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(1976) Directed by: Dr. Herman Middleton. Pp. 189

The purpose of this thesis is to study the background surrounding the playwright and the play itself in preparation for a production of the play, and then present a critical evaluation of the production.

Chapter One deals with the following: (1) research of the playwright's background, (2) research of the play's background, (3) character description and analysis, (4) analysis of the set, (5) the director's justification of script, and (6) the director's interpretation of that script.

Chapter Two consists of the prompt book for the production, performed October 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27 and 28, in Taylor Theatre at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro. Notations include: (1) movement, composition, and picturization, (2) details of characterization and stage business, (3) rhythm and tempo, and (4) lighting and sound cues, production photographs are also included.

The third chapter consists of critical evaluations in four areas. They are: (1) achievement of interpretation, (2) actor-director relationships, (3) audience response, and (4) personal comments.

A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS OF
ARTHUR MILLER'S THE PRICE


by

Louis Bell

A Thesis Submitted to
the Faculty of the Graduate School at
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Approved by


Herman M. Watson
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APPROVAL PAGE

This thesis has been approved by the following committee of the Faculty of the Graduate School at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro.

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July 28, 1976
Date of Acceptance by Committee

DEDICATION

To Pam for her love.

To my mother and father: Thanks.

I am also indebted to the members of the Department of French and Spanish, Special thanks to Dr. Harold H. Johnson, Myriam Bernard, and Dr. Robert Thompson for their advice and guidance. I must also acknowledge the assistance of my friends, Mr. Billy White, ...

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CHAPTER I
A PRODUCTION ANALYSIS OF
ARTHUR MILLER'S THE PRICE

Introduction

There can be no doubt at this point in our literary and theatrical history as to Arthur Miller's position in it. Among the playwrights since the emergence of Eugene O'Neill only Lillian Hellman, Clifford Odets and Tennessee Williams are at all comparable to him. Hellman's and Odets' writing does not possess so wide a formal range, nor has it extended over so long a period. Only Williams has been more prolific.¹

There is no doubt in this director's mind as to the worth of Arthur Miller's contributions to our theatrical history. This director totally agrees with the above quote by Harold Clurman. Miller's work since the 1950s has embodied the austere tragic spirit of the working man of America. As time passes by, his plays continue to endure, many gaining in strength and import. Miller's dramas have a sureness and solidarity that is unique in this period of uncertainty and flux.²

The purpose of this chapter is to explore one of Arthur Miller's best works, The Price. The director will discuss the reasons for the selection of this play for

¹Harold Clurman, ed., The Portable Arthur Miller (New York: The Viking Press, 1971), p. vii.

²Benjamin Nelson, Arthur Miller, Portrait of a Playwright (New York: David McKay Co., 1970), Introduction.

production as well as his interpretation of the script for performances. The first elements to be discussed will be the play in the context of the author's life and times, and of the author's development of themes and structure. The style in which the play was written will form the second element of discussion. A complete character analysis of all characters in the play will form the third element of discussion. The setting for the play will also be analyzed as it relates to its function in the play and the mood that it should create. The final element under discussion in this chapter are those of script selection and interpretation.

Needless to say there is a great deal of literature written by and about Arthur Miller and his works. Since Miller is a contemporary and is, to say the least, one of our most creative authors; many people have attempted to analyze his moods, themes, and life almost constantly. The majority of the information is repetitive and was written before the 1968 production of The Price. The director has attempted to relate this old material to the more relative material written after 1968. Miller's works have followed, for the most part, a developing pattern which have culminated with the writing of The Price. This director will attempt to evaluate Miller's strengths and weaknesses showing how Arthur Miller's "position in

the drama of the twentieth century is both secure and high."³

Biographical Information

Arthur Miller was born on October 17, 1915, in the Harlem section of Manhattan to a middle-class Jewish family of Germanic stock. His father was a prosperous manufacturer and his mother had, at one time, been a teacher in the public school Miller attended. Miller was a poor student who was much more interested in sports.

. . . the idea all of us subscribed to was to get out onto the football field with the least possible scholastic interference. I can fairly say we were none of us encumbered by anything resembling a thought.⁴

In the crash of 1929, Miller's family's fortune was lost (a time later dramatized in After the Fall and The Price) and Miller went to work in various odd jobs. Unable to enter college because of his scholastic record in high school, Miller went to work for his father.

The job was claustrophobic, the people loud, and the tasks routinized. He particularly loathed the vulgarity and aggressiveness of the buyers who treated his father and the salesmen with arrogant contempt, and he became acutely aware of the meaning of self-respect when he saw how cruelly it was abused. So upset was he with this facet of the business that he wrote his first story, an angry and awkward character study of an aging salesman . . . , the story was obviously the initial record of a situation and idea

³Robert Hogan, Arthur Miller (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1964), p. 45.

⁴"A Boy Grew in Brooklyn," Holiday, March 1955, p. 119.

that would blossom some seventeen years later in Death of a Salesman.⁵

Miller left his father's business and took several odd jobs. One of these jobs was as a clerk in an automobile parts warehouse, a time later to be dramatized in A Memory of Two Mondays. It was during this period of his life that he picked up a copy of the Brothers Karamazov and read it on the subway to and from work. The book made such an impression on young Miller that he decided to be a writer, and for the next two and a half years he saved thirteen dollars a week from his fifteen dollars a week salary in order to pay for one year at college.⁶

He also wrote a letter to the president of the university and asked for a chance to prove his merit within the first year of his studies. If he failed to distinguish himself he would quit.⁷

Miller's letter won him his acceptance to the University of Michigan and he said goodbye to his friends at the warehouse.

He won an occasional prize for his writing.⁸ He twice won Michigan's Avery Hopwood Award. One of these prize plays, The Grass Still Grows, also won the Theatre Guild National Award in 1938. In these early plays Miller began to develop the themes he follows for the rest of his career.

⁵Nelson, p. 18-19.

⁶Hogan, p. 7.

⁷Clurman, p. viii.

⁸Ibid., p. 7.

Miller received his B. A. in 1938 and returned to New York. He spent a short time with the Federal Theater Project in its last months. Miller turned to writing for radio including scripts for Columbia Workshop and Cavalcade of America. Miller soon developed a deep dislike for radio and the commercialism that went with it. Nevertheless, the influence of radio can be seen in many of his greatest works.

Because the medium for which they were written catered to an audience's imagination, his plays manifest a wide range of nonrealistic experimentation. Fantasy situations, the use of a narrator, rapid and plastic shifts of scene and the breakdown of conventional time barriers--all these elements which are refined in . . . Death of a Salesman . . . A View from the Bridge . . . are used boldly and interestingly in his radio dramas.⁹

When the Second World War broke out Miller was kept out of the armed forces because of an old football injury. He wrote scripts in behalf of bond drives and worked in the Brooklyn Navy Yard. It was at this time Miller got his first introduction to the professional theater.¹⁰

Miller received the job of collecting material for a movie, The Story of G. I. Joe based on Ernie Pyle's book, Here is Your War. Miller spent two months collecting material from different army camps, tank installations,

⁹Leonard Moss, Arthur Miller (New York: Twayne, 1967), p. 43.

¹⁰Nelson, p. 51.

and officer candidate schools. He published a journal of his tour, Situation Normal.¹¹ It was in 1944, however, before Miller's first Broadway play was to appear.

"The Man Who Had All the Luck appeared on Broadway on November 23, 1944, and lasted for four performances."¹² Miller's first entrance onto Broadway was not a success. The play gave the impression of being almost a student exercise. The crucial situation at the end of the last act was strong, but artificial.

Miller was dissatisfied with this play to such an extent that he refused to include it in his Collected Works, still, he felt it was "a preparation, and possibly a necessary one, for those [plays] that followed."¹³ The show did have many faults but the major themes showed a continuation of the developing pattern that was to culminate in the writing of All My Sons, Death of a Salesman and The Price.

In all three works mentioned above, as well as The Man Who Had All the Luck, a father would forfeit his son's respect by forcing him to accept his own standard of success. "The themes, for instance of money and morality and of individual responsibility are touched upon. The meticulously drawn, real society, the tightly constructed

¹¹Moss, p. 25.

¹²Hogan, p. 12.

¹³Moss, p. 33.

cumulative structure"¹⁴ was to be used as a model for some of Miller's future works, especially The Price.

In writing of the father-son relationship and of the son's search for his relatedness there was a fullness of feeling I had never known before; a crescendo was struck with a force I could almost touch . . . with this discovery Miller found himself. In his best known plays, as in perhaps the best dramas of the Western world, the larger society is reflected by the little society of the family. That little society, that microcosm, Miller knew intimately and revealingly documented.¹⁵

Miller's next published work was to be his first and only novel. The subject of the novel was to be anti-Semitism and its name was to be Focus. The novel received essentially favorable reviews and sold more than ninety thousand copies. Miller, however, was already at work on a new play for "he was determined not to let The Man Who Had All the Luck provide his curtain call."¹⁶

All My Sons was produced on January 29, 1947, and had a Broadway run of 328 performances. The play established Miller as a dramatist of much promise and it was given the Drama Critics Circle Award as the best American play of the season.¹⁷ All My Sons was to be a continuation of the Ibsenism that Miller was developing as a style.

[All My Sons], like Ibsen's serial plays, is economical. All of his characters, even the minor ones, have an integral relation to the theme. No characters are introduced merely to illustrate or

¹⁴Hogan, p. 13.

¹⁵Ibid., p. 14-15.

¹⁶Nelson, p. 78.

¹⁷Hogan, p. 16.

to facilitate the mechanics of the plot. Such economy emphasizes the play's closeness to traditional austere tragedy. This is a family tragedy; the father is a man of some importance who falls from power to ignominy. The lives of his entire family are blighted by his crime. . . . There is even in the play a hint of fate inexorably guiding the destinies of the characters. It is the ghost from the past, [the dead son,] or dead father as in The Price whose words precipitate the tragic climax.¹⁸

All My Sons, as does The Price, develops from a series of illusions that gradually reveal a hidden sin which is to affect the lives of all the characters.

All My Sons was to show a promise that was more than fulfilled when Miller's next work was produced. He was to follow the plot developed in All My Sons but was to vary his structure. This structure was to show the influence of Miller's early radio work but "the protagonists" fall from dignity within the narrative framework of an ancient family drama involving what Shakespeare in King Lear called "Unnaturalness between the child and the parent"¹⁹ was to remain the same.

On February 10, 1949, Death of a Salesman was produced. Salesman was to be Miller's most important play.

The protagonist is Willy Loman, a traveling salesman who lives in Brooklyn and covers some of the New England territory by automobile. Through an intricate series of flashbacks, originating in Willy's fevered mind, we see the roots of his family's deterioration and

¹⁸Ibid., p. 18-19.

¹⁹Moss, p. 45.

his semi-mystical belief in his own concept of success. Willy's belief has deteriorated and his sons, by following their father's counsel, have unintentionally, but unquestionably paved their way to ruin.

The vision Willy was to swallow of the Horatio Alger myth would be later reflected in The Price's protagonist, Victor. Willy and Victor both believed that if you are a clean-living and diligent bank clerk you will gain success; through sacrifice one builds up a moral debt that is always paid. The failure of this American dream, man's social responsibility, and the theme of a father's conflict with his sons are the driving forces behind both Salesman and The Price.

Death of a Salesman was awarded the Pulitzer Prize for drama and after his third production Miller was a force to be reckoned with in the American theatre.

The 1950s for Miller were to be a time of great success and fame; his plays were being produced around the world and his wealth had increased tremendously. Many prizes were awarded him and many honorary degrees. The 1950s, however, were to bring censure as well as wealth and acclaim.²⁰

Miller was particularly disturbed in the early fifties over the inquiries concerning disloyalty being

²⁰Ibid., p. 25-26.

conducted by federal agencies and Congressional committees. He believed that the investigations were being used to harass those with unpopular political views. Miller had been inspired by liberal reform programs and had worked for those programs actively. It is no wonder then that he viewed the Congressional investigations with such disrespect. He wrote The Crucible to expose the "petty ambitions, bareheaded political drives, and the fantasies of very small and vengeful minds."²¹

The Crucible opened on the evening of January 22, 1953, and won both the Antoinette Perry and Donaldson awards. This drama is the fulfillment of three fundamentals of tragedy. First, through a torturous process of self-examination, an individual arrives at a new realization of himself and his relationship to others. Secondly, the individual learns the power and necessity of making a choice. Thirdly, a moment of self-recognition leads to destruction.²² All three of these fundamentals would be later reflected in The Price.

Structurally, the play departs from Death of a Salesman. It follows instead the tradition of the well-made play continuing Miller's experimentations with Ibsen's form. Miller was soon to be caught up in a version

²¹Allan Seager, "The Creative Agony of Arthur Miller." Esquire, October 1959, p. 123-126.

²²Nelson, p. 173.

of his own play when a Congressional committee turned for a closer look at the liberal playwright.

In March, 1954, the State Department refused Miller a passport on the grounds that he was "supporting the Communist movement."²³ Later in 1954, the Youth Board of New York City first suspended, then cancelled a film Miller was to write because of rumors that Miller was shortly to be called before a Congressional committee.

Miller appeared in June, 1956, before the House Committee on Un-American Activities. He testified that he indeed had been to Communist-run meetings for writers but he said, "my conscience will not permit me to use the name of another person and bring trouble to him."²⁴ On May 31, 1957, he was found guilty of contempt of Congress and was fined five-hundred dollars and given a suspended thirty-day jail sentence. A year later the conviction was reversed.

Miller during this ordeal was kept in the limelight by divorcing his first wife and marrying Marilyn Monroe, the most celebrated motion picture star of her time. He became front-page news across the country, and the man who had always placed a high premium on his privacy was made a glaring public figure. During these years Miller

²³New York Times, 31 March 1954, p. 16.

²⁴New York Times, 19 February 1957, p. 1.

produced almost no important work. A View from the Bridge and A Memory of Two Mondays, a screenplay (The Misfits, 1961) and a number of essays and short stories were his only works until he divorced Marilyn Monroe in 1960.²⁵

On January 23, 1964, Miller's first play in almost nine years, premiered. Its title was After the Fall and was patterned after Death of a Salesman. The play was an extremely subjective play about a lawyer named Quentin.

Quentin strives to determine the extent of his guilt and innocence in relation to the people who have shaped his life. His disorientation had its roots in his youth. His mother married Quentin's father because her parents arranged the match for her. She is quickly disappointed in the arrangement and when the economic crash of 1929 takes the father's money, the mother turns on her husband calling him a "moron" and an "idiot", convinced that he has bungled away the business. Quentin's mother turns the children against the husband, pointing out his intellectual inferiority. Quentin has witnessed the failure of love and trust between his parents, he recognizes it in his own marriages in the lives of his friends and finally he sees it on a societal and national level.²⁶ (Quentin's unhappy childhood duplicates almost exactly the Franz brother's past in The Price.)

²⁵Encyclopedia of World Drama, 1972 ed., s. v. "Arthur Miller."

²⁶Ibid.

Less than a month after the opening of After the Fall Miller completed a new drama titled, Incident at Vichy. The new play opened on the third of December, 1964, and subsequently alternated in repertory with After the Fall.

In Incident at Vichy, Miller returned to his realistic style of production he had been trying to perfect over his writing career. This style along with the themes of guilt, responsibility, and moral debt were to be reemphasized in his next work, The Price.

The Price opened at the Morosco Theatre on February 7, 1968, and was greeted by more cordial reviews than any other Miller drama since Death of a Salesman. A one year run was followed by a highly successful London opening and has proven to be one of Miller's most successful plays.²⁷

In 1974, Miller's most recent play opened on Broadway. It ran for twenty performances and twenty-two previews and was called The Creation of the World and Other Business. This was Miller's first try at a full length comedy and it was not greeted by very cordial reviews. He now lives in Connecticut with his wife, Ingeborg Morath, and his eleven-year-old daughter, Rebecca.

Miller's own sense of involvement with modern man's struggle to be himself is revealed in his own

²⁷Nelson, p. 295.

growth as an artist and has made him one of the modern theatre's most compelling and important spokesmen.²⁸

Style

Realism is a style of production which shows life as it actually appears to be. It is not the exact photographic reproduction of life as Naturalism is, but a form that in many cases simplifies many aspects of real life. Realism is a style to describe appearances. The projected appearance of life represents what is most true about life.²⁹

In The Price Arthur Miller presents four very real people. People who each have different ideals, ideas, and pasts. These four people gather in an attic full of old memories and broken dreams to question if the prices they have paid for their lives are justified.

The dialogue is basically expository and revelatory, probing the past and examining a house built on lies, while simultaneously leading to a series of discoveries that shatter the illusions that have enveloped and almost suffocated the house.³⁰

It is essential to the production of The Price that the characters be played as realistically as possible.

²⁸Robert W. Corrigan, ed., Arthur Miller, a Collection of Critical Essays (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc., 1969), p. 22.

²⁹Francis Hodge, Play Directing, Analysis, Communication and Style (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, Inc.), p. 335.

³⁰Nelson, p. 295.

The play contains very little physical action. The characters are penned in by furniture that restricts their movements. The burden of making the play successful, therefore, is on believable characterizations. This form of writing is based on the tradition of the well made play and it is firmly in the style of Ibsen. It is a logical conclusion of a Miller tradition that was developed in The Man Who Had All the Luck, All My Sons, After the Fall and other works.

The Franz family and Solomon interact and gradually reveal themselves in a logical realistic sequence. As in all realistic dramas the characters' inner psychological justification is communicated by the building of scenes which conclude with a new realization of their relationship to the other characters.³¹

The Price is a tightly constructed, fast paced show which reveals the pasts, hopes and desires of the Franz family. Miller gives us two completely different viewpoints of the past of the two brothers. Miller does not reveal which viewpoint is right or wrong but leaves the conclusions to the audience.

This director believes that Miller has returned to the familiar form of a trial in this show. Victor gives us one side of the question and Walter the other. Solomon,

³¹John Gassner, Producing the Play (San Francisco: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, Inc.), p. 295.

the wise man, acts as a judge, constantly keeping the two brothers honest. Esther is a witness to both sides. The audience acts as the jury who must decide, in light of their own experiences, which brother is right. The show will be directed so that neither side is favored. This balance will convey that neither of the brothers is right or wrong but that each in his own way is right. Victor comes to this understanding and, as his names implies, is the victor of the play. Walter never understands this despite all of his soul searching and psychoanalysis.

The audience is the jury and being so, will be an extension of the play. They will be as much a part of the play as the other characters. The set will be arranged in two-sided arena, putting the audience as close as possible to the other actors. A continuing sound tract of city noise will be used to convey the realism of the production to the audience.

This director hopes to grab and hold the audience in the world of the Franz family for the run of the show. These four people will live for the audience and be real. This production will become an extension of the audience's life. The audience will see that their lives and the characters' lives are all a matter of their own viewpoint.

Character Analysis

Victor

Victor Franz is a fifty-year old New York policeman. He is a tall, handsome and forceful-looking man. At one time he was a promising science student but he gave up college education to support his father during the Depression.

Victor's whole life has been based on his self-sacrifice for his father and he banks on the moral debt incurred from his sacrifice. Victor now faces retirement from the police force after twenty-eight years of loyal and honest service. He faces retirement with uncertainty and fear. Victor cannot shake off the frightening suspicion that his past years have not only been a waste but a lie.

This uneasiness has manifested itself to the extent that Victor grinds his teeth at night; a problem which causes pain in his right ear. Victor is a trusting, easy-going man who is probably liked and looked up to on the force (he is a sergeant). In his private life, however, he is unsure of himself and at odds about where he wants to go or what he wants to do. Victor has been a good father and husband and has worked hard for twenty-eight years in a job he says he hates. He is baffled by his life but he wants to know the "truth" no matter what the cost.

Walter

Walter Franz is Victor's fifty-six year old brother. Where Victor has sacrificed his life for his father, Walter has allowed nothing to deter him from his goal. He left his father to be supported by Victor alone and has become a person that cuts money out of people and fame out of the world. Walter has pushed everything out of life that was extraneous--including people--to pursue his studies in medicine. He is now a success in his profession, well-known and the chief administrator of a new hospital. He has, however, paid dearly for his success. His once skilled surgeon's hands now tremble a bit because he has had a nervous breakdown. His wife has left him and his sons no longer care for him. He has money but no happiness. He comes to the attic genuinely trying to make up the lost years to Victor, but, under the warm smile there is a coolness that can never die.

Solomon

Gregory Solomon, is Arthur Miller's most likable and lively character. He is a gentleman, sage, and an aged imp rolled up into one. A large man with untidy rich clothes, his pockets full of oranges and chocolate bars, he slowly moves around the room sizing up the price for Walter and Victor's past life.

Solomon has spent his eighty-nine years indulging in everything from a stint in the British Navy to an acrobatic act in vaudeville. He has lived life deeply and has been married five times. Amassing and losing several fortunes, he is now a retired furniture dealer who has come to undertake a new project that to him means the continuing of a full life. Solomon, the wise man, faces life without illusions. He knows that his existence is dependent on his own point of view and his point of view is rooted in a wry sense of humor and on unflinching belief in his dignity as a human being.³²

Esther

Esther Franz is Victor's wife of thirty-seven years. She was married when she was nineteen and now at forty-six she is frustrated by the shoddiness of their lives. Intelligent and compassionate, she loves Victor but is bewildered at his indecisiveness, embarrassed by his uniform, and discouraged by the treadmill of their lives.³³ Her only son is now gone to college and she spends her time in bed. She has fits of depression which she tries to cure by drinking. Under a doctor's care, she is slowly heading for a nervous breakdown.

³²Nelson, p. 297.

³³Ibid., p. 294.

The Set

The action takes place in the attic of a brown-stone in Manhattan that is about to be torn down. The room is dusty-murky, and full of shadows. The small attic is full of furniture collected from the other ten rooms in the house. The furniture is massive, Germanic, and dominates the room like so many brooding giants.

Only one place in the room looks lived in and it's dominated by an overstuffed armchair. Around this central area the good but shabby furniture and the knick-knacks of a past age press in upon the actors forcing them to come to terms with each other. The armchair, harp, and chests of the boys all stand as symbolic references speaking of unfulfilled promises and hopes of a family long dead.

On the right and left are two doors; one, to the bedroom and, the other to the bath. The whole mood is one of age, loneliness, and despair.

The set must reflect the past of the Franz family. The mood of despair and loneliness is a personification of the father who, like the chair that he sat in, dominates the play.

The set symbolically represents the family. The chair, the father, the chests, the brothers, and the harp, the mother. The other knick-knacks represent the past and hopes of the family.

The set will be arranged in two-sided arena with the audience as an extension of the set. The seating area will be surrounded by "blacks" which will give a confined feeling to every audience member. They need to feel how trapped the brothers, all of us, are in our lives.

Background of the Play

The Price had stormy beginnings which Miller was not soon to forget. For over four months in 1967, Miller and director Ulu Grosbard who had staged the Broadway revival of A View from the Bridge in 1965, searched for a leading man to play Victor, the fifty-year old policeman who is the key figure in The Price. They finally chose Jack Warden, and rounded off the cast with Kate Reid, David Burns, and Arthur Kennedy, appearing in his fourth Miller play.

Warden, however, became seriously ill and had to be replaced overnight by Pat Hingle. The Philadelphia opening was postponed and round-the-clock rehearsals were scheduled to work the newcomer into the show. Although the performances quickly improved, the play came to New York two weeks behind schedule and other problems soon developed.

