fast. Sit down. Jeez, it's hot in here.

(RUDY sits. She hands him her coat.)

Here, would you put this under my foot? Gentle.

(He gently lifts her foot and slides her coat under it.)

There, see? You know how to handle a foot.

RUDY. Everyone tells me that. *(Sits.)*

ANNIE. Okay. Dr. Filsinger gave us an idea of the kind of behavior we can expect from Georgie in the next couple months. It doesn't look pretty. *(A nervous glance to upstairs.)* And this retirement place of Mom's, this community. They've allowed her to take Georgie with her. I guess she sweet talked them. But... *(She shakes her fists in frustration.)* ...she can't! She can't! How can she watch him every minute? How can she give him the kind of care he's going to need?

(Suddenly a woman's voice from upstairs.)

ELLEN. *(Off:)* Georgie!

ANNIE. Shit! I'm gonna have a nervous breakdown!

(She snatches the doctor's letter from RUDY and jams it in her pocket.)

(RUDY jumps up, grabs his coat and runs for the door.)

ELLEN. *(Off:)* Georgie, are you down here?

RUDY. *(Slipping on his coat. Whispers:)* I'm not here yet! *(Drags his duffel bag to the front door.)*

ANNIE. She won't listen to anything we say! She goes on like everything's fine! She thinks she's still thirty-five years old with all this energy! What are you doing?

RUDY. SHHH!

(RUDY silently shuts the tavern door behind him and ducks out of sight in the storm just as ELLEN, early 60s, enters from the upstairs apartment. In an instant, ANNIE snatches her bloody hankie, applies it to her nose and tilts her head back.)

ELLEN. Georgie! *(Sees ANNIE.)* What on earth—?

ANNIE. *(The poor little thing!)* Hi, Mom...

ELLEN. What happened to you?

ANNIE. Well...sort of an accident. You know the way Eddie drives.

ELLEN. Eddie had an accident?

ANNIE. Er, not exactly. But in a way. I mean, there was an accident. My ankle really hurts, Mom, do you have any ice?

ELLEN. *(Goes to her.)* Look at the blood. What happened, did you hit the dashboard? Let's get this boot off. *(Starts removing boot.)*

ANNIE. Careful.

ELLEN. Is Eddie alright? Where is he?

ANNIE. He's in the back with Georgie. Sure, he's alright. I'm the one who gets it, naturally.

ELLEN. Tell me what happened? You hit something?

ANNIE. A lamppost.

ELLEN. He hit a lamppost?

ANNIE. No, I did.

ELLEN. You came in separate cars?

ANNIE. No, the one car. Eddie was driving really recklessly. I mean really recklessly.

(The story is losing steam.)

And then I...got out and...hurt my ankle, and...fell into this lamp-post.

ELLEN. *(Staring at her:)* So there was no accident.

ANNIE. There most certainly was!

ELLEN. You said you got out of the—

ANNIE. If it wasn't on purpose, what else would you call it? An accident!

ELLEN. *(Shaking her head wearily, she removes the boot and looks at ANNIE's ankle:)* Put your weight on it.

ANNIE. What?

ELLEN. Stand up and put your weight on it.

ANNIE. *(Gets up and tests the foot. No pain.)* Oh. ...I guess it's okay.

ELLEN. Your nose stopped.

ANNIE. *(Disheartened, she looks at the dried hankie.)* Well, it was still Eddie's fault!

ELLEN. Honestly.

ANNIE. If you had been there! He ran fifty red lights.

ELLEN. Annie, Annie...

ANNIE. Could've gotten us killed in eighty different ways.

ELLEN. But he didn't.

ANNIE. But he could have! He went down the Fillmore Avenue hill sideways!

ELLEN. The way you blow things up.

ANNIE. And once again, believe him and not me. I'm the one standing here with the bloody—

ELLEN. Rudy!

(She has seen RUDY standing outside the door, playfully waving to her through the glass.)

RUDY. *(He steps in and takes a he-man stance.)* Tavern wench! I'm Klondike Clem and I've got me a he-man hankerin' for a watercress sandwich and a Fresca!

(Fakes a manly "spit.")

ELLEN. *(Laughing:)* You're a lunatic, get in here!

RUDY. Mamasita! *(Hugs ELLEN.)* Ahaaa, hello, Mom! Mmmmm—!

ELLEN. Hello, yourself! Oh, hey, you lost weight.

RUDY. A mother's arms know all. Even through a winter coat.

ELLEN. I was afraid you wouldn't make it. They closed the airport.

RUDY. We were the last plane in, you lucky woman. Well, Annie, dear sister-oh-mine! How nice to see you standing.

(A confused beat.)

And why shouldn't you be standing, you've got two strong ankles—legs. Hello! *(Hugs ANNIE.)*

ANNIE. *(Sullen, still brooding from her conversation with ELLEN:)* Hi there.

ELLEN. I think you can do better than that.

ANNIE. *(Mock joyful:)* HI THERE!

(It's an awkward moment.)

RUDY. ...Boy, am I hungry.

ELLEN. Tough. There's nothing in the house. Tomorrow's my shopping day.

ANNIE. I thought we were going to Chef's Restaurant.

ELLEN. I'm not driving in this.

ANNIE. I'll drive.

ELLEN. That's okay, I'll drive.

(A beat, then she nudges RUDY and they both stifle a laugh.)

ANNIE. Hey, what's wrong with my driving?

ELLEN. Nothing, sweetie, I'm teasing. You're more suited to summer driving, that's all.

ANNIE. Boy, total one car and they never let you forget it.

ELLEN. *(To RUDY:)* The beard's gone. Thank goodness.

RUDY. You had a beard?

(Strokes his chin.)

Oh, that, yeah.

ELLEN. Yeah, that.

ANNIE. We can tell you now. Can we tell him now? We can tell you now. We hated the beard.

RUDY. You told me then.

ANNIE. Well, we hated it.

RUDY. Thanks for the update.

(EDDIE enters from the backroom.)

ELLEN. Where's Georgie?

EDDIE. He's coming.

ANNIE. Eddie, look who just walked in through that door, just this minute, and surprised Mom!

EDDIE. Who? Oh, hey! It's my brother from New York who just arrived. You must have landed in Syracuse and slid here.

RUDY. Skid, not slid. One word can kill a joke.

(Now GEORGIE enters.)

ELLEN. There you are.

GEORGIE. *(With bag of chips:)* 'Tay chip.

(Sees RUDY, as if for the first time in ages!)

(Gasp!) Ruggy!

ELLEN. Here we go.

GEORGIE. *(Runs to RUDY:)* Ruggy-luggy!

RUDY. (*Confused by Georgie's behavior:*) Uh...hi there!

GEORGIE. (*Shakes hands vigorously.*) Hiya-hiya-hiya!

RUDY. Long time no see.

GEORGIE. Hey! (*Shows him the G.I. Joe.*)

RUDY. Yeah, nice. A shrunken Ed.

GEORGIE. Oh! Oh-oh-oh—!

(He starts to lay on the barstool, clearly to play Superman again.)

Shhh-shhh—!

EDDIE. (*Stops him.*) Okay, Georgie-Man. Come in for a landing.

RUDY. (*To ELLEN:*) He sure is glad to see me.

(Gives a perplexed look to ANNIE.)

GEORGIE. (*Shakes RUDY's hand again.*) Hiya-hiya-hiya!

ELLEN. Alright, calm down there, Mister. Get yourself a pop or something. Eddie, fix him up.

GEORGIE. Co-Cola! (*Jumps onto bar stool.*)

EDDIE. Comin' up. (*Goes behind bar.*)

ELLEN. (*To RUDY:*) So, come on, y'big New Yorker, haven't you got any news to tell?

ANNIE. Yeah, what's new in the writing world?

ELLEN. How's your new boss?

RUDY. New boss?

ANNIE. Alan King. What's he like?

EDDIE. Does he still stand with his thumbs in his pockets? I remember him on the old Gary Moore Show, always stood like this, with his thumbs in his vest pockets.

ANNIE. Yeah, he did that, I remember.

EDDIE. (*Stands, thumbs in his "vest pockets."*) "And the airline sent me to Chicago and my tuxedo to Hawaii."

ANNIE. *(To RUDY:)* Watch him, see if he does it.

EDDIE. Take a picture.

ANNIE. Yeah, oh, you know what'd be funny? Tell him you've got this crazy family back home and they want a picture of his thumbs.

RUDY. *(A beat, turns to ELLEN.)* What did you tell them?

ELLEN. About what?

RUDY. About Alan King.

ELLEN. That you work with Alan King.

RUDY. Since when?

ELLEN. Since you said so.

RUDY. When?

ELLEN. In that letter. You said you met Alan King.

RUDY. Met.

ELLEN. I mean you met with him, you had a meeting.

RUDY. A meeting.

ELLEN. And that was it?

ANNIE. You don't work for him anymore?

RUDY. I never worked for him.

ANNIE. *(To ELLEN:)* Wait, you said—

RUDY. He was interviewing new writers for a project and I didn't get it. End of meeting, end of story.

ANNIE. Awww...

RUDY. *(To ELLEN:)* You had to say working?

ELLEN. Okay, I made a mistake.

RUDY. Great! Who else did you tell?

ELLEN. Nobody! What are you getting excited for?

RUDY. I'm not getting—! *(Sigh!)*

(An awkward moment.)

ELLEN. Well, okay, that's good. You met him, that's the main thing. That's how these things start. Connections.

ANNIE. So where are you working? Are you still at the Parking Violations Bureau?

RUDY. *(Overlapping:)* Yes, I'm still at the Parking Violations Bureau.

ELLEN. Nothing wrong with that. There's dignity in all work.

(A beat.)

Though I still don't understand why you had to go all the way to New York to work in a Parking Violations Bureau when we've got a perfectly good one right here in—

RUDY. Could we not go through this again?

EDDIE. *(Sings quietly:)* There's no business like the Parking Violations Bureau, like no business I—

(RUDY stares. EDDIE stops.)

ANNIE. *(A pause.)* Okay, so how are things at the old Parking Violations—

RUDY. I'd rather not talk about the Parking Violations Bureau right now, if that's okay. However, if you want some news that's really news, I do have some of that.

ELLEN. Anything!

ANNIE. Fire away.

RUDY. *(A pause.)* I'm getting married.

ELLEN. Oh, Christ.

(An awkward moment.)

ANNIE. To who?

RUDY. A woman.

EDDIE. *(More to himself:)* Just lost my bet.

ANNIE. Not the cellist.

RUDY. And why not the cellist? Who happens to have a name and it's Julia?

ANNIE. Well, no, I didn't mean not the cellist. I meant—the cellist?

RUDY. I see.

ELLEN. So, it is the cellist.

