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# Broadway Bound

by Neil Simon

A SAMUEL FRENCH ACTING EDITION



New York Hollywood London Toronto

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## DEDICATION

To my mother, my father and my brother

**BROADWAY BOUND** by Neil Simon was first presented by Emanuel Azenberg at The Broadhurst Theatre, New York City, on December 4, 1986, with the following cast:

KATE. . . . . Linda Lavin  
BEN. . . . . John Randolph  
EUGENE. . . . . Jonathan Silverman  
STAN. . . . . Jason Alexander  
BLANCHE . . . . . Phyllis Newman  
JACK. . . . . Philip Sterling

#### RADIO VOICES

ANNOUNCER. . . . . Ed Herlihy  
CHUBBY WATERS. . . . . MacIntyre Dixon  
MRS. PITKIN. . . . . Marilyn Cooper

**BROADWAY BOUND** was directed by Gene Saks. The setting was by David Mitchell, the lighting by Tharon Musser, the costumes by Joseph G. Aulisi, the sound by Tom Morse, and Peter Lawrence was the production stage manager.

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# Broadway Bound

## ACT ONE

*The year is 1949. We are in the Jerome House in Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York—a working class neighborhood about two blocks from the ocean. It is a two-story frame house. On the first floor we see a living room and dining room separated only by furniture. Stage right is the front door. Outside is a brick stoop and the surrounding houses. Just inside the door is a staircase that leads to the four upstairs bedrooms. In the living room area are a sofa, an armchair and a console radio separating the two. Near the front door is a telephone.*

*In the dining room area is an old, beautiful dining table and five chairs. Just upstage of the table is a breakfast. The furniture, curtains, wallpaper and carpeting reflect the small portion of Post-war prosperity which has come to the Jerome family.*

*Upstage center is a swinging door which leads to the kitchen. Stage left and running up the downstage is a windowed porch. The kitchen is accessible either through the center door or from the dining room through the porch. A door from the porch leads to the back yard.*

*The second floor bedrooms are arranged as follows: JACK and KATE's room is stage right, and BEN's room is stage left. Both are visible only when their doors are open. Fully visible and overhanging the living room are EUGENE and STANLEY's rooms.*

*Both rooms contain a single bed and a desk and chair. EUGENE's room is filled with books. All four bedrooms and the bathroom are connected by a central hallway.*

*It is about six p.m. on a cold day in February. Snow covers the streets. It is already dark.*

*KATE JEROME, about 50 and graying, is wearing a sweater to ward off the chill that permeates the house. She is setting five places for dinner. As KATE goes into the kitchen for more dishes, BEN EPSTEIN, KATE's father, about seventy-five, comes out of his bedroom and starts slowly down the stairs. He is wearing a heavy cardigan sweater and carrying a brown paper bag. He is wearing his house slippers over his socks. KATE comes out of the kitchen as BEN reaches the closet. She speaks louder to BEN than to anyone else.*

KATE. I didn't call you, Pop. It's not time for dinner yet.

BEN. Is it dinner yet?

KATE. *(setting out the flatware)* In about a half hour. No one's home yet. Why don't you stay in your room? It's warmer in there.

BEN. *(taking his coat from the closet)* Maybe I'll walk down to the store and get a cigar.

KATE. There's ice on the street, it's twelve degrees out. Eugene will get you a cigar when he gets home.

BEN. I like cold weather.

KATE. You're always complaining you're freezing.

BEN. I don't like it cold in the house. I like it outside. *(putting on his hat)* I have nothing to read. Maybe I'll go to the library.

KATE. *(coming to BEN)* It's six o'clock. The library is closed. Eugene has a million books upstairs.

BEN. I don't read what he reads.

KATE. He has everything.

BEN. He doesn't have a book about Trotsky.

KATE. You just finished a book about Trotsky.

BEN. One book doesn't cover Trotsky. Thursdays they stay open till seven.

KATE. This is Friday.

BEN. I'll take a chance. (*He starts toward the front door.*)

KATE. You want to fall and slip and break your hip again? You don't even have shoes on. You were going to walk in the snow in your slippers?

BEN. (*returning to the closet*) I'll put on my galoshes.

KATE. What's in the brown paper bag?

BEN. (*sitting on the sofa to put on his galoshes*) Where?

KATE. In your hand. What have you got there?

BEN. Nothing. It's garbage. I was going to throw it away.

KATE. Give it to me. I'll put it in the trash can.

BEN. Will you stop treating me like a child. I'm your father, I'll do what I want. When I'm dead, you can treat me like a child.

KATE. You're not going to the library. You were going someplace else. Where were you going?

BEN. I'll go where I want! (*She grabs his galoshes and throws them into the closet.*) If you don't like it, I'll move in with Blanche. Blanche treats me with respect. Don't interfere with me. (*BEN goes to the closet. KATE stops him at C.*)

KATE. You never go out at six o'clock. Something is going on here. If there's something in that bag that's important, you tell me and I'll bring it there myself.

BEN. The day I can't take care of my own things, they'll be praying for me at the synagogue. (*KATE grabs the bag from BEN.*) Katy, don't!!

KATE. (*looking into the bag*) What is this? Is this your bed sheet? . . . Where were you taking it?

BEN. To the Chinese laundry. They never close . . . I want it back, please.

KATE. You *soiled* your sheet and you didn't want to tell me? Why? I've been washing your bed sheets since I'm ten years old . . . So you had an accident. It's alright, Poppa.

BEN. At night I've had accidents. This is the first time during the day.

KATE. So? What else have I got to do with my time? There's no one in this house anymore anyway . . . Take your coat off. You'll catch cold. (*She goes into the kitchen, taking the bag.*)

BEN. (*calling after her*) Not a word, you promise me? I couldn't stay here if the boys knew.

KATE. (*from the kitchen*) The boys? Who sees the boys? I forgot what they look like.

(*BEN sits on the sofa, still in his hat and coat. He puts his slippers back on and takes a newspaper from his coat pocket and reads. EUGENE MORRIS JEROME comes running down the street, wearing a zip-up jacket with the collar up, and a scarf. He is 23 years old. He bursts through the front door and blows on his hands. The front door is not locked. Don't forget, this is still only 1949.*)

EUGENE. Oh, my God! Hi, Grandpa! Did you hear? This is the coldest day in the history of the earth. Is Stanley home yet? (*crossing to the closet and yelling upstairs*) STAN???

