

SAMUEL FRENCH SAMPLE PERUSAL

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Almost Perfect

Jerry Mayer

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION

**SAMUEL
FRENCH**
FOUNDED 1830

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**FOR MOM AND DAD
AND FOR EMILY**

ALMOST PERFECT was originally presented at Santa Monica Playhouse (Chris DeCarlo and Evelyn Rudie, Artistic Directors) in Santa Monica, Ca, produced by Emily Bettman Mayer and Santa Monica Playhouse, on August 14th, 1986. It was directed by Martin M. Speer; the set design was by Scott Heineman; the lighting was by Matthew O'Donnell; the sound was by Evelyn Rudie and the production stage manager was Russell Werthman. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

BUDDY	Charles Levin
JENNY.....	Alley Mills
DAD	Norman Burton*
MIKE	Todd Susman
BOOTS.....	Sandra Kerns
MOM.....	Naomi Serotoff

*This part was originally cast and was subsequently played by Bruce Kirby.

A different production of ALMOST PERFECT was presented at the Hudson Guild Theatre (Geoffrey Sherman, Producing Director) in New York City, produced by the Hudson Guild Theatre, in association with Emily Bettman Mayer, on November 30th, 1988. It was directed by Geraldine Fitzgerald; the set design was by James D. Sandefur; the lighting was by Phil Monat; the costumes were by Pamela Scofield; the sound was by Aural Fixation; and the production stage manager was Frederick Hahn. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

BUDDY	Ethan Phillips
JENNY.....	Mia Dillon
DAD	Bill Nelson
MIKE	Ivar Brogger
BOOTS.....	Cathy Lee Crosby
MOM.....	Chevi Colton

TIME

The present, during June, July and August.

PLACE

St. Louis, Mo.

ACT I

The action takes place at different locations in St. Louis.

ACT II

Six weeks later.

(Scenes flow continuously, without stopping.)

CAST OF CHARACTERS

BUDDY APPLE

Early to mid thirties. Sexy, but not handsome. There's an intensity about Buddy, an inner urgency, perhaps from a constant struggle between doing what's "right" and doing what's right for him. Buddy is a nice guy but not a goody goody or a wimp. He possesses that selfishness of survival that's in all of us. His irreverent sense of humor helps him deal with the daily frustrations caused by his father and his wife.

JENNY APPLE

Buddy's wife. Early thirties. She is slim and attractive, but noticeably understated. Jenny is a "good citizen," responsible, organized, honest and frugal. She's the anchor for her family. She is not mousy or a drudge. She has a wonderful spirit, a sense of humor and a great laugh. During Act II, Jenny goes through a metamorphosis, blossoming, both in appearance and emotion.

DAD APPLE

Buddy's father. Sixtyish, the boss of Apple Construction, a totally self-made man, the ultimate energetic super-salesman. He's charming and impish, yet forceful and manipulative.

MIKE APPLE

Buddy's older brother, late thirties. Attractive, virile, sure of himself. A man of definite opinions, especially about women. You might call him crude, but it wouldn't bother him.

Characters

(continued)

BOOTS CLARK

That unattainable dream of perfection. Boots, in her thirties, has it all: beauty, breeding, wit, intelligence, sensitivity and success.

MOM APPLE

Sixtyish, a few years younger than Dad. Attractive, non-demanding and even tempered. She's happy, as long as her husband and sons are getting along.

ALMOST PERFECT

ACT I

*As the audience settles down, we hear a love song from the Thirties.
LIGHTS dim to black, as the song continues.*

*AT RISE: We hear a TYPEWRITER. LIGHTS up to reveal
BUDDY APPLE (35) in dress shirt and undershorts, typ-
ing on a double bed in Jenny's bedroom. We also see end
tables and a small dresser and/or dressing table. Papers and
clothes are strewn on the floor. He pulls the paper out and
reads it.*

BUDDY. "1933." A screenplay. Cut to: the skyline of Manhattan in the Thirties. Cut to: The Chrysler Building. Cut to the lights of Broadway. Cut to: ... Nah, that's too much "cutting to." (*A brilliant idea! He smiles.*) Dissolve to a party at George Gershwin's penthouse apartment, (*He pencils in the new word.*) where guests, Ernest Hemingway, Irving Berlin and Dorothy Parker are sharing some literate conversation.

JENNY. (*O.S.*) Buddy, don't you have to leave for work?

BUDDY. I'm getting dressed as fast as I can. *Pan* over to George Gershwin as he sits down at the piano, to play "Rhapsody in Blue."

JENNY. (O.S.) It's nine twenty three.

BUDDY. Thank you. *(to the audience:)* George Gershwin, what a guy. He grew up on the streets of New York. Played baseball, got in fights. But when it came to his music, he was a genius. His parents were Russian immigrants, like my mom. Are you ready for this? George was only twenty six when he wrote "Rhasody in Blue." *(unhappily)* I'm thirty five.

(JENNY APPLE [33] enters, wearing very little makeup, in a worn out, unsexy summer robe. She's loaded with men's underwear and socks, which she puts in a dresser drawer. NOTE: JENNY is organized and efficient, but she is not a drudge. She has a great laugh and is alternately amused at BUDDY'S humor and vexed at his unruly life style.)

JENNY. *Buddy.* We agreed, you were going to type on the dining room table.

BUDDY. I'm trying to seize the moment. *(He pinches her behind.)*

JENNY. I'm trying to strip the bed.

BUDDY. So go ahead, strip it. *(He lifts typewriter, she strips bed.)*

JENNY. And I have a lot of things to go over with you.

BUDDY. Oh oh, it's "list time" again.

JENNY. You promised to put a faucet that works in our bathroom.

