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SF PERUSALS

Samuel French Acting Edition

Lost in Yonkers

by Neil Simon

SAMUEL FRENCH

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www.SamuelFrench.com
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FOR PRODUCTION ENQUIRIES

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Lost in Yonkers by Neil Simon was first presented by Emanuel Azenberg at The Stevens Center for the Performing Arts in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, on December 31, 1990, and subsequently opened in New York City on February 21, 1991, with the following cast:

JAY.....Jamie Marsh
ARTY.....Danny Gerard
EDDIE.....Mark Blum
BELLA.....Mercedes Ruehl
GRANDMA KURNITZ.....Irene Worth
LOUIE.....Kevin Spacy
GERT.....Lauren Klein

Gene Saks was the director. The scenery and costumes were designed by Santo Loquasto, the lighting by Tharon Musser, the sound by Tom Morse, and Peter Lawrence was the production supervisor.

ACT

Scene 1

SCENE: Yonkers, New York ... 1942.
An apartment that sits just above "KURNITZ'S KANDY STORE" ... It consists of a living room, dining room, a small kitchen, one bathroom and two bedrooms. The entrance door leads from downstairs directly to the candy store.

AT RISE: About six-thirty in the evening on a hot, sultry day in August. It's still quite light outside. A fan blows in the living room.
TWO YOUNG BOYS are in the living room. One, ARTHUR KURNITZ, about 13 1/2, sits on an old armchair, looking apprehensive. HE is wearing an old woolen suit, his only one, with knickered pants, a shirt, tie, long socks and brown shoes.
The other boy is his brother, JAY KURNITZ, not quite 16. HE sits on the sofa, in a suit as well, but with long pants, shirt, tie, and shiny black shoes. HE looks more sullen and angry than apprehensive.
ARTY keeps wiping his sweaty brown with his handkerchief.

JAY. I hate coming here, don't you?
ARTY. (*In front of fan.*) *It's hot. I'm so hot.*

JAY. I'd hate coming here if I was cool. Pop doesn't even like to come and it's his own mother ... I was so afraid of her when I was a kid. She'd come out of that door with a limp and a cane and looked like she was going to kill you. When I was five, I drew a picture of her and called it "Frankenstein's Grandma."

ARTY. Did she ever see it?

JAY. If she did, you'd be an only child today. Pop said she could swing her cane so fast, she could have been one of the greatest golfers in the world.

ARTY. All I remember was, I hated kissing her. It felt like putting your lips on a wrinkled ice cube.

JAY. Yeah, she's cold all right. She was the only one at Mom's funeral who didn't cry ... I wonder what Pop's talking to her so long for.

ARTY. Because she's deaf in one ear, isn't she?

JAY. Yeah ... Did you ever notice there's something wrong with *everyone* on Pop's side of the family? Mom used to tell me that.

ARTY. She didn't tell me. Like who?

JAY. Like all of them. Like Aunt Bella ... She's a little—(*Points to his head.*)—you know—closed for repairs.

ARTY. I don't care. I like her. Nicer than "hot house" Grandma.

JAY. I didn't say she wasn't nice. But she's got marbles rolling around up there ... Mom said she got that way because when she was a kid, Grandma kept hitting her in the head every time she did something stupid ... which only made her stupider.

ARTY. (*Lays on the floor, in front of the sofa.*) She wasn't stupid at making great ice cream sodas.

JAY. Hooray! Wonderful! She's 35 years old and she can make ice cream sodas. They don't give you a high school diploma for getting the cherry on top of the whipped cream.

ARTY. She went to high school?

JAY. A little. She missed the first year because she couldn't find it.

(The bedroom door opens. Their father, EDDIE KURNITZ, about 41, steps out into the room. HE wears a suit and tie and seems hot and nervous. HE wipes his brow with a hanky.)

EDDIE. You kids all right?

JAY. Yeah, Pop. Fine.

EDDIE. I'll be through talking to Grandma in a few minutes. (*To ARTY.*) Why are you lying on the floor? Don't do that, Arty. You'll crease your pants. You want Grandma to see you with creased pants? (*HE goes back in, closes the door.)*

ARTY. (*Stands.*) What's he want me to do, carry an iron with me?

JAY. He's afraid of her the same as Aunt Bella. Like Aunt Bella couldn't count so good, so instead of two scoops of ice cream in a soda, she'd put in three or four. For the same price. And if Grandma saw it, Whacko! Another couple of I.Q. points gone. (*Picks up a photo from behind the sofa.*) Here, look at this. Aunt Gert when she was a kid. See how her head is down. Probably ducking. The old cane was coming at her ... You don't think Aunt Gert's a little coconuts too?

ARTY. No. She's just sick. She's got bad lungs or something.

JAY. Bad lungs, my eye. She can't talk right. She says the first half of a sentence breathing out and the second half sucking in. You've seen it.

ARTY. Do it for me.

JAY. I don't want to.

ARTY. Come on, do it.

JAY. No, I don't want to.

ARTY. Do it!

JAY. (*Imitates Aunt Gert. HE breathes out.*) "Oh, hello, Jay, how are you? And how is your father? And—(*Then talks as HE sucks in breath.*)—how is your little brother, Arty?"

ARTY. (*Laughs.*) I love it! I love when you do that.

JAY. I once saw her try to blow out a candle and halfway there she sucked it back on.

ARTY. You didn't.

JAY. With these two eyes. Mom says she talks that way because she was so afraid of Grandma. She never allowed her kids to cry.

ARTY. Never?

JAY. Never.

EDDIE. (*Comes back in.*) Grandma's worried about the doilies. Don't lean your head back on the doilies. It gets grease on them. She just had them laundered. (*HE goes back in.*)

ARTY. (*To JAY.*) You mean only people who just had a shampoo can sit here?

JAY. And what about Uncle Louie? You know what *he* is don't you?

ARTY. Yeah. A gangster. You believe that?