BEN. What are you yelling for? I hear you.

EUGENE. (*hanging up his coat*) I was yelling upstairs for Stanley . . . Why are you sitting in your coat?

BEN. What?

EUGENE. Why are you sitting in your coat?

BEN. I was going out. Your mother changed my mind.

EUGENE. (*going to the dining table for an apple*)  
You're better off. It's freezing. I saw a man kissing his wife on the corner and they got stuck to each other. Mr. Jacobs, the tailor, is blowing hot steam on them.

BEN. (*looks at him, concerned*) Two people got stuck?

EUGENE. If they can't get them apart, they're going to have to sew all their clothes together.

BEN. They can't get them apart?

EUGENE. (*straddling a dining chair and facing BEN*)  
It was a joke, Grandpa.

BEN. That was a joke? (*He rises and starts toward the closet.*) What kind of joke?

EUGENE. I made it up. It's not really a joke. It's just funny.

BEN. To who?

EUGENE. To me.

BEN. So if it's funny to you, what are you telling it to me for? (*BEN goes to the closet and hangs up his coat, but leaves his hat on.*)

EUGENE. (*to audience*) The strange thing about my grandfather is, he has totally no sense of humor. None. But everything he says I think is funny. Maybe because he doesn't mean it to be. If he tried to be funny, he wouldn't be. (*to BEN*) Where's Mom?

BEN. What kind of animal wears a zipper?

EUGENE. A zipper? I don't know. What kind?

BEN. A horse fly.

EUGENE. (*to audience*) See what I mean?

BEN. (*crossing back to the sofa*) That's a joke! Not two people got stuck together. You understand?

EUGENE. Yes, Grandpa. Thanks for the priceless information. (*to audience*) My mother and father are the

same way. I could say something so funny that the pictures on the wall would get cramps from laughing, but those three just stare at me like dead bodies. I'm trying to become a comedy writer some day and this is the encouragement I get.

BEN. What kind of fish sings an opera?

EUGENE. What kind of fish sings an opera? . . . I give up. What kind?

BEN. A halibut.

EUGENE. A halibut?

BEN. I got it wrong. I thought it was a halibut, but it doesn't sound right.

EUGENE. (*to audience*) Okay? I guarantee you that a halibut is funnier than the real answer . . . I mean, look at him. Sitting there with a hat on. If he put it on to be funny, it would be dumb. But he doesn't know he's got it on, so its hysterical.

BEN. Does a mackerel sound right?

EUGENE. Don't work on it, Grandpa. It'll come to you. (*to audience*) My brother, Stanley, is the only one who appreciates my humor. When I make Stanley laugh, I feel like Charles Lindbergh landing in Paris . . . And Stanley comes up with great ideas. That's why the two of us teamed up. We're going to be a comedy writing team . . . (*like a radio announcer*) "The Jack Benny Show was brought to you by Lucky Strike and was written by Sam Perrin, Nate Monnister, Milt Josephsberg and Stanley and Eugene M. Jerome." (*He hums "Love in Bloom"\** as KATE comes in from the kitchen with dinner plates.)

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KATE. (*circling the table, setting plates*) What are you eating an apple for? I made chocolate pudding.

EUGENE. It's not a fatal combination, Mom. Where's Pop? I have to talk to everybody.

KATE. I don't think he'll be home for dinner.

EUGENE. Again? That's twice this week. So what are you setting his place for?

KATE. The hell with him, that's what I'm setting his place for. (*She returns to the kitchen.*)

EUGENE. (*crossing to sit beside BEN on the sofa*) Grandpa? What's wrong with Mom? Did she and Pop have another fight?

BEN. It's none of my business.

EUGENE. You know what's going on. She talks to you. You can tell me.

BEN. She *used* to talk to me. She doesn't talk to me anymore.

EUGENE. She snaps at everybody now. Even Stanley can't get a rise from her . . .

BEN. She was always like that. As a child, she could shut off for a month.

EUGENE. I can't picture her as a girl. Was she really supposed to be such a good dancer?

BEN. I only saw her dance once. I didn't like to go to those places. She used to win cups at the er . . . the er . . . that dance place.

EUGENE. The Primrose Ballroom?

BEN. At the er . . . that place near Long Beach.

EUGENE. The Primrose?

BEN. It was a big dance place in those days . . . The Primrose Ballroom!

EUGENE. Right. (*to audience*) Even his timing was terrific . . . He was the greatest teacher of comedy I

ever met . . . Only he didn't even know I was studying him.

BEN. Sure, she was a terrific dancer.

EUGENE. She told me once she danced with George Raft.

BEN. Who?

EUGENE. George Raft. The movie actor.

BEN. I know who he is . . . Yeah, sure, she danced with him. He wasn't a star then. He was just a greasy looking kid. He used to go around to all the different ballrooms and pick out the best dancer. She was fifteen, sixteen years old. Not pretty. She was never pretty. But she was graceful on her feet.

EUGENE. Why didn't she ever try to become a professional? Wasn't she good enough?

BEN. (*shrugs*) She had the accident. She burned half the skin off her back. Twelve girls died in that fire. The owner of that shop went to jail. There was no ventilation, no back door. She couldn't walk for a year . . . She never went down to the beach again. Not with her back like that . . . Her sister, Blanche was a beautiful girl. There were boys lined up outside the house just to look at her. But Blanche couldn't dance a note.

KATE. (*entering from kitchen with a pitcher of water and water glasses, which she puts on the sideboard*) What are you two talking about?

EUGENE. (*crossing to KATE*) About when you used to dance with George Raft.

KATE. You see? He still doesn't believe me, Pop.

EUGENE. Who said? I believe you. One day I'm going to write a movie starring George Raft, and he goes into this club, takes your hand and dances a tango with you.

KATE. I did the fox trot better. Make it a fox trot.

BEN. (*crossing to the table*) What was the name of that place where you danced?

KATE. The Primrose Ballroom.

BEN. (*to EUGENE*) That was it. The Primrose!

EUGENE. Okay. Listen, everybody. I have major news. This is serious.

KATE. Where's Stanley? The pot roast is almost dry.

EUGENE. Listen to me, will you? I have to talk to you.

