THE COCKTAIL HOUR

A Comedy

by

A. R. Gurney

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*Scene for the New York production of The Cocktail Hour designed by Steven Rublin.
THE COCKTAIL HOUR had its world premiere at the Old Globe Theatre, San Diego, California, in June, 1988. It was first produced in New York City by Roger L. Stevens, Thomas Viertel, Steven Baruch and Richard Frankel at the Promenade Theatre, where it opened on October 20, 1988. It was directed by Jack O'Brien, the scenery and costumes were by Steven Rubin, lighting by Kent Dorsey, the managing director was Thomas Hall and the production stage manager, Douglas Pagliotti. The cast, in order of appearance, was as follows:

BRADLEY .................. Keene Curtis

JOHN .................... Bruce Davison

ANN ..................... Nancy Marchand

NINA ..................... Holland Taylor

CAST

BRADLEY

ANN .............................. his wife

JOHN ............................ their son

NINA ............................ their daughter

The play takes place during early evening in early fall in the mid-seventies, in a city in upstate New York.
AUTHOR'S NOTE

The set is basically realistic, but should also be vaguely theatrical, reminding us subliminally of those photographs of sets of American drawing room comedies in the thirties or forties, designed by Donald Oenslager or Oliver Smith. In any case, it is a lovely step-down living room, with an arched entrance leading to a front hall, and perhaps the start of a staircase. There is an antique writing desk, a working fireplace with a mantelpiece, a fire bench, and a pretty good Impressionist painting hanging over it. The Upstage wall is full of good books, all hard-back, some leatherbound sets, some large art books, all neatly organized. The room also contains a baby grand piano on which are a number of black-and-white family photographs framed in silver or leather: portraits of children, snapshots of children at sports, pictures of dogs, large group shots of families, an occasional faded photograph of a 19th century couple. Downstage, of course, is a large, comfortable couch with a coffee table in front of it, along with several comfortable chairs and a moveable footstool. There might be a corner china cabinet displaying excellent china. All the furniture looks old and waxed and clean. There's a thick, warm Persian rug on the floor. Through the windows, a few barren branches are seen in the early evening light. The overall effect should not be opulent or grandiose or particularly trendy, but rather tasteful, comfortable, and civilized, an oasis of traditional warmth and solid good taste, a haven in a heartless world. On the coffee table, noticeably set apart from the china ashtrays and other objects, is a thick manuscript in a black cover.

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ACT I

AT RISE: The stage is empty. The light from the windows indicates early evening, early fall. After a moment, Bradley enters, carrying a silver ice bucket. He is in his seventies and very well-dressed. He is followed by his son, John, who is in his early forties and more informally dressed. John carries a silver tray with several liquor bottles and glasses on it.

BRADLEY. (Turning on the light in the hall.) This is what's called bringing the mountain to Mohammed.
JOHN. Right.
BRADLEY. Otherwise we'd have to trek all the way back to the pantry whenever we needed to return to the well.
JOHN. Makes sense to me.
BRADLEY. (Setting down the ice bucket on the table behind the couch.) Of course when we had maids, it was different. You could just push the buzzer, and say bring this, bring that, and they'd bring it.
JOHN. (Setting down the tray.) I remember.
BRADLEY. Not that they could mix a drink. They couldn't make a martini to save their skin. But they could make ice, bring water, pass cheese. It was very pleasant.
JOHN. Before the war.
BRADLEY. That damn war. Those Germans have a lot to answer for. Well. Let's see... What are we missing?... Have we got the lemon for your mother's martini?
JOHN. (Taking it out of his pocket.) It's right here, Pop.
BRADLEY. Your mother likes a small twist of lemon in her martini.
JOHN. I know.
BRADLEY. And my Cutty Sark scotch.
JOHN. Oh yes.
BRADLEY. (Looking at the label.) It's a good scotch. Not a great scotch, but a good one. I always enjoy the picture on the label. The American clipper ships were the fastest in the world. Magnificent vessels. Beautifully built. Made our country great.
JOHN. The "Cutty Sark" was English, Pop.
BRADLEY. I know that. I'm speaking generally.
JOHN. Actually the clipper ships only lasted a few years.
BRADLEY. Not true.
JOHN. Only a few — before steam.
BRADLEY. Not true at all.
JOHN. I think so, Pop.
BRADLEY. I wish your brother were here. He'd know. He knows all there is to know about boats.
JOHN. (Going to bookcase.) I'll look it up.
BRADLEY. Never mind. I said, never mind. We are not going to waste the evening in pedantic arguments. (John returns from the bookcase.) Now look what I did. I brought out a whole bottle of soda water. Automatically. Thinking your brother would be here. Won't drink anything else. Never did.
JOHN. Smart man.
BRADLEY. I telephoned him yesterday. Tried to get him to come up. "Come on, Jigger," I said. "Join us. John's coming. Your sister will be here. We'll all have cocktails and your mother will provide an excellent dinner. You can play the piano. We'll all gather around the piano and sing. Bring Sylvia, if you want. Bring the children. I'll pay for the whole thing." But no. Wouldn't do it. Jigger's a very positive person, once he's made up his mind.
JOHN. It's tough trip for him, Pop.
BRADLEY. I know that.
JOHN. He's working weekends now. They've put him back in sales.
BRADLEY. We all have to sell. One way or another.
JOHN. He's looking for another job.
BRADLEY. I know all that. You don't need to tell me that. I'm in touch with him all the time. (He returns to the bar.) What'll you have, by the way?
JOHN. Some of that soda water, actually.
BRADLEY. You?
JOHN. That's what I'll have.
BRADLEY. You're the one who likes to tuck it away.
JOHN. Not tonight.
BRADLEY. And why not, may I ask?
JOHN. It makes me say and do things I'm sorry for later.
BRADLEY. That's the fun of it.
JOHN. Not for me.
BRADLEY. You're not in difficulty, are you?
JOHN. No.
BRADLEY. You're not in one of those organizations that make you give it up?
JOHN. I just like to keep a lid on myself, Pop.
BRADLEY. Suit yourself. (Pours him a glass of soda water.) Soda water it is. What is it Lord Byron tells us? "Let us have wine and women, mirth and laughter; sermons and soda water the day after" ... Maybe you'll change your mind later on.
JOHN. Maybe I will.
BRADLEY. (Now pouring his own scotch and water very carefully.) Of course, nobody drinks much these days. At least not with any relish. Mary Watson down at the club is now completely on the wagon. You sit down beside him at the big table, and what's he drinking? Orange juice. I said, "Am I confused about the time, Mary? Are we having breakfast?" Of course the poor thing can't hear, so it doesn't make any difference. But you go to parties these days and even the young people aren't drinking. I saw young Kathy Bickford at the Shoemaker wedding. Standing on the sidelines, looking very morose indeed. I went up to her and said, "What's that strange concoction you've got in your hand, Kathy?" She said, "Lemon Squirt." I said, "What?" She said, "Sugar-free, noncar-
boned Lemon Squirt.” So I said, “Now, Kathy, you listen to me. You’re young and attractive, and you should be drinking champagne. You should be downing a good glass of French champagne, one, two, three, and then you should be out there on that dance floor, kicking up your heels with every usher in sight. And after you’ve done that, you should come right back here, and dance with me!” Of course, she walked away. (He finishes making his drink.) They all walk away these days. I suppose I’m becoming a tiresome old fool.

JOHN. Hardly, Pop.

BRADLEY. Yes, well, I can still keep the ball in the air, occasionally. I gave a toast at the Shoemaker’s bridal dinner. It went over very well.

JOHN. Mother told me.

BRADLEY. Oh yes. I made a few amusing remarks. I complimented the bride. You know Sarah Shoemaker? She’s terribly tall. She towers over the groom. So I began by saying she stoops to conquer.

JOHN. That’s a good one, Pop.

BRADLEY. Yes, they liked that. I can still get on my feet if called upon. They still want me to be the Master of Ceremonies at the annual fund-raiser for the art gallery. They still ask me to do that.

JOHN. That’s great, Pop.

BRADLEY. Of course, we all know what Emerson says, “The music that can deepest reach, and cure all ills, is cordial speech.” Doesn’t Emerson tell us that?

JOHN. I think he does, Pop.

BRADLEY. You’re the publisher in the family. You should know.

JOHN. (Going to bookcase again.) Let me look it up.

BRADLEY. It doesn’t matter.

JOHN. I’ll be right here, in Bartlett’s. (Takes down a book.)

BRADLEY. No! We are not going to destroy the rhythm of the conversation with a lot of disruptive excursions to the bookcase.

JOHN. (Putting the book back.) O.K.

BRADLEY. Besides, I know Emerson said it. I’m positive.

JOHN, O.K., Pop. (Bradley sits in what is obviously his special chair.)

BRADLEY. (After a pause.) Well. Your mother tells me you’ve written a play.

JOHN. That’s right.

BRADLEY. Another play.

JOHN. Right.

BRADLEY. (Indicating manuscript on table.) Is that it?

JOHN. That’s it.

BRADLEY. Do you think this one will get on?

JOHN. I think so.

BRADLEY. Some of them don’t, you know.

JOHN. I know that, Pop.

BRADLEY. I don’t mean just yours. Apparently it’s a very difficult thing to get them done.

JOHN. That’s for sure.

BRADLEY. Of course nobody goes to the theatre any more. Ted Moffatt just made a trip to New York to see his new grandson. I said, “Did you go to the theatre, Ted? Did you see any new plays?” He said he did not. He said all they do these days in the theatre is stand around and shout obscenities at each other. And then take off their clothes. Ted said he wouldn’t be caught dead at the theatre. And Ted was once a big theatre-goer.

JOHN. There’s some good stuff down there, Pop.

BRADLEY. For you, maybe. Not for me. (Pause.) We liked that play of yours we saw in Boston.

JOHN. Thanks.

BRADLEY. Done at some college, wasn’t it?

JOHN. Boston University.

BRADLEY. We liked that one. Your mother particularly liked it. She thought it was quite amusing.

JOHN. Tell the critics that.

BRADLEY. Oh well, the critics. They’re not infallible.

JOHN. I’ll keep that in mind, Pop. (Pause.)

BRADLEY. We liked that little play of yours we saw in New York
a couple of years ago.

JOHN. I thought you didn't like it.

BRADLEY. No, we did. Miserable little theatre. Impossible seats. Impossible bathrooms. But the play had charm.

JOHN. Thanks, Pop.

BRADLEY. Or at least the actress did. What was her name again?

JOHN. Swoosie Kurtz.

BRADLEY. Yes. Swoosie Kurtz. Amusing name. Amusing actress. I hear she's gone on to do very well. Your mother saw her on television.

JOHN. She's great.

BRADLEY. Lovely profile. Lovely shoulders. She was very attractive in your play.

JOHN. I'll tell her.

BRADLEY. Yes, do. Tell her your father liked her very much. (Pause. He eyes the manuscript on the coffee table.) And now you've written another one.

JOHN. Tried to.

BRADLEY. Looks a little long.

JOHN. They'll make me cut it.

BRADLEY. I hope they make you cut it a good deal.

JOHN. They probably will.

BRADLEY. Nobody likes long plays.

JOHN. I know that, Pop.

BRADLEY. Everyone likes to get it over with promptly, and go home to bed.

JOHN. I know.

BRADLEY. Will Swoosie Kurtz be in this one?

JOHN. I doubt it.

BRADLEY. I hope you get someone who's just as much fun.

JOHN. This play's a little different, Pop.

BRADLEY. Different? How is it different?

JOHN. It's not as light as the others.

BRADLEY. Don't tell me you're getting gloomy in your middle years.

JOHN. Not gloomy, exactly, Pop.

BRADLEY. Are people going to scream and shout in this one?

JOHN. They might raise their voices occasionally.

BRADLEY. Are they going to take off their clothes?

JOHN. No, they won't do that, I promise.

BRADLEY. Put Swoosie Kurtz in it. She wouldn't shout. Though I suppose I wouldn't mind if she took off her clothes. (Pause.)

JOHN. This one's about us, Pop.

BRADLEY. Us?

JOHN. The family.

BRADLEY. Oh really?

JOHN. This one cuts pretty close to home.

BRADLEY. Oh well. I understand that. You have to deal with what you know. I do it when I'm toastmaster. I sometimes mention your mother. I refer occasionally to you children. At the Shoemaker's wedding, I told an amusing story about Jigger.

JOHN. This one's about you, Pop.

BRADLEY. Me?

JOHN. You.

BRADLEY. Just me?

