

Thornton Wilder's

HEAVEN'S MY DESTINATION

adapted from the novel

by Lee Blessing

***** July, 2009 version *****

CHARACTERS

GEORGE BRUSH ...Twenties

**Traveling Textbook Salesman
Bringer of God's Word,
Unmarried**

All other characters are played by six actors, three men and three women, designated thus:

ACTOR A In his twenties

ACTOR B In his thirties

ACTOR C In his fifties

ACTOR D About twenty

ACTOR E About thirty

ACTOR F Nearing fifty

There is also a girl of eight or so

TIME

Summer 1930 to summer 1931

PLACE

The American Midwest

Assignment of roles

Actor A Teller, Booking Officer, Collegian, Bat, Hawkins, Young Jailer, Young Clerk

Actor B Man in Shirtsleeves, Mr. Gogarty, Mr. Howells, Dick Roberts, Louie Morris, Mr. Gruber, Burkin

Actor C Dr. Bowie, Doremus Blodgett, Mr. Southwick, Chief of Police, Judge Corey, Camp Morgan Doctor, Herb Callahan, Charley Warren, Judge Carberry

Actor D Mississippi Corey, Jessie Mayhew, Lily, Dolores, Roberta

Actor E Woman's Voice, Mrs. Margaret McCoy, Lillian Roberts, Helma Solario, Gladys, Mayme, Second Waitress, Mrs. Gruber, Lottie

Actor F Nurse Colloquer, Mrs. Howells, Mrs. Corey, Queenie, Mrs. Crofut, Mrs. Efrim

Juvenile Little Roberts Girl, Elizabeth, Rhoda May Gruber

ACT ONE

(A rural hospital in Trowbridge, Texas, 1931. A young man, GEORGE BRUSH, lies in bed, severely ill. DR. BOWIE—an elderly, minister in a frayed frock coat and a black string tie—sits next to him. The room is quiet and dark; we see little more than the bed. GEORGE lies still, holding his pillow over his face with both hands)

DR. BOWIE

Mr. Brush? Mr. Brush, you really are going to have to talk to me.

(a beat)

I'm not going away. I'm staying right here.

(a beat)

The doctor tells me that you're a very sick man. He says you have—

(consulting some notes he's made)

My goodness! My, my, my . . . Mr. Brush, the doctor told me that no one ever came into this hospital as comprehensively run-down as you.

(a beat)

Said he's not sure, but . . . you may be losing the fight. That's why he called for me.

(a beat)

Would you like me to contact your parents for you?

GEORGE

No.

DR. BOWIE

What about your wife?

GEORGE

No.

DR. BOWIE

There must be some message you'd like me to give your family. Do you have any children?

GEORGE

(slowly pulling the pillow down
to his chest, looking away from him)

Two. One that's alive and one that's . . . one that's dead.

(As GEORGE speaks, a projection of a smiling
five-year-old girl, ELIZABETH, appears)

DR. BOWIE

I see. I see. Do you have any church affiliation?

GEORGE

No.

DR. BOWIE

Would you like to ask for God's forgiveness?

(a beat)

Mr. Brush? Would you pray with me? I just know it could lighten your load.

GEORGE

What do you know about it?

DR. BOWIE

Well—

GEORGE

I've broken all Ten Commandments except two. I never killed anybody and I never made any graven images. I was never tempted by idols, but I guess that would have come along any day. I'm saying this because I don't like the tone of your voice. I'm glad I broke those commandments. Wish I'd broken more. I made a mistake all my life thinking you could get better and better until you were perfect.

DR. BOWIE

Well . . . I think we still ought to pray—

GEORGE

Don't! Even if there were a God, he wouldn't like it. I used to ask God for things all the time; the more I asked, the worse I got. Everything I did was wrong. Everybody hated me. Look at you; you must ask God for things all the time, and what's he given you? You're pretty stupid, if I must say, and dry and . . . I bet you even believe in war.

DR. BOWIE

Mr. Brush—

GEORGE

(raising himself to one elbow)

How can I believe in a God that would allow people as foolish as you to be *ministers*?!

(MISS COLLOQUER, a nurse, enters as
the projection fades out)

MISS COLLOQUER
What's going on?

GEORGE
Get him out of here!

DR. BOWIE
Young man, are these the words and thoughts you want to die with?

(GEORGE flings himself down again,
staring away from DR. BOWIE)

MISS COLLOQUER
(to DR. BOWIE)
I'm sorry, sir. Maybe you should go—

DR. BOWIE
But—

MISS COLLOQUER
Please.

DR. BOWIE
(rising, to GEORGE)
I hope you'll reconsider these foolish, proud things you've been saying.

(DR. BOWIE exits. MISS COLLOQUER
picks up GEORGE's pillow and puts it under
his head. GEORGE is exhausted by his outburst)

MISS COLLOQUER (cont'd)
No point in getting mad at the minister, Mr. Brush. He's here to help.
(as GEORGE keeps his head turned away)
By the way, all those letters from your employer—the Caulkins Company? Are you sure you
don't want me to open them?

(no response)
Oh—something else came today.

(producing a small package)
This. It's from a woman in Kansas City—someone named “Queenie”? Does that ring a bell?
(as GEORGE turns toward her)

It does, eh? Well, what do you say? Shall we open it?

(GEORGE stares at her. Suddenly lights shift.
MISS COLLOQUER pockets the package again)

and exits. The SOUND of GEORGE singing “All Through The Night” in a beautiful tenor voice fills the room. GEORGE rises, puts on his clothes, pulls a salesman’s worn sample case out from under the bed and moves downstage)

(As he moves the hospital transforms into the smoking car of a train. A leather-skinned MAN IN SHIRTSLEEVES appears and sits on the train, smoking a cigarette. Meanwhile, GEORGE sets down his sample case, picking up the song as the taped version fades out)

GEORGE

“Love, to thee my thoughts are turning
All through the night.
All for thee my heart is yearning
All through the night.
Though sad fate our lives may sever
Parting will not last forever,
There’s a hope that leaves me never
All through the night.”

(As GEORGE finishes the song, we hear scattered, enthusiastic applause and a WOMAN’S VOICE. As she speaks GEORGE, now in the pink of health, moves upstage with his sample case and into the train car)

WOMAN’S VOICE (off)

Wasn’t that heavenly? That was George Brush, everybody. He’s traveling through town selling—what is it? Textbooks, that’s right. And it was so kind of him to offer to sing at our church social today, wasn’t it?

(more applause)

Yes, indeed it was. George Brush. What a wonderful song. And what a wonderful, wonderful man.

GEORGE

(stopping beside THE MAN IN SHIRTSLEEVES)

Mind if I sit?

GEORGE (cont’d)

(sitting, after THE MAN shrugs)

My name is George Brush. George Marvin Brush. I travel in school books. I was born in Michigan, and I’m on my way to Wellington, Oklahoma.

THE MAN

(ignoring GEORGE's offered hand)

Relax, sonny. You're not under arrest.

GEORGE

In the beginning of a conversation I like to get all the facts on the table. I represent the Caulkins Educational Press. New York, Boston and Chicago. Here's my card.

(holding out a small business card
which THE MAN also ignores)

We publish Arithmetics and Algebras, as well as other superior textbooks for school and college. These are top of the line, best there is. And that's lucky for me, 'cause I wouldn't want to represent them otherwise. I'm a very good salesman. I get raises all the time, even though they say we're in some kind of depression—

THE MAN

What'd I just say? *Relax.*

(offering a cigarette)

Come on, light up.

GEORGE

Oh, I don't smoke.

THE MAN

Then what are you doing in a smoking car?

GEORGE

I was in another car, but I think I made a woman there a little uncomfortable.

THE MAN

Oh, yeah? How'd you manage that?

GEORGE

I didn't mean to. But I noticed her go out between the cars to smoke a cigarette. So I wrote her a note on one of my business cards and left it by her seat.

THE MAN

What did you write?

GEORGE

Not much. Just, um . . . "Women who smoke are unfit to be mothers."

THE MAN

What'd she say when she read it?

GEORGE

Nothing. She didn't know it was me. But I think she got the message.

THE MAN

I'm sure she did.

GEORGE

Anyway she tore up the card, and I decided to come in here.

THE MAN

To spread more joy?

GEORGE

Yes. Exactly. Brother, can I talk to you about the most important thing in life?

THE MAN

If it's insurance, I got too much. If it's oil wells, I don't touch 'em, and if it's religion, I'm saved.

GEORGE

That's fine. I think there's no greater pleasure than to talk with a fellow believer.

THE MAN

What I mean is, I'm saved from making a goddamn fool of myself in public places. I'm saved, you little peahen, from putting my head into other people's business. So shut your damn face or I'll rip your tongue out of your throat.

GEORGE

You're angry, brother, because you're aware of an unfulfilled life.

THE MAN

I warn you—one more peep of that stuff and I'll do something you'll be sorry for.

GEORGE

I won't trouble you, brother.

(after a beat)

But if I stop, don't think it's because I'm afraid of anything you'll do.

THE MAN

Damn it—! I warned you!

(THE MAN grabs GEORGE's sample case
and heaves it out the train window)

THE MAN (cont'd)

Go get it, fella. And after this, learn to pick your man.

GEORGE

It's lucky for you I'm a pacifist! It's lucky for you!

THE MAN

(to the audience, as GEORGE rushes out)

Aw, relax. He'll rent a car in the next town, drive back and find his sample case again. No one ever gets saved from *his* kind.

(Lights shift to a small-town hotel lobby. GEORGE reenters downstage with his sample case. He stops at a small podium-like structure in the lobby—the hotel writing desk, complete with blotter. As GEORGE writes, ACTOR A enters, joining ACTOR B. They speak to the audience)

ACTOR A

George tried never to let anything get him down.

ACTOR B

God had given him so many gifts, he felt like an ingrate if he wasn't happy almost all the time.

ACTOR A

Take his voice, for example. People loved to hear him sing. They said he should be a professional, but he never thought he should charge for a thing like that.

ACTOR B

A gift from God.

(GEORGE starts singing to himself, unconscious that he's doing so)

GEORGE

(singing softly)

“Holy, holy, holy
Lord God Almighty . . .”

(Suddenly aware that he's singing, GEORGE reddens and looks around)

ACTOR B

While he was in Wellington, George visited all the department heads at the high school.

ACTOR A

The next day was his birthday—which he always reserved for meditation.

ACTOR B

George had made a rough draft of his resolutions for the year. He was just finishing a list of his faults and virtues when he suddenly got an impulse that he never could resist.

(ACTORS A and B exit as GEORGE removes his lists and writes directly on the hotel blotter. As he does so, two people enter: an older man with a round, red face and bushy eyebrows and his companion, a gloomy-looking woman in her thirties with orange, brown and black hair: DOREMUS BLODGETT and MRS. MARGARET McCOY. DOREMUS notices GEORGE)

DOREMUS

What are you doing?

GEORGE

Writing.

DOREMUS

On the blotter?

MRS. McCOY

Now, Reme, don't—

DOREMUS

On the hotel blotter?! So everyone will see? So everyone who uses this desk—

GEORGE

That's the point.

DOREMUS

The point!? What are you writing?

(reading)

“Thou, Lord, seest me”. That's what he wrote, Margie. “Thou, Lord, seest me”!

MRS. McCOY

Let him be, Reme. Come on and get some cawfee.

DOREMUS

(to GEORGE)

You're the one who wrote a whole Bible verse on the blotter last night, aren't you?

GEORGE

I thought it would help.

DOREMUS

Why can't you keep your messages in tent meetings where they belong? What are you, some kind of religious faynatic?

GEORGE

Oh, no—I travel in textbooks. My name is George Brush. George Marvin Brush. You look like a traveling man. Are you?

DOREMUS

(mollified by GEORGE's manner)

Well, yeah . . . Doremus Blodgett, Everlast Hosiery. Oh, and this is the finest little girl in the world—my cousin, Mrs. Margie McCoy. But listen, you should leave these blotters alone.

GEORGE

I've found a good thing and I want to tell everybody about it.

DOREMUS

Then why aren't you a preacher? You should be in a church, where you belong.

GEORGE

I'm afraid I did something a preacher can't do.

DOREMUS

Oh? *Oh*. What was it?

GEORGE

I wouldn't like to say with a lady present.

MRS. McCOY

I gotta get outta here. I'm going cuckoo. He's crazy, Reme. He's nuts!

(MRS. McCOY rushes off towards the dining-room)

DOREMUS

So. There's a woman in it, eh?

GEORGE

I'm afraid so. I want to marry her. Only I can't find her.

DOREMUS

Sounds like a quite a story. Think I'd like to hear it.

GEORGE

Sorry. I'm leaving for Oklahoma City this morning.

DOREMUS

That's where we're going. Where do you put up there?

GEORGE

The McGraw House.

DOREMUS

Same as us! How about you come up to our room about eight tomorrow night? We'll have a little drink.

GEORGE

I don't drink.

DOREMUS

I know it's illegal, but—

GEORGE

No, no. I don't drink because it undermines the nervous system and impairs efficiency.

DOREMUS

Oh. Well. Right. Still, you don't mind if me and the little lady have a snort?

MRS. McCOY

(sticking her head back in)

Reme, come on. Before he *shoots*.

DOREMUS

(shaking GEORGE's hand, as she disappears)

She's always that way when you first know her. Tomorrow night, then. Don't forget. That's a story I want to hear. Name's Blodgett. Doremus Blodgett.

MRS. McCOY

(shouting, off)

Reme—

(DOREMUS exits into the dining room. Lights shift as the hotel lobby disappears. GEORGE picks up his sample case and starts walking in place. As he does so ACTORS A, B, D and F enter severally, forming a semi-circle well upstage of him.

As GEORGE walks, an outdoor scene of idyllic charm grows up all around him. He hears the SOUNDS: CHILDREN RUNNING AND PLAYING, A DOG BARKING PLAYFULLY, HOUSEWIVES SHAKING OUT RUGS, SHIFTING SAUCEPANS ON THE STOVE, BIRDS SINGING, A CICADA, SOMEONE CUTTING THEIR LAWN WITH AN UNPOWERED LAWNMOWER, ETC.

GEORGE drinks it all in—it's deeply attractive to him. As he walks on, the sounds become solely natural ones: BIRDS, INSECTS, THE WIND IN THE TREES)

ACTOR A

On the morning of his birthday, George walked in the shade of the cottonwood trees in Wellington, Oklahoma.

ACTOR F

He listened enviously to the domestic sounds that came from the houses.

ACTOR D

The children calling in shrill voices—

ACTOR A

Beginning and ending every sentence with a querulous "Ma".

ACTOR D

He stared at someone cutting his lawn.

ACTOR F

He watched garage doors open and close.

ACTOR B

He turned onto a path that led through deep grass.

ACTOR F

He passed some rubbish heaps—

ACTOR A

A deserted sawmill—

ACTOR D

And finally he followed a stream that seemed to carry a load of tangled weeds toward—

ACTORS A, B, D, F

A pond.

(Instantly a “pond” appears—a large blue oval of light at stage center, between GEORGE and the others. GEORGE stares at it for a moment, then lies down beside it with his head resting on his sample case. ACTORS C and E enter, joining the others in their arc upstage of the pond)

ACTOR E

George lay down by the pond, joining the birds and the turtles and the water snakes—

ACTOR C

And he thought.

ACTOR A

He thought of a birthday years before in his home town of Ludington, Michigan when he’d proposed unsuccessfully to a widow ten years his senior.

ACTOR F

He thought of his last birthday, spent in the Abilene library, reading in the Encyclopedia Britannica about—

ACTORS A-F

Napoleon.

GEORGE

“I am a great man, too—”

ACTOR F

He wrote in the encyclopedia’s margin—

GEORGE

“But for good”.

ACTOR F

Today, on this birthday, beside a pond—

ACTOR E

Or “pool” as he thought of it—

ACTOR C

(delighting in the sound)

A pool.

ACTOR D

George made his resolutions.

GEORGE

(suddenly sitting up straight)

I am going to have a great year. I will save more souls. I will sell more textbooks, even though they say there is a depression. And most of all—

ACTORS A-F

Most of all—

GEORGE

I will take all of my money . . . out of the bank.

(The “pond” snaps off like—well, a light. ACTORS B-F exit as GEORGE enters a small-town bank. He reaches the teller’s window, where ACTOR A stands on the other side of a Teller’s cage)

TELLER

Closing your account?

GEORGE

That’s right. Everything except the interest.

TELLER

Pardon?

