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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Brighton Beach Memoirs

by Neil Simon

SAMUEL FRENCH

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BRIGHTON BEACH MEMOIRS was first produced at the Alvin Theatre in New York City on date. The performance was directed by Gene Saks, with sets by David Mitchell, lighting by Tharon Musser, and costumes by Patricia Zipprodt. The cast was as follows:

EUGENE . . . . . Matthew Broderick
BLANCHE . . . . . Joyce Van Patten
KATE . . . . . Elizabeth Franz
LAURIE . . . . . Mandy Ingber
NORA . . . . . Jodi Thelen
STANLEY . . . . . Željko Ivanek
JACK . . . . . Peter Michael Goetz

CHARACTERS

EUGENE

BLANCHE

KATE

LAURIE

NORA

STANLEY

JACK

SETTING

Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York

TIME

ACT ONE
September, 1937 – 6:30 p.m.

ACT TWO
Wednesday, a week later.
About 6:45 in the evening.

ACT ONE

(Brighton Beach, New York, September, 1937.)

(A wooden frame house, not too far from the beach. It is a lower middle-income area inhabited mostly by Jews, Irish and Germans.)

(The entrance to the house is at stage right, a small porch and two steps up that lead to the front door. Inside, we see the dining room and living room area. Another door leads to the kitchen… A flight of stairs leads up to three small bedrooms. Unseen are two other bedrooms. A hallway leads to other rooms…)

(It's about 6:30 p.m. and the late September sun is sinking fast.)

(At rise: **KATE JEROME***, about 40 years old is setting up for dinner. Her sister,* **BLANCHE MORTON***, 38, is working at a sewing machine.* **LAURIE MORTON***, age 13, is lying on the sofa, reading a book.)*

(Outside on the grass is **EUGENE JEROME***, almost but not quite 15. He is wearing knickers, a shirt and tie, a faded and torn sweater, Keds sneakers and a blue baseball cap. He has a beaten and worn baseball glove on his left hand and in his right hand he holds a ball that is so old and battered, it is ready to fall apart.)*

(He stands on an imaginary pitcher's mound, facing stage left. He looks back over his shoulder to an imaginary runner on second, then back over to the "batter." Then he winds up and pitches, hitting an offstage wall.)

EUGENE. One out, a man on second, bottom of the seventh, two balls, no strikes… Ruffing checks the runner on

second, gets the sign from Dickey, Ruffing stretches, Ruffing pitches. *(He throws the ball.)* Caught the inside corner, steerike one! Atta baby! No hitter up there.

(He retrieves the ball.)

One out, a man on second, bottom of the seventh, two balls one strike… Ruffing checks the runner on second, gets the sign from Dickey, Ruffing stretches, Ruffing pitches – *(He throws the ball.)* Low and outside, ball three. Come on, Red! Make him a hitter! No batter up there. In there all the time, Red.

BLANCHE. *(Stops sewing.)* Kate, please. My head is splitting.

KATE. I told that boy a hundred and nine times. *(She yells out.)* Eugene! Stop banging the wall!

EUGENE. *(calls out)* In a minute, Ma! This is for the World Series! *(back to his game)* One out, a man on second, bottom of the seventh, three balls, one strike…Ruffing stretches, Ruffing pitches– *(he throws ball)* Oh, no! High and outside, JoJo Moore walks! First and second and Mel Ott lopes up to the plate…

BLANCHE. *(stops again)* Can't he do that someplace else?

KATE. I'll break his arm, that's where he'll do it. *(calls out)* Eugene, I'm not going to tell you again. Do you hear me?

EUGENE. It's the last batter, Mom. Mel Ott is up. It's a crucial moment in World Series history.

KATE. Your Aunt Blanche has a splitting headache.

BLANCHE. I don't want him to stop playing. It's just the banging.

LAURIE. *(looks up from her book)* He always does it when I'm studying. I have a big test in history tomorrow.

EUGENE. One pitch, Mom? I think I can get him to pop up. I have my stuff today.

KATE. Your father will give you plenty of stuff when he comes home! You hear!

EUGENE. Alright! Alright!

KATE. I want you inside *now!* Put out the water glasses.

BLANCHE. I can do that.

KATE. Why? Is his arm broken? *(yells out again)* And I don't want any backtalk, you hear?

(She goes back to kitchen.)

EUGENE. *(Slams ball into his glove angrily. Then he cups his hand, making a megaphone out of it and announces to the grandstands:)* …"Attention, ladeees and gentlemen! Today's game will be delayed because of my Aunt Blanche's headache"…

KATE. Blanche, that's enough sewing today. That's all I need is for you to go blind.

BLANCHE. I just have this one edge to finish… Laurie, darling, help your Aunt Kate with the dishes.

LAURIE. Two more pages, alright, Ma? I have to finish the Macedonian Wars.

KATE. Always studying, that one. She's gonna have some head on her shoulders. *(calls out from kitchen)* Eugene!!

EUGENE. I'm coming.

KATE. And wash your hands.

EUGENE. They're clean. I'm wearing a glove.

(He throws ball into glove again…then he looks out front and addresses the audience.)

…I hate my name! …Eugene Morris Jerome…it is the second worst name ever given to a male child… The first worst is Haskell Fleischmann… How am I ever going to play for the Yankees with a name like Eugene Morris Jerome? You have to be a Joe…or a Tony… or Frankie. If only I was born Italian… All the best Yankees are Italian… My mother makes spaghetti with ketchup, what chance do I have? *(He slams the ball into glove again.)*

LAURIE. I'm almost through, Ma.

BLANCHE. Alright, darling. Don't get up too quickly.

KATE. *(to* **LAURIE***)* You have better color today, sweetheart. Did you get a little sun this morning?

LAURIE. I walked down to the beach.

BLANCHE. Very slowly, I hope?

LAURIE. Yes, Ma.

BLANCHE. That's good.

EUGENE. *(He's been listening…then turns to audience again.)* …She gets all this special treatment because the doctors say she has kind of a flutter in her heart… I got hit with a baseball right in the back of the skull, I saw two of everything for a week and I still had to carry a block of ice home every afternoon… Girls are treated like queens… Maybe that's what I should have been born…an Italian girl…

KATE. *(picks up a sweat sock from the floor)* Eugene!

EUGENE. What?

KATE. How many times have I told you not to leave your things around the house?

EUGENE. A hundred and nine.

KATE. What?

EUGENE. You said yesterday, "I told you a hundred and nine times not to leave your things around the house."

BLANCHE. Don't be fresh to your mother, Gene!