BUDDY. Faucet, right. Next?

JENNY. You ran the dishwasher again, with only half a load.

BUDDY. I went a little crazy. I owe you three cents worth of "Cascade."

JENNY. Don't forget to vote today.

BUDDY. (*unenthused*) Oh, we're voting again? Alright.

JENNY. (*She gives him a small pamphlet.*) I marked a sample ballot for you. I want you to get Daddy's old tux altered to fit you, *today*.

BUDDY. Christ, do I have to wear a tux to that party?

JENNY. No, go as you are. It's only my mother and Daddy's thirty-fifth anniversary. They hired Russ David's Dance Band.

BUDDY. Oh shit, that probably means dancing.

JENNY. Naturally. You told me yourself, your idol George Gershwin was a wonderful dancer.

BUDDY. Forget it. You knew I couldn't dance when you married me. I can only turn to the left. What are you doing? (*She is picking up the mess on the floor.*)

JENNY. Fighting disease.

BUDDY. Jenny, *don't*. I've got everything where I want it. When you straighten, I can't find a thing.

JENNY. I want this epidemic out of here! (*JENNY Exits.*)

BUDDY. Actually, I dance great. (*We hear a lively Thirties*

love song. BUDDY dances with confidence all around the room.)
It's dancing with *women* I'm not very good at. Mmm, that music. After you've heard a love song by Gershwin or Berlin, you want to *kill* Barry Manilow. My mother's the one who got me hooked on those great love songs. She sang them all to me, when I was too young to resist. *(He sings, as if to a baby, a Thirties love song.)*

(JENNY Enters with bed linens and a tray with cereal in a bowl and a very bruised peach. She hands BUDDY a pen and paper.)

JENNY. Here, I need your signature on this.

BUDDY. Honey, you are crippling me creatively. *(He signs the paper and hands it back.)* There you go.

JENNY. Aren't you going to read it?

BUDDY. You read it, why do I have to read it?

JENNY. You're doing a very worthwhile thing. You just became an organ donor.

BUDDY. *(He reacts, leaps to her and reads the paper.)* Are you crazy? You just gave away my heart and my liver!

JENNY. They only remove things after you don't need them.

BUDDY. Who knows *what* I'll need when I get where I'm going?

JENNY. You don't believe in life after death.

BUDDY. Sure, *now*, but I plan to get very religious right before I die. Just don't touch anything else. Thanks for not giving away my nuts.

JENNY. Nobody wanted them. (*JENNY points to his cereal.*) Eat your breakfast. I don't know why you can't take the time to come downstairs and eat with Sally and Andy. It's the only time they get to see you.

BUDDY. I said good morning in the bathroom. (*She stares at him accusingly.*) You're right, I'll do it tomorrow. Please stand straight. Bad posture is not very sexy.

JENNY. (*picking up his socks*) Neither are your socks on the floor. Are these clean or dirty?

BUDDY. I don't know, smell 'em.

JENNY. (*She starts to sniff, stops.*) I am not your sock smeller. (*She tosses the socks at him.*)

BUDDY. This peach is bruised.

JENNY. It's not that bruised.

BUDDY. It's one big bruise. You've been shopping in the back of the market again, in "the old age home for fruit."

JENNY. Peaches are a dollar nine a pound. I got a giant bag for seventy-five cents.

BUDDY. Good deal and no teeth marks. (*He looks at cereal bowl.*) You bought me the wrong cereal.

JENNY. I did not. It's Spoon Size Shredded Wheat.

BUDDY. I didn't ask for "Spoon Size Shredded Wheat." That's Nabisco. I asked for "Raisin Squares," by Kellogg's. (*He pulls on chino pants.*)

JENNY. (*She pours raisins from a box into his bowl.*) Raisins. I'm not spending an extra ninety eight cents a box, for ten cents worth of raisins. Anyway, the Spoon Size Shredded Wheat was on special at \$1.98 and double coupon.

BUDDY. But it's not what I wanted! Kellogg's puts the raisins *inside* the little bisquits, it tastes different. Boy, you grew up surrounded by maids, country clubs, Republicans. How'd you learn to be such a niggling little pennypincher?

JENNY. It's called good money management. And the way you waste it, you should be down on your knees thanking Mother for teaching me. *(She Exits.)*

BUDDY. Do me one favor, when it comes time for my funeral, don't take bids. Just shove me in the trash masher. *(to the audience:)* She's so damn practical, and organized! It's like being married to a Volvo! *(JENNY Enters in a Laura Ashley dress.)* I hate that dress. Where do you buy those things, off a covered wagon?

JENNY. *(She laughs, then defensively.)* This happens to be a Laura Ashley.

BUDDY. Right, official uniform for "Virgins International." It should come with a little warning label. *(pretending to read a label)* "Caution, sex may induce nausea."

JENNY. *(She smiles, making the bed.)* I always enjoy your little fashion commentary, but I've got to drop Sally at her friend's and I'm due at Dr. Pines at ten.

BUDDY. For what? What's the matter?

JENNY. Dr. Pines, the psychologist. He's testing Andy today. Remember Andy? He's your four-year-old?

BUDDY. I *knew* that. I mean about Andy's tests. I just forgot the doctor's name.

JENNY. Buddy, I'm tired of doing this alone.

BUDDY. You're not doing it alone, Jen. If you really want me to skip work today, I will.

(*The TELEPHONE rings.*)

BUDDY. Oh no, I'll bet that's Dad. Tell him I'm gone.

JENNY. I can't lie to your father.