JOHN. No, no. Mother's in it, of course. And Nina. And Jigger's referred to a lot. And I put myself in it. But I think it centers around you.

BRADLEY. Me.

JOHN. I thought I better tell you that, Pop.

BRADLEY. And it's going on?

JOHN. It's supposed to.

BRADLEY. In New York?

JOHN. That's the talk.

BRADLEY. When?

JOHN. Soon. Supposedly. (Pause.)

BRADLEY. Do you use our names?

JOHN. Of course not, Pop.

BRADLEY. But it's recognizably us.

JOHN. By people who know us.
BRADLEY. What about people who don't know us?
JOHN. They'll sense it's a personal play. (Pause.)
BRADLEY. I suppose you make cracks.
JOHN. Cracks?
BRADLEY. Wisecracks. Smart remarks.
JOHN. Not really.
BRADLEY. "Not really." What does that mean, "not really"?
JOHN. I just try to show who we are, Pop.
BRADLEY. Oh, I'm sure. I know what you write. I remember
that crack you made about your grandmother in one of your
plays.
JOHN. What crack?
BRADLEY. You know very well what crack. You poked fun at
her. You ridiculed her. My dear sweet mother who never hurt a fly.
That gracious lady who took you to the Erlanger Theatre every
Saturday afternoon. That saint of a woman without whom you
wouldn't even know what a play was!
JOHN. I didn't ridicule her, Pop.
BRADLEY. People laughed. I was there. I heard them laugh at
your grandmother. Complete strangers roaring their heads off at
my poor dear mother — I can't discuss it.
JOHN. Come on, Pop.
BRADLEY. I don't think you've written anything in your life
where you haven't sneaked in a lot of smart-guy wisecracks about
our family and our way of life.
JOHN. Please, Pop...
BRADLEY. That story you wrote at boarding school, that show
you did at college...
JOHN. You never came to that show.
BRADLEY. I didn't want to come. I knew, I knew what you'd
say.
JOHN. It was just fun, Pop.
BRADLEY. Oh yes? Well, your idea of fun and my idea of fun are
very different. My idea does not include making fools out of
your family.
JOHN. Oh Jesus.
BRADLEY. How can I possibly seal my own doom?
JOHN. Oh, come on, Pop.
BRADLEY. I suppose I have no legal recourse.
JOHN. The play’s off, Pop.
BRADLEY. I mean, you don’t need to write plays anyway. You have a perfectly good job in publishing.
JOHN. That just keeps me going, Pop.
BRADLEY. It’s a fine job. It’s a solid, dependable, respectable job.
JOHN. It’s not what I really want to do.
BRADLEY. Well, do it anyway. Most men in this world spend a lifetime doing what they don’t want to do. And they work harder at it than you do.
JOHN. Come on, Pop...
BRADLEY. After I’m dead, after your mother’s dead, after everyone you can possibly hurt has long since gone, then you can write your plays. And you can put them on wherever you want—New York, Hollywood, right here in Memorial Auditorium, I don’t care. But not now. Please.
JOHN. O.K.
BRADLEY. I’m tired.
JOHN. O.K., Pop.
BRADLEY. I’m not well.
JOHN. I know, Pop.
BRADLEY. I’m not well at all.
JOHN. Case closed, Pop. Really.
BRADLEY. Thank you very much. (Pause. They are awkward alone.) Sure you don’t want a drink?
JOHN. No thanks. (Pause.)
BRADLEY. Where’s your mother? ... Suddenly I thoroughly miss your mother. (Going to doorway, calling off.) Darling, where are you?
ANN’S VOICE. (Offstage.) I’m bringing cheese!
BRADLEY. (To John.) She’s bringing cheese. (Eyeing manuscript.) Did you tell her about this play?
JOHN. Yes.
things occasionally, even if the person paid happens to be named Cheryl Marie. (She sits on the couch.)
BRADLEY. (Handing her a drink) Here you are, darling.
ANN. Thank you, dear. (To John) No, I’m sorry. The cocktail hour is sacred, in my humble opinion. Even when your father and I are home alone, we still have it. In the kitchen. While I’m cooking. (She holds out her hand automatically for a cocktail napkin.)
BRADLEY. (Handing her a stack of cocktail napkins) That’s why we did the kitchen over. So we could have it in there.
ANN. I know you children all think you’re too busy to have it.
BRADLEY. You’re missing something.
ANN. I think so, too.
BRADLEY. (Joining Ann on the couch.) We’re never too busy for the cocktail hour.
ANN. It allows people to unwind.
BRADLEY. It allows people to sit down together at the end of the day...
ANN. To talk things over ... Settle things down...
BRADLEY. The bishop used to say — remember this, darling? — Bishop Dow used to say when he came here for dinner that the cocktail hour took the place of evening prayers.
ANN. Well, I don’t know about that.
BRADLEY. No, he did. That’s what he said.
ANN. Well, all I know is I cherish it. And now I want to know what I’ve already missed.
JOHN. Nothing.
BRADLEY. We had a brief discussion of the contemporary theatre.
JOHN. Which terminated rather abruptly.
ANN. (Looking from one to the other.) Oh. (Pause.) Who’ll have some brie? Bradley?
BRADLEY. No, thank you.
ANN. John?
JOHN. (Pulling up a footstool) Thanks.
ANN. I must say I love the theatre.
BRADLEY. Used to love it.

ANN. It used to be very much a part of our lives.
BRADLEY. Years ago. Before the Erlanger Theatre was torn down.
ANN. All the plays would come here.
BRADLEY. All the good plays.
JOHN. I remember...
ANN. Such wonderful plays. With such wonderful plots. They were always about these attractive couples...
BRADLEY. And the husband would have committed some minor indiscretion...
ANN. Normally the wife did, darling.
BRADLEY. No, no. I think it was he...
ANN. She did it more, sweetie. The wife was normally the naughty one.
BRADLEY. Well, whoever it was, they were all very attractive about it. And they’d have these attractive leading ladies...
ANN. Gertrude Lawrence, Ina Claire, Katharine Hepburn...
BRADLEY. They’d all come here...
JOHN. I remember your talking about them...
BRADLEY. Your mother played tennis with Hepburn at the Tennis Club.
ANN. Oh, I think we hit a ball or two...
BRADLEY. Your mother beat her.
ANN. Oh, I don’t think I beat her, Bradley.
BRADLEY. You beat Katharine Hepburn, my love.
ANN. I think we might have played a little doubles, darling.
BRADLEY. You beat Hepburn, six-three, six-four! That I remember!
ANN. Well, maybe I did.
BRADLEY. And we met the Lunts.
ANN. Oh, the Lunts, the Lunts...
BRADLEY. They were friends of Bill Hart’s. So we all met at the Statler for a cocktail. After a matinee.
ANN. They were terribly amusing.
JOHN. I remember you telling me about the Lunts.
BRADLEY. They could both talk at exactly the same time ...
(They do this, of course.)
ANN. Without interrupting each other...
BRADLEY. It was uncanny...
ANN. They'd say the wittiest things...
BRADLEY. Simultaneously...
ANN. And you'd understand both...
BRADLEY. It was absolutely uncanny.
ANN. Of course they'd been married so long...
BRADLEY. Knew each other so well...
ANN. They made you feel very sophisticated. (They both unconsciously cross their legs at the same time.)
BRADLEY. (Touching her hand.) They made you feel proud to be married.
ANN. Absolutely. I totally agree. (Pause) I wish you'd write plays like that, John.
BRADLEY. Won't do it. Refuses to. Simply doesn't want to.
ANN. But I mean, there's a real need. Jane Babcock went to Connecticut last weekend to visit her old roommate from Westover, and they thought they'd go into New York to see a play. Well, they looked in the paper and there was absolutely nothing they wanted to see. Finally, they decided to take a chance on one of those noisy English musicals. But when they called for tickets, the man said he was going to charge them three dollars extra. Just for telephoning. When they were calling long distance anyway. Well, that did it, of course. They went to the movies instead. And apparently the movie was perfectly horrible. People were shooting each other—in the face!... and using the most repulsive language while they were doing it, and the audience was composed of noisy teen-agers who screamed and yelled and rattled candy wrappers all around them. Finally they walked out and drove back to New Canaan, thoroughly disappointed with each other and the world. Jane said they really didn't snap out of it until they had cocktails.
BRADLEY. It's all over. The life we led is completely gone.
ANN. Jane said if one of your plays had been on, John, they would have gone to that. And paid the extra three dollars, too.
JOHN. (Glancing at Bradley.) My plays are a sore subject, Mother.