EUGENE. *(to audience)* Was I fresh? I swear to God, that's what she said to me yesterday… One day I'm going to put all this in a book or a play… I'm going to be a writer like Ring Lardner or somebody… That's if things don't work out first with the Yankees…or the Cubs…or the Red Sox…or maybe possibly the Tigers… If I get down to the St. Louis Browns, then I'll definitely be a writer.

LAURIE. Mom, can I have a glass of lemonade?

BLANCHE. It'll spoil your dinner, darling.

KATE. A small glass, it couldn't hurt her.

BLANCHE. Alright. In a minute, angel.

KATE. I'll get it. I'm in the kitchen anyway.

EUGENE. *(to audience)* Can you believe that? She'd better have a bad heart or I'm going to kill her one day…

(He gets up to cross into the house, then stops on the porch steps and turns to the audience again…confidentially.)

Listen, I hope you don't repeat this to anybody… What I'm telling you are my secret memoirs… It's called, "The Unbelievable, Fantastic and Completely Private Thoughts of I, Eugene Morris Jerome, in this, the fifteenth year of his life, in the year nineteen hundred and thirty-seven, in the community of Brighton Beach, Borough of Brooklyn, Kings County, City of New York, Empire State of the American Nation" –

KATE. *(comes out of kitchen with a glass of lemonade and one roller skate)* A roller skate? On my kitchen floor? Do you want me dead, is that what you want?

EUGENE. *(rushes into the house)* I didn't leave it there.

KATE. No? Then who? Laurie? Aunt Blanche? Did you ever see them on skates?… *(holds out skate)* Take this upstairs… Come here!

EUGENE. *(approaches, holding the back of his head)* Don't hit my skull, I have a concussion.

KATE. What would you tell your father if he came home and I was dead on the kitchen floor?

EUGENE. I'd say, "Don't go in the kitchen, Pal"

KATE. *(She swings at him, he ducks and she misses.)* Get upstairs! And don't come down with dirty hands.

*(***EUGENE** *goes up the stairs. He turns to the audience:)*

EUGENE. You see why I want to write all this down? …In case I grow up all twisted and warped, the world will know why.

BLANCHE. *(still sewing)* He's a boy. He's young. You should be glad he's healthy and active. Before the doctors found out what Laurie had, she was the same way.

KATE. Never. Girls are different. When you and I were girls, we kept the house spotless. It was Ben and Ezra who drove Momma crazy.

(We see **EUGENE** *upstairs, enter his room and take out a notebook and pencil and lie down on his bed, making a new entry in his "memoirs.")*

KATE …I've always been like that. I have to have things clean. Just like Momma. The day they packed up and left the house in Russia, she cleaned the place from top to bottom. She said, "No matter what the Cossacks did to us, when they broke into her house, they would have respect for the Jews."

LAURIE. Who were the Cossacks?

KATE. The same filthy bunch as live across the street.

LAURIE. Across the street? You mean the Murphys?

KATE. *All* of them.

LAURIE. The Murphys are Russian?

BLANCHE. The mother is nice. She's been very sweet to me.

KATE. Her windows are so filthy, I thought she had black curtains hanging inside.

BLANCHE. I was in their house. It was very neat. Nobody could be as clean as you.

KATE. What business did you have in their house?

BLANCHE. She invited me for tea.

KATE. To meet that drunken son of hers?

BLANCHE. No. Just the two of us.

KATE. I'm living here seven years, she never invited *me* for tea. Because she knows your situation. I know their kind. Remember what Momma used to tell us. Stay on your own side of the street. That's what they have gutters for.

(She goes back into the kitchen.)

EUGENE. *(writing, says aloud)* "That's-what-they-have-gutters-for"… *(to audience)* If my mother knew I was writing all this down, she would stuff me like one of her chickens… I'd better explain what she meant by Aunt Blanche's "situation"… You see, her husband, Uncle Dave, died six years ago from… *(he looks around)* …this thing…they never say the word. They always whisper it. It was – *(He whispers.)* Cancer! …I think they're afraid if they said it out loud, God would say, "I HEARD THAT! YOU SAID THE DREAD DISEASE! *(He points*

finger down.) JUST FOR THAT, I SMITE YOU DOWN WITH IT!" …There are some things that grown-ups just won't discuss… For example, my grandfather. He died from – *(He whispers.)* – Diptheria! …Anyway, after Uncle Dave died, he left Aunt Blanche with no money. Not even insurance… And she couldn't support herself because she has – *(He whispers.)* Asthma… So my big-hearted mother insisted we take her and her kids in to live with us. So they broke up our room into two small rooms and me and my brother Stan live on this side, and Laurie and her sister Nora live on the other side. My father thought it would just be temporary but it's been three-and-a-half years so far and I think because of Aunt Blanche's situation, my father is developing – *(He whispers.)* – high blood pressure!

(He resumes his writing. **KATE** *comes out of the kitchen with a pitcher of lemonade. She crosses to* **LAURIE**.*)*

KATE. Have some more lemonade, dear.

LAURIE. *(sits up)* Thank you, Aunt Kate.

BLANCHE. Drink it slowly.

LAURIE. I am.

KATE. *(looks at* **BLANCHE***)* Blanche, that's enough already. Since seven o'clock this morning.

BLANCHE. I was just stopping.

KATE. You'll sew your fingers together.

BLANCHE. It's getting dark anyway. *(She stops, sits back, rubs eyes.)* I think I need new glasses.

LAURIE. Our teacher said you should change them every two years.

KATE. *(to* **BLANCHE***)* Would it kill you to put a light on?

BLANCHE. I don't have to run up electric bills. I owe you and Jack enough as it is.

KATE. Have I asked you for anything? You see anybody starving around here? If I go hungry, you'll give me something from your plate.

BLANCHE. Kate! I'm going to pay you and Jack back someday. I don't know when, but I keep my word.

KATE. From your lips to the Irish Sweepstakes… Go in and taste the soup. See if it needs salt.

*(***BLANCHE** *goes into kitchen.)*

LAURIE. Should I put out the water glasses or is Eugene going to do it?

*(***EUGENE***, having heard, slams his "memoirs" shut angrily.* **KATE** *yells up.)*

KATE. EUGENE! …It's the last time I'm going to tell you! *(to* **LAURIE***)* Just do the napkins, darling.

*(***KATE** *goes into kitchen.* **LAURIE** *gets up and starts to set out napkins.* **EUGENE** *sits up on his bed.)*

EUGENE. *(to audience)* Because of her "condition," I have to do twice as much work around here… Boy, if I could just make the Yankees, I'd be in St. Petersburg this winter…*(He starts out and down the stairs.)* Her sister Nora isn't too bad. She's sixteen. I don't mind her much. *(He is downstairs by now.)* At least she's not too bad to look at. *(He starts taking glasses down from open cupboard.)* To be absolutely honest, this is the year I started noticing girls that weren't too bad to look at… Nora started developing about eight months ago… I have the exact date written in my diary.