JAY. You bet. They say he's some big mobster's henchman.

ARTY. You mean he's got a bad back?

JAY. Not a hunchback. A *henchman*? ... And real tough. He's a bag man.

ARTY. What do you mean, a bag man? He puts people in bags?

JAY. Not people. Money. *Hot* money. He collects bags of it from one guy and delivers it to the mob ...

ARTY. (*Looks out the window.*) Hey! There's Aunt Bella ...

JAY. Is she coming up?

ARTY. No. She's walking past the house.

JAY. I'll bet she's lost again. (*HE looks out window, calls down.*) Aunt Bella? ... Hi! ... It's Jay and Arty ... Up here. (*HE waves to her.*) That's right. Up here ... Here she comes.

(THEY walk away from the window.)

JAY. She ought to wear a compass or something!

(The bedroom door opens. EDDIE comes out again.)

EDDIE. Will you keep your voices down. Grandma said, "What are they yelling for?"

JAY. We were calling down to Aunt Bella. She's on her way up.

ARTY. Can I take my jacket off?

EDDIE. After Grandma sees you. And no ice cream sodas from Aunt Bella. Even if she asks you. I don't want to get Grandma upset now. Fix the doilies.

JAY. Is she all right?

EDDIE. Her back is bothering her. When Aunt Bella comes in, tell her Momma wants a back rub ... Comb your hair, Arty, and don't make a mess. (*EDDIE goes back in. We hear a KNOCK on the front door.*)

BELLA. (*Offstage.*) Jay? Arty? It's me. Aunt Bella. Can I come in?

JAY. Guess who forgot how to open a door? ...

(JAY opens the door. BELLA KURNITZ, in her mid-thirties, stands there. Although SHE's a mess at dressing, nothing matches at all, SHE is neat and sweet and pretty, although looking a little older than her age. SHE's as warm and congenial as SHE is emotionally arrested.)

BELLA. (*Smiles.*) I forgot my key.

JAY. How'd you get in downstairs?

BELLA. I used my spare key. I'm glad you called me. I walked right by the house, didn't I? Sometimes I daydream so much, I think I should carry an alarm clock ... Oh, God, I'm so happy to see you. Arty! Jay! My two favorite cousins.

JAY. Aren't we your nephews?

BELLA. Of course you are. My cousins, my nephews, my boys. Come here, give your Aunt Bella a kiss. (*SHE puts down her purse, pulls JAY and ARTY into her arms and kisses them both.*) Let me look at you. You both got so much bigger. You're growing up so fast, it almost makes me cry ... Where's your father? I haven't seen your father in so long ... (*Calls out.*) Eddie! It's Bella ... Is he here?

ARTY. He's in there, talking to Grandma.

BELLA. (*Suddenly nervous.*) Oh, I'd better not disturb them ... Did she ask for me?

JAY. Pop said her back was hurting. She wanted you to give her a back rub when you came in?

BELLA. Oh. Did you tell her I was here?

JAY. No. You just came in.

BELLA. Did you tell her where I went?

JAY. We didn't know where you went.

BELLA. Well, let's not tell her I'm here yet. Then we won't be able to visit. (*SHE takes off her sweater.*) Oh, you're both getting so handsome.

JAY. Thank you.

ARTY. Thank you, Aunt Bella.

BELLA. I bet I look much older to you two. Do I? The truth. Tell me.

JAY. I don't think so.

ARTY. No.

BELLA. I was hoping you'd say that. I'm thirty-five. And I don't even look it, do I?

JAY. No.

ARTY. Not to me.

BELLA. And how old are you boys now? About twenty?

ARTY. I'm thirteen and a half.

JAY. I'm fifteen and a half.

BELLA. Well, that adds up to about thirty-five. So we could be brother and sisters. Isn't that wonderful?

JAY. Yeah.

BELLA. Yeah ... I just got back from the movies. I had the most wonderful time. I wish I knew you were here, we all could have gone.

JAY. What did you see?

BELLA. I don't know. I couldn't find the theater I was looking for, so I went to the one I found. But it was better than the picture I wanted to see. It was with Bette Davis and George Brent ... Maybe we could all go again next week, if I can find the wrong theater again.

ARTY. Sure. I'd love to.

BELLA. Why don't you take your jackets off, you two? Look at you both perspiring.

ARTY. We're fine, we're cool in here with the fan.

BELLA. They had air conditioning at the movie house. I was actually cold. I felt so happy for the actors to be in an air-conditioned theater.

JAY. *(Looks at ARTY, then at BELLA.)* I don't think the actors feel it. They're just pictures on the screen.

BELLA. Well, I know that, silly. I meant they'd be happy to know that people who were watching their movies were nice and cool so we enjoyed the movie better.

JAY. Oh. Right. I bet they would.

BELLA. I bet I know what would make you two cool in a second. How about a big ice cream soda deluxe? With everything in it? Look at your faces lighting up. Come on. I'll make it for you downstairs.

JAY. I think we have to wait here. Pop'll be out in a second and he wants us to see Grandma.

BELLA. Well, I'll bring them up here. That's no trouble. What kind? Chocolate? Vanilla? Butter Pecan? What's your favorite, Arty?

ARTY. All of them.

BELLA. I can make that. With three different kinds of ice cream. I used to make one with *four* different kinds.

They were selling like crazy, but we lost a fortune ... How long ago did she ask for me?

JAY. Grandma? A couple of minutes ago.

BELLA. Did you tell her I was here?

JAY. No, we told Pop we saw you from the window. But maybe he didn't say anything to her.

BELLA. It doesn't make any difference. She heard my footsteps coming up the stairs.

ARTY. How? Isn't she partly deaf?

BELLA. Oh, sure. But the other part hears perfectly ... What about a small sundae? Chocolate ice cream with hot-fudge sauce and some whipped cream and chopped walnuts? Are you going to say no to that, Arthur? I bet you can't. Say no. Let me hear you.