ANN. Oh dear.
BRADLEY. A very sore subject.
ANN. Yes, well, it seems that John at least makes some attempt to write about things we know.
BRADLEY. Oh yes. Undercutting, trivializing...
ANN. Oh now, darling...
BRADLEY. (Looking warily at manuscript.) What's it called, this play?
JOHN. It's called The Cocktail Hour, actually.
BRADLEY. It's called the what?
JOHN. The Cocktail Hour.
BRADLEY. That's a terrible title.
ANN. Oh now, sweetheart...
BRADLEY. Terrible.
JOHN. Why is it terrible?
BRADLEY. To begin with, it's been used.
BRADLEY. Even worse. We walked out on that one.
ANN. This is The Cocktail HOUR, darling.
BRADLEY. Doesn't make any difference.
ANN. No, it does. A cocktail party is a public thing. You invite people to a cocktail party. A cocktail hour is family. It's private. It's personal. It's very different.
BRADLEY. Nobody will know that. It will confuse everyone. They'll come expecting T.S. Eliot, and they'll get John. Either way, they'll want their money back.
JOHN. They won't want anything back, Pop. I'm putting it on the shelf. Remember?
ANN. On the shelf?
BRADLEY. Where I hope it will remain for a very long time.
ANN. Is that the solution?
BRADLEY. That's the solution. We've agreed on that. That's what we've agreed on. (He goes into the hall to check the barometer.)
ANN. Oh dear. (Pause) How's Ellen, by the way?
JOHN. Fine.
ANN. I wish she had come along.
JOHN. She had a conference today, Mother.
ANN. Oh, I think that’s wonderful. I wish I’d had a job when I was young.
BRADLEY. (From the hall.) All changing, all going...
ANN. And how are the children?
JOHN. Fine. Getting on. Growing up. Charlie already plans to go all the way out to the University of Colorado.
BRADLEY. All gone... Married couples leading totally different lives. Children scattered all over the map...
ANN. I wish you’d brought them all along.
BRADLEY. (Returning to the room.) I wish Jigger had come.
ANN. I wish everyone had come. John’s family, Jigger’s...
BRADLEY. We could have made this a family reunion.
JOHN. Which is another play by T.S. Eliot.
BRADLEY. (Crossing to piano.) I don’t care about that. All I know is that if Jigger had come, we’d be gathered around that piano right now. We’d be singing all the old songs: Kiss Me, Kate — Southern Pacific...
JOHN. It’s “South” Pacific, Pop.
BRADLEY. Whatever it is, Jigger could play it. I miss him. I miss him terribly.
ANN. We miss all the family, Bradley. Everyone.
BRADLEY. Yes. That’s right. Of course. (To John, indicating the photographs on the piano.) You have that lovely wife, you have those fine, strapping children, do you ever write about them? Do you ever write about how hard your wife has worked over those children? Do you ever tell how your son pitched a no-hitter in Little League? How your sweet Elsie won the art prize? Do you ever write about your brother winning the Sailing Cup? Do we ever hear anything good in your plays? Oh no. Instead you attack your parents in their old age.
JOHN. It’s not an attack, Pop.
ANN. (Quickly.) What if you turned it into a book, John? Books aren’t quite so public. Billy Leeming wrote some book about his parents, and our local bookstores didn’t even bother to carry it. Is it all right if he puts us in a book, Bradley?
JOHN. I can’t write it as a book.
ANN. You can certainly try. (To Bradley.) It seems a shame to waste all that work.
BRADLEY. (Looking out a window.) Where’s Nina? Where’s our daughter? She’s normally right on time.
ANN. I think she had to do something with Portia. She’ll be here. Meanwhile, I’d like another drink, Bradley. A weak one — but nonetheless, another.
JOHN. I’ll get it.
ANN. No, your father likes to get it.
BRADLEY. While I still can. (He bends over to get her glass with some difficulty.)
JOHN. Your back O.K., Pop?
ANN. He’s got a pinched nerve.
BRADLEY. Your mother thinks it’s a pinched nerve.
ANN. Dr. Randall thinks it’s a pinched nerve.
BRADLEY. Well, I think it’s something far more serious.
JOHN. What do you think it is, Pop?
BRADLEY. Never mind. We’ll call it a pinched nerve because that makes people more comfortable. We’ll settle for a pinched nerve. (He goes to mix Ann’s drink.)
ANN. (Silently mouthing the words to John.) It’s a pinched nerve.
BRADLEY. (Mixing her drink.) And when I was in the hospital with double pneumonia, it was just a cold. I was lying there half-dead with a temperature of one hundred and four, and people would telephone, very much concerned, and your mother would say, “Oh, he’s fine, he’s perfectly fine, it’s just a cold.” When they’re lowering me into my grave, she’ll tell all my friends that it’s hay fever. (He works on her drink.)
ANN. (Eying the manuscript.) I suppose I should at least read the thing.
JOHN. Don’t if you don’t want to.
ANN. Maybe if I read it, it wouldn’t seem so frightening.
BRADLEY. Who’s frightened? Nobody’s frightened.
ANN. Trouble is, it's always so painful, John. Reading your
things. And seeing them acted, it's even worse. With all those
people watching.
BRADLEY. It won't be acted.
ANN. But it should be done, Bradley.
BRADLEY. Not this one, please.
ANN. But he's written it. It's his career.
BRADLEY. (As he stirs Ann's drink.) It's not his career. Publishing
is his career. That's what's paid the bills and brought up those
children. That, and considerable help from you and me. What
we're talking about here is an amusing little hobby which probably
costs more than it brings in. Which is fine. We all have hobbies. I
like my golf. I like to travel. But I don't use my hobby to attack my
parents or make them look foolish in the eyes of the world. (Ann
finally gets her drink out of his hands.)
JOHN. It's not a hobby! And I don't attack!
BRADLEY. Well, I don't care. I don't want to be on some stage. I
don't want to have some actor imitating me. I've got very little time
left on this earth...
ANN. Oh, Bradley...
BRADLEY. Very little. Much less than anyone thinks.
ANN. Now stop that, Bradley.
BRADLEY. And I don't want people laughing at me, or critics
commenting about me, or the few friends I have left commiserating
with me in these final days. I don't want that, John. I'm sorry. No.
(He crosses to sit in his chair.)
ANN. One thing, John. If you don't do it, you won't get your name
in the paper. And that's a good thing, in my humble opinion. I've
never liked the publicity which happens with plays. It always
seemed slightly cheap to me.
BRADLEY. Of course it is
ANN. And it's dangerous. People read your name, and think
you're rich, and rob you. Peggy Fenris had her name in the paper
for her work with the Philharmonic, and when she went to Ber-
muda, these burglars backed up a whole truck. They even took a
grapefruit she left in the refrigerator.
BRADLEY. (Suddenly.) What do you stand to lose if you don't put
this thing on?
JOHN. (Ironically.) Just my life, that's all, Pop. Just my life.
BRADLEY. Money. I'm talking about money. How much money
would you make on it?
JOHN. You can't tell, Pop.
BRADLEY. Give me an educated guess.
JOHN. Oh ... A little. If we're lucky.
BRADLEY. "A little. If we're lucky." What kind of an answer is
that? No wonder you never went into business.
JOHN. I don't know, Pop.
ANN. I don't see why we have to talk about money, Bradley.
BRADLEY. What's the average amount of money you've made
on your other plays?
JOHN. Average?
BRADLEY. Give me an average amount ... Five thousand?
Ten? What?
JOHN. Pop...
BRADLEY. (Crossing to the desk.) I will give you a check for
twenty thousand dollars right now for not putting on that play.
ANN. Bradley!
BRADLEY. Twenty thousand dollars ... (He sits down at the desk,
finds his checkbook, makes out a check.)
JOHN. Oh, Pop...
ANN. (Putting down her drink.) Twenty thousand!
BRADLEY. You can't cash it, of course, till Monday, till I've
covered it from savings, but I am hereby giving you a check.
JOHN. I don't want a check.
BRADLEY. Well, you might as well take it, because if you don't,
I'll simply leave you twenty thousand extra in my will.
ANN. Oh, Bradley, now stop it!
BRADLEY. (Holding out the check to John.) Here. It's a good deal.
You'll be twenty thousand to the good, and you can still put the
thing on after I'm dead.
JOHN. (Walking away from it.) Pop, I can't...
BRADLEY. (Following him.) And if you invest it, you'll have the
interest besides, which you wouldn't have otherwise.
ANN. I can't stand this.
JOHN. I don't want that money, Pop!
BRADLEY. And I don't want that play! I want some peace and
privacy in the few days I have left of my life. And I'm willing to pay
for it. Now there it is. (Puts the check on the table by his chair.) If you
have any business sense at all, you'll take it. And if you don't want it
for yourself, then give it to your children, who I hope will show
more respect for you in your old age than you've ever shown
for me.
JOHN. Oh, Pop, oh, Pop, oh, Pop ... (Nina's voice is heard
from the hall.)
NINA'S VOICE. Hello!
ANN. Ah. There's Nina. (Calling off.) We're having cocktails,
dear! (To others.) I think it might be time to change the subject.
(Nina enters, well-dressed, attractive, mid-forties, removing her
raincoat.)
NINA. (Kissing her mother.) I'm terribly sorry I'm late. Portia's in
trouble again.
ANN. Oh no.
JOHN. Who's Portia?
NINA. (Kissing her father.) She was up all night, wandering from
room to room, sighing and groaning.
ANN. Oh no.
BRADLEY. That sweet Portia.
JOHN. Who's Portia?
NINA. And we also think there's something radically wrong with
her rear end. (She tosses her raincoat on the banister.)
ANN. Oh no.
BRADLEY. Poor thing.
JOHN. Who the hell is Portia?
NINA. (Kissing her brother.) Portia is our new golden retriever,
and we're very worried about her.
BRADLEY. Portia is a brilliant beast. You should write a play
about Portia.
JOHN. I could call it Practical Dogs. As opposed to Practical Cats.
By T. S. Eliot.
BRADLEY. I hope not. (He sits in his chair.)
JOHN. Well, he is. In a way.
NINA. Are you in it, John?
JOHN. I'm afraid I am.
BRADLEY. I think we've said enough on the subject. I want to
know where Ed is, Pookins. I thought Ed would be with you.
BRADLEY. I see. Well, we'll miss him.
ANN. (Now doing her needlepoint.) Oh yes. We'll miss Ed.
NINA. (To John.) Am I in it?
JOHN. I think Pop wants us to change the subject.
BRADLEY. Thank you, John.
NINA. I just want to know if I'm in it.
JOHN. Yes, you are.
NINA. Oh God.
BRADLEY. Tell us about the children, Pookins. I want to hear
about my grandchildren.
NINA. They're all fine, Pop. (She picks up script, holds it to her
ear.)
ANN. What are you doing, dear?
NINA. I think I heard this thing ticking.
ANN. (Laughing.) That's funny.
NINA. Do you think we should drop it in a big bucket of
water?
BRADLEY. I think we should change the subject. Tell me about
Andy. Does he like his job?
NINA. He likes it fine, Pop. (To John, as she thumbs through the
script.) I hate to think what you do to me in this thing.
JOHN. You come out all right.
NINA. I'll bet. Am I the wicked older sister?
JOHN. No.
NINA. Am I the upright, frustrated, bossy bitch?
JOHN. No, no.
NINA. Well, what am I, then?
JOHN. Actually, you play a relatively minor role.

ANN. Sounds like you're lucky, dear.
BRADLEY. Tell me about Wendy. Is Wendy doing well at
Williams? Does she still want to be in business?
NINA. Do I get a name, at least? What's my name here?
JOHN. I call you Diana.
ANN. Diana?
JOHN. (To Nina.) Isn't that what you used to wish your name
was? The Goddess Diana, Protectress of Wild Animals.
ANN. I knew a Diana Finch once. She used to climb down drain-
pipes and hang around drugstores. No, I don't like the name.
NINA. Well, it's better than Nina, Mother. Which means little
BRADLEY. I asked you a question about Wendy, Pookins.
NINA. (Impatiently.) She's fine, Pop. (She continues to thumb.) I
only see about ten pages of Diana here. (More thumbing.) and in the
second act, less than that.
JOHN. It's what's known as a supporting role.
NINA. Supporting? What do I support?
ANN. I imagine all of us, dear. You give us all support. Which
is true.
BRADLEY. May we talk about something else?
NINA. Do I get to bring in trays? Or do I just carry a spear?
JOHN. You come and go.
NINA. Come and go? Mostly go, I'd say, thank you very much.
(Reads.) "Diana exists huffily." Oh boy, there it is. "Huffily." Jesus,
John. (She gets up huffily.)
BRADLEY. All right, then. (He goes to the bookcase, gets a large
volume — Life's Pictured History of World War II — and takes it to a
chair in the front hall where he begins to thumb through it determinedly.)
While all of you continue to concentrate on one very tiresome
subject, I will try to exercise my mind. Let me know, please, if, as,
and when you're willing to broaden the discussion. (He turns his
back on the group.)
NINA. I just think it's interesting I always play a minor role in
this family.
ANN. That's not true, darling.
JOHN. You were the one who always owned the dogs.
ANN. We gave you that lovely coming-out party.
JOHN. You got that trip to Europe.
ANN. You had the most beautiful wedding...
BRADLEY. (From the hall.) You got my mother's tea set after she died, Pookins.
JOHN. Jigger and I used to call you the Gravy Train Girl.
NINA. Well, not any more, apparently.
ANN. Maybe you're lucky to get off the hook, dear.
NINA. Oh boy, John. I swear. It's the old story. Once again, you and Jigger, who never show up here, who come up once a year for a day or two, if we're lucky, when we have to drop everything we're doing and rush to be at your beck and call — once again, you two end up getting all the attention, whereas I, I, who have remained here since I was married, who have lived here all my life... who see Mother and Pop at least once a week, who have them for Christmas and Thanksgiving and even Easter, for God's sake... I, who got Pop to go to a younger doctor... I, me, who drove Mother all over town for weeks after her cataract operation... who found them a new cleaning woman when their old one just walked out!... once again I am told I play a goddamn minor role!
ANN. Now, now... Now, now.
BRADLEY. (From the hall.) You've been a wonderful daughter, Pookins.
NINA. (Crossing to the bar.) Wonderful or not, I need another drink.
ANN. Be careful, darling. Your stomach.
NINA. Oh, what difference does that make? Who cares? I just play a minor role. If I get ulcers, they're minor ulcers. If I die, it's a minor death.
JOHN. Nina, hey, lookit. I kept trying to build up your part.
NINA. I'll bet.
JOHN. I did. But I never got anywhere.
NINA. Why not?
JOHN. I never could get your number.
BRADLEY. (From the hall.) I don't know why anybody has to get anybody else's number.
JOHN. No, I mean, you always seem so content around here.
NINA. Content?
JOHN. Good husband. Good kids. Good life. You always came out seeming so comfortable and at home.
BRADLEY. (From the hall.) I should damn well hope so.
NINA. Me? Is this me you're talking about? Comfortable and at home?
ANN. He's giving you a compliment, dear.
NINA. Is he? Is that a compliment? Comfortable and at home? Oh boy, that's a laugh. That's a good one, John. Boy, you've really painted me into a corner. Ask Dr. Randall how comfortable I am. Ask him to show you the X-rays of my insides. He'll show you what it's like to be at home.
BRADLEY. (Coming back in.) Pookins, sweetheart...
NINA. (Revealing.) Do you know anything about my life, John? Have you ever bothered to inquire what I do around here, all these years you've been away? Did you know that I am Vice-President of the S.P.C.A.?
ANN. And on the hospital board. AND the School for the Blind. AND the gift shop at the gallery...
NINA. Did you know that I am interested in seeing-eye dogs, John? Did you know that? I am profoundly interested in them. I'm good with dogs, I'm the best, everyone says that, and what I want to do more than anything else in the world is to go to this two-year school in Cleveland where you do nothing but work with seeing-eye dogs.
ANN. You can't just commute to Cleveland, darling.
NINA. I know that, Mother.
JOHN. Why can't you?
NINA. Because I have a husband, John. Because I have a — life!
BRADLEY. And a very good life it is, Pookins.
NINA. I mean, what am I supposed to do, John? Start subsidizing Eastern Airlines every other day? Live in some motel? Rattle around some strange city where I don't know a soul? Just because I
want to work with ... because I happen to feel an attachment to ... oh God. (She starts to cry.)
BRADLEY. (Going to her.) Oh now, Pookins ... Now stop, sweetie pie...
ANN. I didn’t realize people could get so upset about dogs.
BRADLEY. It’s not dogs, it’s John. (Wheeling on John.) You see what happens? You arrive here and within half-an-hour, you’ve thrown the whole family into disarray. It’s happened all your life. Par for the course, my friend. Par for the course. (Comforting Nina.) Now calm down, sweetheart. He’s not going to do the play anyway.
NINA. (Breaking away.) Well, he should! He should do one about me! You’ve never written about me, John. Ever. Why don’t you, some time? Why don’t you write about a woman who went to the right schools, and married the right man, and lived on the right street all the days of her life, and ended up feeling perfectly terrible! (She runs out of the room and upstairs.)
BRADLEY. There you are, John. You satisfied? Will you put that in your play? Or do you still want to concentrate all your guns on your dying father? (He goes out after Nina, calling.) Wait. Nina. Pookins. Sweetheart ... (He follows her off and upstairs. Pause.)
ANN. (Holding out her glass.) I might have just a splash more, John.
JOHN. (Taking her glass.) O.K., Mother.
ANN. Just a splash. I’m serious.
JOHN. (Mixing it.) Right.
ANN. You’re not having anything?
JOHN. Can’t seem to get away with it these days, Mother.
ANN. What does that mean?
JOHN. Very quickly, I turn into an angry drunk.
ANN. Good heavens. Why is that?
JOHN. I don’t know ... (Looks where his father has gone.) I guess I’m sore about something. (Pause.) Is he as sick as he says he is, Mother?
ANN. You know your father.
JOHN. He keeps saying he’s dying.