KATE. Pop? You want a little wine tonight?

BEN. No wine for me. Too much acid. I'll have a beer.

KATE. We're out of beer.

BEN. You got wine?

EUGENE. (*to audience*) If I could just get these two on television. (*to KATE*) Will you please come in here and sit down. I have spectacular news for this family.

KATE. (*bringing in relishes from the kitchen*) What family? You see a family in here?

EUGENE. Please sit. (*He seats BEN US. of the table and KATE at the left end of the table.*) Okay . . . Ready? I wish to announce, that your youngest son, Eugene Morris Jerome — is getting married. (*a beat of silence*)

BEN. A Jewish girl?

KATE. He's kidding, Pop. He's not even going with anyone, how's he getting married?

EUGENE. True! True! I am not going with her — yet! But I've seen her. Her name is Josie. I talked to her. I had lunch with her. I saw the color of her eyes. This is marriage, Mom. This is the girl for the rest of my life.

KATE. This is the same girl you met last summer?

EUGENE. No, no! I hate that girl. I never liked her.

KATE. You went with her for a whole summer.

EUGENE. I had nothing else to do. She was nice on the first date . . . *Part of the first date. Until nine-thirty.*

BEN. He liked a girl until nine-thirty?

KATE. He's kidding. That's a joke.

BEN. That's a joke, too? Ask him to tell you about the people who got stuck together.

EUGENE. This girl is serious. I knew it the minute I saw her. Her father owns a music company on the same floor where I work. She writes poetry. She paints. Her father hung her paintings all over his office. She's incredible. She plays tennis. She plays golf. She plays softball. She's been to Europe. She hums *Bach* and Beethoven, and she can whistle Rachmaninoff. She has jet black hair and olive skin, and when she walks down the street, construction workers fall into the cement. If I live to be a hundred, I'll never meet a girl like her again.

KATE. She likes you too?

EUGENE. *Likes* me? I took her to lunch, and we ate from the same chop sticks. We couldn't stop talking. Philosophy, literature, sports . . . Yeah, she likes me alright.

KATE. I never heard you so excited about a girl.

EUGENE. There's one minor complication, though. She's engaged to be married.

BEN. She's what?

KATE. He's kidding. It's another joke.

EUGENE. No. Really. She's engaged to a Harvard Law student. But I'm not worried. I think I have the inside track.

KATE. (*getting up and going into the kitchen*) I have to check the pot roast.

EUGENE. (*calling into the kitchen after KATE*) She's breaking it off. She's not in love with him. She told him, but he doesn't care. He wants to marry her anyway. That's how great she is. (*as KATE comes out of the*

*kitchen with BEN's wine*) If she was marrying him, would she have had lunch with me today?

BEN. Maybe she's looking for wedding gifts.

KATE. (*setting out napkins*) She sounds fickle, if you ask me.

EUGENE. I want to bring her to dinner next week. I want her to meet the family.

KATE. It's been a long time since this family ate together.

EUGENE. On a Sunday. Everybody's home on Sunday. Alright?

KATE. We'll see. Who knows what'll happen by then. I'm sure she's a nice girl, but eat from your own chop sticks. (*KATE returns to the kitchen. EUGENE crosses toward the stairs.*)

EUGENE. (*to BEN*) She never turned down a chance to cook for someone before . . . Something's wrong between her and Pop, isn't there? (*looks back at BEN*) Grandpa? Did you hear me? (*to audience*) He's sleeping. He's probably working on the halibut joke.

KATE. (*coming out of the kitchen and calling up after EUGENE*) Where are you going? We're eating soon.

EUGENE. I'm not leaving the country.

(*EUGENE goes into his bedroom, turns on the light and begins to write in his journal. KATE returns to the kitchen. STANLEY JEROME comes walking briskly down the street. He is 28, wearing a suit, tie, overcoat and hat. He wipes his shoes carefully on the front mat, then enters the house. He is very excited.*)

STAN. (*hanging his coat in the closet*) Grandpa? Is Eugene here? (*screaming upstairs*) GENE!!

BEN. (*waking abruptly*) What the hell are you screaming for?

STAN. I'm sorry. I didn't know you were sleeping.

BEN. Then ask me. If you asked me, I would have told you.

KATE. (*entering from the kitchen*) You walk in the snow without rubbers? The pot roast is half dry. Tell Eugene it's dinner.

STAN. We haven't got time, Mom. We'll take a sandwich later.

KATE. What do you mean? No dinner? (*Upstairs, EUGENE puts down his journal and comes downstairs.*)

STAN. We have to get right to work. (*again, shouting upstairs*) GENE!!

KATE. I've been cooking since two o'clock. Your father doesn't come home. You tell me no dinner. What am I, a slave here? . . . Sit down, Poppa! It's ready!

EUGENE. (*at the foot of the stairs*) What's up?

STAN. (*to EUGENE*) What are you doing now? Whatever you're doing, forget about it. Back upstairs. We've got to start in right away. Mom, no calls for us. Take a message, we'll get back to them. We may be up all through the night, so don't get nervous if you hear us yelling. (*to EUGENE*) Come on! Let's go. We're wasting time. (*STAN starts to dash upstairs.*)

EUGENE. You mind telling me what this is about?

STAN. (*on the stairs*) We got a job at C.B.S.! The Columbia Broadcasting System.

EUGENE. WHAT???

STAN. I can't believe how much I did today. I was running all over town. I met everybody. I mean, I would make a terrific agent. I talked to these people like they were my friends . . . I met Abe Burrows! He said to me, "Good luck, kid." . . . (*to an uncomprehending KATE*

and BEN ) Abe Burrows, the greatest comedy writer in the business . . . I was on the executive floor, long hallway, pictures of every star in the history of C.B.S. — Jack Benny, Ed Sullivan, Arthur Godfrey, Edward R. Murrow.

KATE. You met them?

STAN. No. Their pictures. (to EUGENE ) There's too much to tell. I haven't got time. We have to start working. I'm so excited, I'm still shaking. Come on, let's go!

EUGENE. (as STAN again starts up the stairs) Wait a minute! You mean the regular C.B.S.?

STAN. No, the fake one!

KATE. Can't you talk this over at dinner?

STAN. Is that all you care about? Your dinner? The most important thing that ever happened in our lives, and you're worried about a lousy pot roast?