GEORGE

You heard me. I don’t want the interest.

TELLER

Here’s the five hundred dollars from your account and, um . . . I’m afraid I have to give you the interest, too.

GEORGE

(shoving the interest back)

Sorry. I don't believe in interest.

TELLER

You don't? Excuse me. Mr. Southwick?

(The TELLER disappears. MR. SOUTHWICK, the bank president, enters and escorts GEORGE to one side as the Teller's cage disappears)

MR. SOUTHWICK

Mr. Brush? We have to give you your interest. Your money earned it.

GEORGE

I don't believe money has the right to earn money.

MR. SOUTHWICK

But it's earning money for us. We're profiting.

GEORGE

I don't believe in profits like that.

MR. SOUTHWICK

Perhaps we should sit down.

(as they do so)

Why are you closing your account?

GEORGE

I haven't thought it all through yet, banks and money. I'll finish that when my vacation comes in November. But for me at least, I don't believe in saving money. Oh, I used to think that keeping something—five hundred dollars for my old age or in case my appendix bursts—I used to think that made sense. But now I don't. I've taken a vow of voluntary poverty, just like Mr. Gandhi.

MR. SOUTHWICK

Who?

GEORGE

I think all the money you've got locked up in this bank is being saved by people who are afraid of a rainy day. They live in fear.

MR. SOUTHWICK

Fear?

GEORGE

Fear.

(MR. SOUTHWICK hits a bell on his desk)

GEORGE (cont'd)

May I ask you sir, if you're a religious man?

(The TELLER enters)

MR. SOUTHWICK

Get Mr.Gogarty. Now!

GEORGE

(as the TELLER disappears)

Saving up money is a sign you're afraid of the future. And one fear makes another. Think about it. It's almost immoral—everyone lying in bed, wondering what'll happen to them when they get old and sick. Who can have money in a bank and sleep at night? Worrying about this and that, worrying about whether the banks themselves will have troubles—

MR. SOUTHWICK

Stop it! Stop it, just—stop what you're saying!

(ACTOR B enters as MR.GOGARTY, a policeman)

MR. SOUTHWICK (cont'd)

Officer—arrest this man!

(MR. GOGARTY takes GEORGE by the arm
And moves him in a large, swift circle back to
ACTOR C, who is by now a fuming CHIEF OF
POLICE)

CHIEF OF POLICE

Are you screwy?!

GEORGE

No, sir. And I'm starting to resent being called that. All I ask is a fair trial; I'll clear myself in a half-hour. I hope there are a lot of people there too, 'cause in these depression times a lot of folks ought to know what Gandhi thinks of money. I told the bank president his bank and every other bank is a shaky building of fear and cowardice, and—

CHIEF OF POLICE

Brush, I'll make it simple. If you aren't out of this town in an hour, you get a strait-jacket and a six-month sanity test up in Monktown. You got that?

GEORGE

(sincerely)

I'd like to take that test. But I can't spare six months.

CHIEF OF POLICE

Take him to the depot!

(CHIEF OF POLICE exits as GOGARTY and GEORGE start walking. Silently, they make one or two turns along the way)

GOGARTY

Where'd you get your idea about the bank being shaky? Who told you that?

GEORGE

Gandhi told me.

GOGARTY

Gandhi, eh? He live around here?

GEORGE

No. But he was talking about all banks, not just—

GOGARTY

All banks? All banks, you say?

(As they turn another corner, GOGARTY suddenly stops, his eyes wide)

GOGARTY (cont'd)

What's that crowd doing in front of the bank?

GEORGE

I don't know.

GOGARTY

(growing nervous as he stares at the crowd)

'Course you do. You're the one who— *Damn* it!

(unlocking GEORGE's handcuffs)

Say, you know where the depot is, right?

GEORGE

Yes.

GOGARTY

Get yourself over there and get on that train. I've got something to do.

GEORGE

What?

GOGARTY

Get my money!

(GOGARTY runs off in the direction of the bank. We hear him shouting in the distance)

GOGARTY (off)

Make way, everybody! Make way! I'm on official police business!

(Lights shift as GEORGE moves downstage and ACTORS D and F enter)

ACTOR F

(to audience)

George went to Oklahoma City and did his usual rounds of school superintendents, principals and the like. He even went to a boys' reformatory, where they asked him to speak to the students.

ACTOR D

That night he found himself in the McGraw House Hotel, knocking on the room of Doremus Blodgett.

(ACTORS D and F exit. GEORGE has moved upstage to the door of BLODGETT's room. The room is created only by a bed, a nightstand and a chair or two. MARGIE sits on the bed, extremely tense. When GEORGE knocks DOREMUS comes out, quickly closing the door behind him)

DOREMUS

Say, Brush, I just want to ask you be a little careful. My cousin's kind of nervous. She's had a lot of fuss lately. She only got a divorce last month, and you know how it is.

GEORGE

She's . . . a divorced woman?

DOREMUS

(ushering him in, to MARGIE)

Well, Marge, look who's here.

(MARGIE sits with a cigarette in one hand,
a drink in the other, staring at the wall.
DOREMUS picks up his own drink)

DOREMUS (cont'd)

I know you don't drink, so . . .

MARGIE

Give him some ginger ale. That way he can at least hold something in his hand, my Gawd!

GEORGE

(to audience, as DOREMUS gives him a ginger ale)

I told them about my adventure at the bank and getting arrested.

DOREMUS

How can you take out all your money like that? What would you do if you got sick?

MARGIE

What'll you do when you get old?

GEORGE

I'll be fine. I work hard and I'm still getting raises, although that makes me nervous.

DOREMUS

How come?

GEORGE

Hardly anyone's getting raises these days, and I think everybody ought to be hit by the depression equally, don't you?

(DOREMUS and MARGIE look at each other)

MARGIE

Your ideas aren't the same as other people's, are they?

GEORGE

I hope not. I didn't put myself through college and accept religious conversion to have ideas like other people's.

DOREMUS

But what are you going to do when you get married? Wives aren't generally fond of one-way trips to the poorhouse.

GEORGE

Mine will be.

MARGIE

She will, eh?

GEORGE

Oh, yes. You see, I'm practically engaged right now. At least I think I am.

DOREMUS

Is she a nice girl?

GEORGE

I'm not sure. It's all part of that big mistake I told you about before. Maybe I should tell you my feelings on women.

DOREMUS

Margie, are you up to it?

MARGIE

After his big poverty idea I guess I can stand anything.

GEORGE

For a long time now I've wanted to settle down and found an American home.

DOREMUS

What?

GEORGE

You know what I think is the greatest thing in the world? It's when a man, I mean an American, sits down to Sunday dinner with his wife and six children around him.

DOREMUS

Six, eh?

GEORGE

Yes, and the more the better. Everywhere I go, I look for a wife. I was singing in church one day—I guess I never told you I have a very good voice—

DOREMUS

No.

GEORGE

Well, I have. I always offer to sing at church services.

DOREMUS

They pay you?

GEORGE

No. I could never take money for it. Anyway, one day I was singing “The Lost Chord” and I saw a girl in the congregation who looked perfect. After the service everyone asked me to go home to dinner with them. That always happens. And I went home with this girl’s family. I sat by her all through dinner. She seemed like the finest girl I’d ever seen in my life, even though she hardly said a word. I brought the conversation around to evolution—and she was all right there. Didn’t believe any of that about monkeys. But after dinner . . .

DOREMUS

What? What?

GEORGE

She asked her brother for a . . . cigarette.

DOREMUS

You don’t say.

GEORGE

Guess she wanted to show off, with a singer in the house. Her mother was pretty disappointed, but not as much as I was. That was in Sulphur Falls, Arkansas. Now I can never hear about that town without a funny feeling in my stomach.

DOREMUS

Quite a story.

MARGIE

(dryly)

Did she ever know what she lost?

DOREMUS

(nervous about MARGIE)

You were going to tell us about some big mistake or other. What was that about?

GEORGE

Oh, yes. When I was in college—

DOREMUS

Where was that?

GEORGE

Shiloh Baptist College, in South Dakota. In the summers I used to sell the Children's Encyclopedia. Walked and hitchhiked all over. One day I got lost outside Kansas City. It was dark and raining. I found a farmhouse and asked to sleep in the barn. They were Methodists and had three or four beautiful daughters moving around, just out of reach of the lamplight. After they fed me, I thanked them and said good night and went to sleep in the barn.

(wiping his forehead with a handkerchief)

From here on now it's kind of delicate. But I guess you've both been married.

DOREMUS

Yes, we know the worst.

GEORGE

I woke up in the pitch dark and heard a girl's voice laughing. Then later it was half laughing and half crying. She asked if I wanted something to eat.

MARGIE

Care for an apple?

GEORGE

No, thanks. Anyhow, we had a long talk. She said she wasn't happy on the farm. Said her name was Roberta. Anyway, it sounded like Roberta. Maybe it was Bertha. Or Hertha—

MARGIE

Go on.

GEORGE

She started crying again, and I tried to comfort her.

(with embarrassment)

Right about then I decided she was the person I was going to marry.

(DOREMUS and MARGIE look at each other,
then at GEORGE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

You understand what I'm saying?

DOREMUS

You mean you ruined the girl?

(Pale now, GEORGE nods)

MARGIE

Give him a drink! Give him a drink for Gawd's sake!

DOREMUS

He don't drink.

MARGIE

Remus, you give him a drink!

(DOREMUS does so. GEORGE takes it, but
he barely has a taste of it)

MARGIE (cont'd)

What happened next?

GEORGE

I tried to tell this girl I'd be back the next day to marry her, but she ran back into the house. So I went down the road in the rain and walked all night, planning what I was going to say to her father. But I've never been able to find that house again. Been up and down every road that side of Kansas City a dozen times. Talked to all the postmen, but it was no good. Now you know why I can't be a preacher.

DOREMUS

And you love the girl, eh?

GEORGE

It's not important if I love her. All I know is I'm her husband until she or I dies. When you know a person as well as that, it means you can never know anybody else . . . like that . . . until one of the two of you dies.

MARGIE

You're not drinking that drink!

DOREMUS

Margie—

MARGIE

Drink it up! Don't fool with it!

GEORGE

I don't drink, Mrs. McCoy—

MARGIE

I don't care!

MARGIE (cont'd)

(as GEORGE takes a small swallow)

Now, listen. You've tried as hard as you can to find that girl. Right? And she let herself in for it in the first place, *right?!* So what I'm saying is, you're in the clear. Forget it. You're free. Begin again. Begin all over.

GEORGE

I can't do that. I'm already married.

MARGIE

You're not *married*. You have no license. You're not married!

GEORGE

I am. And maybe it means that I'll never find her, and I'll never settle down and found an American home. Can't say it doesn't discourage me. Even makes me sick sometimes. I think that's all sickness really is—discouragement, a secret wish not to live. Anyhow, just look at me: I never used to take laxatives, but now—

MARGIE

Name-a-God, get him outta here, Doremus!

DOREMUS

Margie—

MARGIE

I mean it.

DOREMUS

It's not polite to—

MARGIE

(pushing both men toward the door)

Reme—!!

(to GEORGE)

You make me sick! Where do your theories and ideas get you? Nowhere! Live, kid—live! There's no hope for us sons-of-bitches if we stop to argue every step we take.

DOREMUS

Margie—

MARGIE

Stick down to earth! We're gonna be dead soon. Thinking doesn't change anything. It only makes you twice as blue.

GEORGE

It doesn't make me blue.

MARGIE

Oh, go to hell!

(MARGIE slams the 'door', returns to the bed where she smokes and cries. DOREMUS stands with GEORGE in the hall)

DOREMUS

Don't get her wrong. She'll be all right when you get to know her better. Assuming you . . . you know, assuming you ever see us again.

(DOREMUS, MARGIE and the hotel room disappear. GEORGE speaks to himself)

GEORGE

Resolution: I talk too much. I must watch it. I talk too damn much.

(ACTORS A and F enter)

ACTOR A

About then, the Caulkin Books Company sent George up to Camp Morgan to see Judge Corey.

ACTOR F

Camp Morgan was a Chautauqua camp, and Judge Corey picked all the textbooks in Oklahoma.

(ACTORS A and F exit as GEORGE approaches ACTOR B, who has just entered as a down-at-the-mouth real-estate man named DICK ROBERTS. GEORGE, carrying his sample case, is smiling and relaxed)

GEORGE

Hey, there. Guess we'll be sharing the same tent. My name's George Brush. I'm from Ludington, Michigan. I travel in school books.

DICK

(turning to shake hands)

Dick Roberts. Meyrick, Oklahoma. Anything doing in your line?

GEORGE

Yes, we keep selling pretty well. How about you?

DICK

Real estate. We don't do well at all, I'm afraid. Say, would you mind doing me a favor?

GEORGE

Sure.

DICK

Sometimes I talk in my sleep.

GEORGE

If you're snoring, I can—

DICK

No, my wife says it's more like I shout. Not often. Sometimes. If I do, just hit me, see? I'll get up and go sleep out by the lake.

(as ACTOR D enters, now LILLIAN ROBERTS)

Oh, this is my wife, Lillian. Honey, this is my tent-mate, George Brush.

LILLIAN

(shaking hands)

Hello.

GEORGE

Nice to meet you.

DICK

I'm going inside to get my suit on. If I swim a lot, maybe I'll get tired enough to sleep.

GEORGE

(to her, once DICK has exited)

Nice fella.

LILLIAN

Mr. Brush, I ought to tell you something—

GEORGE

About his nightmares, you mean? He mentioned it.

LILLIAN

It's just that he worries about business so much. He sits all day in that office and the phone never rings—and when it does, it's always bad news. He broods. That's why I brought him up here, even though it's expensive.

GEORGE

I'm very sorry to hear that. But it's hard times. Lots of people—

LILLIAN

I think he was going to commit suicide last week. I got up one night and saw a light in the bathroom. He was just standing there, looking so sad. There's no business anymore, Mr. Brush, just none. He worries about me and the children. I don't mind if we're going to be poor, poor as dirt. I don't care if the town pays for us. I just don't want him to be so miserable.

GEORGE

You ought to tell him that.

LILLIAN

I can't; he's so proud. He'd kill himself for the insurance, I know he would.

(A LITTLE GIRL runs in with a turtle)

LITTLE ROBERTS GIRL

Mamma, I got a turtle! A turtle!

(When she sees GEORGE, she's instantly shy and buries herself in her mother's skirts)

LILLIAN

A turtle. That's nice, honey. Go find Mrs. Macklin—she'll explain it to you.
(as the LITTLE GIRL runs off)
Don't let him be alone, Mr. Brush. Please? For me?

GEORGE

All right.

LILLIAN

Very nice to meet you. Hope you enjoy Camp Morgan.

(LILLIAN goes. Lights shift and GEORGE starts walking as ACTORS A and F enter)

ACTOR A

George went to call on Judge Corey.

ACTOR A

He'd met him several times before and was pretty sure Judge Corey liked him. He always called George by name.

(ACTORS A and F exit as GEORGE approaches JUDGE COREY—an older man, still *quite* vital. COREY’S with his daughter, MISSISSIPPI. She’s about twenty, awkwardly coquettish, with very thick glasses. COREY shakes GEORGE’s hand)

COREY

Jim Bush! As I live and breathe!

GEORGE

Hello, Judge Corey. I’ve come to talk to you about putting some of our books on your list.

COREY

Excellent! Always glad to do the people’s business. Write me a letter about it.

GEORGE

I’ve written you three.

COREY

Good. My secretary’s saving them for me.

(taking GEORGE aside)

Say, Jim. I want you to eat at my table tonight.

GEORGE

Thanks. I’d be proud.

COREY

Oh, and here’s another thing. A couple of us fellas are going over to the Depot Hotel later tonight for a game of poker.

GEORGE

I don’t gamble, Judge.

COREY

You don’t?! Well then, wonder if you’d do me a little favor. My daughter Mississippi—that’s her name—doesn’t know too many folks up here. Maybe you could keep an eye on her this evening? You know: a little canoe ride, a little walk, whatever. No rough stuff, though.

GEORGE

Oh, um . . . all right . . .

COREY

Wonderful!

(an arm around GEORGE, introducing him)

COREY (cont'd)

Honey child, I want you to meet Jim Bush, one of the finest fellas you could hope to see. This is Mississippi, the sweetest, snappiest little home-girl in all of Oklahoma.

MISSISSIPPI

I didn't catch the name . . .