RUDY. Yes, it's the cellist, Julia the cellist. Who is not only going to be my bride, but if all goes well, will soon be cello-ing with the New York Philharmonic. (*Checking wristwatch:*) She has her fourth and final audition any minute now.

(The others share concerned glances.)

And, um, Julia's going to enjoy it all while she still can, 'cause pretty soon she won't even be able to, uh—reach the cello, 'cause—this protuberance is going to slowly come between her and Beethoven, and—unless she does some arm stretching exercises—heh-heh...

(An awkward moment.)

EDDIE. I'll say it. (*To RUDY:*) A baby?

RUDY. Not a viola.

ELLEN. When?

RUDY. July. ...So, you can all relax. I'm going to make an honest woman out of her after all. No more "living in sin," as the charming expression goes. Yes, I can hear your collective sigh of relief. And the love and the support and the wishes for a happy life, it's a little overwhelming. Could you hold it down?

ANNIE. (*Awkwardly:*) Congratulations.

RUDY. Thank you.

(EDDIE lazily goes to bar and gets a couple beers.)

ELLEN. I don't understand.

RUDY. Which part? What can I straighten out for you?

ELLEN. Do her parents know?

RUDY. That we're getting married? Yes.

ELLEN. No. That you're Catholic.

RUDY. I'm not Catholic.

ELLEN. That you were Catholic. That you're Christian.

RUDY. Funny, I don't even think of myself as Chris—

ELLEN. That you're not Jewish!

RUDY. Yes, we told them.

ANNIE. How do they like it?

RUDY. We should know any day now.

ANNIE. They didn't say?

RUDY. They're still crying. ...But the wedding's next month at City Hall. If anyone wants to come down and see us get hitched we'd sure love to have you.

ELLEN. Is she going to wear white?

RUDY. No, red. With a feather boa. Okay, that's my news. Thanks for your kind attention, you can go back about your business. Sure wish I was a drinkin' man.

(EDDIE hands him a beer.)

Thanks.

EDDIE. *La chaim.*

ELLEN. *(Getting up:)* Annie, come upstairs with me.

RUDY. Going to light candles for me up there?

ELLEN. We're going to scrape something together for dinner.

EDDIE. There's an appetizing word. "Scrape."

RUDY. I thought we were going to Chef's.

ELLEN. I doubt if they're even open.

ANNIE. (*Goes to window.*) Well, gee, if it's that bad maybe we'd better skip dinner. I can't afford to get stuck here all night. Katie's birthday party is tomorrow and I've got a million things to do.

RUDY. (*With meaning:*) But what about our talk?

ELLEN. What talk?

RUDY. Er, we were going to have a family talk.

ELLEN. About what?

RUDY. Oh, just, y'know, reminiscing.

ANNIE. We can do that on Sunday, after mass. Eddie, can you take me home?

EDDIE. Me? I'm a terrible driver!

ANNIE. Eddie!

EDDIE. I'm a suicidal maniac! I got my license in a Cracker Jack Box.

ANNIE. Oh, shut up!

GEORGIE. NO!

(They all stop. GEORGIE stands up and with sudden rage he flings his bag of potato chips to the floor.)

NO!

(The others watch, stunned, as GEORGIE proceeds to stomp on the potato chips.)

NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO! NO!

(GEORGIE stops. The others stare at him, breathless. RUDY, who's closest, tentatively reaches out his hand.)

RUDY. Georgie—?

GEORGIE. (*Just as suddenly:*) (*Gasp!*) Ruggy!

(Hugs RUDY.)

Ruggy-luggy!

RUDY. (*Stunned:*) H-hi pal, how ya' doin'?

GEORGIE. *(Pumps his hand.)* Hiya-hiya-hiya!

RUDY. G-good to see you again.

GEORGIE. *(Shows him the G.I. Joe.)* Hey!

RUDY. ...Yeah.

(ANNIE and EDDIE watch this with dread fascination.)

GEORGIE. Oh-oh-oh—!

(Turns to the bar stools, ready to become Superman again.)

Shhhhhhh—!

RUDY. *(Stops him.)* That's okay, that's okay.

GEORGIE. *(Discovers his Coke bottle.)* Hey! Co-Cola!

ELLEN. That's enough Co-Cola for you. All that sugar, it gets you wound up. You need a nap. Come on. *(Takes GEORGIE by the arm.)*

GEORGIE. Pop!

ELLEN. *(Taking him to apartment door:)* I'll pop you. Messing up my nice floor. Annie, get a broom. Come on, Georgie-Man, time to calm you down.

(The others watch, breathless, as ELLEN and GEORGIE exit up the stairs. Finally, RUDY turns to them.)

RUDY. What was that?

ANNIE. That was Uncle Belmont.

RUDY. Will somebody please tell me who—

ANNIE. He was Mom's uncle. He got like that towards the end. Aunt Marge used to tell me the stories.

RUDY. Just because they're related doesn't mean—

ANNIE. It doesn't help. And what you saw there is only going to get worse.

RUDY. *(Sits.)* Well...so...there's things we can do, right?

ANNIE. We're looking into medication, but...no, not really.

RUDY. Oh, God.

ANNIE. I'm sorry.

(ANNIE squeezes his shoulder.)

Eddie, come on. I can't take much more of this tonight. Drive me home, alright? I take it back, you're the world's best driver.

EDDIE. *(Looking out window:)* I don't know. I'd better shovel Mom out first.

ANNIE. Not now, come on. I don't want to get stuck here.

EDDIE. I don't want Mom to get stuck here. I'll just do enough so she can get to the store.

ANNIE. You can come back and do it.

EDDIE. I may not be able to get back.

ANNIE. He can do it.

(RUDY makes a muscle.)

EDDIE. *(Off Rudy's muscle:)* Where's the shovel?

ANNIE. Eddie!

EDDIE. I'll call Maureen first; tell her not to expect me. *(Dials phone.)*

ANNIE. No, lemme call a cab! Gimme that!

EDDIE. I'll just be a minute!

ANNIE. Eddie!

EDDIE. *(Re: the phone:)* Hey...

(Taps buttons, listens to receiver.)

What's the matter?

(Taps buttons, listens.)

It's dead.

ANNIE. What?!

(ELLEN quietly re-enters.)

EDDIE. There's no dial tone.

ANNIE. (*Grabs receiver from EDDIE, taps buttons like mad, hears nothing.*) What did you do to it?

EDDIE. Me? Right, I broke it with my thought waves.

ELLEN. (*Calmly:*) My phone's out, too. Must be the storm.

ANNIE. Oh, no. Uh-uh. I gotta get out of here! (*Keeps tapping.*) I need a cab! Operator, operator!

EDDIE. That doesn't even work in movies.

ANNIE. (*Runs for her coat.*) Eddie, drive me home before it gets worse out there.

ELLEN. You're not going home.

ANNIE. My little girl needs me. Don't try and stop me.

ELLEN. I won't stop you, but the mayor will.

(Everyone stops.)

ANNIE. Who?

ELLEN. His honor. It was just on the radio. He put a ban on driving.

ANNIE. A what?

ELLEN. A ban. No one's allowed to drive until this thing blows over. Them's his orders. They're handing out tickets. Fifty bucks a pop.

(A stunned silence.)

ANNIE. That big—dumb—Polack! A ban for this? This is nothing! I walked to school in worse than this! In my Mary Janes!

ELLEN. But you can't drive in it, Mary Jane, so come upstairs and eat.

ANNIE. (*At tavern door:*) Eddie, let's go!

EDDIE. Fifty bucks? I'll sit this one out!

ANNIE. Eddie!

EDDIE. Relax, have a beer.

(ANNIE turns and yanks open the door as if to escape. But as the snow blows in she realizes the futility of it and slams the door.)

ANNIE. Why can't we live in a normal city!?

ELLEN. *(Exits up the stairs, singing:)* And since we've no place to go, let it snow, let it snow, let it snow!

(Blackout.)

Scene 2

(Lights come up on GEORGIE sitting alone in the tavern playing with two G.I. Joe dolls at one of the tables. He wears an army private's cap.)

(It is later that night. Still snowing. Presently ELLEN enters through the side door.)

ELLEN. *(Anxious. But when she sees GEORGIE she breathes a sigh of relief:)* Georgie. You have to let me know where you're going. Remember?

GEORGIE. *(Keeps playing:)* Nnn.

ELLEN. Tell me. Don't just sneak off. Now, come on. Pajama time.

GEORGIE. Nnn.

ELLEN. Come on, bring your friends.

(She gently takes his arm. He stands up.)

Here we go. Almost time for the Waltons, hon'.

(GEORGIE leaves the table and we clearly see a big dark stain on his pants. He's wet himself.)

...Georgie!

GEORGIE. Nnn.

ELLEN. What did you do?

GEORGIE. *(First time he's noticed:)* He-e-e-ey...!

(Laughs.)

Pee-pee!

ELLEN. Did you forget to go?

(GEORGIE chuckles and shrugs his shoulders.)

Are you alright?

GEORGIE. Nnn.

ELLEN. *(Sees the wet chair.)* Oh, look at this now. Alright, just, er— Okay, stay here, sweetie. Give Mommy a minute. *(Moves quickly to the bar and grabs a damp rag.)*

It just happened, huh, Georgie? You forgot to get up? Like at night sometimes, huh? Okay, that's alright.

(GEORGIE waits patiently in his wet pants as she wipes chair and floor with the rag.)

Know what we can do? If this happens again? We can get you a whole new kind of underwear. They make it for just these special occasions. Grandpa used to wear it. How would that be?

GEORGIE. *(Aims his G.I. Joe and has it "pee" all over the room.)* Psss-ssss! *(Laughs.)*

ELLEN. *(Finishing up, throwing rag in waste pail behind bar:)* Okay, all taken care of. Just leave everything to Mommy, sweetie. Everything's okay. Now, let's go clean you up, huh? And you don't have to tell anyone. This is our secret.

(Points him to the door.)

Come on.

GEORGIE. *(At the door he turns and takes a parting shot at the room with his G.I. Joe.)* Psss-ssss!

ELLEN. Alright, alright—

(They exit.)

(Now EDDIE appears outside the front door. An exhausted ANNIE is right behind. They both carry snow shovels. EDDIE opens the door and they enter.)

ANNIE. Swinging tabernacle door, it's cold! (*Quickly shuts door behind them.*)

Oh, my back! *Agh-h-h!* Why are we shoveling? Where's Rudy?

EDDIE. Upstairs hiding under the sink, no doubt.

ANNIE. Why can't we hire little kids to shovel?

EDDIE. You see any little kids out there?

ANNIE. There could be hundreds out there, tunneling, we'd never know! You wouldn't hire them anyway. Just like Bill, you like doing this. It's a sickness. My toes are numb.

EDDIE. My sickness is going to keep us from being buried alive. You're welcome.