(Suddenly we hear a voice. It is **NORA***.)*

NORA. Mom! Laurie! Aunt Kate!

(We see **NORA***, an absolutely lovely sixteen-and-a-half-year-old girl, with a developed chest, bound across the front steps and into the house. She is bubbling over with enthusiasm.)*

I've got incredible news, everybody!!

EUGENE. Hi, Nora!

NORA. Eugene! My sweet adorable handsome cousin! Wait'll I tell you what's happened to me.

(She throws her arms around him, hugs him close and kisses his cheek. Then rushes into the other room to **LAURIE**.*)*

I'm fainting! I'm absolutely fainting!

EUGENE. *(still stunned from the hug, turns to the audience)* I felt her chest! …When she grabbed me, I felt my first chest.

NORA. I can't believe this whole day!

LAURIE. What happened?

NORA. Where's Mom? Aunt Kate? I have to tell everyone. *(She rushes to the kitchen door.)* Everybody inside for the big news!

*(***KATE** *and* **BLANCHE** *comes out from the kitchen.* **KATE** *is mashing potatoes in a pot.)*

KATE. What's all the excitement?

BLANCHE. You're all red in the face.

NORA. Sit down, Mom, because I don't want you fainting on the floor.

KATE. Sit down, Blanche.

LAURIE. Mom, sit down.

*(***BLANCHE** *sits)*

NORA. You too, Aunt Kate. Okay. Is everybody ready?

LAURIE. Stop dragging it out. The suspense is *killing* me.

BLANCHE. Don't say things like that, Laurie.

KATE. *(to others)* Can I hear what the girl has to say? *(to* **NORA***)* …Go ahead, darling.

NORA. *(a little breathless)* Okay! Here goes! …I'm going to be in a Broadway show!

(They look at her in a stunned silence.)

It's a musical called *Abracadabra…* This man, Mr. Beckman, he's a producer, came to our dancing class this afternoon and he picked out three girls. We have to be at the Hudson Theater on Monday morning at ten o'clock to audition for the dance director. But on

the way out he took me aside and said the job was good as mine. I have to call him tomorrow. I may have to go into town to talk to him about it. They start rehearsing a week from Monday and then it goes to Philadelphia, Wilmington and Washington… And then it comes to New York the second week in December. There are nine big musical numbers and there's going to be a big tank on the stage that you can see through and the big finale all takes place with the entire cast all under water… I mean, can you believe it? I'm going to be in a Broadway show, Momma!

(They are all still stunned.)

BLANCHE. *(to* **KATE***)* What is she talking about?

KATE. Do I know? Am I her mother?

LAURIE. How can you be in a show? Don't you have to sing and act?

NORA. I can sing.

LAURIE. No, you can't.

NORA. A little.

LAURIE. No, you can't.

NORA. I can carry a *tune*.

LAURIE. No, you can't.

NORA. Well, I probably won't have to. They're just looking for dancers.

LAURIE. On Broadway you have to sing and act.

NORA. How do *you* know? You never saw a Broadway show.

BLANCHE. Did you tell him how old you were?

NORA. He didn't ask me.

BLANCHE. He didn't ask if you were sixteen?

NORA. He just asked me to audition. My God, isn't anybody excited?

EUGENE. I am. It's the most fantastic thing I ever heard.

NORA. Thanks, Eugene. I'm glad somebody's excited.

EUGENE. *(turns to audience)* My God! I'll be sleeping right next door to a *showgirl!*

BLANCHE. How can you go to Philadelphia? What about school?

NORA. School? Momma, this is a Broadway show. This is what I want to do with my life. Algebra and English isn't going to help me on the stage.

LAURIE. *Aren't?*

NORA. Will you stay out of this!

BLANCHE. You mean not finish school? Not get a diploma? …Do you know how hard it is today for a girl to get a good job without a high school diploma?

NORA. But I've *got* a job. And I'll be making more money than *ten* girls with diplomas.

LAURIE. You don't have it yet. You still have to audition.

NORA. It's as good as mine. Mr. Beckman told me.

BLANCHE. And what if you, God forbid, broke a leg? …Or got heavy… How long do you think they'll keep you? Dancing is just for a few years. A diploma is forever. I know. I never had one. I know how hard it is to find a decent job. Aunt Kate knows. Tell her, Kate.

KATE. It's very hard.

NORA. Then why did you send me to dancing school for three years? Why do I spend two hours a day on a subway, four days a week after school, with money that you make going half blind over a broken sewing machine? Why, Momma?

BLANCHE …Because it's my pleasure… Because I know how you love it… Because you asked me.

NORA. Then I'm asking you something else, Momma. Let me do something for *you* now. I could be making almost sixty dollars a week. Maybe even more… In two years when I get out of high school, I wouldn't make that much with a college diploma.

BLANCHE. *(takes a deep breath)* …I can't think now. It's almost dinnertime. Uncle Jack will be home soon. We'll discuss it later. *(She gets up.)*

NORA. I have to know *now*, Momma. I have to call Mr. Beckman and let him know if I can go to the audition on Monday… At least let me audition. Let me find out first if they think I'm good enough… Please don't say no until Monday.

(They all look at **BLANCHE**. *She looks down at her hands.)*

EUGENE. *(turns out to audience)* …It was a tense moment for everybody… I love tense moments! …Especially when I'm not the one they're all tense about.

(He turns back and looks at **BLANCHE**.*)*

BLANCHE …Well, God knows we can use the money. We all owe Aunt Kate and Uncle Jack enough as it is… I think they have as much say in this as I do… How do you feel about it, Kate?

KATE. *(shrugs)* Me? I never voted before in my life, why should I start with my own family? …I have to heat up the potatoes.

(She goes off to the kitchen.)

BLANCHE. Then we'll leave it up to Uncle Jack. We'll let him make the decision.

(She starts for kitchen.)

NORA. Why, Momma? I love him but he's not my father.

BLANCHE. Because I need help… Because I don't always know what the right thing to do is… Because I say so, that's why.

(She exits into kitchen. **LAURIE** *and* **EUGENE** *stand there staring at the forlorn* **NORA**.*)*

EUGENE …Eugene M. Jerome of New York casts one vote for "yes."

*(***NORA** *looks up at him, breaks into tears and runs out of the room and up the stairs.* **LAURIE** *follows her up.* **EUGENE** *turns out to audience:)*

…What I'm about to tell you next, is so secret and private, that I've left instructions for my memoirs not to be opened until thirty years after my death… I, Eugene M. Jerome, have committed a mortal sin by lusting after my cousin Nora… I can tell you all this now because I'll be dead when you're reading it… If I had my choice between a tryout with the Yankees and actually seeing her bare breasts for two-and-a-half seconds, I would have some serious thinking to do…

*(***KATE** *comes out of the kitchen)*

KATE. I need bread.