GEORGE

It's Geor—

COREY

Jim Bush! Now Jim, why don't you take Mississippi across the lake and eat at that place with all the lanterns? I've got to speak tonight, or my wife and I would join you. Oh—and I'm going to make an announcement! Anyone who mentions the depression must pay a fine of fifteen cents! How do you like that? Mississippi, I hope I can trust you with a big, strapping man like Jim here.

MISSISSIPPI

Oh, Father—!

(COREY exits. GEORGE and MISSISSIPPI smile shyly. ACTORS B and E carry out a canoe. GEORGE and MISSISSIPPI sit in it)

ACTOR E

They hadn't even pushed off when Mississippi started talking.

ACTOR B

And like her namesake, she flowed constantly.

(ACTORS B and E exit)

MISSISSIPPI

You seem very admirable, Mr. Bush.

GEORGE

(picking up a paddle)

Actually, it's—

MISSISSIPPI

I want you to come to Okey City, so I can give you a big, big party. I know our crowd would be crazy about you. We're not foolish, if you know what I mean. We're just friends together, and we have the *best* time. When can you come, Mr. Bush? Of course I don't know whether you're married or not, but I don't think it matters when one's just friends. Do you?

GEORGE

(lifting the paddle, about to push off)

I'm practically engaged. I'm about married.

MISSISSIPPI

She must be a very lucky girl. You seem to have high ideals. I think a man must have high ideals, don't you? My girlfriends say I'm foolish; but I'm funny that way. I couldn't bring myself to marry a man that didn't have good ideals. Of course, I'm no prig either. We had gin at one of our parties, and I certainly drank my share.

(pulling out a cigarette, lighting it)

Experience is so important, don't you think? Aren't you going to start paddling?

GEORGE

(unable to keep it in)

You shouldn't talk baby talk.

MISSISSIPPI

(shocked)

Why, James Bush. I don't talk baby talk. A person can't help how she talks. I didn't think you were *rude*.

GEORGE

I apologize.

MISSISSIPPI

Do I talk baby talk? If I have faults, you should tell me. I'm not conceited, Mr. Bush.

GEORGE

My name's Brush. George Brush. Your father got it all wrong.

MISSISSIPPI

He did?

GEORGE

Yes, he did. Miss Corey, I've made a great study of girls. Everywhere I go I study them. I think they're about the most wonderful thing in the world.

MISSISSIPPI

You do?

GEORGE

Yes. And because of that, I've drawn up a list of rules for girls. You might get to be a really nice girl if you work on them.

GEORGE (cont'd)

(as she puts her hand over her mouth)

Number one is always be simple in everything you do. Also, you should never laugh loud or make unnecessary movements with your hands and eyes. A lot of girls never get married because they have no friend to tell them that. You should never drink liquor or smoke. Most important—

(She suddenly starts a high-pitched sort of keening, these criticisms being too much for her. This wail quickly turns into crying, then a kind of hysterical laughter, and finally an inability to get her breath. She even tries to rise from the canoe, and GEORGE has to prevent her from falling out of it)

GEORGE (cont'd)

Miss . . . Miss . . . Miss Corey, I— I'm sorry, I'm not trying to— Miss Corey—?

MISSISSIPPI

Aren't I *terrible* to act like that! I'm terrible!

GEORGE

No, you're not—

MISSISSIPPI

I *am*!

GEORGE

I'm so sorry!

MISSISSIPPI

No, I *like* to be told my faults—! I *like* it! Oh, what must you *think* of me!?

(pulling out of his grasp and leaping out of the canoe, wading clumsily to shore)

Goodness! I just . . . just . . . *Goodness—!!*

(She exits. GEORGE looks guiltily at the audience. ACTORS B and E return, shaking their heads. ACTOR B gestures to GEORGE to get out. GEORGE does so and exits)

ACTOR B

(to audience)

George thought the evening was about over, but it was just beginning.

ACTOR E

He went from there to a camp sing, where he thrilled everyone with “*Oh, for the wings of a dove*”.

ACTOR B

Still, he was too wrought up to stay and left them to a lecture on the philosophy of smiles by Reverend Kedworth.

ACTOR E

Walking back to his tent, George passed a kitchen where a lot of college students were washing up from dinner.

ACTOR B

He offered to help. And as they washed dishes, they sang their college songs.

(ACTOR D enters as JESSIE MAYHEW, a beautiful young co-ed. ACTOR A also enters as another COLLEGIAN. They all wash dishes. ACTOR A sings the last few phrases of the University of Illinois fight song. As he finishes, we hear applause from their unseen companions)

JESSIE

(nudging GEORGE)

Now you.

GEORGE

Me?

JESSIE

Go on—everybody’s sung one.

GEORGE

Shiloh Baptist doesn’t have much of a song. Here’s one I like, though.

“Minnesota, hail to thee
Hail to thee our state so dear,
Thy light shall ever be
A beacon bright and clear.
Thy sons and daughters true
Shall proclaim thee near and far.
They shall guard thy fame
And adore thy name
Hailing thee, our Northern Star”

(GEORGE sings quite beautifully. Strong applause as he finishes. GEORGE smiles and nudges JESSIE)

GEORGE (cont'd)

Can I pay a call on you when we're through?

JESSIE

A call?

GEORGE

I'd like very much to talk to you. I have to leave tomorrow, so it's rather important that I pay a call on you right now. Maybe we could go out on the pier.

JESSIE

What's your name?

GEORGE

George Marvin Brush.

JESSIE

Let's just go into the club room.

(Lights shift as they move into a clubroom and sit)

GEORGE

(as they move)

I was born in Michigan and travel in school books. I travel around on trains all the time and meet lots of people, but almost everybody depresses me. Why, just today—but why go into it? When I saw you I knew that you were a very fine person, completely different from . . . Anyway, we haven't much time—you must be tired—but I want you to know what I'm like so I can write letters to you.

JESSIE

Letters?

GEORGE

I'm a Baptist, and I'm pretty religious. I grew up on a farm. I've got a father and mother and two brothers, both older. One's a sailor, one's on the farm. My family didn't want me to go to Bible College. I got the highest grades, though. I was captain of track. I can see you get high grades.

JESSIE

Yes. All "A"'s.

What's your name?
GEORGE

Jessie Mayhew.
JESSIE

And? What else?
GEORGE

I'm a senior at McKenna College in Ohio. I'm going to be a teacher. I'm Methodist.
JESSIE

And your family?
GEORGE

I was brought up in an orphanage near Cleveland. No one knows my parents; I was found in a field.
JESSIE

You were? Guess we're kind of alike then, in some ways. I feel like an orphan too, almost. I love my family of course. But there's a wall between us, ever since I left the farm.
GEORGE

I see.
JESSIE

Before I ask you to let me write you, it's only fair I tell you my faults. People are always getting mad at me—even disgusted.
GEORGE

Why?
JESSIE

Because my ideas aren't the same as other people's. Not long ago I was arrested just for my ideas about money.
GEORGE

And he told me the story.
JESSIE
(to the audience)

But even when I don't get taken to jail people call me crazy. Do you think I'm crazy?
GEORGE

JESSIE

No. I like people to be different.

GEORGE

Have you had disappointments in your life? I've had three big ones. First, at college the fellows never elected me to one of the literary societies—not to Philomathian or Eunostia or the Colville Society. Second was when my Religion professor said I have a closed mind and that I'd never get anywhere. I didn't believe him. I keep getting new good ideas all the time. The third disappointment—I can't tell you about that yet, but someday I will. But for all my disappointments, I'm not miserable. Sometimes I feel wonderful. It's like everyone's unhappy except me. Just today I met such a mess of unhappy people. Then I saw you. May I give you my wrist watch? It's brand new, best I ever had.

JESSIE

No, I couldn't take a present. Thank you, though.

GEORGE

What kind of teacher do you want to be?

JESSIE

Biology.

GEORGE

Biology? You don't believe in all that about evolution, do you?

JESSIE

Of course I do.

GEORGE

You don't think the Bible'd tell a lie, do you? Can't you see there's a difference as big as the whole world between a human being with a soul and a monkey jumping around in a tree?

(after a beat)

You don't believe in women smoking cigarettes, do you?

JESSIE

Do you think such things are important?

GEORGE

Yes, I do. Terribly.

JESSIE

Well . . . I hardly smoke any, myself, but I like it when women show they can be taken as seriously as men. I'm surprised you think it's so important. I was starting to enjoy meeting a man who thinks seriously about things.

GEORGE

My vacation comes in November. Can I come to McKenna College and see you?

JESSIE

It wouldn't do any good if you have ideas like these. I live by myself. Right now, I'm *enough* by myself. Do you understand that?

GEORGE

But I could visit. If I wanted.

JESSIE

You can do what you like, I guess. It's a free country.

GEORGE

Would you go for a walk with me, if I visited? Or have dinner?

JESSIE

I suppose, but . . . you shouldn't get your hopes up.

GEORGE

Oh. Well. Well . . . good-bye then.

JESSIE

You're so serious. We've barely met each other, and you act like you've lost your last friend.

GEORGE

I don't know how you can believe the Bible tells lies and it's all right for girls to smoke. What becomes of the world if we let ideas like that into it? What good is living in the world if we become foolish city people who believe such things? With ideas like that, you'd be just be ordinary!

JESSIE

(rising, looking at him intently)

Good-bye, George. I'll think about it, okay?

(starting out, stopping)

You have such a nice voice.

(JESSIE exits. GEORGE rises as ACTORS A, C, E and F enter. They speak to the audience as lights shift to create GEORGE's tent. ACTOR B enters as DICK ROBERTS and lies down on his cot. GEORGE lies down as well)

ACTOR C

His mind much troubled, George went back to his tent.

ACTOR F

Dick Roberts was already asleep.

ACTOR A

Thankfully.

ACTOR E

And soon George was, too.

(DICK thrashes around—he's having a nightmare)

DICK

No . . . No! . . . I can't. I can't! *I can't!* . . .

(ACTORS A and C are the voices of unseen tent-mates)

ACTOR A

What's going on—?

ACTOR C

Who's shouting in here?

DICK

I can't . . . I CAN'T—!!

GEORGE

Dick! Dick— You're dreaming, wake up!

ACTOR C

Shut that man up!

ACTOR A

We're trying to sleep!

GEORGE

It's nothing, fellas. Just a bad dream.

(shaking DICK awake)

Hey, Roberts, y'all right?

DICK

What—?! Oh . . . Oh, damn.

(DICK sits up and gives a heavy sigh. He puts on his shoes. GEORGE does the same)

ACTOR A
(as DICK's son, afraid)

Papa . . . Papa . . . ?

DICK

Go to sleep, son. Just a dream.

(DICK rises quickly, a blanket under his arm. He walks out of the tent. GEORGE follows)

DICK (cont'd)

You go on back. I'll sleep down by the shore.

GEORGE

I should go with you.

DICK

No! I want to be alone.

ACTOR A
(to audience)

But George didn't leave him. He followed.

ACTOR F
(to audience)

He'd made a promise.

GEORGE

I must go wherever you go.

DICK

What are you talking about?

ACTOR D
(re-entering, to audience)

He followed Dick Roberts down to the shore.

ACTOR C

Dick took a canoe and paddled out onto the lake.

ACTOR E

George got a canoe himself and followed.

DICK

Get away from me!

ACTOR F

But George had promised.

ACTOR C

Dick didn't know about canoes. He paddled in circles. Then he lost his paddle.

DICK

Damn it—!!

ACTOR A

George slid his canoe in close to Dick's. It moved like a seal.

GEORGE

I'll get it for you.

DICK

No! Get away! What is this, anyway? I'm not crazy. I don't need a guard.

GEORGE

(handing DICK the fished-out paddle)

I won't trouble you. Just want to make sure you're all right.

DICK

Damn you—!

ACTOR D

Dick paddled even harder. He lost his balance.

ACTOR A

He fell out of the canoe and swam to shore.

GEORGE

This is getting complicated.

ACTOR E

George followed him in and got him a towel.

GEORGE

(toweling him off)

Let's go back to the tent and get dry clothes for you.

DICK

Go away! Get out!

GEORGE

I can't.

ACTOR C

They went back to the tent. Dick put on dry clothes and left again, running for his car.

ACTOR F

And George followed.

DICK

(running)

Keep away from me!

GEORGE

(keeping up with him)

I can't. I promised I'd follow you everywhere!

ACTOR E

Dick started the car. George jumped on the running board, but Dick pulled out and George lost his balance.

GEORGE

Wait for me—!

ACTOR D

Dick drove off and George woke up the camp doctor.

GEORGE

I need your car keys! I gotta follow this man!

ACTOR C

(as the DOCTOR)

Why?

GEORGE

'Cause . . . Well, he's just not happy.

ACTOR F

And George followed Dick Roberts. He followed those dim red tail lights through Morgan's Wood, and he slowly got closer and closer.

ACTOR A

Dick sped up, but George pulled even with him.

GEORGE

Slow up!

DICK

You slow up!

ACTOR E

They came to Morganville.

ACTOR C

Dick swerved suddenly—

ACTOR A

George turned to avoid him—

ACTOR E

And crashed into a hitching post in front of the Depot Hotel.

(We hear the SOUND of this CRASH. All the ACTORS exit, including ACTOR B. GEORGE stands glumly and kicks his car. SOUND of something falling off of it. After a moment JUDGE COREY enters from above)

COREY

Who's dying down there, folks?

GEORGE

Judge Corey! What are you doing here?

COREY

Playing poker, what do you think? Come on up, have a drink!

GEORGE

I don't drink. And I don't gamble.

COREY

Come up anyway, Jim. It's a big free country.

GEORGE

Judge, I gotta borrow your car.

COREY

Looks like you just had one.

GEORGE

I gotta save a man from killing himself. He's . . . He's not happy.

COREY

Not happy!? Is he nuts?

GEORGE

No, it's . . . I guess it's the depression.

COREY

Don't you go mentioning that. Don't you say that word again. Where is this fella? Bring him up here—we'll give him something to live for.

GEORGE

He's over there getting gas right now! Please come down, Judge. He'll be gone in a second.

JUDGE COREY

We can't have people killing themselves. Come on, folks. We're taking a road trip!

ACTOR A

(entering)

And Judge Corey came down with his friends, a happy group of young folks, including Helma Solario—who'd had too much to drink and not enough to wear. There were so many in the car that Helma had to sit on George's lap.

(ACTOR E enters as HELMA, drunk.
She sits on GEORGE's lap)

ACTOR E

Where do you come from, Sweetness?

GEORGE

(distracted, looking out the car's window)

Michigan.

HELMA

(pulling his face back to look at her)

So your friend's not happy, huh? When you find him, tell him for me that life's a big thrill. Tell him we're gonna have some more world wars. Tell him the depression's only begun. Tell him next year's gonna make this year look sky-high.

COREY

You pay a fine for that comment.

GEORGE

There he is!

(as we hear the SQUEAL of BRAKES)

His car's just parked there. I can take it from here, Judge. Thanks.

COREY

I want to talk to him.

HELMA

Aw, leave it to Michigan here.

(to GEORGE)

Good-bye, baby. Remember—tell him life's a big thrill.

(COREY and HELMA disappear as DICK ROBERTS enters)

ACTOR A

(to audience)

The night wasn't over. George searched the woods and finally found Dick Roberts on top of an observation tower.

ACTOR F

(entering, to audience)

He'd brought Dick a blanket. He wouldn't let Dick get back in the car. Dick walked through the woods all night—

ACTOR A

(entering, to audience)

With George right behind. They came to a picnic table.

GEORGE

Why don't you lie down and sleep for awhile?

DICK

I'll never be able to sleep again.

I'll build a fire.

GEORGE

No, I'm walking—

DICK

Sit down! You've got to stop thinking about these things. The world's not that bad. If you can't sleep, it doesn't matter. Just look up through the trees.

GEORGE

So Dick looked up through the trees—

ACTOR F

And George built a fire.

ACTOR A

And he sang.

ACTOR F

(singing)
 "Far above Cayuga's Waters
 With its waves of blue,
 Stands our noble Alma Mater,
 Glorious to view."

GEORGE

"Lift the chorus, speed it onward,
 Loud her praises tell.
 Hail to thee, our Alma Mater,
 Hail, all hail, Cornell."

"Far above the busy humming
 Of the bustling town;
 Reared against the arch of Heaven
 Looks she proudly down."

ACTOR F
 (as GEORGE sings)

He sang all night.

He never left Dick's side.
 (as GEORGE's song fades out)
 And finally, they both went to sleep.

ACTOR A

ACTOR F

In the morning they drove back, without a single word.