ANNIE. I can't feel my toes.

EDDIE. Stamp your feet.

ANNIE. (*Does so with painful results.*) Ow!

EDDIE. Feel 'em now?

ANNIE. (*With her aching toes she goes to the phone, picks up receiver and checks for a dial tone. She hears nothing and hangs up.*) I don't know what's so great about the Great Lakes. What did our ancestors have against Florida? I'm starving. Have you seen the fridge upstairs? It's like Mother Hubbard's.

EDDIE. Mother Hubbard didn't have a fridge. She had a cupboard. If she had a fridge her name would be Mother Hidge.

ANNIE. (*Opening drawers:*) Aren't there any beer nuts around?

EDDIE. Old Mother Hidge went to the fridge.

ANNIE. Alright!

(The apartment door opens and RUDY enters carrying notebooks, manuscripts, pencils, pens and a cup of coffee.)

EDDIE. (*Snaps:*) Have you ever once picked up a snow shovel?

RUDY. (*He picks up a nearby shovel and sets it back down.*) Yes.

EDDIE. How do you always get out of doing chores?

ANNIE. Because he's the youngest. He waited until all the household duties were assigned to us, then he was born.

RUDY. I didn't know you were shoveling.

EDDIE. We weren't working on our tans!

RUDY. You should have told me, I would have helped.

EDDIE. We shouldn't have to tell you!

ANNIE. I hope Mom didn't pack the heating pad.

(With her aching back she moves to apartment door.)

I need dessert. Something to make me forget that dinner. Creamed corn and Maypo.

(She exits up the stairs.)

EDDIE. *(Following ANNIE:)* I'll be too busy for dessert. I'll be fixing that storm window in the front room that's coming off. Since I'm the only male in the house who knows which end of a screwdriver to hold.

(RUDY quickly moves to the pictures over the jukebox.)

RUDY. Eddie—!

(At the door, EDDIE stops and looks. RUDY swings the picture of "Dogs Playing Poker" off to the side and reveals a cartoon of a naked woman painted on the wall.)

Debbie Ronski! *(Sing-songy:)* I'm tellin'!

(Examines cartoon.)

Got to admit, you had talent!

(EDDIE considers a reply, but then shakes his head hopelessly and exits up the stairs. Chuckling, RUDY resets the Dog picture and takes his things to a table. He sits and lays out his notebooks in a very particular order. He opens a typed manuscript, then opens a notebook to a fresh white page. He picks up a pen—and begins.)

(Now ELLEN enters with a laundry basket of clothes.)

ELLEN. Ah, good, you finally found a quiet place to work.

RUDY. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. *(As she passes behind him:)* That part still bugging you?

RUDY. It's okay.

ELLEN. *(Sets her basket down on the bar.)* Maybe I didn't give it a fair chance. Let me see it again.

RUDY. Mom, Mom, it's okay.

ELLEN. *(Going to his papers:)* I probably read it wrong, I'm not a writer.

RUDY. Really, it doesn't matter.

ELLEN. Here. Here it is.

RUDY. Mom—

ELLEN. I want to be fair. Shh!

(RUDY rolls his eyes to heaven as ELLEN picks up a page and reads.)

“Marco, how can I ever trust you again? And if I can't trust you, how can I trust anyone? Or for that matter, myself?” *(Ponders it.)* That's quite a mouthful.

RUDY. *(Takes page back.)* Okey-dokey, thank you.

ELLEN. *(Takes laundry to backroom.)* I don't understand why she doesn't just say, “Get out!”

RUDY. She can't just say, “Get out!”

ELLEN. Why not? People say it all the time.

RUDY. Because I want her to express— She's confused and she has to convey— Because she didn't think of it!

ELLEN. You're the writer. Make her think of it.

(She exits into backroom.)

(Glumly, RUDY ponders this idea. He looks at the typewritten page. He crosses out something and writes.)

RUDY. *(Writing:)* “Get out!”

(ELLEN returns empty handed.)

ELLEN. *(Playfully, as she tip-toes to the door:)* Shhhh—! I'm not here.

RUDY. Mom?

(She stops.)

How's Georgie?

ELLEN. Fine. He's watching the Waltons. He likes saying goodnight with John Boy. "Goodnight, Mary Ellen. Goodnight Ma, goodnight Pa."

RUDY. Yeah. But I mean...how is he? His health. Is there anything I should know?

ELLEN. He's fine. Who have you been listening to? Annie?

RUDY. Well, she's concerned that maybe—

ELLEN. My God, just because I took him to the doctor.

RUDY. So, you did take him.

ELLEN. He's getting more forgetful, so yes, I wanted him checked out. And he's fine. It's nothing for you to worry about. I'll talk to Miss Annie.

RUDY. Okay.

ELLEN. *(She becomes interested in his pages on the table.)* ...Wait.

RUDY. What?

ELLEN. I'm confused, who does she love, Marco or Edmund?

RUDY. She thinks she loves Edmund, but—Mom, it's alright, I've got everything under control.

ELLEN. Maybe it's the way she says it.

(She looks at pages. RUDY hopelessly tosses his pen onto the table.)

Okay, here, this is what I mean.

RUDY. Mom—

ELLEN. Listen, shh! *(Reads:)* "You ask how I know I love you, Edmund? How do I know? You might as well ask how do I know I'm

breathing. Because I can feel my lungs filling up, that's how. You might as well ask why a baby cries. Because it just does. Why does a breeze go from tree to tree to tree? Tell me that."

(A pause.)

Oh, is it a comedy?

RUDY. *(Snatches page from her.)* That's it, show's over!

ELLEN. Don't get mad at me. What did I do?

RUDY. You made me hear it out loud for the first time. That's child abuse.

ELLEN. Well, who are these people, anyway? I don't understand.

RUDY. What do you mean, who are they?

ELLEN. They don't sound like you.

RUDY. They're not supposed to. They're characters, fictional.

ELLEN. Alright, you know best.

(RUDY slumps back into his chair with a mournful sigh.)

What's the matter now? Oh, who needs Alan King? You'll work for someone else.

RUDY. His brother, Burger King.

ELLEN. *(She studies him.)* Are you sure writing is what you want to do?

RUDY. What I want to do? I love writing. It's the most fun I've ever had. It's the thing I do best. That I'm hopelessly inept is just a technicality.

ELLEN. Now who said that? Not me.

RUDY. You don't have to. I'm not delusional. I see what's up on those Broadway stages. Ideas that I don't have, that's what's up there.

ELLEN. *(Re: his notebooks:)* Look at all the ideas you have.

RUDY. Ideas that nobody wants. *(Races through them.)* Mystery thriller story, love triangle story, backstage romance story, time

travel story, time travel backstage love triangle story. And producers are climbing over each other to get away from them. (*Mimes a cigarette.*) "You haven't found your voice yet, kid." What good is learning my craft if I have no story to tell? Am I empty? Do I have nothing to say? My God, my baby's going to starve.

ELLEN. Now, stop.

RUDY. My baby will find his voice before I do. And he'll say, "Daddy, get a teaching job." I'll have to move us all back here. Teach what I can't do. Julia will play cello on "Bowling for Dollars."

ELLEN. A good idea will come along. Don't they say write what you know?

RUDY. It helps if you know something.

ELLEN. How about a vacation? Rest your brain.

RUDY. Can't. I'm entered in the Autumn Festival of New Plays.

ELLEN. The Autumn what?

RUDY. A playwriting competition. Alan King's receptionist got me in. I think she felt sorry for me. I've got to have something to hand in by April first.

ELLEN. Is it worth making yourself crazy?

RUDY. I have to find out. For me. Whether I've got it.

(GEORGIE enters with a slice of bread.)

GEORGIE. Hey!

ELLEN. Here's John Boy. The Walton's over, hon'?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

ELLEN. What's that? Where'd you find cinnamon raisin bread? Don't let Annie see it, your life won't be worth two cents.

GEORGIE. To'!

ELLEN. Toast? Toaster's broken.

GEORGIE. To'!

ELLEN. We'll get a new toaster when we move. When I open an account at the new bank, I told you.

GEORGIE. (*Moving to backroom:*) 'Tay chip.

ELLEN. Eat 'em all, Vietnam doesn't want 'em. That's why they're so thin.

(*GEORGIE exits into backroom.*)

RUDY. Where once stood Chet's Bar & Grill will now stand a little slice of Vietnam. It's a new world, isn't it?

ELLEN. I wish them luck.

(*ANNIE anxiously rushes in from upstairs.*)

ANNIE. (*Breathless:*) Is Georgie down here?

ELLEN. He's in the back.

ANNIE. Oh! Thank God.

(*EDDIE arrives right behind her.*)

EDDIE. I checked every room.

ANNIE. (*Quietly to EDDIE:*) He's here, he's here. (*To ELLEN, awkwardly:*) Heh, we couldn't find him.

ELLEN. What do you want him for?

ANNIE. Er, nothing, we just couldn't find him. (*To EDDIE:*) He's in the back.

ELLEN. Well, I think he is. (*To herself:*) When did I send him out for the paper?

(*They stare at her in disbelief.*)

Now don't look at me like I'm an idiot. I put boots on him.

ANNIE. Mom—!

ELLEN. Y'know, you two are becoming regular pains in the ask me no questions. Quit your worrying, will you? He's in the back room eating chips.

ANNIE. We're not worrying, we're just—

ELLEN. You're worried I'm going to let him out of my sight for five seconds and he's going to blow the house up.

ANNIE. Not at all. We're just—

ELLEN. I've been taking care of him all his life, I think I've got the routine down. Now, if you want to sit here and be quiet I'm going to do some dramatic readings from America's next hit play.

ANNIE. Mom? Do you remember Uncle Belmont?

ELLEN. Uncle Belmont?

ANNIE. Do you remember?

ELLEN. And why shouldn't I remember Uncle Belmont?

ANNIE. Well, it's just that Aunt Marge used to tell me about him.

ELLEN. Did she?

ANNIE. Yes. She told me it got pretty heartbreaking for the family. Y'know. With the way he got.

ELLEN. The way he got.

ANNIE. Yes.

ELLEN. What's going on with you two?

ANNIE. Nothing.

ELLEN. You're up to something.

ANNIE. No.

ELLEN. (*To EDDIE.*) Look at the face on you.

EDDIE. What? I got no face.

ELLEN. You're either guilty or constipated.

EDDIE. I'm not guilty. I got stuff on my mind.

ELLEN. Like what?

EDDIE. I dunno, the snow. Gettin' home. But nothin' about Saint Vincent's.

ANNIE. (*Snaps.*) Eddie—

ELLEN. St. Vincent's?

ANNIE. No, no, no...

ELLEN. What about St. Vincent's?

ANNIE. Nothing.

ELLEN. The nursing home?