ARTY. (*Looks at JAY.*) It sounds like just a small one.

JAY. (*To BELLA.*) He can't. We're having dinner soon. It's just that Pop told us to wait.

BELLA. Oh, your father. He never takes anything from anybody. I couldn't even give your mother a cup of coffee ... Did you know that? ... Where is she, anyway?

JAY. (*Looks confused.*) She's dead. Mom is dead.

BELLA. (*Looks confused a moment.)* Yes. I know ... I mean where is she buried?

JAY. At Mount Israel Cemetery in the Bronx. You were at the funeral. Remember?

BELLA. You mean the first time?

JAY. What do you mean, the first time?

BELLA. When I came in the car. Not the bus.

ARTY. The bus?

BELLA. (*Thinks ...*) No. No. I'm thinking of someone else. Sometimes my mind wanders. The kids in school used to say, "Hey, Bella. Lost and found called and said,

'Come get your brains.' " ... (*SHE laughs.*) ... but I didn't think that was funny.

(The BOYS nod.)

BELLA. I bet you miss Mom a lot, don't you? Don't you, Arty?

ARTY. Yeah. A lot.

BELLA. She was a lot like your father. Very independent. Stuck to her own family mostly. (*SHE lowers her voice.*) She didn't get along too well with your grandmother. Nobody does. My sister, Gert, was once engaged to a man. She brought him over to meet Grandma. The next day he moved to Boston.

JAY. That's too bad.

BELLA. Don't tell Grandma I said that.

ARTY. I won't.

BELLA. You're both so shy. I used to be shy. Grandma didn't like me to talk too much ... I had a lot of friends, but I didn't talk to them ... It's a shame your mother couldn't have had more children ... She didn't, did she?

JAY. No.

BELLA. No ... Because it would be easier for you now that she's gone. Big families are important when you have trouble in your life. We were a big family ... Me and your father and Louie and Gert ... That was before Rose and Aaron died ... Rose was just a baby but Aaron was almost twelve so I didn't know Rose as well as Aaron ... You never knew them, did you?

JAY. I don't think we were born yet.

BELLA. No. I don't think so ... My father died before I was born. But I wasn't sad about that.

JAY. That's good.

BELLA. Because I loved him so much. Did you know you could love somebody who died before you were born?

JAY. I guess so.

BELLA. Because I knew he would have taken care of me ... Like your father takes care of you. You know what I mean?

JAY. I think so.

BELLA. Yeah ... So what about that sundae? It's going to sit down there melting on the counter if I make it and you don't eat it ... Last time I'm asking, Arthur. Yes or no?

ARTY. I'd ... I'd like to ... (*HE looks at JAY. who shakes his head "No."*) Maybe later.

BELLA. (*Snaps coldly, angrily.*) *NO! NOT LATER!! IT'S TOO LATE NOW!!!* ... I'm not asking you again. You hurt my feelings, the both of you. You tell your father to teach you better manners before I'm ever nice to you again ... I know you miss your mother but that doesn't mean you can be disrespectful to me ... I *always* liked your mother whether she took coffee from me or not. And you can tell that to your father, the both of you. You hear me? ... I'm sick of it.

(SHE goes into the bathroom and SLAMS the door hard. JAY and ARTY just look at each other.)

JAY. You see why I don't like to come here too much?

(The bedroom door opens and a bedraggled EDDIE comes out, looks around.)

EDDIE. Where's Aunt Bella? I thought I just heard her.

JAY. She's in the bathroom.

EDDIE. I heard the door slam. Did you say anything to upset her?

JAY. Yeah. Everything.

ARTY. Is it time to go yet, Pop?

EDDIE. We'll go when I tell you. You haven't even seen your grandmother. Stop rushing me. You just got here, didn't you?

EDDIE. (*HE KNOCKS on the bathroom door.*) Bella! It's Eddie. Momma wants to see you. It's her back again ... Bella? (*No answer. To the BOYS.*) Is she all right?

JAY. How do you know when she's all right?

EDDIE. Hey! No remarks about Aunt Bella, you hear me? She loves you boys. Always has. So just sit there and be quiet. God, my head is splitting. (*HE goes back into bedroom, closes door.*)

(The bathroom door opens and BELLA steps out, holding a towel and oil.)

BELLA. Was that your father banging on the door just now?

JAY. Yes.

BELLA. Is he angry with me?

JAY. With you? No.

BELLA. I hope not. Do I look better?

ARTY. Better than when ?

BELLA. Than before. When you said I wasn't looking well.

ARTY. I didn't say that.

BELLA. Then who said it? ... Jay?

ARTY. Maybe. Did you say it, Jay?

JAY. Nobody said anything.

BELLA. Oh. I know. It was Grandma. She didn't like the way I looked today. She hates this dress ... I made it myself.

ARTY. Really ?

BELLA. (*Nods.*) It took me almost a year.

JAY. ... Grandma wants you, Aunt Bella.

BELLA. Oh, yeah ... As soon as I finish Momma's rub, I'll start dinner ... Are you boys hungry?

ARTY. I don't know. Jay knows. Tell her, Jay.

JAY. I'm not so sure we're staying for dinner.

BELLA. Of course you are. You think I'd let you go all the way home without dinner? ... Are you going to say no to me again, Arty?

ARTY. (*Quickly.*) I'm not. I'm eating. I'm hungry. No matter what Jay does. I'm eating.

BELLA. Well, we're *all* eating. It's Sunday. And you think about what you want for dessert, Arty, because whatever you want is what you're going to get ... Start thinking now.

ARTY. I started! I started! I want a big ice cream soda with a sundae with whipped cream and hot fudge sauce. Is that okay?

BELLA. Sounds perfect to me. And don't give any to Jay. He missed the deadline. (*SHE puts her nose up to JAY and goes into Grandma's room.*)

ARTY. (*To JAY.*) Don't be mad. I had to say it. I was afraid she was going to strangle me with the towel.