(JUDGE COREY reenters, sits with GEORGE)

ACTOR A

George ate breakfast with Judge Corey, who thanked him and told him not to worry about the doctor's car.

COREY

You're a prince, Jim.

GEORGE

Thank you.

(ACTOR D enters, as JESSIE MAYHEW.
She happens to be waiting on this table. She
and GEORGE, who's surprised to see her,
trade a look)

JESSIE

How do you like your eggs?

COREY

Jessie, you give this fella the best of everything the camp's got. Nothing's too good for Jim here. How about some coffee to start?

(as JESSIE turns to get the coffee)

Bright kid, that one. Think she's from Ohio. Jim, you did us a big favor last night. The doctor told me all about it, and we're all mighty grateful.

(JESSIE turns back to them with the coffee.
GEORGE hasn't taken his eyes off her)

GEORGE

Thanks . . .

COREY

(as JESSIE pours)

Gotta say, I'm sorry you're leaving today. You made a big hit with our daughter Mississippi. Want a tip, man to man? Thirty-five thousand dollars goes with that girl. Think it over. Plus I have connections. I could settle the right young man in a very good job around the Capitol. What do you say to that?

JESSIE

(to GEORGE, who's been staring at her)

Cream?

COREY

Well, son? Any thoughts?

GEORGE

(coming to himself)

I . . . I hope she finds a good home.

(to JESSIE)

No cream, thanks.

(JESSIE gives a small, ironic smile and disappears. GEORGE stares after her)

COREY

Think it over, Jim. Think it over. Meantime, I'll see your school books get highly recommended. You're a bright young man, Jim. You may go very, very far. Just . . . think it over.

(JUDGE COREY drinks his coffee as lights fade. GEORGE moves into a spot downstage. He's on the phone)

GEORGE

Hello, Jackson Detective Agency? I wonder if you could help me find someone. A young woman, near Kansas City. She lives on a farm.

(GEORGE hangs up, picks up his sample case and moves downstage as ACTORS B and D enter from two different directions)

ACTOR D

George couldn't really say Michigan was his home anymore.

ACTOR B

He had no home at the moment.

ACTOR D

Still, whenever he was in Kansas City, he always stayed at Queenie's—

ACTOR B

Marcella Craven's—

ACTOR D

She had a boarding house above the railroad yards. George stayed up on the top floor. There were three other men up there, too. Sinners.

ACTOR B

But George was working on them.

(He mimes pushing a doorbell. It RINGS, and QUEENIE enters. She smiles broadly when she sees him)

GEORGE

Hello, Queenie!

QUEENIE

Mr. Brush! I'm glad to see you. Are you staying long?

GEORGE

Three nights. Are any of the fellows home?

QUEENIE

They're all at work right now. Let's go up and get your bed made.

(They move upstage as lights reveal the top floor of Queenie's. We can see a beds or two. We can't see the whole room. Remnants of broken doors and plaster lie scattered—the place is a mess. QUEENIE makes GEORGE'S bed as he wanders about the room)

QUEENIE (cont'd)

Looks even worse'n usual up here. But they say they'll kill me if I clean up any more than making the beds. It's tough on them, I know. Mr. Callahan and Mr. Morris both got their jobs reduced lately.

GEORGE

Has Herb been drinking bad?

QUEENIE

I wouldn't know. But the whole banister came off the staircase the other day. And last night Mrs. Kubinsky seen one of them hanging from the roof gutter by his nails. She couldn't say which one, though. It's a wonder they're all still alive.

GEORGE

We've just got to work on them slowly, Queenie. How's Father Pasziewski?

QUEENIE

Oh, he's good. Back on the job again.

GEORGE

No more kidney trouble?

QUEENIE

Now they think it was gall stones. Mrs. Kramer gave him water from the River Jordan for his tea, and it melted those stones completely. But Mrs. Delahanty still thinks he's not long for this world. With Father Pasziewski, if it isn't one thing, it's another.

(finishing the bed)

There. Mr. Brush, if I were to clean this place up now, would you protect me from them?

GEORGE

Can you do it tomorrow? I don't feel that well. Think I need a nap.

QUEENIE

What's wrong?

GEORGE

(sitting on his bed)

Nothing special. Just sick of trains, hotels—sick of lots of things.

QUEENIE

Want some coffee?

GEORGE

No, thanks.

(looking at the ceiling)

Did you ever wish you were dead, Queenie?

QUEENIE

Now, don't you say that! I once said something like that in confession, and the priest almost bit my head off.

GEORGE

I was only joking.

QUEENIE

A healthy young man like you, with a fine tenor voice.

(LOUIE MORRIS rushes in. He's a volatile man, highly energized)

LOUIE

Hi, Queenie! Hitch up your pants, the depression's over. They found a plan to make the ocean fresh water. Say, you're not trying to clean up in here, are you?

QUEENIE

No, I—

LOUIE

Georgie! When'd you get in?

GEORGE

Just now, but I'm kind of . . .

LOUIE

We've gotta have a party! Herb and Bat are right behind me.

QUEENIE

(nervous)

Really?

LOUIE

(pulling a rum-filled medicine bottle from under his bed)

Hey, George. This calls for a beaker of Dr. Schnickenschnauser's, wouldn't you say?

GEORGE

I don't drink—

LOUIE

We know better'n that.

QUEENIE

Maybe I should go—

LOUIE

Fine with me, Queenie. Just don't clean up in here.

(QUEENIE turns to go, but runs smack into HERB and BAT. HERB is an older, smart, cynical alcoholic, depressive newspaper man. He easily dominates everyone but GEORGE. BAT is young, a mechanic in sound pictures)

HERB

What are you doing in here, Queenie?

QUEENIE

Making Mr. Brush's bed, that's all.

LOUIE

She was trying to clean up.

HERB

(to QUEENIE)

If you do that, I'll kill you.

GEORGE

Leave her alone!

HERB

Georgie—as I live and breathe.

(HERB gets out of QUEENIE'S way, and she quickly exits)

HERB (cont'd)

What'd you come back for, George? Thought you'd had enough of us.

BAT

Maybe he wants more medicine.

HERB

Dr. Schnickenschnauser! Of course!

(grabbing LOUIE'S bottle, taking a swig)

I feel better already.

(offering it to GEORGE)

George?

GEORGE

Very funny.

HERB

Little rum won't hurt you.

LOUIE

(jumping behind GEORGE, grabbing his arms)

C'mon, Brush. This is what all the doctors down at the hospital prescribe for what ails you.

GEORGE

Let me go. I'm a pacifist, but—

HERB

Then drink to pacifism! Bat, hold his mouth open.

(BAT moves to do so, but GEORGE shoves him away with his foot. GEORGE, who's certainly the strongest of these men, then wrestles himself out of LOUIE's grasp as well. The others fall to laughing)

GEORGE

Let me be! You fooled me once, but not this time.

HERB

We've been telling that story ever since you were here last, buddy.

LOUIE

We had you drinking this stuff all afternoon, thinking it was medicine.

BAT

Dr. Schnickenschnauser. You thought he was real!

LOUIE

Got you to wander all over town. You puked on the steps of City Hall, remember?

(HERB, LOUIE and BAT dissolve in laughter)

HERB

I still can't believe it. Was that really the first time you ever tried liquor?

GEORGE

(embarrassed but defiant)

I'm glad I did try it! 'Least now I know what everyone's talking about. No wonder they made Prohibition. The thoughts I had. I wasn't right again for two days.

HERB

(handing BAT the bottle, to GEORGE)

If you're not gonna drink with us, then get over here and do the only thing you're good for.

(HERB starts singing "Wasting in Despair" in a baritone. LOUIE and BAT join in. Their harmony is quite good)

HERB (cont'd)

“Shall I wasting in despair
Die because a woman’s fair?
Or make pale my cheeks with care
‘Cause another’s rosy are?”

(Unable to resist, GEORGE joins in as they
continue with the song)

EVERYONE

“Be she fairer than the day,
Or the flow’ry meads in May,
If she be not so to me,
What care I how fair she be?”

HERB

That’s more like it! That tenor—that’s what we’ve been missing around here.

(The men slowly start gravitating to their own
areas. LOUIE collects his bottle and takes a
swig. He offers it to BAT, who takes one too)

GEORGE

How are things at work for you, gents? Queenie says they’ve been cutting you back some.

HERB

(suddenly less expansive)

Yeah, well . . .

BAT

Louie’s down to an orderly now at the hospital.

GEORGE

But you were their pharmacist.

BAT

(as LOUIE shrugs)

They cut my hours on me—and over at the newspaper they’re cutting people’s pay.

GEORGE

Is that right, Herb?

HERB

Why talk about that stuff? Listen, big boy. How would you like a date? You're always looking for a fine girl, aren't you? You know, to be the mother of your children?

GEORGE

You shouldn't make fun of such things.

HERB

I'm not. Don't be sensitive.

GEORGE

I don't trust you when you act serious.

HERB

Here I have a perfectly good invitation to Sunday dinner in a nice home with a lot of beautiful girls in the house and you poop all over me. They've got money, too. Nicest girls in Kansas City.

GEORGE

How'd you meet 'em, Herb?

HERB

Go on, insult me. But I've changed. I've reformed. In fact, I myself am courting one of these girls. I want to marry and settle down. Come on, they're over on MacKenzie Boulevard. Swell mansion. I told them all about you. They said we should bring you along to dinner the next time you swung through town.

BAT

That's right.

LOUIE

That's what they said.

GEORGE

You promise before God that there's no catch in this?

(as HERB, LOUIE and BAT all silently hold up
their right hands)

I don't believe you.

HERB

Oh, you give me a pain. Go eat at the wagon. Hope it chokes ya. I told Mrs. Crofut we'd sing for them and everything. But do what you want—stay home and spoil the quartet; see if I care.

GEORGE
(deliberating, then)

I'll come.

HERB

You will?

(with new-found sincerity)

Thank you, George. Thank you. I can't tell you what this means to me. Hope you don't mind, but I sort of made out to Mrs. Crofut that you were a famous singer, like on the radio. A concert singer—you know.

GEORGE

That's not a lie. Must be five thousand people in this country who've been thrilled by my singing at one time or other. Back in Camp Morgan they were spellbound. I didn't know the human hand could clap that much.

(noticing the others sharing looks)

I don't say that because I'm conceited. A fine voice is just a gift, that's all. Tell Mrs. Crofut I'll be happy to come sing for her and her family.

HERB

That's great, Brushy my boy. Put 'er there.

(HERB and GEORGE shake hands
as BAT muffles a short, quiet laugh)

GEORGE

What?

BAT

Nothin'.

(Lights shift as the men prepare themselves
to go to Mrs. Crofut's. The boarding house
disappears as the men commence a long arc
downstage and then up again. They talk as they go)

GEORGE

You really aiming to get married, Herb?

HERB

You bet. Her name's Gladys. You'll see her tonight.

GEORGE

That's swell. I always thought you should get hitched. You could build a fine American home.

LOUIE

(with a suppressed laugh)

Yeah, right.

GEORGE

What do you know, Louie? “Thou hadst little wit in thy bald crown when thou gavest thy golden one away.”

(The other three all stop)

HERB

What?

GEORGE

Nothing.

BAT

What the hell was that?!

GEORGE

Don’t swear. I just . . . I’m just memorizing something, is all. A play.

LOUIE

A play?

GEORGE

It’s by Shakespeare. It’s called *King Lear*. I’ve been memorizing it.

HERB

Why?

GEORGE

‘Cause back in college a professor told me it was the greatest work in English literature. So I read it— ten times.

BAT

Ten times? Was it any good?

GEORGE

Oh, no—I didn’t see a trace of talent in it. So I figured I must be missing something, and now I’m memorizing it.

(as they stare at him astonished)

That’s all.

HERB

(shaking his head as though to clear it)

Let's go see the girls.

(as they all start walking again)

Now, the Crofuts are an old family, George. But they haven't always lived on MacKenzie St. There's the house—big, ain't it?

(Indeed, they find themselves before a projection of a large mansion that's seen better days)

GEORGE

Sure is. Who lived there before?

HERB

Actually, it was a . . . French restaurant.

(hurrying him along)

We can go right in.

GEORGE

Shouldn't we ring the bell?

HERB

Nah, they know me.

(calling out)

Mrs. Crofut! We're here!

(Lights rise upstage to reveal the parlor of Mrs. Crofut's mansion. It's dominated by a large rattan chair and contains a sofa and several smaller chairs—all seemingly from a bygone and far more genteel era. MRS. CROFUT sweeps into the room as the men enter. She is a handsome and imposing woman of a certain age, with a carefully built-up head of yellow hair, complete with small curls across her forehead. She wears a black silk shirtwaist covered with jet beads and a gold watch pinned over her lungs)

MRS. CROFUT

Boys! How are you?

HERB

Mrs. Crofut, I want you to shake hands with George Brush, the singer.

MRS. CROFUT

It's a pleasure. We've been looking forward to this. I declare, my daughters have been dolling up for hours. They can't wait to meet you.

(sitting in the rattan chair, which reigns over the room)

Have a seat everyone; tell me what you've been doing with yourselves. Herb, we haven't seen much of you lately. Gladys was asking just today—

HERB

(guiding GEORGE to the sofa, sitting in a chair along with the others)

There's a depression on, Mrs. C. More hours for less pay. We've all got to sacrifice.

MRS. CROFUT

Have you lived long in these parts, Mr. Brush?

GEORGE

Actually, I'm from Michigan.

MRS. CROFUT

You don't say? I knew a Mr. Pasternak from there. He was in lumber. Very well off. Really, very well off.

(as a lovely young woman, LILY, also with yellow hair, enters)

Oh, this is my girl Lily!

(to her)

Aren't you bold!

(to BRUSH)

Lily's the musical one around here. Very sweet voice.

LILY

(shyly)

Hello, Mr. Brush.

(GEORGE rises to bow. The others don't bother)

GEORGE

It's a pleasure to meet—

MRS. CROFUT

(as another lovely young woman with yellow hair, GLADYS, enters)

And this is Gladys. Herb, I expect you're happy to see her.

(GLADYS moves by GEORGE to HERB,

who tries to embrace her. She eludes his arms,
grabs his tie and pulls him toward the door)

HERB

Hey, let go—!

(to the others)

Guess she wants to talk about china patterns.

GEORGE

(as GLADYS pulls HERB out of the room)

Nice to meet you—

(to LILY, who's still standing)

Won't you sit down?

MRS. CROFUT

Lily, before you do, will you see what's keeping all those other—my other daughters?
I swear, Mr. Brush will think we have no sense of time.

(as LILY disappears back the way she entered)

GEORGE

(sitting again)

Do you have a lot of daughters, Mrs. Crofut?

BAT

I'll say.

LOUIE

Shut up.

MRS. CROFUT

As a matter of fact I do have a lot of daughters, Mr. Brush.

BAT

And all about the same age.

(LOUIE slugs BAT in the shoulder)

MRS. CROFUT

Some of the older girls are eating by themselves tonight upstairs. The ones you're meeting are what I call my kindergarten. You see, Mr. Brush,

(with intimate complicity)

Perhaps they aren't *all* my daughters; some of them merely make their home with me for the time being.

MRS. CROFUT (cont'd)
 (as DOLORES, a sullen, intense
 dark-haired girl, enters)

For example, Dolores here is a Cuban girl.

GEORGE
 (rising, with a small bow)

Pleased to meet you. George Brush.

MRS. CROFUT
 Speak up, Dolores. I swear, they're all as nervous as witches about meeting you. They're not themselves.

GEORGE
 (as DOLORES sits on the sofa)
 That's all right. I can't remember when I've seen so many beautiful, quiet girls in one place before.

(BAT snickers. LOUIE elbows him)

MRS. CROFUT
 (as MAYME, a lovely red-haired girl, enters)
 Oh, *there* you are, Mayme! It's about time. Mr. Brush, this is Mayme. She's a great reader. Nose always in a book. Mayme's our red-head. I don't know what's keeping my other girls.
 (shouting toward the stairs)
May! Ruth! Pearl! The men are here to sing for you!

GEORGE
 (to MAYME)
 That's wonderful—that you're such a reader, I mean.

LOUIE
 George here reads Shakespeare.

MAYME
 (in a shy, high-pitched voice)
 Really? I read a story by him the other day.

GEORGE
 Did he write things besides theater plays?

MRS. CROFUT
 Shakespeare? He wrote every kind of thing. We've got one of his upstairs, don't we, Mayme? Run up and get it.