ANNIE. It's nothing. We were just talking upstairs, that's all.

ELLEN. Talking about what?

ANNIE. Talking about what a coincidence it is. That the Celestine Sisters have taken over St. Vincent's. You know, the same nuns who used to run Georgie's workshop? That's all. We were talking.

ELLEN. Then why do you look like you just snuck the last ice cream sandwich?

ANNIE. *(A forced chuckle.)* Ooh, remember that? ...No, we were just saying how industrious they are. Such sweet little nuns, and now they've gone big time. They've just added two new wings to the place. They've got all these empty rooms. Don't you find it interesting?

ELLEN. Why should their wings interest me unless they're flying?

(Unable to help himself, RUDY writes that one down.)

ANNIE. Well, I would think you'd be interested. They were so good to Georgie all those years.

ELLEN. You did something, what did you do?

EDDIE. Nothing.

ANNIE. I didn't do anything.

EDDIE. She just paid a visit.

ANNIE. Would you go shovel?!

ELLEN. You went there?

ANNIE. I was driving by, I got nostalgic, I stopped in. We reminisced about Georgie, that's all.

ELLEN. Next you're going to tell me you signed him up.

ANNIE. Mom—

ELLEN. Did you?

ANNIE. How can you think that?

ELLEN. My overly excitable daughter is in a nursing home discussing her brother? What am I supposed to think?

ANNIE. Y'know, I'm going to take offense at this pretty soon.

ELLEN. *(Turns to RUDY.)* And you.

(Sipping coffee, RUDY almost chokes. She waits while he coughs and sputters.)

So you came back for the last mass at St. Casimir's.

RUDY. *(Cough.)* Yes, ma'am.

ELLEN. It's just a coincidence that all this is going on at the same time.

RUDY. All what's going on?

EDDIE. There's nothing going on.

ELLEN. *(To ANNIE:)* I told you how I felt about a nursing home for Georgie. It is out of the question.

ANNIE. Mom...don't you think that maybe what's best for Georgie at this time of his life is a place where he can be taken care of by trained, loving women who know him and can give him the special attention he's going to need?

ELLEN. How could you? How dare you?

ANNIE. He's not getting any better.

ELLEN. How would you know? Are you with him twenty-four hours a day? He is fine. His memory is slipping. I'm here to help him remember. End of discussion.

ANNIE. Mom, Dr. Filsinger said—

ELLEN. And how do you know what he said?

ANNIE. Because I had to call him myself because you wouldn't tell me.

ELLEN. Because I knew what you would do!

ANNIE. What?

ELLEN. Sign him up in a nursing home which is exactly what you did!

ANNIE. I didn't! I don't have that right, I know that. This has to be a family decision.

ELLEN. Family? Where do you see a family? A family doesn't sneak and plot behind a mother's back.

ANNIE. Sneak and plot! Mom!

RUDY. *(Simultaneously:)* Woah, hey, wait a minute—

EDDIE. Okay, okay, we're all getting excited needlessly!

(They stop.)

Let me clarify about St. Vincent's so we'll know exactly what was said and how it was left, so we'll all be up to speed and there'll be no misunderstandings.

(A pause. Aside to ANNIE:)

Wha'd they say?

ANNIE. Mom, do you remember Sister Henrietta?

ELLEN. *(Starts for backroom.)* I'm putting Georgie to bed.

ANNIE. Mom, please listen.

(ELLEN stops.)

Sister Henrietta said that if things got overwhelming here with Georgie, we could just bring him in and the paperwork could be filled out later.

ELLEN. What is overwhelming? You're blowing things up again the way you always—

ANNIE. Dr. Filsinger said—

ELLEN. If I hear that name one more time. They're not gods, these doctors!

ANNIE. But the stories he told. About other patients of his like Georgie.

RUDY. What kind of stories?

ANNIE. About kids wandering away, forgetting where they are.

ELLEN. It wouldn't happen. We are constant companions. We're Mike n' Ike.

ANNIE. You lost Ike in the A&P!

(ELLEN stops.)

Did you think I wouldn't find out? I shop there, too. Maria told me. She said you went back to the deli department to get your baloney and he was out the door. You found him in the street, directing traffic in his policeman's hat.

ELLEN. Maria let him walk out. She knows better now. It will never happen again.

ANNIE. Mom, do you want to see Georgie go through what Uncle Belmont did? It's *senile dementia*, it's what happens. Aunt Marge said he became a different person. He would sit there cursing at them, throwing his food—

ELLEN. I have been taking care of that boy for 31 years. If you think I'm about to hand him over to a—

ANNIE. It wouldn't be a sin! On the seventh day even God rested. You deserve a life.

ELLEN. This is my life.

ANNIE. A break.

(Through this, GEORGIE quietly enters from the backroom with his cinnamon raisin bread and goes to ELLEN.)

ELLEN. For the last time. God has a plan. Georgie and I are a part of that plan. Not separate. Together. That's His plan. I know that as sure as I know I'm alive.

GEORGIE. To'!

(He shows ELLEN the bread, which, curiously, is not bread anymore, but very dark toast.)

ANNIE. Where did you get toast?

RUDY. *(Sniffs the air.)* What is that? Something's burning!

(EDDIE smells it, too; he runs into backroom.)

EDDIE. Holy shit—!

(RUDY jumps up and follows him into backroom.)

ANNIE. Georgie—!

(Runs to backroom doorway and looks in.)

What happened? Oh, my God!

(We hear noises.)

RUDY. *(Off:)* It's okay, it's out, it's out!

(EDDIE slowly emerges, holding up a blackened, burnt dishtowel, still smoldering. RUDY appears behind him.)

ANNIE. *(Gasp!)* Georgie...!

GEORGIE. To'! *(Takes a big bite.)*

(A horrifying silence.)

ELLEN. *(Takes GEORGIE's hand.)* It will never happen again.

(ELLEN takes GEORGIE to the apartment door and they exit up the stairs. The three siblings watch them go, stunned. Now they slowly turn to each other as the lights fade to black.)

End of Act One

ACT II

Scene One

(From the darkness comes the sound of someone traveling up the AM band of a radio. We hear a series of sound bites from different stations with bits of static and disco music in between them.)

RADIO. *(Static, then:)* It is a killer storm, already dubbed the Blizzard of '77, and so far it has broken records going as far back as—

(Static, disco music, then a report from another station.)

—whiteout conditions on our roadways have compelled the mayor to declare a ban on driving until the snow can be cleared. So far, fines of up to one hundred and fifty dollars have been passed out to—

(Another station.)

—meanwhile, the governor has declared the city to be in a state of emergency and National Guard troops are on their way to dig us out—

(Another station.)

Only Mother Nature knows when this assault on our fair city will end, but as our mayor continues to emphasize, it is the people that make a city. And the shining examples we've seen here, of courageous and caring individuals helping neighbors and strangers, only prove what we've always known—that when things are at their worst, the people are at their best.

(Lights quickly up on the Pazinskis "at their best," resembling an orchestra of scorched cats, all shouting at once.)

EDDIE. *(Simultaneously:)* Hell is a proper name! It's a proper name, it's the name of a particular place! You can't get more particular than Hell. Come on, we always played this way. No proper names.

RUDY. *(Simultaneously:)* It is not a proper name. It is not. Hell is a concept, it's not a place! It's an idea, and an idea is not a proper name.

ELLEN. *(Simultaneously:)* I am trying to think! I am trying to concentrate! You people could wake the dead. No, it's always been no proper names. No proper names! Since always.

GEORGIE. *(Simultaneously:)* Bam-bam-bam-bam—!

(His G.I. Joe is shooting the other players. He continues with a series of battle noises.)

EDDIE. *(Ending the discussion:)* Forget it, forget it, end of story! It's a proper name. Get Hell the hell off of there!

(It is two long days later and it seems a rather intense game of Scrabble is in progress. The frazzled players are RUDY, EDDIE, ELLEN, and GEORGIE.)

RUDY. But it's not a place, you can't go there. It's a concept.

EDDIE. It's in the dictionary, so it's a place. Those are the rules, I didn't make them up.

RUDY. *(Spots something on board.)* Oh-oh-oh, wait! Hell becomes "hello" so the point is moot! *(Moving letters on board:)* Ha ha! Thank you, dear brother. *(Adds his score on notepad.)*

ELLEN. Finally! Now, answer me this, can we use dirty words?

EDDIE. Like what?

ELLEN. Like shit.

GEORGIE. Shit!

(They slowly turn to GEORGIE and stare. GEORGIE grins back at them.)

EDDIE. No, it's slang, we can't use slang.

ELLEN. Darn.

EDDIE. Hold it, hold it, time check.

RUDY. Drum roll.

EDDIE. *(Checking watch:)* Six-twenty-four. In 36 minutes it'll be my turn to shovel. And I want this game frozen until I get back.

RUDY. What?

EDDIE. Is there a problem?

RUDY. We've got to wait for you?

EDDIE. Yes. I'm winning.

RUDY. Winning? Georgie's beating you by three thousand points.

EDDIE. Is everybody on board with the shoveling plan?

RUDY. We know, we know— (*ELLEN with him:*) —every hour on the hour.

EDDIE. It's the only way. We don't let one hour go by without our cars being cleared. Then when the National Guard plows the streets we'll be free and clear and on our way. Everybody else around here will be digging out for days, and you'll be thanking me.

RUDY. You miss the Army, don't you? Why don't you re-enlist?

EDDIE. And this time you're going to help.

RUDY. Positive visualization is helping.

ELLEN. Georgie, your turn.

EDDIE. (*Mutters:*) This oughta be good.

ELLEN. Come on, hon', put your letters on the board.

GEORGIE. Nnn...

(GEORGIE very carefully lifts his letter tray and spills all seven tiles onto the board.)

EDDIE. (*Si-i-igh!*)

ELLEN. Georgie, honey...

RUDY. (*Suddenly:*) Wait! Look!

(Rises and points to the mess of letters.)

“Antidisestablishmentarianism!”

EDDIE. This isn't working out. What's Annie doing up there?

ELLEN. (*Picking up Georgie's tiles:*) I don't know. She got that panicky look on her face and ran.

RUDY. Can't be a bathroom break, there's nothing in her stomach.

(Nudges GEORGIE.)

Get it, Georgie, get it, get it, huh?

(GEORGIE laughs.)

EDDIE. Great, he's found his audience.

RUDY. *(Squeezing GEORGIE's shoulder:)* That's right, Georgie and I go way back; we're a team.

ELLEN. Here, Georgie, you made the word "sky." Okay? That's five points.

GEORGIE. Oh boy.

ELLEN. Be a little more genteel next time. Whose turn is it?

RUDY. Yours.

ELLEN. Look at this. Six consonants and one vowel. What am I supposed to do?