JAY. It's up to Pop. We'll see what Pop says.

(ARTY lies on the sofa. The bedroom door opens. EDDIE comes out. HE looks strained ... HE crosses to the open window and takes a deep breath of air.)

EDDIE. Jay! Get me a glass of water, please.

JAY. Right, Pop. (*HE rushes into the kitchen.*)

EDDIE. It must be over a hundred in here. (*HE looks at ARTY.*) Get your shoes off the sofa, what's wrong with you?

ARTY. (*Moves shoes.*) I'm feeling kind of faint.

EDDIE. What do you mean, faint? Kids your age don't faint.

ARTY. Maybe I'm getting older.

JAY. (*Comes in with the glass.*) Here you go, Pop. Nice and cool.

EDDIE. Don't spill it on the rug. (*HE takes the glass and drinks. Puts the glass down.*) All right ... Time to talk. Sit down, Jay. Next to Arty.

(JAY sits on the sofa next to ARTY. EDDIE sits on the stool. HE is thinking about how to start.)

EDDIE. I er ... I wanted to tell you boys—(*And suddenly HE breaks and tears come to his eyes. HE quickly tries to stifle it. HE wipes his eyes. HE goes to the window for some air.*)

ARTY. Is anything the matter, Po—

EDDIE. It's so damn hot in here, isn't it? ... So, I just had a talk inside with your grandmother ... Because I've had a problem ... When your mother and I had a problem, we always tried to keep it from you boys because we didn't want to worry you ... Well, you can't keep cancer, a secret

forever ... You knew without me telling you, didn't you, Jay?

JAY. Yes, Pop.

EDDIE. I did everything I could. The best doctors, the best hospitals I could get into ... She had a nice room, didn't she? Semi-private, no wards or anything ...

JAY. I know, Pop.

EDDIE. We're not rich people, boys. I know that doesn't come as a surprise to you ... but I'm going to tell you something now I hoped I'd never have to tell you in my life ... The doctors, the hospital, cost me everything I had ... I was broke and I went into debt ... So I went to a man ... A loan shark ... A moneylender ... I couldn't go to a bank because they don't let you put up heartbreak and pain as collateral ... A loan shark doesn't need collateral ... His collateral is your desperation ... So he gives you his money ... And he's got a clock. ... And what it keeps time of is your promise ... If you keep your promise, he turns off the clock ... and if not, it keeps ticking ... and after a while, your heart starts ticking louder than his clock ... Understand something. This man kept your mother alive ... It was his painkillers that made her last days bearable ... And for that I'm grateful ... Jay! Remember what I taught you about taking things from people?

JAY. (*Nods.*) Never take because you'll always be obligated.

EDDIE. So you never take for yourself ... But for someone you love, there comes a time when you have no choice ... There's a man in New York I owe ... Nine thousand dollars ... I could work and save four more years and I won't have nine thousand dollars ... He wants his

money this year. To his credit, I'll say one thing. He sent flowers to the funeral. No extra charge on my bill ...

JAY. Pop—

EDDIE. Let me finish ... There is no way I can pay this man back ... So what'll he do? Kill me? ... Maybe ... If he kills me, he not only loses his money, it'll probably cost him again for the flowers for *my* funeral ... I needed a miracle ... And the miracle happened ... This country went to war ... A war between us and the Japanese and the Germans ... And if my mother didn't come to this country thirty-five years ago, I could have been fighting for the other side ... Except I don't think they're putting guns in the hands of Jews over there ... Let me tell you something. I love this country. Because they took in the Jews. They took in the Irish, the Italians and everyone else ... Remember this. There's a lot of Germans in this country fighting for America, but there are no Americans over there fighting for Germany ... I hate this war, and God forgive me for saying this, but it's going to save my life ... There are jobs I can get now that I could never get before ... And I got a job ... I'm working for a company that sells scrap iron ... I thought you threw scrap iron away. Now they're building ships with it ... Without even the slightest idea of what I'm doing, I can make that nine thousand dollars in less than a year ...

JAY. That's great, Pop.

EDDIE. Don't say it till I finish ... The factories that I would sell to are in the South ... Georgia, Kentucky, Louisiana, Texas, even New Mexico. ... I'd be gone about ten months ... Living in trains, buses, hotels, any place I can find a room ... We'd be free and clear and back together

again in less than a year ... Okay? ... So now comes the question, where do you two live while I'm gone?

(There is a deafening silence as JAY and ARTY turn and look at each other.)

ARTY. (*Wipes his brow.*) ... God, it's so hot in here.

JAY. Please, Pop, don't make us live here ... That's what you're thinking, isn't it?

EDDIE. I have no choice, Jay. I don't know where else to turn.

JAY. (*To EDDIE.*) Why can't we stay where we are?

EDDIE. I gave the apartment up. I told the landlady yesterday.

ARTY. (*Astonished.*) You gave it up?

EDDIE. She raised the rent. *Every*body's looking to make money out of this war. And the truth is, by the end of the year, I'll owe eleven thousand. While I'm away, the clock doesn't stop ticking.

JAY. Grandma wouldn't be happy with us. We're slobs. We leave everything on the floor. Arty's always breaking things.

ARTY. (*To EDDIE.*) Remember when I broke the good water pitcher? And the ink stains on the sofa. All mine! ... I'm dangerous, Pop.

EDDIE. Listen to me, both of you. It took me an hour-and-a-half to convince her. It's not that she doesn't like you. But she's old. She's set in her ways. And she's worried about people being around Bella.

ARTY. Me too.

EDDIE. She hasn't even said positively yet. She's thinking about it. She'll come out. She'll talk to you.

She'll see how it goes. It's up to us to convince her that you two won't be any trouble ... That's why I want you both looking so neat. Don't you see how important this is?

JAY. And what if she *did* take us in? Then you'd be obligated, Pop. Don't you think you have enough obligations now?