EUGENE. *(turns quickly)* What?

KATE. I don't have enough bread. Run across the street to Greenblatt's and get a fresh rye bread.

EUGENE. Again? I went to the store this morning.

KATE. So you'll go again this afternoon.

EUGENE. I'm always going to the store. When I grow up, that's all I'll be trained to do, go to the store.

KATE. You don't want to go? …Never mind, I'll go.

EUGENE. *Don't* do that! Don't make me feel guilty. I'll go.

KATE. And get a quarter pound of butter.

EUGENE. I bought a quarter pound of butter this morning. Why don't you buy a half pound at a time?

KATE. And suppose the house burned down this afternoon? Why do I need an extra quarter pound of butter?

(She goes back into kitchen. **EUGENE** *turns out to audience:)*

EUGENE. If my mother taught Logic in High School, this would be some weird country.

(He runs out of the house to Greenblatt's. Our attention goes to the two girls upstairs in their room. **NORA** *is crying.* **LAURIE** *sits on twin bed opposite her, watching.)*

LAURIE. So? …What are you going to do?

NORA. I don't know. Leave me alone. Don't just sit there watching me.

LAURIE. It's my room as much as yours. I don't have to leave if I don't want to.

NORA. Do you have to stare at me? Can't I have any privacy?

LAURIE. I'm staring into space. I can't help it if your body interferes. *(There is a pause.)* I bet you're worried?

NORA. How would you feel if your entire life depended on what your Uncle Jack decided? …Oh, God, I wish Daddy were alive.

LAURIE. He would have said, "No." He was really *strict*.

NORA. Not with me. I mean he was strict but he was fair. If he said, "No," he always gave you a good reason. He always talked things out… I wish I could call him somewhere now and ask him what to do. One three minute call to heaven is all I ask.

LAURIE. Ask Mom. She talks to him every night.

NORA. Who told you that?

LAURIE. She did. Every night before she goes to bed. She puts his picture on her pillow and talks to him. Then she pulls the blanket half way up the picture and goes to sleep.

NORA. She does not.

LAURIE. She does too. Last year when I had the big fever, I slept in bed with the both of them. In the middle of the night, my face fell on his picture and cut my nose.

NORA. She never told me that… That's weird.

LAURIE. I can't remember him much anymore. I used to remember him real good but now he disappears a little bit every day.

NORA. Oh, God, he was so handsome. Always dressed so dapper, his shoes always shined. I always thought he should have been a movie star…like Gary Cooper… only very short. Mostly I remember his pockets.

LAURIE. His pockets?

NORA. When I was six or seven he always brought me home a little surprise. Like a Hershey or a top. He'd tell me to go get it in his coat pocket. So I'd run to the

closet and put my hand in and it felt as big as a tent. I wanted to crawl in there and go to sleep. And there were all these terrific things in there, like Juicy Fruit gum or Spearmint Life Savers and bits of cellophane and crumbled pieces of tobacco and movie stubs and nickels and pennies and rubber bands and paper clips and his grey suede gloves that he wore in the winter time.

LAURIE. With the stitched lines down the fingers. I remember.

NORA. Then I found his coat in Mom's closet and I put my hand in the pocket. And everything was gone. It was emptied and dry cleaned and it felt cold… And that's when I knew he was really dead. *(thinks a moment)* Oh God, I wish we had our own place to live. I hate being a boarder. Listen, let's make a pact…the first one who makes enough money promises not to spend any on herself, but saves it all to get a house for you and me and Mom. That means every penny we get from now on, we save for the house… We can't buy *anything*. No lipstick or magazines or nail polish or bubble gum. *Nothing*… Is it a pact?

LAURIE. *(thinks)* …What about movies?

NORA. Movies too.

LAURIE. Starting when?

NORA. Starting today. Starting right now.

LAURIE. …Can we start Sunday? I wanted to see *The Thin Man*.

NORA. Who's in it?

LAURIE. William Powell and Myrna Loy.

NORA. Okay. Starting Sunday… I'll go with you Saturday.

(They shake hands, sealing their "pact," then both lie down in their respective beds and stare up at the ceiling, contemplating their "future home." **EUGENE** *returns with a paper bag containing milk and butter under his arm. He stops, pretends to be a quarterback awaiting the pass from center. The bread is his football.)*

EUGENE …Sid Luckman of Columbia waits for the snap from center, the snow is coming down in a near blizzard, he gets it, he fades back, he passes… *(He acts all this out.)* – AND LUCKMAN'S GOT IT! LUCKMAN CATCHES HIS OWN PASS! HE'S ON THE 50, THE 40, THE 30, THE 20… IT'S A TOUCHDOWN! Columbia wins! They defeat the mighty Crimson of Harvard, 13-12. Listen to that crowd!

(He roars like a crowd… **KATE** *comes out of the kitchen. She yells out.)*

KATE. EUGENE! STOP THAT YELLING! I HAVE A CAKE IN THE OVEN!

(She goes back into kitchen.)

*(***STANLEY JEROME** *appears.* **STAN** *is eighteen-and-a-half. He wears slacks, a shirt and tie, a zip-up jacket and a cap.)*

STAN. *(half whisper)* Hey! Eugie!

EUGENE. Hi, Stan! *(to audience)* My brother, Stan. He's okay. You'll like him. *(to* **STAN***)* What are you doing home so early?

STAN. *(looks around, lowers his voice)* Is Pop home yet?

EUGENE. No… Did you ask about the tickets?

STAN. What tickets?

EUGENE. For the Yankee game. You said your boss knew this guy who could get passes. You didn't ask him?

STAN. Me and my boss had other things to talk about. *(He sits on steps, his head down, almost in tears.)* I'm in trouble, Eug. I mean really big trouble.

EUGENE. *(to audience)* This really shocked me. Because Stan is the kind of guy who could talk himself out of *any* kind of trouble. *(to* **STAN***)* What kind of trouble?

STAN …I got fired today!

EUGENE. *(shocked)* Fired? …You mean for good?

STAN. You don't get fired temporarily. It's permanent. It's a lifetime firing.

EUGENE. Why? What happened?

STAN. It was on account of Andrew. The colored guy who sweeps up. Well, he was cleaning the floor in the stock room and he lays his broom against the table to put some junk in the trash can and the broom slips, knocks a can of linseed oil over the table and ruins three brand new hats right out of the box. Nine dollar Stetsons. It wasn't his fault. He didn't put the linseed oil there, right?