RUDY. *(Leans over and looks.)* You could make twelve Polish words already.

EDDIE. Don't look at her letters.

ELLEN. Forget it. Here... *(Puts down one tile, adds her score.)* I can't stand this gloom. Rudy, turn on the radio, maybe the Mayor will cheer us up with a press conference.

RUDY. You missed it, it was on already.

ELLEN. What did he say?

EDDIE. He said it's snowing out. The guy's a total loser.

RUDY. It was like listening to a comedy album.

ELLEN. Hey, I like our mayor.

EDDIE. I do, too, but this time he's in way over his head.

RUDY. *(Stands up, does a Polish accent:)* Calm down, everybody, calm down!

EDDIE. Mr. Mayor, Mr. Mayor—!

RUDY. Please, one question at a time, I will get to everybody.

EDDIE. Mr. Mayor—

ELLEN. (*Laughing:*) Sounds just like him—!

RUDY. Remember, if we pull together we can—

EDDIE. Mr. Mayor, can you give us an accurate accounting of the city's snow plows? How many are actually working right now?

RUDY. Right now, as we speak, currently, at this time I'd like to say how proud I am of the citizens of this city for pulling together during—

EDDIE. Mr. Mayor, the plows. I understand the city owns a total of seventy-nine plows.

RUDY. Seventy-nine I am proud to say, and that is a record number for a city of this size according to—

EDDIE. And how many are in for repairs?

RUDY. Tirty-tree.

(*ANNIE enters from upstairs, very agitated.*)

ANNIE. (*With piece of paper:*) Alright, here it is! Here it is and it isn't pretty. (*Rattles off a list:*) Upstairs we have...three boxes of Sun Maid raisins, one can of instant cake frosting, four packs of Good Seasons Italian Dressing Mix, a roll of Ritz crackers, one box of elbow macaroni, one can of canned beets, three cans of Campbell's tomato soup, one egg, two slices of cheese, about fifteen Rice Chex—

RUDY. Fifteen boxes?

ANNIE. Chex, the little Chex. Half a jar of Weber's Horseradish Mustard, enough Lipton tea bags for ten years and down here twenty-two bags of potato chips!

GEORGIE. Twen-Too!

(*A moment.*)

EDDIE. I had no idea. Let's have some people over.

RUDY. What flavor cake frosting?

ANNIE. What are you supposed to be funny? It's been three days since we've had a balanced meal. That's all the food in the whole house!

EDDIE. Y'check your underwear drawer?

ELLEN. Don't get panicky, please. We have water. When you have no water, then you're in trouble.

RUDY. Yeah, and that's not such a bad list.

ANNIE. Not a bad list? Powdered Italian dressing?

EDDIE. *(Busy with his letters.)* Tomato soup, Ritz Crackers, I like those things.

RUDY. What's the worst that will happen? We'll get scurvy.

ANNIE. I'm glad you can take this so lightly. But what if the snow doesn't stop?

ELLEN. But it will.

ANNIE. But what if it doesn't?

ELLEN. Then we'll eat each other! What do you want from us?

ANNIE. Why didn't you shop?

ELLEN. Aha! There it is!

ANNIE. Why didn't you?

ELLEN. I told you. I was waiting for Rudy so we could go together so he could pick out his favorite things.

RUDY. *(Aside to EDDIE:)* Raindrops on roses and whiskers on kittens.¹

ANNIE. *(To ELLEN:)* Was it smart to wait like that?

ELLEN. Did I know the blizzard of the century was coming?

EDDIE. *(Putting letters on board:)* Quit picking on Mom. *(Quickly to RUDY:)* Where are you going?

¹ This line most effective when not sung.

RUDY. *(Halfway out of his chair:)* I'm getting a drink of water, wanna see my hallway pass?

ELLEN. Georgie, get up, let Annie have her spot back. You did good, sweetie.

GEORGIE. Nnn...

(Gets up.)

EDDIE. Yeah, thanks, Georgie.

ELLEN. Go watch the snow for a while, hon'.

GEORGIE. Nnn...

(Through this next he takes a bar stool to the window and makes himself comfortable.)

ELLEN. *(To ANNIE:)* Sit down and play. Come on. Get your mind off it.

EDDIE. Yeah, relax. Rudy will take your turn shoveling.

RUDY. *(From the bar:)* Did you know in Times Square there's a recruiting poster with Eddie's picture on it? People cross the street when they see it; it scares them.

ANNIE. *(Sitting:)* How can I relax? My little girl is stuck in this blizzard.

ELLEN. She's home with her father, snug as a bug. Probably having the time of her life.

ANNIE. Her Birthday party fell through.

ELLEN. So, you throw her another one.

RUDY. With an extra present from her uncle.

EDDIE. A stink bomb kit.

RUDY. You got it.

ANNIE. I'm getting cabin fever. I feel like the walls are closing in on me.

ELLEN. You used to tell me the same thing when I took you to the circus at Memorial Auditorium.

RUDY. The walls closed in on her at Memorial Auditorium?

ANNIE. She's making that up.

ELLEN. You didn't like it. The clown scared you.

ANNIE. Well, he was scary.

EDDIE. But everything scared you. Clowns, ventriloquist dummies, manhole covers...

ANNIE. And nothing ever scared you.

EDDIE. Well, not ventriloquist dummies.

RUDY. Those were his heroes.

EDDIE. Keep it up, Tennessee.

ELLEN. Tennessee?

RUDY. Yeah, he calls me Tennessee. Isn't that clever?

ANNIE. *(To a confused ELLEN:)* Like Tennessee Williams. The playwright.

EDDIE. Tennessee Pazinski, Playwright of the Parking Violators.

RUDY. He made it up himself.

EDDIE. Know what kind of ticket gets you in to see a Tennessee Pazinski play? A parking ticket. *(Laughs to himself.)*

RUDY. *(Moving to jukebox:)* Actually, I'm flattered. Tennessee Williams knows the secret of coming up with interesting, colorful characters. The same way the great painters do. Take these dogs, for instance.

(He lifts "Dogs Playing Poker" off the wall, turns to the group.)

If you look at each one individually, you'll notice how— Oops!

(He slowly turns to see that he's "inadvertently" exposed Eddie's cartoon of naked Debbie Ronski. ELLEN and ANNIE stare in shock. EDDIE is embarrassed.)

GEORGIE. *(The last to notice:)* He-e-e-ey—!

ELLEN. How did that get there?!

ANNIE. Anyone we know?

RUDY. You don't recognize Debbie Ronski?

ANNIE. I didn't know her all that well. She looks cold.

ELLEN. I've been tending bar all these years with her in the room? How could you?

EDDIE. I was fifteen!

ELLEN. What if those dogs had fallen down while I was waiting on someone. A council member or Father Mike? Where was your head?

EDDIE. *(Gets up, muttering:)* Jesus Christ...

ELLEN. Is that what you want Vietnam to think of us?

EDDIE. *(Yanks picture from RUDY.)* Funny guy!

ELLEN. I want that erased.

EDDIE. Alright, alright.

ELLEN. What possessed you?

EDDIE. *(Re-hanging painting:)* I was a possessed little kid, okay? Let's drop it.

ELLEN. I would never have bought you that paint set if I knew that's the kind of thing you—

EDDIE. Mom, okay! *(Sits.)*

RUDY. *(Moves to juke box. On the floor is a small pile of boxes and bags.)* Mom, what's all this stuff?

ELLEN. Things I'm not taking with me. Go through it. Whatever you kids don't want I'm giving to Saint Peter and Paul.

RUDY. Are those two finally moving in together?

EDDIE. Mr. Show Business, it's your turn.

RUDY. *(RUDY digs through bags, pulls out a long baby's garment, holds it up.)* Who's going to wear this, Peter or Paul?

ELLEN. That's your christening gown, smart guy.

RUDY. Mine?

EDDIE. It's you!

ELLEN. I was saving it for you. But I guess you won't be needing it now. I mean, if you're going to raise your child Jewish.

RUDY. *(Folds gown, puts it back.)* Well...actually we've discussed that. We're not going to raise him Jewish.

ELLEN. What are you going to raise him?

RUDY. *(Sits at table.)* Human.

(A glance at EDDIE.)

I hope.

ELLEN. No, I mean—

RUDY. I know, I know what you mean. The thing is, Julia and I don't feel a religion is right for our child.

ELLEN. Any religion?

RUDY. Uh-huh.

ELLEN. At all?

ANNIE. You're going to raise him a nothing?

RUDY. Right, we're naming him Zero.

ELLEN. He'll be an atheist?

RUDY. I didn't say that.

ELLEN. Then what are you saying?

RUDY. I'm saying—

ANNIE. You can't raise a child with no religion.

RUDY. Actually, I can.

ANNIE. Like a pagan?

EDDIE. There y'go. We'll have our own little pagan baby and some Catholic school kids can adopt him.

ELLEN. Wait a minute. You're thinking of raising your child with no religious affiliation or education?

RUDY. Mom, think of it this way. There's a lot of Catholics who never go to church. We'll just do it without the guilt.

ELLEN. Don't be flip. There's a lot more to it than that.

RUDY. I know, I'm trying to keep this light.

ANNIE. You can't. Not when you tell this family you're an atheist.

RUDY. I didn't say that, you said that.

ANNIE. Well, if you're not an atheist, what are you?

RUDY. You could say I'm a deist.

ELLEN. A what?

RUDY. A deist.

EDDIE. That's a sneaker.

RUDY. That's Adidas.

ELLEN. Well, what is it?

RUDY. I believe in God, I don't worship Him. Or Her, or It.

ELLEN. And why not?

RUDY. I don't think He particularly wants to be worshipped. Or needs to be. I think He's more well-adjusted than that.

ANNIE. (*Hushed:*) That's blasphemy!

RUDY. Would you want to be worshipped? Can you imagine anyone in their right mind wanting that?

EDDIE. I wouldn't mind.

ANNIE. God's not just anyone.

RUDY. But think about it.

ANNIE. I don't want to think. Whose turn is it?

EDDIE. His.

RUDY. What if there was some king or ruler somewhere, today, in 1977, who demanded that his subjects worship him? Declared one day a week be put aside for just that purpose. You know what we'd call him over here? We'd call him a nut. "Y'know, he may be a good king, but that ego has got to go, it's a terrible personality flaw." Yet we give that flaw to our God and call it perfection.

ANNIE. It's different with God. He created us, He should be worshipped.

RUDY. He should have a terrible personality flaw?

ANNIE. It isn't a flaw when He has it.

RUDY. *(Sigh.)* I told myself I wasn't going to get into this.

ANNIE. It's too late for that. You've got my future niece or nephew involved.

RUDY. Then get used to the idea that your niece or nephew won't be participating in the same rituals that you grew up with. When you ask him about the Stations of the Cross, be prepared for a glassy stare. There is no deist equivalent of Sister Clarissa.

