

It's Twilight Time

A Play in Three Acts

By

Benjamin Allan Horwitz

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**Inspired by the poetry of Pablo Neruda, and the woman who led me to him.
(A bit pretentious, but true.)**

Cast

Stage Manager, *Brother, son, nephew. Also Ben as an adult*

Ben Kaplowitz, *A young boy living in Shaker Heights, Ohio*

Philip Kaplowitz, *His father*

Belle Kaplowitz, *His mother*

Bess Kaplowitz, *His sister. Later, Bess Kates*

Uncle Pete, *Ben's favorite uncle*

Rozzie Beiderman, *Bess' best friend*

Jane Weiss, *Ben's first love.*

Richard Kates, *Bess' husband*

Robbie, Peter Kates, *Bess' daughter and son*

Dorothy, Ruth, Margie, Ruby, Mike, Rubbie, *Uncles and aunts*

Clarence, *A woman in white*

Sara, *Uncle Pete's true love*

Man and Woman in the Audience

Mr. Kennedy, Mrs. Whittington

Victor, Billy, Carl

1st, 2nd Resident

Mourner, Announcer, Co-ed, Delivery Boy, Telephone
Operator

The Music in “It’s Twilight Time”

The approximate order in which the music appears; some songs are repeated.

1. Twilight Time: The Platters
2. Gillette Look Sharp March
3. Mozart Clarinet Concerto (2nd movement: slow movement)
4. Earth Angel: The Penguins
5. Our Love Is Here To Stay: Gershwin (Nat King Cole)
6. I wonder Why: Dion
7. Vyoch Tyoch Tyoch: The Barry Sisters
8. Come Softly to me: The Fleetwood’s
9. Mr. Blue: The Fleetwood’s
10. Oh What A Nite: The Dells
11. Say It’s Only A Paper Moon: Nat King Cole
12. Since I Don’t Have You : The Skyliners
13. Sinfonia Concertante: Mozart (3rd movement)
14. Devil Or Angel: The Clovers
15. Whispering Bells: Del Vikings

ACT I

(Stage black as The Platters' "It's Twilight Time" plays through completely. STAGE MANAGER enters and sings along.)

STAGE MANAGER

"Heavenly shades of night are falling, it's twilight time. Out of the mist your voice is calling, 'tis twilight time. When purple colored curtains mark the end of day, I'll hear you my dear at twilight time..."

Remember that song? Great song! God, you know, I remember dancing to that song at the Friday night canteen dances at... Where was that place? Oh yeah, Plymouth Church. Does anybody here remember that place, huh? Where was Plymouth church? Does anybody remember? Near Coventry some where, wasn't it?

You know what I really remember about that song? This is crazy. I remember watching pretty Judy Stone all night, dancing with all the "sharp", "cool" people. You remember the people back in school who were "sharp" and "cool"? Anyhow, finally, near the end of the evening, after getting up the nerve, I walked over to Judy as soon as "It's Twilight Time" by the Platters started.

It was a slow dance, and I wasn't much good at jitter-bugging - never went to those fancy dance classes at Florence Shapiro's. So you know, I walked over to where Judy was sitting and asked her if she wanted to dance. She shot me down, of course. I wasn't sharp or cool, so I walked back across the floor, dejected, and feeling like a fool. Then, as soon as I turned back toward the dance floor, I saw Judy dancing with a jerk by the name of Eric Shawl.

Isn't it amazing what memories certain songs evoke? Jesus, that was almost 40 years ago! Judy Stone, wow! Where is Judy now? Damn. Hey Judy, I've got a play on Broadway. Oh well, let's get on with this.

Could we turn the music down a little bit, please? Thank you.

(Gesturing with his hand to lower the music)

Good evening, glad to see you could make it here tonight. You can see I've already gotten carried away there for a moment. Music will do that to me, especially some of those old 50's rock and roll melodies. But I'm OK now, back on track. I'm going to be wandering around this play, so to speak, for the next couple of hours.

Wandering? Wandering? I don't know if that's the right word. Well yes, wandering, maybe that is the right word. Perhaps aimlessly wandering? I suppose you could call me your tour guide for lack of a better description. Actually, it's not a bad title. You see we're going to take a little trip of sorts, through a period of time we should all remember. Maybe even take a peek at the future, if we have the time. I don't know, we'll see how it goes.

Now, we're not gonna try anything fancy or tricky here - in the literary sense, that is. I'm new at this sort of thing, so bear with me, ok? What we're simply going to do for the next hour or two is tell a love story. Well I suppose it's a little more than a love story. It's a story about a rather special time in my life - and perhaps many of yours too. I don't know. I hope so.

Just after the war - the Second World War - when our moms and dads and uncles and brothers and sisters came back to a land different than before the war. Much different, I guess. I don't really know cause I was born just at the end of the War. Anyway, we'll follow a family through those 50's, 60's, 70's, 80's and maybe even the 90's. A family probably a lot like yours. You'll be the best judge of that.

Like I just said, if we have time, we may even look a little bit into the future, we'll see how the time goes. So, that's about it. Let me think. Is there anything else? No, nope, that's it. Pretty simple huh?

Now I know some of you theater devotees are saying this looks suspiciously like an updated "Our Town". Well, maybe so, maybe so. Wonderful play, wonderful. Mr. Wilder was very good at telling that story, and to be truthful, I re-read "Our Town" while writing this play. But no, please don't jump to any conclusions, not just yet.

Now there may be some similarities, but I don't believe there was any music in "Our Town". Was there? I don't remember, but I don't think so. There's lots of music coming up in this play. Nothing original, mind you - mostly tunes we've all heard and maybe even sung in the privacy of our shower or car.

Some may even say the music is the central theme of this evening's activities. It just may be, I don't know. But it sure helps me get through it all, what with me being so nervous and all. I don't know, really. It's not really that important anyway. I'm starting to ramble, aren't I?

So I think I've pretty much talked enough. Yes, I see some people in the back nodding in agreement. So I'll just shut up for the time being and get this story going. Oh, just one more thing. Please bear with me. Don't look for any hidden meaning here, no subtleties, no symbolism. No, this story we're about to tell is very straight forward, easy to understand, as I said before.

So just sit back and relax. Take your shoes off if you'd like. Pretend you're back home watching TV in the 50's, in that new knotty pine recreation room you just built down in the basement. It's mid- July, twilight time actually, and Uncle Pete has just come over to take his familiar position in front of the television. You all remember Uncle Pete; he never married, comes over three, four times a week to visit and watch TV. Doesn't own a TV. Says facetiously, that if he did, he might not come over as often, and that would indeed be sad. We all loved Uncle Pete very much.

Now pay attention! You may see yourself, or someone you know in some of these folks soon to appear on this stage. You're supposed to anyway. I think that's what a good play is suppose to do, isn't it?

Oh I don't know. I'm rambling again. Let's turn the music back up and get on with it.

(Gesturing with his hands)

(Starts walking off the stage, music gets louder,
"Heavenly shades of night are falling..." then
turns back towards the audience)

Oh, one more thing. And it's pretty important too, I think. (Turning backwards towards curtain) Can we please turn the music down a bit one more time, please? Thank you.

I may return from time to time just in case you miss the meaning of something, just to help you a bit. This playwright thing is a little new to me, and I want to make sure everything is presented clearly. It's important to me, that's all, so bear with me on this. It won't be anything long-winded I hope. I just want to see how you're doing - how I'm doing, actually. OK, I think that's about it. I'm a bit nervous, as you can probably tell. I'll get off the stage now. Thank You.

(The music gets louder

STAGE MANAGER starts walking off the stage,
then abruptly turns back toward center stage.)

Oh, one more thing. I'm sorry, I'm so nervous. I don't think I'm giving anything away, but Uncle Pete dies in this scene. Just abruptly falls down and drops dead. I'd never seen a dead person before. Turned out to be some kind of aneurysm thing. Funny, I can remember exactly what they called it now. A dissected aneurysm of the aorta. Why the hell, after all these years, would I remember something like that?

(Music abruptly stops - all stage lights go off.
STAGE MANAGER instantaneously disappears, curtain
opens and lights abruptly go on with the following
scene.

SCENE: The right side of stage has a rattan
chair and rattan table with an old 50's
style TV sitting on top, and a Formica type
bar in the 50's rec-room style.

UNCLE PETE is sitting in the chair.

The left side of the stage has a white, Formica
kitchen table with four chairs, and lighted
Sabbath candles.

BELLE is in an apron washing dishes, PHILIP is
drying them.

Both sides of stage spot-lighted.)

PHILIP

(hollering down to the rec-room)

Hey Pete, open that Airwick bottle on the bar so your goddamn cigar doesn't stink up the place. (turns to his wife) He buys those cheap goddamn 10-cent Bearing cigars, smokes them all night right through the Friday Night Fights, and the rec-room smells all weekend.

BELLE

You know, I think that Airwick bottle is used up. I meant to buy one at Heinen's today but forgot. Why don't you give your brother one of your Gold Labels to smoke? They don't smell so bad.

PHILIP

Hey Pete, don't light up yet, I'll give you one of my Gold Labels.

PETE

No, no, don't like those fancy Gold Labels. If you don't want me to smoke, I won't smoke.

BELLE

He loves to smoke and watch the fights on Friday, let him smoke.

PHILIP

No, go ahead and smoke those Bearings of yours. Bell and I are going to her sister Rose's, so if we get back late just lock up and go out the front door.

PETE

Ok, I'll lock 'em up John.

BELLE

And Pete, when the kids get home, send them to bed by 10. Tell them we should be home before 11, and leave the Airwick bottle open.

PETE

Where are the kids?

BELLE

Bess is at Rozzie's, on Sudbery, and Benjie's across the street at the Hirsch's. I left the phone numbers on the kitchen counter.
(turning towards her husband, in a whisper) God, I can smell that cigar all the way in the kitchen.

PHILIP

He'll smoke those cheap cigars right to his grave. I remember when I was just a kid and he graduated John Marshal Law School with Tommy Blum. That's when they both started smoking them, right after graduation. I think we have an old photograph of them in those pictures you keep in that old straw sewing basket. Hell, that was back in 1910. He's been smoking those goddamn Bearings for 50 years. He'll never stop.

(The Gillette theme song plays in the background.
"To look sharp, and be on the ball...")

UNCLE PETE assumes his position in front of the TV,

leaning back in the chair, the cigar billowing smoke.

Lights dim on the rec-room scene with PETE, and
brighten on the kitchen scene.)

BELLE

When was the last time Pete took a vacation?

PHILIP

Gee, I don't really remember, I think it was just after Molly died. When did Molly pass away, in '46 or '47?

BELLE

Molly died in '47, just after Bess started kindergarten. We visited Molly at Mt. Sinai, after her second cancer surgery. That was the summer before Bess started school.

(Scene is frozen, actors hold pose.

Lights dim on kitchen and BELLE and PHILIP.

STAGE MANAGER enters abruptly and spotlight stays
on STAGE MANAGER.)

STAGE MANAGER

I'm sorry, I just have to step in here for one minute. This has always driven me crazy. Is it just the Kaplowitz family or is it universal? Now any time anyone in our family tries to recall some past event, it always seems to be referenced to a death. Not a birth or a marriage or a Bar Mitzvah, but always a death. "Just after Rose died, just before Pete died, just after Your Mother passed away." Or if not a death, then some other dire event. "Just before Phil was rushed to the hospital, just after your sister Rose's 2nd heart attack." Is it just us or is this the way every family recalls past events? I'm just curious, can someone out there answer me? Anyone? Huh? Well, think about it, okay?

(Spotlight goes off of STAGE MANAGER, lights
brighten over kitchen, action continues)

PHILIP

Well that's when Pete went to visit Willie in California. He hadn't seen Willie and Adelle since Joseph died in the War coming back from England.

BELLE

God that was awful. Adelle has never gotten over that. What a tragedy that was. Joe finishes his 25 missions over Germany, and his plane crashes over Ireland on the way home. She'll never get over that. Your brother Willie started drinking heavily after that, didn't he?

PHILIP

Willie could always hold his own with his fellow sports writers, but Joe's death – well, that's when Adelle called every week complaining about Willie's drunken binges.

BELLE

She called Pete too. Pete went out there to console them both. That was the last time he took a vacation. Ten years now. Why don't you shame him into going out there again? He could fly this time instead of taking the train.

PHILIP

I'll talk to him next week about it. I'm going to the YMCA Business-Men's Club Monday. They're honoring Pete for his 50 years as a member. It's hard to believe that Pete and Tommy Blum were the original members. They're throwing them both a luncheon. Pete almost refused to go. He hasn't talked to Tommy since the end of the War.

BELLE

Did Pete ever talk to you about that? What was that all about? They were friends for more than 65 years, took those Sunday morning hikes along Chagrin River Road and got all shikered up - and then they just stopped talking.

PHILIP

Pete never mentions Tommy or what happened, but Philly Wolfe told me Tommy had some funny dealings during the war - that's when Tommy made big money - and you know Pete, one of the few honest-but-poor lawyers in the city. Joseph's death may have had something to do with it, but Pete refuses to talk about it, and hasn't talked to Tommy for a good 10 years. Don't know what's gonna happen Monday.

BELLE

Is there a more decent or better-liked individual in Cleveland than your brother Pete? Maybe your sister Molly had more friends. There should be a mob at the "Y" Monday for that Luncheon."

(PHILIP and BELLE walk out from the kitchen scene into the darkness of the stage and the lights dim on Kitchen.

Off stage you hear a car starting up and BEN comes racing in through the kitchen.

Light brightens on rec-room scene and UNCLE PETE watching the fights.

Gillette Theme Song gets louder, "*...to feel sharp*".

Light brightens on BEN in Kitchen as he "hollers"
down to UNCLE in rec-room.)

BEN

Uncle Pete, I'm home. Where's Mom and Dad?

PETE

They went to your Aunt Rose's. They should be home soon. Better get ready for bed.

BEN

Bed? It's only 9, we don't go to bed on Fridays 'til 11.

PETE

Not according to your Mom. You go up and get your pajamas on.

BEN

Uncle Pete, I got to talk to you about something real important, and it's private.

PETE

You go up and get your pajamas on first and then come back down and we can talk.

BEN

OK, I'll be down in a minute.

(Front door opens again and BESS comes racing
through the door, talking breathlessly and fast.)

BESS

Hi Uncle Pete, I'm home. I'm going back to Rozzie's to sleep over. I've got to get my PJ's and tooth brush. Tell Mom and Dad I slept over Rozzie's.

PETE

You hold on one minute, young lady, your mother didn't say anything about you sleeping over Rozzie's. You wait for your mother to get home.

BESS

(pleading)

But Uncle Pete, Mom might not get back till late, and by then I won't be able to go. All my friends are going.

PETE

Well, your mother said you and Benjie should be in bed by 10, she didn't say anything about sleeping over at the Beiderman's. You just go up and get ready for bed like your brother.

(Muttering to herself, BESS goes upstairs, and passes her brother on the way down.)

BEN

Tried to pull a fast one on Uncle Pete, huh? Mom will kill you if she finds out you slept over Roz's tonight.

BESS

You shut up! You little fink.

(BEN goes "downstairs" and playfully taunts his UNCLE with shadow boxing moves. He goes behind the Formica bar, gets a power tool and brings it over to his UNCLE.)

BEN

Uncle Pete, I need you to do me a big favor, but you just can't tell Mom or Dad.

PETE

You shouldn't keep secrets from your parents, Ben.

BEN

But this is different, Uncle Pete. I mean its nothing really bad. I just don't want Dad to find out.

PETE

Ok, you tell me what the secret is first, and I'll see if we should keep it from your mother and father.

BEN

You see this Shopmate power saber-saw? I pestered Dad to take me to Uncle Bill's for months to get me one. We finally went last Saturday. The first time I tried it something snapped and it broke. Dad will go nuts if he finds out I broke it already.

PETE

Well did you break it, or was it really just the saw?

BEN

No, I swear Uncle Pete. All I did was turn it on and tried to cut a piece of plywood. As soon as it cut into the wood, I heard something snap, and it just stopped. I should have known, Uncle Bill's sells a bunch of crap.

PETE

Don't use that kind of language, Ben.

BEN

I'm sorry, but it's really cheap. I need to have it fixed.
Before Dad finds out.

PETE

What do you want me to do? I can't fix it.

BEN

No, I know. There's an electronic repair store downtown on Euclid near Olson's electronics, and they fix Shopmate tools. You could take it down there Monday, and they said it would be ready Friday. You can bring it when you come over next Friday for dinner. I'll just meet you outside like I always do, get the saw, and put it in the garage. Can you do that Uncle Pete, please?

PETE

I'll do it this time, but don't make it a habit to keep secrets from your parents.

BEN

No, I won't, I promise, but please don't tell them, ok?

PETE

I won't tell them. It will just between you and me. Don't worry, we'll get it fixed by Friday. Remember what I've always told you, your word is your bond. I won't tell anyone. Now wrap the drill in some newspaper, and put it in my car. Put on your house-slippers first, don't go outside in your bare feet.

(BEN takes the drill and runs upstairs.)

BEN

Oh Uncle Pete, its summertime, everybody runs around outside in their bare feet.

PETE

I said put on some shoes first

(BEN runs around looking for some newspaper,
wraps up the power saw, and heads outside,
barefoot.

After a few minutes he comes back in and heads
down to the rec-room - still shadow boxing –
where the faint sounds of the Gillette Theme Song
can be heard. *"To look sharp and be on the ball,
to feel sharp...."*

UNCLE PETE is slumped further in the chair the

cigar dangling from his mouth, barely in his lips.)

BEN

Thanks, Uncle Pete. Uncle Pete, are you OK? You don't look so good.

PETE

I feel a little dizzy, Ben, could you get me some water?

(Going over behind the Formica bar, BEN runs the water and brings a glass back to UNCLE PETE.

UNCLE PETE is now slumped in the chair, his eyes are closed, the cigar has fallen out of his mouth onto the floor.)

BEN

Uncle Pete! Uncle Pete! What's the matter?! Uncle Pete - get up Uncle Pete! Please get up!(screaming) Oh god! Bess! Bess get down here, something's wrong with Uncle Pete!

(All lights flicker slightly then go off on the stage, like a flashbulb effect from a camera. The image is for a fleeting fraction of a second illuminated again, actors frozen in last position.

Stage is dark. Silence. Time passes.)

Music is in the background. (Uncle Pete, singing)

*"...MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk?
MM MM MM would you like to have a talk..."*

STAGE MANAGER enters, singing along.)