BUDDY. Sure you can. Try it, it's fun. He believes anything you say. *Please?*

JENNY. (*She picks up the phone.*) Hello? Oh, hi, Dad. — Sorry, you just missed him. — Gee, I'm not sure if he was going to the printer's or not. Okay, Dad. Yeah, see you at dinner tonight. Goodbye. (*She hangs up the phone.*)

BUDDY. Goddammit!

JENNY. I thought I was a wonderful liar.

BUDDY. Not you, *Dad*. I'll bet he wants to stop the brochures. He's not sure he likes the name "Heather Highlands" anymore for our new building project.

JENNY. But he loved that name when you came up with it.

BUDDY. That's before he thought of a better name, that'll really appeal to the Italians on the South side. "Madonna Lakes Estates."

JENNY. But there aren't any lakes.

BUDDY. There will be. (*to the audience:*) Give my father a bulldozer and a garden hose and he becomes God.

(*JENNY Exits. BUDDY puts on a high school letter sweater to suggest a flashback. We hear MUSIC under the following.*)

BUDDY. Nothing's changed. When I graduated high school, I wanted to hitchhike to Hollywood one summer. I could've made great contacts out there. Dad said, "Why

waste a whole summer?" So he bought me a hammer and gave me a job. Gershwin had a wonderful father. He bought George a piano and left him alone.

(LIGHTS come up on NORMAN APPLE [DAD], in limbo, wearing a sleeveless sweater, reading some blueprints.)

DAD. Buddy, where you going? You're not even home for meals anymore. Let's have a little talk.

BUDDY. Dad, I've got a date with Jenny and I'm late already.

DAD. *That's* what I want to talk about. You know how Mom and I feel about Jenny. Great girl, fine Jewish family.

BUDDY. Yeah, you've mentioned that.

DAD. Mom just told me Jenny's transferring to Northwestern.

BUDDY. That's right.

DAD. Between us girls, wouldn't you rather keep her here in St. Louis?

BUDDY. Dad, it's Jenny's decision and it's where she wants to...

DAD. *(Interrupts, squeezing BUDDY'S cheeks.)* Good, don't forget what you wanted to say. Jenny could meet all kinds of football heroes and fraternity boys at Northwestern. Three hundred miles away, in a coed dorm.

BUDDY. That won't matter. We have an understanding.

DAD. And I have a septic tank, and they're both full of good intentions. Buddy, you've got a face your mother could never forget. But your girlfriend *might*. Maybe you

ought to protect your interest with a little commitment.

BUDDY. Commitment? Dad, I'm only twenty two, I want to wait a while.

DAD. Buddy, good deals get away when you wait. Son, when you find a good deal, that's lucky. When you *know* it's a good deal, that's smart. And getting the person you're gonna live your life with is the most important deal there is.

BUDDY. Are you talking about marriage?

DAD. Marriage? Are you crazy? I'm talking about an engagement ring, to tie her up. Like an earnest money contract. I know, you're worried about the cost.

BUDDY. I wasn't worried about a thing.

DAD. Buddy, you were a great carpenter's apprentice last summer. As far as I'm concerned, you've got a permanent job, inside the office, with Mike and me.

BUDDY. Thanks, Dad, but I'm not sure I want to stay in the building business. I want to give writing a try.

DAD. You mean your jokes? You can do that, too. In the meantime, you've got to live. I just want you to know, *if* you should decide on a ring, I'll advance you the money. Y'know, against your wedding present.

BUDDY. Wedding present?

DAD. Yeah, you'll get ten thousand, just like Mom and I gave Mike.

BUDDY. Ten thousand?

DAD. And I'm not gonna let you work for slave wages if you're engaged. I plan to double your salary.

BUDDY. (*impressed*) Jesus, Dad.

DAD. *But ... it's your decision.* I know what smart money

would do. (*DAD Exits.*)

BUDDY. (*to the audience:*) Of course I bought the engagement ring. Of course I went into the building business. If Gershwin had a father like mine, he wouldn't have written *chopsticks*.

(*JENNY Enters. BUDDY tosses the letter sweater over his shoulder. She catches it, puts it away.*)

BUDDY. I swear to God, if he insists on "Madonna Lakes Estates," I'm quitting. (*He puts on an Ivy League sportcoat and a rep tie. She finishes getting dressed.*)

JENNY. You're not quitting. You can't afford to lose that job.

BUDDY. Why not? I sold two cartoons to Playboy last month. And my screenplay is getting better all the time.

JENNY. Buddy, you're not ready to earn a living in Hollywood yet. You earned a total of four hundred and sixty five dollars last year, selling your jokes and cartoons.

BUDDY. Nothing like getting support from your wife.

JENNY. Will you grow up! We have responsibilities, we have expenses. When you make a million dollars, then you can be a writer.

(*The TELEPHONE rings. BUDDY reacts.*)

BUDDY. That's Dad again. I've already left.

JENNY. Wait! (*She purses her lips for a kiss.*)

BUDDY. Oops, almost forgot. The obligatory kiss. Just kidding. *(He kisses her.)* Let it ring awhile. It makes him crazy. *(BUDDY Exits. JENNY picks up the phone.)*

JENNY. *(into the phone)* Hello? Oh, hi, Dad. — No, he hasn't called. Dad, you're planning to vote today, aren't you? There are a lot of important measures on the ballot. — Good. Get a pencil.

(LIGHTS out on JENNY. LIGHTS up on BUDDY. As he talks in limbo, we hear an interlude of our MUSIC.)

BUDDY. *(to the audience:)* Just another average day, working for my father. *Undoing* everything that I worked my ass off *doing*, yesterday.

(LIGHTS up on the sales office, consisting of a couch and a chair and table. We see a sign, hanging or on a tripod. "APPLE CONSTRUCTION PRESENTS HEATHER HIGHLANDS." MIKE APPLE [37], in jeans, boots and plaid shirt, is moving furniture into place.)