Miller and Grosbard could not agree on certain interpretations and the playwright took over the direction for the last week of Broadway previews. Prior to

the opening night, David Burns was stricken with an intestinal ailment and his understudy Harold Gray took over the part of Solomon.³⁴

This never happened to me before and, My God, I hope it never happens again, Miller exclaimed, I haven't slept; I feel I've been down here all my life. It's like No Exit--you can never get out!³⁵

Miller did get out on February 7, 1968, when The Price opened. It was greeted by good reviews.

Critical Reviews

When The Price opened on Broadway, the major theatre critics were mixed in their opinions, but on the whole they were favorable. Clive Barnes, writing for The New York Times said:

The Price is one of the most engrossing and entertaining plays that Miller has ever written. It is superbly, even flamboyantly, theatrical, running without an intermission, complying with the classic unities of time, place and action, and Miller holds³⁶ the interest with the skill of a born story-teller.

John Chapman of the New York Daily News called the play absorbing and splendidly acted and stated:

There is little "action", little visible event in this drama, yet it is spellbinding in its intensity

³⁴Nelson, p. 294.

³⁵Joan Barthel, "Arthur Miller Ponders The Price," New York Times, 28 January 1968, sec. 2.

³⁶"Theater: Arthur Miller's 'The Price'," New York Times, 8 February 1968.

as it moves headlong, without interruption, from a lightly amusing beginning to an emotion-stirring finish.³⁷

Richard P. Cooke of The Wall Street Journal called The Price, a first-rate evening of theatre, and wrote:

It is a play about real people, real issues, and above all, real illusions . . . There is warmth in the play and also the chill that can emanate from exposed self-delusion. And parts of it are marvelously funny.³⁸

Walter Kerr of the Sunday Times called the play a fine evening and commented:

Mr. Miller has never been much of a man for leavening his work with comedy . . . But in the person of an ancient used-furniture dealer, . . . he has literally opened an attic door to let guile in, guile with a scallawag charm to it.³⁹

Richard Watts, Jr., writing for the New York Post called The Price intense, thoughtful, and argumentative but commented:

for all its conscientious ruminations and excellent acting, it seemed to me disappointingly lacking in effective resolution and steady interest. . . . it lacks dramatic power.⁴⁰

Martin Gottfried writing for Women's Wear Daily was even less complimentary: "The Price is an old

³⁷John Chapman, "The Price," Daily News, 8 February 1968.

³⁸Richard P. Cooke, "The Theater," The Wall Street Journal, 9 February 1968.

³⁹"Mr. Miller's Two New Faces," The Sunday Times, 18 February 1968.

⁴⁰Richard Watts, Jr., "Two on the Aisle," New York Post, 8 February 1968.

fashioned drama, and a carelessly written one, displaying Mr. Miller as a slackening artist."⁴¹

Script Selection

The Price is a well written, realistic play, written in the style of the well-made play. It shows Miller's most interesting themes of moral debt, responsibility, and family strife.

The play had opened on Broadway with critics calling it "one of the most engrossing and entertaining plays that Miller has ever written."⁴² These reviews and the fascination of the director with this modern version of an Ibsen-like play were the main reasons for the selection of the script.

The Price also presents several problems in directing and acting which make it a natural for selection. Most of the play is made up of scenes of just two people which are hard to stage in an interesting way. There is very little physical action and the dialogue is basically expository. The director must help the actors to physicalize the psychological action in the play. The burden of the success of the play falls on the actor's work. The Price calls for the most believable acting that can be acquired to keep the audience's attention.

⁴¹Martin Gottfried, "Theater," Women's Wear Daily, 8 February 1968.

⁴²"Theater: Arthur Miller's 'The Price'," New York Times, 8 February 1968.

Since the play is modern and has only four characters, the expense of costumes will be low. The set covers a small area and props and furniture can easily be acquired. All the parts are of the highest quality. The Price seems a natural for quality production at small cost.

Interpretation of Script

The Price represents the accumulation of theme, ideals, and years of playwriting skill of Arthur Miller. Miller introduces us to two brothers: one aggressive and lucky, the other loyal and obscure. The first is perhaps more realistic and the second foolish and defeated. Miller does not, however, plead for one or the other. Nowhere in any other work has Miller balanced the opposites so evenly. Miller leaves the final question of right and wrong to the audience.

The Price might almost be the sequel to the family story at the beginning of After the Fall.⁴³ The play, while longer than Incident at Vichy, is written in the same tight and simple form used by Miller in All My Sons and A Memory of Two Mondays. In The Price Miller again returns to his most hospitable context--the family.⁴⁴

The play opens in an attic of an old brownstone in Manhattan. There "is the chaos of ten rooms of

⁴³Gassner, p. 569.

⁴⁴Corrigan, p. 15.

furniture squeezed into this one."⁴⁵ The furniture is good but shabby. An old radio, a console gramophone, a pile of dusty records, an old harp, all the junk of a lifetime, are standing, waiting for someone or something. Into this room enters a police sergeant named Victor Franz.

He strokes an old harp, he tries the victrola, and the late afternoon stillness is broken with the scratchy tone of Gallagher and Shean. . . . The Cop stops the record, . . . The Cop's wife [Esther] enters, . . .⁴⁶

Victor has come back to this attic after an absence of fifteen years to sell the remains of his family's furniture. He seems uneasy and we find out that he is faced with retirement after twenty-eight years on the police force. Afraid of the emptiness that he sees ahead and amazed at the seemingly bleak past he is undecided what to do.

I'll be frank with you, kid; he confides shakily to his wife, I look at my life and the whole thing is incomprehensible to me.⁴⁷

Victor has been dominated by his past, especially by a catastrophe that happened to his father.

Like Willy Loman, the elder Franz had worshiped the god of material success and had viewed his bankruptcy

⁴⁵Arthur Miller, The Price (Dramatists Play Service, Inc., 1968), p. 5.

⁴⁶Clive Barnes, "Theater: Arthur Miller's 'The Price'," New York Times, 8 February 1968.

⁴⁷Arthur Miller, The Price (Bantam World Drama, 1968), p. 23.

as a fall from grace. But unlike the idealistic salesman, Franz took refuge from an alien, working world by fashioning a fortress out of despair and self pity, and embracing defeat, he has allowed his son to become the keeper of his cold, flickering flame.⁴⁸

Victor, we learn, gave up his college degree to support his father after he became a casualty of the Depression. Now, with his whole life molded by this choice he cannot decide if the past twenty-eight years have been a waste or not.

His doubts and confusion are shared by his wife, Esther. She is frustrated by the shoddiness of their life and she is particularly isolated because her son Richard has left for college. She now spends most of her time in bed and has taken to drinking to cover the empty feeling in her life. She has come to the attic to wait for Victor, then they are going to a movie. Esther inquires if Walter, Victor's brother, is coming for the sale.

Esther's frustration is exhibited in her dualistic attitude toward her brother-in-law. On one hand she resents Walter for his aloofness and lack of help given to the support of the elder Franz. On the other hand, she envies Walter's purpose and success. After these points build up, we are surprised by the arrival of Gregory Solomon.

Solomon is an eighty-nine year old, incredibly wise, antique dealer, who has come out of retirement to give a

⁴⁸Nelson, p. 297.

price for the furniture. "You must have looked up my name in a very old telephone book."⁴⁹ Solomon is marvelously human and humorous, he has amassed several fortunes and has rebounded from at least four depressions.

Solomon starts a complicated and often hilarious bargaining process with Victor for the price to be given to the furniture. For Solomon, as for his forebearers, life must be ritualized to make sense, and he goes about doing so with solemnity, gusto, and vigor. However, he is uncertain about his ability to take such a large load of furniture at this time in his life.

Solomon is almost ninety but he burns with a flame that consumes the fear of such an undertaking, in a blaze of anticipation he takes the challenge. He lives his life to the fullest, taking advantage of everything life has to offer.

Victor, overcome by Solomon's love of life and persuasive attitude, accepts a price for the furniture that is less than he expected. As he is receiving payment Walter arrives.

As the men confront each other in cluttered attic of their parents' home, one in his blue policeman's uniform and the other in his tan vicuna coat, their latent antagonism quickly flares into overt hostility, and some initial comments about the prices of furniture explode into a blistering quarrel over the less tangible but more pervasive prices each has paid for the life he has fashioned.⁵⁰

⁴⁹Miller (Dramatists Play Service, Inc.), p. 28.

⁵⁰Nelson, p. 296.

Walter, we learn, has been the winner of the rat race. He left his father to follow the road of success no matter what the cost. He, however, has paid dearly for his victory. After a divorce and a nervous breakdown he has realized how meaningless success can be.

Walter wants to give Victor his share of the price of the furniture and this offer accompanies Walter's first offer of friendship. At this point Solomon, conveniently, has an attack of exhaustion. He and Walter move off to the bedroom.

Esther urges Victor to take Walter's offer, saying that it is more or less their due. She says they must take Walter's friendship at face value. Victor, however, is unsure.

Walter returns and offers Victor two things: one, he has devised a way for Victor to make at least six-times the money for the sale of the furniture. He says he can make it a contribution and the savings on his income tax he will give to Victor. Second, he offers Victor a job in his new hospital. Victor is overcome, so much so, he almost takes the offer.

But Solomon does not disappear altogether and each of his entrances is significant. In effect, he serves to keep the brothers honest; his interruptions deter them from arriving at false or illusory solutions.⁵¹

⁵¹Corrigan, p. 18.

Solomon's brief entrance makes Victor remember he has already made a deal with him. He also knows that he does not have the credentials for Walter's position. After Solomon has returned to the bedroom, Victor releases a lifetime of built up resentment.

Walter tries to justify his life by demonstrating that his flight from his father was not a betrayal of love because it never existed in the Franz home. But he can not forget that he abandoned his family for the motive of self-preservation and he needs Victor's forgiveness to assuage his guilt. Victor knows that there is nothing to forgive. If he was not sacrificing his life for his father then the whole thing is a lie and Walter was and is not guilty of betraying his family.

With this knowledge, Victor is proved the "victor" of the play. Walter still doesn't understand the truth and becomes infuriated at Victor's refusal to give him his forgiveness. He storms from the room telling Solomon as he leaves: "Go ahead you old mutt--rob-them-blind, they love it!"⁵²

Victor tries to go after Walter but Solomon stops him. "What can you do?"⁵³ Esther laments the fact that Victor and Walter could not make a meaningful contact. Solomon replies:

⁵²Miller (Dramatist Play Service, Inc.), p. 77.

⁵³Ibid.

I had a daughter, should she rest in peace, she took her own life. That's nearly sixty years. And every night I lay down to sleep she's sitting there. I see her clear like I see you. But if it was a miracle and she came to life--what would I say to her?⁵⁴

Solomon is a truly wise man. He knows that we can never explain or justify what we have done or have not done to others and that, with this knowledge, any attempt to seek revenge or try to collect a moral debt will lead only to nothingness. Solomon knows that it's irrelevant to worry about "the price" one has paid for his life. Life may be an absurd joke, but it's the only life we have.⁵⁵

⁵⁴Ibid.

⁵⁵Corrigan, p. 21.

CHAPTER II

PROMPT BOOK FOR THE PRICEAct I

(THE AUDIENCE MEMBERS ARE FACED FIRST WITH A HALLWAY OF AN OLD BROWNSTONE. AS THEY FOLLOW THE HALL THEY COME TO THE ATTIC DOOR. ON ENTERING, THE AUDIENCE MEMBERS ARE FORCED TO WEAVE THEIR WAY THROUGH A MAZE OF FURNITURE TO THEIR SEATS WHICH ARE LOCATED ON BOTH SIDES OF THE ATTIC.)

THE FLOOR OF THE ATTIC IS MADE OF WOOD WHICH IS FIFTEEN BY FIFTEEN FEET SQUARE. [THE STAGE DIRECTIONS ARE GIVEN IN RELATION TO THE FURNITURE AND TO THE FACE OF A CLOCK.] TO THE LEFT SIDE OF THE AUDIENCE THE DOOR WAY IS ON THEIR RIGHT AT 6:00 O'CLOCK OR THE LOWER END OF THE COUCH. AT 12:00 O'CLOCK IS A SET OF WINDOWS. AT 3:00 O'CLOCK IS A CHAIR. IN THE CENTER OF THE ROOM IS PAPA'S CHAIR. THE MOTHER'S HARP IS AT 11:00 O'CLOCK. WALTER'S CHEST IS AT 9:00 O'CLOCK. THERE ARE TWO DOORS FAR UP STAGE AT 1:00 O'CLOCK AND AT 11:00 O'CLOCK. THE DOOR AT 11:00 O'CLOCK IS BLOCKED BY FURNITURE. THE LIGHTS FALL ON THE ROOM. IN THE DARK, FOOTSTEPS ARE HEARD IN THE HALL AND KEYS ARE TRIED ON THE ATTIC DOOR. THE DOOR IS OPENED AND AN OUTLINE OF A MAN, WHO IS OBVIOUSLY A POLICEMAN, IS SILHOUETTED BY THE HALL'S LIGHT. AT THIS POINT DAVID GATES' SUITE OF THE WIND AND THE RAIN BEGINS. THE ROOM'S LIGHTS SLOWLY COME UP. THE POLICEMAN IS VICTOR, A TALL, DARK HAIR-ED MAN, NEARING FIFTY. VICTOR SURVEYS THE ROOM AS HE REMOVES HIS HAT AND GUN. HE SLOWLY WALKS TO THE CENTER CHAIR AND PICKS UP THE BUST THAT IS THERE. HE PUTS IT ON A CHEST AT 10:00 O'CLOCK. HE GOES TO WALTER'S CHEST AT 9:00 O'CLOCK AND PICKS UP FOIL. HE HEARS A FAINT SOUND, THEN TRIES TO LOCATE IT; THE SOUND INCREASES--IT IS A HARP. VICTOR GOES TO HIS MOTHER'S HARP AND THE SOUND STOPS. VICTOR FINDS SOME RECORDS AND, CURIOUS, GOES TO THE VICTROLA. THE RECORD IS AN OLD LAUGHING RECORD. VICTOR LAUGHS UNTIL HE FALLS IN PAPA'S CHAIR, CENTER. ESTHER, HIS WIFE, ENTERS FROM THE DOWN LEFT DOOR. HIS BACK IS TO HER. A HALF-SMILE IS ALREADY ON HER FACE AS SHE LOOKS ABOUT TO SEE WHO IS LAUGHING WITH HIM. SHE STARTS TOWARD HIM.)

ESTHER

(ESTHER ENTERS AND CROSSES TO COUCH.)

What in the world is that?

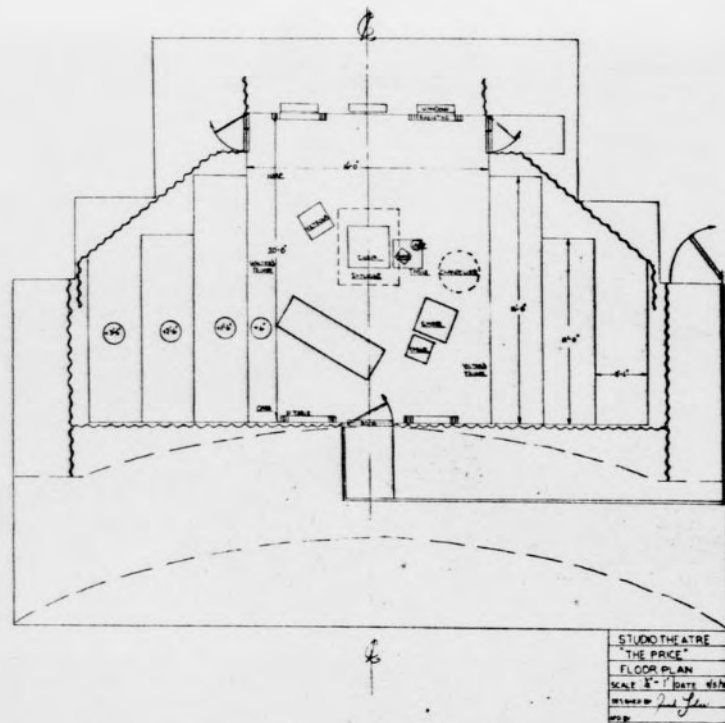


Figure 1



Figure 2

VICTOR

(VICTOR CROSSES TO VICTROLA AND CUTS RECORD.)

Hi!

ESTHER

(ESTHER PAUSES FOR VICTOR'S KISS, THEN ENTERS CENTER.)

Sounded like a party in here! What is that?

VICTOR

Where'd you get a drink?

ESTHER

I told you; I went for my checkup.

VICTOR

Boy, you and that doctor. I thought he told you not to drink.

ESTHER

(ESTHER CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I had one!--one doesn't hurt me. Everything's normal anyway. He sent you his best. (SHE LOOKS ABOUT.)

VICTOR

Well, that's nice. The dealer's due in a few minutes, if you want to take anything.

ESTHER

(ESTHER WALKS AROUND PAPA'S CHAIR UPSTAGE.)

Oh dear God--here it is again.

VICTOR

The cleaning woman did a nice job. (CLOSES LID ON PHONOGRAPH.)

ESTHER

(ESTHER CROSSING UP, LOOKING AROUND.)

Ya--it never used to be so clean. Make you feel funny?

(ESTHER CROSSING TO 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

VICTOR

No, not really--

ESTHER

(SHAKING HER HEAD AS SHE STARES ABOUT.)

Huh.

VICTOR

What.

ESTHER

Time.

VICTOR

I know.

ESTHER

There's something different about it.

VICTOR

No, it's all the way it was.

(ESTHER CUTS ON LAMP BESIDE PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I had my desk on that side and my cot. The rest is the same.

ESTHER

Maybe it's that it always used to seem so pretentious to me and kind of bourgeois. But it does have a certain character . . . I think some of it's in style again. It's surprising.

VICTOR

Well, you want to take anything?

ESTHER

(LOOKING, HESITATES.) I don't know if I want it around.
(LOOKING AROUND.) It's all so massive . . . where would we

put any of it?--that chest is lovely. (GOES TO IT.)

VICTOR

That was mine. (INDICATING ONE AT 5:00 O'CLOCK.) The one over there was Walter's. They're a pair.

ESTHER

(COMPARING. CROSSES TO ONE AT 5:00 O'CLOCK.)

Oh ya! Did you get hold of him?

VICTOR

(HE RATHER GLANCES AWAY.)

I called again this morning--he was in consultation.

ESTHER

Was he in the office?

VICTOR

Ya. The nurse went and talked to him for a minute--it doesn't matter. As long as he's notified so I can go ahead.

ESTHER

What about his share? (HE TURNS AWAY.) I don't mean to be a pest, Vic, but there could be some real money here. You're going to raise that with him, aren't you?

VICTOR

I've changed my mind. I don't really feel he owes me anything, I can't put on an act, he's got a right to his half. (ESTHER TOUCHES LAMP UP BESIDE CENTER CHAIR.) That's probably real porcelain. Maybe it'd go in the bedroom.

ESTHER

(ESTHER CROSSES DOWN TO COUCH AND GETS PURSE FROM SOFA.)

Why don't I meet you somewhere? The whole thing depresses me.

VICTOR

(VICTOR CROSSES TO ESTHER AND PUSHES HER DOWN ON SOFA.)

Why?--it won't take long, relax. Come on, sit down--the dealer'll be here any minute.

ESTHER

(SITTING DOWN END OF SOFA, PUTS PURSE BESIDE HER.)

There's just something so rotten about it. I'm sorry, I can't help it. There always was. The whole thing's infuriating.

VICTOR

(VICTOR CROSSES AND SITS ON ARM OF COUCH, 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

We'll sell it and that'll be the end of it. (TAKING TICKETS OUT OF SHIRT POCKET.) I picked up the tickets, by the way.

ESTHER

Oh, good. Boy, I hope it's a good picture.

VICTOR

Better be great, not good. Two-fifty apiece. (PUTS TICKETS BACK IN POCKET.)

ESTHER

I don't care, I want to go somewhere.--(CROSSES TO HARP.) God, what's it all about? When I was coming up the stairs just now, and all the doors hanging open . . . it doesn't seem possible.

VICTOR

They tear down old buildings every day of the week, kid.

ESTHER

I know but it makes you feel a hundred years old. Well, where's your dealer?

VICTOR

(GLANCING AT WATCH.)

He's ten minutes late now--he should be here soon. (SHE ANGRILY PLUCKS THE HARP.) That should be worth something.

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO VICTROLA.)

I think a lot of it is. But you're going to have to bargain, you know. You can't just take what they say . . .

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA. WITH AN EDGE OF PROTEST.)

I can bargain; don't worry, I'm not giving it away.

ESTHER

Because they expect to bargain.

VICTOR

Don't get depressed already, will you? We didn't even start. I intend to bargain, I know the score with these guys.

ESTHER

(SHE WITHOLDS FURTHER ARGUMENT, CROSSES TO VICTROLA; AND FIRING UP SOME SLIGHT GAIETY . . .)

What's this record?

VICTOR

It's a Laughing Record. It was a big thing in the Twenties.

ESTHER

(CURIOUSLY.) You remember it?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Very vaguely. I was only five or six. Used to play them at parties. You know--see who could keep a straight face--Or maybe they just sat around laughing; I don't know.

ESTHER

(TURNS TO VICTOR.)

That's a wonderful idea!

VICTOR

You look good.

(CROSSES A STEP TOWARD ESTHER.)

I mean it--

ESTHER

I believe you--This is the suit.

VICTOR

(CROSSING TO HER.)

Oh, is that it! And how much? Turn around.

ESTHER

(TURNING.)

Forty-five, imagine? He said nobody'd buy it, it was too simple.

VICTOR

(SEIZING THE AGREEMENT.)

Boy, women are dumb; that is really handsome. See, I don't mind if you get something for your money, but half the stuff they sell is such crap . . . (GOING TO HER.) By the way, look at this collar. Isn't this one of the ones you just bought.

ESTHER

(EXAMINES IT. CROSSES DOWN STAGE OF VICTOR.)

No, that's an older one.

VICTOR

Well even so. (TURNING ON A HEEL.) Ought to write to Consumers Union about these heels. Three weeks--look at them!

ESTHER

Well you don't walk straight--

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

You're not going in uniform, I hope.

VICTOR

I could've murdered that guy! I'd just changed, and McGowan was trying to fingerprint some bum and he didn't want to be printed; so he swings out his arm just as I'm going by, right into my coffee cup.

ESTHER

Oh, God . . .

VICTOR

(WALKS AWAY.)

I gave it to that quick cleaner, he'll try to have it by six.

ESTHER

Was there cream and sugar in the coffee?

VICTOR

Ya.

ESTHER

(SITS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

He'll never have it by six.

VICTOR

(ASSUAGINGLY.) He's going to try.

ESTHER

Oh, forget it.

VICTOR

Well it's only a movie . . .

ESTHER

But we go out so rarely--why must everybody know your salary? I want an evening! I want to sit down in a restaurant without

some drunken ex-cop coming over to the table to talk about old times.

VICTOR

(TURNS TOWARD ESTHER.)

It happened twice. After all these years, Esther, it would seem to me . . .

ESTHER

I know it's unimportant--but like that man in the museum, he really did--he thought you were the sculptor.

VICTOR

So I'm a sculptor.