STAGE MANAGER

I guess this seems like a rather strange melody to play after that scene. Actually, if you knew my Uncle Pete it would be most appropriate. He used to sing it all the time to me and my sister as we were growing up. He'd just grab our hands and begin to saunter "down the street" and start singing. *"MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk..."*

It's an old tune, turn of the century ditty I think. But you know, even with that song in the background, even after all these years, that scene in the rec-room is difficult to relive again.

Uncle Pete never regained consciousness, and died the next day in Mt Sinai Hospital, where his sister Molly died in '47, where his mother and father died before that, and where his sister Helen died before that. It seems like everyone in the

Kaplowitz family dies at Mt Sinai Hospital. I suspect it's where I'll die too, when the time comes.

Now when Uncle Pete died, all the grown ups said it was a blessing to die like that - quick, painless, no suffering. But at age 12, I didn't feel that way at all. Uncle Pete was 72, and everyone thought Peter L. Kaplowitz would live forever. Mostly they thought he deserved to live forever. He had a thousand friends, and they all came to the funeral. Even Tommy Blum came, and cried like a baby when he came over to my dad to pay his respects. Everyone cried like a baby. I remember the funeral like it was yesterday.

(STAGE MANAGER stays on stage, but spotlight dims a little.

(The funeral.

SCENE: Simple wooden casket center stage and open, UNCLE PETE is lying in the casket as people file by to pay last respects. STAGE MANAGER begins again.)

STAGE MANAGER

I had never seen a dead person before. The sight of my Uncle, lying in full public view, with people filing by and even in some cases touching him, was almost too much to bear. It's almost too much to bear watching again now, as we recreate it. They don't open caskets at funerals anymore, and I think that's a good thing.

(Now everything the STAGE MANAGER is saying is acted out at the casket scene simultaneously with his words.)

STAGE MANAGER

We would be the last people to walk by the casket. The immediate family. I didn't think I could do it. I started crying uncontrollably. My mother put her arm around me and said I could make it. I distinctly remember my father leaning over the casket crying like a baby, and kissing his brother on the forehead, and calling him by his Yiddish name, Peña.

(Lights are abruptly turned off on the funeral scene, and again, like a camera's flashbulb, instantaneously flashed again to burn the image in.

Lights are turned up on the STAGE MANAGER.)

STAGE MANAGER

I'll spare you the scene of the burial at the cemetery. Don't think I could relive that one anyhow. After the funeral, we all went back to our house to begin sitting Shiva. Now for those in the audience who don't know what "sitting Shiva" is, it's the designated period of time for mourning the dead that the Jews set aside. The equivalent of the wake, it lasts a week if you're an orthodox Jew, three days if you're conservative. If you're a reform Jew, I don't know, I think they all go to Disneyland to sit Shiva.

OK, I see some Suburban Temple Jews in the audience getting annoyed with that last comment. Tried to be funny, sorry. Anyway, during the week of Shiva, condolence calls are paid to the family. And our house in Shaker Heights was filled to capacity every day of Shiva.

Now you would think this should be a solemn time. A sad and mournful time, full of introspection. At least, that's what I thought at age twelve. But in the Jewish tradition, when five or more people congregate, for a birth or a death or any gathering, there's always eating. Jews have got to have food. Good food. I think it's in the Bible, the Old Testament.

(Stage Goes Dark.

The scene opens again with sounds of people eating, talking loudly, and laughing and telling stories about UNCLE PETE. Everyone's in a festive mood. It sounds more like a wedding than a wake.

SCENE: The living room of the Kaplowitz family – a couch and several chairs. The room is brightly lit.

Also onstage is BEN's bedroom, dimly lit, with BEN sitting on the bed, the door partially open.)

MOURNER

(Talking to PHILIP)

Where's Benjie? I haven't seen him all evening.

PHILIP

He's in his room. He's taking this pretty hard. Hasn't delivered his Cleveland Press route all week. This is a real shock to both kids. (Turning to his wife) Belle, maybe you should go upstairs and talk to Benjie. See if you can get him to come downstairs.

(Lights dim on living room and brighten on BEN's room. BELLE gently knocks on slightly open door.)

BELLE

Ben, are you all right in there? Can I come in, Ben?

BEN

I'm ok, Mom. Why are those people so loud down there? Why don't they just go home already?

BELLE

Ben, let me in. I want to talk to you.

(BELLE enters BEN's bedroom. BEN starts to cry, slowly at first, then uncontrollably.)

BEN

Mom, why don't those people go home already? Why are they laughing? Uncle Pete just died, and they're laughing. I want them to go home and get out of here.

BELLE

Ben, those people love your Uncle Pete. That's all we're talking about down there. Pete this and Pete that. They're laughing about the wonderful memories your uncle gave everyone, and what a character he could be and what a good man he was. They're honoring your uncle like that. Imagine what it would be like if no one showed up, Ben. Imagine what this house would be like without the sound of laughter downstairs. That laughter is out of respect for your Uncle.

I know this is difficult for you to understand, Ben. You'll get over this. We'll all get over this, God willing. Those people down stairs who loved your Uncle so much are helping us get over the sadness and suddenness of his death. Why don't you try to come downstairs for a while? Everyone is asking about you, Ben.

BEN

But Mom, I don't feel like those people do. I don't feel like laughing and telling stories about Uncle Pete. I want to see him again, I want to smell his cigar and see him in front of the TV watching the fights. I just can't go down there Mom. Not yet.

BELLE

That's okay, Ben. You come down when you feel like you can. You'll see, you'll begin to feel better when you start talking about your Uncle. You come down when you're ready.

(BELLE leaves and lights dim out on BEN's bedroom and the living room. Stage stays dark and silent for several minutes.

"Earth Angel" begins during dark.

"Ooh oh, ooh, oh, earth angel, earth angel, will you be mine? My darling dear, love you all the time...."

STAGE MANAGER enters singing along.)

STAGE MANAGER

"love you forever, and ever more ...I'm just a fool, a fool in love with you.."

Look, I don't know what the hell it is with that song. I was only 8 or 9 years old when it came out, but every time I hear it on one of those oldies radio station, I get all choked up. No kidding. If I'm in my car, I turn the volume way up and act like an idiot. I sing along, and pretend I'm playing guitar. There is no rhyme or reason for this behavior, and no other rock and roll song has quite this effect. I mean I really do get all choked up when I hear it.

Now, my recollection of rock and roll songs begins with "Earth Angel" and "Shaboom". I haven't a clue exactly when these songs came out, other than I know it was early to mid fifties. I didn't even buy these records. In fact I never bought a single rock and roll record in my life. My sister did.

She was 3 years older than me, and a bit more "with it". It was important for kids to be "with it" back in the fifties and early sixties, remember? Important if you wanted to be thought of as "sharp" and "cool". I didn't really care about that. Well maybe I did, but I didn't show it.

My sister would religiously go down to Shaker Square on Saturdays with her friends, and shop for the latest rock and roll records at John Wade's. She'd bring the 45's home and play them all day long, and evidently I listened to them no matter what I might be doing. I probably remember the lyrics better than her. Now to me, that's very strange. Because all these years later, it's those songs that evoke all these memories, not the Mozart Clarinet Concerto, which I practiced and played incessantly back then.

You see, I was addicted to the clarinet, and practiced religiously with absolutely no prodding from my parents. In fact, and I know this is hard to believe, my mom would actually threaten to cancel my clarinet lessons if I did something wrong. I'm sure if I had a clarinet in my hands right now, I could indeed play the first few bars of the slow movement of the Concerto, from memory, and I haven't played the clarinet for 35 years.

(Stagehand brings out clarinet and hands it to
the STAGE MANAGER.

"Earth Angel" stops. STAGE MANAGER looks at the
clarinet, clears his throat, and begins to play
the first few bars of Mozart's Clarinet
Concerto. STAGE MANAGER stops and in surprise turns
back to audience)

STAGE MANAGER

See? Not bad, huh? I better not press my luck.

(Returns clarinet to stagehand)

Actually, it gets even more bizarre than the Mozart and Penguins combination. I could be in the rec room practicing Mozart, the acoustics were great down there. My sister would be playing "Earth Angel" in her bedroom, and my Mom and dad would go into an impromptu dance in the kitchen if a Cole Porter or Gershwin song popped up on the radio.

(Lights dim and STAGE MANAGER leaves.
Scene opens in the Kaplowitz's kitchen. BELLE is
preparing dinner. "Earth Angel" is heard from
"bedroom", Mozart's Clarinet Concerto from
"basement", radio playing Gershwin in kitchen.

Gershwin song dominates.

*"You know the Rockies may crumble, Gibraltar may tumble,
they're only made of clay, but..."*)

BELLE

Bess, turn that record player down. They can hear it all over the neighborhood.

BESS

(from off stage)

What about Benjie's clarinet? They can hear that too.

BELLE

That's different.

BESS

Why is that different?

BELLE

'Cause it is. Now turn your record player down before Dad gets in from the road.

("Earth Angel" stops abruptly, BESS mutters.)

BESS

No, he can play his goddamn clarinet all day, but I can't listen to my records cause she says so.

BELLE

What was that?

BESS

Nothing, I'm just turning off the record player. She's got hearing like an elephant.

BELLE

What was that? I heard that. Who's "she"? Is that how you refer to your mother, "SHE"? Get down here and help "she" set the table. And Benjie, you come upstairs now. Dad will be in from the road shortly, and he'll be hungry.

BESS

(entering the kitchen)

I hope he got some business. I need some money to go to the show with Nancy and Janet tonight.

BELLE

Now don't ask your dad for money as soon as he sets foot in the house. Wait 'til after dinner.

BEN

(entering the kitchen)

If he has his cigar sticking up in the air when he gets out of the car, you know he got orders. Then we can ask him for anything before dinner. Right Mom?

BELLE

You just go wash your hands before you sit down to eat, and don't worry about the direction of your father's cigar. And if you're both smart, you'll wait 'til after dinner before you ask your dad for anything.

(Sound of automobile pulling up in the driveway, horn beeping.)

BELLE

That's a good sign, business must have been good in Buffalo.

PHILIP

(From outside)

Benjie, come on out here and get your wood out of the trunk.

BEN

Oh great, dad got me some wood from one of the lumber yards he calls on.

(Running out the door to get his wood.)

BELLE

(As PHILIP enters kitchen, kisses him while setting table.)

How was the trip honey?

PHILIP

Real good, Stranski ordered a truckload, and Joey Goldstein of Senneca Surplus ordered two truckloads of driveway topping and one of roof-coating.

BESS

Hey dad, I need a fin this weekend. I'm going downtown to the Allen to see West Side Story.

BELLE

Now couldn't you wait till after dinner? Didn't I tell you to ask your Father after dinner?

PHILIP

(Reaching into his pocket)

That's ok, here's a sawbuck, go to Bouquerre's after the show, and take the girls.

BELLE

Fins and sawbucks and double sawbucks. You'd think these kids were raised by Damon Runyon.

(Everyone sits down to dinner and BELLE starts serving. The radio is still on, and just as BELLE starts to go back to get another dish, the DJ announces the song on the radio.

"It's very clear, our love is here to stay..."

PHILIP gets up and starts dancing with BELLE.)

BELLE

Phil, I'll drop the dish.

PHILIP

Put it down then. Remember where we danced to this song?

BELLE

Sure we danced to it a hundred times at Sojacks, and then that first night in California when we visited Willie and Adelle.

PHILIP

We spent the winter in California that year. When was that, in '36 or '37?

BELLE

'37. Your sister Helen died in the summer of '36, and we left for California the following fall.

BEN

(Head buried in his hands)

Jesus, the Rosenbergs can look right in the back window and see you guys dancing.

BELLE

Look Phil, the kids are embarrassed. So what, let em look, what are you guys embarrassed for? Don't you think your Mom and Dad ever danced? Your Father and I were good dancers. We loved to dance. That's one of my favorite songs. They don't write songs like that anymore. Not like that junk you kids listen to.

BESS

You mean like "shaboom shaboom"?

BESS AND BEN

"yadadadada, shaboom"

BESS

(turning to BEN)

Boy they sure don't write songs like that anymore.

BELLE

Very cute, very funny.

(Telephone rings. BELLE breaks away from her dancing partner to answer phone.)

BELLE

OK, simmer down, there's someone on the phone. Benjie, turn the radio down. Hello, yes, hello Elsie. I'm fine, how are you?

Did I hear about what? No I hadn't heard that, where did you get that information. Someone from city hall called Grace Ordin? Charkie's? What's a charkie's?

(Lights go off on stage and STAGE MANAGER enters.

"I Wonder Why" in the background.

"I wonder why I love you like I do...")

STAGE MANAGER

(Looking at a woman in the first row.)

I see you like this song too. Do you want to dance to this?

WOMAN IN AUDIENCE

What, are you joking?

STAGE MANAGER

No really. C'mon, let's dance to this.

WOMAN

What about your play? You must be nuts. Besides, my husband is right here.

STAGE MANAGER

He won't mind, will you sir? Don't worry about the play. C'mon, I have to dance to this song. Get up here and let's show these folks how we danced in the 50's. C'mon, please.

(WOMAN from the audience reluctantly comes up on stage. STAGE MANAGER and WOMAN do some fancy jitter-bugging 'til the end of the song.)

STAGE MANAGER

Thank you ma'am, thank you very much, and you sure can dance. Thank you sir. (Looking at the husband) Your wife is a lady and a very good sport.

See, eventually I did learn how to jitterbug. Eat your heart out Judy Stone. Screw you Miss Shapiro.

Well, that was a nice break. She can dance can't she? Let's give her a round of applause. (claps)

Isn't that a great song! "*I wonder why I love you like I do.*" Maybe I'll find out before this play ends, whatever that means. We'll see. But first let me briefly describe where I grew up, on Lindholm road, in Shaker Heights, Ohio.

Now some of you here tonight may think of Shaker Heights as an affluent upscale suburb of Cleveland, Ohio, which for the most part is quite true. But, there was nothing upscale about Lindholm road and the surrounding area. Lindholm was a street that was almost on the Cleveland/Shaker Heights boundary. A very middle class neighborhood that barely sneaks in on the Shaker boundary. A well struck nine-iron from our front yard could easily land in Cleveland.

Lindholm wasn't far from the intersection of Kinsman and Lee roads. Well, actually today it's called Chagrin and Lee. Kinsman road had its name changed from the Cleveland/Shaker Heights boundary, which if I remember correctly, was at East 154th street. They changed the name from Kinsman to Chagrin Blvd. going east on Kinsman. It was really just a racist thing, thinking back on it now. There was absolutely no reason to change the name of Kinsman road, a very old and famous highway. In fact Kinsman road is U.S. Highway 422, and I believe it goes all the way to Philadelphia.

Be that as it may, as it passes through Cleveland, it changes names from Kinsman to Chagrin Boulevard, and as I said before, the name change was racist, plain and simple. At the time, African Americans lived from 154th street west, and whites lived east of 154th street in Shaker Heights. Today, of course, blacks live both east and west of 154th in Shaker.

Very middle class folks lived on Lindholm road. Salesmen, pharmacists, electricians, and steel shop foremen. No bankers or Squires, Sanders and Dempsey lawyers. No vice presidents of TRW. They lived in the other parts of Shaker, where

the suburb earned its reputation. Let's listen to the sounds of summer on Lindholm road, in 1959.

(Voices, all off stage. Spotlight dims on
STAGE MANAGER)

VICTOR

Hey Benny, your mom was great at the neighborhood meeting at the Lustig's last night.

BENJIE

Yeah, I guess she really gave it to Barney Deutch for selling that corner lot at Scottsdale and Lee to Charkie's.

VICTOR

Do ya think that Charkie's will go through now? Man, everyone's up in arms about it after last night.

BENJIE

Hell, I don't know. All the mothers on the street are out getting petitions signed against the sale. I wouldn't bet against Belle and Elsie and Birdie and Grace and Millie. Hey, Where the hell is Carl?

VICTOR

Playing with his goddamn citizen's band radio.

BENJIE

Didn't anyone tell him about the game? He's my team-mate for the whiffle ball championship of Lindholm road, and he's screwing around with that goddamn radio of his? Like he'll ever amount to anything with that radio crap. Tell Billy to get his ass down here.

BILLY

Hey Carl, get your fat ass down here, so B&D can beat H&K's butt. Hey Vicky, better go over the rules again.

VICTOR

OK let's get the rules straight so we don't argue about fair and foul balls and where the home run line is.

BENJIE

We'll just leave the rules and boundaries like last time

CARL

Hey, I just heard the greatest DJ on the radio. I think he was from upstate New York. The guy had an English accent. Man, he was cool.

BENJIE

Hey Carl! Cut the radio crap and get with it. You're pitching the first few innings and I'll play the outfield.

CARL

Let's go over the rules and boundaries again.

VICTOR

OK same as before: anything on the Zucket's lawn is out of bounds, and an automatic out. And, you gotta get the ball before the old bitch comes running out and takes it. Past the Jacob's drive on a fly is a home run. If it hits the street light, it's still in play and if you catch it on the fly, its an out.

BENJIE

That's stupid, man. That's not baseball. Shit, if it hits the street light, it's just a no-play.

VICTOR

Hey Benny, you're full of shit. This is the way we've been playing all summer, and you want to change the rules now?

BENJIE

But it's not baseball, and it's the championship!

VICTOR

Hey Benny, whiffle ball isn't baseball, and this ain't the World Series. So cool it, and don't get so technical.

(Spotlight now shines on BEN'S mother hollering from second floor bedroom window. BELLE is on a ladder with a window frame.

There is also a spotlight on BENJIE.)

BELLE

Benjie, did you brush your teeth this morning?

BENJIE

(In disgust)

What?

BELLE

Don't use that tone of voice with me. Did you brush your teeth this morning?

BENJIE

Jesus Mom, we're playing the whiffle ball championship. Yes, I brushed my teeth.(turning to VICTOR) Do you believe she's asking me if I brushed my teeth?

BELLE

Don't lie to me, you did not! Your toothbrush is bone dry! Now get up here this instant and brush your teeth!

BENJIE

(Cussing under his breath)

Goddamn, do you believe her? I'm in the middle of a game and she's making me go upstairs and brush my teeth. 'The toothbrush is bone dry'. I've gotta have a detective for a mother!

BELLE

What was that?

BENJIE

Nothing, I'm coming up now. Hey guys, I'll be back in a minute.

(Light turns up on STAGE MANAGER, looking bemused by the episode.)