EUGENE. Right.

STAN. So Mr. Stroheim sees the oily hats and he gets crazy. He says to Andrew the hats are going to have to come out of his salary. Twenty-seven dollars. So Andrew starts to cry.

EUGENE. He cried?

STAN. Forty-two years old, he's bawling all over the stock room. I mean, the man hasn't got too much furniture upstairs anyway, but he's real sweet. He brings me coffee, always laughing, telling me jokes. I never understand them but I laugh anyway, make him feel good, you know?

EUGENE. Yeah?

STAN. Anyway, I said to Mr. Stroheim I didn't think that was fair. It wasn't Andrew's fault.

EUGENE. *(astounded)* You said that to him?

STAN. Sure, why not? So Mr. Stroheim says, "You wanna pay for the hats, big mouth?" So I said, "No. I don't want to pay for the hats." So he says, "Then mind your own business, big mouth."

EUGENE. Holy mackerel.

STAN. So Mr. Stroheim looks at me like machine gun bullets are coming out of his eyes. And then he calmly sends Andrew over to the factory to pick up three new hats. Which is usually my job. So guess what Mr. Stroheim tells *me* to do?

EUGENE. What?

STAN. He tells me to sweep up. He says, for this week I'm the cleaning man.

EUGENE. I can't believe it.

STAN. Everybody is watching me now, waiting to see what I'm going to do.

*(***EUGENE** *nods in agreement)*

…Even Andrew stopped crying and watched. I felt the dignity of everyone who worked in that store was in my hands… So I grit my teeth, and I pick up the broom, and there's this big pile of dirt right in the middle of the floor…

EUGENE. Yeah?

STAN …And I sweep it all over Mr. Stroheim's shoes. Andrew had just finished shining them this morning, if you want to talk about irony.

EUGENE. I'm dying. I'm actually dying.

STAN. *(enjoying himself)* You could see everyone in the place is about to bust a gut. Mrs. Mulcahy, the bookkeeper, can hardly keep her false teeth in her mouth. Andrew's eyes are hanging five inches out of their sockets.

EUGENE. This is the greatest story in the history of the world.

STAN. So Mr. Stroehim grabs me and pulls me into his back office, closes the door and pulls down the shades. He gives me this whole story how he was brought up in Germany to respect his superiors. That if he ever – *(in accent)* "did soch a ting like you do, dey would beat me in der cup until dey carried me avay dead."

EUGENE. That's perfect. You got him down perfect.

STAN. And I say, "Yeah. But we're not in Germany, old buddy."

EUGENE. You said that to him?

STAN. No. To myself. I didn't want to go too far.

EUGENE. I was wondering.

STAN. Anyway, he says he's always liked me and always thought I was a good boy and that he was going to give

me one more chance. He wants a letter of apology. And that if the letter of apology isn't on his desk by nine o'clock tomorrow morning, I can consider myself fired.

EUGENE …I would have had a heart attack… What did you say?

STAN. I said I was not going to apologize if Andrew still had to pay for the hats… He said that was between him and Andrew…and that he expected the letter from me in the morning… I said good night, walked out of his office, got my hat and went home…ten minutes early.

EUGENE. I'm sweating. I swear to God, I'm sweating all over.

STAN …I don't know why I did it. But I got so mad. It just wasn't fair. I mean, if you give in when you're eighteen-and-a-half, you'll give in for the rest of your life, don't you think?

EUGENE. I suppose so… So what's the decision? Are you going to write the letter?

STAN. *(thinks)* …No!

EUGENE. Positively?

STAN. Positively. Except I'll have to discuss it with Pop. I know we need the money. But he told me once you always have to do what you think is right in this world and stand up for your principles.

EUGENE. And what if he says he thinks you're wrong? That you should write the letter.

STAN. He won't. He's gonna leave it up to me, I know it.

EUGENE. But what if he says, "Write the letter"?

STAN. Well…that's something we won't know until after dinner, will we? …

(He crosses into the house.)

EUGENE. *(looks after him, then turns out to audience)* …All in all, it was shaping up to be one heck of a dinner. I'll say this though… I always had this two way thing about my brother. Either I worshipped the ground he walked

on…or I hated him so much I wanted to kill him… I guess you know how I feel about him today.

(He walks into the house as **KATE** *comes out of the kitchen carrying water pitcher for the table.* **STAN** *has stopped to look at the small pile of mail.)*

KATE. *(to* **EUGENE***)* All day it takes to bring home bread? Give Aunt Blanche the butter, she's waiting for it.

EUGENE. I was home a half hour ago. I was talking to Stan.

(He goes into kitchen.)

STAN. *(looking at letter)* Hey, I got a letter from Rosalyn Weiner. Remember her? She moved to Manhattan. They live up on Central Park West.

KATE. Why not? Her father's a gangster, her mother is worse. I don't get a kiss "Hello"?

STAN. Nope. I was going to save it up and give you a giant one for Christmas.

KATE. We don't have Christmas. I'll take it now, thank you.

(He puts his arms around her and kisses her warmly, then embraces her.)

A hug too? When do I ever get a hug from you? You must have done something wrong.

STAN. You're too smart for me, Mom. I robbed a barbershop today.

KATE. Is that why you look so tired? You don't get enough sleep. Running around all night with your two hundred girl friends.

STAN. A hundred and thirty. That's all I have, a hundred and thirty.

KATE. How do you get any work done?

STAN. I get it done.

KATE. And your boss doesn't say anything to you? About being tired?

STAN. About being tired? No. He doesn't.

(He starts towards stairs.)

KATE. Did you ask him about Thursday?

STAN. What?

KATE. You were going to ask him about getting paid this Thursday so I can pay Greenblatt's on Friday. Saturday is a holiday.

STAN. Oh. No. I forgot… I'll ask him tomorrow.

KATE. If it's a problem, don't ask him. Greenblatt can wait. Your boss is more important.

STAN. That's not true, Mom. My boss isn't any more important than Mr. Greenblatt.

(He goes upstairs with his letter and on up to his room, where he lies down, tries to read his letter, then puts it down and stares up at the ceiling wondering about his predicament. **EUGENE** *bursts out of the kitchen and practically staggers out of the house. He sits on the steps, his head down, looking very disconsolate. He addresses the audience.)*

EUGENE. Oh, God! …As if things weren't bad enough… and now this! …The ultimate tragedy …Liver and cabbage for dinner! …A Jewish mediaeval torture! … My friend, Marty Gregorio, an A student in Science, told me that cooked cabbage can be smelled farther than sound travelling for seven minutes… If these memoirs are never finished, you'll know it's because I gagged to death one night in the middle of supper.