ESTHER

Well it was nice, that's all! You really do Vic--you look distinguished in a suit--Why not? (SHE LIGHTS A CIGARETTE.) I have an idea. Why don't you leave me? Just send me enough for coffee and cigarettes.

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP AROUND PAPA'S CHAIR AT CENTER.)

See, one drink and look how depressed you get.

ESTHER

Well, it's the kind of depression I enjoy.

VICTOR

Hot diggety dog. Look, why don't you go off for a couple of weeks with you doctor? (SHE CHUCKLES.) Seriously. It might change your viewpoint.

ESTHER

I wish I could.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Well do it. He's got a suit. You could even take the dog--especially the dog.

ESTHER

For God's sake, what have you got against that dog?

VICTOR

Esther, she's a pain in the ass. Eighty dollars in veterinary bills,

(PICKING FUR OFF HIS PANTS, HOLDING IT OUT TO HER, HE CROSSES TO SOFA AT 6:00 O'CLOCK END.)

and everytime I put on a uniform it's like a fur coat.

ESTHER

That is not the dog . . .

VICTOR

So it's the cat. Between the two of them I'm getting up half an hour earlier to brush myself off. (SHE LAUGHS.) It's not funny. Everytime you go out for one of those walks in the rain I hold my breath what's going to come back with you.

ESTHER

(LAUGHING.) Oh, go on, you love her.

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AND STAYS AT THE DOWNSTAGE END.)

I love her. You get plastered, you bring home strange animals, and I "love" them! I do not love that dog! (SHE LAUGHS WITH AFFECTION.) I don't get the humor; the house stinks.

ESTHER

(DEFIANCE.) Well you're not throwing out the cat!

VICTOR

(SITS ON ARM OF DOWNSTAGE SOFA AT 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

The problem is not the cat, Esther. You're an intelligent, capable woman, and you can't lay around all day. Even something parttime, it would give you a place to go.

ESTHER

(CROSSES UP TO THE VICTROLA.)

I can't go to the same place day after day. I never could and I never will. I'm not quite used to Richard not being there, that's all.

VICTOR

He's gone, kid. He's a grown man; you've got to do something with yourself.

ESTHER

Did you ask to speak to your brother?

VICTOR

(GLANCING OFF.) I asked the nurse. Yes. He couldn't break away.

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

That son of a bitch. It's sickening.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO RADIO AT PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Well what are you going to do? He never had that kind of feeling.

ESTHER

What feeling? To come to the phone after sixteen years? It's common decency. (HE HITS THE RADIO CHASSIS AS HE GOES BY IT. WITH SUDDEN INTIMATE SYMPATHY.) You're furious, aren't you?

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP TO BUREAU AT 10:00 O'CLOCK.)

Only at myself. Calling him again and again all week like an idiot . . . To hell with him, I'll handle it alone and send him his half.

ESTHER

But how many Cadillacs can he drive?

VICTOR

That's why he's got Cadillacs.--People who love money don't give it away.

ESTHER

I don't know why you keep putting it like charity. There's such a thing as a moral debt.

VICTOR

(CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

You sound like a book sometimes. Moral debt? The guy wouldn't know what I was talking about. Esther, please--let's not get back on that, will you?

ESTHER

(CROSSES DOWN SOFA AND TURNS HER PROFILE TO VICTOR TOWARD 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

When are we going to start talking the way people talk!--He could never have finished medical school if you hadn't taken care of Pop.--There could be some real money here.

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP STAGE, 12:00 O'CLOCK.)

I doubt that--there are no antiques or--

ESTHER

Just because it's ours why must it be worthless? (MAD.)

VICTOR

Now what's that for?

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO VICTOR. PAPA'S CHAIR IS BETWEEN THEM.)

Because that's the way we think!--We do!

VICTOR

(SHARPLY.) The man won't even come to the phone, how am I going to . . .

ESTHER

Then you write him a letter, bang on his door--this belongs to you! (EXPLODING. CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO ESTHER. STOPS BY SOFA.)

What are you so excited about?

ESTHER

Well for one thing it might help you make up your mind to take your retirement. (A SLIGHT PAUSE.)

VICTOR

(RATHER SECRETIVELY, UNWILLINGLY.) It's not the money been stopping me.

ESTHER

Then what is it? I just thought that with a little cushion you could take a month or two until something occurs to you that you want to do.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO VICTOR'S CHEST, LOOKING AT WRIST WATCH AND OUT OF THE DOOR.)

It's all I think about right now, I don't have to quit to think.

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

But nothing seems to come of it.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Is it that easy? I'm going to be fifty. You don't just

start a whole new career. I don't understand why it's so urgent all of a sudden.

ESTHER

(LAUGHS.) All of a sudden! It's all I've been talking about since you became eligible--I've been saying the same thing for three years!

VICTOR

Well it's not three years . . .

(SITS IN CHAIR.)

ESTHER

It'll be three years in March! It's three years. If you'd gone back to school then, you'd almost have your Masters by now. You might have had a chance to get into something you'd love to do. Isn't that true? (WITH TOTAL CURIOSITY AND SYMPATHY.) Why can't you make a move?

VICTOR

(HE IS ALMOST ASHAMED.) I'll tell you the truth, I'm not sure the whole thing wasn't a little unreal. I'd be fifty-three, fifty-four by the time I could start doing anything.

ESTHER

But you always knew that.

VICTOR

I know, but it's different when you're right on top of it. I'm not sure it makes any sense now.

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

--But you might have twenty more years, and that's still a long time. Could do a lot of interesting things in that time. (SLIGHT PAUSE. CROSSES TO VICTOR.) You're so young, Vic.

VICTOR

I am?

ESTHER

Sure! I'm not, but you are. God, all the girls goggle at you, what do you want? (WITH SELF PITY.)

VICTOR

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

It's hard to discuss it, Es, because I don't understand it.

ESTHER

(TURNS AWAY FROM VICTOR.)

Then why don't you write a letter to Walter?

VICTOR

(LIKE A REPEATED STORY.) Walter. What's this with Walter again? Every time we start to talk you bring up Walter. You . . .

ESTHER

He is an important scientist; and that hospital's building a whole new research division. (CROSSING TO HIM.) I saw it in the paper, it's his hospital.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO ESTHER.)

Esther, the man hasn't called me in sixteen years.

ESTHER

But neither have you called him! (HE LOOKS AT HER IN SURPRISE.) Well you haven't. That's also a fact.

VICTOR

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR. AS THOUGH THE IDEA WERE NEW AND INCREDIBLE.)

What would I call him for?!

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO VICTOR, KNEELS.) (See Figure 3.)



Figure 3

Because, he's your brother, he's influential, and he could help--Yes, that's how people do, Vic!--Those articles he wrote had a real idealism, there was a genuine human quality . . . I mean people do change, you know.

VICTOR

I'm sorry, I don't need Walter.

ESTHER

I'm not saying you have to approve of him; he's a selfish bastard, but he just might be able to put you on the track of something. I don't see the humiliation.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

I don't understand why it's all such an emergency.

ESTHER

Because I don't know where in hell I am, Victor.

(TO HER OWN SURPRISE SHE HAS ENDED, SCREAMING. SHE STANDS, PAUSES, COLLECTS HER THOUGHTS.)

I'll do anything if I know why, but all these years we've been saying, once we get the pension we're going to start to live . . . it's like pushing against a door for twenty-five years and suddenly it opens . . . and we stand there.
--Sometimes I wonder, maybe I misunderstood you, maybe you like the department.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN BACK OF SOFA.)

I've hated every minute of it.

ESTHER

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I did everything wrong! I swear, I think if I demanded more it would have helped you more.

VICTOR

(FROM BEHIND SOFA.) That's not ture. You've been a terrific wife . . . (WITH SINCERITY.)

ESTHER

I don't think so. But the security meant so much to you I tried to fit into that; but I was wrong. God--just before coming here, I looked around the apartment to see if we could use any of this . . . and that place is so ugly. It's worn and shabby and tasteless. And I have good taste! I know I do! It's that everything was always temporary with us. It's like we never were anything, we were always about-to-be. I think back to the war when any idiot was making so much money--that's when you should have quit, and I knew it, I knew it!

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO SIDE OF SOFA, STAGE RIGHT, TOWARD 3:00 O'CLOCK, TURNING TO HER.)

I swear, Es--sometimes you make it sound like we've had no life at all.

ESTHER

God--my mother was so right!--I can never believe what I see. I knew you'd never get out if you didn't during the war--I saw it happening, and I said nothing.--You know what the goddamned trouble is?

VICTOR

(HE SITS ON THE ARM OF THE SOFA. HE SENSES THE END OF HER REVOLT.)

What's the goddamned trouble?

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

We can never keep our minds on money! We worry about it, we talk about it, but we can't seem to want it.--I do, but you don't. I really do, Vic. I want it. Vic? I want money!

VICTOR

Congratulations.

ESTHER

You go to hell!

VICTOR

I wish you'd stop comparing yourself to other people, Esther! That all you're doing lately.

ESTHER

Well, I can't help it!

VICTOR

(PAUSES AND CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Then you've got to be a failure, kid, because there's always going to be somebody up ahead of you . . . Actually, I've even started to fill out the forms a couple of times.

ESTHER

(ALERTED.) What happened?

VICTOR

(HE SITS IN CHAIR. ESTHER TURNS TO VICTOR. WITH DIFFICULTY. HE CANNOT UNDERSTAND IT HIMSELF.)

I suppose there's some kind of finality about it that . . . (BREAKS OFF.) It's stupid; I admit it. But you look at that goddamned form and you can't help it--You sign your name to twenty-eight years and you ask yourself, is that all? Is that it? And it is, of course. The trouble is, when I think of starting something new, that number comes up--five o--and the steam goes out. The whole thing turns into some kind of joke. (WITH A CREATED DETERMINATION.) But I'll do something, I will! (SLIGHT PAUSE, HE SEARCHES FOR HIS THOUGHT.) I don't know what it is; every time I think about it, it's almost frightening.

ESTHER

I know.

VICTOR

(RISES AND CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.

Like when I walked in here before. (LOOKS AROUND.) This

whole thing . . . hit me like some kind of craziness. To pile up all this stuff like it was made of gold. I brought up every stick.--I damn near saved the carpet tacks.--I mean you look back, and so many things that seemed so important turn out to be . . . ridiculous. (HE TOUCHES THE CHAIR.) Like that whole way I was with him--it's inconceivable to me now.

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO AND SITS ON SOFA. GETS A CIGARETTE.)

Well, you loved him.

VICTOR

I know, but it's all words somehow. What was he?--a busted businessman like thousands of others, and I acted like some kind of a mountain crashed. I don't know--sometimes I wonder maybe I don't sign out because I regret it all more than I realize and I can't face it. Except what's the difference what you do if you don't do the work you love?--It's a luxury, most people never get near it--I don't know, I tell you there are days when the whole thing is like a story somebody told me. You ever feel that way?

ESTHER

All day, every day.

VICTOR

Oh, come on . . .

(CROSSES TO ESTHER BY THE 9:00 O'CLOCK SIDE OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

ESTHER

It's the truth.--(PICKS UP SUIT ON SOFA AND RELATES TO IT.) The first time I walked up those stairs I was nineteen years old. And when you opened that box with your first uniform in it--remember that?--When you put it on the first time? --how we laughed? If anything happened you said you'd call a cop! (THEY BOTH LAUGH.) It was like a masquerade. And we were right. That's when we were right.

VICTOR

(PAINED BY HER PAIN, TAKES A STEP TO ESTHER.)

You know, Esther--every once in a while you try to sound childish and it . . .

ESTHER

(INDICATING THE FURNITURE, ESTHER RISES AND CROSSES TO THE TABLE BY PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Please don't talk childishness to me, Victor--not in this room! You let it lay here all these years because you can't have a simple conversation with you own brother, and I'm childish? You're still eighteen years old with that man! --I mean I'm stuck, but I admit it! I can't stand it here. I'm going for a walk.

(CROSSES TO DOOR.)

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO HARP.)

O. K. Go ahead.

ESTHER

(PAUSE, SADDENED. CROSSING UP GETS CIGARETTES AND MATCHES FROM TABLE AND CROSSES TO CENTER.)

You got a receipt? I'll get your suit.--I just want to get out of here.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO ESTHER BY SOFA. GIVES HER RECEIPT.)

I don't blame you. It's right off Seventh. The address is on it.

ESTHER

I'm coming back right away.

VICTOR

Do as you please, kid. I can't tell you what to do.

ESTHER

(PUTTING RECEIPT IN PURSE.)

You were grinding your teeth again last night, did you know that?

VICTOR

Oh, no wonder my ear hurts!

ESTHER

I mean it, it's gruesome; sounds like a lot of rocks coming down a mountain. I wish I had a tape recorder, 'cause if you could hear it, you wouldn't take this self sufficient attitude.

VICTOR

Self sufficient? I just finished telling you that I . . .

ESTHER

Then do something! You want to stay on the force then stay on the force, if you don't then don't, and let me know what to do with the rest of my life!

VICTOR

What's that supposed to mean?

ESTHER

(CROSSES BEHIND SOFA.)

It means jumping out of bed in the morning and wanting to do what you're going to do! You know goddamned well what it means! Not that I'm any better. (SHE TRIES TO LAUGH BUT HE DOESN'T PARTICIPATE.)

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO RADIO.)

It's okay. I think I get the message.

ESTHER

(SHE TRIES TO SMILE.) Like what?

VICTOR

What other message is there?

ESTHER

What's that?

VICTOR

Oh, one of my old radios that I made. (TAKING LARGE TUBE OUT OF SET.) Mama Mia, look at that tube.

ESTHER

Would that work?

VICTOR

No, you need a storage battery . . .
(HE SUDDENLY LOOKS UP AT THE CEILING.)

ESTHER

(LOOKING UP.)

What?

VICTOR

One of my batteries exploded, went right through there some-place. (POINTS.) There!--See where the plaster is different?

ESTHER

Is this the one you got Tokyo on?

VICTOR

Ya, this is the monster.

ESTHER

(WITH A WARMTH.) Why don't you take it?

VICTOR

Ah, it's useless.

ESTHER

Didn't you once say you had a lab up here? Or did I dream that?

VICTOR

Sure, I took it apart when Pop and I moved up here. Walter had that wall, and I had that one. We did some great tricks

up here. I'll be frank with you, kid--the whole thing is incomprehensible to me. I know all the reasons and all the reasons and all the reasons--and it ends up . . .

(CROSSES AROUND CHAIR AND SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

nothing.--It's strange, you know?--I forgot all about it--we'd work up here all night sometimes, and it was often full of music. My mother'd play for hours down in the library. Which is peculiar, because a harp is so soft. But it penetrates, I guess . . .

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO VICTOR.)

You're dear. You are, Vic.

VICTOR

(HE LOOKS AT HIS WATCH. RISES.)

I'll have to call another man. Come on, let's get out of here. We'll get my suit and act rich!

ESTHER

Vic, I didn't mean that I . . .

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Forget it.--Wait, let me put these away before somebody walks off with them.

(PICKS UP FOIL.)

ESTHER

Can you still do it?

VICTOR

Oh, no--you gotta be in shape for this. It's all in the thighs . . .

ESTHER

Well let me see, I never saw you do it!

VICTOR

All right, but I can't get down far enough anymore . . .

ESTHER

Maybe you could take it up again.

VICTOR

Oh no, it's a lot of work, it's the toughest sport there is. Okay, just stand there.

ESTHER

Me?!

VICTOR

(POINTS FOIL.)

Don't be afraid.--It's a beautiful foil, see how alive it is? I beat Princeton with this.

(LAUNCHES TO ESTHER.)

ESTHER

God!--Victor!

(FALLS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

VICTOR

What!

ESTHER

You looked beautiful.

Act II

(HE LAUGHS, SURPRISED AND HALF-EMBARRASSED--WHEN BOTH OF THEM ARE TURNED TO THE DOOR BY A LOUD, SUSTAINED COUGHING OUT IN THE CORRIDOR. THE COUGHING INCREASES AND . . . ENTER GREGORY SOLOMON, A MAN NEARLY NINETY BUT STILL STRAIGHT-BACKED AND THE AIR OF HIS MASSIVENESS STILL WITH HIM. HE HAS PERFECTED A WAY OF LEANING ON HIS CANE WITHOUT APPEARING WEAK. HE WEARS A WORN, FUR-FELT, BLACK FEDORA. HIS VEST IS WRINKLED, HIS TROUSERS BAGGY. HE IS

CARRYING A WRUNG-OUT LEATHER BRIEF CASE. HE HASN'T SHAVED TODAY. STILL COUGHING, CATCHING HIS BREATH, HE IS NODDING AT ESTHER AND VICTOR AND HAS ONE HAND RAISED IN A PROMISE TO SPEAK QUITE SOON. NOR HAS HE FAILED TO GLANCE WITH SOME SUSPICION AT THE FOIL IN VICTOR'S HAND. BOTH VICTOR AND ESTHER GO TO HIS AID.)

VICTOR

(ESTHER STANDS, GOES TO SOLOMON.)

Can I get you a glass of water?

ESTHER

Why don't you sit down?

(SOLOMON GESTURES THANKS, SITS ON SOFA AT 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

You sure you don't want some water?

SOLOMON

Water I don't need; a little blood I could use. Thank you. (HE TAKES DEEP BREATHS.) Oh boy. That's some stairs.

ESTHER

You all right now?

SOLOMON

Another couple steps you'll be in heaven. Ah . . . excuse me, officer--I am looking for a party. The name is . . .

(HE FINGERS IN HIS VEST.)

VICTOR

Franz.

SOLOMON

That's it, Franz.

VICTOR

That's me. Victor Franz.

SOLOMON

So it's a policeman!

VICTOR

Uh huh.

SOLOMON

What do you know! (INCLUDING ESTHER.) You see? There's only one beauty to this lousy business, you meet all kinda people. But I never dealt with a policeman. (REACHING OVER TO SHAKE HANDS.) I'm very happy to meet you. My name is Solomon, Gregory Solomon.

VICTOR

(SHAKING HANDS.) This is my wife.

ESTHER

How do you do.

SOLOMON

Very nice. That's a nice looking woman. (EXTENDS HIS HANDS TO HER.) How do you do, darling. (THEY SHAKE HANDS.) Beautiful suit.

ESTHER

(LAUGHS.)

The fact is, I just bought it!

SOLOMON

You got good taste. Congratulations, wear it in good health.

ESTHER

I'll go to the cleaner, dear. I'll be back soon. Will you be very long?

SOLOMON

With furniture you never know, can be short, can be long, can be medium.

ESTHER

Well you give him a good price now, you hear?

SOLOMON

Ah ha!--(WAVING HER OUT.) Look you go to the cleaner, and we'll take care everything one hundred percent.

ESTHER

Because there's some very beautiful stuff here . . . I know it but he doesn't.

SOLOMON

I'm not sixty two years in the business by taking advantage. Go, enjoy the cleaner.

ESTHER

I hope I'm going to like you, Mr. Solomon.

SOLOMON

Sweetheart, all the girls like me, what can I do?

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO END OF SOFA AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

You be careful.

VICTOR

See you later.

(SHE GOES.)

Act III

SOLOMON

I like her, she's suspicious.

VICTOR

What do you mean by that?

SOLOMON

Well a girl who believes everything how you gonna trust her? I had a wife . . . (BREAKS OFF WITH A WAVE OF THE HAND.) Well, what's the difference? Tell me, if you don't mind, how did you get my name?

VICTOR

(CROSSES AND PUTS FOIL ON PAPA'S CHAIR.)

In the phone book.

SOLOMON

You don't say!--the phone book.

VICTOR

Why?

SOLOMON

No-no, that's fine, that's fine.

VICTOR

The ad said you're a registered appraiser.

SOLOMON

Oh yes. I am registered, I am licensed, I am even vaccinated. (VICTOR LAUGHS.) Don't laugh, the only thing you can do today without a license is you'll go up the elevator and jump out the window. But I don't have to tell you, you're a policeman, you know this world. (HOPING FOR CONTACT.) I'm right?

VICTOR

I suppose.

SOLOMON

So. (HE SURVEYS THE FURNITURE. WITH AN UNCERTAIN SMILE . . .) That's a lot of furniture. This is all for sale?

VICTOR

Well, ya.

SOLOMON

Fine, fine. I just like to be sure where we are. Frankly, in this neighborhood I never expected such a load. It's very surprising.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

But I said it was a whole houseful.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO HARP.)

Look, don't worry about it, we'll handle everything very nice. I'm not mixing in, Officer, but if you wouldn't mind--what is your connection? How do you come to this?

VICTOR

It was my family.

SOLOMON

You don't say.--

(SOLOMON SEES A HALF DOLLAR ON THE FLOOR AND PICKS IT UP AND OFFERS IT TO VICTOR.)

Looks like it's standing here a long time, no?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO SOFA.)

Well, my father moved everything up here after the '29 crash. My uncles took over the house and they let him keep this floor.

SOLOMON

I see.

VICTOR

Can you give me an estimate now, or do you have to . . . ?

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TOWARD DINING CHAIRS.)

No-no, I'll give you right away, I don't waste a minute, I'm very busy.

(KEEPS MOVING TO VICTOR'S CHEST.)

He passed away, your father?

VICTOR

Oh, long time ago--about sixteen years.

SOLOMON

It's standing here sixteen years?

VICTOR

Well, we never got around to doing anything about it, but they're tearing the building down, so . . . It was very good stuff, you know--they had quite a little money.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO DINING TABLE.)

Very good, yes . . . I can see. I was also very good; now I'm not so good. Time, you know, is a terrible thing. (HE INDICATES THE HARP.) That sounding board is cracked, you know. But don't worry about it, it's still a nice object. It's a funny thing--an armoire like this, thirty years you couldn't give it away; it was a regular measles. Today all of a sudden, they want it again. Go figure it out.

VICTOR

(PLEASED. PUTTING FOIL ON TABLE, CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Well, give me a good price and we'll make a deal.

SOLOMON

Definitely. You see, I don't lie to you--

(CROSSES TO VICTOR'S CHEST.)

For instance, a chiffonier like this I wouldn't have to keep it a week. That's a pair, you know.

VICTOR

I know. There's more stuff in the bedroom, if you want to look.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO BEDROOM.)

What've you got here?

(ENTERS COUGHING. EVERYTHING GETS QUIET. VICTOR, WORRIED, STARTS AFTER SOLOMON.)

I like the bed.

(SOLOMON ENTERS FROM BEDROOM, CLOSES DOOR.)

That's a very nice carved bed. That I can sell. That's your parent's bed?

VICTOR

Yes. They may have bought that in Europe, if I'm not mistaken. They used to travel a good deal.

SOLOMON

Very handsome, very nice. I like it. Looks a very nice family. That's nice chairs, too. I like the chairs.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO DINING TABLE.)

By the way, that dining room table opens up. Probably seat about twelve people.

SOLOMON

(LOOKS AT TABLE, CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I know that. Yes. In a pinch even fourteen. (HE PICKS UP FOIL.) What is this? I thought you were stabbing your wife when I came in.

VICTOR

(LAUGHS.) No, I just found it--

(CROSSES AND GETS FOIL. PUTS IT ON WALTER'S CHEST.)

I used to fence years ago.

SOLOMON

You went to college?

VICTOR

For a while, ya.

SOLOMON

That's very interesting.

VICTOR

It's the old story.

SOLOMON

No, listen--what happens to people is always the main element to me. Because when do they call me? It's either a divorce or somebody died. So it's always a new story. I mean it's the same, but it's different.