STAGE MANAGER

'Your toothbrush is bone dry'. Why didn't she just tell me to come upstairs and brush my teeth? What was with 'the toothbrush was bone dry' routine. The woman was in a constant battle with cleanliness. Personal hygiene, or domestic hygiene, my mom was in a never-ending battle. Cleanliness wasn't next to godliness, cleanliness was godliness. I always wondered if some of her phrases were unique or heard in other households.

Take "tracking dirt" for instance. Does that mean anything to anyone here tonight? Tracking dirt in the Kaplowitz household was a capital offense. You could track dirt in one of two ways. You could track dirt on the soles of your shoes of course, from the outside of the house inside. Or even more insidiously, track dirt from a room inside the house that wasn't yet cleaned, to one cleaned or in the process of being cleaned.

Talk about walking on egg shells. I can remember many times I would go from the kitchen to the living room, and instinctively take one step across the boundary of the two rooms and back track, thinking, did she clean the living room yet or is it still "dirty"? And of course, as with every other aspect of growing up with the Kaplowitz family, there was music, even for cleaning the house.

Oh, by the way, for those that are interested, they never did build that 50's style diner, Charkie's at the corner of Lee and Scottsdale roads. And we never spoke to Barney Deutch again, and they lived right next door to us.

(**SCENE:** It is summer vacation, a typical weekday morning at the Kaplowitz home. In the living room, music is loudly playing in the background. BELLE is dressed in schmattas for cleaning.

She is running the vacuum cleaner, smoking a cigarette. BEN comes running in from the outside into the kitchen. Once again there is a split set, with simple kitchen and living room scenes, side by side.

The Berry Sisters' "Vyoch Tyoch, Tyoch" begins.

"Yingaleh, zeda shaeda lida singa medaleh...")

BEN

Hey mom, I'm hungry. What's for lunch?

BELLE

Did you wipe your feet? I just finished cleaning the kitchen!

BEN

Yep I wiped em, what's for lunch?

BELLE

It's not even 12 o'clock, it's not time for lunch yet.(to herself) I'll be happy when school starts so I don't have to worry about lunch.

BEN

OK, I'll be at Vicky's shooting baskets

(BEN Opens the door and runs out of the house singing *"Mine shena, mine klaneh, maedaleh..."*)

BELLE

Quit running in and out of the house, you're tracking dirt. Can't you wait till I finish cleaning the entire house? In and out, in and out, he could drive you crazy. Get back here a minute. Do you want to go to Julie's delicatessen for lunch today?

BEN

Yeah, great.

BELLE

Well after you play with Vicky, you come back here and wash up before you go to Julie's. I don't want you looking like a bum.

BEN

(from outside)

Like a bum? Julie's ain't exactly the Tavern.

BELLE

You just come back from Victor's before you go and wash up, and I'll give you some money. How much is the barbecued beef sandwich?"

BEN

Buck-fifty.

BELLE

Get back here in half an hour, and I'll give you some money.

BEN

Can I get some soup? Julie's has great chicken noodle soup.

BELLE

Yes, you can have soup.

(BEN leaves and BELLE continues to clean the house, madly, obsessively, counting to herself and muttering unintelligibly as she attacks the house.

The Berry Sisters are still on, blaring loudly.

*"Shanella, shana maeda shana maeda shanala, yuch
zuch zuch zuch zuch, mine shana maedela... "*

SISTER runs in the house with her friend ROZZY. Both take a step back from the kitchen and remember to wipe their feet.)

BESS

Mom, can I have some money to go to lunch with Rozzy and Janet? We're going down to Shaker Square for lunch.

BELLE

Did you wipe your feet? I just got finished cleaning the Kitchen.

BESS

Yes I wiped my feet. I need some money for the rapid too.

BELLE

Didn't you get an allowance this week? What did you do with that money already, buy records at John Wades?"

BESS

It's almost the end of the week already and Mom, Rozzy's with me, OK?

ROZZY

Hi Mrs. Kaplowitz.

BELLE

Hi Rozzy. Ok, take some money from my purse on the kitchen sink, and be home before four. We're going to Solomon's tonight for dinner.

(BESS looks for purse in kitchen, but can't find it.)

BESS

I can't find your purse Mom. Where is it?

BELLE

It's in the kitchen. Oh, wait a minute. I put it in the living room, DON'T GO IN THERE! I haven't finished cleaning the living room yet. I'll get the purse.

(BELLE gets purse from living room, wipes her feet on a rag thrown on the floor between living room and kitchen - expressly for the purpose of not "tracking dirt" - and enters the kitchen.)

BELLE

Hi Roz. How's your mom and dad?

ROZ

Just fine, thanks.

BELLE

Ok here's five dollars, do you have any change for the Rapid?

BESS

No.

BELLE

Do you save any money from your allowance? Rozzy, do you spend all your allowance before the end of the week like Bess? Ok, here's some change for the Rapid, and it wouldn't hurt you to stop in and say hello to your aunt Rose. She lives so close to the rapid stop.

(Lights dim on Kaplowitz house and STAGE)

MANAGER enters, with the Berry Sisters
still belting it out.

"Vyouch, tyouch, tyouch")

STAGE MANAGER

Please, please, enough with the Berry Sisters already.(music abruptly stops)
Would you believe I can still sing the lyrics to most of those songs?

Now my mother was born in this country and had no accent whatsoever. Both my mom and dad were native-born Americans, although both could speak Yiddish – the language of their parents, who were from Eastern Europe and Russia. Nor were my parents old-fashioned. I'm sure both were rather "Hip" back in their generation. So, don't confuse my mother's love of the Berry Sisters with some type of "Green Horn" behavior.

Besides, the Berry Sisters had great harmony, and could sing. The irony, if there is one, is that I can still sing these songs.

(STAGE MANAGER begins to sing. *"Shanella..."*)

Now what is the possible connection between the Berry Sisters, Mozart, the Penguins, and Gershwin? Quite frankly, I don't know, but we're sure as hell gonna find out if there is one before the end of this play.

Well, the high school years were mostly unexceptional. I practiced the clarinet everyday.

(clarinet practicing scales from Lazarus Book I
in background)

It was the one thing in high school I could do quite well, and so I used it to make myself feel important. At Shaker High School, in the late 50's and early 60's, it was important to be sharp, and popular, and smart, and good-looking. I was none of those things, but I could play the clarinet.

Of course, there was someone in high school who was a better clarinet player than me. I studied clarinet with his father, who played with the Cleveland Orchestra, which should explain why I was the second best clarinet player at Shaker High.

As I mentioned before, those high school years moved swiftly and uneventfully. Didn't go to the senior prom. Stayed up in my bedroom and watched Vicky Dun get picked up in a white limo. Vicky took Sherri Nagle to the senior prom. She was a real knock-out.

(*"It's Twilight Time"* begins again.

*"Heavenly shades of night are falling, it's
twilight time..."*)

STAGE MANAGER

Well there's that tune again, sounds like a good place to take a little break. Nothing too long, maybe ten, fifteen minutes. For those of you who did in fact take your shoes off, please put them back on before you go outside. As Uncle Pete would say, "don't go outside in your stocking feet."

(Music gets louder.

*"Heavenly shades of night are falling, it's
twilight time..."*

House lights are turned up and all the music from the
first act is played starting with the Barry Sisters
"Shaenelleh..." Earth Angel, Gershwin, etc.
Continuously played through intermission)

INTERMISSION

ACT II

("It's Twilight Time" begins again as STAGE MANAGER enters.

"Heavenly shades of night are falling, its twilight time. Out of the mist your voice is calling, 'tis twilight time. When purple colored curtains mark the end of day, I'll hear you, my dear at twilight time..."")

STAGE MANAGER

(Looks out over audience, and attempts to count the number of people and seats.)

Well, I'm just taking attendance, and it looks like most everyone has returned for the second act. That's encouraging. A few folks didn't make it back, I hope it's nothing we said. But, like Uncle Pete always used to say, "you can't please everyone." Could we lower the music a bit, please? Thank you. Gee, you'd think we'd have that coordinated by now. A little lower please. That's good, that's fine. Thank you.

Well, most of you made it back, and I'm happy to see that. This is a rather important part of the play, so I'll need your undivided attention. If I could beg your indulgence here just for a moment?

Before we get into this second act, I would like to take this opportunity to, shall we say, wax philosophically for a minute or two. You see, I have this theory. It's a theory that is part social science, part pure science, and perhaps a bit cosmic in nature.

As a trained engineer, chemical engineer to be specific, with an advanced degree in mathematics, my art-historian English degreed sister thinks I have no business espousing such whimsical theories, but that, perhaps, is a theme for another play.

Be that as it may, I offer the following and hope I do not lose too many more of you after the next intermission. You see, I fervently believe that every generation goes through a period in their lives – a most important and impressionable period - which usually takes place in their twenties, where the historical events of the times are so powerful, so overwhelming, they affect the rest of their lives on almost a daily basis, consciously or subconsciously - even 20 or 30 or 50 years later.

For our parents - those of us called the war babies, or baby boomers - that period would have to be the Depression, or maybe World War II, depending on whether you fought in it or not. As an example: my mother is 85 years old. She lives by herself, in a very modest 800 square foot bungalow in South Euclid, Ohio. She has owned her own home for most of her married and widowed life, but if she mentioned it once she has mentioned it a thousand times, how lucky she is to own her own home, to own her own car.

Both her parents and my father's parents lost their homes during the Depression, and she has recounted more than once the scene of her father sitting in the kitchen, both

elbows resting on the kitchen table, head cradled between both his hands, sobbing and lamenting, how was he going to support his family? Powerful scenes, vivid memories, lasting a lifetime. And then, passed on to the next generation.

Now that brings us to the most influential historical period in our generation, that of the baby boomers. It has to be the sixties, doesn't it? I mean wouldn't all you war-babies and baby boomers here tonight agree?

For me, personally, the decade of the sixties was ushered in with the death of John Kennedy my freshman year of college, and appropriately enough ended with men on the moon. Of course, several important political assassinations occurred during that period, along with a dirty little war that most of us tried to avoid and the nation as a whole is still trying to forget.

Oh, by the way, did I mention that my mom and dad fell in love and got married during the Depression?

(Lights abruptly go off and STAGE MANAGER
instantaneously disappears.

Stage is dark. Silence. Time passes
in darkness.

“Come Softly to Me” begins, still in darkness.

*“Dum dum dum do dum be do be do Come softly darling,
speak softly darling hear what I say...”*

SCENE: Girl's dormitory at a girl's college.
A College student is sitting behind a desk. Very
sixties looking. Frizzled hair, wire rim glasses,
very preppy attire.

Sign on desk, “Mellon Hall”. Music is blasting from
radio on the desk.

BEN KAPLOWITZ enters and speaks to CO-ED at desk.)

CO-ED

Hi, can I help you?

BEN

(Trying to speak over the loud radio)

Yes, could you please call up Jane Weiss, and tell her Ben Kaplowitz is here?

(Radio is still blasting out “Come Softly To Me”)

CO-ED

Sorry, I couldn't hear you. What was that?

(She turns down radio to an acceptable level)

BEN

(In a quieter voice)

Yes, could you please call up Jane Weiss and tell her Ben Kaplowitz is here.

CO-ED

Sure, one minute. (She dials up on the phone) Hey Sandy, tell Jane she has a visitor. Ok Sure. (Turning towards BEN) She'll be down in a minute.

BEN

Thanks. Boy, this is quite a dormitory

CO-ED

Yeah, it's not bad, Huh? You probably know this college is built on the original Mellon Estate. This is actually Mellon's home. In the basement we have a full size swimming pool and two bowling alleys.

BEN

Tough life here at Chatham College.

(Radio DJ announces new song by The Fleetwoods
and song begins as BEN waits.

*“Our guardian star lost all its glow, the day that
I lost you. He lost all its glitter the day you
said no, and his silver turned to blue.
Like him I am doubtful that your love is true. But
if you decide to call on me, ask for Mr. Blue,
da dum, dum, dum. I'm Mr. Blue...”*

JANE comes walking down the staircase, smiling. She
gets to the bottom of the staircase and reaches out
to shake hands.)

JANE

Hi Ben, I'm Jane Weiss, nice to meet you.

BEN

(Awkwardly reaches out to shake JANE's hand)

Yes, nice to meet you Jane.

(BEN and JANE begin to walk out the front door)

CO-ED

(speaks sarcastically)

Don't forget to be back by two.

JANE

(responds sarcastically)

I don't think so. I'm a junior and juniors have no hours this year, remember?
(Takes out a key and shows coed.)

CO-ED

Oh yeah that's right, I forgot. They just made that rule this semester. Well, have a good time.

JANE

Sounds like a very interesting evening you have planned. Where is Brady's Bend anyhow?

BEN

Oh, it's a little town north of here right on the Allegheny River.

JANE

Well, how did you decide to have a party at Brady's Bend?

BEN

It's a long story. I'll fill you in on the details on the ride up there. It takes about an hour.

(Dorm scene darkens, BEN and JANE walk over to "car", which is just a front seat of a car. BEN opens door, and JANE gets in. BEN goes over to other side gets in and starts car.)

JANE

So how long have you known Stuart?

BEN

Geez, Stu and I go back to elementary school, third grade. I started taken clarinet lessons from his dad in forth grade. Stu tells me you guys worked together this summer, at the medical school labs at Case.

JANE

Yeah, our family doctor got me the job. Actually it was in the blood labs where they check type. I guess Stu is in pre-med. What are you majoring in?

BEN

Chemical engineering.

JANE

Wow, chemical engineering, sounds tough.

BEN

Eh, not really, lots of math and stuff, but I'm good at that. I mean it's easy for me, so it's not really that difficult. English and Psych and term papers, and all that liberal artsy crap, that's what's tough for me. Oh geez, sorry, you're probably a liberal arts major.

JANE

Yeah, but I'm majoring in Chemistry, so I have to take all that math and science "crap" too. I understand you're a good musician, the clarinet right?

BEN

Yeah, how did you know that? Oh I guess I just told you. Sounds like you must have done some espionage.

JANE

Probably no more than you did, talking with Stu. But yeah, I have my sources. I checked you out, so to speak. I play a little piano, and sing in the choir. Maybe we can get together some time. Did you bring your clarinet to Pittsburgh?

BEN

(almost in a reverie, and not believing
her wish to see him again almost before
the date has even begun)

Yeah, yes, I mean yes. Yes, I did bring my clarinet down to school, and yes that would be fun. That would be great.

(Lights abruptly go off on BEN and JANE.

STAGE MANAGER immediately enters stage with
spotlight.)

STAGE MANAGER

Tell me. Is there a more profound moment in anyone's life than that first instant when you realize you like someone, I mean really like someone? Now I'm not talking about love at first sight, OK. I'm just talking about meeting that someone who is different than anyone else you've ever met, and you can consciously feel that difference almost as it's happening. You can sense that special feeling instantly, because it's a new and different feeling. One you've never felt before, but only read about or heard expressed in poetry or songs.

Once when I was very young – maybe not even five years old – I was walking with my dad across Euclid Heights Blvd., where it comes into Coventry road. You know, right near the old Heights Picture show. The street-cars were still running on that median strip up the center of Euclid Heights Blvd. I think that's where they turned around and went back down town. Anyway, I forget the name of the movie we saw at the show, but the song from the movie was Lavender Blue. Anybody remember that song?

“Lavender Blue Dilly dilly, lavender green.”

I asked my dad why all songs were about love, and I remember his simple reply. He said that I would figure that out when I was older. He was right, and I did.

(STAGE MANAGER disappears and lights go off.

Stage still dark as The Dells’ “Oh What a Nite” begins.

“Oh what a nite, to love you dear, oh what nite to hold you near. . .”

SCENE: An old room at an old hotel in Brady’s Bend, PA. The lights are low and couples are Slow-dancing to music by the Dells.

JANE and BEN are dancing.)

JANE

The food was really good. How did you find this place again?

BEN

Well, like I said in the car, we just took a drive a couple of weeks ago looking for a neat place to have a party. We started driving north on Route 8 through Butler, got to Brady’s Bend and saw this old hotel. Looked just like the place we had imagined.

JANE

So what do you guys do, just drive around on the weekends looking for places to have parties?

BEN

Not every weekend. Like I said, none of us belong to a fraternity, so we just naturally formed this loose social club.

JANE

Do you have a name or anything?

BEN

Yeah, but its really corny.

JANE

What is it?

BEN

Oh, it’s too corny. You don’t want to know.

JANE

Now I'm curious, c'mon, what do you guys call this group?

BEN

Joy Enterprises.

JANE

Joy Enterprises? You've got to be joking.

BEN

See, I told you you'd find it goofy. But no, really, that's what we call ourselves. We even have cards, which we give out after the dates. If you really want to throw up I'll show you one. No, I'll give you one when we get back to your dorm.

JANE

Boy, for a bunch of engineers, you guys are real romantics.

BEN

Yeah, I guess we're pretty sick. Hey, would you mind if I ask you something pretty stupid right now?

JANE

Well, that depends. I mean you could ask I suppose, but I might not be able to give you an answer, or the answer you want.

BEN

Well, I guess I'll have to take my chances.

JANE

Ok, then go ahead and ask.

BEN

This is really dumb, I mean I know I'm going to regret this. Normally, after our date I'd just take you back to your dorm and then, you know, spend the whole week wondering if you had a good time and if you'd want to go out with me again say, next week.

JANE

Ben...

BEN

No please, let me finish since I've already started. Anyhow, you know, I'd get all nervous and everything, and finally I'd call you up say, Tuesday or Wednesday for Friday. That's kinda tricky, you know the time interval to wait to call you up. I don't wanna call too soon, but I wanna give you enough time to, you know. Anyhow, then,

after all the anticipation, you might say you're busy or whatever, and then I'd feel like a jerk.

So, this way I could just ask you out right now for next week. But, the disadvantage to that is, you might say you're too busy or you're busy or just no, and then we'd have this very long hour ride back to Pittsburgh. It would really be uncomfortable for both of us, but at least I'd know and wouldn't have to worry all day Sunday and Monday and Tuesday.

So really what I'm doing is chancing an uncomfortable ride back to the dorms - very uncomfortable - for three or four uneasy days before I would ask you out anyway. Now before you answer, just think a minute, cause there may be another option. You could say 'yes, you'd really like to go out next Friday'. Then, if you really wouldn't like to but are only being nice to avoid the uncomfortable ride back to Pittsburgh, you could call later in the week and say something like, oh I don't know, something came up and you can't go out. But I'd rather you didn't do that. I mean, I'd rather you just be honest, and let me have it straight and true. So anyhow that's it, that's what I'd like to ask you.