MRS. CROFUT (cont'd)

(as MAYME exits)

Have a seat, Mr. Brush.

(as GEORGE does so, on the sofa with DOLORES)

Oh, the two of you can sit closer than that, can't you?

(as GEORGE awkwardly slides closer)

You know, speaking of plays, did you ever see Lillian Russell?

GEORGE

I don't think so.

MRS. CROFUT

Well, some of my girls think I look exactly like her. Don't they Dolores? Speak up, Dolores; this is no time to be sullen.

GEORGE

(to the silent DOLORES)

Are you all right?

(DOLORES suddenly slaps GEORGE's face, strides to the door, turns back to GEORGE, hisses, spits in his direction and rushes out of the room. Mortified, MRS. CROFUT rises and shouts after her)

MRS. CROFUT

Go upstairs! Go upstairs, you slut. You're a nasty slut. I'll give you something to learn you a lesson!

(recomposing herself, sitting again)

Why, I'm so ashamed I don't know what to say. Here we were, enjoying ourselves, and— You see: I have my troubles like everyone else. They're so nervous around a great singer. Still, all in all I think I have some pretty nice girls, if I do say so myself.

BAT

Wow!

(BAT's head is bent to the floor, trying to suppress his urge to laugh. MAYME returns)

MAYME

Here it is. Here's the book.

MRS. CROFUT

Ah! Wonderful! Show Mr. Brush.

(She hands it to GEORGE. He reads the title)

GEORGE

September Morn at Atlantic City. I don't think that's by Shakespeare.

MRS. CROFUT

Really? I could have sworn.

HERB

(re-entering, now alone)

There's a cop in the kitchen.

MRS. CROFUT

Oh! Jimmy's here. Mayme, go tell him there's a surprise for him in there.

HERB

Heard some yelling out here. What's going on?

LOUIE

Cuban girl's off her feed.

HERB

So's Gladys. Think she scratched me.

(showing LOUIE his ear)

Is there blood?

LOUIE

A little.

(LILY returns and sits next to GEORGE on the sofa. She's much friendlier than DOLORES)

MRS. CROFUT

The path of true love did never run smooth—eh, Mr. Brush?

GEORGE

Yeah, I guess—

MRS. CROFUT

(to HERB)

If you were to visit a little more often, perhaps Gladys would be happier to see you.

HERB

It's the depression, Mrs. C. These days I've got to go to George Washington Park.

MRS. CROFUT

Well, be common if you want to. It's none of my business.

HERB

Quit the high horse, ma. Who do you think you are?

MRS. CROFUT

I will not be talked to that way in my own home!

HERB

Home?! That's a hell of a thing to call it!

GEORGE

(rising, angry)

Herb, you apologize right now. You are in a fine American home. I don't know what you tried with Gladys back there, but if you don't apologize I'll take you out and turn the hose on you.

MRS. CROFUT

That's all right. I don't expect decency from the likes of him.

HERB

(to GEORGE, pulling his coat off)

Come on then! Let's fight it out, you goddamn simp!

LOUIE

Sit down, Herb. Don't get into it now. We'll tell him later.

GEORGE

Tell me what?!

HERB

(shrugging his jacket back on, sitting down)

Ah, nothing.

GEORGE

I forgive you, Herb.

HERB

What?

GEORGE

I forgive you. And I'm sorry I lost my temper. Even friends can quarrel. Just means human nature isn't raised up yet to what we hope it's going to be. The world's getting better and better. Someday there won't be any quarrels.

GEORGE (cont'd)
(to MRS. CROFUT)

Mrs. Crofut, I want to thank you for taking me into this fine home of yours. Most of my life I'm on trains and in hotels. I'm almost never around girls as quiet and beautiful as—

HERB

It's a *cat-house*!!

GEORGE

What?

HERB
(as LOUIE and BAT start laughing)

My God! You're the simplest galoot in the world! You're so simple, you stink!

GEORGE

Are you saying that these are . . . fallen women?

(LOUIE and BAT, hysterical, fall on the floor)

HERB

You couldn't *get* 'em more fallen!

GEORGE

(red-faced)

You promised there was no catch in it!

HERB

All promises went out with Daylight Savings, kid.

(GEORGE is livid. He rises, picking up a small wooden end table. Eyes fixed on HERB and barely noticing it, he breaks off a leg of the end table with his bare hands. MRS. CROFUT rises instantly)

MRS. CROFUT

Go along, girls!

(MAYME and LILY rise and hurry out)

HERB

You gonna take a club to me, kid?

GEORGE

(hesitating, then throwing it away)

No. No matter how bad you are, I . . . I don't fight.

HERB

(standing slowly, removing his coat)

You'll fight, all right. You'll fight, you pontificating bastard. I've owed you this for a long time.

(HERB punches GEORGE in the face. GEORGE goes down and covers himself with his arms)

MRS. CROFUT

(halfway out of the room)

Not in here!

HERB

C'mon, boys!

(LOUIE and BAT quickly join HERB. They descend on GEORGE, punching and kicking him viciously)

MRS. CROFUT

No! No!! *You'll pay the damages!*

(running out, toward the kitchen)

Jimmy! *JIMMY—!!!*

(HERB and the others continue beating and kicking GEORGE, who never fights back)

(Suddenly lights shift. The SOUND of GEORGE'S VOICE singing "How Can I Bear to Leave Thee?" fills the room. The men stop beating their by now unconscious victim. Together, with stylized movements, they lift GEORGE and place him gently in a side chair which BAT has moved center.

Carefully they sit him up, arranging his arms and legs, raising his head in a formal pose—as though he were sitting in the Lincoln Memorial. The song continues as they disappear. Lights fade slowly to black as the song ends. GEORGE's eyes never open)

End of ACT ONE

ACT TWO

(Lights up suddenly to reveal GEORGE in a hospital bed, covered in bandages. This is not to be confused with the Texas hospital we saw at the top of the play. QUEENIE enters, carrying his sample case. She sits beside him)

QUEENIE

I brought your things, Mr. Brush. Are you in any pain?

GEORGE

No. Doctor says I'll be fine. Thank you, Queenie.

QUEENIE

I knew they were wild boys, but I didn't think they'd try to break your bones. I told 'em to pack up and get right out. But they're not leaving very fast. I'll let 'em stay if you say so, Mr. Brush. With these hard times, I don't know who else I'd find.

GEORGE

(after a beat)

Let 'em stay. Is this the hospital Louie works in?

QUEENIE

Yes. I just saw him.

GEORGE

How's Father Pasziewski, Queenie?

QUEENIE

What? Oh, well I told you—he's doing much better. Funny, you ask about him so much. He always asks about you.

GEORGE

He does?

QUEENIE

Yes. I told him all about you.

GEORGE

And it wasn't his kidneys?

QUEENIE

Gall stones. Drops from the River Jordan melted 'em right down.

GEORGE

Tell Father Pasziewski . . . I think of him a lot.

QUEENIE

Can I write a card to somebody for you, Mr. Brush?

GEORGE

No. There's nobody. Could you send Louie to see me though?

QUEENIE

What? Oh . . . all right.

(She exits. After a moment LOUIE enters dressed as an orderly)

GEORGE

Hi, Louie.

LOUIE

What do you want? I'm in a hurry. Gotta go get some arms and legs.

GEORGE

Louie, what's wrong with me? It must be serious, 'cause that's the third time people have suddenly hated me.

LOUIE

You'll figure it out someday. Only don't come 'round us guys again. You don't fit in.

GEORGE

Did the fellows say that?

LOUIE

Yeah. See ya.

GEORGE

(as LOUIE starts out)

Louie, if you ever change your mind and want to sing some more—

LOUIE

(turning back, unable to contain himself)

Learn to drink! That's what you need to do. Leave other people's lives alone. Run around with women. Enjoy life. You're gonna be dead a long time. A long, *long* time! You keep looking for an American home? What a joke! Believe me, all you're going to find is—

GEORGE

Get away!

LOUIE

What?

GEORGE

Get away!! If I was like you, I'd *expect* to be dead a long time! I'd rather be crazy all alone than sensible like you. I'm glad I'm *nuts!*

LOUIE

(grabbing GEORGE, who struggles)

Pipe down!

GEORGE

No!

(struggling all the harder, trying to rise)

If you fellas ever want me back, I'll be as I am, only worse! It's the world that's crazy. Everybody's crazy except me. *The whole world is nuts!*

(They freeze. Lights fade on them as
ACTOR C enters, addresses us)

ACTOR C

After several weeks, George was healthy and on the road again. He buried himself in his work. Then, out of the blue he received a letter that had been forwarded many times. It was from the Jackson Detective Agency.

ACTOR F

(entering)

They'd found the farmhouse he was looking for. One of the daughters—

ACTOR C

A Miss Roberta Weyerhauser—

ACTOR F

Had left the farm about a year ago, and moved into town—

ACTOR C

There she found work as a waitress at the Rising Sun Chop Suey Palace.

(Lights shift back to what is now the Rising Sun
Chop Suey Palace—a large room hung with
Chinese lanterns. Two WAITRESSES move

in and out. They're dressed in Chinese costume, including red satin trousers. Their makeup is vaguely Oriental.

A table, with GEORGE sitting at it, is revealed.
ROBERTA, one of the waitresses, approaches him)

ACTOR F

One of the employees approached the table where George Brush sat. He was nervous—

ACTOR C

Wondering which of these waitresses, if any, would someday be his wife.

ROBERTA

(as ACTORS C and F disappear)

What'll you have?

GEORGE

What's specially good?

ROBERTA

'T's all wonderful.

GEORGE

Is there anything here that's a favorite of yours?

ROBERTA

I'm crazy about'm all. Everyone of'm'll give you a great big thrill you'll never forget.

GEORGE

Might I ask you your name?

ROBERTA

Sure. You can know everything. My name's Whosis. I live with my mother and we don't have a phone. I get out at four o'clock. My boyfriend picks me up. I don't like to dance and the pictures hurt my eyes. What else would you like to know?

GEORGE

I didn't mean anything like that. Is there a waitress here named Roberta Weyerhauser?

ROBERTA

(suddenly staring at him)

What is this? Who are you? Did somebody send you?

GEORGE

Are you Roberta?

ROBERTA

(quickly looking back down at her pad)

No, I'm Lily Watson. Hurry up. What'll you have?

GEORGE

It *is* you. Roberta—!

(She suddenly looks up at GEORGE, who smiles.
She gives an exclamation of astonishment and hatred)

ROBERTA

Oh-h! OH--!!

GEORGE

Roberta—

ROBERTA

Don't call me that! I never want to see you again. *Ever*.

GEORGE

For months I looked for your father's house. I didn't know how to find you—

ROBERTA

I'm glad you didn't. What happened was *terrible*, and I never want to *think* about it again.

GEORGE

I want you to marry me, Roberta.

ROBERTA

You're crazy!

GEORGE

We're married already.

ROBERTA

Crazy as a coot. Stop talking to me—I'll lose my job.

GEORGE

(pulling out his wallet)

Here. I want to give you thirty dollars—

ROBERTA

What?! *No!*

GEORGE

I owe you money all my life. I'm going to support you until you die.
(holding it out to her)

Please, Roberta. I have to get this fixed up. You and I have to at least be friends—

ROBERTA

(of the money)

Put that away!

(looking around nervously as he does so)

That's an *awful* thing to say to me. I have to get back to work.

GEORGE

Can I at least go and talk to your father about it?

ROBERTA

If you do that, I'll kill myself.

GEORGE

Then I'll just have to keep talking to you. I won't go away, Roberta. I can't.

ROBERTA

(with a desperate look)

My sister Lottie's coming to town on Sunday. You can talk to her.

GEORGE

Will you be there?

ROBERTA

We can meet inside the gate at City Park. Four o'clock.

GEORGE

That's fine. Roberta, will you please accept my wristwatch—?

ROBERTA

No! I don't want anything to do with you. Don't you *understand?!?*

GEORGE

No.

(She shakes her head sadly, then rushes off.
Lights fade on GEORGE as ACTOR B enters)

ACTOR B

Sunday was five days away. Since he was in Kansas City anyway, George decided to stop by Queenie's boarding house. He didn't go upstairs, of course. He waited until he saw Bat rush out before ringing the bell.

(Lights up on QUEENIE, delight in her smile)

QUEENIE

Mr. Brush!

GEORGE

Hello, Queenie. How are you?

QUEENIE

In the pink. In the pink, but you know Mr. Callahan's terrible sick.

GEORGE

Herb?

QUEENIE

Yes! He's at a hospital ten miles in the country. The doctors say he's going to die soon.

GEORGE

Have you seen him?

QUEENIE

Yes.

GEORGE

Can we go out there tomorrow? Will you come with me?

QUEENIE

Well—

GEORGE

You can go in first, and ask him if I can come in. I won't say anything to make him mad, I promise.

ACTOR B

They bought carnations and rode out on the trolley.

(GEORGE and QUEENIE sit with their flowers.
Faint sound and jostle of a trolley-car)

QUEENIE

There's nothing I like more than a good long street-car ride in the country.

GEORGE

How's Father Pasziewski, Queenie?

QUEENIE

Oh, he was sick, but he got better. Began doing everything again. Hikes with the Knights of St. Ludowick, and he took Mary's Flowers to the zoo, like he used to do in the old days. And then the gall stones came right back. Sure as you live.

GEORGE

Did they?

QUEENIE

I don't think he'll ever get well. Way down deep, he's an awful disappointed man.

GEORGE

What about?

QUEENIE

About how his young people have turned out. Those Knights of St. Ludowick have turned into practically gangsters. They hold people up in the park, steal automobiles. And a lot of Mary's Flowers have become taxi-dancers.

GEORGE

What's that?

QUEENIE

Now you ask me, I don't quite know myself. It's when a man pays girls to dance with him; something like that.

GEORGE

It's not immoral to be a taxi-dancer, is it?

QUEENIE

I guess not; but it's not as good as a trip to the zoo. Father Pasziewski don't know what to do about it. It's not like they don't need the money. I declare, I can't talk about the depression for very long. I get dizzy.

GEORGE

Does Father Pasziewski ever talk about me?

QUEENIE

He prays for you.

GEORGE

Really?

QUEENIE

You're on the Friday list. I'm on the Tuesday list.

(as the trolley stops)

Here we are!

ACTOR B

(as QUEENIE goes and returns)

Queenie went in first, with the carnations. When she came back—

QUEENIE

He says you can come in. But he won't have you preaching at him.

GEORGE

I won't. I've learned not to—honest. Is he in pain?

QUEENIE

He looks terrible.

(As QUEENIE and ACTOR B disappear,
GEORGE moves to HERB, in a hospital bed.
HERB does indeed look to be at Death's door)

GEORGE

Hello, Herb.

HERB

Hello, Nuts. You came here all by yourself. I didn't send for you. Right?

(as GEORGE nods)

I'm on the point of croaking, and I don't care if I do. I want you to do me a favor. Just say yes or no. It's a straight proposition; take it or leave it.

GEORGE

All right.

HERB

I've got two hundred forty dollars in the bank. I'm leaving it to you. Don't know if you knew, but I had a wife and kid. We lived separately; it was just that way. I didn't see myself coming home at regular hours, wheeling baby carriages and all that tripe. Anyhow, one day she beat it—

HERB (cont'd)

I don't know where. She left the kid behind. I pay some folks three dollars a week to keep the kid now. I can't give them the money in a lump or God knows what they'd do with it. So I want to give you the money—don't talk!—so you can keep on sending the three bucks a week. You don't have to see the kid, just send the money. What do you say? Yes or no, now. None of that soft stuff, or I'll kill you.

GEORGE

(almost without hesitation)

Can I adopt the kid? I mean, forever?

HERB

(staring at him a moment)

Oh, I don't give a goddamn.

GEORGE

What's its name? How old is it?

HERB

I don't know. Elizabeth? Four, five—maybe older. Wish I hadn't brought it up.

GEORGE

I could get a lawyer—

HERB

You don't need a lawyer. Just take it.

GEORGE

(as HERB pulls a bank book and blank checks from under his pillow)

I don't need the money—

HERB

Shut up! Write what I tell you!

ACTOR E

(entering, to audience)

And Herb showed George the child's address with a Mrs. Barton on Dresser Street. Herb told him he also sent four dollars a week to his mother.

GEORGE

What's she doing?

HERB

I don't know. She don't either, she's so full of gin. You might slip her twenty or thirty sometime, but I don't care. They can all go to hell. I'm glad I'm clearing out.

ACTOR E

There was a long pause during which Herb glared angrily at the top of the windows. George said nothing.