VICTOR

You pick up the pieces.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO RADIO.)

That's very good, yes. I pick up the pieces. It's a little bit like you, I suppose. You must have some stories, I betcha.

VICTOR

Sometimes.

SOLOMON

What are you, a traffic cop, or something . . . ?

VICTOR

No. I'm out in Rockaway most of the time, the airports.

SOLOMON

(SITS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

That's Siberia, no?

VICTOR

I like it better that way.

SOLOMON

You keep your nose clean

VICTOR

That's it. So what do you say?

SOLOMON

What I say? (TAKING OUT A CIGAR.) You like a cigar?

VICTOR

Thanks, I gave it up a long time ago.

SOLOMON

I can see you are a very factual person. (LIGHTS CIGAR.)

VICTOR

You hit it.

(VICTOR PUTS ON COAT AT SOFA.)

SOLOMON

Couldn't be better. So tell me, you got some kind of paper here? To show ownership?

VICTOR

Well, no, I don't. But . . . I'm the owner, that's all.

SOLOMON

In other words, there's no brothers, no sisters.

VICTOR

I have a brother, yes.

SOLOMON

Ah haha. You're friendly with him. (?)--Not that I'm mixing in but I don't have to tell you the average family they love each other like crazy, but the minute the parents die is all of a sudden a question who is going to get what and in five minutes you're covered with cats and dogs . . .

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

There's no such problem here.

SOLOMON

Unless we're gonna talk about a few pieces, then it wouldn't bother me, but to take the whole load without a paper is a . . .

VICTOR

All right, I'll get you some kind of statement from him; don't worry about it.

SOLOMON

That's definite; because even from high-class people you wouldn't believe the shenanigans--lawyers, college professors, television personalities--five hundred dollars they'll pay a lawyer to fight over a bookcase it's worth fifty cents-- because you see, everybody wants to be number one, so . . .

VICTOR

I said I'd get you a statement. Now what's the story?

SOLOMON

All right, so I'll tell you the story.

(RISES AND CROSSES TO DINING TABLE.)

For instance, you mention the dining room table. That's what they call Spanish Jacobean. Cost maybe twelve, thirteen hundred dollars. I would say--1921, 22. I'm right?

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Probably, ya.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I see you're an intelligent man, so before I'll say another word, I ask you to remember--with used furniture you cannot be emotional.

VICTOR

I haven't opened my mouth!

SOLOMON

I mean you're a policeman, I'm a furniture dealer, we both know this world--anything Spanish Jacobean you'll sell quicker a case of tuberculosis.

VICTOR

(CROSSES AND SITS ON SOFA.)

Why? That table's in beautiful condition.

SOLOMON

Officer, you're talking reality; you cannot talk reality with used furniture. They don't like that style, not only they don't like it, they hate it. The same thing with that buffet there and that . . .

VICTOR

You only want to take a few pieces, is that the ticket?

SOLOMON

Please, Officer, we're already talking too fast . . .

VICTOR

(CROSSES DOWN TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

No-no, you're not going to walk off with the gravy and leave me with the bones. All or nothing or let's forget it. I told you on the phone it was a whole houseful.

SOLOMON

What're you in such a hurry? Talk a little bit, we'll see what happens. In a day they didn't build Rome. You see, what I had in mind--I would give you such a knockout price for these few pieces, that you . . .

VICTOR

That's out.

SOLOMON

Out!

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I'm not running a department store. They're tearing the building down.

SOLOMON

(RISES AND CROSSES TO VICTROLA.)

Couldn't be better! We understand each other so . . . --so there's no reason to be emotional. These records go?
(PICKS UP ONE.)

VICTOR

I might keep three or four.

SOLOMON

Look at that!--Gallagher and Sheean!

VICTOR

You're not going to start playing them now!

SOLOMON

Who needs to play? I was on the same bill with Gallagher and Sheean maybe fifty theaters.

VICTOR

You were an actor?

SOLOMON

An actor!--an acrobat; my whole family was acrobats.
(SMALL JUMP.) You never heard "The Five Solomons"--may they rest in peace? I was the one on the bottom.

VICTOR

(CROSSES AND SITS ON ARM OF SOFA AT 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

Funny--I never heard of a Jewish acrobat.

SOLOMON

What' the matter with Jacob, he wasn't a wrestler?--wrestled with the Angel?

(SITS ON PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Jews been acrobats since the beginning of the world. I was a horse them days: drink, women, anything--on-the-go, nothing ever stopped me. Only life. Yes, my boy. What do you know, Gallagher and Sheean.

VICTOR

(RISES, CROSSES BEHIND SOFA, KEEPING TO THE BUSINESS.) So where are we?

SOLOMON

Tell me. What's with crime now? It's up, eh?

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Yeah, it's up. It's up. Look, Mr. Solomon, let me make one thing clear, heh?--I'm not sociable.

SOLOMON

You're not.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

No, I'm not; I'm not a businessman, I'm not good at conversations. So let's get to a price, and finish. Okay?

SOLOMON

You don't want we should be buddies.

VICTOR

That's exactly it.

SOLOMON

So we wouldn't be buddies! (SIGHS.) But just so you'll know me a little better--I'm going to show you something.

(CROSSES TO SOFA, TAKES OUT A LEATHER FOLDER WHICH HE FLIPS OPEN AND HANDS TO VICTOR.)

That's my Discharge from the British Navy.

VICTOR

(LOOKING AT DOCUMENT.) Huh!--what were you doing in the British Navy?

SOLOMON

Forget the British Navy. What does it say the date of birth?

VICTOR

"18 . . . ?" (AMAZED, LOOKS UP AT SOLOMON.) You're almost ninety?

SOLOMON

Yes, my boy. I left Russia sixty-five years ago, I was twenty-four years old. And I smoked all my life. I dranked, and I loved every woman who would let me. So what do I need to steal from you?

VICTOR

Since when do people need a reason to steal?

SOLOMON

(SITS ON SOFA.)

I never saw such a man in my life!

VICTOR

Oh, yes, you did. Now you going to give me a figure or . . . ?

SOLOMON

How can I give you a figure?--you don't trust one word I say!

VICTOR

I never saw you before, what're you asking me to trust you?!

SOLOMON

(WITH A GESTURE OF DISGUST.)

But how am I going to start to talk to you? I'm sorry; here you can't be a policeman--if you want to do business a little bit you gotta believe or you can't do it. I'm, . . . I'm . . . look, forget it.

(CLOSES CASE, RISES, AND CROSSES TO DOOR.)

VICTOR

What are you doing?

SOLOMON

I can't work this way. I'm too old every time I open my mouth you should practically call me a thief.

VICTOR

Who called you a thief?

SOLOMON

No--I don't need it. I don't want it in my shop. And don't forget it--I never gave you a price, and look what you did to me. You see?--I never gave you a price!

VICTOR

Well, what did you come here for--to do me a favor? What are you talking about?

SOLOMON

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA.)

Mister, I pity you! What is the matter with people! You're worse than my daughter!--Nothing in the world you believe, nothing you respect--how can you live? You think that's such a smart thing? That's so hard, what you're doing? Let me give you a piece advice--it's not that you can't believe nothing, that's not so hard--it's that you still got to believe it. That's hard. And if you can't do that, my friend--you're a dead man!

VICTOR

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Oh, Solomon, come on, will you?

SOLOMON

(CROSSING TOWARD DOOR.)

No-no . . . you got a certain problem with this furniture but you don't want to listen so how can I talk?

VICTOR

I'm listening!--For Christ's sake, what do you want me to do, get down on my knees?

(SOLOMON TURNS AT DOOR.)

I'm listening.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, PUTS BRIEFCASE DOWN, GETS DISCHARGE FROM VICTOR AND TAKES TAPE MEASURE FROM HIS POCKET.)

Okay, come here. I realize you are a factual person, but some facts are funny.

(CROSSES TO BUFFET AND STRETCHES THE TAPE MEASURE ACROSS THE DEPTH OF THE BUFFET.)

What does that read?

VICTOR

(CROSSES DOWN IN FRONT OF SOFA.)

Forty inches. So?

SOLOMON

My boy, the bedroom doors in a modern apartment house are thirty, thirty-two inches maximum. So you can't get this in--

VICTOR

What about the old houses?

SOLOMON

All I'm trying to tell you is that my possibilities are smaller!

VICTOR

(CROSSES 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Well, can't I ask a question?

SOLOMON

I'm giving you architectural facts! Listen . . .

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

You got there, for instance, a library table. That's a solid beauty. But go find me a modern apartment with a library. If they would build old hotels, I could sell this but they only build new hotels. People don't live like this no more. This stuff is from another world. So I'm trying to give you a modern viewpoint. Because the price of used furniture is nothing but a viewpoint, and if you wouldn't understand the viewpoint is impossible to understand the price.

VICTOR

So what's the viewpoint--that it's all worth nothing?

SOLOMON

That's what you said, I didn't say that. The chairs is worth something, the chiffoniers, the bed, the harp . . .

VICTOR

Okay, let's forget it, you're not going to leave me with . . .

SOLOMON

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD VICTOR.)

What're you jumping?

VICTOR

Good God, are you going to make me an offer or not!

SOLOMON

Boy, oh boy, oh boy--you must've arrested a million people by now.

VICTOR

(CROSSES BACK OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Nineteen in twenty-eight years.

SOLOMON

So what are you so hard on me?

VICTOR

Because you talk about everything but money and I don't know what the hell you're up to.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

We will now talk money

VICTOR

Great. I mean you can't blame me--every time you open your mouth the price seems to go down.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK AND SITS.)

My boy, the price didn't change since I walked in.

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND CHAIR.)

That's even better! So what's the price?

(SOLOMON GLANCES ABOUT, HIS WIT FAILED, A SUNK LOOK COMING OVER HIS FACE AS HE SITS IN ARMCHAIR.)

What's going on? . . . What's bothering you?

SOLOMON

I'm sorry, I shouldn't have come. I thought it would be a few pieces but . . . It's too much for me.

(SUNK HE PRESSES HIS FINGERS INTO HIS EYES.)

VICTOR

(CROSSES DOWN FRONT OF SOFA.)

Well, what'd you come for? I told you it was the whole house.

SOLOMON

You called me so I came! What should I do, lay down and die?--Look, I want very much to make you an offer, the only question is . . .

VICTOR

(TURNS AND CROSSES TO END OF SOFA.)

This is a hell of a note . . .

SOLOMON

Listen, it's a terrible temptation to me! But . . . you see, I'll tell you the truth; you must have looked in a very old phone book; a couple of years ago already I cleaned out my store. Except a few English andirons I got left, I sell when I need a few dollars. I figure, I was eighty, eighty-five, it was time already. But I waited--and nothing happened--I even moved out of my apartment. I'm living in the back of the store with a hot plate. But nothing happened. I'm still practically a hundred percent--not a hundred but I feel very well. And I figured maybe you got a couple nice pieces--not that the rest can't be sold but it could take a year, year and half. For me that's a big bet. The trouble is I love to work; I love it, but--I don't know what to tell you.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO DOOR.)

Well, all right, let's forget it then.

SOLOMON

What're you jumping?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO SOFA.)

Well, are you in or out?

SOLOMON

How do I know where I am? You see, it's also this particular furniture--the average person he'll take one look, it'll make him very nervous.

VICTOR

(SITS ON THE ARM OF SOFA.)

Solomon, you're starting again.

SOLOMON

I'm not bargaining with you!

VICTOR

Why'll it make him nervous?

SOLOMON

Because he knows it's never gonna break.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Oh, come on, will you?--have a little mercy.

SOLOMON

My boy, you don't know the psychology!--If it wouldn't break there is no more possibilities. For instance, you take--

(RISES AND CROSSES TO TAKE AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

--this table. . . . Listen! You can't move it. A man sits down to such a table he knows not only he's married, he's got to stay married--there is no more possibilities. (VICTOR LAUGHS.) You're laughing, I'm telling you the factual situation. What is the key word today?--Disposable. The more you can throw it away the more it's beautiful. The car, the furniture, the wife, the children--everything has to be disposable. Because you see the main thing today is --shopping. Years ago a person, he was unhappy, didn't know what to do with himself--he go to church, start a revolution--something. Today you're unhappy? Can't figure it out?--what is the salvation?--go shopping.

VICTOR

(LAUGHING.)

You're terrific, I have to give you credit.

SOLOMON

I'm telling you the truth!--If they would close the stores for six months in this country there would be from coast to coast a regular massacre. With this kind of furniture the shopping is over, it's finished, there's no more possibilities, you got it, you see?

(CROSSES TO 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

So you got a problem here.

VICTOR

(LAUGHING. SITS AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Solomon, you are one of the greatest.

SOLOMON

(SMILING.)

What, the greatest?

VICTOR

I used to sell encyclopedias, door-to-door, and you know what that is . . .

SOLOMON

(HAPPILY FASCINATED.)

You don't say! You sold . . . ?

VICTOR

Oh yeah; I was top man in the southern part of Westchester County, but you make me look like a . . .

SOLOMON

So why did you give it up?

VICTOR

(WITH THE AMUSED SMILE.)

I couldn't stand the bullshit. I'm not criticizing you, I admire it. I'm serious. Sometimes I wish I was that way myself. But I'm way ahead of you, it's not going to work.

SOLOMON

What "work"? I don't know how much time I got. What is so terrible if I say that? The trouble is, you're such a young fella you don't understand these things . . .

VICTOR

I understand very well, I know what you're up against--I'm not so young.

SOLOMON

What are you, forty? Forty-five?

VICTOR

I'm going to be fifty.

SOLOMON

Fifty! You're a baby boy!

VICTOR

Some baby.

SOLOMON

My God, if I was fifty . . . ! I got married I was seventy-five.

VICTOR

Go on.

SOLOMON

What are you talking?--She's still living by Eighth Avenue over there. See, that's why I like to stay liquid, because if she'll get her hands on this I don't want it . . . Birds she loves. She's living there with maybe a hundred birds. She gives you a plate of soup it's got feathers--I didn't work all my life for them birds.

VICTOR

I appreciate your problems, Mr. Solomon, but I don't have to pay for them;

(CROSSES TOWARD DOOR.)

I've got no more time.

SOLOMON

(RISES AND CROSSES UP TO CENTER, HOLDING UP A RESTRAINING HAND--DESPERATELY.)

I'm going to buy it!

(HE HAS SHOCKED HIMSELF, AND GLANCES AROUND AT THE TOWERING MASSES OF FURNITURE.)

I mean I'll . . . I'll have to live, that's all, I'll make up my mind! I'll buy it.

VICTOR

We're talking about everything now. (?)

SOLOMON

Everything, everything!

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I'll figure it up, I'll give you a very nice price, and you'll be a happy man.

VICTOR

That I doubt.

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR. SOLOMON TAKES A HARD-BOILED EGG OUT OF THE PORTFOLIO.)

What's this now, lunch?

SOLOMON

(PEELING SHELL OFF OF EGG.)

You give me such an argument I'm hungry! I'm not supposed to get too hungry.

VICTOR

Brother.

SOLOMON

You want me to starve to death? I'm going to be very quick here.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Boy--I picked a number!

SOLOMON

There wouldn't be a little salt, I suppose.

VICTOR

I'm not going running for salt now.

SOLOMON

Please, don't be blue. I'm going to knock you off your feet with the price, you'll see.

(HE EATS THE EGG. HE CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK AND GETS PAD.)

I'm going to go here like an IBM.

(CROSSES TO DINING CHAIRS.)

VICTOR

That's all right, take it easy. As long as you're serious.

SOLOMON

Thank you.

VICTOR

You really got married at seventy-five?

SOLOMON

What's so terrible?

VICTOR

No, I think it's terrific. But what was the point?

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO HARP.)

What's the point at twenty-five? You can't die twenty-six?

VICTOR

I guess so, ya.

SOLOMON

It's the same like second-hand furniture, you see; the whole thing is a viewpoint. It's a mental world. Seventy-five I got married, fifty-one, and twenty-two.

VICTOR

You're kidding.

SOLOMON

I wish!

VICTOR

You're a hell of a guy.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

You know it's a funny thing. It's so long since I took on such a load like this--you forget what kind of life it puts into you.

(WORKS HIS WAY TOWARD SOFA AND DINING TABLE.)

To take out a pencil again . . . it's a regular injection. Because I'll tell you the truth, my telephone you could use for a ladle, it wouldn't interfere with nothing. But when you called me, well, I don't want to take up your time. But--I want to thank you; very much. I'm going to take good care of you, I mean it. I can open that?

VICTOR

Sure, anything.

SOLOMON

(GOES TO THE ARMOIRE.)

Some of them had a mirror.

(HE OPENS THE DOOR OF ARMOIRE AND A ROLLED-UP FUR RUG FALLS OUT. IT IS ABOUT THREE BY FIVE.)

What's this?

VICTOR

God knows. I guess it's a rug.

SOLOMON

(OPENS LAP ROBE AND GIVES IT TO VICTOR.)

No-no--that's a lap robe. Like for a car.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Say that's right, ya. When they went driving. God, I haven't seen that in . . .

SOLOMON

You had a chauffeur?

VICTOR

Ya, we had a chauffeur.

(PUTS LAP ROBE ON CHAIR.)

SOLOMON

Look at that!

(TAKES DOWN A SPORTS HAT FROM THE SHELF WITHIN.)

My God! What a world!

(TURNS TO VICTOR.)

He must've been some sport guy!

VICTOR

You look pretty good!

SOLOMON

And from all this he could go so broke?

VICTOR

Why not? Sure. Took five weeks. Less.

SOLOMON

You don't say. And he couldn't make a comeback. (?)

VICTOR

Well, some men don't bounce, you know.

SOLOMON

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Hmm! So what did he do?

VICTOR

Nothing. Just sat here. Listened to the radio.

SOLOMON

But what did he do? What . . . ?

VICTOR

Well, now and then he was making change at the Automat.
Toward the end he was delivering telegrams.

SOLOMON

You don't say. And how much he had?

VICTOR

Oh . . .

(CROSSES TO HARP.)

couple of million, I guess.

SOLOMON

My God. What was the matter with him?

VICTOR

--Well, my mother died around the same time--I guess that didn't help. Some men just don't bounce, that's all.

SOLOMON

Listen, I can tell you bounces--I went busted 1932; then 1923 they also knocked me out; the Panic of 1904, 1898 . . . But to lay down like that . . .

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Well, you're different. He believed in it.

SOLOMON

What he believed?

VICTOR

The system, the whole thing--He thought it was his fault, I guess. You--you come in with your song and dance, it's all a gag--you're a hundred and fifty years old, you tell your jokes; people fall in love with you and you walk away with their furniture.

SOLOMON

That's not nice.

(CROSSES BACK OF SOFA AND PUTS HAT BACK.)

VICTOR

Don't shame me, will ya?--What do you say?

(CROSSES TO SOFA.)

You don't need to look anymore, you know what I've got here. What are you afraid of? --It'll keep you busy.

SOLOMON

You don't think it's foolish. (?)

VICTOR

Who knows what's foolish? You enjoy it . . .

SOLOMON

(CROSSES BACK AROUND SOFA AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Listen, I love it . . .

VICTOR

. . . So take it. You plan too much, you end up with nothing.

SOLOMON

(INTIMATELY.)

I would like to tell you something. The last few months, I don't know what it is--she comes to me. You see, I had a daughter, she should rest in peace, she took her own life, a suicide. . . .

VICTOR

When was this?

SOLOMON

(SITS ON SOFA.)

It was . . . 1915--the latter part. But very beautiful, a lovely face, with large eyes--she was pure like the morning. And lately, I don't know what it is--I see her clear like I see you. And every night practically, I lay down to go to sleep, so she sits there.

(VICTOR CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR AND SITS ON ARM AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

And you can't help it, you ask yourself--what happened? What happened? Maybe I could have said something to her . . . maybe I did say something . . . it's all . . . It's not that I'll die, you can't be afraid of that. But . . . I'll tell you the truth--a minute ago I mentioned I had three wives. . . . Just this minute I realize I had four. Isn't that terrible? See, that's what I mean--it's impossible to know what is important. Here I'm sitting with you . . . and . . . and . . . What for? Not that I don't want it, I want it, but . . . You see, all my life I was a terrible fighter--you could never take nothing from me; I

struggled in six different countries, I nearly got killed a couple times, and it's . . . It's like now I'm sitting here talking to you and I tell you it's a dream, it's a dream! You see, you can't imagine it because . . .

VICTOR

I understand it very well.

SOLOMON

What do you understand?

VICTOR

I think it's what you just said--it's impossible to know what's important. The big decision is always the one you don't realize you're making--till the results start coming in. And then you're stuck with it.

SOLOMON

Why?--you're healthy, you got such a nice . . . Your wife is all right?

VICTOR

Oh ya, she's a terrific woman--best piece of luck I ever had. But like--when we started out, the one important thing was to live the life we wanted, not the rat race. But I don't think there is anything else. Unless you've got some kind of talent--but otherwise it's three feeds a day, and you make a kid for the Army, and then you lose your hair, and pack it in.

(RISES AND CROSSES BEHIND CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Not that I'm complaining, but finally there's just no respect for anything but money. You try to stay above it; but you shovel it out the window and it creeps in under the door. It all ends up--she wants. She wants. And I can't blame her for it. Like we've got people in our apartment house, ignorant knuckleheads, they can hardly write their names; but last month a couple knocks on the door to offer us their old refrigerator, buy a new one every couple of years. They know what I make, y'see? and it's that friendly viciousness, just to show who's on top. And things like that are eating her out. . . .

SOLOMON

What does she want, a police commissioner? And honest cop
is a . . . is a . . .

VICTOR

He's a jerk.

(CROSSES TO SOLOMON.)

Took me fourteen years to get the goddam stripes because I
wouldn't kiss ass.--Which we were always in perfect agree-
ment about, but you end up . . . Like I'm supposed to retire
now . . .

SOLOMON

What're you going to do?

VICTOR

That's not really the problem--I'll do something.

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

It's that it's hard to find the point in it anymore--the
whole thing. For years I thought it would mean some kind
of freedom. Study science again; something interesting.
But that'll take three, four years in school, and she's not
in the mood for sacrifice anymore, and I'm not sure I am
either. So what's left?--Go sell something, shoot the bull
one way or another--which is just what I was trying to avoid.
There are days when I can't even remember what I was trying
to do. Except, there was an idea we had, that . . .

SOLOMON

No, you see--you make one mistake. A man can think whatever
he wants to think, but he should never . . .

VICTOR

. . . Forget about the money.

SOLOMON

What've you got against money?

VICTOR

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Nothing, I'm all for it--I just didn't want to lay down my life for it, that's all.

(TURNS TO SOLOMON.)

But you lay it down another way . . . and you're a damn fool in the bargain. I guess it's the old story--you can do anything, just make sure you win.--Like my brother; years ago, I was living here with the old man, and he used to contribute five dollars a month. A month, and a successful doctor. I had to drop out of school to keep the guy from starving to death. Point I'm making, though, is that the few times he'd come around, the expression on the old man's face--you'd think God walked in. The respect, you know what I mean? And why not? Why not?

SOLOMON

Well sure, he had the power.

VICTOR

Now you said it--if you got that you got it all--you're even lovable!

(CROSSES AROUND BACK OF SOFA.)

Well, what do you say? Give me the price.

SOLOMON

(RISES, TAKES A FEW STEPS. SLIGHT PAUSE.)

I will give you eleven hundred dollars.