JANE

Are you finished? 'Cause that was really a run on sentence, or question, or statement, or whatever that was.

BEN

Yep.

JANE

Well, I've had a great time and I would love to go out with you next Friday. I'm not busy, nor do I plan on being busy. I won't call you up during the week to change my mind, and I think Joy Enterprises is a goofy name, but a great concept. I like you, and your honesty, and let me see is that all, have I answered all your questions? I think I have.

BEN

Well, yes, great.

JANE

One more thing, as long as we're on this honesty kick.

BEN

Yeah?

JANE

(parroting BEN's cadence, but in a nice way)

Well, to be honest, on the ride back I'm gonna be wondering if you're gonna try and kiss me goodnight, or maybe even make out with me in the dorm parking lot. Normally, on a first date, like we're having, I probably wouldn't do either - you know, make out or kiss goodnight. Well, I'd kiss the person goodnight you know, if I liked

them and the way they looked, but probably not make out, not on a first date. But if you want to you know, make out a little, that would be fine.

I'd like to, cause I feel I know you. I mean, I don't really know you, cause we just met a few hours ago and I talked to you briefly on the phone once, but I feel like I know you. So it would be alright you know, to make out a little and kiss goodnight, that would be fine. I'd like that. I'd like to...

BEN

Jane

JANE

Yeah?

BEN

Let's get outta here, and go back to Pittsburgh.

(Lights instantly go off.

The Dells' "Oh What a Nite" is turned up.
The stage is silent and black until the
end of the song.

Time passes.

The STAGE MANAGER enters, while Nat King Cole's
"It's Only a Paper Moon" plays. The STAGE
MANAGER is singing along.

*"Say it's only a paper moon, hanging over a
cardboard tree, but it wouldn't be make believe,
if you believe in me. . .")*

STAGE MANAGER

Ok, I can see you're a bit confused already. Good. What do the Dells' and "Oh What A Nite" have to do with Nat King Cole and "It's Only a Paper Moon"? Now look, you're gonna have to start paying closer attention. I mean, I can't just come out here every fifteen minutes and explain everything I'm doing.

These are techniques of the playwright, and if I'm doing my job, you should be able to get the gist of what's going on here. But, I can see you're totally confused by the juxtapositioning of these two melodies. Well, there's a simple straight-forward explanation.

There's no way anyone in this theater tonight could possibly figure out the relation of these two melodies. Unless of course Jane Weiss is out there in the theater. You see, after several more dates with Jane, Ben - that is me - I brought over my clarinet to play with Jane on the piano. Now the only music I had was some sheet music stuck under the cover of my clarinet case, which happened to be "It's Only a Paper Moon".

Now here's the story on that. Many years before, while attending a wedding of a cousin down on Mayfield Road at the old Heights Temple, I heard the 5-piece band play "It's Only a Paper Moon". I was about nine or ten, and had been studying the clarinet for a couple of years. The melody captivated me and like a good mother, my mom went downtown that Monday to Schermer's Music store, I think it was in the Old Arcade, bottom level.

So, I always kept it in my case, and it was the only music Jane and I could play that I had brought down to school. Of course, the sheet music was for the piano, which is in the key of C, and I played the B-flat clarinet. So in order to play along with Jane on the piano, I had to transpose a step from B-flat to C. I guess I'm bragging a bit now, but to be truthful, I practiced transposing the melody back at the dorms although I led on I was transposing by sight.

So that's the connection. It's a melody made for the clarinet or saxophone, if someone will bring out my clarinet, I believe I can still play it.

(A stagehand brings out clarinet and STAGE
MANAGER plays the first few bars of "It's
Only a Paper Moon")

Catchy little tune, don't you think? If I remember the cover of the sheet music, I think the tune came from a Joan Leslie movie, but I'm not sure. The sheet music had an orange color. Ya know, come to think of it, she never returned it. Simple tune, simple words:

*"Say its only a paper moon, sailing over a cardboard sea,
but it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me.
Say it's only a canvas sky, hanging over a muslin tree,
but it wouldn't be make believe if you believed in me.
(Starts to get a little teary eyed)
Without your love, it's a honky tonk parade,
without your love, it's a melody played in the penny arcade.
It's a Barnum and Bailey world, just as phony as it could be,
but it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me..."*

Well I think that's enough of that. Whew, that's tough even after all these years. Ok, so now you get the picture. Jane and I dated the rest of that school year, our junior year, and since we both lived in Cleveland, we pretty much dated that entire summer. My classes started almost a month before hers, so I had to wait a month before she got back to Pittsburgh.

(Light goes off on STAGE MANAGER. The
stage is dark as the Dells' begin again.

*"Oh what a nite to love you dear, oh what
a nite to hold you near. Oh what a nite to
squeeze you dear, that's why I love you so."*

BEN and JANE are walking around the college campus, JANE's arm is tucked inside BEN's with her head resting on his shoulder.

Music stops.)

JANE

You know, I really practiced "Paper Moon" this summer. Now I'm not Nat King Cole, but I can play it pretty good.

BEN

Great, we'll give it another try this weekend. Craig and Mary Pat and Rothy and Vida and Jim and Mimi are having a party at Rothy's apartment. I think it actually has an old upright piano, think you're ready to give a performance?

JANE

Oh god no, don't you dare.

BEN

Just kidding. I think Saturday is the first football game, do you want to go? We haven't been to a football game yet.

JANE

Sure, sounds great. Oh ya know, I just remembered, I can't go to Rothy's party. I told my roommate Sandy I'd go to dinner with her and some friends. Italian restaurant on Liberty Blvd., have you been there?

BEN

No.

JANE

I hear its really good, maybe we can go there this semester.

BEN

Sure.

(Time passes, with noticeable silence. It is an awkward situation.)

JANE

Is anything wrong? 'Cause I sense the old silent treatment coming on.

BEN

No, not really.

JANE

What does "not really" mean?

BEN

Well, I don't know. I mean this is your first weekend back and I just thought we'd be going out this weekend.

JANE

Well, we don't have to go out every weekend together, do we?

BEN

(long pause, very quiet response)

Gee, I don't know, I guess not. Is that the way you feel Jane? I just kinda thought, well, you know, after this summer and all, we'd just be going out, and well yeah, I guess I just assumed we'd be going out every weekend.

JANE

You mean like going steady?

BEN

Well, yeah. Does it sound corny?

JANE

Well Ben, what can I say now? I just don't feel like that yet. I don't want to hurt you, I mean I like you, and I want to continue to see you. We had some great times last summer, but I think we should see other people this year. I just...

BEN

Oh Jesus. Jane please don't say you think it would be good for both of us. Please, I just don't want to hear that. Not now. You know how I feel, and now I know how you feel about it, I mean our relationship, or whatever the hell this is. God this is awkward, what the hell can I say now?

JANE

Well, you don't have to say anything. Why can't we just see each other like we have been? What's wrong with that? I don't see...

BEN

You don't see anything wrong with just continuing on like we have been? Jesus Christ Jane, you know how I feel about you, you know I don't really want to see anyone else, or date anyone else, and you evidently do. What do I do, just wait for the time you tell me you can't go out this Friday, cause you have a date? Then what do I do? Wait for you to feel like I do, and what if you don't or never do or whatever?

Oh Shit, this is ridiculous, I'm talking like an idiot. Look, let's just put all this on hold. You just do whatever the hell you gotta do, and I'll do whatever I have to do.

(BEN withdraws from JANE, she removes her arm from inside his and takes her head off his shoulder.)

JANE

Well, will I see you Saturday for the football game? I really would like to go with you.

BEN

I don't know. I just don't know. Maybe we shouldn't go to the game. Maybe we should just end it here. You know, beginning of the school year, maybe you're right. We'll meet other people, I don't know.

(The Dells' "Oh What a Nite" begins in the background.

"Oh what a nite to love you dear, oh what a nite to kiss you dear. . .")

How can you break up with someone you've never really... Oh shit, this is crazy, maybe we should just stop seeing each other for a while. No I don't think we should go to the Syracuse game on Saturday. I think I'm gonna go back to the dorms, Jane.

(The stage goes instantly dark, the music in the background gets louder.

STAGE MANAGER walks from the darkness into the spotlight and lets music play for a while. Then, he gets a hold of himself and slowly begins to speak.)

STAGE MANAGER

Well, that's pretty much the way it happened. Oh no, we didn't break up then. I went back to the dorms that night and sat at my desk and began to write Jane a letter. Told her how disappointed I was, thought we'd just continue getting closer, and closer. Quoted lines from the songs in the Fleetwoods' album we danced to at all the Joy Enterprise parties. Lines like, "Thought our love would do nothing but grow..."

It was really quite a letter. Now some of you may become nauseated by this, but it's the god's honest truth. As I continued to pour out my heart in this letter, I could barely hold back the tears, in fact I couldn't, and a couple actually dropped onto the letter and smudged the ink. Yep, when you fall in love that first time, it just opens you up like when you peel back the metal on a can of sardines.

Feelings and emotions come pouring out that you never knew existed. I wish I could express this more poetically, but remember, I'm a trained engineer. Which, in retrospect may be part of the problem. Maybe If I could have taken a course like "falling in love 101", well maybe then I could have handled the situation.

You know, it's all in the timing, I guess. I was in love with Jane, but she didn't feel the same about me. How could that be? How can you love someone, but they not love you in return? It never occurred to me that maybe in time she would love me. Actually, I suppose it's almost impossible, statistically speaking, to fall in love at exactly the same time, know what I mean? How can I explain this?

Once on a sports program on ESPN I heard this interview with a major league umpire. He was asked the age-old question about a tie being in favor of the runner. You know, the runner and the ball getting to first base at exactly the same time. But the umpire's answer was rather unusual. He said there was no such thing as a tie in favor of the runner, either the ball gets there first or the runner; it's impossible for both to get there at the exact same time.

So, you see my point here. Mathematically, or statistically, it's impossible for two people to fall in love at exactly the same time. Someone has to get there first, right? But who the hell can be that rational while it's actually happening, you know, falling in love.

That's why that course, "Falling in Love 101" would have been so beneficial. I could have learned all about timing, and waiting, and then maybe I wouldn't have been so hurt. See what I mean? Just a simple goddamn course in falling in love, and I could be married to Jane right now.

I mean we take courses in all kinds of things, like learning to drive a car for instance. No one is expected to just get in a car and start driving from day one. Think how dangerous that could be? Is falling in love that first time any less dangerous?

Alright, ok, enough already, I can see some of you are getting a little fed up with the idea of courses for falling in love. Maybe we should take all those songs about love a bit more serious. You know, like "you gotta give a little, take a little, and let your poor heart break a little...." Am I starting to ramble again? I think I am, aren't I.

PERSON FROM THE AUDIENCE

(Stands up from his seat)

You sure as hell are, get on with it for Christ's sake. Why didn't you get married? Why did you finally break up? Jesus, we've all had love affairs that didn't work. Get on with it. Get on with your life, get on with the play.

STAGE MANAGER

(Responding to man in audience)

Excuse me sir, but I think you're a bit out of line, and a bit disruptive to the flow of the play, and perhaps you owe both me and this audience an apology.

PERSON FROM THE AUDIENCE

An apology? What are you nuts? Look Mr. Kaplowitz, Ben. Can I call you Ben?

STAGE MANAGER

Yes, sure, go ahead.

PERSON FROM THE AUDIENCE

Look, Ben. You ask all these plaintive, rhetorical type questions, and I just thought I'd answer. Nothing personal. I think we'd all like to know what finally happened to you and Jane, and why. That's all, and then you can move on.

(JANE walks onto the stage to a startled
STAGE MANAGER and begins to speak)

JANE

You know Ben, I agree with the guy in the audience. Just what the hell did happen that summer?

STAGE MANAGER

(Stunned by JANE's presence)

What the hell!? What are you doing here? Have I lost complete control here?

JANE

I would just like an explanation, like the rest of the audience. I mean it doesn't make any sense. Even after all these years. We dated the rest of our senior year, right?

BEN

Right.

JANE

I mean like, we were going "steady" we didn't see anyone else. At least I didn't for the entire senior year.

STAGE MANAGER

Neither did I, Jane

JANE

I had you over for dinner that spring to "officially" meet my parents and my family. That's a pretty serious move, and a strong indication of how I felt, wasn't it?

STAGE MANAGER

Yes, it sure was.

JANE

Then, a couple of weeks later, you invited me over to your house for dinner to meet your family "officially". So just what the hell were you thinking when you wrote me that stupid letter breaking it off? And of course your timing was impeccable.

I got that goddamn letter a week after I started graduate school at Wisconsin. I thought everything was going just great. You were headed off to graduate school at Ohio State. We were all set to meet each other during the school year. Then you send me that god-awful letter. It was just plain mean-spirited. Your accusations of my frigidness, and all that crap. From nowhere it came. What the fuck were you thinking, Ben? Just..

STAGE MANAGER

Hey, watch the language. You never used to talk like that.

JANE

Well that was back in the 60's. We've been liberated, or haven't you heard? So just answer the question, what were you thinking?

STAGE MANAGER

Hey, hold on a minute here. I have lost complete control. Sit your ass down sir, and let me talk to Jane here for a minute.
(man in audience takes his seat)

OK, now wait a minute Jane, just hold it down a second, OK. This was a long time ago, I can't remember exactly what I even said in that letter, let alone why I wrote it. I'm not sure I even remember the letter you're referring to.

JANE

Bullshit. You know exactly what I'm talking about, and along with the rest of this audience I want to know what happened.

STAGE MANAGER

OK, OK, calm down a minute and let me collect my thoughts.

(STAGE MANAGER tries to recollect and collect his thoughts as "Twilight Time" begins again.

"Heavenly shades of night are falling, it's twilight time....")

STAGE MANAGER

Well there you go, the music is back. Sorry sir, (looking at man in audience) sorry Jane, we've got to keep things moving and there's that music, so I'll have to get to your questions a bit later in the play. Please excuse me.

(JANE disappears into the darkness of the stage and STAGE MANAGER continues)

Sorry for that interruption, perhaps we'll get back to that subject, if time permits.(looking at his watch) I don't know, we'll just have to wait and see. Well, there you have it. It wasn't exactly the way I wanted to describe my first love affair and how it ended, but nothing in life seems to go as planned. Now there's a revolutionary and enlightening theory on the vicissitudes of life.

Jane got married to a graduate student at the University of Wisconsin the following year. I dropped out of graduate school at Ohio State, and quickly took a job with an engineering and construction company in Cleveland. Couldn't screw around in the sixties trying to figure out what to do with your life. Not with the draft board and Vietnam lurking in the wings.

(sigh, deep breath, long pause)

OK, now I'm going to need your cooperation and perhaps imagination for the next scene. Being new at play writing, I was told numerous times I should probably begin the next scene after an intermission. I was told numerous times that these two scenes do not logically follow, shall we say, smoothly. They need some type of break between them.

I just don't feel that way, and besides I already have another intermission planned so it just wouldn't fit in, know what I mean? So with your undivided attention, and like I said before, cooperation, I think we can both pull this off, and make it work. So let me just quicken the pace here a bit, and borrow a technique from Mr. Wilder's play, if I might.

The next scene takes place about 12 years later, end of the 70's to be exact. Well to really be exact, March 15, 1979. "The sun has come up and set almost 4500 times," as Mr. Wilder might say. It's easy to remember the Ides of March in 1979. That's the day I first heard the word Alzheimer's.

(The lights abruptly go off on stage. Music stops.)

SCENE: The Kaplowitz home. BELLE is in the kitchen preparing dinner. PHILIP is talking to a picture of his mother on the table in the living room. BEN, now played by STAGE MANAGER, enters through the kitchen door.

BEN

Hi mom. Smells like breaded veal chops.

BELLE

That's what it is. Did you wipe your feet?

BEN

Yes I wiped my feet. Where's dad?

BELLE

In the living room.

(BEN walks into the living room to find his father talking to a picture of his mother on the table. Ben stands there for a minute watching this in disbelief, his father oblivious to BEN's presence.)

BEN

Hey dad, who are you talking to?

(PHILIP continues to talk to photograph.)

BEN

(voice grows louder with frustration)
Dad, dad, what are you doing? Who are you talking to?
(Grabs father with both hands on the shoulders,
PHILIP turns around.)

PHILIP

Oh, hi Benj, when did you come in?

BEN

A couple of minutes ago. Dad, who are you talking to?

PHILIP

My mother, there she is. Boy what a woman, what a sweet person.

BEN

Dad, you're talking to a picture of your mother, not your mother.

PHILIP

You know, after she died I couldn't pass a cemetery on the road without crying.
(PHILIP turning to the picture, speaking
again to his mother. BEN walks quickly back
into the kitchen.)

BEN

Mom, what the hell is dad doing talking to a picture of his mother? When did he start doing that?

BELLE

Well, he's been doing it for several months. If you came over or called more often, you'd know about your father's condition.

BEN

Condition? What condition? What are you talking about? I was just out with dad last weekend, we went to the track. He was fine.

BELLE

Well, for the most part he is fine. But if you were with him for 24 hours, you'd see things like your seeing today. And it seems to be getting worse. Sam Hartman thinks he may be getting senile. Or it may be something Sam called Alzheimer's.

BEN

Alzheimer's? What the hell is that? When did you go to Dr Hartman?

BELLE

I didn't go see him, I called Sam on the phone. Sam suggested I take your father to see a psychiatrist for an evaluation.

BEN

Psychiatrist? Evaluation? What the hell's going on?

BELLE

Don't start raising your voice. I don't want your father to hear this. What's going on? What's going on is your father's getting old, and it's difficult for me to see this happening. It's difficult to take care of your dad at times and you mister big shot, Mr. World Traveler, should understand that, and spend a little more time with your parents. Who knows how much more time we have?

BEN

Mom, please don't start with the guilt trip - I don't come over enough, or call you enough. Not now.

BELLE

The guilt trip? I make you feel guilty? I've been keeping your father's condition from you for months. Look at me, I've lost 15 pounds this last year. Do you know why Mr. Guilty? You see your father talking to a picture, and you get all excited and upset. Good, that's how you should feel. But don't talk to me about any guilt trip. I make you feel guilty by saying you might want to spend more time visiting your parents. Did I make you feel guilty when you decided to go into the Peace Corps and India for Two years? Did I ask you not to go?

BEN

No Ma, you didn't.

BELLE

Then you went to work in Paris for a year, did I try in any way to stop you?

BEN

No ma, you were supportive of both.

BELLE

Then don't give me the guilty Jewish mother lecture, Ben, not now. Your father is getting senile, and it may get worse, and we will eventually have to do something. It's even worse than talking to pictures.