KATE. (Obviously hurt, she goes to the kitchen) Just like your father. You're getting to be just like your father every day. Next thing you'll turn Eugene against me, too.

STAN. I'm sorry! . . . Mom? Ah, shit! (to EUGENE ) Come on. (EUGENE and STAN run upstairs, as KATE comes charging out of the kitchen.)

KATE. What did you say?

BEN. (ushering her back into the kitchen) He didn't mean anything. (EUGENE and STAN go into STAN's room. EUGENE sits in the chair. STAN takes his jacket and tie.)

EUGENE. Alright, tell me slow. Tell me everything. What kind of a job did we get? When do we start? How much money do we get paid?

STAN. I didn't discuss details. If they like the sketch we bring in, then they'll hire us.

EUGENE. If they like the sketch, then they'll hire us? You mean it's not a job, it's an audition?

STAN. It's a job. They just have to like it first.

EUGENE. I knew it was too good to be true.

STAN. Let me take care of business. I got us the audition, didn't I?

EUGENE. So it *is* an audition. Why can't you say so? I don't mind an audition, but you make it sound like we're leaving for Hollywood tomorrow.

STAN. We discussed Hollywood. I said we would have no problem in moving to Hollywood. We could leave immediately, if they wanted.

EUGENE. C.B.S. asked if we wanted to go to Hollywood?

STAN. No, I brought it up so they would know how we felt. You have to have confidence when you talk to these people . . . That's why I introduced myself to Abe Burrows.

EUGENE. You introduced yourself?

STAN. In the elevator. I said, "Mr. Burrows, the greatest thing that could ever happen to me is to work as a writer on your staff." And he said, "Good luck, kid." And got off on the twelfth floor.

EUGENE. That's why he said, "Good luck"? You made it sound like you had lunch with him or something.

STAN. Did *you* talk to Abe Burrows?

EUGENE. That's not exactly talking to Abe Burrows. That's like the Pope waving to you in the Vatican.

STAN. You say hello to people like that three or four times in the elevator, and after a while they remember you. I'm starving. Do you have anything in your room? Some cookies or something?

EUGENE. Why don't we have dinner first?

STAN. We haven't got time for dinner. We have to work.

EUGENE. If you can eat cookies, you can eat pot roast. It just takes another few minutes to chew it.

STAN. (*pulling EUGENE to his feet*) Alright, go get a couple of sandwiches. We can eat here while we work. And some milk. And some dessert. A piece of cake, whatever we've got.

EUGENE. (*at the door, turning to STAN*) How late are we going to work?

STAN. (*sitting in the chair, pads and pencils ready*) Until we finish. Maybe all night. They want it tomorrow morning at ten o'clock.

EUGENE. They want a finished sketch by ten o'clock in the morning?

STAN. That's how television works. They want it good, but they want it fast. Those shows are on every week, not twice a year.

EUGENE. (*sitting on the ottoman*) We never wrote a sketch in less than three weeks. And we only wrote one sketch . . . And we didn't even finish it . . . And the first part needs rewriting . . . Maybe we're not ready for C.B.S. yet.

STAN. You want me to call them up and tell them that? We'll never hear from them again . . . Once that kind of thing gets around, you're through at *all* the networks.

EUGENE. You mean C.B.S. is going to call N.B.C. and A.B.C. and tell them that two guys auditioning from Brighton Beach can't be depended on?

STAN. Maybe. Do you want to take that chance?

EUGENE. You actually believe that our names are going to come up in a meeting at A.B.C. and N.B.C.? We're not even writers yet. You're the manager of boys clothing at Abraham and Straus. I'm in the stock room of

a music company. Our names don't even come up where we work.

STAN. (*standing*) What is it, Eugene? Are you afraid? If you're afraid, tell me. You have to have confidence in this world. If you don't have confidence, I'll *always* be in boys clothing and you'll always be in the stock room.

EUGENE. Why will *you* always be in boys clothing if *I* have no confidence? Your career doesn't depend on my confidence.

STAN. Yes. It does. We're a team. I need you; you need me. You have a great comic mind. I'm the best editor and idea man in the business.

EUGENE. You really believe that?

STAN. Absolutely. I have an eye for talent, and we have talent. When Joe DiMaggio came up from San Francisco, didn't I say he'd become one of the greatest ball players of all time?

EUGENE. Because he was already a great ball player in San Francisco. Why are we so great? We sold three comedy monologues to a guy who plays weddings and Bar Mitzvahs.

STAN. Right. And his salary has tripled in three months. Now all the young comics are starting to come to us. How do you think I got in to C.B.S.? My friend, Mort Garfield, the press agent, showed the monologues to the head of Comedy Development . . . Eugene, I'm going to get us everything we ever dreamed of. If you don't have faith in us, I have enough for both . . . Please trust me . . . Now go get the sandwiches. I want to start working on some ideas.

EUGENE. I didn't know we were going to work tonight.

STAN. Well, we are . . . Put some lettuce on my sandwich. And mayonnaise.

EUGENE. The thing is, I wanted to see this girl tonight.

STAN. Well, now you won't see her. And get me some cucumbers.

EUGENE. I could leave by seven and be back by nine. I could write on the subway. I just have to see her.

STAN. You can see her another night. What's wrong with you?

EUGENE. She's engaged to a guy from Harvard. She wants to break it off, but he's coming in tomorrow to talk her back into it. If I don't convince her I'm the guy for her, he's liable to talk her into going through with it.

STAN. If he can talk her into it, what do you want her for?

EUGENE. Because she's perfect. And you only get one chance in your life of meeting a perfect girl.

STAN. You know how many perfect girls there are in Hollywood? They're *all* perfect. In two years you'll be sick of perfect girls. You'll be begging for a plain one. (*EUGENE goes to his own room and begins to dress for his date. STAN is in pursuit.*)

EUGENE. An hour and a half, that's all I'll be gone. If I don't talk to her face to face, I'll lose her, Stan. I know it.

STAN. Eugene, as much confidence as I have in us, I don't have that much confidence that we can write the sketch by tonight. But we have to try. Remember the story Pop told us? How he had the opportunity to go into his own business with a friend . . . how he stayed up all night thinking about it . . . and he couldn't make up his mind. A week later it was too late. His friend lives on Park Avenue now, and Pop is still cutting raincoats . . . Maybe this is the only chance we'll ever get. Maybe not. But are you willing to risk everything for a girl you might not even be interested in by next week?