VICTOR

(SLIGHT PAUSE. CROSSES IN BACK OF CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

For everything?

SOLOMON

Everything.

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

I want it so I'm giving you a good price. Believe me, you will never do better. I want it; I made up my mind. Here . . . I'll pay you now.

VICTOR

It's that I have to split it, see . . .

SOLOMON

All right . . .

(CROSSES UP STAGE TOWARD 12:00 O'CLOCK.)

so I'll make out a receipt for you and I'll put down six hundred dollars.

VICTOR

No-no . . .

SOLOMON

Why not? He took from you so take from him. If you want, I'll put down four hundred.

VICTOR

No, I don't want to do that.

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

--I'll call you tomorrow.

SOLOMON

(SMILES. CROSSES TO CHAIR AND PACKS UP HIS THINGS.)

All right; with God's help if I'm there tomorrow. I'll answer the phone. If I wouldn't be . . .

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

Then I wouldn't be.

VICTOR

(CROSSES DOWN STAGE AND SITS ON PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Don't start that again, will you?

SOLOMON

(TURNS TOWARD VICTOR TO MAKE DEAL IN FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Look, you convinced me, so I want it--so what should I do?

VICTOR

I convinced you.

SOLOMON

Absolutely you convinced me. You saw it--the minute I looked at it I was going to walk out!

VICTOR

Ah, the hell with it. Give it to me.

SOLOMON

Please, don't be blue.

VICTOR

Oh, it all stinks. Come on.

SOLOMON

What stinks? You should be happy--now you can buy her a nice coat, take her to Florida, maybe. . . .

VICTOR

Right, right!--we'll all be happy now. Give it to me.

SOLOMON

There's one hundred; two hundred; three hundred; four hundred. . . . Take my advice, buy her a nice fur coat your troubles will be over . . .

VICTOR

I know all about it. Come on.

SOLOMON

So you got there four, so I'm giving you . . . five, six, seven . . . I mean it's already in the Bible, the rat race. The minute she laid her hand on the apple, that's it.

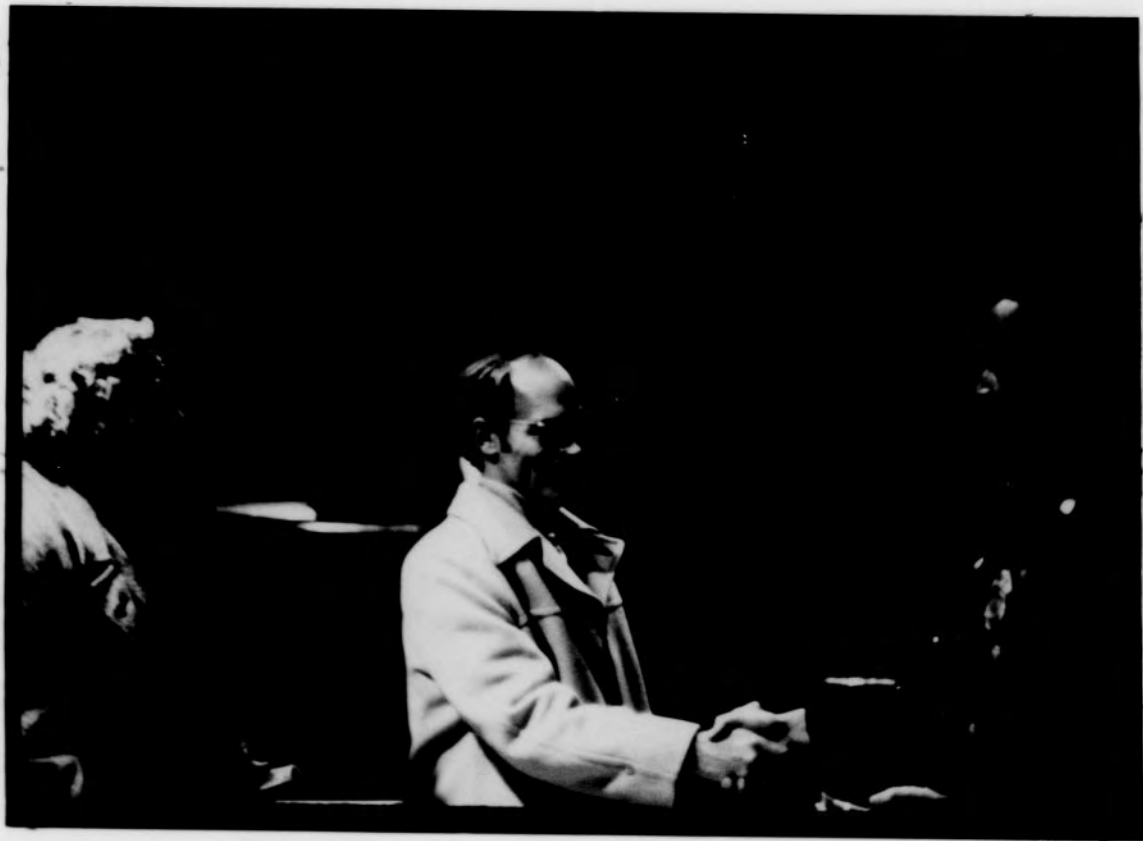


Figure 4

VICTOR

I never read the Bible. Come on.

SOLOMON

If you'll read it you'll see--there's always a rat race, you can't stay out of it. So you got there seven, so now I'm giving you . . .

(A MAN ENTERS. IN HIS MID-FIFTIES, WELL-BARBERED, HATLESS, IN A CAMEL'S-HAIR COAT, VERY HEALTHY COMPLEXION. A LOOK OF SHARP INTELLIGENCE ON HIS FACE.)

Act II - Scene IV

(THE ACTION IS CONTINUOUS AFTER A FIFTEEN MINUTE INTERMISSION.) (See Figure 4.)

VICTOR

(HE IS SUDDENLY FLUSHED.)

Walter!

(SOLOMON TURNS, LOOKS, STEPS BACK.)

WALTER

(HE COMES A FEW STEPS TO EDGE OF COUCH TO VICTOR WITH EXTENDED HAND.)

How are you, kid?

VICTOR

(HE SHIFTS THE MONEY TO HIS LEFT AS HE SHAKES.)

God, I never expected you.

WALTER

Sorry I'm late. What are you doing?

VICTOR

I . . . I just sold it.

WALTER

Good! How much?

VICTOR

(SOLOMON CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Ah . . . eleven hundred.

WALTER

(IN A DEAD VOICE SHORN OF COMMENT.)

Oh. Well, good.

(HE TURNS TO SOLOMON.)

For everything?

SOLOMON

(HE COMES TO WALTER, HIS HAND EXTENDED.)

I'm very happy to meet you, Doctor! My name is Gregory Solomon.

WALTER

How do you do?

Act II - Scene V

WALTER

How's Esther?

VICTOR

Fine. Should be here any minute.

WALTER

Here?--Good! And what's Richard doing?

(SOLOMON SITS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

VICTOR

He's at M. I. T.

WALTER

No kidding!--M. I. T.!

VICTOR

Ya. They gave him a full scholarship.

WALTER

What do you know! You're proud.

VICTOR

I guess so. They put him in the Honors Program.

WALTER

Really. That's wonderful.--You don't mind my coming, do you?

VICTOR

No! I called you a couple of times.

WALTER

Yes, my nurse told me. What's Richard interested in?

VICTOR

Science. So far, anyway. How are yours?

WALTER

(CROSSES UP STAGE, 3:00 O'CLOCK, TOWARD RADIO.)

I suppose Jean turned out best--but I don't think you ever saw her.

VICTOR

I never did, no.

WALTER

The Times gave her quite a spread last fall. She's a pretty fair designer.

VICTOR

Oh?--That's great. And the boys? They in school?

WALTER

They often are--I hardly see them.

(LAUGHS.)

With all the unsolved mysteries in the world they're investigating the guitar. But what the hell . . . I've given up worrying about them.

(CROSSES UP STAGE, 12:00 O'CLOCK, TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I'd forgotten how much he had up here.--There's your radio!

VICTOR

I know, I saw it.

WALTER

(HE LOOKS UP AT THE CEILING WHERE VICTOR POINTED EARLIER. BOTH LAUGH. HE GLANCES WITH OPEN FEELING AT VICTOR.)

Long time.

VICTOR

Ya.

(FOLLOWS WALTER.)

How's Dorothy?

WALTER

She's all right, I guess. Looking forward to seeing Esther again; she still writing poetry?

VICTOR

No, not for years now.

SOLOMON

He's got a very nice wife. We met.

WALTER

Oh? Well. Same old junk, isn't it?

VICTOR

I wouldn't say that. Some of it isn't bad.

SOLOMON

One or two very nice things, Doctor. We came to a very nice agreement.

VICTOR

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD SOLOMON.)

I never thought you'd show up; I guess we'd better start all over again. . . .

WALTER

Oh, no-no, I don't want to foul up your deal.

SOLOMON

Excuse me, Doctor--better you should take what you want now than we'll argue later. What did you want?

WALTER

Oh, I didn't want anything. I came by to say hello, that's all.

VICTOR

I see.

(CROSSES TO OAR, HANDS IT TO WALTER OVER SOFA.)

I found your oar, if you want it.

WALTER

Oar? Hah!

(HE RECEIVES THE OAR.)

I must have been out of my mind!

SOLOMON

(RISES AND CROSSES UP STAGE OF SOFA.)

Excuse me, Doctor; if you want the oar . . .

WALTER

(STANDING THE OAR ON END BEFORE SOLOMON, WHO GRASPS IT IN SURPRISE.)

Don't get excited, I don't want it.

SOLOMON

No. I was going to say--a personal thing like that I have no objection.

WALTER

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

That's very generous of you.

VICTOR

(SOLOMON HANDS THE OAR TO VICTOR.)

I threw in everything--I never thought you'd get here.

WALTER

(TAKES A STEP, 6:00 O'CLOCK OF CHAIR.)

Sure, that's all right. What are you taking?

VICTOR

Nothing, really. Esther might want a lamp or something like that.

SOLOMON

He's not interested, you see; he's a modern person, what are you going to do?

WALTER

You're not taking the harp?

VICTOR

Well, nobody plays . . . You take it, if you like . . .

SOLOMON

(STEPS TOWARD WALTER.)

You'll excuse me, Doctor--the harp, please, that's another story. . . .

WALTER

(CROSSES TOWARD HARP. LAUGHS--ARCHLY AMUSED AND PUT-OUT.)

You don't mind if I make a suggestion, do you?

SOLOMON

Doctor please, don't be offended, I only . . .

WALTER

(WITH A STEADY, IRON SMILE.)

Why don't you just relax? We're only talking. We haven't seen each other in a long time.

SOLOMON

Couldn't be better; I'm very sorry.

VICTOR

We wouldn't have room for it anyway.

WALTER

Kind of a pity--this was Grandpa's wedding present, you know.

VICTOR

(LOOKING WITH SURPRISE AT THE HARP. CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Say--that's right!

WALTER

What are you giving him for this?

SOLOMON

I didn't itemize--one price for everything. Maybe three hundred dollars.--That sounding board is cracked, you know.

VICTOR

You want it?

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR, 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

Please, Victor, I hope you're not going to take that away from me.

(TO WALTER.)

Look, Doctor, I'm not trying to fool you--the harp is the heart and soul of the deal. I realize it belonged to your mother, but . . . but like I tried to tell

(TO VICTOR.)

you before . . .

(TO WALTER.)

with used furniture you cannot be emotional.

WALTER

I guess it doesn't matter. . . . Actually, I was wondering if he kept any of Mother's evening gowns. Did he?

VICTOR

I haven't really gone through it all . . .

SOLOMON

Wait, wait, I think I can help you.

(CROSSES TO ARMOIRE.)

WALTER

She had some spectacular . . .

SOLOMON

(DRAWING OUT A GOWN.)

Is this what you mean?

WALTER

(CROSSES TO FRONT OF SOFA.)

Yes, that's the stuff!

(TAKING A GOWN FROM SOLOMON.)

Isn't that beautiful!--Say, I think she wore this at my wedding!

(HOLDS IT UP.)

Sure! You remember this?

VICTOR

What do you want with it?

WALTER

I thought Jeannie might make something new out of the material. I'd like her to wear something of Mother's.

VICTOR

Oh! Fine, that's a nice idea.

SOLOMON

Take, take--they're beautiful.

(WALTER PUTS FIRST DRESS ON BACK OF SOFA, PICKS UP DRESS SOLOMON HAS JUST PUT THERE.)

WALTER

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

. . . What happened to the piano?

VICTOR

(CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Oh, we sold that while I was still in school. We lived on it for a long time.

WALTER

(INTERESTED.)

I never knew that.

VICTOR

Sure. And the silver.

WALTER

Of course! Stupid of me not to remember that.

VICTOR

Why? Why should you?

WALTER

I suppose you know--you've gotten to look a great deal like Dad.

VICTOR

I do?

WALTER

It's very striking. And your voice is very much like his.

VICTOR

I know; it has that sound to me, sometimes.

(INDICATING SOLOMON. CROSSES TOWARD SOLOMON. SOLOMON CROSSES UP STAGE TOWARD VICTOR.)

Maybe we'd better settle this now.

WALTER

Yes, go ahead!--

SOLOMON

Don't worry. We didn't waste a minute so, gentlemen . . . you got there seven . . .

WALTER

Wonderful to see you looking so well.

VICTOR

(TURNS AWAY FROM SOLOMON.)

You do too, you look great.

WALTER

I ski a lot; and I ride nearly every morning. . . . You know, I started to call you a dozen times this year. . . . Finish up, I'll talk to you later.

SOLOMON

So now I'm going to give you . . .

VICTOR

That price all right with you?

WALTER

Oh, I don't want to interfere--It's just that I dealt with these fellows when I split up Dorothy's and my stuff last year, and I found . . .

VICTOR

You're not divorced, are you?

Act II - Scene VI

WALTER

Yes!

(ESTHER ENTERS ON HIS LINE, SHE IS CARRYING A SUIT IN A PLASTIC WRAPPER.)

ESTHER

(OFF-GUARD, SURPRISED.)

Walter! For heaven's sake!

WALTER

(EAGERLY COMING TO HER, SHAKING HER HAND.)

How are you, Esther!

ESTHER

(BETWEEN HER DISAPPROVAL AND FASCINATED SURPRISE PUTS HER PURSE ON SOFA.)

What are you doing here?

WALTER

You've hardly changed!

ESTHER

Oh, go on now!

WALTER

You son of a gun, she looks twenty-five!

VICTOR

I know!

ESTHER

(FLATTERED AND OFFENDED TOO.)

Oh, stop it, Walter!

WALTER

But you do, honestly; you look marvelous.

SOLOMON

It's that suit, you see? What did I tell you, it's a very beautiful suit.

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR AND SITS.)

ESTHER

(WITH MOCK AFFRONT--TO VICTOR.)

What are you laughing at?--It is.

(SITS ON SOFA, TAKES CIGARETTE, WALTER LIGHTS IT.)

VICTOR

You looked so surprised, that's all . . .

ESTHER

Well, I'm not used to walking into all these compliments!

WALTER

Say . . . ! I'm sorry I didn't know I'd be seeing you when I left the house this morning--I'd have brought you some lovely Indian bracelets. I got a whole boxful from Bombay.

ESTHER

How do you come to . . . ?

WALTER

I operated on this big textile guy and he keeps sending me things. He sent me this coat, in fact. . . .

ESTHER

I was noticing it. That's gorgeous material.

WALTER

Isn't it? Two gallstones.

(LAUGHS WITH A CERTAIN SHY VICTORY.)

ESTHER

How's Dorothy?--Did I hear you saying you were . . . ?

WALTER

We're divorced, ya. Last winter.

ESTHER

I'm sorry to hear that.

WALTER

(TURNS AND PUTS DRESS ON CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

It was coming a long time. We're both much better off--we're almost friendly now.

ESTHER

Oh, stop that, you dog.

WALTER

It's true!

ESTHER

Look, I'm for the woman, so don't hand me that. Have you settled everything?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO ESTHER.)

Just about, I guess. . . .

WALTER

I was just telling Victor--

(TO VICTOR.)

when we broke up our home . . .

(TO SOLOMON.)

you ever hear of Spitzer and Fox?

SOLOMON

Thirty years I know Spitzer and Fox. Bert Fox worked for me maybe ten, twelve years.

WALTER

They did my appraisal.

SOLOMON

They're good boys. Spitzer is not as good as Fox, but between the two you're in good hands.

WALTER

Yes. That's why I . . .

SOLOMON

Spitzer is vice president of the Appraisers' Association.

WALTER

I see. The point I'm making.

SOLOMON

I used to be president.

WALTER

Really.

SOLOMON

Oh yes. I made it all ethical.

WALTER

Did you.

(VICTOR SUDDENLY BURST OUT LAUGHING, WHICH SETS OFF WALTER AND ESTHER.)

SOLOMON

(SMILING.)

What's so funny? Listen, before me was a jungle--you wouldn't laugh so much. I put in all the rates, what we charge, you know--I made it a profession, like doctors, lawyers--used to be it was a regular snakepit. Today, you got nothing to worry--all the members are hundred percent ethical.

WALTER

Well, that was a good deed, Mister Solomon--but I think you can do a little better on this furniture.

ESTHER

How much has he offered?

VICTOR

(EMBARRASSED.)

. . . Eleven hundred.

ESTHER

(DISTRESSED, WITH A TRANSCENDENT PROTEST.)

Oh, I think that's . . . isn't that very low?

WALTER

(CROSSES UP STAGE AROUND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Come on, Solomon--he's been risking his life for you every day; be generous . . .

SOLOMON

(TO ESTHER.)

That's a real brother! Wonderful;

(TO WALTER.)

but you can call anybody you like--Spitzer and Fox, Joe Brody, Paul Cavallo, Morris White--I know them all and I know what they'll tell you.

VICTOR

See, the point he was making about it . . .

SOLOMON

(TO ESTER, RAISING HIS FINGER.)

Listen to him because he . . .

VICTOR

Hold it one second, will you? Not that I'm saying it's true, but he claims a lot of it is too big to get into the new apartments.

ESTHER

(HALF-LAUGHING.)

You believe that?!

WALTER

(CROSSES TO HARP.)

I don't know, Esther, Spitzer and Fox said the same thing.

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES, 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

Walter, the city is full of big, old apartments. (!)

SOLOMON

Darling, why don't you leave it to the boys?

ESTHER

I wish you wouldn't order me around, Mister Solomon! Those two bureaus alone are worth a couple of hundred dollars!

WALTER

Maybe I oughtn't interfere . . .

ESTHER

Why?!

(ESTHER CROSSES AROUND CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Don't let him bulldoze you . . .

SOLOMON

My dear girl, you're talking without a basis . . .

ESTHER

I don't like this kind of dealing, Mr. Solomon! I just don't like it!

(VICTOR CROSSES TOWARD ESTHER.)

This money is very important to us, Walter.

WALTER

Yes, I . . . I'm sorry, Esther. Well . . . if it was mine . . .

ESTHER

Why? It's yours as much as Victor's.

WALTER

Oh, no, dear--I wouldn't take anything from this.

VICTOR

No, Walter, you get half.

WALTER

I wouldn't think of it, kid. I came by to say hello, that's all.

ESTHER

(A PAUSE. SHE IS VERY MOVED.)

That's terrific, Walter. It's . . . Really, I . . .

VICTOR

Well, we'll talk about it.

WALTER

No-no, Vic, you've earned it. It's yours.

VICTOR

(REJECTING THE IMPLICATION.)

Why have I earned it? You take your share.

WALTER

Why don't we discuss it later? In my opinion . . .

SOLOMON

So now you don't even have to split. You're lucky they're tearing the building down--you got together, finally.

WALTER

(CROSSES TO VICTOR.)

. . . I would have said a minimum of three thousand dollars.

ESTHER

That's exactly what I had in mind! I was going to say thirty-five hundred dollars.

WALTER

In that neighborhood.

VICTOR

Well? What do you say?

SOLOMON

What can I say? It's ridiculous. Why does he give you three thousand? What's the matter with five thousand, ten thousand?

WALTER

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA.)

You should've gotten a couple of other estimates, you see, that's always the . . .

VICTOR

(TURNS TO WALTER.)

I've been calling you all week for just that reason, Walter, and you never came to the phone.

WALTER

Why would that stop you from . . . ?

VICTOR

I didn't think I had the right to do it alone--the nurse gave you my messages, didn't she?

WALTER

I've been terribly tied up--and I had no intention of taking anything for myself, so I assumed . . .

VICTOR

But how was I supposed to know that?

WALTER

Yes. Well, I . . . I beg you pardon.

(HE DECIDES TO STOP THERE.)

SOLOMON

(RISES, TAKES STEP, 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Excuse me, Doctor, but I can't understand you; first it's a lot of junk . . .

ESTHER

Nobody called it a lot of junk!

SOLOMON

He called it a lot of junk, Esther, when he walked in here.

(ESTHER TURNS TO WALTER, PUZZLED AND ANGRY.)

WALTER

(REACTING TO HER LOOK--TO SOLOMON.)

Now just a minute . . .

SOLOMON

No, please, this is a factual man, so let's be factual.

ESTHER

(CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Well, that's an awfully strange thing to say, Walter.

WALTER

I didn't mean it in that sense, Esther . . .

SOLOMON

Doctor, please--you said junk.

WALTER

(THERE IS AN OVER-MEANING OF MUCH GREATER ANGER IN HIS TONE.)

I didn't mean it in that sense, Mister Solomon! When you've been brought up with things you tend to be sick of them . . . That's all I meant.

SOLOMON

My dear man, if it was Louise Seize, Biedermeyer, something like that, you wouldn't get sick.

WALTER

Well, there happens to be a piece right over there in Biedermeyer style!

SOLOMON

Biedermeyer "style"! I got a hat it's in Borsolino style but it's not a Borsolino. I mean he don't have to charge me to make an impression.

WALTER

Now what's that supposed to mean?

VICTOR

Well, what basis do you go on, Walter?

WALTER

I don't know . . . it's a feeling, that's all.

ESTHER

(THERE IS RIDICULE.)

Well, on what basis do you take eleven hundred, dear?

VICTOR

(ANGERED.)

I simply felt it was probably more or less right!

ESTHER

Oh, God, here we go again. All right, throw it away . . .

SOLOMON

(INDICATING VICTOR, TO ESTHER AND WALTER.)

Please, Esther, he's not throwing nothing away--this man is no fool! Excuse me, but this is not right to do to him!

WALTER

Are you going to teach me what's right now?

ESTHER

(TO VICTOR--EXPANDING WALTER'S PROTEST.)

Really!--I mean.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO SOLOMON.)

Mister Solomon . . . why don't you sit down in the bedroom for a few minutes and let us talk?

SOLOMON

Certainly, whatever you say. Only please, you made a very nice deal, you got no right to be ashamed . . .

(TO ESTHER.)

Excuse me, I don't want to be personal.

ESTHER

(CROSSES 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

He's fantastic!

VICTOR

Whyn't you go inside?

SOLOMON

I'm going; I only want you to understand, Victor, that if it was a different kind of man

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO HARP.)

I would say to you that he's got the money in his hand, so the deal is concluded.

WALTER

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA.)

He can't conclude any deal without me, Solomon; I'm half owner here.

SOLOMON

(TO VICTOR.)

You see?! What did I ask you the first thing I walked in here?--"Who is the owner?"