BEN

What do you mean worse?

BELLE

Well, I'm afraid to tell you, you'll accuse me of the guilty mishigas.

BEN

C'mon Ma, what do you mean its even worse?

BELLE

Last night I got up at three in the morning and your father was sitting in the living room chair with two steak knives, one in each hand.

BEN

Jesus Christ!

BELLE

Just sitting there wide awake, with two steak knives.

BEN

What did you do?

BELLE

I just took them away and he got up and went back to bed.

BEN

Oh god mom, we've got to do something. You can't live like this. It may even be dangerous. Does Bess know?

BELLE

No I haven't told anyone about last night. But he wakes up early in the morning, and turns on the stove to make tea, and then sometimes leaves the stove on, so I have to wake up and turn the stove off after he gets back in bed. Ben, sometimes he doesn't even recognize himself in the mirror, and asks who the stranger is in the house. I think that's why he got the steak knives last night.

I absolutely dread when the social security check comes every month. He accuses me of trying to steal his social security money. I don't know what I'm going to do. Forty two years of a wonderful marriage, and now this.

(PHILIP come into kitchen)

PHILIP

Belle, aren't Bess and Richard and the kids coming over tonight.

BELLE

Yes, honey. They'll be here after dinner, about 7.

PHILIP

Good, I want to talk to Richard, about the Cashway account. You know I sold old man Cashway when he had one little store just outside Akron, in Cuyahoga Falls back in the early fifties. Boy have they ever grown. Can't afford to lose Cashway.

(Turning to BEN)

Benjie, I told you when you came back from India to come into the business with your brother-in-law. It would just get bigger and bigger. Eventually, you'll see, I'll be right. Eventually we'll all get rich from roof coating.

BEN

Well, dad you might be right, but I like what I'm doing. I make a decent living, and there wasn't much use for a chemical engineer in the business.

BELLE

Ben's happy Phil, that's what's important.

(Lights dim and then go off, then quickly on again like a flashbulb from a camera. The scene is frozen, and then goes dark.

STAGE MANAGER walks from darkness into a spotlight on the dark stage.)

STAGE MANAGER

Well, that's how the nightmare began. Exactly like that, an innocent visit to the folks for dinner. And it just got worse, fast. That weekend we visited the psychiatrist, and his diagnosis was Senile Dementia, just a couple of code words for Alzheimer's. The doctor could only warn us what was to happen. He called it a mishigas, which a loose translation from the Yiddish would be a craziness.

That doesn't come close to capturing what this disease can do - mostly to the family of the loved one afflicted. I hope that doesn't sound too harsh. My dad got real bad that weekend, started lashing out at the "Guy" he saw in the mirror. It had been too much for my mom the entire year, when she lost all that weight. Now it just became dangerous for her, and so we got the doctor on the phone that weekend, and dad was sent to Mt Sinai hospital's psychiatric ward.

We were told he couldn't stay there more than three weeks. The insurance wouldn't pay for more than that. We would have to find a suitable nursing home. The really difficult part of these initial stages of the disease, was that half the time dad kind of knew where he was and who we were, and during these periods he would constantly want to know when he was going home. We would have to pretend all was well, he would be home soon. But soon the three weeks were up and we had to take him to a nursing home, knowing he would probably never see his home again. And so the real mishigas begins.

(Lights out on STAGE MANAGER. The stage is completely dark and silent.

SCENE: The Manor Nursing home. People and patients in chairs milling about.

The Kaplowitz family enters. BELLE and PHIL are walking hand in hand. BESS and BENJIE follow.)

BESS

(agitated)

Who are we suppose to meet here? I forget her name. What's her name again Mom, I forget it. I wrote it down. Goddamnit, where's that piece of paper.

BEN

Jesus Christ, would you calm down a little, you're making me nervous as hell.

BESS

Oh shut up Benjie. Making you nervous.

BELLE

(turning around speaking in a hushed but firm voice)

Both of you keep quiet. This isn't easy for any of us.

PHILIP

What are the kids arguing about Belle?

BELLE

Nothing honey, don't worry, everything is fine.

PHILIP

Boy this looks like a pretty fancy resort. It must cost a fortune. Where are we Belle? Let's go home. I want to go home already. I've got to go to Buffalo with Richard Monday to see Stransky.

BELLE

We will honey, but first, until you get better you have to stay here a little longer. Excuse me, (speaking to a lady in a white uniform) is Mrs. Whittington here? We're here to see her about admitting Mr. Kaplowitz.

LADY IN UNIFORM

She's in her office, I'll tell her you're here.

BELLE

Thank you.

(Family very uncomfortably looks around as they wait for MRS. WHITTINGTON. MRS. WHITTINGTON soon appears, smiling broadly and extending her hand to BELLE)

MRS WHITINGTON

Hello Mrs. Kaplowitz, Mr. Kaplowitz, so nice to meet you.

BELLE

This is my daughter Bess and my son Benjie.

MRS WHITINGTON

Hello, nice to meet you.

BESS and BEN

Hi.

MRS WHITINGTON

Now, Mrs. Kaplowitz, I understand from the forms you filled out, you will not be using Medicare or Medicaid, except for the medical assistance and prescription medicines Mr. Kaplowitz needs?

BELLE

That's correct.

MRS WHITINGTON

Have you seen the room Mr. Kaplowitz will be staying in?

BELLE

Yes, we saw it last week when we came here.

MRS WHITINGTON

OK, fine then. I'm sure you'll find everything at Manor House to your satisfaction. (Turning to PHILIP) I think you'll like it here just fine Mr. Kaplowitz. We have all kinds of activities here, and tomorrow Mr. Kaplowitz, the Mentor High School choir will be here. I'm sure you'll enjoy that.

PHILIP

(oblivious to everything being said, turns to his wife)

I don't see many Jews here, Belle.

BESS

(nervous laughter, trying to stop laughing)

Do you believe dad, he's right, I don't see a Jewish face. God, I hope we can get him into Montefiore or Meyers.

BEN

They said the waiting list was over a year.

(One of the nursing home patients comes up to the family and talks to BELLE)

1ST RESIDENT

You gotta cigarette for Tony Piazza?

MRS WHITINGTON

Now Tony, we don't bum cigarettes from our guests.

TONY

OK, Nobody knows, just Major Bow's.

(TONY walks away repeating the last statement and continues repeating it periodically till the end of the scene.)

2ND RESIDENT

(From across the room, in a thick New Jersey, New York accent, addressed to BEN)

Hey Mister, Hey sonny. Hey mister, hey sonny, c'mere, c'mere, c'mere.

(Also repeated periodically throughout the rest of this scene.)

MRS WHITINGTON

(Noting PHILIP is getting agitated)

Mrs. Kaplowitz, it's best if you don't stay too long this first day, so we can get Mr. Kaplowitz accustomed and acclimated to his new surroundings.

BELLE

Can we comeback tomorrow?

MRS WHITINGTON

Oh sure Mrs. Kaplowitz, you can come and visit anytime. It's just that we find the first day is a bit difficult for everyone, and it's best if we just get your husband acclimated as soon as possible.

BELLE

We'll just say good-bye and we'll be back tomorrow afternoon.

MRS WHITINGTON

Oh sure Mrs. Kaplowitz, take your time.

(MRS WHITINGTON walks over to another family and patient)

BELLE

Bess, Benjie, c'mon, let's say good-bye to your father.

BEN

We can stay a little longer, mom. We don't have to go so soon.

BELLE

Mrs. Whittington says its better if we leave now so they can get your father better acclimated to the new surroundings. C'mon let's say good-bye.

(First BESS, then BENJIE, than BELLE say good-bye
and hug and kiss their father/husband)

BESS

Good-bye dad.

BEN

Good-bye dad, see you tomorrow.

BELLE

Good-bye Phil, see you tomorrow honey.

PHILIP

(obviously agitated)

Wait a minute, where are you going? I'm going with you.

(BELLE, BESS and BEN try to leave but
PHILIP follows.)

PHILIP

I'm not staying here without you.

BELLE

No honey, you stay here till you get better. We'll be back tomorrow.

(MRS WHITINGTON, seeing this scene, gets
two male orderlies to go over and
physically restrain PHILIP, as the family
turns to leave the nursing home. BELLE turns
around to see her husband restrained and speaks.)

BELLE

Don't worry dear, everything will be alright.

PHILIP

(As a moment of clarity returns)

Belle, when am I going home again? When will I see my home again?

(Scene is frozen in time as lights flash
on and off like a flashbulb from a camera.

The scene goes dark. Time passes.

STAGE MANAGER emerges from the darkness
to a spotlight on the stage.)

STAGE MANAGER

That look on my father's face, like his whole family was abandoning him, has never entirely been erased from my memory. We had a huge argument on the ride back to mom's house, me and my sister. Born from the frustration of the moment and the helplessness we all felt which we expressed as anger, mostly misdirected at each other.

Somehow we managed to get through it. Mom visited Dad daily at Manor Nursing Home. My sister and I visited on alternate days so mom would never have to go alone. And of course, dad kept getting worse physically and mentally. It was the mental deterioration that was horrible to watch.

You know, its funny, one of the things I remember most from those visits at the nursing home was that goddamn smell that I brought home to my apartment. That incredible awful goddamn odor of disinfectant combined with urine and feces. Jesus that was awful! They tried to mask the urine feces smell with a powerful detergent of some kind, but instead of masking the odor, it just combined with it to produce something even worse. And I just couldn't escape that smell.

Even when I came home I could smell that odor, it was on my cloths or something, even after I washed them, I still could faintly smell that goddamn nursing home.

We would take my dad out of the nursing home as often as we could, but never took him back to his home, as advised. So, we went to my apartment or my sister's home. Each time his readjustment to the nursing home was difficult, and the nursing home administration asked us not to take him out so frequently.

For the amount of money we were paying, we figured screw the nursing home, and we paid no attention to their requests. In retrospect I'm glad we didn't. Their charges were preposterous, especially the medical charges. At first you feel helpless, and at the mercy of the nursing home. One unscrupulous shrink was actually charging for weekly one hour visits with my dad. It's all part of the "mishigas".

Eventually, dad's condition worsened, and the nursing home said they could no longer take care of him, and we would have to find another home equipped to care for Alzheimer's patients. Today, of course, Alzheimer's being so prevalent in the elderly, almost every home cares for the Alzheimer's patient.

Back in the late seventies, the public had hardly heard of Alzheimer's, and so very few facilities in the area would handle these patients. After almost 6 months at Manor Nursing Home, we had to find another one, and eventually found one in Cleveland Heights that was willing to accept him. It wasn't the Margaret Wagner Home, but one close by, on Cedar road, just past where Fairmount Boulevard cuts into Cedar. He was only there a couple of weeks when I got the following call:

(Stage goes completely black. A telephone
rings. The stage stays black and only voices
are heard.)

BEN

H.K. Ferguson Company, Ben Kaplowitz.

NURSING HOME ADMINISTRATOR

Mr. Kaplowitz, this is Bob Kennedy at the nursing home. I need to see you about your dad...

BEN

Is he alright?

MR KENNEDY

Yes, nothing to worry about there, but we have a problem and I'm afraid we won't be able to take care of him. I tried to call your mother and sister but couldn't get hold of them.

BEN

Yes, they're out of town for the weekend. Well, I guess we'll start looking for a place as soon as possible.

MR KENNEDY

I don't think you understand Mr. Kaplowitz. We found your father wandering out on Cedar road this morning, and unless he is permanently restrained, we can't take care of him. We don't restrain or drug our patients here like that, I'm afraid you'll have to come down right away to get him.

BEN

Get him? Jesus Christ, where can I take him?

MR KENNEDY

I have already called Winston Hospital in Chardon, and they said they can take him. They are expecting you this afternoon. If you'll just come down and sign the required papers, we can discharge your dad this afternoon.

BEN

What is Winston Hospital?

MR KENNEDY

It's a very fine psychiatric hospital, where they're equipped to handle patients like your dad.

BEN

I'll be there in half an hour.

(SCENE: A dark stage with a spotlight on PHILIP just wandering back and forth talking to himself about how he's going back on the road, selling roof-coating. He's mumbling something about Tom Sullivan.

BEN enters from the shadows and greets his

father. BEN embraces PHILIP)

PHILIP

Hi Benj. Where's your wife, is she coming?

BEN

(with great frustration, bordering on anger)

I'm not married dad, that's your wife, not mine. Oh God. C'mon, we've got to see Mr. Kennedy.

PHILIP

Hey, Tom Sullivan is here, he looks good.

BEN

Tom Sullivan? You mean he came here to visit you?

PHILIP

No he works here, he runs the joint.

BEN

OK dad, c'mon, we've got to see Mr. Kennedy.

PHILIP

Well, let's get going, we can still get to Buffalo if we leave early.

(**SCENE:** A simple desk with two chairs with
MR KENNEDY sitting behind a desk.

MR KENNEDY gets up to greet BEN and PHILIP.

During this entire scene, PHILIP is oblivious to anything being said between BEN and MR KENNEDY, and is constantly talking about going back on the road, selling roof-coating. PHILIP's soliloquy is continuous at different volumes throughout the scene.)

MR KENNEDY

Ben, thanks for coming on such short notice. Please sit down and look these documents over. They're pretty standard release forms, just to say your dad hasn't been harmed here and his health is ok, etc. Take your time, look them over and sign them at the bottom next to my signature. Please write in the date.

PHILIP

(continuously talking throughout)

First, we'll stop in Erie and call on the Cashway yard. Talked to Cecil yesterday and he said that the Erie yard could use some driveway topping. . .

BEN

Was he just wandering out on Cedar this morning?

MR KENNEDY

Yeah, said he was trying to catch a bus for Waterloo Road. We brought him back.

PHILIP

Benj, ask Tom if the aluminum paste is coming this week.

MR KENNEDY

He keeps calling me Tom, like he recognizes me for someone else.

BEN

Well, you look exactly like someone my dad knew from the business, Tom Sullivan. Actually, you're a dead ringer for him. That's why he's talking about going back on the road and selling. You're reminding him of the business. He was trying to go to Waterloo Road this morning because that's where the factory is.

PHILIP

After Erie we should get into Buffalo, early enough to still see Stranski. I've known that Polack for 50 years. Had a little store, crappy as hell, junk all over the place. C'mon Benj we got to get going.

BEN

(pleading)

Isn't there any way we can hold off till after the weekend, Mr. Kennedy? Until my mom and sister get back from Toronto?

MR KENNEDY

I don't think so Ben. We're just not equipped to handle your dad. It's too dangerous. We've had to cover the mirror in his room completely. He gets so agitated when he sees himself in the mirror, doesn't recognize himself. Thinks it's some gangster coming to get him and his wife. Gets very belligerent and upsets the other patients.

It won't take you long to get there. Winston is just 20 minutes from here. Right on Wilson Mills road, just before you get into Chardon. On the left.

PHILIP

I know I can sell again if they just give me the chance. The stuff's a natural, almost sells itself. Boy, that driveway topping is the nuts. I make sure the lumber yards put it right up front. They let me do that, I've known those guys so long. You've got to

sell FOR the customer Benj, not TO the customer. I learned that from Harry Schaefer back at American Safety Razor during the Depression.

Now there was a salesman, I learned everything from Harry. "Never sell TO a customer, sell FOR a customer" Harry would always say. I've told that to Richard. C'mon let's go we can be in Buffalo before...

BEN

I don't know if I can do this Mr. Kennedy. You know, putting my dad in a place like Winston? I mean it's a mental hospital isn't it? Jesus, how can I put my dad in a place like that for Christ's sake?

(Voice starting to break, frustration building)

MR KENNEDY

(growing impatient and wanting to get rid of the Kaplowitz's)

Ben, I can't keep him here. Not even for this weekend. Winston is a fine hospital. They have experience with these kinds of patients.

BEN

Well, will he be drugged? Will he be in a locked ward?

MR KENNEDY

Ben, I have no way of knowing.

BEN

Maybe I'll just take him back to my apartment.

MR KENNEDY

Do what you want. I wouldn't advise that, Ben. Your dad needs 24 hour attention, and you can't keep him at your place indefinitely. Eventually you'll have to place him in a facility that can care for him.

BEN

But I checked with some people at work. Winston is a psychiatric hospital, with locked wards. For schizophrenics and nuts. Jesus, it's nothing but a fucking insane asylum.

MR KENNEDY

Now Ben, we don't appreciate that kind of language around here.

PHILIP

(Somewhat agitated)

Now, c'mon Benj. Let's say good-bye to Tom Sullivan. Call your wife, Belle and tell her we've got to go out of town today. Got to get some orders. We've got to get to Cashway, and Stranski and maybe even Joey Goldstein today.

BEN

(erupting)

No dad, goddamnit. We're not going to Cashway or Stranski or Joey Goldstein today, and you can't go back on the goddamn road. Don't you understand that? Don't you understand anything? I'm not married to your wife, Belle, for Christ's sake. That's YOUR wife, not my wife, YOUR WIFE!! Her name is Belle. You've been married to her for 42 years. Your wife. I'm not married. Do you understand me dad? Do you understand anything dad?

(PHILIP looks completely confused)

We're getting out of here and going to Winston hospital. It's a goddamn insane asylum, right Mr. Kennedy? We're going to put you in a goddamn insane asylum. That's where Philip Kaplowitz is going to wind up, in a goddamn fucking insane asylum.

(BEN is now crying and hugging his father,
who still looks confused.)

MR KENNEDY

Mr. Kaplowitz, please watch your language, we have some very fine people staying with us, and their families may be visiting. I'm going to have to shut the door. . .

BEN

Oh fuck your fine families Mr. Kennedy. C'mon dad, we're getting out of here.

(Lights go out. The stage is dark as
time passes.

BEN's voice is heard coming out of the
darkness.)

BEN'S VOICE

Winston Hospital was everything I was afraid it might be. Locked wards, drugged patients, patients screaming or muttering to themselves. It was a nightmare. Part of the Mishigas. Just another stop before mercifully it all ended.

Philip Kaplowitz, unlike his mother and father and brothers and sisters, didn't die where he was suppose to, Mt Sinai Hospital, Cleveland, Ohio. No, he died at Castle Nursing Home in Millersburgh, Ohio March 15, 1980. He was 80 years old.

They didn't catch us before we left Cleveland for our weekly drive Sunday, to see him. So, we entered the nursing home expecting to see dad wheeled in to the lobby half drugged, head slumped over to the side resting on his chest. This time one of the Amish who worked at the home showed up by herself. It was obvious from the expression on her face what had happened that morning.