EDDIE. I'm not asking for myself. I'm asking for my boys. For my boys, I'll be obligated ... There's nothing to discuss anymore ... It's up to Grandma now ... And it's up to you. (*HE crosses to Grandma' s bedroom door.*) I'll see if she's ready. (*HE turns back to them.*) If she says no, I can't take this job. I can't pay back the man I gave my promise to ... Just show Grandma what a terrific present she's getting to have you boys live with her ... Fix your tie, Jay. Straighten your collar, Arty ... Stand straight, both of you ...

(THEY stand straight. HE nods.)

EDDIE. That's my boys. (*HE goes into Grandma's room.*)

(The BOYS look at each other.)

JAY. Oh, my God. What if Grandma says "Yes"?

ARTY. She won't. Because I'm going to break something. What's her favorite thing in this room?

JAY. You're not breaking anything. Because we have to stay here and save Pop's life.

ARTY. And what about *our* lives? We could grow up like Aunt Bella. I could be in the seventh grade for the next twenty years.

JAY. Listen, if you act like this when Grandma comes out, that's like putting a gun to Pop's head and pulling the trigger.

ARTY. Oh. So we stay here and get whacked in the head every time we cry ... or suck candles back on like Aunt Gert. (*HE sucks his breath in and says.*) "Hello, Arty. How are you?"

JAY. (*Grabs ARTY by his shirt collar.*) One more word from you and I'll whack you, I swear to God.

(ARTY pulls away but JAY holds on ... and Arty's collar gets torn halfway off and dangles there.)

JAY. Oh, my God. It tore!

ARTY. Well, that's it. The war is over for us ... I hope Pop bought the grave next to Mom.

JAY. (*Looking in a drawer.*) Jesus! It's all your goddamn fault ... (*Starts to cry.*) Dammit! I hate you so much. I hate Mom for dying. I hate Pop for putting us in this spot. I hate Grandma for being such a rotten old lady. I hate everybody in the whole goddamn world.

(And the bedroom door opens and EDDIE comes out with a smile.)

EDDIE. You ready, boys? (*And then HE looks at them.*) ... What the hell's going on here? ... What are you crying about? What happened to your collar? (*HE quickly closes the bedroom door.*)

ARTY. Nothing.

EDDIE. Don't tell me nothing. Were you fighting? Of course you were fighting, just look at you. I don't believe it. If I can't trust you for two minutes, how can I trust you for a year? ... And do you think I would do this to my mother? To my sister, Bella? ... I'm ashamed of you. I'm ashamed of you both ... Wait outside for me. Out in the street. I don't want to look at you ... Go on, get out.

ARTY. We weren't fighting. It was an accident. I was trying to straighten my tie and I straightened it too tight.

JAY. I was crying about Mom. She'd be so sad to see you in such trouble ... We really want to stay here. We like Yonkers.

EDDIE. Are you serious? Or are you just trying to lie your way out of this?

JAY. Serious. Very serious.

ARTY. It's the most serious we've been in our lives.

EDDIE. I hope so. For all our sakes ... All right. Fix yourself up. Tuck in your collar. Wipe your eyes ... I'll get Grandma.

(The door opens and BELLA comes out. SHE rushes to the sofa and throws herself on it, sobbing.)

EDDIE. Oh, Jesus! Bella? ... What's wrong? ... What is it, Bella?

(SHE buries her face in a pillow, like a five-year-old child. ARTY and JAY look at each other ...
EDDIE sits next to BELLA and puts his arm around her shoulder.)

EDDIE. (*To BELLA, softly.*) ... Did Momma say something? ... Was she angry with you?

(BELLA whispers in Eddie's ear.)

EDDIE. No, no, Bella. She does too love your back rubs, she told me that... She's just got a lot on her mind today. (*HE looks at the BOYS disapprovingly, then back to BELLA.*) You all right now, sweetheart?

(BELLA whispers again to him.)

EDDIE. Yes, I know you're lonely ... I know it's hard to be alone with her all the time ... But, Bella, I have good news for you ... Maybe you won't be alone anymore ... You know who's going to stay here, Bella? If Momma says yes ... Arthur and Jay ... Wouldn't that be nice? ... To have Arthur and Jay here? ... They'd live here and spend time with you and you'd have someone to talk to at nights.

(ARTY and JAY look at each other.)

EDDIE. Would you like that, honey?

BELLA. (*Beams.*) Yes.

EDDIE. All right. Then give me a smile and a hug.

BELLA. (*Throws her arms around Eddie's neck.*) Don't go away, Eddie ... Stay and live with us ... I miss you so much ... She's so mean sometimes.

EDDIE. No, she's not. She's just getting old ... I can't stay, honey. I have to go away for a while. But the boys will be with you. They're looking forward to it ... Would

you like to lie down in your room for a while, Bella? Momma has to talk to the boys now.

BELLA. (*Grabs his hand.*) No. I want to stay here with you.

EDDIE. It would be easier, I think, if Momma and the boys talked alone.

BELLA. (*Sternly.*) I want to stay here with you.

EDDIE. Ohh, God ... All right. You sit right there. But you be very quiet now, all right? ... Just don't interrupt because we don't want to get Momma upset ... Okay. Here we go. (*HE crosses to the bedroom door, knocks and goes in.*)

(JAY and ARTY look at BELLA. SHE looks up at the ceiling.)

JAY. Er ... Arty and I are really hoping it works out, Aunt Bella.

BELLA. (*Puts finger to her lips.)* Shhh. Mustn't interrupt.

JAY. Oh, yeah. Right.

(EDDIE comes out of the bedroom and arranges the BOYS to greet GRANDMA.)

EDDIE. Her back is killing her but she doesn't want me to help her. (*Calls in.*) Okay, Momma.