ANN. He’s been saying that for years. He announced it on his fortieth birthday. He reminds us of it whenever he gets a cold. Lately, when we go to bed, he doesn’t say “goodnight” any more. He says, “goodbye,” because he thinks he won’t last till morning.
JOHN. But you think he’s O.K.?
ANN. I think ... No, I know, we all know, that he has a blood problem, a kind of leukemia, which seems to be in remission now. Somehow I don’t think that will kill him. Something else will.
JOHN. You think my play will?
ANN. He seems to think it will.
JOHN. Oh God...
ANN. And you must think it might, John. Otherwise you never would have bothered to clear it with him.
JOHN. I almost wish I hadn’t.
ANN. I’m glad you did. It shows you have strong family feelings.
JOHN. Family feelings, family feelings! The story of my life! The bane of my existence! Family feelings. Dear Mother, dear Pop. May I have permission to cross the street? May I have permission to buy a car? Would you mind very much if I screwed my girl?
ANN. Now that’s enough of that, please.
JOHN. Well, it’s true! Family feelings. May I have your approval to put on a play? Oh God, why did I come here? Why did I bother? Most playwrights dish out the most brutal diatribes against their parents, who sit proudly in the front row and applaud every insult that comes along. Me? Finally — after fifteen years of beating around the bush — I come up with something which is — all right, maybe a little on the nose, maybe a little frank, maybe a little satiric at times — but still clearly infused with warmth, respect, and an abiding affection, and what happens? I’m being censored, banned, bribed not to produce.
ANN. I still wish you’d make it a book.
JOHN. Oh, Mother...
ANN. No, I’m serious. Books are quieter.
JOHN. I can’t write books.
ANN. You work on them all the time.
ANN. Oh, John, face it. Everyone's got beans to spill. And, knowing you, you'll find a way to spill ours.

JOHN. I'm simply trying to tell the truth, Mother.


JOHN. I can't, Mother.

ANN. You can try.

JOHN. I can't. Maybe I'm a masochist, but I can't seem to write anything but plays. I can't write movies or television. I'm caught, I'm trapped in this old medium. It's artificial, it's archaic, it's restrictive beyond belief. It doesn't seem to have anything to do with contemporary American life. I feel like some medieval stone cutter, hacking away in the dark corner of an abandoned monastery, while everyone else is outside, having fun in the Renaissance. And when I finish, a few brooding inquisitors shuffle gloomily in, take a quick look, and say, "That's not it. That's not what we want at all!" Oh, God, why do I do it? Why write plays? Why are they the one thing in the world I want to do? Why have I always done them?

ANN. Not always, John. You used to write the most marvellous letters, for example. From camp. From boarding school...

JOHN. But I wrote plays long before that. Long before I could even write, I put on plays.

ANN. Oh well. Those things you did down in the playroom.

JOHN. They were plays, Mother. I'd clear the electric trains off the ping-pong table so it could be a stage. And I'd use up all the crayons in the house doing the scenery. And use up all my allowance bribing Nina and Jigger to be in them.

ANN. And then you'd drag your father and me down and we'd have to sit through the damn things.

JOHN. But they were plays, Mother.

ANN. Yes. I suppose they were.

JOHN. What were they about, Mother? Do you remember?

ANN. I do not.

JOHN. My psychiatrist keeps asking me what they were about. He says they could open a few doors for me, but I've blocked them all.
ANN. I wish you'd block that psychiatrist.
JOHN. But if there was a pattern to the plots, if there was some common theme to what I was doing, it would...
ANN. It would what?
JOHN. Explain things ... I wish you could remember. (Pause.)
ANN. You always gave yourself a leading part, I remember that.
JOHN. I'll bet.
ANN. And it seems to me you always played this foundling, this outsider, this adopted child...
JOHN. Is that true?
ANN. I think so. Your father and I would roll our eyes and think, what have we wrought. I mean, on you'd come, this poor prince who'd been adopted by beggars. Or else...
JOHN. What?
ANN. I remember one particularly silly one. You were the court jester. You put on a bathing suit and a red bathing cap and started dancing around, being very fresh.
JOHN. Hold it. Say that again. What did I wear?
ANN. You wore your little wool bathing trunks from Best and Company, and Nina's red bathing cap.
JOHN. The Red-Headed Dummy.
ANN. I suppose.
JOHN. No, I mean that was the title of my play: The Red-Headed Dummy! It's coming back!
ANN. Well, whatever it was, I remember it went on forever! It made us late for dinner somewhere.
JOHN. Good God, Mother, I suddenly realize what I was doing in that play.
ANN. Well, I certainly don't.
JOHN. I think I know! And I think my shrink would agree!
ANN. I'm all ears.
JOHN. It's a little Freudian, Mother. It's a little raw.
ANN. Then I'm not terribly interested. (Pause.) What?
JOHN. What I was doing was parading my penis in front of my parents.

ANN. Oh, John, honestly.
JOHN. I was! The bathing suit, the red cap, the Red-Headed Dummy! Get it? I was doing a phallic dance.
ANN. John, don't be unattractive.
JOHN. No, no, really. I was playing my own penis. Smart kid, come to think of it. How many guys in the world get a chance to do that? Especially in front of their parents.
ANN. I think it's time to turn to another topic.
JOHN. No, but wait. Listen, Mother. I'll put it in a historical context. What I was doing was acting out a basic, primitive impulse which goes back to the Greeks. That's how comedy originated, Mother! The phallic dance! These peasants would do these gross dances in front of their overlords to see what they could get away with! And that's what I was doing, too, at three-years-old! Me! The Red-Headed Dummy! Dancing under the noses of my parents, before they went out to dinner! Saying, "Hey, you guys. Look. Look over here. I'm here, I'm alive, I'm wild, I have this penis with a mind of its own!" That's what I was doing then! That's what I've always done! That's what I'm doing right now, right in this room! And that's why I have to write plays, Mother. I have to keep doing it. (Long pause.)
ANN. Are you finished, John?
JOHN. For now, at least.
ANN. All right, then, I want to say this: I don't like all this psychological talk, John. I never have. I think it's cheap and self-indulgent. I've never liked the fact that you've consulted a psychiatrist, and your father agrees with me. It upsets us very much to think that the money we give you at Christmas goes for paying that person rather than for taking your children to Aspen or somewhere. I don't like psychiatrists in general. Celia Underwood went to one, and now she bursts into tears whenever she plays bridge. Psychiatrists make you think about yourself too much. And about the bedroom too much. There's no need!
JOHN. Mother—
ANN. No, please let me finish. Now I want you to write, John. I
think sometimes you write quite well, and I think it's a healthy enterprise. But I think you should write books. In books, you can talk the way you've just talked and it's not embarrassing. In books, you can go into people's minds ... Now we all have things in our lives which we've done, or haven't done, which a book could make clear. I mean, I myself could tell you ... I could tell you ... I could tell you lots of things if I knew you would write them down quietly and carefully and sympathetically in a good, long book ... (Bradley enters.)

BRADLEY. What book?

ANN. We were just talking about the value of a good book, dear.

BRADLEY. (Crossing to his chair.) I agree with you. I'm reading the Bible now, John. I keep it right by my bed. It's surprisingly good reading. And excellent insurance.

ANN. How's Nina? And where's Nina?

BRADLEY. Nina is fine. Nina is dealing with a slight confusion in the kitchen.

ANN. (Jumping up.) I knew it. I could feel it in my bones. Tell me what happened.

BRADLEY. There was a slight misunderstanding about the oven.

ANN. Explain that, please.

BRADLEY. The oven was inadvertently turned off.

ANN. You mean that beautiful roast of beef...

BRADLEY. Is at the moment somewhat underdone.

ANN. Oh, I could cry.

BRADLEY. Now don't worry, darling. The oven is now working overtime. And there's even talk of Yorkshire pudding.

ANN. How can that creature make Yorkshire pudding if she can't cook a simple roast?

BRADLEY. Because I asked her to, darling. And because I presented her with another package of peas from the deep freeze. ANN. Why more peas? What happened to the peas she had?

BRADLEY. I'm afraid there was a lack of attention to the right rear burner, darling.

ANN. Oh, I can't stand this! We'll be lucky if we eat by nine! I should have known never to take a chance on someone named Cheryl Marie! (She hurries out, adlibbing about the roast beef.)

BRADLEY. (Calling after her.) Her name is Sharon, dear. Sharon Marie. (Pause; to John.) Do you have any servants in this play of yours?

JOHN. Not really.

BRADLEY. "Not really?" What does that mean, "Not really?" Does your producer have to pay for a maid or not?

JOHN. No, he doesn't, Pop.

BRADLEY. Probably just as well. Knowing you, you'd get them all wrong anyway.

JOHN. Thanks.

BRADLEY. Well, I mean, nobody understands how to treat servants today. Even your mother. She was born with them, they brought her breakfast in bed until she married me, and I'm afraid she takes them too much for granted. Your generation is worse. You don't even seem to know they're there. Now I went out just now and spoke personally to Sharon Marie. I inquired about her life. And because I took the time to converse with her, because I made her feel part of the family, you may be sure we will have a much more delicious dinner.

JOHN. And because you tipped her twenty bucks.

BRADLEY. Yes. All right, I did that, too. Because I firmly believe good service is important. You can't live without servants. At least you can't live well. Civilization depends on them. They are the mainstay of intelligent life. Without them, you and I would be out in the kitchen right now, slicing onions and shoveling over the Dispose-All, and none of this would be taking place at all.

JOHN. You're probably right.

BRADLEY. Of course I'm right. (Pause.) I did something else while I was out there, besides buttering up Sharon Marie.

JOHN. What else did you do?

BRADLEY. I put in a call to your brother.

JOHN. Ah.

BRADLEY. Couldn't get him, of course. He's still with a client.
Seven-thirty on a Saturday night. Yes, well, we all have to work. We all have to put our shoulder to the wheel. No substitute for good hard work. When the head of General Motors dies, they hire a new office boy.

JOHN. You think that's true, Pop?

BRADLEY. Of course it's true. Or was, until your friend Roosevelt came along and gave everyone a free ride.

JOHN. Hey, now wait a minute...

BRADLEY. I can't discuss it. Anyway, I spoke to Sylvia. She expects Jigger home any minute, and then he'll call.

JOHN. Good.

BRADLEY. So when he calls, we can all talk to Jigger. If we can't gather around a piano, we can still gather around a telephone.

JOHN. Fine. (Bradley goes to the bar to make himself another drink.)

BRADLEY. I wish you'd have a drink.

JOHN. No thanks, Pop.

BRADLEY. It will still be quite a while before we eat.

JOHN. I can last.

BRADLEY. (As he makes his drink.) I hate to drink alone.

JOHN. That's O.K.

BRADLEY. As you know, I have very firm rules about alcohol. Never drink before six. Never drink after dinner. And never drink alone. You make me feel like an old souse.

JOHN. I'll have wine, then, Pop.