It was finally over, and do you know how I felt? I felt relieved. We all felt relieved, the mishigas was finally over.

(sigh of relief)

(House lights are turned up to a bare stage)

ANNOUNCER (NOT BEN'S VOICE)

Act three will begin in approximately 10 minutes. We remind you to please put your shoes back on if you took them off. Thank you.

INTERMISSION

ACT III

(The stage is dark.

“Since I Don’t Have You” begins, with its classical opening, violins and strings.

“I don’t have plans and schemes and I don’t have hopes and dreams. I don’t have anything, since I don’t have you. . .”

After the first verse plays through, a spotlight shines on stage as if the STAGE MANAGER is expected.

The spotlight tracks to the back of the theater and reveals the man who argued with BEN and the women who dance with BEN. They have begun to enter the theater and look embarrassed to be coming in late and caught in the spotlight, like deer caught in headlights. They act embarrassed and begin to speak.)

MAN

Where the hell have you been, the play is starting.

WOMAN

Shhh! Not so loud, everyone can hear you. Did you see those damn lines for the women's bathroom?

MAN

Ok just follow me.

(He starts dancing with his wife)

WOMAN

What the hell are you doing? Are you nuts? There's a play going on. Why don't they take the damn spotlight off us?

MAN

Look just follow me, OK

(With nothing to lose, they begin to slow dance. It’s supposed to look very innocent and natural.)

The spotlight goes off them. The STAGE MANAGER enters from the side and the spotlight shines him as he pretends to dance with a partner until the song ends.)

STAGE MANAGER

(Looking at the couple)

That'll teach you to come late to my third act. By the way, nice job dancing. C'mon let's give them a hand, even if they don't deserve to be rewarded for coming back late. (Begins to clap)

Is that song great or what? You know, it doesn't have a damn thing to do with anything, I just love that song. It always puts me in a good mood. I was peering through the curtain when our couple was dancing down the aisle, and saw the expression on some of your faces. Looked like the old Friday night canteen dances at Plymouth Church.

Looked like some of you wanted to take your partner and get up and dance. Next time that feeling hits you, just get up and dance. Don't worry about the play, we're flexible, we'll wait till you finish.

Well, like I said it doesn't really have anything to do with anything except it makes me, and evidently some of you, feel good. Nothing wrong with just feeling good is there?

Besides, I needed that. I needed that feeling, and what better song to evoke those great feelings, when the only real anxiety we had back then was whether Judy Stone would shoot us down when we finally got enough nerve to walk across the dance floor at Plymouth Church and asked her to dance.

Well, if my calculations are correct, and they should be with a master's in Mathematics, I calculated the sun has since come up and set over 7000 times - 7306 to be precise, and that includes all the leap years. You can figure out where we are now, and where we are now, is now.

(Couple takes their seats. The only light on stage is the spotlight on the STAGE MANAGER.

A doorbell rings.)

BESS

(talking to herself)

Who the hell is that now? I've got to get the damn turkey in the oven, set the table, clean the bathrooms. Jesus.

DELIVERY BOY

Flowers for Bess Kates.

STAGE MANAGER

Those are the flowers I send my sister every Thanksgiving for the dinner at her place. We've been having it at my sister's since my dad died. Hey, (looking at his watch) I gotta get going, gotta be there in a couple of hours.

(STAGE MANAGER starts to walk off stage as
"Mozart's Concertante for Violin and Viola",
Third Movement softly begins to play.

STAGE MANAGER comes back on stage.)

(In disbelief)

Do you hear that music my sister is playing? It's Mozart. And by the way, in keeping with the Cleveland theme, it's the Cleveland Orchestra, featuring Raphael Druian on violin, and Abraham Skernick, on the viola. Mozart and the Cleveland Orchestra, and Szell - what could be better than that.

(Pretends to be conducting the orchestra)

Ok you can turn this one up a bit.

(Motioning to the stage hands. Stage left,
sound is increased considerably.)

Louder! Is that Mozart a goddamn genius or what?

(Continues conducting the orchestra)

Ok, Ok, enough of that. Now there's definitely something wrong with this picture. Remember about forty years ago back on Lindholm Road in Shaker Heights, when I was in the cool of the recreation room basement, practicing the Mozart Clarinet Concerto, and my sister was upstairs in her bedroom blasting Earth Angel? Well do you see this CD I just bought at Best Buy? (Holds up CD)

You know what it is? It's a four disc package of Doo Wop Music. You know those Rhino Records CD's they sometimes advertise on TV? Golden Oldies from the past. I'm using it for a project I'm trying to develop. But do you see the damn irony here? Now I'm listening to the Penguins and she's going to the Cleveland Orchestra to hear Mozart. She's actually got season tickets to the orchestra. She can barely carry a tune to save her life. Never played a musical instrument.

Bess Kaplowitz Kates - in sixth grade the music teacher told her to just mouth the words at graduation ceremonies from elementary school when it came time to sing. You figure it all out. I gotta go.

(Stage goes black. Scene opens.

SCENE: Bare stage supposed to look like a living room, but in direct tribute to Wilder's "Our Town", only tables and chairs set up. No visual scenery.

We are at a family gathering for Thanksgiving,
waiting for the family to show up.

Mozart is still playing loudly in the

background.)

BESS

(Straightening out the chairs, dusting,
looking frustrated and busy cleaning.)
Richard, who's picking your mother up tonight?

RICHARD

(from off stage)
Peter said he would, after he picks up Robbie from the airport.

BESS

What was that?

RICHARD

Turn that damn record player down and you'll be able to hear me.

BESS

It's not a record player, it's a CD player, dear.
(Turns down the sound.)

RICHARD

Peter said he would, after he picks up Robbie from the airport.

BESS

When was Robbie's plane supposed to be in?

RICHARD

Two. They should be here already. It's almost 3:30.

(Doorbell rings.

ROBBIE, PETER and RICHARD's mother RUTH come
out of the dark stage. ROBBIE and PETER wipe
their feet.)

ROBBIE

Hi mom.

BESS

Hi Rob. How was the flight? Wipe your feet, I just cleaned the kitchen.

ROBBIE

Never travel on Thanksgiving. Its a mad house everywhere.
(ROBBIE turns to PETER, and in a quieter voice)
You owe me five bucks. I told you the first thing she'd say is "wipe your feet".

BESS

Very funny, I heard that. Who's "she"?

ROBBIE

Oh Mom, we're just kidding.
(ROBBIE hugs her mother)

BESS

Where's grandma Ruth?

ROBBIE

She's coming, she's getting something from the car.

BESS

Peter, you go help your grandmother.

ROBBIE

Where's dad?

BESS

Down the basement fooling around with his golf clubs.
Richard are you coming up here today?

RICHARD

I'll be right up. Hi Rob.

ROBBIE

Hi dad.

(RUTH and PETER enter from the shadows.)

RUTH

Hi Bess.

PETER

Hi mom.

BESS

Hi Ruth. Peter, go downstairs and help your father bring up two bridge chairs.

(PETER hugs BESS and disappears into darkness.
He reappears with RICHARD and two bridge chairs.)

RICHARD

(Hugs and kisses Robbie)

Hi Rob, how was the trip?

ROBBIE

New York was a mad house, and Cleveland was its usual mess. Never travel Thanksgiving day if you can help it.

RICHARD

Why didn't you come in yesterday, like you usually do?

BESS

That goddamn law-firm she works for had her writing briefs until ten last night.

ROBBIE

Its slave labor the first few years.

PETER

You love it Robbie.

RICHARD

Want a drink mom?

RUTH

Yeah Richard, make me a Vodka and orange juice.

RICHARD

What did you shoot today Peter?

ROBBIE

You played golf today? It was freezing this morning in New York.

PETER

It was pretty cold when we started, but it warmed up into the 50's by late morning. I shot great, an 83.

(Doorbell rings)

BESS

Robbie, get the door. It's probably Dorothy and Ruby.

(ROBBIE walks into the darkness and re-enters
with RUBY and DOROTHY.)

BESS

Hi Dorothy. Hi Ruby.

DORTOBY

Hi Bess.

RUBY

Hi Bess.

DOROTHY

Hi Ruth.

RUTH

Hello Dorothy.

(Doorbell rings.)

BESS

Robbie or Peter, get the door.

(PETER comes back with MIKE and MARGIE)

BESS

Hi Margie, hi Mike. How's the foot business? I've got a problem with my arch, from running.

MIKE

Great, more free consulting. I'll look at it after dinner. You know I'm semi-retired now.

MARGIE

Yeah, he only goes downtown to the office three times a week. Bess, what is that music playing, its beautiful.

BESS

It's Mozart. Sinfonia Concertante. Richard and I are going to hear it tomorrow with the Cleveland Orchestra.

MIKE

Where's Richard? I want to put driveway topping on before the winter.

MARGIE

Bess, the house is beautiful, when did you move in?

BESS

We moved in the end of September.

MIKE

I see you're putting in a deck out back.

BESS

Yeah, at first we didn't think we needed one, with the kids gone, but we decided to add it on before the winter.

(Everyone is now sitting in the "living room")
Mike, Margie, Dorothy, Ruby, anything to drink?
(All decline)

DOROTHY
Bess, the house is beautiful.

MARGIE
It is Bess, it's lovely.

BESS
Thanks.

MIKE
Hey Richard, looks like the roof-coating business is OK.

RICHARD
Can't complain, Mike. It's been awfully good these last few years.

(Doorbell rings.

ROZZIE walks in from the shadows.)

ROZZIE
The door was wide open, so I just walked right in.

BESS
Rozzie. (They hug) You all know my friend Rozzie Beiderman.

ROZZIE
Bess, the house is absolutely beautiful. Boy, it sure seems like a long way from Lindholm Road. Are your mom and Benjie here?

BESS
They haven't come yet. They're usually here an hour before everybody else.

MIKE
Yeah, Benjie's always giving it to me for being late.

DOROTHY
(speaking softly to RUBY)
Rozzie is one of Bess' oldest and dearest friends. I don't think she ever got married.

ROBBIE

How come Uncle and Grandma are so late ?

BESS

I don't know. My brother's been acting pretty strange lately. He's writing a play.

MIKE

A play? You gotta be kidding. What the hell is he writing about? He better keep his day job.

BESS

Actually it's about our family. It's really pretty good, you know, for a chemical engineer. He seems to be obsessed with it.

(Doorbell rings)

BESS

There they are. Is the door still open? Get the door Robbie.

(ROBBIE, RUBBIE and BELLE enter the
living room as everyone greets them.
BENJIE is surprised to see ROZZIE.)

BEN

Rozzie Beiderman!! (They embrace) Bess, you didn't say anything about Rozzie coming for dinner. Rozzie, I was just over by the old neighborhood, drove right by your home on Sudberry. I think it was your home, middle of the street, the only single family, all brick. Still looks pretty good.

ROZZIE

Yeah that's the one. Hi Mrs. Kaplowitz.
(ROZZIE and BELLE embrace)

BELLE

Hi Roz, how's your mom and dad.

ROZZIE

Fine, they're at my brother's in New Jersey for the holiday.

(ROZZIE wanders around, looking at the house.
She comes upon a poem hanging on the wall,
and reads it aloud.)

ROZZIE

Books are keys to wisdom's treasure
Books are gates to lands of pleasure
Books are paths that upward lead

Books are friends, come let us read
Hey Bess, this poem's familiar, where did you get this?

BESS

Benjie had it made for me when we moved into the house. Don't you remember, we had to learn that poem for Miss Snow's class in 7th grade?

ROZZIE

God, that's right. She made us recite poetry every Friday. Benjie did you have Miss Snow too?

BENJIE

Oh yeah, I sure did. Hazel Snow, 7th grade English. Section 7-Z, the dummies' section. Boy, Fridays were a riot when John Piazza, and Alan Pazetsky had to recite poetry.

DOROTHY

You guys had Miss Snow too. Both my sons had her. They hated her. She must have been at Woodbury Junior high for 100 years. She wanted to fail both my sons. Terrible teacher.

BENJIE

I don't think so.

BESS

Neither do I.

ROZZIE

I thought she was great.

BELLE

Well, here you kids are some 40 years latter talking about her and her poetry. Looks like Miss Snow did something right. Where ever she is, she must be smiling.

BESS

Boy, high school has changed a lot since we went.

ROBBIE

Oh, c'mon mom, this isn't going to be another one of those "when I went to school" lectures.

BESS

No, but things are a lot different now than when your uncle and I went to school.

PETER

How so?

BESS

Well, for one thing, when your uncle or I came home from school and complained how a teacher screwed us, it meant they gave an impossible test, or graded unfairly or gave too much homework. Nowadays, if your kid comes home from school and says their teacher screwed them, first thing you gotta do is get a lawyer, cause that's literally what they probably did, SCREW them.

MIKE

(sarcastically)

Ok, enough about school past and present. Hey Benjie, I hear you're writing a play. What's it about?

BENJIE

My sister's got a big mouth, huh. (Equally sarcastically) Well Mike, it's about you, of course.

MIKE

About me? What do ya mean it's about me?

BENJIE

Well Mike, it's a musical. Actually, a musical tragedy. It's about a podiatrist who has to stop working because of a foot fetish.

MIKE

(continuing the sarcasm)

Really. Are you writing original music?

BENJIE

No, no Mike. I'm writing song parodies, like "I've Got You Under My Foot."

BELLE

Go ahead Mike, schpilsach with Benjie Kaplowitz.

PETER

What does schpilsach mean grandma.

BELLE

Literally it means play with, or fool around with. It's a shame that my children and grand-children have such little knowledge of Yiddish.

BESS

That's not really true, mom. I mean, we can't really speak it or anything, but we've heard a lot of Yiddish and know a lot of expressions.

BEN

Yeah, mom. And what about those two weeks we spent at Camp Vladic, that Yiddish camp you sent us to back in the 50's. Hell, they sang nothing but Yiddish songs at that camp.

BESS

Boy, was that a camp.

MARGIE

You sent the kids to camp Vladic, Bell? I was thinking of sending Kenny there one year. Wasn't that run by the Workman's Circle.

MIKE

The Workman's Circle? Weren't they a bunch of communists?

BELLE

Don't be so funny, Mike. They weren't communists. Maybe they were a bit socialistic. My father was a member of the Workman's Circle.

MIKE

Communists, Socialists, they're the same thing. They sang Yiddish songs at the camp?

BESS

I don't know Mom. We had to call our counselors Comrade.

BELLE

Another comedian. Don't be so cute. It was a nice camp, and after the War it was all your father and I could afford.

BENJIE

Hey, mom, easy. We're just kidding. It was kind of a weird place, though. Most of our classmates were coming back from summer camps in Wyoming and Vermont, singing "Michael Row Your Boat Ashore." We learned "Micky Meisel Micky Moise"

BESS and BENJIE

(sing together)

Micky Meisel Micky Moise, cooms arinin gay a voiz.

BENJIE

Remember the camp song?

BESS

Sure.

BESS and BENJIE

(BESS sings first, than BENJIE joins in)
"Vladic Camp avelta neigh eye, full mit yungen una frie eh, ala kinderla ..."

BESS
See mom, we know a lot of Yiddish.

BENJIE
If you couple that with all those Barry Sister's songs we learned while you were cleaning the house.

(BEN and BESS sing again. First BENJIE,
then BESS sings along.)
"Shanella, shean meada shaena meada, sheanalla, Yuch such, such ..."

DORTHY
(in amazement)
Hey Bell, your kids know a lot of Yiddish.

BELLE
They're just being cute, Dorothy. Don't humor them, please. We never should have moved to Shaker Heights. I raised a couple of snobs.

BESS
Oh, c'mon mom. Where's your sense of humor?

BENJIE
Hey Bess, I see you decided to put in a deck.(aside) I think we better change the subject, fast.

BESS
Yeah, at first I wasn't going to put one in, but everyone around here has a deck.

BENJIE
Well, there's a hell of a good reason to put one in. How come no one built decks back in the 50's? They sure were a hell of a lot simpler than Knotty Pine recreation rooms.

RUBY
Did you guys have a knotty pine rec room too? That's the first thing we put in our home, wasn't it Dorothy?

MARGIE
We put one in too, remember Mike? First year after we moved into our home on Lomond.

MIKE

That was the status symbol of the 50's. Now I guess its the deck. Go figure.

BENJIE

Wait a minute Mike. Since when was the knotty pine rec room a status symbol? The 90's redwood deck is a status symbol, but not the Knotty Pine rec room. First of all, no one knew you had a rec room until they came into your house and you brought them down to the basement.

BESS

You know, you're all nuts. The deck is the status symbol of the 90's home? Richard, you can join in here and help me anytime.

BENJIE

No, I think Mike, in his perverse reasoning, has a point. All our neighbors eventually put in a knotty pine rec room. The Hirsch's had one, the Lustig's had one, the Deuch's, the Sniders. They all put in a knotty pine rec room. The difference is that we really used the rec room as a center for the family gathering. Remember Bess, we moved the television down there. We used it both in the winter and the summer. There was nothing phony about the knotty pine rec room. Now the deck, that's another story. What the hell do you use the deck for?

BESS

My brother is nuts and so are you Mike. We'll use the deck for lots of activities.

BEN

Name one.

BESS

How about for sunning?

BEN

You need a deck to set out a lounge chair and take in the sun? Used to be able to just use the driveway, or the back yard. I mean really, they're nice and attractive, but do you really need a deck for anything?

BESS

Oh, so I'm a phony for putting in a deck? Is that what you're insinuating?

BENJIE

Well, you just said a few minutes ago all the neighbors have one, and that's why you're putting one in. Sounds a little like keeping up with the Jones.

BESS

Mother, your son is a complete nut. Look, get married already so you can "fadre" your wife instead of your sister.

PETER

Grandma, what does "fadre" mean?

BESS

Don't worry about "what" fadre means. You and Robbie go downstairs to OUR BOURGEOIS KNOTTY PINE RECREATION ROOM, and bring up Aunt Molly's dishes. They're in the locker.

(ROBBIE and PETER leave the living room
and walk out of the stage lights.

BESS continues)

So let me get this straight, my dearest brother: the deck represents everything phony about the 90's, while the solid middle class values of the 50's knotty pine recreation room represent everything good about the 1950's.

BENJIE

Well, yes. Basically, I think you've got it.

BESS

Mother I think we can clear all this up if you'll just finally tell Benjie the truth. He's over 50, I think he can take the shock.

BELLE

What truth? What are you talking about?

BESS

Just tell Benjie the truth, he was adopted. There's no way we can possibly have the same DNA. That would explain his bizarre behavior and reasoning.