MIKE. Buddy, where you been all day?

BUDDY. Putting a hold on Heather Highlands brochures, Heather Highlands billboards and three hundred and fifty yards of plaid carpeting. Where's Dad?

MIKE. All over the fuckin' place. He's bringing in the new sign.

BUDDY. Goddamit. You couldn't talk him out of it?

MIKE. Did you ever try taking meat from a pit bull?

(DAD Enters, crosses to BUDDY with a sign: "APPLE CONSTRUCTION PRESENTS... MADONNA LAKES ESTATES." A moment after DAD Enters, MIKE Exits.)

DAD. Well, here it is, Madonna Lakes Estates. Whataya think, kiddo?

BUDDY. You know what I think. What do you want to name the models. "The Father," "The Son," and "The Holy Ghost?"

DAD. Funny, we'll name them after lakes. The Como, The Lugano, The Geneva ... *(He puts the new sign over "Heather Highlands.")*

BUDDY. "The Titticaca?" Dad, we all three agreed on "Heather Highlands."

DAD. I know, but my stomach didn't agree.

BUDDY. *(complaining to the audience)* His stomach. The fourth member of the firm.

DAD. Last night, at two in the morning, it was saying, "Heather Highlands? That sounds so 'tippy toe.' We're selling to Italians not ballet dancers. Italians are Catholic, so why go Scottish?"

BUDDY. You loved Scottish. It says value.

DAD. It also says cheap. Why remind people they're poor? It pisses them off. "Madonna Lakes Estates" will sell houses.

BUDDY. Dad, how can you call two bedrooms, one bath, on a thirty foot lot, an estate?

DAD. Every man's home is his estate. My pal, my goombah, Bishop Balducci at the Archdiocese, suggested the name, "Madonna." And the Catholic Church knows real estate. They own most of St. Louis tax free. So,

I promised his Holiness two free acres and he promised me a church and a school. And you know Italian Catholics. Before you can blink, a dozen kids. (*indicating many little heads*) Maria Christina, Maria Teresa, Maria Maria. And soon they'll be running out of bedrooms, which *we* will be glad to supply. And the Madonna keeps smiling, and *we* keep smiling.

BUDDY. Aren't you forgetting something?

DAD. What?

BUDDY. We're *Jewish*.

DAD. So was the Madonna.

(*MIKE Enters unrolling a blueprint.*)

BUDDY. Mike, what do *you* think of "Madonna Lakes Estates?"

DAD. Mike's opinion doesn't matter anymore.

BUDDY. What do you mean?

DAD. You didn't tell your brother?

MIKE. I was about to. I told Dad and Mom this morning. I'm leaving to start my own project.

BUDDY. You're bailing out? Jesus Christ! Why?

MIKE. I just want to try things on my own. But I'll stick around as long as I'm needed. Dad, I'm not gonna leave you high and dry.

DAD. You leave *me* high and dry? That'll be the day. I wasn't exactly falling on my ass before I took you in. Bud, we'll talk later about your taking over Mike's duties.

BUDDY. (*unenthused*) Yeah, okay.

DAD. We'll also talk about your new salary.

BUDDY. New Salary?

DAD. You'll be getting more. You'll deserve it. Buddy, be thinking about the ad campaign for Madonna Lakes Estates. Whatever you want, it's your baby. Listen, what do you say, we try a little radio this time?

BUDDY. Radio? I don't know, I've checked it out and...

DAD. *(He interrupts, squeezing BUDDY'S cheek.)* Good, don't forget what you wanted to say. Y'know, I heard them advertising Brentwood Oaks on Mom's psychologist, "Dr. Susan." And those shmucks are selling houses.

BUDDY. Okay, I'll check it out.

DAD. I already did. I mean they contacted me. I told them advertising is your baby. Someone's coming out to see you. *(He pulls a paper from BUDDY'S open briefcase.)* Is this the sales report I asked you for?

BUDDY. No, Dad.

DAD. *(He reads, confused.)* Cut to the skyline of Manhattan in the thirties. What the hell is this?

BUDDY. Nothing, it's a screenplay I'm working on.

DAD. A screenplay? Buddy, for Christ sake! You're in the *building* business.

BUDDY. You know I only write in my spare time.

DAD. Spare time? I wish I had some of that. With him leaving, I have to be able to count on you to be a mensch.

BUDDY. Don't worry, I'm not gonna let you down.

DAD. I'll hold you to that. By the way, "Mr. Words," I loved your flowery descriptions in the brochure. *(to MIKE:)* Who but your brother could make a square hole in a roof sound like a desirable feature? He called it an

“atrium.” (*MIKE playfully gives BUDDY the finger, behind DAD’s back. Then, as DAD turns back, MIKE scratches his cheek to cover up.*) Smart. It’s even Italian. I’ll be at the downtown office if you need me. Remember, Buddy, think Italian. Ciao. (*DAD Exits.*)

BUDDY. Mike how can you do this to me? You know I was thinking about getting outta here, so I can write. You can’t just take off and leave me alone with him.

MIKE. Bud, I had to get out of here while I still know how to make a decision. What’s the difference what I’m doing? You’re thirty-five years old. Do what you want.

BUDDY. You make it sound so simple. How can I leave him now? He calls us his good right arm and his good left arm.

MIKE. Easy, you walk up to him and say, “Listen, *Stumps.*”

BUDDY. Yeah, fine, go ahead, joke. I’m stuck here. I have no control over my life. You’re doing it to me again, Mike. First you leave Laura, now this.

MIKE. What’s the difference if I left Laura?