(There is a beat as MOMMA is going to make her entrance when SHE wants.
GRANDMA KURNITZ enters slowly from the bedroom. SHE is a big woman, or, hopefully, gives that

appearance. Not fat, but buxom, with a strong, erect body, despite her seventy-odd years. SHE has white hair pulled back in European style with buns in the back. SHE carries a cane and walks with a slight dragging of one foot. SHE wears rimless glasses and has a pasty white complexion. SHE wears a large-print dress of the period with a cameo brooch pinned on. Authority and discipline seem to be her overriding characteristics and SHE would demand attention in a crowd. SHE speaks with few, but carefully chosen words, with a clear German accent.

SHE walks to the armchair, not looking at anybody, least of all the BOYS. Then SHE sits and looks at EDDIE.)

GRANDMA. So?

(EDDIE motions with his head to the BOYS.)

JAY. (*On cue.*) Hello, Grandma.

ARTY. Hello, Grandma.

(EDDIE looks at them again and gives them another head signal. JAY steps up and kisses her quickly on her cheek and steps back. ARTY does the same and steps back. GRANDMA KURNITZ hardly reacts.)

EDDIE. I know you haven't seen the boys in a long time, Mom. They wanted to come but with their mother sick so long, they felt they should spend as much time, as they could with her ... I bet they've grown since you've seen them, haven't they?

GRANDMA. (*Looks at them, then points her cane at ARTY.*) Dis iss the little one?

EDDIE. Yes. Arthur. He's two years younger, right, Arty?

ARTY. Yes. I'm two years younger ... than him.

GRANDMA. (*Looks at JAY, points cane at him.*) Dis one I remember more ... Dis one looks like his mother.

JAY. Yes. A lot of people tell me that.

GRANDMA. Vot's wrong with your eyes?

JAY. My eyes? Oh. They're a little red. I got something in them and I scratched them too hard.

GRANDMA. You vere crying maybe?

JAY. Me? No. I never cry.

GRANDMA. Big boys shouldn't cry.

JAY. I know. I haven't cried in years. A couple of times when I was a baby.

EDDIE. Oh, they're strong kids, Ma. Both of them.

GRANDMA. (*Looks at JAY.*) Yakob, heh?

JAY. Yes, but they call me Jay.

GRANDMA. No. I don't like Jay ... Yakob iss a name.

JAY. Sure. Yakob is fine.

GRANDMA. And Artur.

ARTY. Arthur. But they call me Arty.

GRANDMA. I don't call you Arty.

ARTY. Sure. I *love* Arthur. Like King Arthur.

GRANDMA. You go to school?

ARTY. Yeah.

GRANDMA. Vat?

ARTY. Yes. I go to the same school as Yakob.

GRANDMA. Vitch one iss da smart one?

(JAY and ARTY look at each other.)

EDDIE. They both do very well in school.

GRANDMA. (*Points cane at EDDIE.*) They'll tell me. (*SHE looks at them.*) Vitch one iss da smart one?

ARTY. (*Points to JAY.*) Yakob is. He gets A's in everything. I'm better at sports.

GRANDMA. Shports?

ARTY. Baseball. Basketball. Football.

GRANDMA. You play in the mud? In the dirt? You come home with filthy shoes and make marks all over the floor?

ARTY. No. Never. I clean them off at the field. I bring a brush and polish and shine them up on a bench. (*HE looks at EDDIE to see if HE got away with that.*)

GRANDMA. If the smart one iss smart, he'll make sure you do.

EDDIE. No, the boys are very neat. Even their mother said so.

GRANDMA. (*Taps her cane a few times on the floor, like an announcement.*) So tell me ... vy do you vant to live with Grandma?

(The BOYS look at each other.)

ARTY. ... Why don't *you* tell Grandma, Yakob?

JAY. (*Glares at him.*) ... Well ... because ... Pop has to go away. And we had to give up our apartment ... and when Pop said we had the opportunity to live here with you—our only living grandmother ... and our only living Aunt Bella ... I thought that families should sort of stick together now that our country is at war with Germ—Japan

... so we can all be together during times like this ... and I also think that—no. That's all.

GRANDMA. (*Nods.*) ... And this is the smart one?

EDDIE. I thought he said that very well, Momma.

GRANDMA. (*Points cane at ARTY.*) And what about this King Artur? ... Vy do you vant to live with Grandma?

ARTY. (*After looking at GRANDMA.*) ... because we have no place else to go.

EDDIE. I ... I think what Arty is trying to say, Momma—

GRANDMA. (*Points cane at EDDIE.*) No! ... he knows vot he vants to say ... (*SHE looks at ARTY.*) I tink maybe *diss* is da smart one.

EDDIE. He's always been very honest. But he's just a boy, Momma—

GRANDMA. So! You haff no place else to go. Dot's vy you vant to live vith Grandma ... All right ... So now Grandma vill tell you vy she doesn't tink you should live vit her ... Dis house is no place for boys. I'm an old woman. I don't like to talk. I don't like noise. I don't like people in my house. I had six children once, I don't need more again ... Bella and I take care of the store six days a veek and on Sunday ve rest. Today is Sunday and I'm not resting ... Bella is not—she's not goot vit people too long. A little bit yes, then she gets too excited ... You understand vot I'm saying? ... Vot vould you do here? There's no games in dis house. There's no toys in dis house. I don't like the radio after six o'clock. The news yes, dot's all ... Ve go to sleep nine o'clock, ve get up five o'clock. I don't have friends. Bella don't have friends. You vould not be happy here. And unhappy boys I don't need.

EDDIE. Momma, can I just say something—?