(We suddenly hear a crash of broken dishes in the kitchen. **EUGENE** *turns towards the sound, then to the audience.)*

You're all witnesses. I was sitting here, right? But I'll get blamed for that anyway.

(The kitchen door opens and **KATE** *comes out helping* **BLANCHE** *who is wheezing and gasping quite badly. She can't catch her breath.)*

BLANCHE. I'm alright. Just let me sit a minute.

KATE. Didn't I tell you to get out of that hot kitchen? *I* can't breathe in there and *I* don't have asthma. *(She calls out.)* NORA! LAURIE! Come help your mother!!

*(***NORA** *and* **LAURIE** *jump up from their beds.)*

BLANCHE. I'm sick about the plates. I'll replace them. Don't worry about the plates.

KATE. Plates I can always get. I only have one sister.

(The girls have come down the stairs.)

NORA. What happened?

BLANCHE. I'm alright. Don't run, Laurie.

KATE. It's another asthma attack. It's the second one this week. Nora, maybe you'd better get the doctor.

BLANCHE. I don't need doctors…

KATE. This is no climate for you, near the beach. What you need is someplace dry.

LAURIE. Like Arizona, Momma.

NORA. Should I get the doctor?

BLANCHE. No. No doctors. It's better. It's going away.

LAURIE. I can still hear the whistle.

NORA. Will you shut up!

BLANCHE. *(to* **NORA***)* Help Aunt Kate in the kitchen, Nora. I broke her good plates.

KATE. Never mind. Eugene will do it. You go up and get your mother's medicine…Laurie, you sit there quiet and watch your mother. You look pale as a ghost. Eugene!

EUGENE & KATE. Come in here and help me!

JACK. *(offstage)* Hello, Mrs. Kresky, how are you?

EUGENE. *(gets up, looks off down the street)* In a minute, Ma. Pop's home!

*(***LAURIE** *sits next to her mother.)*

(to audience:) I would now like to introduce my father, a read hard worker. He was born at the age of forty-two… Hi, Pop! How you doin', Pop?

*(***JACOB "JACK" JEROME** *appears, a man about 40, who could pass for older. He wears a wrinkled suit, brown felt hat and black shoes. The Brooklyn Eagle sticks up out of his side coat pocket. He carries two large and very heavy cardboard boxes, tied around with hemp cord. He appears to be very tired.)*

JACK. How am I doin'?

EUGENE. Let me carry these for you, Pop. *(He reaches for one of the boxes.)*

JACK. They're too heavy, you'll hurt yourself.

EUGENE. No. I can do it easy. *(He takes one of the boxes, tries to lift it. It weighs a ton.)* Ugh!… I just have to get a good grip. *(***JACK** *stops and sits. He wipes his forehead with handkerchief and holds his chest.)*

JACK. I want to sit a few minutes.

EUGENE. Are you okay, Pop?

JACK. I'm resting, that's all… Get me a glass of cold water.

EUGENE. I'll be out for the other box in a minute, Pop. *(He struggles with the first box towards the house. To audience:)* …I don't know how he does it. King Kong couldn't lift these… You know what's in here? Noise makers and party favors. Pop sells them to nightclubs and hotels after he gets through every day with his regular work, which is cutting material for ladies' raincoats.

JACK. Did you do your homework today?

EUGENE. Not all of it. Mom sent me to the store fifteen times. Amos and Andy is on tonight.

JACK. Do your homework then we'll discuss Amos and Andy.

*(***EUGENE** *continues into the house as* **NORA** *comes down the stairs with her mother's medicine.)*

NORA. Here's your medicine, Mom. Laurie, go get some water.

BLANCHE. Laurie shouldn't be running.

EUGENE. *(the hero)* I'll get it, Nora.

NORA. You sure you don't mind?

EUGENE. No. No trouble at all. *(to audience)* Two and a half seconds, that's all I ask. *(He goes into the kitchen.)*

NORA. *(to* **BLANCHE***)* When are you going to speak to Uncle Jack, Mom?

BLANCHE. When I speak to him, that's when I'll speak to him.

NORA. Tonight? I have to know tonight.

BLANCHE. I'll see… If he's not too tired, I'll talk to him tonight. *(***KATE** *comes out of the kitchen)*

KATE. Jack's home. We'll eat in ten minutes. Nora, darling, go get Stanley… How's your mother, Laurie?

LAURIE. Much better. The whistling's stopped.

*(***KATE** *crosses to the front door and goes out.* **JACK** *is sitting on the stoop, wiping his neck.* **NORA** *goes upstairs.)*

KATE. What's wrong? Eugene said you were holding your chest.

JACK. I wasn't holding my chest.

KATE. You have to carry that box every day? Back and forth to the city. You don't work hard enough, Jack?

JACK. You want the box, it's yours. Keep it. I don't need it anymore.

KATE. What do you mean?

JACK. Del Mars Party Favors went out of business. They closed him out. The man is bankrupt.

KATE. Oh, my God!

JACK. He never even warned me it was coming.

KATE. You told me he lived up on Riverside Drive. With a view of the river. A three hundred dollar a month apartment he had. A man like that.

JACK. Who are the ones you think go bankrupt? You live in a cold water flat on Delancey Street, bankruptcy is the one thing God spares you.

KATE. Alright… You can always find good in something. You don't have to lug that box anymore. You don't

have to get up at five-thirty in the morning. We can all eat dinner at a decent hour. You still have your job with Jacobson, we won't starve.

JACK. I can't make ends meet with what I make at Jacobson's. Not with seven people to feed.

KATE. *(looks back towards the house)* They'll hear you. We'll talk later

JACK. I can't get by without that extra twenty-five dollars a week. I can't pay rent and insurance and food and clothing for seven people. Christmas and New Year's alone I made a hundred and fifty dollars.

KATE. *(nervous about anyone hearing)* Stop it, Jack. You'll only get yourself sick.

JACK. He didn't even pay me for the week, the bastard. Five salesman are laid off and he's going to a Broadway show tonight. I stuffed every hat and noisemaker I could carry in that box and walked out of there. At his funeral I'll put on a pointy hat and blow a horn, the bastard!

KATE. Don't talk like that. Something'll come up. You'll go to temple this weekend. You'll pray all day Saturday.

JACK. *(smiles ironically)* There's men in that temple who've been praying for forty years. You know how many prayers have to get answered before my turn comes up?

KATE. *(She rubs his back where it pains him.)* Your turn'll come up. God has time for everybody.

*(***EUGENE** *has come out of the kitchen with two glasses of water. He crosses to* **BLANCHE**.*)*

EUGENE. Here's your water, Aunt Blanche.

BLANCHE. Thank you, darling.