BUDDY. Because, I’d like a few options around here, myself. If you want to know, I’m not that happy at home.

MIKE. You’re shitting me. You and Jenny are having problems?

BUDDY. No. But that doesn’t mean I’m happy.

MIKE. Is that all? Buddy, there’s a difference between griping and leaving. My marriage was over. For eight years, I kept giving Laura more rope and she kept taking it. She wants to go into the fucking *rope* business. You and Jenny’ll be fine.

BUDDY. I don't want to be fine, I want to be in love.

MIKE. Didn't we have this conversation when you were thirteen? Bud, this is not a "sock hop," it's life. You'll be okay. Just don't fight it so much.

BUDDY. That's what you used to say when you sat on my head.

MIKE. I'm gonna miss that sense of humor of yours. But I'll be back from time to time, when I visit Lot Eighty Three.

BUDDY. Eighty Three? The one with the tits?

MIKE. Yeah, she comes with the standard equipment.

BUDDY. You fell on that? You bastard. she was *my* customer.

MIKE. So what was stopping you?

BUDDY. I thought about it, but I couldn't go for her. She's so short, and she's got these "Steinway legs." God, I feel sorry for dumpy women, even when they've got big tits. There's no way to hide bad legs. They try pants...

MIKE. *Hey! Don't ruin it for me!* I like 'em built healthy and close to the ground. Buddy, as a parting gift, I'm gonna teach you a few things about women. You don't have to fall in love with 'em to bang 'em. And they love builders. Any woman who walks through that door needs me. With these strong hands, I build her shelter. Think of the symbolism. The operative word here is *erection*. (*He projects the measuring tape on his belt to indicate "erection."*) You've got a sexual role to play, and look how you're dressed.

BUDDY. I'm head of sales.

MIKE. You head's in your ass. You're a *builder*. Dress

like one. Boots, jeans, tan, they eat it up.

BUDDY. Dad asked me to wear a coat and tie.

MIKE. Of course he did. Dad doesn't want you to get laid. You want to know why I got Lot Eighty Three and you're playing with yourself?

BUDDY. Alright, why?

MIKE. A couple of months ago I walk in the office and there she is. I'd been backfilling with the dozer that day, so I had a hint of diesel about me. She's going through sheer torture trying to decide on her kitchen group colors. Sandalwood ... *or* ... Avocado? Ysee, women tend to be slightly insecure. Probably from waiting in line at public toilets. So, I took charge, and said, "Hi, I'm the builder. Why don't I help you decide?" and I move in close, so my elbow's touching her tit. (*MIKE'S arm touches BUDDY'S chest.*) Elbow to brain: *Soft*.

BUDDY. Jesus, what did she do?

MIKE. Nothing. She just had to step back an inch if she wasn't interested. She didn't budge. Her husband travels.

BUDDY. I wouldn't have the nerve to touch some strange tit. Anyway, I'm not looking to screw around. That gets everything very complicated. Look what happened to you and Laura.

MIKE. I take great offense at that. My screwing around had nothing to do with our problems. It was the twelve years of unbroken screaming. I can still hear it in sea shells.

BUDDY. Jenny and I never scream. We never even *fight*. We just peck at each other.

MIKE. How is she in bed?

BUDDY. You shithead.

MIKE. That bad, huh?

BUDDY. No, she's fine, once I get her there. But it's always *me* asking *her*. I'm constantly saying to myself, "Okay, this time *she's* gonna ask. If it takes weeks ... months ... years. I'm saying *nothing* till she asks. I've waited as long as *five* days.

MIKE. Five days? Snails don't wait that long! (*He pats BUDDY on the back.*) Well, at least you know Jenny doesn't screw around.

BUDDY. Yeah, no problem there. She doesn't know how to flirt. She doesn't wear makeup. She dresses like Emily Dickenson. What guy is gonna come on to Jenny, unless he needs voting information?

(*"BOOTS" CLARK [30], beautiful, blonde, Enters, carrying a briefcase. She is dressed appropriate for business but sexy enough to be appreciated by men.*)

BOOTS. Hello, is this the sales office?

MIKE. It sure is. Hi, I'm the builder.

BOOTS. Mr. Apple?

MIKE. That's right. And you are?

BOOTS. Boots Clark, KPRZ.

BUDDY. Oh, Ms. Clark, I'm...

MIKE. *Bud*, I got it. (*to BOOTS:*) Now, you're the type of customer that makes building a pleasure. Obviously an intelligent, capable, career gal moving up fast. (*He walks her to a floor plan.*) Why don't you step right over here? I'll explain what Apple Construction is all about. This is the ideal first house for you. Two spacious bedrooms, a fully

tilled bath. Very sexy kitchen in either Sandalwood or Avocado. (*His elbow touches BOOTS' breast. She steps back.*)

BOOTS. Lovely.

BUDDY. *Jesus!*

BOOTS. But I'm not interested ... in a house. In fact, I don't think you're the person I want to talk to.

MIKE. I'm the builder.

BOOTS. The foreman told me to look for Buddy Apple, a man in a sportcoat and tie.

BUDDY. (*His hand shoots up happily.*) Yo! I'm Buddy Apple. See, sportcoat, tie?

BOOTS. (*Smiles, warmly, shakes BUDDY'S hand.*) Hi, I'm Boots Clark, from KPRZ.

BUDDY. Hi.

BOOTS. Hi, I'd love to talk to you about the impact of radio advertising.

(*JENNY picks up a phone in limbo*)

JENNY. (*into the phone:*)
Hello?

BOOTS. I apologize for being so late.

JENNY. (*into the phone:*)
Hi, Mother.

BUDDY. I've got all the time in the world.

MIKE. Bud, I've got some important overall supervising to do, so I'll just...