EUGENE. I'll be interested in her for the rest of my life.

STAN. Then go out with her. Take as much time as you

want. I'll write the sketch myself. (*storming back to his own room*) I mean it. I'm not going to blow this opportunity.

EUGENE. Never mind. I won't see her.

STAN. I said, I'll do it myself.

EUGENE. (*going downstairs*) Don't do me any favors.

(*KATE and BEN enter from the kitchen. KATE puts BEN's soup on the table. He sits down to eat.*)

KATE. (*to EUGENE*) Are you eating or not?

EUGENE. (*going into the kitchen*) We're having sandwiches upstairs, so N.B.C. and A.B.C. won't be mad at us.

(*KATE follows EUGENE into the kitchen. BLANCHE MORTON, KATE's sister, comes down the street. She wears a mink coat and fur hat. She looks very prosperous. She rings the doorbell. No one answers. BLANCHE opens the door and walks in. She crosses into the dining room. We can sense some tension between BLANCHE and BEN.*)

BLANCHE. Hello, Poppa.

BEN. (*glancing up from his soup*) Who's that? Blanche? I didn't hear the limousine pull up.

BLANCHE. It's not a limousine, Poppa. It's just a plain Cadillac. (*She kisses BEN. He is clearly uncomfortable.*)

BEN. Like John D. Rockefeller is just a plain businessman.

BLANCHE. (*putting her purse and gloves on the sofa*) It got stuck in the snow, just like other cars. I had to walk the last two blocks . . . Where's Kate?

BEN. What happened to the colored fella who drives you around?

BLANCHE. Robert? He's still with us. He was calling a garage to get us pulled out.

BEN. You pay him enough money, he could have carried you here.

KATE. (*entering from kitchen*) Why didn't you tell me you were coming? I could have made extra dinner.

BEN. (*to KATE*) Why? Somebody's eating it besides me?

BLANCHE. Thank you, Kate. I didn't come for dinner. I wanted to talk to Poppa.

KATE. You had to come out in this weather? We have a telephone now, too, you know. (*Everything seems to be an innuendo about the differences in their economic standing. EUGENE enters from the kitchen.*)

EUGENE. (*crossing down to KATE*) Mom, I'm having trouble with the pot roast.

KATE. What did you do?

EUGENE. Hello, Aunt Blanche.

BLANCHE. Hello, Eugene.

EUGENE. I didn't slice it right. I shredded it. It looks like shoe laces.

KATE. I told you to let me do it. What do I bother cooking for? (*KATE goes into the kitchen.*)

EUGENE. (*to BLANCHE*) How's Nora?

BLANCHE. She's fine. Her children are wonderful. She thinks the new baby looks just like you. He's going to be so handsome.

EUGENE. Is that what she said? What did she name him?

BLANCHE. Myron Isaac.

EUGENE. Myron Isaac. (*to audience*) Myron Isaac Eisenberg. Poor kid. Wait till he tries to date a girl from Mount Holyoke.

KATE. (*shouting from kitchen*) EUGENE! WHAT DID YOU DO TO THIS MEAT??

EUGENE. (*going slowly into the kitchen*) I KILLED IT! IT WAS HIM OR ME, MA!! I KILLED THE POT ROAST!!

BLANCHE. (*waiting for EUGENE to disappear into the kitchen, and turning to BEN*) Momma is sick, Pop.

BEN. That's a beautiful coat. What do you need a Cadillac for with a coat like that?

BLANCHE. The doctor tells me if I don't move her to Florida, he can't guarantee what'll happen to her.

BEN. I thought we had a bargain.

BLANCHE. (*sitting on the sofa*) Not talking about Momma is not a bargain, Poppa. It's a punishment. To me, to Momma, to the whole family. And I'm not leaving here tonight until we talk about her.

BEN. (*rising and crossing to BLANCHE*) Who's stopping you? Take her to Florida. She'll outlive the palm trees, believe me.

BLANCHE. You can be so cruel sometimes.

BEN. What did I say? I wished her a long life. You come here and aggravate me while I'm eating my dinner, and I'm cruel?

BLANCHE. Do you know what she says to me at night? The very last thing before she goes to bed? She says to me, "Why does that man hate me so much?" What do I answer her, Poppa?

BEN. (*crossing to the armchair*) You don't. Because she'll ask it again tomorrow. Her whole day is built around, "Why do I hate her so much?" She sits on park benches and asks strange women why I hate her so much.

BLANCHE. Why do you?

BEN. Who said I did? *She* did, I never said it . . . I have feelings for the woman, I always will . . . But I can't live her kind of life, she knows that. I hope she lives another fifty years, whether it's on Park Avenue or in

Miami Beach. But these are my roots. I lived here most of my life, this is where I want to die. (*BEN sits in the armchair.*)

BLANCHE. She's sick, Poppa. This is not the place for her. The cold wind coming off the ocean would kill her in two years. Thank God I can afford to send the both of you to a warm climate. It would make all of us so happy to see the both of you living together in comfort for the rest of your lives.

BEN. Comfort doesn't make me happy. I don't need some place where it's hot twelve months of the year. April till October is all the sun God meant us to have. To want more is a crime against those who were born without. Read your Trotsky.

BLANCHE. Don't turn this political, Poppa. This is *not* political.

BEN. *Everything* is political. The soup in my dish is political. The bread on my plate is political. And the four thousand dollar coat on your back is political. (*rising and going back to his place at the dining table*) Don't tell me about things I was taught from the day I was born.

BLANCHE. (*rising*) Momma's health is *not* political. Momma's love for you is *not* political . . . When you can't find a reasonable answer for something, you always turn to Trotsky for help. (*She turns angrily away from BEN.*)

BEN. (*crossing to the sofa*) You're angry with me because I won't live in your high class apartment house where a year's rent could feed everyone on this block for a year? With a man in a uniform opening doors for me who's ten years older than I am? I'm not dead yet, I can still push a door open. Because I don't go to your fancy Park Avenue doctors four times a week? How much money did he get for telling your mother to move to

Florida? I got friends who would have told her to move for nothing. (*BEN sits on the sofa.*)

BLANCHE. And why are you so angry with me? Because you were brought up to despise the rich? I didn't marry Saul because he was rich. I'm so used to not spending money, he had to teach me how to do it. (*coming to sit beside BEN*) But if he is loving enough to offer my parents the opportunity to live out their lives without worrying, for the first time in their lives, about where the rent was coming, what in God's name is wrong with it?