HERB

They shouldn't put the window-curtains so high.

ACTOR E

Afraid to speak, George rose to leave.

(As GEORGE goes, HERB's eyes close.
GEORGE rejoins QUEENIE at the trolley stop)

QUEENIE

How was it?

GEORGE

I don't want to go on living, Queenie. I believe there's a God, all right—but why's he so slow in changing the world? Why does he deliberately disappoint people like Father Pasziewski, and why does he let fine fellows like Herb get so mixed up?

QUEENIE

It's awful to think like that. I won't listen to you.

GEORGE

But what's the explanation?

QUEENIE

I won't listen!

GEORGE

Wouldn't it be terrible if I lost my faith? I'd go on, just as I am—only I wouldn't get any pleasure out of it. The world isn't worth living in for its own sake. Queenie, have you ever had anything to do with babies?

QUEENIE

Yes.

GEORGE

I'm bringing you one this afternoon.

QUEENIE

What?

GEORGE

About three o'clock. Herb's. I'm bringing an old lady, too. His mother.

QUEENIE

(as a TROLLEY BELL RINGS)

Mr. Brush, what are you talking about? The trolley's here.

GEORGE

You go. I'll walk.

QUEENIE

It's ten miles!

GEORGE

I have a lot to think about.

(Another RING. She mounts the car)

QUEENIE

What on earth are you talking about?

GEORGE

I'll see you this afternoon!

(GEORGE waves as the trolley and QUEENIE disappear. He stands smiling quietly, looking up lost in thought as ACTOR E speaks to the audience)

ACTOR E

George found Herb's mother and told her of the new arrangements. Then he called on the Bartons, explained everything to them, and they gave him Elizabeth.

(ELIZABETH, a wide-eyed little girl—the same one whose image was projected early in the play—enters uncertainly and stares up at GEORGE. He stares back for a moment, then holds out his hand. They start walking)

ACTOR E

George took her off to her new home and sent a telegram reassuring Herb that everything was taken care of.

GEORGE

(as QUEENIE reenters and greets them)

I think you'll be happy here, Elizabeth. Queenie's a good woman. I travel a lot—in fact, I'm going to Ozarkville, Missouri tomorrow. But Queenie's here all the time.

(to ELIZABETH, after she and QUEENIE exchange uncertain smiles)

So, um . . . how would you like to hear the story of the Flood?

(Lights shift as ACTOR E exits. ACTOR A enters)

ACTOR A

George was happy to go to Ozarkville. It took his mind off Sunday's meeting with Roberta Weyerhauser and her sister. On the train down, George decided to do something he'd been putting off. To honor his master, the Mahatma Gandhi, he would spend twenty-four hours straight, from four p.m. Thursday to four p.m. Friday, without eating a particle of food or speaking a single word.

(GEORGE reappears, holding his sample case, which he sets down. ACTOR C also enters. As ACTOR C speaks, GEORGE takes out a pad and writes)

ACTOR C

(to audience)

At first it went well. George stayed around the hotel. When other guests asked him questions, he wrote his answers down on a pad. Everyone thought he had laryngitis.

ACTOR A

As the next day wore on, he felt light-headed from lack of food, but strangely happy from all the spiritual benefits of the exercise. As it approached four o'clock, he put some apples in his pockets and took a stroll through town.

ACTOR C

There he saw an arresting sight.

(GEORGE comes upon a little girl, RHODA MAY GRUBER, on the front porch of a house. Around her neck is a placard which reads, "I AM A LIAR". GEORGE stops and stares for a moment, then approaches her. He pulls out his pad and pencil, writes, then shows it to her)

ACTOR A

George wrote, "What is your name?"

(RHODA MAY takes GEORGE'S pad and pencil
and writes, showing it to him)

ACTOR C

The little girl wrote, "Rhoda May Gruber".

ACTOR A

(as GEORGE does this)

George wrote, "You can talk?"

(RHODA MAY takes the implements again)

ACTOR C

She wrote, "Yes".

ACTOR A

George wrote, "Talk. You can talk."

ACTOR C

(impatiently hurrying her along, shifting
the pad back to GEORGE)

She wrote, "I cannot talk now because I have been naughty".

ACTOR A

(hurrying GEORGE, shifting the pad)

George asked her if her parents were home.

ACTOR C

(moving it along even faster)

She wrote, "Yes".

ACTOR A & C

And then the Grubers came out.

(MR. GRUBER and MRS. GRUBER,
looking alarmed and angry, come out of the
house behind RHODA MAY as ACTORS A
and C exit, taking GEORGE'S sample case)

MR. GRUBER

What's going on here?

MRS. GRUBER

Rhoda May, take that thing off your neck and come here.

(RHODA MAY does so, instinctively
grabbing her mother's skirts and whimpering)

MR. GRUBER

What's this man saying to you?

(as RHODA MAY whimpers louder, to GEORGE)

What do you want?

(as GEORGE writes on his pad)

You're deaf-'n'-dumb, that it?

(as GEORGE shakes his head no)

You're *not*? Then why—? Rhoda May, what'd he say to you?

(as RHODA MAY begins to whine and wail)

What is it you want, stranger?

MR. GRUBER (cont'd)

(as GEORGE points at RHODA MAY then
the placard, and returns to his writing)

Get in the house, you two! I'll take care of this!

MRS. GRUBER

Now, Herman—

MR. GRUBER

Git!

(They go, RHODA MAY wailing all the
way inside. GEORGE hands MR. GRUBER
the note he's been writing)

MR. GRUBER (cont'd)

(reading it)

"I will be back after four p.m. to talk with you about her punishment. I think you'll see what I mean."

(GEORGE salutes MR. GRUBER silently and
heads off. MR. GRUBER shouts after him)

MR. GRUBER (cont'd)

Show up here again, and I'll lick the hide off ya! I'll knock yer damn teeth out! You hear me?!!

(RHODA MAY wails even louder from inside.
MR. GRUBER starts back in)

MR. GRUBER (cont'd)

Damn it, *shut up!!*

(Lights shift as GEORGE reappears. He begins running in place as ACTOR D enters behind him)

ACTOR D

After his useful exchange with the Grubers, George noted it was almost four o'clock. He decided to celebrate the accomplishment of his vow by running for the final fifteen minutes.

(as GEORGE slows to a walk)

Then he slowed and ate an apple. As he walked he gazed affectionately at the squatters' frame cabins, the hound dogs by the gates of the wire fences, chickens in the wintry sunshine. At the edge of town he found a store—

GEORGE

(reading the store's sign)

"N. Efrim, Dry Goods and Notions".

ACTOR D

And went in. He thought he'd get a doll for little Rhoda May.

(GEORGE enters, where he discovers MRS. EFRIM, an intelligent, dolorous old woman knitting by the window. She wears a woolen dress and frayed sweater)

GEORGE

Hello. I'd . . . I'd like a doll, please.

(MRS. EFRIM nods and they look at the dolls)

ACTOR D

He told her all about Rhoda May and the placard. Mrs. Efrim knew her.

MRS. EFRIM

Ain't that terrible now!

ACTOR D

They found a doll and some milk chocolate, but all George had to pay was a ten-dollar bill.

GEORGE

I'll go change it at the drug store.

MRS. EFRIM

No, no. I have it. Only it's hid.

ACTOR D

She put her hand behind a bolt of cloth and drew out a packet of one dollar bills and a packet of fives.

MRS. EFRIM

It don't do to have money in the till these days.

ACTOR D

She gave him his change, hid her money again, then asked if he might help her thread a few needles, as her eyesight was beginning to fail. And George said—

GEORGE

I'd like to.

ACTOR D

And so it was that when the hold-up man arrived, George Brush was standing by the window, threading needles.

(HAWKINS, A HOLD-UP MAN, enters rapidly with a revolver. He has a desperate and hungry look and a bandana over his face which keeps slipping off)

HAWKINS

Stick up your hands, you two!

MRS. EFRIM

Ach Gott!

HAWKINS

One peep outta you and you're dead. Stay where you are.

(He grabs money from the till—mostly change—and, keeping his gun on a happily excited GEORGE, looks around for objects of value)

HAWKINS (cont'd)

What are you laughing at, you big hyena? Wipe that smile off your face or I'll plug you.

ACTOR D

He rifled through George's pockets and found two apples, a copy of *King Lear* and an application for a marriage license.

HAWKINS

Damn it!

GEORGE

Can I say something?

HAWKINS

What?!

GEORGE

There's hardly any money in that coat, but I know where there is some.

(to MRS. EFRIM)

I'll pay you back, Mrs. Efrim. Honest.

HAWKINS

Where is it!!?

GEORGE

First, stop pointing that gun at us. Never point a gun at a person. That's a rule everybody ought to know.

(as HAWKINS turns the barrel away)

Good. Now, the money's behind that roll of blue cloth right there.

MRS. EFRIM

Gott—enu! How can you tell him that?!

GEORGE

I swear to you, you won't lose a cent.

(as HAWKINS grabs the money)

And there's some five-dollar bills behind the ribbon.

(as HAWKINS goes for those)

You see, Mrs. Efrim, this is very interesting to me. I have a theory about thieves and robbers.

ACTOR D

However, before George could explain his theory, a sudden gust of wind blew open the door with a bang! The nervous hold-up man dropped his gun.

GEORGE

(swiftly picking up the gun)

Now *you* hold up your hands.

MRS. EFRIM

Make him give the money back!

GEORGE

No! Don't you understand? This is an experiment. We'll give this man a new start in life, and I'll pay you back every cent.

MRS. EFRIM

I don't want your money. I want *my* money.

GEORGE

(gesturing with the gun)

Mrs. Efrim, you move over there and put up your hands.

MRS. EFRIM

(doing so)

Ach, g'rechter Gott!

GEORGE

What's your name? Do you know a trade? Have you been holding up people long?

HAWKINS

Oh, shoot me and get it over with!

(Suddenly MRS. GRUBER enters the store)

MRS. GRUBER

Mrs. Efrim. You won't believe the day we've had—

(seeing the two men)

Oh! *OH—!!*

(She instantly runs out again)

GEORGE

Now, that's too bad. We'll have to hurry, I guess. It's clear you're no good as a hold-up man. There's really only one thing to do.

(handing him money)

Here's fifty dollars, plus the price of this gun. You think you can make a new start?

HAWKINS

I'll try.

(HAWKINS rushes out of the store.

GEORGE smiles, sets the gun on the till)

GEORGE

Wasn't that interesting? Now I want to pay you what I owe you.

MRS. EFRIM

You're crazy.

GEORGE

No, I'm not. I had to act that way to live up to my ideals.

MRS. EFRIM

Whoever thought of giving money to a burglar?

(MRS. GRUBER reenters with her husband
and the town constable, MR. WARREN,
whose gun is drawn)

MR. WARREN

Come out quiet, Mister. Hands up!

GEORGE

(to MRS. EFRIM, putting up his hands, smiling)

He thinks I did it!

MRS. GRUBER

Look, Herman! It's that man. That same man!

MR. GRUBER

Arrest this fella, Charley! He tried to kidnap our daughter!

(All of them disappear as lights shift, revealing a
jail-yard in Ozarksville, Missouri. A man named
BURKIN lies dozing on a bench in the pale sunlight,
wrapped in his overcoat. GEORGE enters, escorted
by a YOUNG JAILER)

YOUNG JAILER

You can sit out here in the yard if you want to. No reason to wait around all day in your cell. No
telling when Judge Carberry will see you. He's out fishing.

(The YOUNG JAILER exits. GEORGE
looks around the yard, which is surrounded
by high walls. The MAN ON BENCH looks
up, then sits up—he has a thin, sardonic face)

BURKIN

Well, well.

GEORGE

(going to him, offering his hand to shake)

My name is George M. Brush. I come from Michigan and I sell textbooks for Caulkins and Company.

BURKIN

(staring at his hand without shaking)

Any birth marks?

GEORGE

What?

BURKIN

(lying back down, with a sigh)

My name is Zoroaster Eels. I lie on benches for a living.

(Surprised, GEORGE shrugs, walks around the yard and does some hygienic bending. BURKIN watches)

BURKIN (cont'd)

Why don't you relax?

GEORGE

(continuing his exercises)

Oh, I like relaxation, too. But the best relaxation comes after exertion, don't you agree?

(as he continues)

They don't take your fingerprints here.

BURKIN

They probably would, if you asked 'em to. You've obviously got the right spirit.

(turning his back again)

You look like the kind of prisoner they like to have. I bet they'll be sorry when you go.

GEORGE

Oh, I see. Everything you say is a joke. I didn't understand at first.

BURKIN

(suddenly rising again)

Why should we quarrel? My name is Burkin. I'm from New York City.

(offering his hand)

Put 'er there, Brush.

(as GEORGE, a bit leery, shakes his hand)

I'm unemployed at the moment, but by trade I'm a motion-picture director.

BURKIN (cont'd)

(patting the bench)

Sit down, and we'll discuss our shame. I'm in here for a Peeping Tom. What about you?

GEORGE

They think I was trying to kidnap a little girl. They also think I was trying to hold up a store—or at least helped the real hold-up man to escape.

BURKIN

It was all a misunderstanding, though. Right?

GEORGE

Yes. Except for the last part—and even then, I knew what I was doing all the time. Would you like to hear about it?

BURKIN

You got a cigarette?

GEORGE

I don't smoke.

BURKIN

What the hell. Tell me anyway.

(to the audience)

And George Brush told me the whole story, from his vow of silence to landing in jail. Then he told me about his arrest for starting a run on the bank in Armina, Oklahoma. Then he told me about being arrested in Baton Rouge, Louisiana for riding in a Jim Crow car because he believed in the brotherhood of man. Then he told me his theory of voluntary poverty and his theory of robbers. Then I just stared at him.

(rising)

Then I rose, squinted into the sun, and said—

(to GEORGE)

Well. I've been hunting for someone like you for a long time. To think I had to go to jail to find you. You know who you are? You're the perfectly logical man.

GEORGE

I'm *logical*? Almost everybody I meet says I'm crazy. Is it a good thing to be logical? I know I'm the happiest man I ever met.

BURKIN

'Course you are. You just keep seeing the world the way you do, Brush. Hell, I don't have to make movies for you. You make up your own.

GEORGE

Could you tell me about your misunderstanding? What made them put you in here?

BURKIN

I was standing on the lawn of a house, looking in a window. Neighbors saw me and phoned the police.

GEORGE

Oh. Oh, so that wasn't . . . so much of a misunderstanding, then.

BURKIN

(his tone more pugnacious)

I never explain anything. Never regret anything. If they think I'm prowling around the streets, trying to catch their hags undressing, let 'em. Let 'em keep me in jail—I don't care. I never put idiots out of their misery with explanations.

GEORGE

I see—

BURKIN

No, you don't! I'm a movie-director, see? I'm the greatest artist America ever had. I knock about the whole damn country in a Ford, just looking. One night I'm in this little burg. I see a lighted window. Man, wife and kid eating supper.

(creating a movie "frame" with his hands)

When you're looking through a window at people who don't know you're there, you see a lot more than usual. Understand?

GEORGE

Yes.

BURKIN

It's terrible how much you see. You see their very souls. I was there for hours before the police took me away.

GEORGE

Well then, all you have to do is tell them—like that, I mean. The judge'll believe you.

BURKIN

I—*never*—explain. Besides, the judge is a tight old bird—doesn't believe anybody. Hey, you got anything to read on ya?

GEORGE

(pulling it out of his pocket)

I have a copy of *King Lear*.

BURKIN
(surprised, taking it)

Great.

GEORGE
(pulling these from another pocket)
Also, the New Testament and, um . . . a pamphlet on colonic irrigation.

BURKIN
(clapping the two books together
in GEORGE'S hands)
Good. Keep those two together. They must never be separated.

GEORGE
You shouldn't say things like that.

BURKIN
It's a big, free country.

(The YOUNG JAILER returns with JUDGE
CARBERRY, an older man whose wrinkled
face betrays kindness, disillusion and boredom.
The Judge is in his fishing gear and carries a
string of perch and bass)

JUDGE CARBERRY
(of GEORGE)
Is this the one?

YOUNG JAILER
Yes, sir.

JUDGE CARBERRY
Let's get it over, then. I'm not about to spend my afternoon on the bench letting these fish go
bad—and the good Lord knows Emma won't clean 'em.