BUDDY. Good, Mike. And report back to me later. (*MIKE reacts at "being had," then Exits.*)

JENNY. (*into the phone:*)
No, Buddy's not home yet.

BOOTS. Your dad said advertising is your baby.

BUDDY. That's right. (*BUD-DY leads BOOTS to the office desk. They sit. BOOTS opens her briefcase.*)

JENNY. (*into the phone:*)
Of course, Buddy voted today, Mother. Thanks for keeping the kids tonight. Andy's tests? Nothing new. Difficult behavior patterns, short attention span. The same stuff they always tell me. No, Buddy couldn't go. He had some really important things at the office.

(*LIGHTS dim out on JENNY. She Exits.*)

BOOTS. (*laughing*) That's very funny.

BUDDY. You like that?

BOOTS. Yes. You're the funniest builder I've talked to today. Anyway, I'd say your best buy would be drive-time spots during Dr. Susan's late afternoon show. How does that sound, Mr. Apple?

BUDDY. Perfect, except my father is "Mr. Apple." I'm Bud. (*She laughs.*) You find that funny, too? (*to the audience:*) Hey, I'm doing okay here.

BOOTS. (*still enjoying it*) Don't mind me, I'm a nut. "Bud" is kind of a joke name I use for my boyfriend, Pete, when he works too hard. Y'see, he's an executive at Anheuser Busch. *Bud.*

BUDDY. Oh? Well, we've got to call me something. How about Buddy, or Heineken or Schlitz? (*She laughs,*

showing beautiful teeth.) My compliments to your orthodontist.

BOOTS. I didn't have one. *(She points heavenward.)* Other than *him*.

BUDDY. My compliments to *Him*. *(He points heavenward.)* He did an excellent job. On *everything*.

BOOTS. Thank you.

(MIKE Enters.)

MIKE. Buddy, I'm leaving. It's six, aren't you going to be late for dinner with your *wife*?

BUDDY. *(He looks at the audience, caught.)* Oh, that's right.

BOOTS. Is it six already? Pete'll kill me. Now that I've seen your operation, I'll lay out a campaign, then we'll talk. No obligation.

BUDDY. Oh, let me be a little obligated.

MIKE. It's dark out there, Boots. C'mon, I'll walk you to your car.

BOOTS. Thanks. Goodbye, Bud.

MIKE. Goodbye, Bud. Boots, did you ever take a ride on a dozer? *(MIKE and BOOTS Exit.)*

BUDDY. *(to the audience:)* He couldn't be my brother. A second cousin wouldn't do that.

(We hear our interlude MUSIC.)

BUDDY. Boots Clark. Unbelievable. She reminds me so much of Carole Lombard. *The* movie beauty of the thirties. Carole Lombard. *She's* the reason I dream in black and white.

(The MUSIC ends. BUDDY walks through limbo to JENNY'S bedroom.)

JENNY. Buddy, is that you?

BUDDY. Yeah, sorry I'm late.

JENNY. *(O.S.)* You could've called.

BUDDY. That would've made me later. Are the kids at your mother's?

(JENNY Enters, changing to a blouse and full skirt.)

JENNY. Yes. I called your Mom and told her we'd be very late.

BUDDY. How'd it go with Andy?

JENNY. Okay. There's nothing new. I'll tell you in the car. I called you at the office and got the answering machine. I guess you'd already left to vote?

BUDDY. Actually, no. I completely ran out of time.

JENNY. I knew it, Buddy! You're disgraceful. Mother asked if you'd voted. I lied to her.

BUDDY. And you lied to my father this morning. That's a bad habit.

JENNY. You take it so lightly. Voting happens to be more than a right and a privilege, it's a duty. Hitler got into power because people like you didn't vote.

BUDDY. I apologize for letting Hitler in. It won't happen again. Come here. *(He kisses her.)*

JENNY. Couldn't you have left the office a half hour earlier?

BUDDY. When Mike tells me he's leaving the firm, I think it's worth a few minutes discussion.

JENNY. Mike's leaving?

BUDDY. Yes. He's starting his own project. And then I had a very important advertising meeting.

JENNY. Was it more important than voting?

BUDDY. *(to the audience:)* Is she kidding? It was more important than *citizenship*.

JENNY. How the hell could you not vote?

BUDDY. Hitler wasn't running this time. It was a nothing election. *(He begins removing his sportcoat and shirt and gets into a sportshirt.)*

JENNY. That's not true. My friend Nancy Krakower winning a seat on the Board of Education is very important.

BUDDY. Nancy Krakower? Aren't there enough ugly women on that board already?

JENNY. *(Shakes her head, fighting a smile.)* That's not funny.

BUDDY. I know. Especially for her husband. Tell you what, we'll stop on the way to Mom and Dad's and I'll vote, okay?

JENNY. *(softening)* Okay. I finished my little speech for the anniversary party. Want to hear it?

BUDDY. Yeah, go ahead. *(He Exits, then comes back wiping his face with a wash cloth, holding a brush for his hair.)*

JENNY. *(She reads "sincerely," from a paper.)* Mother and Daddy: On this happy occasion of your thirty-fifth anniversary, I want to thank you both for setting wonderful examples for me. Your intense involvement in the St. Louis community has always given me inspiration and demonstrated that being a viable community leader is not only gratifying and fulfilling ... *(BUDDY has been react-*

ing to the “good citizen” tedium of her speech. He interrupts with a snore.)

BUDDY. Wait a minute. Have you been introduced to these people? They’re your parents. Write something cute. Be adorable.

JENNY. You’re right. You’ll have to help me. Are you ready? I’m starved. Your mom told me she baked lemon pound cake.