GRANDMA. (*Holds up cane.*) No! I'll just say someting ... I think about dis inside. Because anger hass been in me for a long time ... Vy should I do dis? ... Vot do I owe your father? ... Ven did he ever come around here after he married your mother? I never saw him ... Because she turned him against me. His own mother ... She didn't like me, I didn't like her. I'm not afraid to tell da truth either ... I don't vish anybody's death. Maybe she vas a goot mother to you, may she rest in peace, to me she vas nothing ... And your father vas afraid of her. Dot's vy he stopped coming here. You're big boys now, how many times haff I seen you since you were born? Four, five times? ... Dose are not grandchildren. Dose are strangers ... And now he comes to me for help? ... He cried in my bedroom. Not like a man, like a child he cried. He vas always dot vay ... I buried a husband and two children und I didn't cry. I didn't haff time. Bella vas born vit scarlet fever and she didn't talk until she vas five years old, und I didn't cry ... Your father's sister, Gertrude, can't talk vitout choking und I didn't cry ... Und maybe one day, they'll find Louie dead in da street und I von't cry ... Dot's how I vas raised. To be strong. Ven dey beat us vit sticks in Germany ven ve vere children, I didn't cry ... You don't survive in dis vorld vitout being like steel. Your father vants you to grow up, first let *him* grow up ... Ven he learns to be a father, like I learned to be a mother, den he'll be a man. Den he von't need my help ... You think I'm cruel? You tink I'm a terrible person? Dot a grandmother should say tings like dis? I can see it in your faces vot you tink ... Goot, it'll make you hard. It'll make you strong. Den you'll be able, to take care of yourselves vitout *any*body's help ... So dot's my decision. Maybe one day you'll tank

me for it. (*SHE gets up.*) Give da boys an ice cream cone, Bella. Den come inside and finish my legs.

(SHE starts for the bedroom. THEY ALL stand, stunned. BELLA, who has remained seated, seems impervious to this.)

EDDIE. (*Without anger.*) ... You're right, Momma. I am the weak one. I am the crybaby ... Always was. When you wouldn't pick me up and hug me as a child, I cried ... When my brother and sister died, I cried ... And I still haven't stopped crying since Evelyn died ... But you're wrong about one thing. She never turned me against you. She turned me towards *her* ... To loving, to caring, to holding someone when they needed holding ... I'm sorry about not bringing the boys out here more. Maybe the reason I didn't was because I was afraid they'd learn something here that I tried to forget ... Maybe they just learned it today ... I'm sorry I bothered you on your Sunday. I'm sorry I imposed on your rest. I'm sorry about what they did to you as a child in Berlin. I'm sure it was terrible. But this is Yonkers, Momma. I'm not angry at you for turning me and the boys down. I'm angry at myself for not knowing better ... Take care of yourself, Momma ... Never mind the ice cream cones, Bella. I used up all my obligations for this year. (*HE crosses to the door.*) Come on, boys. We're going.

(JAY and ARTY are too dumbstruck to move, to have been in the middle of all this.)

EDDIE. ... I said let's go.

(THEY start for the door.)

BELLA. Arty? (*SHE gets up with a warm, sweet smile on her face.)* We'll have dinner another night ... Why don't you and Jay go home and pack your things and I'll get your bed ready and make room in the closet for when you move in.

(The BOYS stop, look at EDDIE.)

EDDIE. Thank you, Bella ... but Momma and I just decided it's not a good idea.

BELLA. (*Still smiling, SHE begins to make up the sofa bed.*) And, Jay, you make a list of all the things you boys like for breakfast, and I'll make sure we have it ... And don't forget your toothbrushes because we don't carry them in the store ... And each of you bring something from your house that you really love, even if it's big, and we'll find someplace to put it.

GRANDMA. Dot's enough, Bella. Diss is not your business.

BELLA. (*To the BOYS.*) How about a picture of your mother? We can put it right here on the table. It'll be the last thing you see at night and the first thing you see in the morning ... It's going to be such fun with you both here ... Momma's right. I do get so excited around people but it makes me so happy.

GRANDMA. Bella! Nicht sprecken! Enough!! ... They're going. Dot's the end of it.

BELLA. (*Quite calmly.*) No, Momma. They're not going. They're staying. Because if you make them go, I'll

go too ... I know I've said that a thousand times but this time I mean it ... I could go to the Home. The Home would take me ... You're always telling me that ... And if I go, you'll be all alone ... And you're afraid to be alone, Momma ... Nobody else knows that but me ... But you don't have to be, Momma. Because we'll all be together now ... You and me and Jay and Arty ... Won't that be fun, Momma?

(THEY stand there, ALL frozen, except BELLA, who is beaming ...
The stage goes to BLACK.)

ACT I

Scene 2

Over the sound of the TRAIN, in the BLACK, we hear EDDIE's voice.

EDDIE. (*VO.*) "Dear Jay and Arty ... I tried phoning you the other night, but I forgot the phone is in the candy store and you probably couldn't hear it ... Well, I've been through Kentucky, Georgia, Tennessee and West Virginia ... Don't complain about Aunt Bella's cooking to me because I haven't eaten anything down here that wasn't fried, smoked, hashed, gritted or poned ... or wasn't caught in a swamp, a tree, or coming out of a hole in the ground ... Right now I'd go into debt again just to eat an onion roll" ...

(The LIGHTS come up and the letter continues to be read by JAY. THEY are both in bed, one lamp on. It is late at night.)

JAY. (*HE reads.*) "Although business is good, I've had one minor setback. I've developed what the doctor calls an irregular heartbeat. He says it's not serious, but doesn't think I should be traveling so much. But I can't afford to stop now." (*HE looks at ARTY.*) An irregular heartbeat doesn't sound too good ... God, I wish there was some way we could make some money. Not "kid" money. I mean *real* money.

ARTY. What if one night we cut off Grandma's braids and sold it to the army for barbed wire?

JAY. I can't believe we're fighting a war to make this a better world for someone like you.

(The front door opens and BELLA comes in, closing the door quietly. SHE looks at the BOYS, puts her finger to her lips to be quiet.)

BELLA. Is Grandma sleeping? Don't tell me, you'll wake her up ... Arty! Jay! The most wonderful and exciting thing happened to me tonight. But don't ask me. I can't tell you. You're my good luck charms, both of you.

GRANDMA. (*Appearing suddenly out of her room. To BELLA.*) You tink I don't hear you coming up the stairs? You tink I don't know it's eleven o'clock? You tink I don't know where you've been?