BELLE

You were not adopted, Benjie.

BESS

Hey Roz, you've been awfully quiet through all this. Is my dearest and oldest friend gonna come to my defense, or what?

ROZZIE

Well, my dearest friend, I think the redwood deck -

BESS

Wolmanized.

ROZZIE

Excuse me, Wolmanized. Pretty much symbolizes all the decadence, evil and phoniness of the 90's. Along with all those stupid four wheel drive vehicles. What is with all those 4-wheel drive sport vehicles, anyway?

MIKE

Hey, look. Some bad weather suddenly comes up, and without that forty thousand dollar Range Rover, who knows, you could be stuck in the parking lot at Beachwood Mall all weekend.

BENJIE

Or, you're near Cedar and Warrensville, driving late at night when that rhino comes charging your car from the Kaufmann's parking lot. I'll bet your damn sure glad that car you're in is a Range Rover.

MIKE

What kind of a car did you and Richard just buy, Bess?

BESS

Oh, you're all so very funny, very cute, so very clever - and you're all crazy as hell.

BELLE

(sarcastically)

Where's your sense of humor, dear?

BENJIE

You know, if you keep this up, it's all gonna be in my play.

(Lights dim on the living room scene,
and brighten on PETER and ROBBIE in the
basement, having found some old record's pictures.)

ROBBIE

Hey, Peter, look at these old pictures of Mom and Uncle. Where the hell were these taken?

PETER

(Takes the pictures)

Looks like they were at Disneyland.

ROBBIE

(hollering upstairs at her mother)

Hey, mom, when did you and Uncle go to Disneyland?

(From the darkness of the stage)

BESS

What the hell are you guys doing? I told you to just bring up Aunt Molly's dishes, quit rummaging through all those boxes, you'll just make a mess. And make sure you put the sheets back over the boxes and cover them up. Then, get up here.

PETER

But mom, when did you go to Disneyland? That's where these pictures were taken, weren't they?

BESS

(Talking to mother and brother)

When did we all go to California and visit Uncle Bill and Aunt Adelle?

BENJIE

I think it was my sophomore year in High school. 1960, I think.

BELLE

No, it was just after Uncle Pete died, December of 1959. I remember, your father bought the airline tickets before Pete died. He asked the Rabbi if we should go so soon after Uncle Pete's death.

(ROBBIE and PETER continue rummaging
through memorabilia)

ROBBIE

God, Peter look at these goofy records. Look at the size of the hole in the middle.
(Robbie holds up an old 45) How did they play these things?

PETER

(digs up an old record player with the
45 exchanger already on the center.)

I guess on one of these.

PETER

Wow look at all these old records. What's this one? "Earth Angel" by the Penguins. Hey, these things might be worth a fortune.

ROBBIE

Hey let's set this up and play one.

BESS

(Voice from dark of the stage.)

Would you guys quit messing around and get up here with those dishes? I'm going into the kitchen and get ready to serve dinner in a little while.

(Spotlight now shines on BESS in kitchen
getting dinner ready. Two spotlights
appear on opposite ends of stage, one
on PETER and ROBBIE, the other on BESS,
in the kitchen.

PETER and ROBBIE manage to hook up the old record player, and begin to play “Devil or Angel”.)

BESS

Turn that off and get up here right now.

(RICHARD walks into the kitchen. Spotlight on PETER and ROBBIE turns off. Now, it is only on BESS and RICHARD in Kitchen.

RICHARD

Hey, remember this song. We danced to this at that first fraternity party at Ohio State our freshman year.

(RICHARD starts dancing with BESS)

BESS

Richard! I've got to get dinner ready.

(RICHARD and BESS start to really dance all over the kitchen, while PETER and ROBBIE appear with the dishes.)

ROBBIE

What the hell are you guys doing?

PETER

God, everyone can see you guy's dancing, c'mon.

RICHARD

Look Bess, the kids are embarrassed.

BESS

What's the matter, don't you think your mom and dad ever danced? We were damn good dancers, weren't we honey?

(BESS and RICHARD dance till the end of the song as the spotlight slowly dims to total darkness.
Stage is dark. Silence. Time passes.

Telephone rings, the TELEPHONE OPERATOR answers.)

TELEPHONE OPERATOR

Mount Sinai Hospital, hold a minute please.

(While the phone is on hold, the slow movement of Mozart's "Clarinet Concerto" plays for about 10 or 15 seconds.

The Mount Sinai TELEPHONE OPERATOR comes back on line.)

TELEPHONE OPERATOR

Mount Sinai Hospital, can I help you? Kaplowitz? What is the first name please? Benjamin Kaplowitz? Mr. Kaplowitz's condition is listed as serious. He's in the cardiac intensive care unit. No I'm sorry, Mr. Kaplowitz can't have any visitors, immediate family only.

(**SCENE:** There is a spotlight on a hospital bed in the middle of the stage. BEN is lying in bed with oxygen tubes. There is an Oscilloscope heart monitor and a green sinusoidal wave.

"Beep, beep, beep. . ."

After a while, a woman dressed in a white suit, white shirt and white tie comes out of the darkness and sits on the edge of the bed. She gently begins to shake BEN awake.)

WOMAN IN WHITE SUIT

Ben, Ben Kaplowitz? wake up Ben.

(BEN begins to move and slowly wake up, groggy and uncertain as to his whereabouts.)

BEN

Who are you? Where am I? What happened?

WOMAN IN WHITE SUIT

You're at Mount Sinai Hospital, Ben. You've had a serious heart attack.

(Shaking the cobwebs off a little more, and becoming more aware of his surroundings, now sitting up in bed.)

BEN

Yeah, I remember having this tremendous pain in my left arm. I was having dinner at my nephew's house, with his family. My sister was talking about Peter's new

house, and the silly conversation we had many years ago about putting in a deck. And then I felt this pain in my neck and arm.

WOMAN IN WHITE SUIT

That's right Ben. They rushed you to the hospital. You've been here for almost 8 hours.

BEN

What time is it?

WOMAN IN WHITE

About 3 in the morning.

BEN

Where's my sister? Where's my niece and Nephew?

WOMAN IN WHITE

They've been here most of the night. Your sister left about 20 minutes ago.

BEN

Well, nurse, tell me the truth. How does it look?

WOMAN IN WHITE

I'm not the nurse Ben.

BEN

Oh, I'm sorry. I'm from the old school. You know, when men were doctors and women were nurses. So how am I doing Doc.

WOMAN

I'm not the doctor either, Ben.

BEN

Well, who the hell are you then?

WOMAN

Well Ben, I'm called the facilitator.

BEN

Facilitator, what the hell is a facilitator?

WOMAN

Well, Ben, I'm here to help you move through the next stages. Offer you some choices and alternatives.

BEN

Next stages? Choices? Alternatives? Oh Christ, you're the hospital social worker. You want to put me in a nursing home? Is that it? Oh, no. Get my sister here. Call my niece or nephew. I'm not going to any goddamn nursing home. I told them a long time ago, no nursing home. I've got enough money saved up and...

WOMAN

Easy, Ben. I'm not here to put you in any nursing home. Relax. I don't work for the hospital. I don't work at the hospital.

BEN

Well, where the hell do you work? Where are you from? How did you get into my room?

WOMAN

Boy, you sure have a lot of questions. You know I was in Basking Ridge New Jersey a few years ago, facilitating for a friend of yours, Larry Nault.

BEN

You knew Larry Nault? He died a couple of years ago.

WOMAN

Yes, I know, I was there. He asked as many questions as you. Must be your engineering training.

BEN

Look, who the hell are you? I'm gonna call for the nurse and get security to throw you the hell out of here.

WOMAN

That won't do any good Ben.

BEN

Why Not?

WOMAN

'Cause if any one walked in here right now, the only thing they would see is you lying in bed with an oxygen tube up your nose, and sound asleep.

BEN

Ok, ok, ok, I'm probably on some strong drug for the heart attack, and I'm hallucinating. This whole episode is a dream, or nightmare.

WOMAN

Well, you believe what you want to, Ben, but I was sent here to offer you some immediate choices, concerning your present condition. And, should you choose, facilitate your passage to the next life.

BEN

See, there you go talking like some nut. Choices. What Choices? And who are you? Who do you work for? This is absurd. Boy that damn medicine must be strong.

WOMAN

Well, I suppose if I tell you I work for the Lord, you'll really think I'm crazy.

BEN

Ok, that's it, get the hell out of here before I really call the nurse.

WOMAN

Go ahead, pull that cord, see what happens.

(BEN pulls the cord and the NURSE comes in. She sees that BEN is asleep and all is in order.)

NURSE

Are you ok Mr. Kaplowitz?

BEN

No.

(The NURSE doesn't hear him, and leaves.)

WOMAN

See, I told you they wouldn't see us like this. Now if you'll just sit quiet for a minute, I'll explain some of your options. Or, I can just leave if you want me too.

BEN

Well, what If I just ask you to leave, then what?

WOMAN

Well I will, and you may or may not survive your present condition. I have no way of knowing until I go back and check the book.

BEN

Oh, that's good. By the way, is that book you're referring to THE BOOK?

WOMAN

Yes.

BEN

And If I continue on with this charade, and ask you to stay, then what can happen?

WOMAN

Well, Ben, then we have some choices to make. We can either insure your survival for an unspecified time, or we can take you to the next world beyond this life.

BEN

So basically what your saying is that you can assure either my immediate death, or survival for "x" amount of years.

WOMAN

Well, that's almost correct. There are some extenuating circumstances that we should discuss. Most importantly, what I am about to offer you at this point in time can never be offered again. So, if you choose to survive, the next time you "meet your maker" so to speak, no facilitator will be around to make this offer.

BEN

Hey, this is an easy choice. I'm no moron, I want to live.

WOMAN

Well, before you jump to conclusions, like you've been prone to do most of your life, why don't you let me take you on a certain journey of sorts.

BEN

Oh, like "Let us go then you and I, when the evening is spread out against the sky, like a patient etherized upon a table."

WOMAN

Good Ben, good analogy. Quoting from your favorite poem and poet, T.S. Eliot. I can see this is going to be fun.

BEN

Yeah, now how did you know the "Lovesong of J. Alfred Prufrock" is my favorite poem?

WOMAN

Oh, I know quite a bit about you Ben, Kaplowitz.

BEN

Wait a minute, wait - a - minute, wait one goddamn minute. I know what's going on here. Hey, your name is Clarence, right.

WOMAN

Clarence?

BEN

That's right. Your name is Clarence, and you're an angel second class. You're trying to earn your wings.

WOMAN

Oh Ben, you are so clever. This is going to be fun. Sorry though, I know that's your favorite movie, but sorry to disappoint you. That's Mr. Capra's idea of a facilitator, excuse me angel, good try though. No, my name isn't Clarence, and I'm definitely no angel second class. But, if it makes you feel more comfortable, you can indeed call me Clarence. Where I'm from, gender is of no importance.

BEN

Ok Clarence, fine. I'm game, let's go for it. I'll take this journey of yours. Let's go. I'm ready.

CLARENCE

I want to remind you of some of the ground rules. After the journey, you will have a decision to make. Whether you want to live, or for lack of a better term - and one you can relate to - die. Once the decision is made, you can't go back, and should you decide to live, this offer will never be available to you again, understand?

BEN

Right. Now where do we go to get on this journey? Do we go by bus, or plane, or car or what?

CLARENCE

More questions. Boy, I can see this is going to be a real "trip". Don't worry about our mode of transportation, just lie back and close your eyes.

(Stage goes black. All sounds of the hospital room stop.

Silence and Blackness for several seconds.

The stage still black, but UNCLE PETE starts to sing.)

UNCLE PETE

MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk? MM MM MM would you like to have a talk?

(Continues singing throughout the scene)

BEN

Hey, that's my uncle Pete. Uncle Pete! Uncle Pete! Where are you? Hey Clarence, that's not the least bit funny. How the hell are you doing that? Uncle Pete this is Benjie, can you hear me?

CLARENCE

Its no joke Ben, and I'm not trying to be cruel. That is your Uncle. He can't hear you. Not yet. But I can let you see him.

BEN

Ok Clarence, I'll bite. I want to see my Uncle.

(Two spotlights go on.

One is on CLARENCE and BEN, who is wearing civilian clothes, and looks to be in his 40's.

The other spotlight is on UNCLE PETE and a woman. They are holding hands, and strolling about a park bench.

UNCLE PETE continues to sing.

"MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk?"

BEN

Who's that women he's with? I don't recognize her.

CLARENCE

That's Sara Mezzi, Ben. Your Uncle and Sara were very much in love.

BEN

When was that? I don't remember her. Then why didn't he marry her?

CLARENCE

More questions. Well, Ben, when you were very young, not even one year old, they discovered Sara had cancer. Your Uncle and Sara had planned to get married just before that. Sara didn't want to burden your uncle with what she was about to undergo. She died before you were three years old.

BEN

You know, I vaguely remember my parents talking about Sara Messi.

CLARENCE

The first time I met your Uncle Pete was in your recreation room basement, late Summer, 1959.

BEN

There you go again, now how did you know that? You were there when my uncle died?

CLARENCE

Yes, Ben. Your uncle was dying right there in your new knotty pine recreation room basement, with the Gillette Friday night fights blaring away. I became his facilitator right there, even before they took him to Mount Sinai Hospital.

BEN

Now wait a goddamn minute here Clarence. You're gonna tell me my Uncle Pete had the choice to live or die and he chose to die? To leave me and my sister, who he loved so dearly? I'm not going to believe that for one second.

CLARENCE

Well Ben, you believe what you want. But, I'm telling you exactly what happened that Friday in your recreation room basement. Let's listen to your uncle and Sara for a few minutes. They might shed some light on the subject for you.

(Lights dim on BEN and CLARENCE, and
brighten on UNCLE PETE and SARA.)

SARA

Pete, are you ever gonna stop singing that song?

PETE

Probably not.

SARA

Well, you better start getting ready. We're visiting your brother and Belle tonight. I forget what time they told us to come over.

PETE

I told them we'd be over around 8.

SARA

Did you look in on your niece and nephew today? How are they doing?

PETE

Benjie had a serious heart attack yesterday.

SARA

Do you know if he's visited with the facilitator yet?

PETE

He should be with the facilitator now, but I haven't checked up on him today. He'll make the right decision.

SARA

How're Bess' kids, Robbie and your namesake Peter, doing? Haven't heard about them for some time now. Didn't Robbie become a lawyer?

PETE

She sure did, and a damn good one too. Honest as the day is long. She's up for a Federal Judge in the third district. Can you believe that? She's even been mentioned for the Supreme Court.

SARA

The Supreme Court? Wow, I'll bet her parents are proud as hell. She never married, did she Pete?

PETE

That's another story, Sara. Don't bring it up when we visit my brother.

SARA

Well, we should be leaving now, it takes a while to get there.

(Lights dim as PETE and SARA walk off
into the darkness of the stage. PETE
holds SARA's hand and begins to hum.

"MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk?"

Spotlight brightens on BEN and CLARENCE.)

BEN

Well Clarence, I'll be honest. I don't know what the hell is going on here. Am I still in the hospital? Is this just the result of strong medicine, am I hallucinating? I don't know what to think.

CLARENCE

Ben, just try and relax. I'm not trying to confuse you. It will all make sense eventually. I'll promise you that.

BEN

I've got another question, OK?

CLARENCE

Sure go ahead.

BEN

When you visited my uncle in the basement of our house, that summer evening. You made my Uncle the same offer you're making me. Is that right?

CLARENCE

That's exactly right, Ben.

BEN

And my uncle chose to leave this life as he knew it. To leave his only family. To leave me and my sister. For What Clarence? For what? I don't get it.

CLARENCE

To be with Sara, Ben. He simply wanted to be assured to be with Sara. It's just that simple. He knew you and your sister were in good hands, with your Mom and Dad.

BEN

Yeah, but he knew my dad had been sick with ulcers, and rushed to the hospital several times. Dad could have died and left mom with me and my sister.

CLARENCE

Well Ben, I assured him your dad would be around for you and your sister.

BEN

You could do that. You can do that Clarence? You can see into the future?

CLARENCE

In some cases, yes I can Ben. It depends on your final choice -and other circumstances. Stay with me a while longer, Ben. Your journey isn't over just yet.

(BEN and CLARENCE continue walking as
BEN hears his mother singing offstage.

*"It's very clear, our love is here to stay.
Not for a year, but ever and a day."*

BELLE continues singing as spotlight fades on
BEN and CLARENCE and brightens on BELLE and
PHILIP.

PHILIP is sitting in a chair, reading a
newspaper. BELLE is dressed in her 'Cleaning
Attire', sweeping the floor around PHILIP, with
a dust cloth tucked in her apron. Both appear as
they were in the 1950's.)

BEN

God, look how young my parents look, Clarence.

CLARENCE

Yes, young and happy, Ben. This was when they moved to their very own home on Lindholm, in Shaker Heights. It was the first time your parents owned their own house. Let's listen to your mom and dad.

BELLE

Lift your feet, honey, I want to sweep under the chair.

(PHILIP lifts his feet and continues
to read his newspaper.)

PHILIP

Jesus, Belle, when are you gonna stop all this craziness with cleaning?

BELLE

When I'm dead and buried, that's when I'll stop. Now lift your feet higher.

PHILIP

But Belle, we are dead and buried.

BELLE

Very funny, now keep your feet up a second. I want to finish cleaning before your brother Pete and Sara come over tonight. Did you check on the kids this morning?

PHILIP

Benjie's still in the hospital, and Bess just left. Peter's taking his son, Philip to Bar Mitzvah classes today. Robbie is waiting to hear about the appointment to a Federal Judgeship. That's about it. Benjie will probably be wandering by to look in with the facilitator sometime today. They may be watching now. I think his heart attack was pretty serious.

BELLE

Well, he'll make the right choice. We have good kids, Phil, we must have done something right. Or maybe we were just lucky. I just wish Benjie had a wife and kids looking in on him. I don't know why he never married.

PHILIP

Well, he almost did back in college, didn't he? What was the name of that girl he brought over for dinner that time?

BELLE

Jane. Jane Weiss.

PHILIP

I wonder what happened with them? I thought for sure they would get married. Did Benjie ever talk to you about that? You know, later in life, after I died? Did he say anything to Bess or the kids?

BELLE

Never heard anything about it. Seems like a few months after she came over for dinner, they broke up. Benjie never mentioned a word about it. I thought they would get married too. I hoped they would. Benjie was kind of shy all through high school and college. When he told us he wanted to bring over some girl for dinner I was ecstatic.