BRADLEY. Good. It's a convivial thing, drinking together. Even if it's just white wine.

JOHN. Have you got any red there, Pop?

BRADLEY. Red?

JOHN. I don't like white that much.

BRADLEY. You mean I have to go all the way out and open a whole new bottle of red wine?

JOHN. O.K., Pop. A drop of scotch, then.

BRADLEY. (Pours a glass.) A little scotch. (Pours a strong one.)

JOHN. A little, Pop? That looks like a double.

BRADLEY. You can't fly on one wing.

JOHN. Fly? Should I fasten my seat-belt?

BRADLEY. Maybe I just want to have a good, healthy belt with my older son before the evening's over.

JOHN. O.K. (Raises his glass to his Father; takes a sip. It is obviously strong.) Ah.

BRADLEY. (Looking at the check.) I notice my check is still there.

JOHN. I don't want it, Pop.

BRADLEY. Take it. I insist.

JOHN. I don't want it. (Pause.)

BRADLEY. (Settling into his chair.) Tell me a little more about your play.

JOHN. (On the couch.) It's not going on. I promise.

BRADLEY. I just want to know a little more about it.

JOHN. Pop, we'll just get into trouble...

BRADLEY. No, no. we're mature individuals. We're having a drink together at the end of the day... For example, does it have a plot?

JOHN. Not much of one, actually.

BRADLEY. I like a good plot.

JOHN. I can't seem to write them.

BRADLEY. I remember learning at Yale: there are three great plots in Western literature: Oedipus Rex, Tom Jones and I forget the third.

JOHN. Ben Johnson's Volpone.

BRADLEY. No, it wasn't that.

JOHN. According to Coleridge, those are the three great plots.

BRADLEY. No, no.

JOHN. I've just edited a textbook on Coleridge, Pop.

BRADLEY. Well, you're still wrong.

JOHN. (Starts getting up.) I could look it—

BRADLEY. No!

JOHN. O.K. (Pause. They drink.)

BRADLEY. So you don't have a plot.

JOHN. Not much of one.
BRADLEY. You don't try to drag in that business about our family having Indian blood, do you?
JOHN. Do we?
BRADLEY. We do not. (Pause.) Though some people keep saying we do.
JOHN. What people?
BRADLEY. Your cousin Wilbur, particularly. He used to bandy it about. But it's an absolute lie. There is no Indian blood in our branch of the family. I want that absolutely understood before I die.
JOHN. O.K.
BRADLEY. Your Great-uncle Ralph may have had a relationship with an Indian woman, but that was it.
JOHN. Did he?
BRADLEY. May have. Besides, she was an Indian princess. She was very well-born. According to your grandmother, she was quite beautiful. And she sewed very well.
JOHN. Sowed corn?
BRADLEY. Sowed moccasins. I don't know what she sewed. The point is that Indian blood never came down through our line. Harry Blackburn down at the club constantly brings it up. He says it accounts for our affinity for alcohol. It's not funny, and I told him so, and if he mentions it again, I'm going to punch him in the nose.
JOHN. Take it easy, Pop.
BRADLEY. Anyway, if you bring up that Indian blood stuff in your play, you are simply barking up the wrong tree.
JOHN. I never thought of it, Pop.
BRADLEY. Good. (He crosses to sit next to John on the couch.) Did you bring up your grandfather's death? (Pause.)
JOHN. Yes.
BRADLEY. I knew you would.
JOHN. I don't make a big deal of it.
BRADLEY. I don't know why you have to make any deal of it at all.
JOHN. I think it helps say who we are.

BRADLEY. You're always harping on it. It seems to be an obsession with you.
JOHN. I just refer to it once, Pop.
BRADLEY. How? What do you say?
JOHN. Oh, well...
BRADLEY. I want to know what you say about my father.
JOHN. I say he was a good man, a kind man, one of the best lawyers in town...
BRADLEY. True enough...
JOHN. A leader in the community. A pillar of the church...
BRADLEY. True ... All true...
JOHN. Who, one day, for no discernible reason, strolled down to the edge of the Niagara River, hung his hat, his coat, and his cane on a wooden piling, and then walked into the water and drowned himself. (Pause.)
BRADLEY. That's what you say in your play?
JOHN. That's what I say, Pop. (Pause.)
BRADLEY. He left a note.
JOHN. I didn't know that, Pop.
BRADLEY. Oh yes, there was a note in his breast pocket. Addressed to me and my mother. I have it in my safe deposit box.
JOHN. I didn't know he left a note.
BRADLEY. You can have it when I die. (Pause.) He says there will be enough money to support my mother and to send me through college. (Pause.) Which there was. (Pause.) Then he says he's terribly, terribly sorry, but he's come to the conclusion that life isn't worth living any more. (Pause. Bradley turns away from John, takes out a handkerchief and dries his eyes.)
JOHN. Oh, Pop.
BRADLEY. Churchill had those dark moments.
JOHN. So does my son Jack.
BRADLEY. Jack too? That sweet Jack?
JOHN. He gets it in spades.
BRADLEY. Of course, it's just ... life, isn't it? It's part of the equation. The point is, we don't complain, we deal with it. We divert our-
selves. We play golf, we have a drink occasionally.

JOHN. We write plays.

BRADLEY. Well, we do something. What does that sweet Jack do?

JOHN. Builds model airplanes.

BRADLEY. Oh that poor boy. That poor, poor boy.

JOHN. Yeah, I know. (Pause.)

BRADLEY. And your play gets into all this?

JOHN. A little.

BRADLEY. Sounds like a very depressing play.

JOHN. It has its darker moments.

BRADLEY. But no plot.

JOHN. Not really. No.

BRADLEY. (Getting up.) Seems to me, you have to have some twist or something. I mean, it's your business, not mine, but it seems to me you need some secret or surprise or something. I thought all plays had to have that.

JOHN. Actually, there is. A little one. At the end of the first act.

BRADLEY. What is it?

JOHN. Oh well.

BRADLEY. Tell it to me.

JOHN. You don't want to hear, Pop.

BRADLEY. Tell it to me anyway.

JOHN. You'll just get angry, Pop.

BRADLEY. I want to hear it. Please. (Pause.)

JOHN. All right. At the end of the first act, I have this older man...

BRADLEY. Me. I'm sure it's me.

JOHN. It's you and it's not you, Pop.

BRADLEY. What does this fellow do?

JOHN. He tells his older son...

BRADLEY. You.

JOHN. Partly me, Pop. Just partly.

BRADLEY. Tells his son what?

JOHN. The father tells his son that he doesn't believe...

BRADLEY. Doesn't believe what?

JOHN. Doesn't believe his son is his true son.

BRADLEY. WHAT?

JOHN. He says he thinks his wife once had an affair, and the son is the result.

BRADLEY. That is the most ridiculous thing I ever heard in my life!

JOHN. I knew you'd get sore.

BRADLEY. Of course I'm sore. Who wouldn't get sore? Where in God's name did you get such a ridiculous idea?

JOHN. I don't know. It just happened. As I was writing.

BRADLEY. Thank God this play is not going on! It's demeaning to me, and insulting to your mother! Why in heaven's name would you ever want to write a thing like that?

JOHN. Because I don't think you ever loved me, Pop. (A telephone rings Offstage.)

BRADLEY. That's Jigger. (The telephone rings again, as Bradley hurriedly exits Off and up the stairs. Then a half-ring. Bradley's voice is heard answering from Offstage.)

BRADLEY'S VOICE. Hello? ... (John sits on the couch, looking after his Father, then looking at his glass.)

END OF ACT I

44
ACT II

Immediately after. John is sitting on the couch. His glass is now empty. Nina comes in with a plate of carrot sticks and celery.

NINA. Here are more munchies. It might be a little while before we eat.

JOHN. What's new with Jigger?

NINA. I don't know. I just had a chance to say hello. But I know how these things work. Mother will get on the phone in their bedroom, and Pop will be on the extension in the guest room, and everyone will talk at once. (She finds her glass.) Don't you want to get in on the act?

JOHN. I'll wait till things settle down.

NINA. We're lucky that whoo-oo out there in the kitchen missed up on the meat. I told her we'll be a minimum of twenty minutes, during which time she can at least think about making gravy.

JOHN. You know. I just thought: isn't this familiar?

NINA. What?

JOHN. This. You and me. Sitting here. Stomach growling. Waiting to eat.

NINA. Because of the cocktail hour...

JOHN. Because of Jigger.

NINA. It wasn't always Jigger.

JOHN. Most of the time it was. I was the good little boy, remember? I'd dash home, do my homework, wash my hands, brush my hair, sit here all during cocktails, and then just as we were about to eat, Jigger would call to say that he was still at some game or something.

NINA. Sometimes.

JOHN. All the time. So you'd dig into another one of your Albert Payson Terhune dog books, and Mother and Pop would have another drink and talk about their day, and I'd just sit here stewing.

NINA. That's your problem.

JOHN. Well, it was the maid's problem, too, remember? All those maids, over the years, coming to the doorway in their rustly, starch-y uniforms and saying, "Dinner is served, Missus," and Mother would say, "Give us five more minutes, Mabel, or Jean, or Agnes, or whatever your name is this month," but it would be five, it would be fifteen, it would be half an hour, before Jigger got home and our parents would rise from the couch and stagger into the dining room to eat.

NINA. They never staggered, John.

JOHN. No, you're right. They held it beautifully. The cook held dinner beautifully. And the maid kept the plates warm. The cocktail hour kept all of life in an amazing state of suspended animation.

NINA. But oh those meals! Remember those meals? Three courses. Soup, a roast, home-made rolls, a home-made dessert! Floating Island, Brown Betty, Pineapple Upside Down Cake...

JOHN. Stewed prunes...

NINA. Only occasionally. And even that was good!

JOHN. Maybe. But how did those poor souls put up with us night after night? Well, of course, they didn't. They lasted a month or two and then quit, one after the other. We were lucky that one of them didn't appear in the doorway some night with a machine gun and mow us all down!

NINA. Oh, honestly, John. We were good to everyone who worked for us. We'd always go out in the kitchen and make a huge fuss.

JOHN. Oh sure, and cudge an extra cookie while the poor things were trying frantically to clean up. Oh God, Nina, what shits we were about maids!

NINA. We drove them to church, we paid their medical bills ...
(She takes her shoes off and sprawls on the couch.)

JOHN. We were shit! When Grandmother died, she left five hundred dollars to each of the three maids that had served her all her life, and the Packard to the chauffeur.

NINA. Mother made it up to them.

JOHN. Oh sure. She tried. And they tried to make it up to themselves all along the way. Remember the one who stole all that liquor? Or the one who started the fire, smoking in the cedar closet? Or the one who went stark raving mad at breakfast and chased Mother around with a butter knife? Oh they had their moments of revenge. But we still built our life on their backs. Has it ever occurred to you that every dinner party, every cocktail hour, good Lord, every civilized endeavor in this world is based on exploiting the labor of the poor Cheryl Maries toiling away offstage.

NINA. Her name is Shirley Marie. (Pause.) I think. (Pause.) And she’s exploiting us. She’s probably getting fifty bucks for three hours work, when Mother and I did most of it anyway.

JOHN. There you go. Now we’re exploiting each other. Pop always carries on about the importance of civilized life, but think of what it costs to achieve it. Between what Freud tells us we do to ourselves, and what Marx tells us we do to each other, it’s a wonder we don’t crawl up our own assholes.

NINA. Nicely put, John. All I know is, according to your good wife, Ellen, whenever you and she give a party in New York, you’re the first one to want to hire some poor out-of-work actor to serve the soup.

JOHN. Yeah, I know. It’s a shitty system, but I can’t think of a better one.

NINA. (Getting up, making another drink.) I think you’re a shit, John. I’ll say that much.

JOHN. What else is new?

NINA. No, I mean now. Tonight. For this.

JOHN. For this?

NINA. Coming up here. Stirring things up. With your play.

JOHN. This is probably one of the most decent things I’ve ever done.

NINA. Badgering two old people? Threatening them with some ghastly kind of exposure in the last years of their lives?

JOHN. I came here to get their permission.

NINA. You came here to stir things up, John. You came here to cause trouble. That’s what you’ve done since the day you were born, and that’s what you’ll do till you die. You cannot let people alone, can you? A rainy day, a Sunday afternoon, every evening when you finished your homework, off you’d go on your appointed rounds, wandering from room to room in this house, teasing, causing an argument, starting a fight, leaving a trail of upset and unhappy people behind you. And when you finished with all of us, you’d go down in the kitchen and start on the cook. And when the cook left, you’d tease your teachers at school. And now that you’re writing plays, you tease the critics! Anyone in authority comes under your guns. Why don’t you at least be constructive about it, and tease the Mafia or the C.I.A., for God’s sake? (She sits in a chair opposite him.)