BELLA. Just to the movies, Ma.

GRANDMA. Movies, movies, movies. You waste your money and your life in da movies. Und den you walk

home by yourself. Do you know what kind of men are on the street at eleven o'clock?

BELLA. I didn't see a soul, Ma.

GRANDMA. Ya, ya, ya! Look for trouble, you'll find trouble.

BELLA. No one bothers me, Ma.

GRANDMA. Then you waste money on movie magazines? Fill your head with Hollywood and dreams that don't happen to people like us?

BELLA. Sometimes they do.

GRANDMA. Never. NEVER!! ... (*Holds out her hand.*) Give it to me. I don't want trash in this house.

BELLA. It's my magazine, Ma. I bought it with my own money.

GRANDMA. No! *My* money. I pay for everything here. You don't have anything unless I give you. Give-me-the-magazine!

BELLA. Please don't do this to me in front of the boys, Momma.

GRANDMA. You bring it home in front of the boys, you'll give me the magazine in front of the boys. (*Holds her hand out.*) Give it to me now, Bella.

(BELLA looks at the BOYS embarrassed, then gives her the magazine. GRANDMA looks at magazine, nods disgust.)

GRANDMA. When I'm dead, you can buy your own magazine.

BELLA. No, I won't, Momma. Because you'll find a way to get them anyway.

(SHE rushes into her room. GRANDMA looks at the BOYS.)

GRANDMA. ... You like to pay my electric bill?

(JAY quickly turns out the light. It is DARK, except for the LIGHT from GRANDMA's room.)

GRANDMA. ... And you try cutting my braids off, you'll get your fingers chopped off. (*SHE goes in and slams her door.*)

(The lights go to BLACK and we hear the TRAIN again.)

ACT I

Scene 3

In the DARK, we hear the voice of EDDIE again.

EDDIE. (*VO.*) "Dear Boys ... This'll just have to be a short one. I'm in Houston, Texas, and I just got plumb tuckered out. That's how they talk down here. I had to take a week off and rest. Nothing to worry about. I'll be on the road again real soon and I promise I'll make up the time ... Love, Pop."

(The LIGHTS come up. It is Sunday afternoon, weeks later. ARTY stands on Grandma's chair, his hand upraised, and HE is jubilant.)

ARTY. (*Yelling.*) Alone at last!! Grandma's out! Aunt Bella's out! We have the house to ourselves. We're *free*! Ya ya ya ya ya!!!

JAY. Will you shut up! She could walk back in any minute. You know what she'd do if she found you jumping on her chair?

ARTY. (*With German accent.*) Ya! She vould chop off my legs ... And Aunt Bella vould cook dem for dinner. (*HE jumps on the bed.*)

JAY. (*Looks out the window.*) Hey! Arty! There's that car again.

ARTY. What car?

JAY. The black Studebaker. It's the two guys who came looking for Uncle Louie. They look like killers to me ... What do you think they want?

ARTY. (*Looks out window.*) I don't know. Let's give 'em Grandma. Ya ya ya ya ya!

JAY. (*Pulls him away.*) Get out of there. (*HE peeks again.*) They just keep circling and circling. Aren't you afraid of guys like that?

ARTY. No. I lived up here for a month. I can take anything.

(The front door opens and BELLA comes in.)

BELLA. Is Momma home?

JAY. No. She's still at Aunt Gert's.

BELLA. I don't want to cry. I don't want to cry. I don't want to cry.

JAY. Is there anything we can do? ... You can talk to us, Aunt Bella.

BELLA. Do you think so? Do you think I can trust you? You're still so young.

JAY. You don't have to be old to be trusting.

BELLA. And you'd never tell Grandma what I tell you? Because if she ever found out, she'd put me in the Home ... She would. For the rest of my life.

JAY. I don't think she would do that. She just says that to scare you sometimes.

BELLA. No. She would do it. Sometimes she'd take me on the trolley, and we'd go by the Home and she'd say, "That's where you'll live if you're not a good girl."

ARTY. You said she wouldn't do that because she's afraid to be alone.

BELLA. But she's not alone anymore. She's got you two here.

ARTY. Oh, no. If you left, we'd go with you to the Home.

JAY. Arty, knock it off ... if you don't want to tell us Aunt Bella, you don't have to. We're your friends.

BELLA. ... I wish Eddie was here. Eddie would know what to do.

JAY. We're Eddie's sons. That's almost the same thing.

BELLA. Yes. That's true ... All right ... Come here. Sit down, both of you.

(SHE crosses to sofabed and sits.
THEY sit on either side of her.)

BELLA. This is our secret now, all right? ... A sacred secret. Say it, the both of you.

ARTY and JAY and BELLA. This is a sacred secret.

BELLA. All right then ... (*SHE smiles.*) I'm going to get married ... I'm going to be a wife and I'm going to have lots and lots of children and live in a place of my own ... Isn't that wonderful news?

(The BOYS look at each other.)

BELLA. You're the only ones that know this ... Jay! Arty! I'm going to get married.

(THEY're, of course, dumbstruck.)

JAY. Gee, that's swell, Aunt Bella.

ARTY. Have you met anybody yet?

BELLA. What do you mean, have I met anyone? ... Of course I have ... I met him ten days ago at the movies. At the Orpheum Theatre ... I saw him there four times this week.

JAY. You both went to the same movie four times?

BELLA. I didn't mind. And he has to, because he works there. He's an usher ... And he looks so wonderful in his uniform.

ARTY. He's an usher?

BELLA. And his name is Johnny. I always thought I would marry someone named Johnny.

ARTY. What a great guess.

BELLA. Anyway, we went out later for some coffee ... And we went for walks in the park ... and down near the river. And then today, just like in the movies, at exactly two o'clock ... or two-fifteen ... or two-thirty ... he asked me to marry him ... And I said I would have to think it over, but the answer was yes.

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