GEORGIE. Sissa!

(Everyone turns to GEORGIE.)

EDDIE. The things he does remember.

ELLEN. You remember Sister Clarissa, don't you, honey?

GEORGIE. *(Quickly fishes for a silver medal he wears around his neck on a thin chain. He holds it up.)* Sissa!

ELLEN. There it is! *(Mutters:)* That thing must be twenty years old. *(Aloud:)* She gave you that, didn't she, hon'?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

ELLEN. Nice.

ANNIE. Rudy, look, I'm not saying raise him Catholic. Look at me, I left the Church, after my divorce.

EDDIE. They kicked you out, I thought.

ANNIE. Whatever! ...So, we're Lutheran now and we're fine. I'm saying raise him something. You have to give some thought to eternity.

RUDY. Except that there is no recognized, absolute authority that says my child must join an organization here on Earth in order to enjoy his life after he dies.

EDDIE. *(His head comes up.)* What?

RUDY. *(To EDDIE:)* Tell me, why do you go to church?

EDDIE. Better safe than sorry.

RUDY. Well, I can't live like that. I'm not saying it's wrong, it's just not for me.

ANNIE. Rudy, if we we're talking about some kid off the street, I'd say fine, to each his own, lots of luck. But this is blood. I care about your child. He's family.

RUDY. If he's family then he deserves the same thing you said to that kid off the street. Nothing less.

ANNIE. What did I say?

RUDY. "To each his own."

ANNIE. Look...look...God has a plan.

EDDIE. *(With dread:)* Oh, no.

RUDY. He does?

ANNIE. I don't know if you moving all the way to New York was part of God's plan or not. But what you're doing now—taking an even bigger step away from us—it just can't be what God had in His—

GEORGIE. Sissa...

(All turn to GEORGIE.)

Sissa...hiya...yuh...yuh...

(Giggles.)

(They all watch in fascination as GEORGIE proceeds to have a “conversation” with an unseen Sister Clarissa.)

ANNIE. *(Starts to get up.)* Georgie—?

(ELLEN puts out a staying hand.)

GEORGIE. *(To “Sister”:)* No, uh-uh...uh-uh...

(Points to snow.)

Ooh-hoo-hoo!

(He listens.)

Wuh? Yup.

(Points to RUDY.)

Rugy. Rugy-lugy.

(He laughs at something.)

Wuh?

(Following instructions, he tucks his medal back into his shirt and pats it safely.)

Okay. Yuh, okay. 'Bye.

(Waves goodbye to her.)

ANNIE. *(Watching in horror:)* Mom...!

(ELLEN goes to GEORGIE and gently embraces him.)

Mom...his mind, it's...

ELLEN. *(Soothingly:)* Shhhh...

ANNIE. Mom, he needs to be...he needs...

(ELLEN strokes GEORGIE's head.)

ELLEN. Shhhh...

ANNIE. *(Upset:)* Listen to me, everybody, please! There is a plan. As sure as shooting, God does have a plan. And as sure as shooting—this is not it!

(The lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(Later that evening. Still snowing outside. The Scrabble board is as we left it. Empty glasses and beer bottles are littered about. But no one is here.)

(Now ELLEN, GEORGIE, EDDIE, and RUDY enter through the front door, all but GEORGIE carrying snow shovels.)

ELLEN. This is for the birds! I had children so I wouldn't have to do this.

GEORGIE. *(Runs for backroom.)* 'Tay chip!

ELLEN. *(Shedding her coat:)* Only one bag, Mister. We're keeping track now.

(He exits.)

My aching back.

RUDY. *(Re: GEORGIE:)* Hey, is that smart? Letting him back there after what happened?

ELLEN. It's okay. Eddie searched the room for all the matches.

RUDY. No, he "policed the area," Mom. In the army you police the area.

ELLEN. Whatever. Keep your eye on him. I'm going to fix him something to eat.

(Heads for door, holding her back.)

Oh-h-h—!

RUDY. *(Removing coat; to EDDIE:)* Why do you always get the good shovel? I couldn't do anything with this plastic thing.

EDDIE. It's the poor workman who blames his tools.

RUDY. Y'know, if you could get down to the City, there's a show at Madison Square Garden you'd love. "Reader's Digest Comprehensive Guide to Home Repair on Ice."

ELLEN. Why don't you two get married?

(Exits up the stairs.)

RUDY. *(Looking at the snow:)* You know what I think? I think if God does have a plan...

EDDIE. Oh, will you shut up? What could be more boring and pointless than to stand around talking about God's plan? Christ! What the hell does it matter if He has one, anyway? We're not going to find out about it 'til we die.

RUDY. Did you get a thorn in your paw?

EDDIE. He must be so tired of dead people running up to him— Hey God, so, remember when me and Iggy were looking through the dumpsters in back of Larkin's? And then that cat came along? And Iggy turned away to pet the cat? And right then the lid shut and just missed cutting off his head? So, was the cat part of your plan?

RUDY. ...Guess I won't be mentioning God's plan again.

EDDIE. If you value your life. *(Starts clearing away glasses and bottles.)*

(An awkward silence.)

RUDY. I just wanted to talk about something. I tried talking outside but you were kinda quiet.

EDDIE. I don't talk when I work.

RUDY. Right. And upstairs you have to fix things. Come on, let's talk about Sister Clarissa. Or Debbie Ronski. We can swap war stories.

EDDIE. Where are you going to get war stories?

RUDY. I watch M*A*S*H.

EDDIE. That's about your speed.

RUDY. Want a beer?

EDDIE. No.

RUDY. *(A pause.)* Okay, I guess blunt is the only way to go here.

(Sits on bar stool.)

When we were growing up, you and I weren't real buddy-buddy. Like Wally and the Beaver. And that was okay. But over the last few years it's gotten kind of, y'know, worse. So I just want to know if you in any way resent me. Because I lucked out of the draft with my lottery number, and you had to go over there and face hell, and I got to stay here and write jokes.

EDDIE. Yeah, I do. A lot.

RUDY. I didn't want it to happen like that.

EDDIE. Oh, sure, I know. But there it is.

RUDY. Anything I can do?

EDDIE. *(A beat.)* You can drop the army jokes.

RUDY. *(Awkwardly:)* Okay, you got it. No more jokes. That's a promise.

(He slowly starts for the apartment door. Opens door, then suddenly slams it shut.)

No more jokes, what kinda crap is that?! I'm sorry, I don't accept that. Joking is like breathing to me. Would you ask me to stop breathing? Don't answer that. ...Y'know, if Iggy were here making army jokes, you'd be laughing your head off. Hey-hey-hey, let's hear some more, Iggy!

EDDIE. Because Iggy was there. Sufferin' through that shit right along with me.

RUDY. Suffering? You think I didn't suffer? I may not have been there, pal, but do you know what it was like? Reading the news every day, looking for your unit's number? Watching Walter Cronkite and those body bags coming home? Wanna hear about guilt? Why him, God, why him and not me? Don't tell me I didn't suffer!

EDDIE. *(A pause.)* You suffered?

RUDY. Yes!

EDDIE. *(A little smile.)* ...Cool.

(RUDY shakes his head wearily and exits up the stairs. EDDIE starts to follow him out when ANNIE rushes in from the outside, carrying a shovel.)

ANNIE. You left me alone out there!

EDDIE. I had to get Georgie inside.

ANNIE. You could've told me. I look up, suddenly I'm all alone.

EDDIE. So?

ANNIE. *(Removing coat:)* It's spooky out there. The howling wind. White-outs getting me all mixed up. I dug out half the car and then I remembered we don't own a station wagon.

(EDDIE exits up the stairs. She starts to follow but first tries the phone again.)

ANNIE. *(Picks up receiver and listens.)* ...Shit.

(Hangs up, goes to door, flips off light switch, exits up the stairs.)

(The room is dark now with the only light coming from the street-lamp. After a silent moment the backroom door opens and GEORGIE steps out, still in his coat, eating potato chips.)

GEORGIE. Hey...!

(He heads for the apartment door, is about to open it when he is distracted by the snow outside.)

Wow!

(Now he goes to the front door and opens it, letting the snow blow in.)

Wow!

(He drops his chips bag on the floor, flips up his parka hood, grabs a snow shovel and casually walks out into the storm.)

Bye! Da-Kween!

(He closes the door behind him, heads down the street and out of sight.)

(A moment passes and ANNIE returns.)

ANNIE. (*Muttering:*) Cannot take these stairs one more day!

EDDIE. (*Off:*) Get me one, too!

ANNIE. (*Shouts:*) I'm not a waitress! (*Mutters:*) Gonna have a nervous breakdown, I swear.

(She flips the room lights back on.)

(She goes to the cooler behind the bar and brings out two beer bottles. Now she looks at the beers and contemplates. She turns around and considers the bottles of liquor behind the bar. She selects one and reads the label. She gets a shot glass and sets it on the bar. She opens the bottle, sniffs it and makes a face. Ve-e-ery carefully, she pours some liquid into the shot glass, making it abundantly clear that she's a novice at this.)

(She raises the glass to her lips and makes a couple attempts to drink it, finally holding her nose and downing it. She lets go of her nose and receives the shock of her life!)

(ELLEN enters from upstairs.)

ELLEN. I hope this radio works.

ANNIE. (*Cough-wheeze!*) What?

ELLEN. What's the matter with you?

(Sees the booze.)

Are you crazy?

ANNIE. I must be!

ELLEN. (*Looks at bottle.*) This stuff'll kill you.

ANNIE. Why do you sell it?!

ELLEN. (*Goes to radio behind bar.*) I want to hear the news. They just found a body under the train trestle on Swan Street.

ANNIE. Right over here?

ELLEN. Been there a couple days, I guess. Frozen stiff.

(Getting static on radio.)

I couldn't catch the name; everything's on the fritz upstairs.

(Tries to find station, gets only static.)

Same all over.

(Turns radio off.)

This isn't fun and games anymore. People are dying out there. Six people frozen in their cars, stranded on the Thruway. People having heart attacks from shoveling. I'm not lifting another flake.

ANNIE. I hope they don't cancel the mass tomorrow.

ELLEN. Shoveling. That's what got Walter, the poor love. I told him, get some kid to shovel. But when do husbands ever listen to their wives?

(A sigh and she starts for the door.)

Hope they don't cancel the mass tomorrow.

ANNIE. That's what I just said.

ELLEN. What?

ANNIE. I just said that.

ELLEN. Said what?

ANNIE. I hope they don't cancel the mass tomorrow.

ELLEN. I just said it.

ANNIE. I know, but I just said it before you.

(A beat. ELLEN dismisses it with a wave and continues to the door.)

...I did say it.

ELLEN. What?

ANNIE. I did say it.