BUDDY. Fine, but let’s be aware of the possibility of something nice happening later. If it so pleases you? *(He lays down in a comic pose, waving at her with his fingers.)*

JENNY. Something nice? That’s a possibility.

BUDDY. *(bluntly, as he moves to her)* Good. We’re talking definite penetration here, so please, D.O.E. Don’t overeat.

JENNY. I’m not going to overeat and I don’t want you staring at me. I didn’t have time for lunch and I’m very hungry.

BUDDY. Fine, I only mention it, because I know how you love my mother’s cooking. *(to the audience:)* And I don’t want a beached whale on my hands.

JENNY. *(an anticipatory smile)* She’s making her stuffed peppers.

BUDDY. Just remember how uncomfortable you get.

JENNY. *(Smiles, as she brushes her hair.)* Yeah.

BUDDY. And remember one other thing. Priorities.

JENNY. You mean, sex.

BUDDY. I mean, breathing. Last time, you asked to have dessert served in an oxygen tent. And what fun when we got home. *(He lays down and comically dem-*

onstrates.) You laying there, gasping for air, begging me to take your shoes off. Then, the final thrill, you fell asleep on me.

JENNY. I won't fall asleep. And if I do, we'll make it up in the morning.

BUDDY. (*He rises, making the point of his life.*) You never make 'em up! Once they're *gone*, they're *gone*! And it's been five days.

JENNY. It's so romantic to have love making on a schedule.

BUDDY. Some schedule. We were going to get together Monday night, until your "Smoking Kills" meeting came up. Then Tuesday was Business Economics, Wednesday, Basic Computer Skills...

JENNY. Alright, I had a busy week. I'm trying to get a degree one of these days. We do have the whole weekend.

BUDDY. No we don't. You're getting your period tomorrow.

JENNY. (*amazed*) You know that?! *How?* You have a headache?

BUDDY. I happen to have you programmed into my calendar alarm watch. You "dinged" this morning.

JENNY. Here we go again. You do this every month. You actually hold my period against me.

BUDDY. I do not. I'm just trying to face it with you.

JENNY. I want to face it *alone*!

BUDDY. (*tenderly*) Jenny, I know this testing thing with Andy must have been crappy. If you're feeling bummed out, we can forget tonight.

JENNY. No, it was okay and I want to make love.

BUDDY. Wonderful.

JENNY. All this planning is what bums me out.

BUDDY. You're right, no planning. Oh, by the way, good news. We'll have more money, when I take over Mike's job.

JENNY. Great.

BUDDY. Y'know, we could bring the lemon pound cake back here and have it after we make ... sorry.

JENNY. We'll just let things happen. Ready?

BUDDY. You're very pretty, you know that? Nice slim hips, somewhere under that Mother Goose skirt. Outstanding nose job. Great legs, too. Let me check something. *(He sits her on the bed, then grabs her ankle.)*

JENNY. What are you doing?

BUDDY. This is how Harold Minsky of Minsky's Burlesque picked perfect legs. Thin ankles are very important. If he could touch his thumb and middle finger together, the legs were perfect. *(He can't quite touch.)* See that? Almost perfect. *(He smiles and sings a love song from the Thirties. For example:)*

DON'T BLAME ME FOR FALLING IN LOVE WITH
YOU.

I'M UNDER YOUR SPELL, BUT HOW CAN I HELP
IT. DON'T BLAME ME

(He puts his arm around her. They Exit.)

(LIGHTS up on MOM and DAD'S dining room. MOM APPLE [60], in a dress and apron, Enters, setting the table, which can be brought on by actors.)

MOM. *(singing a continuation of BUDDY's love song)*

CAN'T YOU SEE, WHEN YOU DO THE THINGS YOU
DO.

IF I CAN'T CONCEAL THE THRILL THAT I'M
FEELING...

(JENNY, carrying a bag from Saks, and BUDDY Enter.)

JENNY. Hi Mom, sorry we're late. *(She points meaningfully to BUDDY.)*

BUDDY. Hi, Mom. *(He hugs MOM.)*

MOM. Hi, Sweetheart.

(DAD Enters, rolled up sleeves, chewing a cigar.)

DAD. Hi, kids.

JENNY. Dad! What is that in your mouth?

DAD. I'm not smoking, I'm biting.

JENNY. Good, I brought you something. *(She hands him a news clipping.)*

DAD. *(Smiles, to MOM.)* Jenny brought me something. *(He glances at the clipping, forces a smile.)* An article on mouth cancer. How thoughtful.

JENNY. This house smells wonderful.

MOM. Wait till you taste it. I hope you're hungry.

BUDDY. Was tonight for dinner? We already ate. *(MOM reacts, then laughs.)*

MOM. Such a wonderful jokester. He likes to make his mother laugh. *(taking JENNY'S paper bag, MOM removes a conservative one-piece woman's swim suit)* Good, you brought the swim suit.

BUDDY. So that's what you were hiding in the bag?

JENNY. I knew you'd hate it.

MOM. It's beautiful. I'd like to have it myself.

BUDDY. It's too old for you, Mom.

JENNY. (*holding the suit up to her chest*) Could you take it in through the neck? It just hangs there.

MOM. I'll try. I've never taken in a bathing suit.

DAD. You've never had to.

MOM. Dear, we're given what God gives us.

BUDDY. No wonder you believe in God.

DAD. (*joking, he nuzzles her*) This is what I've been up against all these years. My first wife. Got her right off the boat. I always have something to fall back on. (*DAD gives MOM an unseen goose.*)

MOM. Stop it. Go away.

DAD. I love to make her blush. (*to JENNY:*) Jenny, how about some white wine? It's in the kitchen.