BEN. (*lowering his voice*) I can't leave here. Not now.

BLANCHE. Not now? Then when?

BEN. Are you so blinded by your own life, you don't see what's happening to your sister's? Don't you know what's going on between her and Jack?

BLANCHE. No. What are you talking about?

BEN. He's getting ready to leave her. Tomorrow, next week, next month, who knows? He stays because he doesn't have the courage yet to go. But he's going, trust me.

BLANCHE. I don't believe that. Not Jack.

BEN. Not Jack, she says . . . A man gets older, he changes. He suddenly realizes he only has a few years left to do what he thought he had a lifetime to do.

BLANCHE. Jack loves Kate. He's always loved her.

BEN. Absolutely. But at fifty-five, he can overlook it.

BLANCHE. He depends on her. She manages his life.

BEN. Lucky for her. Otherwise, he would have left last year.

BLANCHE. Oh, God. Don't tell me this. It's the last thing I ever expected to hear.

BEN. Do you understand why I'm telling you I can't leave this house? Stanley and Eugene are grown men. Their life is just starting. It's time for them to leave this place. Do you know what it would be like for her to be

alone? A woman who doesn't know a thing in this world except how to serve someone? If she can't make dinner for somebody, her life is over . . . You take your mother to Florida. You take care of her. But as long as I'm alive, I'll eat in this house.

EUGENE. (coming out of the kitchen with a tray of sandwiches) Your dinner will be ready in a second, Grandpa. Mom is sewing the pot roast back together. (EUGENE starts up the stairs, stopping at the top.)

BLANCHE. Maybe Jack won't leave. Maybe they'll work things out.

BEN. Maybe . . . I'll stay here until "maybe."

BLANCHE. I would do anything in the world for Kate. But I've got to take care of Momma first . . . If I bring her down to Florida, I can only stay a few weeks. I can't leave Saul to spend the winter in New York alone. She doesn't know anyone down there. She cries now when she thinks about it. Stay with her until Spring . . . Until April . . . Kate is strong. She can take care of herself.

BEN. When did your mother ever have trouble making friends? In two weeks down there she'll be running for Mayor . . . If she gets sick, if she needs me, I'll come to her . . . I have my own work to do. This country is getting richer every day from war profits. And whose pockets does it go into? To those who had the money before the war.

BLANCHE. Poppa, I'm not equipped to argue these things with you. I don't understand them. I never did. But I respect what you think is right. All I'm saying is, does it have to be in Brighton Beach? Can't you change the world from Florida?

BEN. You can change your bathing suits in Florida. Not the world.

BLANCHE. (crossing to the front door and looking out)

Why do we have so much trouble understanding each other?

EUGENE. (*entering STAN's room with the tray of sandwiches*) Aunt Blanche is here. She's trying to get Grandpa to . . .

STAN. Shut up! Don't say anything! I'm thinking.

EUGENE. (*sitting in the chair*) Have you got an idea?

STAN. Will you shut up?

EUGENE. Tell me so I can think about it, too.

STAN. It's not an idea yet. It's the beginning of an idea. It's just a thought. A germ. A tiny speck in my mind. (*He inspects his sandwich.*) You forgot the cucumbers.

EUGENE. How about a college sketch? College sketches are always funny.

STAN. (*interested; sitting on the ottoman*) Like what?

EUGENE. Like this girl, Kathy O'Hara, from Mount Holyoke goes out on a blind date with a guy named Myron Isaac Eisenberg.

STAN. I hate funny names. It's a cheap way of getting a laugh.

EUGENE. I don't know. Why don't you try it out on Aunt Blanche?

BLANCHE. What if, God forbid, Jack *did* leave her? What if the boys moved out? Saul and I can take care of her. She doesn't have to stay here. We could get a place in Florida for all three of you. Then you wouldn't have to worry about Kate or Momma. (*EUGENE leaves STAN's room and returns to his own.*)

BEN. (*rising and returning to his place at the dining table*) You think she would leave this house? You think she would take charity from her own sister?

BLANCHE. (*crossing above the sofa*) I took it from her when I needed it. Where was I going to go when Dave died? There's no shame in it when it's your own family. I

would be paying her back for what she did for me and the girls.

BEN. Don't you know your own sister better by now? . . . No. I don't think you do.

BLANCHE. (*crossing below the sofa*) Sometimes, Poppa, I think you don't approve of me . . . Sometimes, I think you don't even like me very much.

BEN. I have three daughters, and I love them the same. But the one who's in trouble is the one that I help.

BLANCHE. Doesn't that include your own wife? Why am I the only one in the family who wants to help Momma?

BEN. Because you're the only one who can afford it. Don't ask for too much, Blanche. When you live on Park Avenue, sympathy doesn't come with it. (*BLANCHE sits on the sofa.*)

EUGENE. (*coming back into STAN's room*) What's new inside the old brain, Stan?

STAN. You're still an infant. I have a God damn infant for a partner. Why don't you wait in your room. I'll call you when I think of it.

EUGENE. I want to help you.

STAN. I said, "Come back when I call you."

EUGENE. (*At STAN's door*) Yes, Heathcliffe. I'll be waiting on the moors. (*EUGENE returns, again, to his own room and sits at the desk.*)

STAN. And bring up the cucumbers!

EUGENE. (*to audience*) It's very hard writing with your brother because your whole relationship gets in the way. Can you imagine *Hamlet* written by William and Harvey Shakespeare?

(*KATE comes out of the kitchen with a hot plate of pot roast and vegetables, which she puts in front of BEN.*)

*She also has a small box wrapped in gift paper, which she gives to BLANCHE.)*

KATE. This is for Nora's baby. If Nora doesn't like the color, I can exchange it.

BLANCHE. I'm sure she'll love it. She's coming over Sunday with the baby. (*more to BEN than to KATE*) It would be a wonderful time for the whole family to get together. Before Momma leaves for Florida . . . Please come.

KATE. It's a long trip on the train for Poppa.

BLANCHE. I could send a car.