(JUDGE CARBERRY slaps the fish down
on one end of the bench as BURKIN jumps to
his feet. JUDGE CARBERRY sits on the
other end of the bench)

JUDGE CARBERRY (cont'd)

The Grubers and Mrs. Efrim gave me their stories on the way over here. All I need is to hear from you. Apparently, you're some sort of kidnapping, larceny-abetting maniac who's been running about town. That about right?

GEORGE

No sir, your honor. And he isn't, either.

BURKIN

Leave me out of this.

GEORGE

First of all, I never kidnapped anyone. That little girl had a sign around her neck that said, "I AM A LIAR".

JUDGE CARBERRY

She did, eh?

GEORGE

I didn't think that was any way to punish a child.

JUDGE CARBERRY

That what you said to Mr. Gruber?

GEORGE

No, sir. I wrote him a note.

JUDGE CARBERRY

You wrote him a *note*?

GEORGE

Yes, sir—as I stood right there in front of him. See, I'd taken a vow of silence for a day on account of my respect for the ideas of Gandhi.

JUDGE CARBERRY

Gandhi?

GEORGE

I've been studying his ideas for quite awhile, especially the doctrine of *ahimsa*, and—

JUDGE CARBERRY

Quiet! I'm not going to take all afternoon here. You care about children, eh? You a father?

GEORGE

Not that I know of.

JUDGE CARBERRY

I beg your pardon?

(as BURKIN gives a snorting laugh)

Fact is, this isn't the first time the Grubers have made that poor little girl of theirs wear a sign. From what I can tell she was never out of her parents' control. The kidnapping charge is dismissed. Now, about the incident at Mrs. Efrim's store. She says you showed a hold-up man where her secret cache of money was hid? And that you took the man's gun yourself and held up Mrs. Efrim?

GEORGE

That's right, your Honor. But—

JUDGE CARBERRY

(holding up his string of fish, examining them)

All I want is facts. Facts speak for themselves, don't they?

(pointing at a particular fish)

That's a nice-size one right there, isn't it?

GEORGE

Your Honor—

JUDGE CARBERRY

Did you allow the hold-up man to escape?

(no response)

What's this? Another vow of silence? Maybe there is nothing to say. Sounds to me like you wound your way into Mrs. Efrim's confidence, threaded her needles, even bought a doll. No wonder she showed you where her money was. Yes sir, the facts certainly do seem to speak for themselves.

(as GEORGE turns and heads to the jail)

Where are you going? I'm not done with you.

GEORGE

I won't be talked to like that, Judge Carberrry. I'd rather sit in jail and make rope than be treated this way. You haven't heard my explanations.

JUDGE CARBERRY

Explanations?

GEORGE

It's all based on two theories of mine. One is voluntary poverty, which is what I live by, and the other is Mr. Gandhi's theory of *ahimsa*. And the point of that is this: a *poor* man, even if he's a millionaire, is one who always has anxious thoughts about money. A rich man is a person who has no such thoughts.

JUDGE CARBERRY

That's all very inspiring, but—

GEORGE

A robber is a poor man. He's a beggar who doesn't know he's a beggar. When you give money to a robber, you do two things: you show him he's really a beggar at heart, and you make a strong impression on his mind that—

JUDGE CARBERRY

That you're a coward or a fool.

GEORGE

I'm a pacifist. If they put me in a battle, I wouldn't shoot anyone. Suppose I met an enemy who was about to shoot me, and I tore his gun from his hands. He'd expect me to shoot him, but I wouldn't. And *that would make an impression on his mind*. See, I'd have had *ahimsa* in my mind, and like Mr. Gandhi, I believe that *ahimsa* can leap from one mind to another.

JUDGE CARBERRY

What becomes of that if you find a man attacking your sister?

GEORGE

I know that argument. I get angry about it. Let a thousand sisters get attacked. If the attackers are met with *ahimsa* they will learn from it. That's how it spreads. Sisters are being attacked all the time, and things aren't getting any better. It's time to try a new way to cure it.

JUDGE CARBERRY

So what should the government do? Give every thief a hundred dollar bill?

GEORGE

Maybe. As it is now, people just go on committing crimes.

JUDGE CARBERRY

You have a profound misunderstanding of the criminal mind. Still, given that you already repaid the fifty dollars Mrs. Efrim lost, and given that Ozarksville would clearly be better off with you outside the city limits, and given these fish are not going to clean themselves . . . I'm going to let you go.

GEORGE

Thank you, Judge. Oh—and Mr. Burkin, too. I can explain about his case—

JUDGE CARBERRY

Don't explain anything else! Just go. Please. And take Burkin with you.

GEORGE

Yes, your Honor. Thank you.

(Both GEORGE and BURKIN hurry back
into the jail with the YOUNG JAILER)

JUDGE CARBERRY

(calling after them, brushing off his fish)

And make sure you have dinner—in *another* town!

(Lights shift and the jail-yard disappears. BURKIN
drives his car with GEORGE beside him)

BURKIN

Kansas City, eh? What've you got doing up there?

GEORGE

I expect to get married Monday or Tuesday, and I want to get there Sunday so as to talk it over.

BURKIN

My, you are full of surprises.

GEORGE

(suddenly spotting someone up ahead)

Hey, look! A hitchhiker! Stop! Stop for him!

BURKIN

Not on your life!

GEORGE

(grabbing the wheel)

Stop!

BURKIN

(as they struggle)

You can't do that in this country! It's not safe! He could rob us! Take my car!

GEORGE

I'll buy you another car! Why are you so *afraid* of everything!?

BURKIN

(disgusted, braking)

You're rich enough for anything, aren't you? All right, he's your responsibility.

(as the hitchhiker comes to the door)

Get in, Buddy. The car's yours.

(The hitchhiker—whom we recognize as the robber
HAWKINS—slips into the car's backseat)

HAWKINS

Thanks.

BURKIN

(starting out again)

Don't thank me.

(GEORGE turns to get a look at the rider)

GEORGE

It's Mrs. Efrim's hold-up man!

BURKIN

What?

GEORGE

It's the hold-up man!

HAWKINS

Hey! Lemme outta here. Lemme out!

BURKIN

Shut up and settle down. We won't hand you over. Brush saved you once already, didn't he?

HAWKINS

I said lemme out!

BURKIN

Forget it!

(HAWKINS sits back, desperate but not
daring to jump from the speeding car)

GEORGE

(to BURKIN)

Wish I knew what he was thinking. To know what's going on in a person's mind when he's been treated with *ahimsa*.

BURKIN

Nothing goes on. He's like a fox at the edge of a chicken farm.

GEORGE

You're wrong. He's got a soul like anybody else.

HAWKINS

Lemme out, you guys.

BURKIN

What's your name?

HAWKINS

Hawkins.

BURKIN

What do you do? Tell us your story. How'd it all happen?

GEORGE

He's too embarrassed to talk. The Bible says you should turn the other cheek when someone does something bad to you. But I think that shames a man too much. I think you should do just a little bit bad in return, so he can keep his self-respect.

HAWKINS

If you don't lemme outta here, I'll break every window in this car!

(HAWKINS SMASHES a side window.
GEORGE instantly leans over the seat and
slugs HAWKINS in the side of the head)

HAWKINS (cont'd)

OW—!!

GEORGE

You be quiet! Sit there and *be still!*

BURKIN

Looks like you're renegeing on that *ahimsa*.

GEORGE

I didn't hurt him. I'm experimenting.

(as HAWKINS suddenly hits GEORGE
in the back of the head)

Hawkins, you mustn't do that.

(to BURKIN)

Isn't this interesting? This means that bad people can't bear to be benefited by anyone.
Now I'll punish him a little to restore his self-respect.

(GEORGE leans over the seat, grabs
HAWKINS and shakes him violently)

BURKIN

Good Lord! We're not going to go through this all night!

(pulling the car to a stop and opening the door)

Get the hell out of here before I throw you out my broken window!

HAWKINS

You guys are *crazy!!*

(HAWKINS hurriedly flees the scene.
BURKIN shuts the door and starts driving
again. He and GEORGE are silent for a time)

GEORGE

Here's three dollars for your window.

BURKIN

Thanks. For a man who practices voluntary poverty, you always seem to have enough money.
You share this philosophy with a lot of folks?

GEORGE

Voluntary poverty? Oh, yes.

BURKIN

Ever gain any converts?

GEORGE

(a little embarrassed)

I think it works in people's minds and perhaps they begin to practice long after. You see, I have
a theory—

(as BURKIN bursts out laughing)

What's so funny?

BURKIN

You're the damnedest prig I ever saw, you know that? You're a bag of wind. How'd this all start for you, anyway? Where'd you catch the religious bug in the first place? At home?

GEORGE

No. My people don't believe anything. They just live from day to day. At Shiloh Baptist College I was only interested in athletic scores and stamp collecting. I wasn't converted until the middle of my sophomore year.

BURKIN

What did the trick?

GEORGE

A girl evangelist came to town. She was only sixteen. She set up a tent down by the railroad tracks and held meetings twice a day. Her name was Marian Truby. She had a very beautiful face, and . . . I just went to look at her. She was a wonderful speaker. I converted the first night. Later I took a religion course, and read about Gandhi and—

BURKIN

Hold on. Did you ever talk to Marian Truby?

GEORGE

Only for a minute.

BURKIN

What happened?

GEORGE

The last night of meetings I went 'round back of the tent to tell her what she'd done for me. I waited until the rest of the people were gone. There was no door to knock on; I just went right in. She was in a sort of dressing-room, and she was sort of moaning and groaning. And . . .

BURKIN

And what? What?

GEORGE

And an older woman was standing over her, sticking a hypodermic syringe into her arm.

BURKIN

You don't say! Did you say anything?

GEORGE

Yes, but she didn't look up. The older woman was mad and drove me away.

BURKIN

Ever seen her since?

GEORGE

No. I wrote a letter; she never answered. I ask about her everywhere, but she must have retired. Or she might be sick. If she is, I mean to support her the rest of her life.

BURKIN

So what you're telling me is . . . Let's see if I've got it now . . . All your big ideas about life were fed to you by a sixteen-year-old girl while she was hopped up on drugs?

(guffawing)

It all makes sense now! Voluntary poverty? Christmas baskets for burglars? You've got the gaseous ideas of a sick girl!

GEORGE

You better let me out.

BURKIN

You've lived your whole life among the half-baked! You don't want to grow up—that's the trouble with you.

GEORGE

And you think no one with brains ever felt any religion.

BURKIN

I'm not talking about brains, I'm talking about education. Hell, if you'd gone to a real school, I could show you the absurdity of the scholastic proofs of the existence of God—maybe do you a little good.

GEORGE

(growing angrier—and louder)

You can't just think about religion. It's not something you prove or disprove. It's just there—and you have to *live with it*.

BURKIN

Stop yelling.

GEORGE

(still loud)

You can't think about religion like it's some, some . . . *fish* a long ways off!

BURKIN

If you're gonna keep yelling, then you can get out and *walk!*

GEORGE

With pleasure!

(BURKIN brakes the car to a stop. They sit silently. GEORGE is seething. He hands BURKIN a dollar)

GEORGE

Here's a dollar for gas.

BURKIN

Thank you.

(after a beat)

You're full of evasions. You don't give a goddamn for the truth.

GEORGE

I have the truth.

BURKIN

(reaching over, opening GEORGE's door)

Then go ahead. Go back into the world with your 'truth'.

GEORGE

(getting out of the car)

I will!

BURKIN

Fine!

(quieter)

I'd wish you luck, but . . . what's the point?

(BURKIN slams shut the door and pulls away as lights shift, leaving GEORGE alone. Sample case in hand, GEORGE starts walking. He exits as ACTORS A and C enter and speak to the audience)

ACTOR A

George took a train the rest of the way back to Kansas City—the first time he'd ever traveled on a train on a Sunday.

ACTOR C

By the time he arrived, he barely had time to change into his best suit at Mrs. Kubinsky's, where he'd taken a room—

ACTOR A

Then dash next door to Queenie's to check on Elizabeth—

ACTOR C

Who after a week with Queenie looked less pale and smelled better.

ACTOR A

Then George ran to City Park to meet the woman he already thought of as his wife—

ACTOR C

And her sister.

(ACTOR C exits as GEORGE rushes in the gate to City Park. He finds ROBERTA sitting on a long bench with her sister LOTTIE)

GEORGE

I'm only one minute late. Just got back into town.

ROBERTA

This is my sister Lottie.

GEORGE

I remember, from the night I was at your farm.

(An embarrassed silence)

LOTTIE

Won't you sit down?

(He starts to sit next to ROBERTA, but the two women quickly shift so that LOTTIE's in between them. A beat)

GEORGE

Hope you haven't been waiting long.

(after another beat)

A little cold today. Still, it's not as cold as the Ice Age. See over there? Those marks in the earth were left by the ice-cap, maybe eight hundred thousand years ago.

(another beat)

Roberta, I—

(He stops as ROBERTA suddenly rises)

LOTTIE

Maybe we should go.

GEORGE

No, please—wait. Don't you see, Lottie, that all serious-minded people would agree that I'm really her husband already?

LOTTIE

Mr. Brush—

GEORGE

You must call me George, Lottie. You're practically my sister.

LOTTIE

You barely know Roberta. Why do you want to be married to her?

GEORGE

We are married. We can never marry anyone else—there's one of the Ten Commandments about it. Now, I've done wrong. But whenever I do wrong, I won't stop until I've done everything I can to make it right.

LOTTIE

(starting to rise)

That's very nice, but—

GEORGE

Please. You've got to believe me, both of you. I'm not the usual kind of traveling salesman.

LOTTIE

I don't suppose you are.

GEORGE

I owe Roberta a living for the rest of her life. I've got more money than I know what to do with.

LOTTIE

That's not what she wants.

GEORGE

What does she want?

LOTTIE

(as ROBERTA breaks down in sobs)

Roberta honey, go over there for a little while I talk to him.

(ROBERTA rises and moves to another bench further along)

LOTTIE (cont'd)

She wants Papa to like her again. She was his favorite. It's been terrible for him.

GEORGE

I didn't know.

LOTTIE

(checking that ROBERTA can't hear)

I've been thinking—

GEORGE

What?

LOTTIE

Sometimes I think . . . if perhaps you did marry Roberta, maybe you could call on Papa and talk with him about the Bible or something. Maybe then he would forgive her. But what good is it if you don't love each other?

GEORGE

I'll love her pretty well. Almost perfectly—she'll never notice the difference. In fact, there's only one other girl in the world I love more.

LOTTIE

You're kind of crazy. You know that?

GEORGE

Why did your father send Roberta away? He must have, right? You say he didn't forgive her.

LOTTIE

She was . . . she was very sick, and . . . I thought you knew.

GEORGE

How could I know?

LOTTIE

Of course. You couldn't have known.

(with a sigh)

Well, on the farm we all went through . . . quite a time . . .

GEORGE

I see.

LOTTIE

(after a beat)

I was thinking . . .

GEORGE

Yes?

LOTTIE

Nothing, really. Just . . . you might marry Roberta just to please Papa. Then separate right away. And after awhile you could get divorced.

GEORGE

I don't believe in divorce.

LOTTIE

Oh.

GEORGE

And I don't believe in doing anything just for show. Lottie, I'll love and respect your sister until the day I die. I'll take all the responsibility. We'll have a nice home somewhere, and the family can come in from the farm for Sunday dinner. I have a very good tenor voice. Everything that began so badly will end up all right—better, even.

(LOTTIE stares at him)

LOTTIE

Wait here.

(She goes to ROBERTA as he watches. LOTTIE gestures GEORGE to move further off. He does so. The two women whisper for a moment, then)

ROBERTA

But Lottie, he's *terrible!*

LOTTIE

Don't look at him like that. Compare him with Gus Brubaker back home—or Oscy Deschauer. Besides, he told me he has a fine tenor voice.

ROBERTA

What'll we talk about?

LOTTIE

He's full of conversation. All that about the ice-cap? And he's so rich you can have a radio.

ROBERTA

He's *rich*?

LOTTIE

He talks that way. Don't you like him? Even a little?

ROBERTA

You know why I could never like him.

LOTTIE

He'll never drag that up. He's not mean; just kind of stupid and good as gold. You ought to marry him—then take him to see Papa.

ACTOR A

(to audience, as GEORGE does this)

While they'd been speaking, George drew in the dirt with Lottie's umbrella. He drew an "A" for Adele, the widow he'd proposed to when he was twenty-one; then an "F" for Frances, his high-school chemistry teacher; and up above those an "MT" for Marian Truby. Plus a "J" for Jessie Mayhew and a "V" and an "S" and a "C". Then he erased them all, drew a large "R" and waited.