EUGENE. Where's Nora?

LAURIE. She went up to call Stanley for dinner.

EUGENE. Hey, Laurie. You want to take a walk on the beach tonight?

LAURIE. I have homework. What do you want to walk with me for?

EUGENE. You, me and Nora. I just felt like taking a walk.

LAURIE. I think Nora has a date with Larry Clurman.

EUGENE. *Larry Clurman?* …She likes Larry Clurman?

LAURIE. I don't know. Ask her yourself.

EUGENE. Larry Clurman is my father's age.

LAURIE. He's twenty.

EUGENE. Same thing… You think he's good-looking?

LAURIE. I don't think *anybody's* good-looking.

EUGENE. Larry Clurman? He doesn't even have a chin. His tie comes all the way up to his teeth.

KATE. *(calls out)* Eugene! Where's your father's water?

EUGENE. I'm coming! I'm coming. *(As he crosses to front door, he turns to the audience.)* Now I've got Larry Clurman to contend with. *(He comes out.)* Here's your water, Pop. I put ice in it.

(He hands father glass of water. He drinks it all.)

KATE. Don't drink so fast.

EUGENE. Do you have time to look at my sneakers, Pop?

KATE. What does he want to look at your sneakers for?

EUGENE. They have no soles. They're hanging on by a tiny piece of rubber. I have to clench my toes when I run out for a fly ball.

JACK. I bought you new sneakers last month.

EUGENE. Last year, Pa. Not last month. I can only wear them two hours a day because my toes can't grow in them.

KATE. This is no time to talk to your father about sneakers. He's got enough on his mind. Turn the light down on the liver.

*(***EUGENE** *goes into the house and into the kitchen.)*

(to **JACK***)* We'll talk about this tonight. You'll eat a nice dinner, relax and when everybody's asleep, we'll figure

things out calmly. I don't like it when you get upset.

BLANCHE. I'm feeling better. Come, dear, help me with dinner. *(She goes into kitchen.)*

JACK. *(looks at house)* You think she'll ever get married?

KATE. Blanche?

JACK. She's not unattractive. I see men look at her on the beach. What does she want to waste her life in this house for?

KATE. She's raising two children.

JACK. Why doesn't she ever go out? If she wants to meet people, I know plenty of single men.

KATE. Blanche isn't the type to get married.

JACK. She was married once, wasn't she? Those are the type that get married.

KATE. Dave was different. She's not interested in other men.

JACK. What about that Murphy fellow across the street? He's plenty interested, believe me.

KATE. That drunk! The man can't find his way into the house at night. He slept in the doorway once. In the rain. He was there when I went out to get the milk.

JACK. He's got a good paying job, lives alone with his mother. So he takes a drink on a Saturday night. Maybe what he needs is a good woman.

KATE. Not my sister. Let him meet someone lying in the next doorway. I don't want to discuss this anymore.

(She goes into the house and into the kitchen. The father sighs, gets up slowly and follows her in. Our attention goes to **STAN** *on his bed still reading the letter from Rosalyn Weiner. He suddenly sits up.* **NORA** *knocks on his door.)*

STAN. Come in. *(***NORA** *comes in.)*

NORA. Are you busy? I wanted to talk to you.

STAN. That's funny, because I wanted to talk to *you*.

NORA. About what?

STAN. I need a favor. Real bad. You're the only one who can help me.

NORA. What is it?

STAN. Well, when Pop comes home tired, he doesn't usually pay too much attention to me and Eugene. He's different with you. He's always interested in what you have to say.

NORA. Really? I hope so.

STAN. Oh, sure. You never noticed that?

NORA. Not really. What's the favor?

STAN. This may sound dumb, but at dinner, do you think you could steer the conversation in a certain direction?

NORA. What direction?

STAN. Well, something like "how much you admire people who stand up for their principles."

NORA. *What* people?

STAN. *Any* people. Principles is the important word. If you could work it in three or four times, I'd be very grateful.

NORA. Three or four times??

STAN. It'll be easy. I'll mention someone like Abraham Lincoln and you look up and say, "Now there's a man who really stood up for his principles."

NORA. I have my *own* things to bring up at dinner. I don't want to get into a discussion about Abraham Lincoln.

STAN. Not his whole life. Just his principles.

NORA. Why would I do such a stupid thing?

STAN ….Because as of tomorrow I'm unemployed… Unless someone besides me mentions "sticking up for your principles."

NORA. What happened? Did you get fired?

STAN. I will be unless I write Kaiser Wilhelm a letter of apology. It's really up to my old man. I've decided to do whatever he tells me…

NORA. When are you going to ask him?

STAN. Tonight. Right after dinner.

NORA. *Tonight?* Does it have to be tonight?

STAN. That's the deadline. I have to give my answer to Mr. Stroheim in the morning. Why?

NORA. Couldn't you ask your father in the morning?

STAN. He gets up at five-thirty. My mother has to line up his shoes at night because he can't make decisions at five-thirty. *(She is about to break into tears.)* What's wrong, Nora?

NORA. *(angrily)* I don't know what *you* have to complain about. At least your father is alive and around the house to make decisions. You don't know when you're well off, Stanley. Sometimes you make me sick!

(She runs out of the room, slamming the door behind her. **STAN** *sits there looking bewildered.* **EUGENE** *crosses into the dining room and is the first one seated, facing the audience. He looks at them and speaks.)*

EUGENE. Chapter Seven. "The Infamous Dinner"!

(The others drift into the dining room, taking their seats. **BLANCHE** *and* **KATE** *bring most of the dishes, passing them around. They are all seated as* **EUGENE** *continues his narrative.)*

…It started out like a murder mystery in Blenheim Castle. No one said a word but everyone looked suspicious… It was so quiet, you could hear Laurie's soup going down her esophagus.

(They sit quietly, eating.)

Everyone had one eye on their plate and the other eye on Pop. Except me. I sat opposite Nora. I kept dropping my napkin a lot so I could bend down to get a good look at those virginal creamy-white legs. She was really deep in thought because she left herself unguarded a few times and I got to see half way up her thighs that led to the Golden Palace of the Himalayas.

KATE. Eugene! Keep your napkin on your lap and stop daydreaming.

EUGENE. *(to audience)* Stanley knew what I was doing because he's the one who taught it to me. But he was busy with his own problems like everyone else. You could hear the clock ticking in the kitchen. The tension in the air was so thick, you could cut it with a knife. Which is more than I could say for the liver. *(He tries to cut his liver.)*

JACK. Ketchup…mustard…pickles…

EUGENE …I'm through. I'll help with the dessert.

KATE. Finish your liver.

EUGENE. I finished. Do you see liver on my plate'?