BEN. A socialist sitting in the back of a Cadillac with a colored man driving?

BLANCHE. You can let me know at the last minute . . .

KATE. You sure you can't stay for dinner?

BLANCHE. I told her we'd start to pack tonight. If I don't help her, she'd try to get her furniture in the suitcase . . . Poppa? Would you *call* Momma during the week and just say hello?

BEN. I have a lot of meetings this week.

KATE. He'll call.

BEN. If I find the time.

KATE. He'll call.

BLANCHE. (*crossing back to KATE*) I wish I could stay. I wish we had more time to talk. I'll call you tomorrow. (*She collects her things.*) Sometimes I miss this house so much. I miss how good we were to each other. (*BLANCHE kisses KATE on the cheek.*)

KATE. Blanche! I need to talk to you. Not on the phone. Can we meet someplace in the city? Let me take you to lunch. Tomorrow, the next day. Whenever you can find time.

BLANCHE. Of course, Kate. Tomorrow. As early as you want.

KATE. (*tears welling in her eyes*) I hate to ask you this. You know I never like to be obligated to anyone. But you're the only one I . . . (*Suddenly, BEN, who appeared to be nodding off at the table, drops his fork onto the plate. His breathing is heavy.*) Poppa? What's wrong? (*He is holding onto the table to balance himself.*)

BLANCHE. (*dropping her bag and package on the sofa*) Oh, my God!

KATE. (*taking BEN's hat off*) What is it, Poppa? Is it a pain? Is it your chest?

BLANCHE. (*rushing to BEN*) Oh Poppa!

KATE. Try to breathe slowly. Deep breaths, Poppa.

BEN. (*sitting up straighter*) It's alright. I'm alright.

KATE. You want some water? (*Pours him a glass of water*) Drink some water.

BLANCHE. (*taking BEN's hand*) His hands are cold as ice.

KATE. Do you want to lie down?

BEN. I got dizzy for a second. (*now fully recovered; To KATE:*) I was hungry. You could wait forever for something to eat around here.

BLANCHE. It's this climate. Two blocks from the ocean in February, how can you keep the cold out of the house?

BEN. It's not the cold. It's not the climate. It's nerves, that's what it is.

KATE. How do you know it's not your heart? You haven't seen a doctor in over a year.

BEN. A heart attack God gives you. Nerves you get from people who worry about you too much.

BLANCHE. Is that meant for me, Poppa?

KATE. It was meant for both of us. You learn not to pay attention. He doesn't mean it.

BLANCHE. He can't stand the winters here any more than Momma. (*She sits at the table.*) I don't mean to upset you, Poppa. If you're happier here, then stay. Forget what we talked about. I'll get somebody to stay with Momma. I'll work it out myself.

KATE. (*returning BEN's hat to the closet*) Alright, Blanche. Leave it alone for now. We've got time yet.

BLANCHE. (*to BEN*) Why is it so hard for us to talk to each other? Why is it so hard for you to take anything from me? I'm afraid to kiss you when I see you, I know how uncomfortable it makes you . . . Why is that, Poppa?

BEN. (*banging his fist on the table*) YOU ASK TOO MUCH OF ME! (*KATE and BLANCHE are stunned by this outburst.*) I am not an affectionate man. I don't trust affection . . . Sometimes people give it to you instead of the truth.

BLANCHE. (*visibly hurt, going to sofa to collect her purse and package*) I see . . . And what's the truth about me, Poppa? Have I betrayed you because the man I married became wealthy? When I met him, he was on the verge of bankruptcy. Whatever he got, he earned. Whatever he has, he worked for.

KATE. Blanche, stop it. That's enough. Everybody has said enough.

BEN. Let her say what she wants. She's a good girl, my Blanche, but sometimes she forgets where she came from . . . Is it cold outside, Blanche? You bet your life it is . . . Is it hard on the people who live out here? Ask them, they'll tell you . . . Take them *all* to Florida, they'll put up a statue of you on the boardwalk . . . But not even Saul could afford that. They all can't escape, Blanche. They all don't get a ticket to Miami.

BLANCHE. And my sin is that I can afford to buy you one?

BEN. There's no sin, Blanche. You're a generous woman. Even *I* can see that. I thank God you're able to take care of your mother. But I can't enjoy the benefits of a society that made my daughter rich and starves half the people in the country.

BLANCHE. I can't take care of all the people in the country. I didn't ask for all this. I was happier when I had no money and Dave was alive. But I'm not going to curse God because He gave me a kind and loving husband and yes, a mink coat and a Cadillac car. You want them, take them. I didn't ask for it. I found the coat in my closet on my birthday. Some good it does me. It keeps out the cold, but it also stops my father from reaching out and holding me . . . Is that the politics you believe in, Poppa?

BEN. I believe in what I was taught from the day I was born.

BLANCHE. I believe in what I was taught, too . . . I was taught that a family who loves each other takes care of each other . . . You're seventy-seven years old, Poppa, you've done enough. You've worked hard all your life. It's time to play pinochle and walk on the beach. Maybe you'll meet a few retired Socialists. (*going to KATE*) I'll see you tomorrow, Kate?

KATE. Let me see what happens. I'll call you in the morning.

BLANCHE. (*walks to the door, then turns to look at BEN*) I love you, Poppa . . . and I'll accept whatever affection you can give me. But you're not going to stop me and Momma from giving you ours. We're women, we don't know any better. (*BLANCHE exits.*)

EUGENE. (*from his bedroom, to audience*) Can you see now why I want to write comedy? Even God has a terrific sense of humor. Why else would He make Grandpa a dedicated Socialist, fighting against the wealthy class, and then give him a daughter who marries the richest guy

in the garment district? I wonder if we could sell it to C.B.S.? (*KATE clears away EUGENE's, STAN's and her place settings. Then she turns out the porch light.*)

KATE. Why don't you finish your dinner?

BEN. I'm not hungry anymore.

KATE. You'll change your mind. I'll leave it in the oven. (*KATE takes BEN's plate and starts toward the kitchen.*)

BEN. You think I don't know what's going on between you and Jack? That's what you wanted to talk to Blanche about, wasn't it?

KATE. You spoke to Jack?

BEN. I spoke to nobody. But you don't get to be seventy-seven without noticing a few things.

KATE. Nothing's going on.