JOHN. Because I’m not a political person.

NINA. Then what kind of person are you, John? Why are you so passionately concerned with disturbing the peace? I mean, here we are, the family at least partially together for the first time in several years, and possibly the last time in our lives, and what happens: you torment us with this play, you accuse us of running a slave market in the kitchen, you make us all feel thoroughly uncomfortable. Have you ever thought about this, John? Has it ever come to mind that this is what you do?

JOHN. Yes.

NINA. Good. I’m so glad. Why do you suppose you do it?

JOHN. (Moving around the room.) Because there’s a hell of a lot of horseshit around, and I think I’ve known it from the beginning.

NINA. Would you care to cite chapter and verse?

JOHN. Sure. Horseshit begins at home.

NINA. He’s a wonderful man.

JOHN. He’s a hypocrite, kiddo! He’s a fake!

NINA. Sssh!

JOHN. Talk about civilization. All that jazz about manners and
class and social obligation. He's a poor boy who married a rich girl and doesn't want to be called on it.

NINA. That is a lie! He was only poor after his father died!

JOHN. (With increasing passion.) Yes, well, all that crap about hard work and nose to the grindstone and burning the midnight oil. What is all that crap? Have you ever seen it in operation? Whenever I tried to call him at the office, he was out playing golf. Have you ever seen him work? Has he ever brought any work home? Have you ever heard him even talk on the telephone about work? Have you ever seen him spade the garden or rake a leaf or change a light bulb? I remember one time when I wrote that paper defending the New Deal, he gave me a long lecture about how nobody wants to work in this country, and all the while he was practicing his putting on the back lawn!

NINA. He's done extremely well in business. He sent us to private schools and first-rate colleges.

JOHN. Oh, I know he's done well — on charm, affability, and Mother's money — and a little help from his friends. His friends have carried him all his life. They're the ones who have thrown the deals his way. You ask him a financial question, he'll say, "Wait a minute, I'll call Bill or Bob or Ted."

NINA. Because that's life, John! That's what business is! The golf course, the backgammon table at the Mid-Day Club, the Saturn Club grille at six — that's where he works, you jerk!

JOHN. Well then that's where his family is, not here! Did he ever show you how to throw a ball or dive into a pool? Not him. Mother did all that, while he was off chumming it up with his pals. All he ever taught me was how to hold a fork or answer an invitation or cut in on a pretty girl. He's never been my father and I've never been his son, and he and I have known that for a long time. (Pause. He sits exhaustedly on the piano bench.)

NINA. Well, he's been a wonderful father to me.

JOHN. Maybe so. And maybe to Jigger. I guess that's why I've teased both of you all my life. And why I tease everybody else, for that matter. I'm jealous. I'm jealous of anyone who seems to have a leg up on life, anyone who seems to have a father in the background helping them out. Hell, I even tease my own children. I've bent over backwards to be to them what my father never was to me, and then out of some deep-grained jealousy that they have it too good, I tease the pants off them.

NINA. Jesus, John, you're a mess.

JOHN. I know. But I'd be more of one if I didn't write about it.

NINA. Well, write as much as you want, but don't go public on this one.

JOHN. I've already said I won't.

NINA. I'm not sure I believe you, John. You're too angry. You'll change a few words, a few names, and out it will come.

JOHN. Nina, I promise...

NINA. Then how come that check is still there? Mother told me about the check, and there it is. How come?

JOHN. I don't want it.

NINA. (Brings it to him.) Take it, John. Take it, just so I'll be sure. I know you're gentleman enough not to do it if you take the dough.

JOHN. I'll never cash it. (He takes the check.)

NINA. I don't care, but it's yours now, and the play stays in your desk drawer now, until they're both dead. And until I'm dead, goddammit.

JOHN. (Putting the check in his wallet.) Or until he changes his mind.

NINA. Fair enough. (She returns to the couch for more food.)

JOHN. (Putting his wallet away.) Actually I'm kind of glad it's not going on, Nina.

NINA. Why?

JOHN. Because, to tell you the truth, I haven't got the plot right yet.

NINA. What's wrong with it?

JOHN. I dunno. It's not right yet. It's not true yet. There's a secret in it somewhere, and I haven't quite nailed it down.

NINA. What secret?

JOHN. Oh, simply the secret of what went wrong between my
father and me. Where, when, why did he turn his countenance from me? There must have been a point. Did I wake him too early in the morning with my infant wails before one of those constantly replaceable nurses jammed a bottle in my mouth? Or rather refused to jam a bottle in my mouth because I wasn't crying on schedule?

NINA. Here we go...

JOHN. Or when I was displayed to family and friend, did I embarrass him by playing with my pee-pee?

NINA. John, you have an absolute obsession with your own penis.

JOHN. Or — I know! Maybe this is what I did: I made the unpardonable mistake of contradicting him — of looking something up in the Book of Knowledge, and proving him wrong — no, not wrong, that makes no difference, right or wrong, — what I did was destroy the "rhythm of the conversation," maybe that's what I did wrong!

NINA. Oh good Lord...

JOHN. Yes well, I'd love to know what I did to have him say to himself — and to me! — "I don't know this boy. This is not my son." Because he's said it as long as I can remember.

NINA. And if he ever told you he loved you, you'd immediately do some totally irritating thing to make him deny it.

JOHN. You think so?

NINA. I know so. If he killed the fatted calf, you'd complain about the cholesterol.

JOHN. Jesus, Nina.

NINA. You would. I've got your number, John, even if you don't have mine. For instance, I know why you're writing this goddamn play.

JOHN. Why?

NINA. (Hurriedly, as she puts on her shoes.) You're writing it because he's dying. You're writing it because you love him. You're writing it to hold onto him after he's gone. (Ann comes in.)

ANN. John, don't you want to speak to your brother before your father hangs up.

JOHN. Sure. (He angrily grabs some carrots and goes Off upstairs.)

ANN. (Distractedly.) Well, that's that.

NINA. What?

ANN. (Vaguely.) I'd like a splash more, please, Nina.

NINA. (Getting Ann's glass, going to the bar.) All right.

ANN. Just a splash. I'm serious.

NINA. All right.

ANN. (Sinking onto the couch.) I give up.

NINA. What's the trouble, Mother?

ANN. Jigger. Jigger's the trouble. He wants to move to California.

NINA. What?

ANN. He wants to pick up stakes and move. Wife, children, off they go.

NINA. What's in California?

ANN. A job. A new job. There's a man out there who builds wooden boats, who wants Jigger to work for him. For half of what he's making now.

NINA. But why?

ANN. Because he wants to. He says it's something he's always wanted to do.

NINA. He's always liked boats.

ANN. Don't I know it. That canoe he built in the basement. Those sailboats out on the lake...

NINA. (Joining her on the couch.) Which had to be wood, remember? No fiberglass allowed. All that labor every spring, because only wood sat naturally on the water...

ANN. Between his boats and your dogs we hardly had time to think around here.

NINA. He felt free on the water. I wish I felt free about something.

ANN. Well I hear they feel free about everything in California. NINA. And he's just ... going?

ANN. Says he is. Says he plans to buy one of those grubby vans, and lug everyone out, like a bunch of Oakies. Your father is frantically trying to talk him out of it.
NINA. (Musingly.) I should just go to Cleveland to that dog school.
ANN. Oh, Nina. Think of Ed.
NINA. I have thought of Ed. We've talked about it. He says, do it. Which makes it all the harder.
ANN. I should hope so.
NINA. Still. Maybe I should. I should just do it. What would you say if I did it, Mother?
ANN. Go to Cleveland?
NINA. Three days a week.
ANN. Just to be with dogs?
NINA. To work with them, Mother.
ANN. I've never understood your fascination with dogs.
NINA. I don't know. When I'm with them, I feel I'm in touch with something . . . basic.
ANN. Horses I can understand. The thrill of riding. The excitement of the hunt. The men.
NINA. The men?
ANN. There used to be a lot of attractive men around stables.
NINA. Mother!
ANN. Just as there are around garages today.
NINA. Are you serious?
ANN. But I don't think they hang around kennels.
NINA. I'm interested in dogs, Mother.
ANN. I know you are, darling, and I don't think that's any reason to change your life. I mean if you had met some man...
NINA. Mother, have you ever watched any of those Nature things on TV?
ANN. I love them. Every Sunday night...
NINA. I mean, you see animals, birds, even insects operating under these incredibly complicated instincts. Courting, building their nests, rearing their young in the most amazing complex way...
ANN. Amazing behavior...
NINA. Well, I think people have these instincts, too.
ANN. Well, I'm sure we do, darling, but...

NINA. No, but I mean many more than we realize. I think they're built into our blood, and I think we're most alive when we feel them happening to us.
ANN. Oh well now, I don't know...
NINA. I feel most alive when I'm with animals, Mother. Really. I feel some instinctive connection. Put me with a dog, a cat, anything, and I feel I'm in touch with a whole different dimension ... It's as if both of us ... me and the animal ... were reaching back across hundreds of thousands of years to a place where we both knew each other much better. There's something there, Mother. I know there's something there.
ANN. Oh Nina, you sound like one of those peculiar women who wander around Africa falling in love with gorillas.
NINA. Maybe I do. (Pause.) I hope I do. (Pause.) I'd rather sound like that than just an echo of you, Mother.
ANN. Well. I think we're all getting too wound up over boats and dogs. People, yes. Boats and dogs, no. The whole family seems to be suddenly going to pieces over boats and dogs.
NINA. And plays, Mother.
ANN. Yes. All right. And plays. (Bradley comes in from upstairs.)
BRADLEY. We've lost him.
ANN. Oh now, darling.
BRADLEY. We've lost him.
ANN. Oh no.
BRADLEY. I'll never see him again.
ANN. Oh, darling.
BRADLEY. I'll be lucky if he comes to my funeral.
ANN. Now, now. I'll tell you one thing. A good meal will make us all feel much better.
NINA. I'll tell Shirley.
BRADLEY. Her name is Sharon.
ANN. I still think it's Cheryl.
NINA. Well, whatever it is, I'll tell her we're ready to eat! (She goes out. Bradley goes to the bar.)
ANN. I wouldn't drink any more, sweetie. We're about to eat.
BRADLEY. I need this.
ANN. How about some wine with dinner? We'll have that.
BRADLEY. Wine won't do it.
ANN. Oh, Bradley...
BRADLEY. (Moving around the room.) I've lost my son. My son is moving three thousand miles away. I'm too old and sick and tired to go see him. And he'll be too tied up in his work to come see me.
ANN. (Following him.) Oh now, sweetheart...
BRADLEY. There are men, there are men in this world whose sons stay with them all the days of their lives. Fred Tillinghast's sons work with him every day at the office. He has lunch with them at noon, he has cocktails with them at night, he plays golf with them on weekends. They discuss everything together. Money, women, they're always completely at ease. When he went to Europe, those boys went with him and carried his bags. What did he do to deserve such luck? What did he do that I didn't? I've given my sons everything, I gave them an allowance every week of their lives. I gave them stock, I gave them the maximum deductible gift every Christmas. And now what happens? I reach my final years, my final moments, the nadir of my life, and one son attacks me while the other deserts me. Oh, it is not to be borne, my love. It is not to be borne. (He sinks into his chair.)
ANN. Oh, now just wait, Bradley. Maybe John is talking him out of it.
BRADLEY. John?
ANN. John always had a big influence on him.
BRADLEY. John? Jigger and John have fought all their lives. I'm the influence. I'm the father. What can John possibly say that I haven't said? (John enters quickly.)
JOHN. I told him he should go.
BRADLEY. You didn't.
ANN. John!
JOHN. Sure, I said, go on. Make your move! How many guys in the world get a chance to do what they really want? BRADLEY. I should never have let you near the telephone.