(ROBERTA and LOTTIE approach,
and GEORGE rises)

GEORGE

Before you say anything, there's something I ought to tell you. I own a little girl. A friend of mine died and left her to me. She's bright, and I know you'll like her.

(ROBERTA looks at LOTTIE, who shrugs.
ROBERTA looks at GEORGE)

ROBERTA

I'll marry you.

GEORGE

That's wonderful! I'll be on the road a good deal, but I'll write every day. We'll have a wonderful life, and laugh while we wash the dishes and—I'm good at fixing things. I'll build you an arbor in the back yard. I know I'm kind of funny in some ways, but that's only these early years while I'm thinking things out. Soon things will be clearer to me, and everything will be settled.

(ROBERTA and LOTTIE exit. The park
disappears as ACTOR F enters)

ACTOR F

They were married on Wednesday. They rented a place over a drugstore and started buying a used set of the Encyclopedia Britannica. Roberta's family came to visit the following Sunday. They went to church with the new couple and had dinner. Roberta's father was cool toward George, but he *had* come to meet him, which surprised everyone.

(ROBERTA returns as the apartment appears. She and GEORGE sit across the room from each other—she in a loveseat and he in a chair. She picks up a magazine and starts to read. He looks through a paper and makes notes on it. ACTOR C enters)

ACTOR C

Roberta was correct to wonder what they'd talk about. The long evenings left them both speechless after a time. He learned that she loved to read—about movie stars. So he looked for stories in the paper about such people, at least the ones suitable for mentioning in a Christian home.

ACTOR F

After a little time off for the honeymoon and setting up their fine American home, George was about to set out on a three-month trip for the Caulkins Company.

(ELIZABETH enters. She has a snarl in her hair. She goes to ROBERTA, who eagerly starts combing it out. GEORGE looks up and smiles at them. ELIZABETH smiles back)

ACTOR C

Both of them loved Elizabeth. But from the beginning, George became aware of a furtive, unceasing game of strategy in the house. He and Roberta—not intentionally, almost unconsciously—were vying to be first in the affections of their stepdaughter.

(ROBERTA conquers the snarl. She tries to get ELIZABETH to sit next to her, but the little girl strains in her grasp. ELIZABETH'S attention is fixed on GEORGE)

ACTOR F

The worst of it for George was that Elizabeth showed a marked preference for him.
 (as GEORGE looks up and smiles at them, then quickly lowers his head into the paper again)
 He tried time after time to give Roberta the advantage.

(ROBERTA finally gives up, letting
ELIZABETH cross over to GEORGE'S arms)

ACTOR C

Only to be filled with ignoble pleasure when the effort did not succeed.

(GEORGE smiles sheepishly at ROBERTA
as he holds ELIZABETH. The three of them
freeze as LOTTIE enters the room. She stands
behind ROBERTA and puts her hand on her
shoulder as she stares at GEORGE)

ACTOR F

That night, Lottie came to dinner. She'd had a long, earnest conversation with her sister that
afternoon, and during the meal George noted that both women had been crying.

GEORGE

(suddenly, to ELIZABETH)

How would you like to look at the stars?

ELIZABETH

Yes!

(Lights shift from the room and follow
GEORGE and ELIZABETH as they climb
a ladder to a trap door that opens on the roof.
GEORGE speaks as they go)

GEORGE

I disagree with the custom of putting children to bed at dusk. It robs you of the chance to see the
stars frequently. It's an important element in the spiritual education of mankind.

(They move onto the roof. GEORGE sits on a
soap-box in front of the chimney, holding
ELIZABETH in his arms. He stares up. She
closes her eyes and hums contentedly to herself.
Their manner is conspiratorial—and happy)

GEORGE (cont'd)

What's your name?

ELIZABETH

Elizabeth Martin Brush.

Where do you live?
GEORGE

Twelve twelve Brinkley Street.
ELIZABETH

What do you do if you're lost?
GEORGE

Policeman.
ELIZABETH

And what do you *always* you do?
GEORGE

Tell the truth . . .
ELIZABETH

Yes.
GEORGE

Love God.
ELIZABETH

Yes.
GEORGE

And brush my teeth.
ELIZABETH

That's right.
GEORGE

Look at all the stars.
ELIZABETH

(ROBERTA'S voice comes from below)

She ought to go to bed now, dear.
ROBERTA

All right. We're coming.
GEORGE

(But they do not move. Lights crossfade to the apartment. Only ACTOR F remains there)

ACTOR F

While Roberta put Elizabeth to bed, Lottie and George had a talk.

(GEORGE and LOTTIE enter with coffee and sit as ACTOR F exits)

LOTTIE

There's really no need to keep this apartment while you're gone for so many months. Why can't Roberta come back to the farm? It would be much better for Elizabeth.

GEORGE

But this is our *home*. It's very important a married couple has a home of their own.

LOTTIE

George . . . are you happy with Roberta?

GEORGE

Yes, of course. Why would you ask?

LOTTIE

She wants to go back to the farm.

GEORGE

(after a beat)

I'll give up the business.

LOTTIE

George—

GEORGE

I'll get a job in town. My home's more important to me than—

LOTTIE

It wouldn't help.

GEORGE

What are you talking about?

LOTTIE

We're both tremendously fond of you, George, but . . . Roberta wants to live alone.

GEORGE
(stunned, suddenly rising)

I'd better take a walk.

LOTTIE

Don't be mad.

GEORGE

I don't see how you can say a thing like that.

LOTTIE

You know you don't really suit each other. Think about it: everything's fine now. You've been married, and that awful thing in the past is all settled and forgotten—

GEORGE

Are you going to be one of those city people too, with ideas like that? Don't you know about God's law? Roberta and I are one person, don't you understand? I've got to get some air.

(ROBERTA enters. She's been listening.
She stares at GEORGE)

ROBERTA

I want to live by myself, George. I like you very much, but we're different; you know we are.

(ROBERTA rushes off into the kitchen)

GEORGE

All married people go through this. But then they come out of it—

LOTTIE

George . . .

GEORGE

Why don't you say it right out? You want me to get a divorce like all those people in the newspapers, and so go on smoking and . . . giggling and drinking to the cemetery.

LOTTIE

George—

GEORGE

So what if Roberta and I are different? So what if we don't get on like some couples? We're married, and it's for the good of society and morals that we stay together until we die.

LOTTIE

George, go into the kitchen and tell Roberta you love her more than anyone in the world. More than anybody ever loved anybody else. Go on, do it. That's what a marriage promise is.

(They stare at each other)

LOTTIE (cont'd)

Let her have Elizabeth. They'll be happy together. Go on the road like usual. Just . . . go on.

GEORGE

I don't want to go on! Why go to work if I haven't got a home to work for?! I don't want to live! Everything goes wrong.

LOTTIE

You're a fine person, George. The finest. But this . . . this is an entirely different sort of thing. Don't you see? You should look at things simply now. This is the way to be kind to Roberta.

GEORGE

Isn't the principle of a thing more important than the people that live under that principle?

LOTTIE

No one can live up to the rules. We all need an exception now and then.

(as ROBERTA re-enters quietly)

Say a nice goodbye to her.

(GEORGE rises. ACTOR C enters with
GEORGE's sample case)

ACTOR C

George was scheduled to leave at midnight. Instead he kissed them both and went to the train station three hours early.

(GEORGE kisses LOTTIE and ROBERTA
on the cheek as lights shift and the apartment
and the two women disappear. ACTOR C hands
GEORGE the sample case, then brings him to a
YOUNG CLERK at the train station)

GEORGE

Do you sell pipes?

YOUNG CLERK

(producing one)

Yes, sir.

GEORGE

I'll take it. What's your best pipe tobacco?

(The YOUNG CLERK gives GEORGE a pipe and a pouch of tobacco. ACTOR C takes money out of GEORGE's wallet and pays the YOUNG CLERK. As the YOUNG CLERK exits, GEORGE stares at the pipe and tobacco. ACTOR C takes the pipe and proceeds to fill it with tobacco. ACTOR C hands the pipe back, tucks the tobacco into GEORGE's pocket and, with a flourish, lights a match. As he's about to light GEORGE's pipe, lights fade on the two of them and rise ACTORS A, B, D, E and F entering. After a moment, GEORGE joins them, walking, pipe in mouth)

ACTOR B

George set out on another slow swing of the pendulum. Kansas—

ACTOR E

Oklahoma—

ACTOR F

Texas.

ACTOR D

Trains—

ACTOR B

Busses—

ACTOR A

Streetcars—

ACTOR F

Blank hotel rooms—

ACTOR E

Public libraries—

ACTOR C

(entering)

Long walks at night, encircling the nameless prairie towns that were his—

Territory.	ACTORS A-F
He told himself he was happy.	ACTOR A
Pretended to enjoy his work—	ACTOR B
His Sundays—	ACTOR D
His reading. He smoked his pipe—	ACTOR E
Which he found he liked.	ACTOR C
And he learned German, since Caulkins had come out with a First and Second German Reader.	ACTOR F
He learned “Du Bist wie eine Blume”—	ACTOR A
And “The Lorelei”.	ACTOR D
And he got rich.	ACTOR E
He no longer lived by voluntary poverty.	ACTOR C
He had over eight hundred dollars.	ACTOR E
He bought a gramophone and bought German instructional records.	ACTOR F
He told himself he was happy.	ACTOR A

ACTOR B

But nothing could conceal the stab of physical pain he felt whenever he glimpsed, through half-drawn blinds, the felicities of a fine American home—

ACTOR D

Or when in church he realized old-fashioned hymns had lost their power to render him inexplicably happy.

ACTOR A

He couldn't sleep. He lost his appetite.

ACTOR B

He lost his faith.

(GEORGE sets down his sample case with
a loud, foreboding THUD)

ACTOR E

He wasn't sure where.

ACTOR F

Somewhere among all those trains and busses and towns—

ACTOR D

(as a spot rises on a bed, center stage)

He didn't know how to feel about it.

ACTOR A

(as GEORGE starts to kneel by the bed)

At night he would fall automatically to his knees—

ACTOR B

But then spring up again, guilty, and lie on his bed—

ACTOR E

(as GEORGE gets on the bed)

Stare at the ceiling and mutter—

GEORGE

Es ist nichts da.

ACTOR C

“There is nothing there”.

Gar nichts. GEORGE

“Nothing at all”. ACTOR F

For awhile he cheered up. ACTOR A

He went to the movies— ACTOR D

He talked more easily with strangers— ACTOR B

He even began to take advantage of his expense account. ACTOR C

For the first time, he chose the dollar dinner. ACTOR F

But after awhile— ACTOR E

After months on the road— ACTOR B

After he’d lost his faith— ACTOR C

By the time he reached Trowbridge, Texas— ACTOR D

He was sick. ACTOR F

(Lights widen to reveal the hospital room from the beginning of the play. By now ACTORS A-F stand around his bed)

He had amoebic dysentery— ACTOR F
(touching GEORGE lightly, exiting)

ACTOR D

(the same)

Sinus trouble, rheumatism—

ACTOR E

(the same)

Jaundice, asthma, a heart murmur—

ACTOR C

(the same)

His body was shutting down. Every day he grew worse.

ACTOR B

(the same)

He turned his face to the wall and conjugated the German verb “to die”.

GEORGE

Ich sterbe, du stirbst, er stirbt, wir sterben, ihr sterbet, sie sterben, sie sterben . . .

(Silence. All are gone but GEORGE. After a moment, MISS COLLOQUER enters. She stands over GEORGE’S bed just as she did earlier. Then, after a beat, she speaks)

MISS COLLOQUER

(no response)

Oh, and something else came today.

(producing a small package)

This. It’s from a woman in Kansas City—someone named “Queenie”? Does that ring a bell?

(as GEORGE turns toward her)

It does, eh? Well, what do you say? Shall we open it?

(GEORGE hesitates, then nods. MISS COLLOQUER opens the package, pulling a spoon from some tissue paper)

MISS COLLOQUER (cont’d)

It’s a spoon. Just a . . . an ordinary spoon.

(looking further)

There’s a letter. From . . . Marcella L. Craven?

GEORGE

Queenie.

MISS COLLOQUER

(skimming it)

Says she hopes you're well. Says "the boys on the top floor are all doing well and still have jobs." That's good news. Says, "Roberta and Lottie and Elizabeth" paid a call on her. Says they're in fine health. Says, "Elizabeth wants more lessons from you. She couldn't be fonder of you if were her own father." Let's see, what else? What else? Oh—she says, "I forget if I told you that Father Pa . . . Pah . . ."

GEORGE

Pasziewski.

MISS COLLOQUER

"Died. Mrs. Kubinsky and I called on him a few days before, and it seemed he knew he was going to die and he wanted to give us something to remember him by. So he said to each take a spoon from the dining-room table. He asked me to give you a spoon from him, too. I told him you liked to hear about him, Mr. Brush, and he seemed to have a special feeling about you. It's a terrible pity you never met."

(staring again at the spoon)

Well, isn't that odd?

(She hands him the spoon, shrugs and starts out)

GEORGE

What day is it?

MISS COLLOQUER

It's Friday, Mr. Brush.

GEORGE

Thank you.

(She's gone. GEORGE stares at the spoon, turning it in the light. Suddenly he gets out of bed and puts on his clothes. ACTOR A and ACTOR C enter)

ACTOR A

From that day on, George began to get well.

ACTOR C

At first he was silent and thoughtful, but gradually the talkativeness reappeared.

ACTOR A

As did his appetite.

ACTOR C

He was able to resume his itinerary—with a few changes. For instance, one day in Lockburn, Missouri . . .

(GEORGE, who has by now wrapped the spoon in tissue paper and placed it in his breast pocket, picks up his sample case and walks downstage.

Lights shift, ACTORS A and C disappear, and the hospital room is replaced by a table and chair in an empty diner. ACTOR D, dressed as a WAITRESS, sits at the table reading a book. GEORGE enters. The WAITRESS jumps up immediately)

WAITRESS

Oh! Sorry. Have a seat. Things are pretty slow this morning.

GEORGE

(sitting down)

That's all right. What are you reading?

WAITRESS

Oh—nothing you ever heard of. You want coffee?

GEORGE

(gently taking the book)

“The Voyage of the Beagle, by Charles Darwin.”

(A beat. He stares at her, making her nervous)

WAITRESS

It's about dogs.

GEORGE

No, it isn't; it's about evolution. You believe in evolution?

(Hesitantly, she nods)

GEORGE (cont'd)

Do you study it in college?

WAITRESS

Oh, I could never afford college. I do like reading about science, though. I got very good grades in high-school.

WAITRESS (cont'd)
(taking the book back)

Well. I'll get your coffee.

GEORGE

I'd like to send you to college.

WAITRESS

What?

GEORGE

My name is George Brush, and I sell textbooks, so I believe in education. I make a very good living and always have more money than I know what to do with. Now, I've just had a—well, a very educational year, I'd guess you'd say. And I've learned one important thing: you can't know everything just by thinking about it for yourself.

WAITRESS
(with continuing, quiet amazement at GEORGE)

No, you can't.

GEORGE

I believe there's a very fine science department at the University of Missouri.

WAITRESS

Are you serious?

GEORGE

Always.

WAITRESS

I'll get your coffee.

(The WAITRESS exits, and GEORGE pulls out his pipe. With a quiet smile he starts to fill it. Lights shift, and the diner disappears as GEORGE picks up his case and starts walking)

(ACTORS A, B, C, E and F enter. The SOUND of GEORGE SINGING "The Lost Chord" slowly rises at this point and continues under to the end)

ACTOR A

Of course, George hadn't changed completely.

ACTOR E

A few days later, people in Tohoki, Missouri noticed a strapping but apparently deaf-mute young man writing everything he had to say on a pad of paper.

ACTOR B

A week after that, in Killam, Oklahoma, a man heard George sing at a community-chest bazaar and made a lucrative offer to sing on the radio in Chicago.

ACTOR F

George refused, saying his route didn't take him through Chicago.

(ACTOR D enters, joining the others)

ACTOR C

And later, in Dakins, Kansas, George M. Brush spent several hours in jail before everything was declared to be a total misunderstanding.

ACTOR D

He was released and continued on his journey.

(GEORGE stops walking. He pulls out the spoon, takes it from its wrapping and holds it up to the light. Its reflection dances throughout the theater—gradually to be joined by scores, hundreds of similar small lights which glimmer in crazy, unpredictable patterns everywhere he looks. Lights out)

THE END