PHILIP

I always wondered what happened after that dinner. It was a Friday wasn't it?

BELLE

Yes, Friday night. The summer of 1967. My sister Rose had a heart attack the next day Saturday and died in late September that same year. I remember we were talking in the bedroom about Benjie and Jane, and Herm called about Rose.

PHILIP

That's right. Do you remember that stupid comment I made about Benjie? You were so upset with me, you were ready to give me hell for saying it when the phone rang, and then we left to see your sister.

BELLE

That's right, I never did take you to task for making that stupid comment. God, I'm glad Benjie never heard it. It would have hurt him deeply.

PHILIP

You know Belle, I often wondered if he did accidentally hear me. If that was the cause of his breaking up with that girl. God it was a stupid thing to say.

BELLE

It sure was. And I would have given you hell, if Rose hadn't had that sudden attack, and her husband called. But after the call we went outside to go to Mount Sinai. And Benjie was washing his car, remember, so he couldn't have heard you, thank god.

(UNCLE PETE singing in the background.

"MM MM MM, would you like to take a walk?

"MM MM MM, would you like to have a talk")

BELLE

I hear your brother Pete and Sara, help me with the tablecloth.

(Lights black out on BELLE and PHILIP,
and brighten on CLARENCE and BEN.)

BEN

Boy, you don't miss a trick, do you Clarence?

CLARENCE

What do you mean, Ben?

BEN

You know exactly what I mean. That part about what dad said that following morning about me and Jane. You don't miss a damn thing do you? Christ, how long have you been following me and my family around?

CLARENCE

You did hear what your dad said that morning didn't you Ben?

BEN

You know damn well I did, Clarence.

CLARENCE

And then when the phone rang, you got up off the living room chair and ran outside and began washing your car.

BEN

That's right Clarence. You know the whole story, don't you? Sure I didn't want them to think I heard them talking, especially after what my dad said. It would have been too embarrassing for both of us. Besides, I didn't really know how to handle it. I was hurt, and shocked. I didn't know what the hell to do. So, when I went back to Pittsburgh, I took it all out on Jane. Just abruptly broke it off. Yeah, wrote her some stupid letter blaming it all on her. She'd already left for graduate school that summer.

CLARENCE

Well there were some other extenuating circumstances, but we don't have to rehash that.

BEN

You know about that too, huh Clarence? You know, I am puzzled by one thing though. Why didn't my dad want to live longer if he had the choice? His grandchildren were still young, I was only 35. I don't understand that at all.

CLARENCE

Well Ben, that one has a simple explanation. If you choose to live, I am still limited by the medical science of the day. I can't cure what's wrong with you or what brought you to the hospital, unless there's a cure available. Your dad had Alzheimer's, Ben. There was no cure for that back in 1980. His decision was really quite easy then, wasn't it?

BEN

Damnit, Clarence, you've got an answer for everything, don't you? You know, I think I'm ready to go back to the hospital. I think I've seen enough. I'm ready to make my decision.

CLARENCE

Ok Ben, If you've seen and heard enough, I guess we can go back now.

(BEN and CLARENCE begin to walk back towards the hospital scene. Their spotlight follows them across the stage.

A female voice(JANE's) can be heard from the darkness of the stage singing.

"Say its only a paper moon, hanging over a cardboard tree, but it wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me."

She continues with the next verse, but forgets many of the lyrics, and fills them in with "dum dee dum, etc." as she tries to recall the lyrics.

BEN stops in his tracks and listens.)

BEN

Clarence, is that who I think it is?

CLARENCE

I don't know, Ben. Who do you think it is?

BEN

Don't start playing games with me now, Clarence. You know who I think it is. Is it her, Clarence? Is that Jane Weiss?

CLARENCE

Yes, it is. I was planning one more stop in the journey, but you seemed bent on going back and making your decision. So I...

BEN

No Clarence, I want to see her. Please, let's go there.

CLARENCE

Are you sure, Ben? This might be difficult.

BEN

I'm sure.

(SCENE: JANE is watering her garden, still singing, humming and whistling.

“Say it’s only a paper moon.”

JANE appears to be in her early forties.

The set design is very simple, with a spotlight now on JANE. The lighting is dimmer on BEN and CLARENCE.

JANE continues humming and singing “Paper Moon”. The spotlight begins to dim on JANE and brightens on BEN and CLARENCE.)

BEN

God, look how young and pretty she looks.

CLARENCE

You look just as young, Ben. You haven't seen yourself since we began this journey.

BEN

Clarence, I wanna talk to her. Can we do that?

CLARENCE

Ben, I can't let you do that. It's against all the rules. I mean, I am capable of making it happen. But I would be severely punished. I had a most unpleasant year when I did it once before.

BEN

Jesus Clarence, I know what you're doing, but I can't make any decisions until I get a chance to speak with her. Please, I beg of you, just a few minutes, that's all I need. Five, ten minutes. That's all I need Clarence. Five, ten minutes please!?

CLARENCE

Ben, I really can't. I don't know. Look, I've really got to go myself, I have appointments at the Clinic, and University Hospitals, other people here at Mount Sinai. I've really got to go.

(CLARENCE starts to walk towards the darkness of the stage.

BEN is almost in a panic.)

BEN

Hey Clarence, wait a minute. Where are you going? How will I be able to tell you of my decision? How do I get back to my hospital room? Please wait just a few minutes more...

CLARENCE

Ben, I really must go now. Don't worry, everything will take care of itself. I'll know of any decision you make, and you'll get back to your hospital room, if that's what you want. But I really have to go now.

(CLARENCE disappears into the blackness of the stage. Faintly, she speaks.)

CLARENCE

Good luck Benjamin, this time I'm sure you'll make the right decision.

(BEN continues to watch JANE water her garden and sing "Paper Moon". She gets to the bridge, and completely forgets the words.

BEN begins to sing the bridge.)

BEN

Jesus Jane, how could you forget the bridge.

"Without your love, its a honky tonk parade, without your love, it's a melody played, in the penny arcade. It's a Barnum and Bailey world."

(Now, JANE stops and listens to BEN continue singing.)

JANE

Who is that? Who's singing that?

(BEN now realizes that CLARENCE has granted him his wish and begins to walk over to JANE, singing the next verse.)

BEN

"Just as phony as it could be..."

BEN and JANE

(singing together)

"But It wouldn't be make believe, if you believed in me."

(BEN and JANE now face each other in stone silence.)

JANE

Ben Kaplowitz, my god it must be you. When did you get here?

BEN

You remember me Jane?

JANE

Remember you? Of course I remember you. Who else would know the words to "It's Only a Paper Moon"? It was either Ben Kaplowitz, or Nat King Cole. And Nat Cole was a better singer. Of course I remember you.

BEN

You still remember that song, huh?

JANE

Sure. Catchy tune, it kind of stays with you. Even after all these years. Some tunes do that, you know.

BEN

Yeah, they sure do. Gee, it's still kind of awkward. You know, seeing you like this. It's a bit strange, awkward. You know, even after all these years.

JANE

Yeah, it is. Even after all these years. Its like all those high school reunions. You see all those people in high school after 20, 30 years, and for the moment you think you're back in high school, almost like nothing's changed.

BEN

Do you feel like you're back in Pittsburgh, back at Chatham College? Like nothing's changed?

JANE

Sort of, yeah, a little bit. Those were some good times. Special, very special in some ways.

BEN

They sure were for me. I guess I never really recovered from those days.

JANE

Recovered? What do you mean, recovered?

BEN

Well you know, I never got married Jane, never had a family. Never...

JANE

You never got married? Never had any children? I think you would have been great with kids.

BEN

You didn't know that about me? You were never curious what happened to Ben Kaplowitz?

JANE

Well, no Ben. To be truthful, after that miserable little letter you sent me to break things off I wanted you out of my life, fast. You hurt me deeply with that stupid letter.

BEN

Well, you sure got rid of me fast. Got married the following year, didn't you?

JANE

Yes I did. Met a wonderful guy, we had a good marriage. Lasted almost 50 years, Ben. Three kids, all girls. Five grandchildren. Life is sure funny. I once thought, way back when, that we'd be having children.

BEN

(startled)

You did?

JANE

Sure. I thought things were going great that summer. When was that, '67 or '68?

BEN

It was 1967. My aunt Rose died that summer.

JANE

1967. The summer of '67. I went off to graduate school that summer. In fact I remember it well. I had dinner with you and your parents at your house. It was a Friday. I left for Wisconsin Sunday. I knew you were stewing about something. You didn't answer my letters, didn't return my calls. It was the old silent treatment. Remember that?

BEN

Oh, yeah, sometimes I could really act like a jerk.

JANE

Sometimes? Boy, you sure could. At first, I thought well, what did I do? What the hell could I have done? But there wasn't any time to have done anything. I left for summer school thinking everything was great. And then of course, came the letter.

What the hell was that all about? All those ridiculous accusations. I was frigid and cold and unaffectionate. What the hell were you thinking? None of that crap was true, but of course at age 20 and in love, well you don't know what to think, what to believe. I was hurt, deeply, and then I was mad. I could never figure it out.

First, I thought it was because we never slept together. But we really never tried, you never tried. It was a different age and time. I don't know. What was it Ben? I guess I'm still curious. Was there a reason for that behavior? Was there a reason for that letter?

BEN

I don't really know what to say, Jane. Yeah, I suppose there was a reason. Probably not a very good one. If I told you now, after all these years it would probably sound pretty silly, pretty stupid.

JANE

Try me Ben. I guess even after all these years I'm still curious.

BEN

Well, I'm not sure I can even remember all the details. It's been what, 50 years now? You're right about the timing. It all started to go wrong after you came over for dinner that Friday.

JANE

But dinner went great with your mom and dad. I think they really liked me. We didn't have any arguments that night. What could have possibly happened?

BEN

Oh, they liked you alright, Jane. This is really ridiculous. Here we are 50 years later talking about something that after all these years, seems so unimportant. Does it really matter, after all this time, what happened to Ben Kaplowitz and Janey Weiss? I don't know, maybe it does. Anyway, I got up early Saturday. By the way, do you remember where we went that night after dinner? How we got back to your house?

JANE

Yes, Ben I do. We drove down by the lake, near the ninth street pier, near where they kept that submarine. We made out pretty hot and heavy that evening.

BEN

You remember that, huh? Well, that morning I got up early and watched some TV in the living room. My mom and dad were talking in their bed room, and I could hear them talking about you and me. They thought you were terrific. Bright, attractive. They were happy for me, knowing how awkward I was in high school, with dating and women and such. Then my dad said something that really shocked and hurt me. Even mom was surprised and shocked.

JANE

What did he say?

BEN

He said something to the effect that you were too good for me. But it was the way he said it. The phrase he used. Even my mom said something like, 'Don't ever let Benjie hear you say that'. Now I remember what he said. He said he didn't see what you saw in me. What could you see in Ben Kaplowitz that would attract you to me.

I didn't know what to do. I got up and quickly went outside and just started washing my car. Then, the phone rang and it was my uncle telling mom her sister just had a serious heart attack. Mom and dad came outside and saw me washing the car, told me about my aunt Rose, and both of them took off for the hospital.

After that, I went back to Pittsburgh to finish up my last semester, and of course started to think about what my dad said. I was going to prove him wrong, I guess. I don't know, I took it out on you, I started to brood you remember? It was the silent treatment, by long distance.

JANE

That's when you stopped answering my phone calls and my letters.

BEN

That's right.

JANE

And that's it? I can see how you were hurt by that, Ben. But we'd been dating for more than a year. Why didn't you just call me? We could have talked about it. I certainly didn't feel that way. Didn't you know that?

BEN

I didn't know what to feel, what to think. I guess I wasn't confident enough in the relationship to call you. Hell Jane, I was 20 years old. I'd never felt this way about a woman before. It was all so new to me.

JANE

Ben, I was only 20 too. That letter you wrote. That goddamn letter. All prompted by your dad's silly comment.

BEN

Well, not exactly Jane. Three or four weeks after I got back to Pittsburgh, and stopped taking your phone calls, throwing all your letters in the trash, my roommate saw I was in pretty bad shape, told me to come to a party the football players were throwing at some guy's apartment. He said a bunch of nurses from Marcy School of Nursing were coming. I don't want to draw this out more than necessary, Jane.

I got drunk as a skunk, and Frank, that was my roommate, brings this pretty blond nurse over to sit on my lap. She was more drunk than me, if that was possible. We left the party, drove up behind Alumni Hall, got out of the car and began to roll around on

the hill behind the Chemistry building. She was, shall we say, very experienced, and the next thing I knew I was no longer a virgin.

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it, that I was 21 when I lost my virginity. Today, if you're 14 and haven't been laid, you're an outcast. I wrote that letter you have been referring to as soon as I got back to dorm, probably 3 o'clock in the morning. Didn't even go to sleep. Mailed it right after I put the stamp on it.

JANE

Well, that was pure Ben Kaplowitz. Rush to judgement. Don't reflect on anything. Jump to conclusions. Just...

BEN

Hey, hey, hey, hold up a minute. This all happened 50 years ago. Don't get mad all over again. You wanted to know what happened, so I told you. In fact, rehashing this whole thing after all this time is a bit ridiculous, don't you think?

JANE

No. I don't think its ridiculous at all, and if you thought it was really so stupid, you wouldn't be standing here right now.

BEN

I guess so.

JANE

So, some ill advised comment you overheard from your dad, and losing your virginity to some floozy was all it took to end our relationship. Maybe it wasn't that strong after all. It's funny you know. Here we are all these years later talking about a relationship that lasted a little over a year.

BEN

Now c'mon Jane, don't trivialize it after all these years. I was only 20 years old.

JANE

Guess what Ben, I was only 20 too.

BEN

Well, you have to put everything in perspective.

JANE

Perspective? Perspective? I'm trying to Ben. Why didn't you just call me and tell me what happened? You knew I wasn't a virgin when I met you. I may have understood. I'm sure I would have been angry, but no angrier than when I got that letter.

BEN

You weren't a virgin when I met you? I didn't know that. How would I have known that?

JANE

Because I told you, I told you all about it.

BEN

You did? When? I don't remember that. I'm sure I would have remembered that.

JANE

Didn't I tell you I was dating that doctor I met my sophomore year? He was in his senior year of medical school.

BEN

Yeah, I remember that, but you never said you slept with him.

JANE

Didn't I tell you that I visited him in Plattsburgh, New York, when he went into the Air Force that summer? That was about six months before we met. I told you about how upset my mom was that I went up to visit him over a weekend.

BEN

Yes I remember all that, but you never said anything about sleeping with him.

JANE

Jesus, Ben. What did you need, a road map or what? What do you think we did, play scrabble all night long? Why do you think my mom was upset? Couldn't you figure that out? I told you cause I wanted you to know, and that I was committed to you. Didn't I tell you that I wrote him and told him that I had met someone else? That someone else was you, Ben Kaplowitz.

BEN

I remember all that, but I just didn't think... I don't know, Jane. I guess not only could I be a jerk, but a naive one as well.

JANE

Can you imagine telling some one today, that there was a time when people actually fell in love before they ever slept together? No one would believe it's possible today.

BEN

Some would liken it to immaculate conception.

JANE

This is really strange, isn't it Ben?

BEN

What do you mean?

JANE

Well, here we are after all these years - almost 50 years - talking about events as if they happened yesterday. Recalling specifics that should seem trivial, and yet here we are, passions aroused like we're still at college. Doesn't that seem a bit strange to you?

BEN

Not really, Jane. I guess maybe I've had more time to relive those moments, to reflect on them more than you.

JANE

Oh, I don't know if that's true. I've thought about them through the years. I've never really forgotten that period of my life. I never really wanted to. Some song or some tune is played on the radio, or maybe as you're walking through the mall, wherever, and you can be transformed in time and place, instantaneously.

(Softly in the background, the Dells'
begin singing "Oh What a Nite.")

Both BEN and JANE stand in silence for
a moment, and look around.)

JANE

Where is that music coming from? It's the Dells isn't it? Isn't that the song we danced to, back at Chatham College? Back at Brady's Bend, wasn't it? This is starting to get a bit corny, isn't it Ben.

BEN

Yeah I guess maybe it is. That Clarence, she doesn't know when to stop.

JANE

Clarence, She?

BEN

Yeah, that's what I call my facilitator. You know, back when my sister and I were growing up, we used to make fun of all that corny stuff my parents used to do and say. Dancing in the kitchen to a Gershwin tune, or listening to them tell us the best things in life really are free.

They said we could go on and make fun of all that corny stuff, but at some point we'd come to realize how important and real all that was. So humor me Jane, OK, and dance with me to this corny Dells song.

JANE

Sure Ben, I'd love to,

(BEN and JANE dance to "Oh What a Nite".)

BEN

You know Jane, when your husband dies, I'm sure you'll want to spend your time with him. I understand that, 50 years of marriage, three children. I understand that.

JANE

That's absolutely right, Ben.

BEN

Then would it be wrong to wish your husband a long healthy life, with his children and grandchildren. That wouldn't be wrong, would it Jane?

JANE

No, Ben. I don't think so. That wouldn't be wrong. Not at all.

(The music is turned up.

BEN and JANE dance to the end of the song as they disappear into the darkness. As soon as the song ends, the spotlight appears at the hospital bed and stays on the oscilloscope monitoring BEN's heart beat.

The sinusoidal wave and 'beep, beep, beep' are all you see and hear.

Suddenly, the sinusoidal wave flat lines, and you hear a long, drawn out beep.

Stage immediately goes dark.

The Drifters' "It's Twilight Time" begins.

The spotlight shines on center stage as the cast appears in pairs. The pairs are of course paired as couples from the play, beginning with PETE and SARA.

The couples appear in the spotlight, bow towards each other, walk hand in hand to

center stage, bow towards audience, then
dance stage left into darkness.

The last couple to appear is BEN and JANE.
First, JANE appears with the young BEN from
the second act. Then, BEN appears alone in the
spotlight, waiting for JANE, who comes rushing in
to be with STAGE MANAGER 'BEN'.

After, the entire cast comes out with stage lights
up, a sign across the stage that says "Plymouth
Church", and the cast bows together. Then, they
all dance until "Twilight Time" is finished.

The exit music is as follows:

"Whispering Bells"	Del Vikings
"Paper Moon"	Nat 'King' Cole
"Devil or Angel"	
"Zuch, Zuch, Zuch"	Barry Sisters
"Clarinet Concerto, Third Movement"	Mozart
All other songs from the play.)	
THE END	

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