ANN. I'm not sure that was entirely helpful, John.
BRADLEY. He has a fine job where he is.
JOHN. Pushing papers around a desk. Dealing with clients all weekend.
BRADLEY. That's an excellent job. He has a decent salary. He's made all sorts of friends. I got him that job through Phil Foster.
JOHN. You might as well know something else, Pop. I got him this new one.
BRADLEY. You?
JOHN. I put him on to it. The boathouse is owned by a college classmate of mine. I read about it in the Alumni Review and got an interview for Jigger.
BRADLEY. Why?
JOHN. Because he was miserable where he was.
BRADLEY. I should have known you were behind all this...
JOHN. He hated that job, Pop. Now he can work with boats, and join the Sierra Club, and do all that stuff he loves to do.
BRADLEY. It was none of your damn business.
JOHN. He's my brother!
BRADLEY. I'm his father! Me! (Nina enters.)
JOHN. Well, I'm glad he's going, Pop. And I think Nina should work in Cleveland, too... I think you should, Nina.
NINA. I think I will.
ANN. Oh Nina, no!
BRADLEY. That's ridiculous.
JOHN. So what if Ed has to cook his own spaghetti occasionally...
NINA. He'd do it gladly.
BRADLEY. Nonsense. Ed can't cook spaghetti...
NINA. No, I think I'll do it. I think I'll go. I'll stay there, and study there, and come home when I can. Put that in your play and write it, John.
JOHN. Maybe I will.
NINA. Sure. Have the goddess Diana come downstage and plant her feet, and give this marvelous speech about seeing-eye dogs,
which will bring the audience rising to its feet, and cause your
friends the critics to systematically pee in their pants!
ANN. That's not attractive, Nina.
JOHN. I don't know. I kind of liked it.
BRADLEY. You kind of like playing God around here, don't
you?
ANN. Yes, John, I really think you should stop managing other
people's lives.
BRADLEY. Yes. Do that in your plays if you have to, not in
real life.
JOHN. Oh yeah? Well, I'm glad we're talking about real life now,
Pop. Because that's something we could use a little more of, around
here. Hey, Know what? The cocktail hour is over, Pop. It's dead.
It's gone. I think Jigger sensed it thirty years ago, and now Nina
knows it too, and they're both trying to put something back into the
world after all these years of a free ride.
BRADLEY. And you? What are you putting back into the
world?
JOHN. Me?
BRADLEY. You.
JOHN. I'm writing about it. At least I have the balls to do
that.
BRADLEY. Leave this room!
ANN. Oh Bradley...
JOHN. Maybe I should leave altogether.
BRADLEY. Maybe you should.
NINA. Oh Pop...
JOHN. (Grabbing his bag in the hall.) Lucky I didn't unpack...
ANN. John, now stop...
JOHN. (Throwing on his raincoat.) Call Ellen, Nina. Tell her I'm
coming home. Say I'm being banished because of my balls!
BRADLEY. I will not allow you to speak vulgarities in this
house.
JOHN. Balls? Balls are vulgar?
ANN. Now that's enough.
JOHN. (Coming back into the room.) Does that mean you don't
have any, Pop? Does that mean we should all just sit on our ass and

watch the world go by?
ANN. (Going to front hall.) I think it's time to eat.
BRADLEY. I'll tell you what it means. It means that vulgar
people always fall back on vulgar language.
ANN. (Beckoning to Nina.) What's the food situation, Nina?
BRADLEY. It means that there are more important things in the
world than bodily references.
ANN. (At the doorway.) Food! Yoo-hoo, everybody! Food!
BRADLEY. It means that your mother and I, and your
grandparents on both sides, and Aunt Jane and Uncle Roger and
Cousin Esther, and your forbears who came to this country in the
seventeenth century have all spent their lives trying to establish
something called civilization in this wilderness, and as long as I am
alive, I will not allow foul-minded and resentful people to tear it all
down. (He storms Off and upstairs. Long pause.)
ANN. Well. You were right about one thing, John: the cocktail
hour is definitely over.
NINA. Um. Not quite, Mother.
ANN. What do you mean?
NINA. Come sit down, Mother.
ANN. Don't tell me there is more bad news from the kitchen.
NINA. (Going to her.) The roast beef is a little the worse for
wear.
ANN. What?
NINA. The roast is ruined.
ANN. No.
NINA. Sheila got confused.
ANN. Sheila?
NINA. It's Sheila Marie. I know, because I just made out her
check and said she could go.
ANN. What did she do?
NINA. She thought that microwave thing was a warming oven. It
came out looking like a shriveled head.
ANN. Oh, I can't stand it!
NINA. The peas are still good, and I found some perfectly ade-
quate lamb chops in the freezer. They won't take too long.
ANN. Thank you, darling. Would you tell your father? I imagine he’s upstairs in the television room, cooling off on the hockey game.

NINA. *(Taking one of the hors d’oeuvres plates.)* I’ll take him up some cheese, just to hold him. *(She goes Off and upstairs.)*

ANN. *(Calling after her.)* You’re a peach, Nina. You really are. Those dogs don’t deserve you. *(Pause.)* That was an absolutely lovely rib roast of beef.

JOHN. I’m sure.

ANN. Twenty-eight dollars. At the Ex-Cell.

JOHN. I can believe it.

ANN. I suppose Portia might like it. Nina can give it to Portia.

JOHN. Good idea. *(Pause.)*

ANN. *(Beginning to clean up.)* I don’t know why I’m talking to you, John. I’m very angry. You’ve caused nothing but trouble since the minute you arrived.

JOHN. Story of my life.

ANN. I’m afraid it is.

JOHN. I wish I knew why.

ANN. Isn’t that what your psychiatrist is supposed to explain, at one hundred dollars a throw?

JOHN. He never could.

ANN. Then I was right: They’re a waste of money. *(She starts out.)* I’d better check on those lamb chops.

JOHN. Mother ... *(She stops.)* Since I’ve been here, I’ve discovered a big problem with this play of mine.

ANN. I’d say it had lots of problems. In my humble opinion.

JOHN. Well, I’ve discovered a big one. It’s missing an obligatory scene.

ANN. And what in heaven’s name is that?

JOHN. It’s a scene which sooner or later has to happen. It’s an essential scene. Without it, everyone walks out feeling discontented and frustrated.

ANN. I suppose you mean some ghastly confrontation with your father.

JOHN. Hell no. I’ve got plenty of those.

ANN. You’ve got too many of those.

JOHN. I’m thinking of a scene with you, Mother.

ANN. With me?

JOHN. That’s what’s been missing all my life, Mother.

ANN. Oh, John, please don’t get melodramatic. *(She starts out again.)*

JOHN. I’ve also discovered why it’s been missing.

ANN. Why?

JOHN. Because you don’t want it to happen.

ANN. I’ll tell you what I want to have happen, John. I want us all to sit down together and have a pleasant meal. That’s all I want to have happen at the moment; thank you very much.

JOHN. *(Leading her to the couch.)* Oh come on, Mother. Please. This is the ideal moment. Pop’s sulking upstairs. Nina’s busy in the kitchen. And you and I are both a little smashed, which will make it easier. Tell me just one thing.

ANN. What thing?

JOHN. What went wrong when I was very young. Something went wrong. There was some short circuit ... some problem ... something ... What was it?

ANN. I don’t know what you’re talking about.

JOHN. Come on, Mother. Please. Think back.

ANN. *(Getting up.)* John, I am not going to sit around and rake over a lot of old coals. Life’s too short and I’m too old, and thank you very much. *(She goes out to the kitchen.)*

JOHN. *(Calling after her.)* And once again, there goes the obligatory scene, right out the door! *(A moment. Then Ann comes back in, putting on an apron.)*