KATE. You buried it under the mashed potatoes. I know your tricks. Look how Laurie ate hers.

EUGENE. *(to audience)* I had a major problem. One more bite and I would have thrown up on the table. That's a sight Nora would have remembered forever. A diversion was my only escape from humiliation. *(to* **STAN***)* So how's things down at Stroheim's, Stanley?

*(***STAN** *is drinking water, slams down glass, splashing it. He glares at* **EUGENE**.*)*

(to audience) I felt bad about that, but for the moment, attention had shifted away from my liver.

JACK. *(to* **STAN***)* How long have you been working there now?

STAN. Where?

JACK. At Stroheim's.

STAN. At Stroheim's? Let me see… Part-time a year and a half before I graduated high school. And a year since then.

JACK. So what's that?

STAN. Two and a half years, counting part-time.

JACK. And he likes you?

STAN. Who?

JACK. *(impatiently)* Mr. Stroheim.

STAN. Yeah. Usually he likes me. Sometimes I'm not sure.

JACK. You come in on time?

STAN. Yeah.

JACK. You do your work?

STAN. Yeah.

JACK. You get along with the other people?

STAN. Yeah.

JACK. So why shouldn't he like you? How much are you making now?

STAN. Seventeen dollars a week.

JACK. It's time you moved up. Tomorrow you go in and ask him for a raise.

STAN. A RAISE???

JACK. If you don't speak up, people take advantage of you. Tomorrow morning you go into his office, you're polite, you're respectful, but you're firm. You tell him you think you're worth another five dollars a week.

STAN. *FIVE DOLLARS????*

JACK. He'll offer you a dollar and a quarter, you settle for two-fifty. I know how these things work. You're a high school graduate, he's lucky he's got you.

STAN. I don't think this is the time to ask him for a raise, Pop. I think his wife is very sick.

JACK. You're afraid to ask him? You want me to take you by the hand and walk into his office and say, "My little boy wants a raise"?

STAN. I'm not afraid.

KATE. Your father wouldn't ask you if he didn't think it was the right thing. Believe me, Stanley, now is the time to ask for it.

EUGENE. *(choking)* Ma, I think I have a bone in my throat.

KATE. There are no bones in liver.

(He runs into kitchen.)

LAURIE. So what's new at dancing school, Nora?

NORA. *(glares at her)* Nothing is new. Mind your own business.

LAURIE. I'm just trying to introduce the subject.

NORA. I don't need your help. Will you tell her to be quiet, Mother.

BLANCHE. *(to* **NORA***)* Laurie, you may be excused if you're finished.

JACK. What happened at dancing school?

BLANCHE. Nora received a very nice compliment from her teacher. She said Nora had professional potential.

LAURIE. He didn't say "potential." "Potential" is the future. Mr. Beckman is interested in Nora's "immediate present."

JACK. *(still eating)* Isn't that something! Mr. Beckman is your teacher?

NORA. No. He's one of the most widely known and respected producers on Broadway.

JACK. Broadway? Imagine that? That's wonderful. And how are you doing in school otherwise?

NORA. *(looks at her mother)* I'm doing fine.

BLANCHE. She's doing very well.

LAURIE. I wish *I* was as smart as she is.

EUGENE. Isn't that the same Mr. Beckman who's producing the great Broadway extravaganza, *Abracadabra?* I hear if a girl gets hired for the chorus of a show like that, not only is her career practically guaranteed, but the experience she gains is equal to a four year college education.

KATE. Eugene, that's enough.

JACK. Only a four year college education is equal to a four year college education.

STAN. I don't think Abraham Lincoln went to college.

*(***NORA** *goes into kitchen.)*

JACK. What about you, Laurie? You're feeling alright?

LAURIE. Yes, Uncle Jack.

JACK. You getting plenty of fresh air?

*(***NORA** *returns.)*

LAURIE. As much as I can hold in my lungs. Nora, did you tell Uncle Jack about the big tank that's filled with water.

BLANCHE. Girls, why don't we just let Uncle Jack eat his dinner? If we have something to discuss, we can discuss it later?

JACK. Somebody has something to discuss? If there's a problem, this is the time to bring it up. This is the family hour.

EUGENE. What a great idea for a radio show. The family hour. Every Wednesday night you hear a different family eating dinner discussing their problems of the week. And you get to hear different recipes. *(as announcer)* WEAF presents dinner at Brighton Beach starring the Jacob Jerome Family and featuring tonight's specialty liver and cabbage, brought to you by Ex-lax, the mild laxative.

KATE. The whole country's going to hear about a fifteen year old boy gagging on liver?

JACK. Nothing to discuss? Nobody has any problems? Otherwise I want to turn on the news.

STAN. Well, as a matter of fact…

JACK. What?

STAN. Nothing.

EUGENE. I'll help with the dishes.

KATE. You sit there and finish your liver.

EUGENE. I can't swallow it. It won't go down. Remember the lima bean catastrophe last month? Does anybody want to see a repeat of that disgusting episode?

JACK. Why does he always talk like it's a Sherlock Holmes story?

STAN. He thinks he's a writer.

EUGENE. And what do you think *you* are?

KATE. Eat half of it.

EUGENE. Which half? They're both terrible.

KATE. A quarter of it. Two bites.

EUGENE. *One* bite.

KATE. *Two* bites.

EUGENE. I know you. If I eat one bite, you'll make me eat another bite… I'll take it to my room. I'll eat it tonight. I need time to chew it.

JACK. These are not times to waste food. If you didn't want it, Eugene, you shouldn't have taken it.

EUGENE. I didn't take it. They gave it to me. It comes attached to the plate.

NORA. If it's so important to everybody, I'll eat your liver, Eugene.

(They all look at her.)

EUGENE. You *will?*

NORA. It seems to be the only thing this family is worried about. Give me your liver so we can get on with more important things in our lives.

JACK. Nora's right. Take the liver away. If nobody likes it, why do you make it?

KATE. *(angrily)* Because we can't afford a roast beef for seven people.

(She heads for the kitchen.)

EUGENE. *(to audience)* I suddenly felt vulgar and cheap.

JACK. Stanley, turn on the news.

BLANCHE. Laurie, get off your feet. You look tired to me.

STAN. Can I talk to you a minute, Pop? It's something really important.

JACK. More important than what's going on in Europe? *(He turns radio on.)*

STAN. It's not more important. It's just coming up sooner.

JACK. *(fiddles with stations)* Hitler's already moved into Austria. In a couple of months the whole world will be in it… What's the matter with this radio?

KATE. *(comes out of kitchen)* Someone's been fooling around with it. Haven't they, Eugene?

EUGENE. Why Eugene? Pop had the news on last night.

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