WALTER

Why do you confuse everything? I'm not making any claim, I merely . . .

SOLOMON

Then how do you come to interfere? He's got the money; I know the law!

WALTER

Now you stop being foolish! Just stop it! I've got the best lawyers in New York, so go inside and sit down.

VICTOR

(STEPS TO WALTER.)

Take it easy, Walter, come on, cut it out.

ESTHER

Why? He's perfectly right.

VICTOR

(TO SOLOMON.)

Here, you better hold onto this money.

SOLOMON

No, that's yours; you hold . . .

(HE SWAYS, COUGHS AND CROSSES DOWN TO SIT IN PAPA'S CHAIR.
WALTER CROSSES TO SOLOMON'S LEFT AND HELPS HIM TO SIT.)

WALTER

You all right?

SOLOMON

(DIZZY.)

Yes, yes, I'm . . .

WALTER

Let me look at you.

SOLOMON

I'm only a little tired, I didn't take my nap today.

WALTER

(AT SOFA.)

Come in here, lie down for a moment.

SOLOMON

Don't worry about me, I'm . . . Please, Doctor, if you wouldn't mind--I got a Hershey's in there.

(WALTER HESITATES TO DO HIS ERRAND. VICTOR CROSSES TO SOFA TO GET OUT OF HIS WAY.)

I'm a very healthy person, but a nap, you see, I have to have a . . . Not the orange--on the bottom is a Hershey's.

(WALTER PUTS THE ORANGE BACK, TAKES OUT A HERSHEY BAR. WALTER HELPS SOLOMON UP, EXIT BEDROOM.)

That's a boy.

WALTER

All right, come on . . . easy does it . . .

SOLOMON

I'm all right, don't worry--you're very nice people . . .

(THEY EXIT INTO THE BEDROOM, CLOSING DOOR. VICTOR GLANCES AT THE MONEY IN HIS HAND.)

Act II - Scene VII

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO VICTOR.)

Why are you being so apologetic?

VICTOR

About what?

ESTHER

That old man. Was that his first offer?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Why do you believe Walter? He was obviously pulling a number out of a hat.

ESTHER

CROSSES TO VICTOR.)

Well, I agree with him. Did you try to get him to go higher?

VICTOR

I don't know how to bargain and I'm not going to start now. You know, you take a tone sometimes--likes I'm some kind of an incompetent.

ESTHER

(CROSSES AND SITS ON SOFA.)

I wish you wouldn't be above everything, Victor, we're not twenty years old. We need this money. You hear me?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO VICTROLA.)

I've made a deal, and that's it.

ESTHER

(TAKES A CIGARETTE.)

Well, anyway, you'll get the whole amount.--God, he certainly has changed. It's amazing.

VICTOR

Seems so, ya.

ESTHER

He's so human! And he laughs!

VICTOR

I've seen him laugh.

ESTHER

(WITH A GRIN OF TREPIDATION.)

Am I hearing something or is that my imagination?

VICTOR

I want to think about it.

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES TO FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

You're not taking his share? (!)

VICTOR

I said I would like to think . . .

(ESTHER CROSSES TO SOFA AND PICKS UP HER PURSE.)

Where you going?

ESTHER

I want to know; are you or aren't you taking his share?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Esther, I've been calling him all week; doesn't even bother to come to the phone, walks in here and smiles and I'm supposed to fall into his arms?--

ESTHER

I don't understand what you think you're upholding!--

VICTOR

Certain things have happened, haven't they?--I can't turn around this fast, kid; he's only been here ten minutes, I've got twenty-eight years to shake off my back . . . Now sit down, I want you here.

ESTHER

Don't talk to me like that . . .

VICTOR

Please. You can wait a few minutes.

ESTHER

(SITS ON SOFA.)

Vic, it's all blowing away.

VICTOR

Half of eleven hundred dollars is five-fifty, dear.

ESTHER

I'm not talking about money. He's obviously making a gesture, why can't you open yourself a little?

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP STAGE 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

He's only been here ten minutes. Give me a chance.

ESTHER

My mother was right--I can never believe anything I see. But I'm going to. That's all I'm going to do. What I see.

Act II - Scene VIII

VICTOR

(WALTER ENTERS. VICTOR TAKES A STEP TO WALTER.)

How is he?

WALTER

I think he'll be all right. God, what a pirate! He's eight-nine!

ESTHER

I don't believe it!

VICTOR

He is. He showed me his . . .

WALTER

Oh, he show you that too?

BOTH

Ya, the British Navy?

VICTOR

He's got a Discharge. He's not altogether phoney.

WALTER

I wouldn't go that far. A guy that age, though, still driving like that . . .

(CROSSES DOWN STAGE TO VICTROLA.)

There is something wonderful about it.

VICTOR

I think so.

ESTHER

What do you think we ought to do, Walter?

WALTER

There is a way to get a good deal more out of it. I suppose you know that, though. (?)

VICTOR

Look, I'm not married to this guy--if you want to call another dealer we can compare.

WALTER

You don't have to do that; he's a registered appraiser--

(SITS ON ARM OF SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

You see, instead of selling it, you could make it a charitable contribution.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I don't understand.

WALTER

It's perfectly simple. He puts a value on it--let's say twenty-five thousand dollars, and . . .

ESTHER

(FASCINATED AND WITH A LAUGH.)

Are you kidding?

WALTER

It's done all the time. It's a dream world but it's legal--he estimates its highest retail value; which could be put at some such figure. Then I donate it to the Salvation Army; I'd have to take ownership, you see; because my tax rate is much higher than yours so it would make more sense if I took the deduction. I pay around fifty percent tax, so if I make a twenty-five thousand dollar contribution I'd be saving around twelve thousand in taxes. Which we could split however you wanted to. Let's say we split it in half, I'd give you six thousand dollars.

(A PAUSE.)

It's really the only sensible way to do it, Vic.

ESTHER

(SHE GLANCES AT VICTOR, BUT HE REMAINS SILENT.)

Would it be costing you anything?

WALTER

On the contrary--it's found money to me. I mentioned it to him just now.

VICTOR

What'd he say?

WALTER

It's up to you. We'd pay him an appraisal fee--fifty, sixty bucks.

VICTOR

Is he willing to do that?

WALTER

Well, of course he'd rather buy it outright, but what the hell . . .

ESTHER

That's not his decision, is it?

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

No . . . it's just that I feel I did come to an agreement with him and I . . .

WALTER

Personally, I wouldn't let that bother me--he'd be making fifty bucks for filling out a piece of paper.

ESTHER

That's not bad for an afternoon.

VICTOR

I'd like to think about it.

ESTHER

There's not much time, though, if you want to deal with him.

VICTOR

(CORNERED.)

I'd like a few minutes, that's all.

WALTER

(RISES, CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK, PUTS COAT DOWN, AND SITS.)

Sure . . . let him think it over. It's perfectly legal, if that's what's bothering you; I almost did it with my stuff but I finally decided to keep it. In fact, my own apartment is so loaded up it doesn't look too different from this.

ESTHER

Well, maybe you'll get married again.

WALTER

I doubt that very much, Esther--I often feel I never should have.

ESTHER

Why!

WALTER

Seriously, I'm in a strange business, you know--there's too much to learn and far too little time to learn it.--I tried awfully hard to kid myself but there's simply no time for people. Not the way a woman expects, if she's any kind of woman. But I'm doing pretty well alone!

VICTOR

How would I list an amount like that on my income tax?

WALTER

Well . . . call it a gift. . . . Not that it is, but you could list it as such. It's allowed.

VICTOR

--I was just curious how it . . .

WALTER

Just enter it as a gift. There's no problem.

VICTOR

I see.

(TURNS TOWARD CHEST AND PICKS UP FOIL. WALTER FEELS THE FIRST STING OF A VAGUE RESENTMENT.)

WALTER

You still fence?

VICTOR

(ALMOST GRATEFULLY PURSUING THIS DIVERSION.)

No, you got to join a club and all that. And I work weekends often. I just found it here.

WALTER

Mother used to love to watch him do this.

ESTHER

Really?

WALTER

Sure, she used to come to all his matches.

ESTHER

You never told me that.

WALTER

Of course; she's the one made him take it up. She thought it was elegant! Especially with those French gauntlets!

VICTOR

Hey, that's right.

WALTER

He did look pretty good too!--

(RISES. SPREADS HIS JACKET AWAY FROM HIS CHEST.)

I've still got the wounds!

VICTOR

Say . . . !

(CROSSES TO VICTOR'S CHEST.)

I wonder if they're still . . .

ESTHER

French gauntlets?

WALTER

(TAKES STEP UP STAGE.)

She brought them from Paris. Gorgeously embroidered. He looked like one of this musketeers.

VICTOR

Here they are!

(HE LIFTS A PAIR OF EMBLAZONED GAUNTLETS FROM OFFSTAGE DRAWER.)

What do you know!

ESTHER

Aren't they beautiful!

VICTOR

God, I'd forgotten all about them.

WALTER

Christmas, 1929.

VICTOR

Look at that, they're still soft . . .

(TO WALTER.)

How do you remember all this stuff?

WALTER

Why not? Don't you?

ESTHER

He doesn't remember your mother very well.

VICTOR

I remember her. It's just her face; somehow I can never see her.

WALTER

(WARMLY.)

That's amazing, Vic. She adored him.

ESTHER

(PLEASED.)

Did she?

WALTER

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Victor? If it started to rain she'd run all the way to school with his galoshes. Her Victor--my God? By the time he could light a match he was already Louis Pasteur.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

It's odd . . . like the harp! I can almost hear the music.
. . . But I can never see her face. Somehow.

(FOR AN INSTANT, SILENCE, AS HE LOOKS AT THE HARP.)

WALTER

Vic?

(TURNS TOWARD VICTOR.)

What's the problem?

Act II - Scene IX

SOLOMON

(SOLOMON ENTERS.)

Please, Doctor, if you wouldn't mind I would like to . . .

(BREAKS OFF, INDICATING THE BEDROOM.)

WALTER

What is it?

SOLOMON

(INDICATING THE BEDROOM.)

Just for one minute, please.

WALTER

I'll be right back.

(CROSSES TO BEDROOM AND EXITS.)

ESTHER

Why can't you take him as he is?

(VICTOR TAKES A FEW STEPS IN FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Well, you can't expect him to go into an apology, Vic--he probably sees it all differently anyway.

(HE IS SILENT.)

I know it's difficult, but he is trying to make a gesture, I think.

VICTOR

I guess he is, yes.

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

You know what would be lovely? If we could take a few weeks and go to like . . . out-of-the-way places . . . just to really break it up and see all the things that people do. You've been around such mean, petty people for so long and little ugly tricks. I'm serious--it's not romantic; we're much too suspicious of everything.

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND PAPA'S CHAIR, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Strange guy.

ESTHER

Why?

VICTOR

Well, to walk in that way--as though nothing ever happened.

ESTHER

Why not? What can be done about it?

VICTOR

I feel I have to say something.

ESTHER

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD VICTOR.)

What can you say?

VICTOR

. . . You think I ought to just take the money and shut up, heh?

ESTHER

But what's the point of going backwards?

VICTOR

(CROSSES AWAY FROM ESTHER.)

You seem to have forgotten everything--I don't mean only right now. It gets to sound as though I invented our whole situation. That's what throws me sometimes--seriously--like when you talk about the pension. It wasn't only the pension we were after.

ESTHER

Well, why bring that up now?

VICTOR

I'm not going to take this money unless I talk to him.

(PUTS GAUNTLET ON PAPA'S CHAIR.)

ESTHER

(CROSSES TO SOFA AND PUTS GAUNTLET DOWN. FRIGHTENED.)

You can't bear the thought that he's decent. That's all it is, dear. I'm sorry, I have to say it.

VICTOR

(WITHOUT RAISING HIS VOICE.)

I can't bear that he's decent. (!)

ESTHER

You throw this away you've got to explain it to me. You can't go on blaming everything on him or the system or God knows what else! You're free and you can't make a move, Victor, and that's what's driving me crazy!

(CROSSES TO CHAIR, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

You take this money! Or I'm washed up. If you're stuck it doesn't mean I have to be.

(SHE SITS. VICTOR CROSSES UP STAGE, 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Act II - Scene X

WALTER

(ENTERS AND CROSSES TO BACK OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Boy--we got a tiger here. What is this between you, did you know him before?

VICTOR

No; why?--what'd he say?

WALTER

He's still trying to buy it outright.

(LAUGHS.)

He talks like you added five years by calling him up.

VICTOR

(REBUKING ESTHER TOO.)

Well, what's the difference, I don't mind.

WALTER

No, that's fine, that's all right. We don't understand each other, do we?

VICTOR

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD SOFA. WITH A CERTAIN THRUST.)

I am a little confused, Walter . . . yes.

WALTER

Why is that?

(VICTOR DOESN'T ANSWER AT ONCE.)

Come on, we'll all be dead soon!

VICTOR

All right, I'll give you one example--when I called you Monday and Tuesday and again this morning . . .

WALTER

I've explained that.

VICTOR

But I don't make phone calls to pass the time; your nurse sounded like I was a pest of some kind . . . it was humiliating.

WALTER

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST. TAKES STEPS TOWARD VICTOR.)

I'm terribly sorry, she shouldn't have done that.

VICTOR

I know, Walter, but I can't imagine she takes that tone all by herself.

WALTER

(AWARE NOW OF THE DEPTH OF RESENTMENT IN VICTOR.)

Oh, no--she's often that way. I've never referred to you like that. Believe me, will you? I'm terribly sorry. I'm overwhelmed with work, that's all it is . . .

VICTOR

(SITS ON SOFA.)

Well, you asked me, so I'm telling you.

WALTER

Yes! You should! But don't misinterpret that.

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR AND SITS ON ARM, 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Now about this tax thing. He'd be willing to make the appraisal twenty-five thousand. If you'd like, I'd be perfectly willing for you to have the whole amount I'd be saving.

ESTHER

Twelve thousand?

WALTER

Whatever it comes to.

(PAUSE. ESTHER SLOWLY LOOKS TO VICTOR.)

You must be near retirement now, aren't you?

ESTHER

He's past it. But he's trying to decide what to do.

WALTER

Oh. It would come in handy, then, wouldn't it? I don't need it, that's all, Vic. . . . Actually, I've been about to call you for quite some time now.

VICTOR

What for?

WALTER

Don't be suspicious!

VICTOR

I'm just trying to figure it out, Walter.

WALTER

Yes, good. All right. I thought it was time we got to know one another. That's all.

VICTOR

You know, Walter, I tried to call you a couple of times before this about the furniture--must be three years ago . . .

WALTER

I was sick.

VICTOR

Oh. . . . Because I left a lot of messages. . . .

WALTER

I was quite sick. I was hospitalized.

ESTHER

What happened?

WALTER

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

I broke down.

VICTOR

(DISARMED.)

I had no idea.

WALTER

Actually, I'm only beginning to catch up with things. I was out of commission for nearly three years.

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

But I'm almost thankful for it now--I've never been happier!

ESTHER

You seem altogether different!

WALTER

I think I am, Esther--I live differently, I think differently. All I have now is a small apartment; and I got rid of the nursing homes. . . .

VICTOR

What nursing homes?

WALTER

(CROSSES BEHIND SOFA.)

Oh, I owned three nursing homes; there's big money in the aged, you know--helpless, desperate children trying to dump their parents--nothing like it. I even pulled out of the market. Fifty percent of my time now is in City hospitals. And I tell you, I'm alive. For the first time. I do medicine, and that's it. Not that I don't soak the rich occasionally, but only enough to live, really.

VICTOR

Well, that must be great.

WALTER

(CROSSES AROUND END OF SOFA, 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

Vic, I wish we could talk for weeks, there's so much I want to tell you. . . . I never had friends--you probably know that; but I do now. I have good friends.

(CROSSES AROUND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

You see . . . The damned thing happens so gradually. You start out wanting to be the best, and there's no question that you do need a certain fanaticism; there's so much to know and so little time. Until you've eliminated everything extraneous--including people. And of course the time comes when you realize that you haven't merely been specializing in something--something has been specializing in you. You find you've become a kind of instrument, an instrument that cuts money out of people. And it finally makes you stupid; power can do that. You get to think that because you can frighten people they love you. Even that you love them.-- And the whole thing comes down to fear. One night I found myself in the middle of my living room, dead drunk with a knife in my hand, getting ready to kill my wife.

ESTHER

Good Lord!

WALTER

Oh ya--and I nearly made it too!

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR. LAUGHS NERVOUSLY.)

But there's one virtue in going nuts--provided you survive, of course. You get to see the terror--not the screaming kind, but the slow, daily fear you call ambition, and cautiousness, and piling up the money. And really, what I wanted to tell you for some time now--is that you helped me to understand that in myself.

VICTOR

Me?

WALTER

Yes.

(GRINS WARMLY, EMBARRASSED.)

Because of what you did. I could never understand it, Vic --after all, you were the better student. And to stay with a job like that through all those years seemed . . . You see, it never dawned on me until I got sick--that you'd made a choice.

VICTOR

A choice, how?

WALTER

You wanted a real life.--And that's an expensive thing; it costs. I'll be frank with you, Vic--I didn't answer your calls this week because I was afraid--I've struggled so long for a concept of myself and I'm not sure I can make it believable to you. But I'd like to. You see, I got to a certain point where . . . I dreaded my own work; I finally couldn't cut.

(RISES AND CROSSES UP EDGE OF SOFA, 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

There are times, as you know, when if you leave someone alone he might live a year or two; while if you go in you might kill him. And the decision is often . . . not quite, but almost . . . arbitrary. But the odds are acceptable, provided you think the right thoughts. Or don't think at all, which I managed to do till then.

(CROSSES UP BY VICTROLA.)

I ran into a cluster of mis-judgments. It can happen, but it never had to me. There were three cases which had been diagnosed by other men as inoperable. I lost the three. And quite suddenly the . . . the whole prospect of my own motives opened up. Why had I taken the risk that very competent men had declined? And the quick answer, of course, is--to pull off the impossible. Shame the competition. But suddenly I saw something else. And it was terror. In dead center, controlling my brains, my hands, my ambition--for thirty years.

VICTOR

Terror of what?

WALTER

(IN BACK OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Of it ever happening to me . . . as it happened to him. Overnight for no reason, to find yourself degraded and thrown-down.

(WITH THE FAINTEST HING OF A CHALLENGE.)

You know what I'm talking about, don't you?

(VICTOR TURNS AWAY SLIGHTLY, REFUSING COMMITMENT.)

We were both running from the same thing, Vic. I thought I wanted to be tops, but what it was was untouchable:--I ended up in a swamp of success and bankbooks, you on Civil Service. The difference is that you haven't hurt other people to defend yourself. And I've learned to respect that, Vic; you simply tried to make yourself useful.

ESTHER

That's wonderful, Walter, to come to such an understanding with yourself.

WALTER

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD ESTHER.)

Esther, it's a strange thing; in the hospital, for the first time since we were boys, I began to feel . . . like a brother. In the sense that we shared something.

(TO VICTOR.)

--And I feel I would know how to be friends now.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Well, fine. I'm glad of that.

WALTER

You see, that's why you're still so married. That's a very rare thing. And why your boy's in such good shape.--You've lived a real life. But you know that better than I.

ESTHER

Sometimes. I don't know what I know, Walter.

WALTER

Don't doubt it, dear--believe me, you're fortunate people. You know that, don't you?

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND VICTROLA.)

I think so.

ESTHER

It's not quite as easy as you make it, Walter.

WALTER

(HE HESITATES, THEN THROWS HIMSELF INTO IT.)

Look, I've had a wild idea--it'll probably seem absurd to you, but I wish you'd think about it before you dismiss it. I gather you haven't decided what to do with yourself now? You're retiring . . . ?

VICTOR

I'll decide one of these days, I'm still thinking.

WALTER

Could I suggest something?

VICTOR

Sure, go ahead.

WALTER

We've been interviewing people for the new wing. For the Administrative side. Kind of liaison people between the scientists and the board. And it occurred to me several times that you might fit in there.

ESTHER

(WITH A RELEASE OF EXPECTATION.)

That would be wonderful!

VICTOR

(SLIGHT PAUSE. CROSSES TOWARD ESTHER, 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

What could I do there though?

WALTER

It's kind of fluid at the moment, but there's a place for people with a certain amount of science who . . .

VICTOR

I have no degree.

WALTER

But you've had analytic chemistry, and a lot of math and physics, if I recall. If you thought you needed it you could take some courses in the evenings--I think you have enough background.--How would you feel about that?

VICTOR

(DIGGING IN AGAINST THE TEMPTATION.)

Well . . . I'd like to know more about it, sure.

ESTHER

(GRABS VICTOR'S HAND.)

It'd be great if he could work in science, it's really the only thing he ever wanted.

WALTER

I know; it's a pity he never went on with it. It'd be perfectly simple, Vic, I'm chairman of the committee. I could set it all up . . .

(VICTOR STARTS TO SAY SOMETHING TO WALTER. SOLOMON ENTERS. THEY TURN TO HIM SURPRISED.)

Act II - Scene XI

SOLOMON

(ENTERS AND CROSSES UP STAGE BACK OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

Excuse me, go right ahead. I'm sorry to disturb you. About the harp. If you'll make me a straight out-and-out sale, I would be glad to go another fifty dollars.

WALTER

Well, you're getting warmer.

SOLOMON

I'm a fair person!--so you don't have to bother with the appraisal and deductions, all right?--But don't rush, I'll wait. I'm at your service.

(HE GOES QUICKLY AND WORRIEDLY INTO THE BEDROOM.)

ESTHER

Where did you find him?

WALTER

(CROSSES TO VICTROLA AND STARTS TO LAUGH.)

That wonderful?--he "made it all ethical"! What do you say, Vic? Will you come by?

(VICTOR CROSSES UP STAGE OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

VICTOR

I'm not sure I know what you want, Walter.

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES TO 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I don't think that's being very fair, is it?

VICTOR

Why is it unfair? We're talking about some pretty big steps here . . .

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD WALTER.)

Not that I don't appreciate it, Walter, but certain things have happened, haven't they? It just seems odd to suddenly be talking about . . .

WALTER

I'd hoped we could take one step at a time, that's all. It's very complicated between us, I think, and it seemed to me we might just try to . . .

VICTOR

I know, but you can understand it would be a little confusing.

WALTER

What do you find confusing?

VICTOR

You must have some idea, don't you?

WALTER

This is a little astonishing, Victor--after all these years you can't expect to settle everything in one conversation, can you?

(TAKES A STEP TOWARD SOFA AND TURNS TO VICTOR.)

I simply felt that with a little good will we . . . we . . .

(VICTOR CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Oh, the hell with it.

(GETS COAT FROM CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Get what you can from the old man, I don't want any of it.

(HE GOES AND EXTENDS HIS HAND TO ESTHER, FORCING A SMILE.)

I'm sorry, Esther. It was nice seeing you anyway.

(SICKENED, HE CROSSES TOWARD DOOR.)

Maybe I'll see you again, Vic. Good luck.

ESTHER

(BEFORE SHE CAN THINK, CROSSES AFTER WALTER.)

Walter?

WALTER

(CROSSES BEHIND SOFA.)

I don't accept this resentment, Victor. It simply baffles me. I don't understand it. I just want you know how I feel.

ESTHER

It's not resentment, Walter.

VICTOR

The whole thing is a little fantastic to me, that's all. I haven't cracked a book in twenty-five years, how do I walk into a research laboratory?