ANN. You got lost in the shuffle, John. That’s what went wrong. I mean, there you were, born in the heart of the Depression, your father frantic about money, nurses and maids leaving every other day — nobody paid much attention to you, I’m afraid. When Nina was born, we were all dancing around thinking we were the Great Gatsby, and when Jigger came along, we began to settle down. But you, poor soul, were caught in the middle. You lay in your crib screaming for attention, and I’m afraid you’ve been doing it ever since.
JOHN. That's it?
ANN. That's it. In a nutshell. Now I feel very badly about it, John. I always have. That's why I've found it hard to talk about. I've worked hard to make it up, I promise, but sometimes, no matter how hard you work, you just can't hammer out all the dents. (She turns to leave again.)
JOHN. Exit my mother, after a brief, unsatisfactory exchange....
ANN. That's right. Because your mother is now responsible for a meal.
JOHN. (Blocking her way.) I can see the scene going on just a tad longer, Mother.
ANN. How?
JOHN. I think there's more to be said.
ANN. About what?
JOHN. About you, Mother.
ANN. Me?
JOHN. You. I think there's much more to be said about you.
ANN. Such as?
JOHN. Such as, where were you, while the king was in the counting house and the kid was in his cradle?
ANN. I was here, of course.
JOHN. Didn't you pick me up, if I was screaming in my crib?
ANN. Yes. Sometimes. Yes.
JOHN. But not enough?
ANN. No. Not enough.
JOHN. Why not? (Pause.)
ANN. Because... because at that point I was a little pre-occupied.
JOHN. With what?
ANN. Oh, John.
JOHN. With what?
ANN. I don't have to say.
JOHN. With what, Mother? (Pause.)
ANN. I was writing a book.
JOHN. You were what?
ANN. I was sitting right at that desk, all day, every day, writing a big, long book. It took too much of my time, and too much of my thoughts, and I'm sorry if it made me neglect you... I've never told anyone about that book.
JOHN. Doesn't it feel good to tell me?
ANN. Not particularly. No. (She sits at the desk.)
JOHN. What happened to it?
ANN. I burned it.
JOHN. You burned it?
ANN. All six hundred and twenty-two pages of it. Right in that fireplace. One day, while your father was playing golf.
JOHN. Why?
ANN. Because I didn't like it. I couldn't get it right. It was wrong.
JOHN. Wow, Mother!
ANN. I know it. (Pause.) But then we had Jigger, and that took my mind off it.
JOHN. What was the book about, Mother?
ANN. I won't tell.
JOHN. Oh, come on.
ANN. I've never told a soul.
JOHN. One writer to another, Mother.
ANN. Never.
JOHN. You mean, the book you wrote instead of nursing me, the book that took my place at your breast...
ANN. Oh, John, really.
JOHN. The six hundred page book that preoccupied your mind during a crucial formative period of my own. I'll never get to know about. Boy. Talk about hammering out dents, Mother. You've just bashed in my entire front end. (Pause.)
ANN. I'll give you a brief summary of the plot.
JOHN. O.K.
ANN. Brief. You'll have to fill things in as best you can.
JOHN. O.K. (He quickly gets a chair from the hall, and straddles it next to her.)
ANN. (Taken aback.) First, though, I will have a splash more.
JOHN. Sure.
ANN. Just a splash. I’m serious.
JOHN. All right, Mother. (*He hurriedly mixes her martini.*)
ANN. I mean, it’s no easy thing to tell one’s own son one’s innermost thoughts. Particularly when that son tends to be slightly critical.
JOHN. I won’t criticize, Mother. I swear. (*He brings her her drink and again straddles the chair beside her.*)
ANN. (*After taking a sip.*) All right, then. My book was about a woman.
JOHN. A woman.
ANN. A governess.
JOHN. A governess?
ANN. A well-born woman who goes to work for a distinguished man and supervises the upbringing of his children.
JOHN. Sounds like Jane Eyre.
ANN. If you make any cracks, I won’t tell you any more.
JOHN. Sorry, Mother. It sounds good.
ANN. Now, this woman, this governess, does not fall in love with her employer. Unlike Jane Eyre.
JOHN. She does not?
ANN. No. She falls in love with someone else.
JOHN. Someone else.
ANN. She falls in love with a groom.
JOHN. A groom?
ANN. A very attractive groom. At the stable. Where she keeps her horse.
JOHN. I’m with you, Mother.
ANN. She has a brief, tempestuous affair with the man who saddles her horse.
JOHN. I see.
ANN. Well, it doesn’t work out, so she terminates the affair. But the groom gets so upset, he sets fire to the stable.
JOHN. Sets fire.
ANN. The fire symbolizes his tempestuous passion.
JOHN. I see.
ANN. Naturally, she rushes into the flames to save the horses. And she gets thoroughly burned. All over her face. It’s horrible.
JOHN. She is punished, in other words, for her indiscretion.
ANN. Yes. That’s right. That’s it exactly. But finally her wounds heal. The doctor arrives to take off the bandages. Everyone stands around to see. And guess what? She is perfectly beautiful. She is even more beautiful than she was before. The children cluster around her, the master of the house embraces her, and so she marries this man who has loved her all along. You see? Her experience has helped her. In the long run. (*Pause.*) Anyway, that’s the end. (*Pause.*) You can see why I burned it. (*Pause.*) You can see why I haven’t told anyone about it, all these years. (*Pause.*) It’s terribly corny, isn’t it?
JOHN. No, Mother.
ANN. It’s silly.
JOHN. No, it says a lot. (*He kisses her on the cheek.*)
ANN. John, you’re embarrassing me.
JOHN. No, really. It’s very touching.
ANN. Well, I never could get the feelings right. Especially with that groom. That passion. That tempestuous passion. Those flames. I could never get that right in my book.
JOHN. I never could either, in a play.
ANN. Oh, it would be impossible in a play.
JOHN. Maybe.
ANN. That’s why I wish you would write a good, long, wonderful book. (*She gets up.*) And now I really ought to give Nina a hand with supper.
JOHN. Mother, one more question...
ANN. You’ve asked too many.
JOHN. About the groom.
ANN. Ah, the groom.
JOHN. What happened to him?
ANN. Oh heavens. I can’t remember. I think I sent him off to Venezuela or somewhere.
JOHN. In the book?
ANN. In the book.
JOHN. But what happened in life, Mother.
ANN. In life?
JOHN. Where did he go? Who was he?
ANN. I never said he existed, John. This ... groom.
JOHN. But he did, didn't he? You met him before you had me.
And he left after I was born. And you sat down and wrote about
him. Now come on. Who was he?
ANN. John...
JOHN. Please, Mother. Tell me.
ANN. It was over forty years ago...
JOHN. Still, Mother. Come on. Whom did you base him on?
ANN. Oh, John, I don't know ... Maybe I'm getting old ... or
maybe I've had too many cocktails ... but I'm beginning to think I
based him on your father. (She starts out as Bradley comes in.)
BRADLEY. Based what on me?
ANN. My life, darling. I've based my life on you. (She kisses him
and goes out. Pause.)
BRADLEY. Your mother always knows when to walk out of a
room.
JOHN. My mother is full of surprises.
BRADLEY. Well, she instinctively senses when a man needs to
do business with another man. And out she goes.
JOHN. We're going to do business, Pop?
BRADLEY. (Going to his chair.) We're going to talk seriously.
And I hope when you have to talk seriously with one of your sons,
your sweet Ellen will bow out just as gracefully.
JOHN. What's on your mind, Pop?
BRADLEY. First, I'd like a glass of soda water, please.
JOHN. I'll have one, too.
BRADLEY. Good. Time for sermons and soda water, eh?
JOHN. It sure does feel like the day after. (John fixes the two
drinks.)
BRADLEY. John: you and I spoke angry words to each other a
while back. It was most unfortunate. I blame you, I blame myself,
and I blame alcohol. There's nothing more dangerous than a
lengthy cocktail hour.
JOHN. I apologize, Pop. I got carried away.
BRADLEY. We both got carried away. We screamed and
shouted, didn't we? Well, at least we didn't take off our
clothes.
JOHN. Here's your soda water, Pop.
BRADLEY. Thank you, John. You know what I did upstairs
instead of watching the hockey?
JOHN. What?
BRADLEY. I sat and thought. I thought about all of you. I
thought about ... my father. Do you suppose all families are
doomed to disperse?
JOHN. Most of them do, Pop. Eventually. In this country.
BRADLEY. You don't think it's ... me?
JOHN. No, Pop.
BRADLEY. People seem to want to leave me. There seems to be
this centrifugal force.
JOHN. That's life, Pop.
BRADLEY. Well, whatever it is, I can't fight it any more ... When
I was upstairs, I telephoned Jigger. I called him back.
JOHN. Oh yes?
BRADLEY. What is it Horace Greeley tells us? "Go west, young
man"? Well, he's young. It's there. I gave him my blessing.
JOHN. (Sitting near him.) That's good, Pop.
BRADLEY. "The old oak must bend with the wind ... or break ...
" (Looks at John.) Isn't that from Virgil?
JOHN. I think it's T. S. Eliot. (Both laugh.) But don't look it up.
(They laugh again.)
BRADLEY. Maybe I've loved him too much. Maybe I've loved
him at your expense. Do you think that's true? (Pause.)
JOHN. (Carefully) I don't know...
BRADLEY. Maybe he's trying to get away from me. What do
you think?
JOHN. I think ... (Pause) I think maybe he's trying to get away
from all of us. I think maybe I got him to go because I was jealous.
Hell, I think we all put our own spin on the ball — you, me, Nina,
Mother — and guess what: it no longer matters. Jigger likes boats,
Pop. He likes working with wood. Maybe he'll build a new clipper ship.
BRADLEY. Well, the point is, he'll be happy there. Sailing. He's a magnificent sailor. Remember right here on Lake Erie?
JOHN. I remember...
BRADLEY. I could sit in my office and look out on the lake, and sometimes I think I could actually see his sails...
JOHN. Yes...
BRADLEY. Of course, that friend of yours is hardly paying him a nickel out there. Hardly a plug nickel. And they'll have to buy a house. I mean, they all can't live in that stupid van. Even after he sells his house here, he'll need a considerable amount of additional cash. So I told him I'd send him a check. (Bradley begins to look at, around, and under the table next to him for the check he gave to John.) And I told him the cupboard was a little bare, at the moment. A little bare. I'm no longer collecting a salary, as you know, and I do need to keep a little cash on hand these days. Doctor... Pills... If I should have to go into the hospital... (John takes the check out of his wallet, hands it to Bradley.)
JOHN. Here you go, Pop.
BRADLEY. (Taking it.) Thank you, John. (Pause.) I mean, I refuse to sell stock. I can't do that. When I die, I want your mother to have... I want all of you to have... I've got to leave something.
JOHN. I know, Pop. (Nina comes on.)
NINA. I think we're almost ready to eat. Just so you'll know. (She takes the hors d'oeuvre plate, starts out.)
JOHN. We're discussing the National Debt.
NINA. Oh. (Then she stops.) Come to think of it, Pop, you could do me one hell of a big favor.
BRADLEY. What, Pookins?
NINA. (Going to him.) I wonder if I might ask for a little money.
BRADLEY. Money?
NINA. (Sitting on the arm of his chair.) For Cleveland. Tuition. Travel. Living expenses. It costs money to change your life.

BRADLEY. I'm sure that Ed...
NINA. Ed would subsidize my commuting to the moon, if I asked him. Which is why I won't. I want to get back on the gravy train for a while, Pop. I'll borrow from you and pay you back, once I have a job. It's as simple as that.
BRADLEY. We'll work out something, Pookins. I promise.
NINA. Oh thanks, Pop. I knew you would. (Kiss him, and starts to exit gloatingly.) And as for you, John, I think you should get yourself a good dog. I'll tell you why but first I have to toss the salad. (She goes Off.)
BRADLEY. I suppose she'll want at least twenty as well.
JOHN. She might.
BRADLEY. And she should get it. It's only fair.
JOHN. Right.
BRADLEY. I am not going to cut into capital.
JOHN. I know...
BRADLEY. My father used to tell me every moment of his life...
JOHN. I know...
BRADLEY. Even as it is, I'm cutting close to the bone...
JOHN. You'll live, Pop.
BRADLEY. No, I won't. I'll die. But I'll die fair. I'll add twenty extra for you in my will. That's a promise. I'll call Bill Sawyer first thing.
JOHN. Thanks, Pop.
BRADLEY. So: You all get exactly the same amount of money.
JOHN. That's right.
BRADLEY. Jigger gets his boats... Nina gets her dogs...
JOHN. Right, Pop...
BRADLEY. And all I have to worry about is that damn play.
JOHN. It's not going on, Pop.
BRADLEY. (Getting up.) If only you'd put in some of the good things. The singing around the piano, for example. That was good. Or the skiing. That was very good. That's when we were at out best.
JOHN. It's hard to put skiing on the stage, Pop.
BRADLEY. You could talk about it. You could at least mention it.
JOHN. I do, actually. I bring it up.
BRADLEY. You do? You mention the skiing?
JOHN. The skiing and the piano both.
BRADLEY. Do you think you could mention anything else?
(Ann's voice is heard from Offstage.)
ANN'S VOICE. I'm about to light the candles!
BRADLEY. (Calling Off.) Two more minutes, darling! Just two!
(To John.) I mean, if I were writing the damned thing, I'd want to prove to those critics we are worth writing about. I'd put our best foot forward, up and down the line.
JOHN. I have to call 'em as I see 'em, Pop.
BRADLEY. That's what I'm afraid of. (Ann appears at the door.)
ANN. Now Nina has just whipped together a perfectly spectacular meal. There's even mint sauce to go with the lamb chops. Now come on, or it will all get cold.
BRADLEY. Just a minute more, my love. We're discussing the future of American drama.
ANN. Couldn't you discuss it in the dining room?
BRADLEY. I'm not sure I can.
ANN. Well hurry, or Nina and I will sit down and dig in all by ourselves. (She goes off. John takes a necktie out of his jacket pocket, and begins to put it on, looking in a wall mirror.)
BRADLEY. What happens at the end of this play? Do you have me die?
JOHN. No, Pop.
BRADLEY. Sure you don't kill me off?
JOHN. Promise.
BRADLEY. Then how do you leave me in the end?
JOHN. I'm not sure now.
BRADLEY. You could mention my charities, for example, you could say I've tried to be very generous.
JOHN. I could...

BRADLEY. Or you could refer to my feelings for your mother. You should say I've adored her for almost fifty years.
JOHN. I'll think about it, Pop ... (Nina enters.)
NINA. Those lamb chops are just lying there, looking at us! (Nina exits. Ann's laughter is heard Offstage.)
BRADLEY. I suppose what you need is a kicker at the end of your play.
JOHN. A kicker?
BRADLEY. When I give a speech, I try to end with a kicker.
JOHN. A kicker.
BRADLEY. Some final point which pulls everything together.
JOHN. In the theatre, they call that a button.
BRADLEY. Well, whatever it is, it makes people applaud.
JOHN. You can't make people applaud, Pop... BRADLEY. You can generate an appreciative mood. I mean, isn't that what we want, really? Both of us? In the end? Isn't that why I make speeches and you write plays? Isn't that why people go to the theatre? Don't we all want to celebrate something at the end of the day?
JOHN. I guess we do.
BRADLEY. Of course we do. In spite of all our difficulties, surely we can agree on that. So find a good kicker for the end.
JOHN. Kicker, kicker, who's got the kicker?
BRADLEY. (Picking up the script gingerly, like a dead fish, and handing it to him.) Meanwhile, here. Put this away somewhere, so it doesn't dominate the rest of our lives.
JOHN. (Taking it) O.K., Pop.
BRADLEY. (Turning off various lights.) Because there are other things in the world besides plays...
JOHN. Pop...
BRADLEY. Good food ... congenial conversation ... the company of lovely women...
JOHN. I've just thought of a kicker, Pop.
BRADLEY. Now please don't settle for some smart remark.
JOHN. Pop, listen. Remember the plot I was telling you about? Where the older son thinks he's illegitimate?
BRADLEY. *(Starting out.) I can't discuss it.*

JOHN. No, no, Pop. Wait. Please. Here's the thing: suppose in the end, he discovers he's the true son of his father, after all.
*(Bradley stops, turns, looks at him.)*

BRADLEY. That just might do it. *(Ann comes in again.)*

ANN. Now come on. Nothing can be more important than a good meal. Bring the tray, please, John, so that we don't have to stare at a lot of old liquor bottles after dinner. *(To Bradley, taking his arm.)* Wait till you see what Nina has produced for dessert...

BRADLEY. *(As he goes, over his shoulder, to John.)* I still don't like your title, John. Why don't you simply call it The Good Father? ...
*(John stands, holding his play, watching his parents go off, as the lights fade quickly.)*

THE END

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COSTUME PLOT

BRADLEY:
- Navy flannel blazer with gold buttons
- Grey pullover sweater vest
- Grey flannel slacks with suspenders
- White shirt with blue stripes
- Tie with small red print
- Black wingtip shoes
- Navy socks
- Gold wedding band

JOHN:
- Brown tweed sport jacket
- Dark green sweater vest
- Dark brown gabardine slacks
- Green/maroon tattersall button-down shirt
- Red tie with green pattern
- Brown/green/grey argyle socks
- Oxblood "Rockport" walking shoes
- Brown leather belt
- Beige "London Fog" trenchcoat *(pre-set offstage)*

ANN:
- Maroon silk paisley dress with self-belt & soft tie
- Beige slip with lace trim
- Brown pumps with 2" heel
- Sage-green lace knit cardigan with gold buttons
- Gold pince-nez glasses on neck chain
- 20" long strand of pearls