ELLEN. Alright, you said it.

ANNIE. Alright, I'm just sayin'.

ELLEN. I didn't hear you.

ANNIE. Alright.

(ELLEN starts out.)

...You never hear me.

ELLEN. What?

ANNIE. Nothing.

ELLEN. What did you say?

ANNIE. I said you never hear me.

ELLEN. And what does that mean?

ANNIE. It means what it means, you never hear me.

ELLEN. What kind of a thing is that to say? Explain yourself.

ANNIE. What do I have to explain? You don't hear me. You manage to hear everyone else, but when it comes to me, I don't know what happens, something happens, your ears stop working.

ELLEN. Of all the ridiculous things.

ANNIE. (*Busies herself cleaning bar.*) Fine. Good. It's ridiculous.

(A beat, and ELLEN turns to leave.)

And once again I'm not heard from.

ELLEN. Will you tell me what this is about?

ANNIE. Y'know, when Katie talks I listen so hard. Even when it's some nonsense about her Barbie Doll's underwear, I listen. And then I think, "What am I working so hard for? No one ever listened to me like this."

ELLEN. If you're through, I have a child to feed.

ANNIE. Go ahead.

(ELLEN turns to leave.)

Do you know I used to be jealous of Georgie? Jealous of a retarded kid, can you believe it? Because when he talked, everybody listened. It wasn't even talking, it was noises. And I'd say to myself, "How do I learn that?"

ELLEN. You should be ashamed of yourself.

(RUDY enters.)

RUDY. Georgie's soup is getting cold.

(Silence.)

Mom?

ELLEN. Well, give it to him. Have him wash his hands first.

RUDY. *(Moving to backroom:)* Georgie, come wash your hands.

ELLEN. Not here, he's upstairs.

RUDY. He's in the backroom.

ELLEN. He's upstairs.

RUDY. No, he never came up.

ELLEN. What are you talking about? He was just in the bathroom.

ANNIE. *(To RUDY:)* Go see! We're talking!

RUDY. *(Entering backroom:)* Georgie...!

ELLEN. *(To ANNIE:)* You have come up with some doozies in your day.

ANNIE. I'm going to get some dinner.

ELLEN. I listened to all of you kids. Equally.

ANNIE. Fine. If that's the way you remember it.

ELLEN. That's the way it was. I played no favorites.

ANNIE. Ha.

RUDY. *(RUDY returns.)* Not in here.

ELLEN. I told you, he's upstairs.

(EDDIE enters from upstairs.)

EDDIE. Can I have that soup?

RUDY. Is Georgie upstairs?

EDDIE. No, he's down here.

RUDY. No, he's not.

(A horrific moment.)

ANNIE. ...Oh, my God.

(EDDIE dashes back up the stairs.)

ELLEN. He has to be upstairs, I heard him in the bathroom.

RUDY. That was me.

ELLEN. It sounded just like him!

RUDY. We're brothers!

ANNIE. Oh, my God!

ELLEN. Stop saying that!

EDDIE. *(Off:)* Georgie? Georgie?

(RUDY spies something on the floor near the front door, picks it up—an empty potato chip bag.)

RUDY. Annie? Where's the good shovel?

(RUDY and ANNIE look at each other. Suddenly RUDY flings open the front door and steps out.)

Georgie!

(They all listen.)

Georgie!

(Comes back in.)

I can't see a thing!

(EDDIE enters from upstairs with his coat.)

EDDIE. Alright, move it, everybody! Coats, boots! Rudy, flashlights, all you can find!

(RUDY dashes into the backroom. Everyone scrambles into their coats.)

Me and Rudy will split up. You two stay together. Check out the dumpsters behind the Larkin Building, he likes to play there.

(RUDY returns with flashlights, grabs his coat.)

Rudy, start with Winkler's yard, go up to the playground, his usual routes. I'll check the alleys between here and Fillmore Avenue. Benny Miller's, Vicky's Diner...

ANNIE. *(Exiting with flashlight:)* Leave the door unlocked in case he comes back!

ELLEN. *(Following:)* And pray! Everybody!

(ELLEN and ANNIE disappear down the street.)

RUDY. *(Rushing out with EDDIE:)* You're a regular commando!

EDDIE. Move it!

RUDY. What's the army term for this?

EDDIE. "Looking."

(Closes door behind them.)

(They run out of sight as the lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(About a half hour later. The storm blows on. The room is empty. Now two figures appear at the door. Freezing and shivering, ELLEN and ANNIE let themselves in.)

ANNIE. Georgie?

ELLEN. Georgie?

ANNIE. *(Runs to backroom and pokes her head in.)* Georgie?

ELLEN. *(Goes to apartment door. To ANNIE:)* Shh! *(Calls up the stairs:)* Georgie?

(They both listen. No response.)

Okay, let me just catch my breath, then we'll try Exchange Street.

ANNIE. Mom, you can't! You're exhausted.

ELLEN. *(Sits.)* I just need a minute.

ANNIE. This could be dangerous for you.

ELLEN. Someone of my age, you mean?

ANNIE. Stay here, I'll go.

ELLEN. I'd rather freeze to death than just sit here.

ANNIE. Alright, you rest a while.

(Moves to door.)

Tell you what, I'll look for fifteen minutes, then I'll come back for you.

ELLEN. *(Gets up.)* No! You can't be alone out there!

ANNIE. I'll be okay!

ELLEN. Nothing doing! Eddie told us—

ANNIE. Here he is!

ELLEN. Where?

ANNIE. Eddie's got him! Oh my God, he's hurt!

(She opens the door and EDDIE staggers into view with a body slung over his shoulder.)

Here, this way! Careful!

(EDDIE enters.)

It's Rudy!

ELLEN. Rudy?!

ANNIE. Oh my God! He's dead!

EDDIE. Shut up, he's not dead. Get a chair.

(ANNIE runs for chair.)

ELLEN. What about Georgie?

EDDIE. No sign yet.

ELLEN. Oh, God!

ANNIE. What happened?

EDDIE. (*EDDIE lowers RUDY into a chair.*) He saw my flashlight and came running.

ANNIE. (*Sees Rudy's head wound.*) Ooh, look!

EDDIE. Right into a lamp post.

ANNIE. That lamp post! I'm calling the mayor's office!

ELLEN. That's a goose-egg alright! Get some ice!

(*ANNIE runs to the bar. ELLEN pats RUDY's face.*)

Wake up, c'mon, c'mon...! How long has he been out?

EDDIE. It just happened, right out here.

ELLEN. C'mon, sweetie! ...Annie, hurry! (*Rubbing RUDY's hand:*) C'mon, let's see some life here. Let's hear some jokes here.

EDDIE. It's brutal out there. I'm going to try Exchange Street next. The railroad tracks.

ELLEN. Annie!

ANNIE. (*ANNIE arrives with a bottle of beer.*) Here!

ELLEN. He's not thirsty! I said ice!

ANNIE. There is no ice! Use this!

ELLEN. No ice in a bar?

RUDY. (*Groggy:*) Peel some onions, that'll make your ice water.

ELLEN. Rudy—!

RUDY. Groucho Marx, nineteen-twenty-seven.

EDDIE. Knock him out again.

ELLEN. Are you alright?

RUDY. Am I a father?

EDDIE. No, but you're a heavy mother.

ELLEN. Annie, go upstairs and get some real ice. Then stay with him. Eddie, you and I will go out there.

ANNIE. Mom, no!

EDDIE. You shouldn't, Mom.

ELLEN. I am not going to just sit here!

RUDY. Did it occur to anyone to ask me?

ANNIE. What?

RUDY. You're looking at the guy who knows where Georgie is.

ALL BUT RUDY. Where?

RUDY. There.

(RUDY gestures to the front door just as GEORGIE steps into view. He waves to his family through the glass.)

ALL BUT RUDY. Georgie!

(Leaving RUDY, they run to the door, all speaking at once. ELLEN stops halfway there and watches, upset.)

EDDIE. Look at him!

ANNIE. Oh, the poor love, get him in here!

EDDIE. He's an icicle!

(They yank open the door and pull the shivering GEORGIE inside.)

GEORGIE. Hey—!

ANNIE. *(Throwing her arms around him:)* Georgie, where were you? We were worried, honey!

EDDIE. *(Teasing:)* If you lost my good shovel...

ANNIE. Oh, you're like ice! Come in here! *(Taking his gloves off, rubbing his hands:)* Where did you go, hon'? We looked all over.

GEORGIE. Shur.

ANNIE. Church?! You went to the church?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

ANNIE. Inside?

GEORGIE. Yuh.

RUDY. Then he was warm for a while.

ANNIE. Oh, thank God. Why did you go to church, honey?

GEORGIE. 'Tay chip.

ANNIE. Potato chips in church?

EDDIE. No, that's just a wafer, Georgie.

ANNIE. Y'know something, Georgie? You have got one hell of a guardian angel.

GEORGIE. Mama—

(Everyone turns to ELLEN. She is silent and visibly upset.)

ANNIE. *(Nudging GEORGIE:)* Go ahead.

(GEORGIE goes to ELLEN.)

GEORGIE. *(Quietly:)* Hiya.

(ELLEN can't quite look GEORGIE in the eye.)

ELLEN. *(Touches GEORGIE's hand, struggles for words.)* Bedtime, Georgie. *(Leads him to the door.)*

ANNIE. Mom—?

(ELLEN keeps moving.)

Mom—?

(ELLEN stops.)

What do you think?

ELLEN. I think we've had enough excitement for one night. Turn off all the lights down here.

ANNIE. Mom, I mean about—

ELLEN. Rudy, don't dawdle. I want to look at that head.

RUDY. It's just a bump.

ELLEN. You could have a concussion. You want to fall asleep during one of Julia's concerts and never wake up? Fine way to start a marriage. Come on, Georgie.

(She and GEORGIE exit up the stairs.)

(The siblings are stunned. They look at one another in helplessness. Finally, ANNIE drags herself to the apartment door. There, she faces them, wanting to say something, but with a helpless gesture she turns and exits up the stairs.)

RUDY. Never a dull moment at Chet's Bar & Vietnamese Emporium.

(Stands up, a little woozy.)

Woah—

EDDIE. Y'alright?

RUDY. I'm fine.

(RUDY points to "Dogs Playing Poker.")

Hadn't you better get the paint remover?

EDDIE. Wash my sin away? Guess I'll just paint over it.

RUDY. I mean, shooting the Vietnamese is one thing. Leaving a dirty picture on their wall is—

(Realizing he's making another army joke, he stops. EDDIE removes the dog painting from the wall and sets it on the floor.)

Tell me, why did you draw a naked Debbie Ronski on the wall? Of all places.