ESTHER

But Walter feels that you have enough background . . .

VICTOR

I know less chemistry than most high school kids, Esther . . . and physics, yet! Good God, Walter . . . where you been?

WALTER

I'm sure you could make a place for yourself . . .

VICTOR

What place? Running papers from one office to another?

WALTER

You're not serious.

(ESTHER SITS ON CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

VICTOR

Why? Sooner or later my being your brother is not going to mean very much, is it? I've been walking a beat for twenty-eight years, I'm not qualified for anything technical; what's this all about?

WALTER

Why do you keep asking what it's about? I've been perfectly open with you, Victor!

VICTOR

I don't think you have.

WALTER

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Why! What do you think I'm . . . ?

VICTOR

Well, when you say what you said a few minutes ago, I . . .

WALTER

What did I say?

VICTOR

(WITH A COOL SMILE.)

. . . What a pity it was that I didn't go on with science?

WALTER

(PUZZLED.)

What's wrong with that?

VICTOR

Oh, Walter, come on now!

WALTER

But I feel that--I've always felt that.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF PAPA'S CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

There used to be a man in that chair, staring into space.
Don't you remember that?

WALTER

Very well, yes--I sent him money every month.

VICTOR

You sent him five dollars every month.

WALTER

(CROSSES TO FRONT OF SOFA.)

I could afford five dollars. But what's that got to do with you?

VICTOR

What it's got to do with me!

WALTER

Yes, I don't see that.

VICTOR

Where did you imagine the rest of his living was coming from?

WALTER

Victor, that was your decision, not mine.

VICTOR

My decision!

WALTER

We had a long talk in this room once, Victor.

VICTOR

(NOT RECALLING.)

What talk?

WALTER

(ASTONISHED. HE SITS ON SOFA.)

Victor! We came to a complete understanding--just after you moved up here with Dad. I told you then that I was going to finish my schooling come hell or high water, and I advised you to do the same. In fact, I warned you not to allow him to strangle your life. And if I'm not mistaken I told you the same thing at your wedding, Esther.

VICTOR

(WITH AN IRONIC LAUGH.)

Who the hell was supposed to keep him alive, Walter!

WALTER

(WITH A STRANGE FEAR, MORE THAN ANGER.)

Why did anybody have to? He wasn't sick. He was perfectly fit to go to work.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Work? In 1936? With no skill, no money . . . ?

WALTER

(OUTBURST.)

Then he could have gone on welfare! Who was he, some exiled royalty? What did a hundred and fifty million other people do in 1936? He'd have survived, Victor--good God, you must know that by now, don't you?!

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO DOOR. WALTER STOPS HIM AND GRABS HIS HAND.)

I've had enough of this Esther; it's the same old thing all over again, let's get out of here.

WALTER

Vic! Please!

(HE CATCHES VICTOR WHO FREES HIS ARM.)

I'm not running him down; I loved him in many ways . . .

ESTHER

(RISING. AS THOUGH CONCEDING HER EARLIER POSITION.)

Vic, listen--maybe you ought to talk about it.

VICTOR

It's all pointless! The whole thing doesn't matter to me!

WALTER

He exploited you!

(VICTOR HALTS, TURNS TO HIM, HIS ANGER FULL IN HIS FACE.
WALTER CROSSES TO SOFA 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

Doesn't that matter to you?

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA.)

Let's get one thing straight, Walter--I am nobody's victim.

WALTER

But that's exactly what I've tried to tell you--I'm not trying to condescend.

VICTOR

Of course you are. Would you be saying any of this if I'd made a pile of money somewhere?

(WALTER CROSSES TO VICTROLA.)

I'm sorry, Walter, I can't take that--I made no choice; the icebox was empty and the man was sitting there with his mouth open.

(SLIGHT PAUSE. VICTOR CROSSES AROUND SOFA AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I didn't start this, Walter, and the whole thing doesn't interest me, but when you talk about making choices, and I should have gone on with science, I have to say something--just because you want things a certain way doesn't make them that way.

WALTER

All right then. . . . How do you see it?

VICTOR

(STEPS TOWARD WALTER.)

Look, you've been sick, Walter, why upset yourself with all this?

WALTER

It's important to me!

VICTOR

(TRIES TO SMILE--AND IN A FRIENDLY WAY.)

But why?--It's all over the dam.

ESTHER

I think he's come to you in good faith, Victor.

(HE TURNS TO HER ANGRILY, BUT SHE BRAVES HIS LOOK.)

I don't see why you can't consider his offer.

VICTOR

I said I would think about it.

ESTHER

(RESTRAINING A CRY. CROSSES BEHIND CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

You know you're turning it down! I mean what's so dreadful about telling the truth, can it be any worse than this?

VICTOR

What "truth"? What are you . . . ?

Act II - Scene XII

SOLOMON

(ENTERS BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.) (See Figure 5.)

Excuse me.

ESTHER

For God's sake, now what!

SOLOMON

I just didn't want you to think I wouldn't make the appraisal; I will, I'll do it . . .

ESTHER

(POINTING TO THE BEDROOM. CROSSES TOWARD SOLOMON.)

Will you please leave us alone!

SOLOMON

(SUDDENLY HIS UNDERLYING EMOTION--INDICATING VICTOR.)



Figure 5

What do you want from him!--He's a policeman! I'm a dealer, he's a doctor, and he's a policeman, so what's the good you'll tear him to pieces?!

ESTHER

Well, one of us has got to leave this room, Victor.

SOLOMON

Please, Esther, let me . . . Doctor, listen to me, take my advice--stop it. What can come of this? . . . In the first place, if you take the deduction how do you know in two-three years, they wouldn't come back to you, whereby they disallow it? I don't have to tell you--the Federal Government is not reliable. I understand very well you want to be sweet to him

(TO ESTHER.)

but can be two-three years before you'll know how sweet they're going to allow him.

(TO VICTOR AND WALTER.)

In other words, what I'm trying to bring out, my boys, is that . . .

ESTHER

. . . You want the furniture.

SOLOMON

(SHOUTING AT HER.)

Esther, if I didn't want it I wouldn't buy it! But what can they settle here? It's still up to the Federal Government, don't you see?--if they can't settle nothing they should stop it right now!

(WITH A LOOK OF WARNING AND ALARM IN HIS EYES. CROSSES UP STAGE TO BEDROOM DOOR.)

Now please--do what I tell you! I'm not a fool!

(HE WALKS ABOUT INTO THE BEDROOM, SHAKING.)

Act II - Scene XIII

WALTER

(CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

I guess he's got a point, Vic--why don't you just sell it to him; maybe then we can sit down and talk sometime. It isn't really a very conducive atmosphere. --Can I call you?

VICTOR

Sure.

ESTHER

(CROSSES BEHIND PAPA'S CHAIR.)

You're both fantastic.

(SHE TRIES TO LAUGH.)

We're giving this furniture away because nobody's able to say the simplest things. You're incredible, the both of you.

WALTER

It isn't that easy, Esther . . .

ESTHER

Oh, what the hell--I'll say it. When he went to you, Walter, for the five hundred he needed to get his degree . . .

VICTOR

Esther! There's no . . .

ESTHER

It's one of the things standing between you, isn't it?!-- Maybe Walter can clear it up. I mean . . . Good God, is there never to be an end?

(TO WALTER, WITHOUT PAUSE, CROSSES BEHIND VICTROLA.)

Because it stunned him, Walter; he'll never say it, but--

(SHE TAKES THE PLUNGE.)

he hadn't the slightest doubt you'd lend it to him. So when you turned him down . . .

VICTOR

Esther, he was just starting out . . .

ESTHER

Not the way you told me! Please let me finish!

(TO WALTER.)

You already had the house in Rye, you were perfectly well established, weren't you?

VICTOR

So what? He didn't feel he could . . .

WALTER

(WITH A CERTAIN DREAD, QUIETLY. STEPS TOWARD ESTHER.)

No, no, I . . . I could have spared the money . . . We've never talked about this. I think perhaps we have to.

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

It was despicable; but I don't think I can leave it quite that way. Two or three days afterwards . . .

(TO VICTOR.)

After you came to see me, I phoned to offer you the money.

(SLIGHT PAUSE.)

VICTOR

Where'd you phone?

WALTER

Here. I spoke to Dad.

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR AND SITS ON ARM AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.
SLIGHT PAUSE.)

I saw that I'd acted badly, and I . . .

VICTOR

You didn't act badly . . .

WALTER

(ESTHER CROSSES AND SITS ON SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

It was frightful! --We'll have another talk, won't we? I wasn't prepared to go into all this . . . In any case . . . when I called here he told me you'd joined the Force. And I said--he mustn't permit you to do a thing like that; I said--you had a fine mind and with a little luck you could amount to something in science. That it was a terrible waste. Etcetera. And his answer was--"Victor wants to help me. I can't stop him."

(PAUSE.)

VICTOR

You told him you were ready to give me the money?

WALTER

Victor, you remember the . . . the helplessness in his voice. At that time? With Mother recently gone and everything shot out from under him . . . ?

VICTOR

(PERSISTING. STEPS TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK AWAY FROM WALTER.)

Let me understand that, Walter; did you tell . . . ?

WALTER

(IN ANGUISH, BUT HEWING TO HIMSELF. RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

There are conversations, aren't there, and looking back it's impossible to explain why you said or didn't say certain things?

(TURNS AND LOOKS AT VICTOR.)

--I'm not defending it, but I would like to be understood if that's possible.--You all seemed to need each other more, Vic --more than I needed them. To the point where I used to

blame myself for a lack of feeling. You understand?--So when he said that you wanted to help him, I felt somehow that it'd be wrong for me to try to break it up between you. It seemed like interfering.

VICTOR

I see . . .

(TURNS TO WALTER.)

Because he never mentioned you'd offered the money.

WALTER

All I'm trying to convey is that . . . I was never indifferent; that's the whole point. I did call here to offer the loan--but he made it impossible, don't you see?

VICTOR

I understand.

WALTER

(EAGERLY.)

Do you?

VICTOR

Yes.

WALTER

(SENSING THE UNSAID.)

Please say what you think. It's absurd to go on this way. What do you want to say?

VICTOR

(SLIGHT PAUSE. CROSSES UP STAGE TO PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I think it was all . . .

(TURNS TO WALTER.)

very convenient for you.

WALTER

(APPALLED.)

That's all. (?)

VICTOR

I think so. If you thought Dad meant so much to me--and I guess he did in a certain way--why would five hundred bucks break us apart? I'd have gone on supporting him; it would have let me finish school, that's all.--It doesn't make any sense, Walter.

WALTER

What makes sense?

VICTOR

You didn't give me the money because you didn't want to.

WALTER

(TURNS AWAY, HURT AND QUIETLY ENRAGED.)

It's that simple. (?)

VICTOR

That's what it comes to, doesn't it? Not that you had any obligation, but if you want to help somebody you do it, if you don't you don't. Well why is that so astonishing? We do what we want to do, don't we?

(CROSSES DOWN STAGE TO CHAIR FRONT AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I don't understand what you're bringing this all up for.

WALTER

You don't feel the need to heal anything. (?)

VICTOR

I wouldn't mind that, but how does this heal anything?

ESTHER

I think he's been perfectly clear, Victor--he's asking your friendship.

VICTOR

By offering me a job and twelve thousand dollars?

(ESTHER RISES.)

WALTER

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO VICTROLA.)

Why not? What else can I offer you?

VICTOR

But why do you have to offer me anything? It sounds like I have to be saved, or something.

WALTER

I simply felt that there was work you could do that you'd enjoy and I . . .

VICTOR

Walter, I haven't got the education, what are you talking about?

(CROSSES UP STAGE IN BACK OF PAPA'S CHAIR.)

You can't walk in with one splash and wash out twenty-eight years. There's a price people pay. I've paid it, it's all gone, I haven't got it anymore. Just like you paid, didn't you?--you've got no wife, you've lost your family, you're rattling around all over the place?--can you go home and start all over again from scratch? This is where we are; now, right here, now. And as long as we're talking, I have to tell you that this is not what you say in front of a man's wife.

WALTER

(GLANCING AT ESTHER, CERTAINTY SHATTERED.)

What have I said . . .

VICTOR

We don't need to be saved, Walter! I've done a job that has to be done and I think I've done it straight. You talk about changing your attitudes--well Jesus, kid, I can't see what the hell is changed.

ESTHER

(GETS PURSE AND CROSSES TOWARD DOOR.)

I want to go, Victor.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TOWARD 3:00 O'CLOCK CHAIR.)

Please, Esther, he's said certain things and I don't think I can leave it this way.

ESTHER

(ANGRILY. TURNS TOWARD VICTOR.)

Well, what's the difference?!

VICTOR

(SUPPRESSING AN OUTBURST.)

Because for some reason you don't understand anything anymore!
What are you trying to tell me

(CROSSES TO SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

--that is was all unnecessary? Is that it? Well, correct me, is that the message? Because that's all I get out of this.

WALTER

(CROSSES TOWARD 3:00 O'CLOCK CHAIR FRONT.)

I guess it's impossible . . .

VICTOR

What's impossible? . . . What do you want, Walter!

WALTER

I wanted to be of some use. I've learned some painful things, but it isn't enough to know; I wanted to act on what I know.

VICTOR

Act--in what way?

WALTER

I feel . . . I could be of help. Why live, only to repeat the same mistakes again and again? I didn't want to let the chance go by, as I let it go before. And I must say, if this is as far as you can go with me, then you're only defeating yourself.

VICTOR

Like I did before. (?) Is that what you mean?

WALTER

(HESITATES.)

. . . All right, yes; that's what I meant.

VICTOR

Well, that's what I thought.--See, there's one thing about the Cops--you get to learn how to listen to people, because if you don't hear right sometimes you end up with a knife in you back.

(CROSSES AWAY TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

In other words, I dreamed up the whole problem. (?)

WALTER

(CASTING ASIDE HIS CAUTION.)

Victor, my five hundred dollars was not what kept you from your degree! You could have left Pop and gone right on--he was perfectly fit.

VICTOR

And twelve million unemployed, what was that, my neurosis? I hypnotized myself every night to scrounge the outer leaves of lettuce from the Greek restaurant on the corner? The good parts we cut out of rotten grapefruit . . . ?

WALTER

(CROSSES UP STAGE BY PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I'm not trying to deny . . .

VICTOR

We were eating garbage here, buster!

ESTHER

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

But what is the point of . . .

VICTOR

(TO ESTHER. BY PAPA'S CHAIR AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

What are you trying to do, turn this all into a dream?

(TO WALTER.)

And perfectly fit!--What about the inside of his head? The man was ashamed to go into the street!

ESTHER

But, Victor, he's gone now.

VICTOR

(WITH A CRY--HE SENSES THE WEEKNESS OF HIS POSITION.)

Don't tell me he's gone now!--

(HE IS WRACKED, TERRIBLY ALONE BEFORE HER.)

He was here then, wasn't he? And a system broke down, did I invent that?

ESTHER

No, dear, but it's all different now.

VICTOR

(CENTER.)

What's different now? Take a walk in the street with your eyes open, kid--we're a goddamned army holding this city down, what do you mean it's different? I'm sorry; I'm on the side-walk all day, I don't have time to read propaganda.--When it blows again you'll be thankful for a roof over your head!

(WALTER MOVES LIGHTLY TO 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

How can you say that to me? I could have left him with your five dollars a month? I'm sorry, you can't brainwash me--if you got a hook in your mouth don't try to stick it into mine. You want to make up for things, you don't come around to make fools out of people--I didn't invent my life. Not altogether. You had a responsibility here and you walked on it.

(TURNS AWAY AT 6:00 O'CLOCK.)

You can go. I'll send you your half.

WALTER

If you could reach beyond your anger, I'd like to tell you something--Vic.--I know I should have said this many years ago. But I did try . . . When you came to me I told you . . . remember I said, "Ask Dad for money." I did say that. . . . He had money left, after the crash.

VICTOR

(TURNS BACK TO WALTER.)

What are you talking about?

WALTER

He had nearly four thousand dollars.

ESTHER

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO TABLE BY PAPA'S CHAIR.)

When?

WALTER

When they were eating garbage here.

VICTOR

How did you know that?

WALTER

He'd asked me to invest it for him.

VICTOR

Invest it.

WALTER

(WALTER CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

Yes. Not long before he sent you to me for the loan. That's why I never sent him more than I did. And if I'd had the strength of my convictions I wouldn't have sent him that!

VICTOR

(TURNS AWAY FROM WALTER. SHAME IS FLOODING INTO HIM.)

He actually had it?--in the bank?

WALTER

Vic, that's what he was living on, basically, till he died. What we gave him wasn't enough; you know that.

VICTOR

But he had those jobs . . .

WALTER

Meant very little.--He lived on his money, believe me.

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD VICTOR.)

--I told him at the time, if he would send you through I'd contribute properly. But here he's got you running from job to job to feed him--I'm damned if I'd sacrifice when he was holding out on you. You can understand that, can't you? Kid, there's no point getting angry now--you know how terrified he was that he'd never earn anything anymore. And there was just no reassuring him.

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

But he saw I was supporting him, didn't he?

WALTER

For how long, though?

VICTOR

(ANGERING. TURNS TO WALTER.)

What do you mean . . . how long? He could see I wasn't walking out--

WALTER

I know, but he was sure you would sooner or later.

ESTHER

He was waiting for him to walk out. (?)

WALTER

(FEARING TO INFLAME VICTOR, HE UNDERCUTS THE OBVIOUS ANSWER. VICTOR SITS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Well . . . you could say that, yes.

ESTHER

I knew it! God, when do I believe what I see!

WALTER

He was terrified, dear . . . I don't mean he wasn't grateful to you, Vic. He was. But he really couldn't understand it. I may as well say it, Vic--I myself never imagined you'd go that far. Well, you must certainly see now how extreme a thing it was, to stick with him like that? And at such cost to you?

(VICTOR IS SILENT.)

ESTHER

(WITH SORROW. CROSSES TOWARD CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

He sees it.

WALTER

. . . I know we could work together and I'd love to try. What do you say?

(PAUSE.)

VICTOR

. . . Why didn't you tell me he had that kind of money?

WALTER

But I did when you came to me for the loan.

VICTOR

To "ask Dad"?

WALTER

Yes!

VICTOR

(STANDS.)

But would I have come to you if I had the faintest idea he had four thousand dollars under his ass? It was meaningless to say that to me.

WALTER

Now just a second . . .

(HE STARTS TO INDICATE THE HARP.)

VICTOR

Cut it out, Walter!--I'm sorry, but it's kind of insulting--I'm not five years old! What am I supposed to make of this? You knew he had that kind of money, and came here many times, you sat here, the two of you, watching me walking around in this suit and said nothing? And now you expect me to . . . ?

WALTER

(SHARPLY.)

You certainly knew he had something, Victor!

VICTOR

What do you want here? What do you want here!

WALTER

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO HARP.)

Well, all I can tell you, is that I wouldn't sit around eating garbage with that staring me in the face!

(HE POINTS AT THE HARP.)

Even then it was worth a couple of hundred, maybe more!--
Your degree was right there. Right there, if nothing else.

(CROSSES TO SOFA AND GETS COAT.)

But if you want to go on with this fantasy, it's all right
with me. God knows, I've had a few of my own . . .

VICTOR

Fantasy.

WALTER

(AT SOFA.)

It's a fantasy, Victor--your father was penniless and your
brother a son of a bitch, and you play no part at all. I said
to ask him because you could see in front of your face that
he had some money. You knew it then and you certainly know
it now.

VICTOR

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF SOFA.)

You mean if he had a few dollars left, that . . . ?

ESTHER

(TAKES A FEW STEPS TOWARD VICTOR.)

What do you mean, a few dollars?

VICTOR

I didn't know he . . . had four--

ESTHER

But you knew he had something?

VICTOR

. . . I didn't say that.

ESTHER

Then what are you saying? I want to understand what you're
saying!! You knew he had money left?

VICTOR

Not four thousand dol . . .

ESTHER

But enough to make out?

VICTOR

(CRYING OUT IN ANGER AND FOR RELEASE.)

I couldn't nail him to the wall, could I? He said he had nothing!

ESTHER

But you knew better?

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO END OF SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

I don't know what I knew!

(HE HAS CALLED THIS OUT, AND HIS VOICE AND WORDS SURPRISE HIM.)

ESTHER

It's a farce. It's all a goddamned farce!--To stick us into a furnished room so you could send him part of your pay? Even after we were married, to go on sending him money? Put off having children, live like mice--and all the time you knew he . . . ? --Victor, I'm trying to understand you.

VICTOR

(ROARING OUT, AGONIZED.)

Stop it!! I mean, Jesus, you can't leave everything out like this. The man was a beaten dog, ashamed to walk in the street, how do you demand his last buck . . . ?

ESTHER

You're still going to go on saying that? --The man had four thousand dollars!

(HE IS SILENT.)

It was all an act! Beaten dog!--he was a calculating liar!
And in you heart you knew it!

(VICTOR SITS ON EDGE OF SOFA AT 9:00 O'CLOCK.)

No wonder you're paralyzed--you haven't believed a word you've said all these years! We've been lying away our existence all these years; down the sewer, day after day after day . . . to protect a miserable cheap manipulator. No wonder it all seemed like a dream to me--it was; a goddamned nightmare. I knew it was all unreal, I knew it and I let it go by. --Well, I can't anymore, kid. I can't watch it another day.

(SITS IN CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I'm not ready to die.

VICTOR

Esther . . . This isn't true either.

ESTHER

We are dying, that's what's true!

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR, LOOKS AT IT.)

I'll tell you what happened. I did tell him what you'd said to me. I faced him with it. Not that I "faced" him, I just told him--"Walter said to ask you."

(HE STOPS, HIS STARE IS ON THE CHAIR, CAUGHT BY MEMORY--IN EFFECT, THE LAST LINE WAS ADDRESSED TO THE CHAIR.)

WALTER

And what happened?

(PAUSE.)

VICTOR

He laughed. And that's when I knew. Because it was that kind of a laugh.

(TURNS AROUND.)

But then again it could be a different kind, like a wild joke--because we were eating garbage here.

(SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

And I went out--over to Bryant Park behind the Public Library. The grass was covered with men. Like a big, open-air flop-house. And not bums--some of them still had shined shoes and good hats, busted businessmen, lawyers, skilled mechanics. Which I'd seen a hundred times. But suddenly, you know?-- I saw it. There was no mercy. Anywhere. One day you're the head of the house, at the head of the table, and suddenly you're shit. Overnight. And I tried to figure out that laugh. --How could he be holding out on me when he loved me?

ESTHER

Loved . . .

VICTOR

(HIS VOICE SWELLING WITH SORROW.)

He loved me, Esther! He just didn't want to end up on the grass! It's not that you don't love somebody, it's that you've got to survive. We know what that feels like, don't we!?

(SHE CAN'T ANSWER, FEELING THE BARB.)

We do what we have to do, Esther. What else are we talking about here? If he did have something left it was . . .

ESTHER

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

"If" he had . . .

VICTOR

(RISES.)

What does that change!--I know I'm talking like a fool, but what does that change?--He couldn't believe in anybody anymore, and it was unbearable to me?

(WALTER CROSSES IN BACK OF SOFA, CENTER STAGE. VICTOR TURNS TO WALTER.)

He'd kicked him in the face; my mother . . . the night he told us he was bankrupt, my mother . . . It was right on this couch.