BEN. If you can tell your sister, why can't you tell me?

KATE. I don't know. Maybe I'm afraid you'll think it's all my fault.

BEN. Is it?

KATE. You see? That's why I'm afraid to talk to you.

(*KATE exits into the kitchen. BEN goes upstairs to his bedroom. EUGENE speaks from his bedroom to the audience.*)

EUGENE. There's so much material in this house. Maybe I don't have to become a writer. If only I could get enough people to pay for seats in the living room.

STAN. (*bursting into EUGENE's room, holding a sheet of paper*) I can't believe it. I cannot believe it!

EUGENE. What?

STAN. I just came up with an idea. One of the funniest ideas I ever heard of in my life. I was hysterical just picturing it.

EUGENE. So what's wrong?

STAN. I just remembered I saw it on the Red Skelton show three weeks ago. (*He throws the paper into the wastebasket*) Can you imagine if we brought that in to C.B.S.? They would grab us by our collars and crotches and throw us out in front of Abe Burrows.

EUGENE. Well, what was the idea? Maybe we could twist it around.

STAN. Twist it around? We don't make pretzels, we write comedy. We're supposed to be original, think of *new* things. We don't steal from other people's shows.

EUGENE. What are you, the District Attorney of Comedy?

STAN. We're wasting time again. What have you got?

EUGENE. *Me?* I don't have anything.

STAN. Then what were you doing all this time?

EUGENE. I was thinking of a way to grow cucumbers in my bedroom.

STAN. God, you are lazy! Let me ask you something.

EUGENE. Oh, God! I hate it when you say, "Let me ask you something."

STAN. Let me ask you something. Are you serious about writing or not?

EUGENE. Yes.

STAN. Yes, what?

EUGENE. Yes, I am serious about writing.

STAN. No, I don't think you are.

EUGENE. (*jumping to his feet*) Oh, Jesus! . . . I am, Stanley. I am serious about writing. I'm kind of footloose and fancy-free about cucumbers, but I'm serious about writing.

STAN. You can say what you want, I don't believe you are.

EUGENE. I am! I am! (*to the heavens*) Please, Holy

MOTHER, make my blind brother see that I speak the truth.

STAN. Alright. Tell me how serious you are about writing.

EUGENE. Let me call a doctor, Stanley. I think you're cracking up.

STAN. I want to know. I want to know just how serious you are about writing.

EUGENE. (*spreading his arms out wide, as though measuring a fish*) This much!

STAN. Don't get sarcastic with me.

EUGENE. That wasn't sarcastic. I was telling you point blank I think you're crazy.

STAN. You've been writing your memoirs since you're fourteen years old, and you still don't give a God damn about your craft.

EUGENE. It's not a craft, Stanley. A craft is Indian rug weaving. My memoirs is putting down the nutty things that have happened in my life. And this conversation is getting a whole chapter of its own.

STAN. That's exactly what I mean. You may say you're serious about it, but you don't *act* serious.

EUGENE. You want me to act serious about writing? . . . Okay. Watch! (*He strikes a very grim pose.*) I would rather write a comedy sketch than feed all the starving children in the world. (*He falls to the floor at STAN's feet.*)

STAN. I could kill you right now. You want to forget about this? You want me to call C.B.S. and tell them we're just not ready for this yet? Huh? Huh? Alright?

EUGENE. What are you getting so angry about?

STAN. I'm not angry.

EUGENE. Yes, you are.

STAN. I'm angry about your attitude.

EUGENE. So why did you say you're not angry?

STAN. Your attitude stinks, you know that?

EUGENE. I can't believe this! Maybe to *you* my attitude stinks. To me, my attitude smells wonderful.

STAN. (*going to the door*) Listen, let's just forget about it. I don't think we can work together. I'm getting older, I don't have any more time to waste. I'll find somebody else.

EUGENE. How about Abe Burrows? He's probably waiting for you on the elevator.

STAN. No, that's what I'm going to do. I'm going to find somebody else. Someone with a bigger interest in his career than you have.

EUGENE. (*spreading out his arms again*) You mean bigger than this?

STAN. You've got a lot to learn, my young friend.

EUGENE. "My young friend"?? . . . Jesus, now you're Abraham Lincoln! (*STAN storms out, into his own room. EUGENE follows.*) You know what I think this is all about, Stanley? I think you're scared. I think it's a terrific way to put off sitting down and writing. That's what I think. (*EUGENE returns to his own room.*)

STAN. (*following EUGENE*) Go on! Go visit your girlfriend! I just hope to God she's got money and is willing to support you, because you'll never make a penny in this world on your own, you little shit! (*He slams EUGENE's door, and goes back into his room.*)

EUGENE. (*to audience*) See what I mean about brothers writing together! . . . They're too busy sibling all the time . . . But in a way, Stan was right. I wasn't concentrating because I was afraid I was losing the greatest girl in the world . . . Being in love is a definite career killer. (*The door opens and STAN comes back in.*)

STAN. I got another idea.

EUGENE. (*to audience*) But lucky for me, Stan was real dedicated. (*to STAN*) What's the idea?

STAN. Not an idea for a sketch. But I know what we've been doing wrong.

EUGENE. You do?

STAN. Tell me what you think we've been doing wrong.

EUGENE. What we've been doing wrong?

STAN. (*nods*) What's the essential ingredient in every good sketch we've ever seen?

EUGENE. I don't know. What?

STAN. Don't say "what" so fast. Think about it.

EUGENE. (*thinks*) What's the essential ingredient in every good sketch we've ever seen.

STAN. Right.

EUGENE. I don't know. What?

STAN. You *do* know. We've talked about it. You're just not thinking.

EUGENE. Stan, I don't want to take a high school exam. Tell me so we can write the sketch.

STAN. The ingredient in every good sketch we've ever seen—is conflict! . . . Remember? Remember the night we talked about conflict?

EUGENE. Yes.

STAN. You *do* remember?

EUGENE. Tuesday, September 7th, eight-thirty-five p.m.

STAN. Alright. Now what's the *other* ingredient in every good comedy sketch we've ever seen?

EUGENE. (*sighs in exasperation*) More conflict!

STAN. Come on. You know it . . . Think about it . . . Heh? . . . Do you know it?

EUGENE. Yes. It's when one brother wants to kill the other brother.

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