EDDIE. It was the day I helped Dad with the new paint job. The wall looked so fresh and clean, like a giant, pristine canvas. I musta snapped. Before I knew it, there was a naked Debbie Ronski. Then I just rehung all the pictures and forgot about it.

RUDY. But why a naked Debbie Ronski? I never understood.

EDDIE. I was always drawing naked Debbie Ronski.

RUDY. *(Confused:)* I know, but—did you ever see her naked?

EDDIE. No, that's why I had to draw her.

(Heads for backroom.)

I hope Walter's poster paints are still here.

(At the door.)

Say goodbye to Debbie.

(Exits.)

(RUDY starts for the apartment door, then stops for perhaps his last good look at the old place. He spins, a stool, which doesn't spin. He exits up the stairs.)

(Presently EDDIE returns with a sizeable box of paint jars and brushes. He sets it down on a table, takes out a jar of paint and shakes it. Grabbing a brush he starts for the wall to paint over his naked friend.)

(But then he stops as an idea occurs to him.)

(He slowly steps back and studies the wall. His wheels are turning. Now he returns to the box of paints and carefully selects a narrow brush. He has a plan.)

(As the lights begin to fade to black we hear radio static as someone tunes into the news.²)

Scene 4

(In the darkness we hear a radio news report³: a man-on-the-street interview.)

INTERVIEWER. And now that the worst of the Blizzard of '77 is over, the real work begins with the "Big Dig-Out." I'm here, live, with Frank Kashinski in his driveway on Bailey Avenue. Frank, that's quite a mountain of snow between you and the street.

FRANK. *(Blasé:)* Eh, whattaya gonna do?

INTERVIEWER. Frank, it looks like you cleared all the—

FRANK. *(Hollers off microphone:)* Ronnie, get offa that house! Don't be playin' up there, what's wrong wit' you!?

INTERVIEWER. Frank, it looks like you cleared all the snow from your driveway and then the National Guard came along and plowed you right back in again.

² See Production Note.

³ For a shorter version of this interview, see Appendix.

FRANK. Ain't it?

INTERVIEWER. And how does that make you feel?

FRANK. Eh, whattaya gonna do?

INTERVIEWER. Have you heard, Frank, that historians are already calling this the storm of the century?

FRANK. No, my reception's been bad.

INTERVIEWER. Well, that's what they're calling it. What do you think about that?

FRANK. *(Another thoughtful moment.)* Okay.

INTERVIEWER. And now that the—

FRANK. *(Off microphone:)* Ronnie, don't make me come up there!

INTERVIEWER. And now that the driving ban has been lifted, Frank, where is the first place you're going to go?

FRANK. *(Blasé:)* Eh, bowlin'.

INTERVIEWER. Frank Kashinski, sportsman, philosopher, here on Bailey Avenue. Now back to the studio.

(Lights slowly come up on the bar room. It is the next morning. The snow has finally stopped and sunlight streams in the windows. EDDIE is propped up on two chairs, dead asleep. The reason for his state of exhaustion is readily apparent as the daylight reveals jars and jars of paint scattered all over the room, along with brushes, rags and empty beer bottles.)

(And above the mess, on what used to be a wall of photographs, is a magnificent hand-painted mural that fills the entire space. It is a portrait of the Pazinskis, sitting around their kitchen table. Young Pazinskis.)

(In the portrait, the family table is littered with remnants of a meal and flanking the children, on either side, are the parents. Chet, their departed father, in trousers and undershirt, is engrossed in his newspaper. The house could be on fire, he wouldn't notice. Across from him sits Ellen in housedress and apron. With chin in her hand and a smirk on her face, she gazes at her dreamboat across the table, wondering if he'll ever put down the paper and notice them.)

(Rudy, about 12, mischievously makes devil's horns with his fingers behind Annie's head. Annie, a chubby 16, glumly holds the weight of the world on her shoulders, glancing trepidatiously at her father. Eddie, 15, in high school jacket, rests his face in his hands, rolling his eyes, wishing he were somewhere else. Georgie happily squirms on his mother's lap, clutching a box of cereal.)

(It's a masterful work.)

(EDDIE stirs. He awakens, sits up and yawns. He turns to his work and takes it in. He is pleased. Now he notices something odd out the window: the falling snow. There is none! He jumps to his feet and rushes to the window, throwing up his arms in exaltation. Now he runs to the phone, reaches for it, but then stops and makes the sign of the cross for luck. He picks up the receiver and listens. Hooray—dial tone!)

EDDIE. *(Dials quickly.)* Gary? Guess who! Hi pal, how ya' doin'? Yeah, I bet you had some days off; Mommy must be going nuts. Is everybody safe and sound? Huh? I don't know, why is it impossible to starve in the desert? Because of—because of the sand which is there. That's a cutie, where'd you hear it? Oh, Uncle Rudy! Well, how'd you like to see Uncle Rudy? Yes he is, and I'm going to have him come over and give you a little talk. About what? About how to get out of Catholic school alive. How's your sister? Good. Can I talk to Mommy? Okay, I'll see you in a couple hours, buddy. Bye!

(Someone else gets on the line.)

Good morning, madam, may I interest you in a set of snow tires? It is so good to hear your voice! I know, our phone, too. How are you? Oh, we're fine, never better. I'll never look at another potato chip again, but other than that— What? Mission accomplished? No, mission not accomplished, mission disaster. Next time I say my mother is a level-headed woman, hit me with a shovel, okay? Yeah, I think I'm going to sign myself up at Saint Vincent's. At least then I won't have to—

(We hear church bells in the distance. He checks his watch.)

Oh, shoot, I gotta get to mass. Yeah, listen, I'll be home as soon as I get Mom some groceries. I know, me too! Okay, bye!

(Through this next, EDDIE grabs a bottle of seltzer and takes a swig. He gargles, swishes and spits into a sink. He buttons up his shirt, straightens his clothes, combs his hair and grabs his coat.)

(RUDY enters singing to himself, to the tune of "It's a Long Road to Tipperari.")

RUDY. *Oh, it's the last mass at Sa-aint Casimir's. It's the last mass today...*

(Sees the mess.)

Jeez, what hit this place?

(Sees EDDIE.)

Look at you! What'd you do, fall asleep on top of the—

(He sees the mural and stares, awestruck.)

(We hear ANNIE on the stairs.)

ANNIE. *(Off, groaning:)* Ohhh—

(She appears, carrying her coat, staggering down the stairs, leaning on the walls for support.)

Ohhh, I didn't sleep a wink. I had nightmares all night. Paul Winchell and Jerry Mahoney were chasing me down manholes. I couldn't even—

(She sees the mural and stops dead in her tracks.)

Oh, cheese and crackers! Oh! Oh!

(She is agog!)

(Now GEORGIE comes bounding down the stairs and into the room, wearing his coat and policeman's hat. Laughing, he heads straight for the front door.)

ELLEN. *(Off:)* Grab him! Grab him, somebody! Georgie!

(But before GEORGIE gets to the door he sees the painting and stops.)

GEORGIE. Wo-o-ow—!

ELLEN. (*Enters wearing her coat.*) Georgie, those are my gloves you've got. They'll never fit you, come here. Well, what's everybody—?

(She sees it.)

Glory be!

(As they stare in wonder, EDDIE unceremoniously steps over to the painting, picks up a brush and signs his name in the lower right hand corner. Then he gets into his coat and boots.

(The others are moved beyond words. The silence is finally broken by ANNIE who, overcome with emotion, turns away from the group and stifles a sob.)

ELLEN. Oh, Eddie, it's—it's—

RUDY. Well, you can't move now!

ANNIE. The new owners. They'll paint over it.

RUDY. Maybe not.

ANNIE. Of course they will. Why would they want us in their restaurant?

RUDY. A conversation piece? Maybe it'll attract customers. Like cave paintings. People will come from the four corners of the earth to gaze at the enigmatic Polish family.

EDDIE. Or maybe they'll paint over it.

(They gaze at the painting.)

RUDY. (*Suddenly:*) Holy cow, we're gonna be late!

(General hubbub! Everyone pulling on coats and boots. "Hurry up!" "We can't miss this one!" "Of all times to be late!" "Come on, let's move it!" "The last mass at Saint Casimir's!" "The second bell didn't ring yet, we're okay!")

RUDY. Eddie. Eddie, look. If we very carefully take a jigsaw around that picture, then we get about five strong guys with crow-bars...

ELLEN. Nobody's moving any walls.

RUDY. She's right. No lifting. I'm an expectant father.

ANNIE. (*Buttoning up:*) Rudy, what do you want, a boy or a girl?

RUDY. A Pazinski.

ANNIE. No preference?

RUDY. I look at it this way. If you get a boy—

(He stops. His glance has fallen back on the mural. Now he stares at it, entranced.)

ANNIE. Yeah? If you get a boy—

(But he doesn't answer. He is lost in the painting, slowly moving toward it. It's as if a flood of ideas are overwhelming him.)

What's the matter with him?

ELLEN. Hey, lose something?

RUDY. (*Quietly:*) I think I found something!

ELLEN. Huh?

RUDY. My voice.

EDDIE. Voice?

ANNIE. His voice. What do you mean?

(RUDY excitedly goes to the bar and grabs his notebook.)

RUDY. What did the brilliant mother say? Write what you know?

(He kisses ELLEN, sits at table and writes quickly.)

Isn't that what she said?

ELLEN. (*Watches him write.*) Now?

RUDY. (*Writing:*) Just a few notes. Go ahead, I'll catch up.

ANNIE. What do you mean? You mean you're going to write about us? Oh, that's so neat!

EDDIE. Make 'em buy tickets to see us? Stick to parking tickets.

(RUDY ignores him and continues writing.)

(GEORGIE is at the mural.)

GEORGIE. Mama—

(He points to the image of himself and ELLEN.)

ELLEN. There we are, hon'. Look, I could hold you on my lap then. Used to hold you so tight Daddy was afraid I'd break you in two.

(Holds out his gloves.)

Come on.

(He goes to her and takes gloves.)

Okay, let's see you now.

(She removes his policeman's hat.)

Stand up straight, fix your hair.

(He messes it up.)

No, no, you've got to look sharp. We've got a date after church, Georgie. Just you and me.

GEORGIE. Nnn.

ELLEN. We're going to pay a visit to St. Vincent's.

(The others silently turn to listen.)

You remember St. Vincent's, Georgie? By the Dairy Queen?

GEORGIE. Oh boy!

ELLEN. Right, now come here, let me show you how things are going to be from now on.

(Takes him to a table, points to a spot.)

You see here? That's St. Vincent's, by the Dairy Queen. That's where Georgie's going to live. See? And over here...there's Mommy in her new house. See? And every day Mommy's going to get in her car and drive over to Georgie's house, and—

GEORGIE. No.

ELLEN. Yep, Mommy's going to get in her car and drive over to—

THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!

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