She was all dressed up--for some affair, I think. Her hair was piled up, and long earrings? And he had his tuxedo on . . . and made us all sit down; and he told us it was all gone. And she vomited. All over his arms. His hand. Just kept on vomiting, like thirty-five years coming up. And he sat there. Stinking like a sewer.--And a look came onto his face. I'd never seen a man look like that. He was sitting there, letting it dry on his hands. What's the difference what you know? Do you do everything you know?--Not that I excuse it; it was idiotic, nobody has to tell me that.

(CROSSES TO PAPA'S CHAIR AND TURNS AWAY.)

But you're brought up to believe in one another, you're filled full of that crap--you can't help trying to keep it going, that's all.

(TURNS BACK AND SITS IN PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I thought if I stuck with him, if he could see that somebody was still . . . on his side . . .

ESTHER

Yes, I know!

(SHE IS CLOSE TO WEEPING.)

VICTOR

I can't explain it; I wanted to . . . stop it from falling apart . . .

WALTER

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

It won't work, Vic. You see it yourself, don't you? --it's not that at all. You see that, don't you?

VICTOR

What.

WALTER

Is it really that something fell apart? Were we really brought up to believe in one another? We were brought up to succeed, weren't we? Why else would he respect me so and not you? What fell apart? What was here to fall apart?

(RIGHT TO VICTOR.)

Was there ever any love here? When he needed her, she vomited. And when you needed him, he laughed. --What was unbearable is not that it all fell apart, it was that there was never anything here.

ESTHER

. . . But who . . . can ever face that, Walter?

WALTER

But you have to! What you saw behind the library that day was not that there was no mercy in the world, kid. It's that there was no love in this house. There was no loyalty.

ESTHER

(STEPS TO VICTOR.)

Except his.

WALTER

Esther, there was nothing here but a straight financial arrangement. That's what was unbearable--And you proceeded to wipe out what you saw.

VICTOR

Wipe out . . .

WALTER

Vic, I've been in this box. I wasted thirty years protecting myself from that catastrophe. . . . And I only got out alive when I saw that there was no catastrophe, there had never been;--they were never lovers--she said a hundred times that her marriage destroyed her musical career. I saw that nothing fell here, Vic--and he doesn't follow me anymore with that vomit on his hands. I don't look high and low for some betrayal anymore; my days belong to me now, I'm not afraid to risk believing someone.--All I ever wanted was simply to do science, but I invented an efficient, disaster-proof, money-maker. You--

(TO ESTHER, WITH A WARM SMILE.)

You could never stand the sight of blood? And what do you do?
--march straight into the most violent profession there is.

We invent ourselves, Vic, to wipe out what we know. You invent a life of self-sacrifice, a life of duty; but what never existed here cannot be upheld.--You were not upholding something, you were denying what you knew they were. And denying yourself. And that's all that is standing between us now;--an illusion, Vic. That I kicked them in the face and you must uphold them against me. But I only saw then what you're seeing now; there was nothing here to betray. I am not your enemy. It is all an illusion and if you could walk through it, we could meet . . . we're brothers. It's almost as though

(HE SMILES WARMLY, UNCERTAIN STILL.)

we're like two halves of the same guy.--As though we can't quite move ahead--alone. Do you ever feel that, Vic?

VICTOR

Walter, I'm trying to trust you. I want to. I . . . I'll even tell you . . . there are days when I can't remember what I've got against you. And it hangs in me like a rock. I see myself in a store window, and my hair going, and I'm walking the streets--and I can't remember why. You can go crazy when all the reasons disappear--when you can't even hate anymore.

WALTER

Because it's unreal, Vic, and underneath you know it is.

VICTOR

Then give me something real.

WALTER

What can I give you?

VICTOR

(RISES AND CROSSES TO WALTER'S CHEST.)

I'm not blaming you now, I'm asking you. I can understand you walking out. I've wished a thousand times I'd done the same thing. But, to come here through all those years knowing what you knew and saying nothing . . .

WALTER

And if I said . . . Victor, if I said that I did have some wish to hold you back?--What would that give you now?

VICTOR

Is that what you wanted?--Walter, tell me the truth.

WALTER

I wanted the freedom to do my work. Does that mean I stole your life? You made those choices, Victor! And that's what you have to face!

VICTOR

But what do you face? You're not turning me into a walking fifty-year-old mistake--we have to go home when you leave, we have to look at each other. What do you face?

WALTER

I have offered you everything I know how to!

VICTOR

I would know if you'd come to give me something! I would know that!

WALTER

(CROSSES TO SOFA AND PICKS UP COAT.)

You don't want the truth, you want a monster!

VICTOR

(CROSSES AROUND SOFA AND GRABS COAT. BOTH VICTOR AND WALTER HOLD ON TO THE COAT.)

You came for the old handshake, didn't you! The okay! And you end up with the respect, the career, the money, and the best thing of all, the thing that nobody else can tell you so you can believe it--that you're one hell of a guy and never harmed anybody in your life! Well, you're not going to get it. Not till I get mine.

WALTER

And you? You never had any hatred for me? Never a wish to see me destroyed? To destroy me, to destroy me with this saintly self-sacrifice, this mockery of sacrifice? What will you give me, Victor!

VICTOR

I don't have it to give you. Not anymore. And you don't have it to give me. And there's nothing to give--I see that now. I just didn't want him to end up on the grass. And he didn't. And that's all it was. I couldn't work with you, Walter. I can't. I don't trust you.

WALTER

Vengeance. Down to the end. He is sacrificing his life to vengeance.

ESTHER

Nothing was sacrificed.

WALTER

To prove with your failure what a treacherous son of a bitch I am--to hang yourself in my doorway. Then and now.

ESTHER

(QUIETLY, NOT FACING EITHER OF THEM.)

Leave him, Walter, please. Don't say any more.

WALTER

You quit. Both of you. You lay down and quit, and that's the long and short of all your ideology. It is all envy!-- And to this moment you haven't the guts to face it! You are a failure. But your failure does not give you moral authority! Not with me! I worked for what I made--and there are people walking around today who'd have been dead if I hadn't. Yes. He was smarter than all of us--he saw what you wanted and he gave it to you! He killed our mother and he killed you. But not me. Not then and not now.

(HE TAKES COAT.)

He will never kill me.

(HUMILIATED BY HER. HE IS FURIOUS. HE TURNS AND SEES SOLOMON. TO SOLOMON.)

Go ahead, you old mutt--rob them blind, they love it! You will never, never again make me ashamed!

(CROSSING UP STAGE TO VICTOR HE FLINGS DRESS AT HIM. EXITS.)

VICTOR

(CROSSES TO ATTIC DOOR.)

Walter! Walter!

Act II - Scene XIV

SOLOMON

(CROSSES TOWARD 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

Let him go. What can you do?

ESTHER

Whatever you see, huh. (?) --You believe what you see.

SOLOMON

What then?

ESTHER

No--it's wonderful. Maybe that's why you're still going. I was nineteen years old when I first walked up those stairs--if that's believable. And he had a brother, who was the cleverest, most wonderful young doctor . . . in the world. As he'd be soon. Somehow, someday. And a rather sweet, in-offensive gentleman, always waiting for the news to come on . . . And next week, men we never saw or heard of, will come and smash it all apart and take it all away.--Why is finality always so unreal? So many times I thought--the one thing he wanted most was to talk to his brother, and that if they could--But he's come and he's gone. And I still feel it--isn't that terrible? It always seems to me that one little step more--and some crazy kind of forgiveness will come, and lift up everyone. When do you stop being so . . . foolish?

SOLOMON

(CROSSES IN FRONT OF CHAIR AT 3:00 O'CLOCK.)

I had a daughter, should rest in peace, she took her own life. That's nearly sixty years. And every night I lay down to sleep--she's sitting there. I see her clear like I see you. But if it was a miracle and she came to life--what would I say to her?--

(TAKING MONEY FROM HIS POCKET.)

So you got there seven; so I'm giving you eight, nine, ten, eleven . . .

(SEARCHES, FINDS A FIFTY.)

and there's a fifty for the harp. Now you'll excuse me--I got a lot of work here tonight.

VICTOR

We could still make the picture, if you like.

ESTHER.

Okay.

(CROSSES BY END OF SOFA. VICTOR PICKS UP SUIT.)

Don't bother. Goodbye, Mister Solomon.

SOLOMON

Goodbye, dear--I like that suit, that's very nice.

ESTHER

Thank you.

VICTOR

(CROSSES UP STAGE TO SOLOMON.)

When will you be taking it away?

SOLOMON

(LOOKS AROUND ROOM.)

With God's help if I'll live--first thing in the morning.

VICTOR

I'll be back for this later, then. And there's my foil, and the mask, and the gauntlets.

SOLOMON

Don't worry, I wouldn't touch it.

VICTOR

(SHAKES HANDS OVER PAPA'S CHAIR.)

I'm glad to have met you, Solomon.

SOLOMON

Likewise. And I want to thank you.

VICTOR

What for?

SOLOMON

Well . . . who would ever believe I would start such a thing again . . . ? But go--go, I got a lot of work here.

VICTOR

Good luck with it.

SOLOMON

Good luck you can never know till the last minute, my boy.

VICTOR

Right. Yes. Well . . . bye-bye.

(VICTOR AND ESTHER EXIT.)

SOLOMON

Bye-bye, bye-bye.

(HE IS ALONE. HE PUTS THE PAD AND PENCIL IN HIS POCKET. HE LOOKS ABOUT, AND THE CHALLENGE OF IT ALL OPPRESSES HIM AND HE IS AFRAID AND WORRIED. HIS HAND GOES TO HIS CHEEK, HE PULLS HIS FLESH IN FEAR. THEN HIS EYE FALLS ON THE PHONOGRAPH. HE GOES TO IT, INSPECTS IT, THEN LOOKS AT THE RECORD ON THE TURNTABLE. HE SWITCHES THE TURNTABLE ON. IT IS THE LAUGHING RECORD. HE SMILES, THEN CHUCKLES. NOW AS HE SITS IN THE ARMCHAIR HE LAUGHS, THE LAUGHTER OF THE RECORD COMBINING WITH HIS. HE LEANS BACK SPRAWLING IN THE CHAIR, LAUGHING WITH TEARS IN HIS EYES, HOWLING HELPLESSLY TO THE AIR.
CURTAIN.)

CHAPTER III
CRITICAL EVALUATION

The evaluation of a theatrical production is, at best, a vain attempt to capture something that is in a few hours gone forever. We can never be sure whether we are correct in our evaluation because the production begins to dim minutes after the final curtain. This director will attempt to discuss what he thought were the strong as well as the weak points in directing Arthur Miller's, The Price. In order to accomplish this, the final chapter of this thesis will deal with four specific areas: (1) achievement of interpretation, (2) actor-director relationships, (3) audience response, and (4) personal comments.

Achievement of Interpretation

This director's main objective was to present the author's viewpoint of life as reflected through a realistic interpretation of the script. This director decided that symbolically Miller had returned to the elements of a trial in his character relationships. Solomon, the wise man, was the judge, Esther was a witness, the audience was the jury, and the two brothers were the lawyers which presented both sides of the case. The two sides of the case, as interpreted by this director, were the presentation of two entirely different points of view of the same series of events. This

director and the cast as a whole decided that Miller's main point was to present a balance between the point of views, leaving the audience as the jury. The designer and this director decided that the best method of presenting these points of view was through a realistic interpretation. The methods used to achieve this interpretation were the setting, a continuous soundtrack, realistic blocking and the acting style.

The set was to reflect the personality of the family that has lived there and the time that had passed since their last visit. The family's hopes and dreams were to be shown in memorabilia of past ages.

The setting was to be a dust covered attic of a New York Brownstone being readied to be torn down. In this attic was the furniture of a rich family gone broke. The center of the attic was dominated by the overstuffed armchair of the dead father. The rest of the furniture in the room had been laid out in relation to this chair. The overstuffed chair was to symbolically dominate the show, so, the director carried the symbolism one step further by symbolizing the whole family with furniture. The set, to the audience, would at first seem to be a giant unsolvable problem but would become clearer as the symbolism was revealed by the play. The furniture was to be huge and domineering, creating a trap in which the actors would battle for the meanings of their lives.

The designer and this director understood that they would only be able to approximate a real brownstone attic full of furniture. We had to borrow furniture from many sources and we were not sure of what was coming at any given time. Therefore, instead of pure realism we moved toward the theatrical realism practiced by Eli Kazan and Jo Mielziner in A Streetcar Named Desire. The audience was seated on two sides of the attic area making the audience-actor relationship as intimate as possible. This close relationship made the actors and the setting seem more believable.

The furniture and props that were acquired all fit into the set very nicely. The actor-audience relationship was helped by the efforts of the set crew which did beautiful work to create an old brownstone attic. The wooden floor and the careful attention to detail helped the relationship become more realistic and believable. The set was easy to work in, exciting to see, and above all realistic. The designer and this director decided to carry the realism created by the set into the sound.

This director reasoned that in a large city, street noises could be heard even in the attic of an old brownstone. Our sound man was dispatched to Washington, D. C. where he taped three hours of street noise. This tape was edited for maximum effect and was to run throughout the length of the play.

This effect raised many questions. Would the sound add or distract from the realism of the show? Would the audience even notice the sound always competing with the actors? This director believed that the effect would enhance the show for many people or, at the worst, not be noticed at all. The theory this director had was that the audience was so used to the soundtracks of movies and television that they would not notice its use more than subconsciously. However, there was always a chance that since a continuous soundtrack was almost never used in legitimate theatre that it might seem obtrusive.

The audience members that were polled did not notice the sound track until it was mentioned to them. The few that did notice stated that they thought that it added to the dramatic effect and the realistic interpretation.

The third element used to achieve the realistic interpretation was the use of realistic blocking. Since the play's set was in a very confining room this director was worried about the repetition of movements. The set was highly symbolic so the director blocked the movements around the symbolic elements in the room, the father's chair, the mother's harp and the two brothers' chests. Victor, when he talked of greed or his brother's life, would relate to Walter's chest. Thusly, even if the blocking was repetitive, it was motivated and explained the symbolic puzzle of furniture.

The last element that added to the realistic style of production was the acting style. The play was broken into

units of action and each unit was tried in many different ways to achieve the best effect. The actors constantly worked to find details in their own lives with which to create their characterizations.

This symbolic and individual approach to characterization helped each member of the cast set a new level in their professional lives. These very realistic portrayals will be discussed further in the actor and director section following.

The time and effort spent on the setting, sound, blocking and acting style produced a play that was stylistically complete. While not all elements were achieved, on the whole, this director believes that the interpretation he attempted worked.

Actor-Director Relationship

The actor-director relationships during rehearsals and the run of the play were very gratifying. Never had this director worked with a cast that was so experienced. The cast consisted of one member of the faculty and three undergraduates. The three undergraduates boasted much theatrical experience among them; two were actors who had returned to undergraduate school after various life-styles and experiences, the last was an undergraduate with a long background of dramatic experience at this university. All the actors exhibited intense dedication to the production and displayed a fine spirit of enthusiasm. They were co-operative and

professional in almost every way. It was a joy as well as a pleasant experience working with them.

The script is a large undertaking for any serious actor. Three areas of concern were stressed by the director. These were characterization with emphasis on age, playing the emotional intensities advocated by the author, and maintaining the energy and concentration needed to make the production seem believable and realistic.

The believable characterization of the actors and the age factor were of major concern to the director and the actors. Three of the actors were to portray middle age, a somewhat indeterminate age. We spent many hours discussing the difference between a man in his twenties and a man in his fifties. The differences found were very slight. The arena staging also added a different factor to the portrayal of age. Since arena staging calls for a very subtle make-up, the actors relied heavily on physicalization.

Through observation, a basic element of the actor, we concluded that middle age showed up more in a slower reaction time and a more mature outlook on life; a contentment or security not found in youth. These things once determined were still hard to portray. Since all the actors were young, they had to try many different vocal patterns, walks, and gestures. These experiments gave each actor a point of reference as they built their characterizations. Certain actors were able to achieve a higher degree of believability

than others but each actor progressed beyond the limits they had previously achieved. The illusion of middle age, from this director's point of view, was very effective and believable.

Each actor delved into his own private world and concentrated on the feelings that he thought would portray his individual character and age. Each actor had a solid basis for his characterization in his own life's experiences. The actor who portrayed Victor had in his background a feeling of insecurity that was necessary to his character. The actor who portrayed Walter had recently been divorced and was questioning his own values in his life like his character. The actress who portrayed Esther was once married to a policeman and had decided to break out of the very trap Esther was in. The actor who portrayed Solomon was the oldest of the cast and a Jewish man whose memories included many characters like Solomon. With these added advantages of background the actors were able to expand their roles quickly and believably.

The actors cast in The Price had to be able to portray many varied emotions in keeping with this director's interpretation of the play. Love, hate, joy of the past, intense dislike and self-pity were only a few emotions that had to be portrayed. In an arena production emotions had to be exhibited in an extremely believable way.

Several methods were used to produce these emotions. This director attempted to produce a feeling of a married couple between the two actors who portrayed Victor and Esther. Long discussions about their past and the relationship between these two characters took place every night. This director saw little need for improvisational games with the seasoned actors he was working with in the play. The director relied on discussions between all the actors together and individually to identify the emotions to be shown in the play. This director led the discussions and each actor discussed his character's past and relationships, both mental and physical, as revealed in the script. Special emphasis was placed on the structure of the play and the "beats" which gave rise to their feelings.

Considerable progress was made from the early rehearsal periods to the final production in the actors' ability to portray the emotional intensities. The level of these intensities, however, were never as consistent as this director would have liked in performance. While the actors became entirely comfortable in expressing this intensity of emotion, this director felt that maybe some improvisational exercises were called for during rehearsals after all. This director felt that even the most seasoned actor needs to be given ideas, concepts, and comparisons to aid in the development of characterization. This director felt that he was intimidated by the level of experience shown by some of the actors. The

firmness that this director should have shown led to the problems that have been and will be discussed in the personal comments section of this thesis.

The believable acting achieved by the actors was due also to the high level of energy and concentration they maintained. The concentration was maintained through out rehearsal by the constant changing of the set. New furniture arrived all the time and we had to switch rehearsal space once. The actors became accustomed to the constant change. All this helped in their high degree of concentration. Energy was a greater problem.

Energy is a problem in any show, especially The Price. Movement is confined to a small area and the audience must listen to a great deal of exposition. The actors must generate their own energy to keep the audience interested. The energy of the show was maintained by breaking the show down into beats of low and high energy. It was decided exactly what level of energy each beat must meet and we tried to achieve each level of energy one at a time. We did not always achieve our use of beats in every performance but the energy level was high and the pace moved well.

The director was faced with a problem that was not typical of most thesis work. The director had the opportunity to cast a member of the faculty in his show. This caused a bit of uneasiness in the director's mind. The relationship could have been very awkward but to the director's great

relief there was no major problem in the decision. Mr. Reynolds was very professional and offered no hardship. When asked, he was very helpful in suggesting difficulties and how these could be overcome. This working relationship was very helpful and a great learning experience for this director.

The qualities of acting and interpretation in any given production are seldom as perfect as the director would like. The Price was no exception to the rule. The interpretation, as was discussed above, was very pleasing. The main point of view as interpreted by the director and cast was achieved as will be shown in the audience evaluation section. The qualities of acting, however, seemed to be lacking to the director. Certain actors were able to achieve a higher degree of believability than others. The actors that had the most experience approached their roles with what seemed a lack of enthusiasm. This director felt that in retrospect that he was intimidated by the age and level of experience he was faced with in the production. One the whole, only one actor achieved what the director had hoped would be the final result of his acting. The director felt that with more discipline on his part all the roles could have been expanded to their fullest potential. The show, taken as a whole, was very entertaining and well done. The audience's and reviewer's reactions to the production were very pleasing.

Audience Evaluation

Audience reaction to The Price was very gratifying to the director. The show was sold out every night and we were held over by popular request. The hold over of the show and various remarks by audience members were significant positive audience response. The only review the play received was by Joe Knox of the Greensboro Daily News.

Mr. Knox entitled his review, "Play Leaves Human Emotions Bare",⁵⁶ and went on to say:

It is a brilliant theatrical jewel, staged and performed to perfection, one of the best among many outstanding successes of UNC-G theatre.⁵⁷

Mr. Knox called the arena staging "altogether real" and providing "the audience with an extraordinary intimacy with the players."⁵⁸ Mr. Knox said of the first act:

When Victor is joined by Solomon to appraise the furnishings and make an offer, the humor is rich, intensely human, deliciously funny.⁵⁹

Mr. Knox ended his review with "I could not find fault with The Price as I saw it on opening night Wednesday."⁶⁰

The reader and this director know that no production is without fault. While none of our shows were perfect,

⁵⁶Joe Knox, "Play Leaves Human Emotions Bare," Greensboro Daily News, 24 October 1975.

⁵⁷Ibid.

⁵⁸Ibid.

⁵⁹Ibid.

⁶⁰Ibid.

each portrayed the essence of Arthur Miller's drama and the personal viewpoint of the director. The student-faculty evaluation revealed many small errors in each show but the evaluations were very pleasing and helpful. The last evaluation of audience response came from this director's thesis committee who unanimously passed this production.

Personal Comments

The directing of The Price at the University of North Carolina at Greensboro was a wonderful experience for this director. The cast and crew were experienced and professional in almost every sense of the word. The faculty of the school were always helpful and understanding no matter what problems were encountered. This director's budget was very liberal and easy to work with during the entire production. Few problems were so difficult that they could not be overcome. These few problems were Esther's characterization, Solomon's lines and the lack of props early in the production.

The actress who portrayed Esther was very stiff and nervous in rehearsal and performance. These problems came from a lack of experience and the lack of detail in the part as written by Miller.

Miller's women characters, unlike his males, are drawn with very little detail and the role of Esther is no exception. She seems to be used mainly for balance and her past is hard to define. It would take an actress of much

experience to make this part come alive beyond the scope of Miller's writing. The actress cast as Esther did not have this experience and was somewhat ill at ease in the part.

This director's problem was that he felt that the character of Esther should be stiff and nervous. The fact that the nervousness was not intentional characterization bothered this director. This was an acting problem which was not overcome and although the show did not suffer from this performance the actress in question was not helped to overcome her problem. Esther's problem was left unsolved and so was another acting problem, Solomon's memorization.

The actor that portrayed Solomon did not, at any time, learn his lines correctly although the director tried to stimulate memorization. This actor caused his fellow actors to constantly readjust their performances to overcome his lack of lines. This problem was one that the actor himself should have overcome for there is no way short of decasting for a director to force an actor to learn lines. This lack of discipline caused the part of Solomon to suffer and thus hurt the overall production.

The last problem that was not solved was the lack of definite props early in the rehearsal period so that the cast constantly had to adjust to a changing environment. The props were never definite even up to dress rehearsal. This problem gave rise to one of the few criticisms of the show; that the actors did not relate to their environment

sufficiently. The prop crew was the only crew that did not perform in a professional manner. Their lateness added a problem that hurt the overall production and was the last problem that was not solved.

The few problems mentioned above were minor and the good points of the production far out weighed the bad. The Price as produced by the University of North Carolina at Greensboro was an experience that this director will never forget. The knowledge gained and the criticism received have helped this director to find new levels of ability that he never knew existed. The success of The Price and comments by audience members makes this director think that the ideas Miller wrote were expressed clearly. This director can only hope that this success will be carried over to the other work he will do in his future career.

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