JENNY. Good, I want to peek in the oven. (*JENNY and DAD Exit.*)

BUDDY. (*for JENNY'S benefit*) Don't fall in, Gretel.

MOM. (*to BUDDY:*) Why do you make her so nervous about what she wears?

BUDDY. I just want her to look her best.

MOM. Men, always with the looks.

BUDDY. Lucky for you. If you weren't so gorgeous, you'd still be sewing for the gentiles in Kiev. You told me yourself, the border guards let your family out of Russia because they thought you were cute.

MOM. (*enjoying this "truth"*) That's true, because men are fools. I don't know what they all see in me.

BUDDY. Mom, men have this weakness. They love beautiful women. I'm talking about intelligent men, sensitive men. Arthur Miller married Marilyn Monroe, didn't he? And Eleanor Roosevelt was *very* available.

MOM. Your Jenny just happens to be a lovely girl.

BUDDY. I agree.

MOM. Then tell her that. I like to give people flowers while they can still smell them. And give her a pinch once in a while, the way Dad always bothers me.

(MIKE Enters.)

MIKE. Hi, Mom.

MOM. Michael, darling. *(She kisses MIKE.)*

MIKE. Hi, Bud.

BUDDY. Mike. *(MIKE purses his lips at BUDDY.)* No thanks.

MOM. *(She calls O.S.)* Dear, Michael's here. Let's all sit down.

MIKE. How you feeling, Mom?

MOM. I'll feel fine, if you and Dad get along tonight.

MIKE. That's up to him and you know it.

MOM. Just keep food in your mouth, not answers.

(MOM Exits.)

MIKE. If he starts, I'm leaving. I can't take any more of his crap.

BUDDY. Sure you can. Come on, take some crap for Mom. *(He playfully punches MIKE'S arm.)*

MIKE. That didn't hurt. *(as he walks away, he hits BUDDY'S arm.)*

(DAD and JENNY Enter with wine. JENNY is chewing bread.)

DAD. Jenny, I should tell someone with a down payment in his hand that he can't smoke in my sales office?

JENNY. You don't have to tell them. Just put up a small "No Smoking" sign. Mmm, Mom this onion garlic bread is delicious.

BUDDY. *(He reacts. Then, to JENNY.)* Dinner didn't even start. You're eating already? *(He chuckles hollowly.)*

MIKE. Hi, Dad.

DAD. Michael, you're here. Now maybe we can start.

JENNY. Hiya, Mike. *(JENNY hugs MIKE. DAD starts pouring ice tea for JENNY, then BUDDY.)*

DAD. Y'see, Jenny, things are going to be tough enough on this project. Buddy and I are faced with developing fifty acres, by ourselves. Just the two of us, alone.

(Instead of pouring MIKE some tea, DAD slams the pitcher down firmly, next to him. MOM Enters with a platter of potato pancakes. They sit for dinner.)

MOM. Potato pancakes?

BUDDY. Just one for me, Mom.

MOM. One? Since when?

BUDDY. It's summertime, Jenny and I are eating light, so we won't feel stuffed.

JENNY. Two for me, Mom. Mike, I hear you're starting your own project. Good luck.

MIKE. Thanks, Jenny. *(MOM Exits to the kitchen.)*

BUDDY. And lucky for us, he bought acreage on the

North Side, so we won't be competing.

DAD. Of course we'll be competing. If not on this project, the next. That's fine, I'm not afraid of competition.

JENNY. Sour cream? (*MIKE passes JENNY the sour cream. She piles it on her plate as BUDDY reacts. NOTE: During this entire scene, JENNY eats with delight and total gusto.*)

DAD. So, when are you leaving officially, Michael? I don't want to be surprised again..

MIKE. I didn't surprise you. I told you, "I'd like to leave."

DAD. It's *when* you told me. *After* the three of us agreed to take on this new development.

(*MOM Enters with a bowl of noodles.*)

JENNY. Mmm, noodles! (*She takes a large helping as BUDDY reacts.*)

MIKE. Dad face it. Some people weren't meant to work together.

DAD. Dear, our son just made a big discovery. I'm impossible to work with.

MIKE. I didn't say that.

MOM. I leave the room for ten seconds!

DAD. (*to MIKE:*) It's just a shame you couldn't have come to me, like a mensch, *before* I bought the fifty acres and said, "Goodbye, Dad, I've picked your brain for fourteen years, now I'm leaving."

MOM. (*She feels her side, pained.*) Mmmph!

DAD. What's the matter? Your gallstone operation again?

MOM. You know it hurts me when you fight. Michael is our son.

DAD. No, we got him on sale at K-Mart. Of course he's our son.

JENNY. Mom, I'll serve. Why don't you sit down?

MOM. If I sit down, there goes my diet. (MOM Exits.)

DAD. If he weren't our son, I'd be suing him for sticking me with fifty acres of corn and alfalfa.

MIKE. (to DAD:) Why are you so angry? You were in business with Grandpa and you left to go on your own.

JENNY. (to BUDDY:) The bread please?

DAD. That's right, I left, with Pa's blessing. I didn't run away. You've got a history of running away from things.

MIKE. Can we skip the history lessons?

DAD. (touching his stomach) It can only stay in here so long. When I caught you smoking at eleven and I grounded you, you ran to Cincinnati, hitchhiking.

BUDDY. (He hands JENNY a small heel of bread.) Sweetie, starches tend to swell, later.

JENNY. (She takes a larger piece.) I'll worry about that, later.

(MOM Enters with a baking dish of stuffed peppers, which she hands to JENNY, then Exits.)

JENNY. Ooh, the peppers.

BUDDY. And they're stuffed.

DAD. Then there were more people you couldn't get

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