

YOURS TILL NIAGARA FALLS
by Ellen Goldfinch

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Characters

Gran
Joe
Howie
Murray
Denise

Late 50's
Early teens
Late 30's
Early 60's
Early 30's

Act | Scene |

Gran's living room, one month after Christmas. The living room is still decorated in all its Christmas finery. Not a single space has been left uncovered by balls, tinsel, coloured lights, statues of Santa Claus, reindeer, and any other Christmas symbol one could possibly think of, including the stairs. In one corner of the room, an artificial Christmas tree is standing, with no presents under it and the base clearly showing. The clutter is further intensified by the fact that the room seems to be a showcase of Niagara Falls and Canadian souvenirs and mementos. There are maps, posters, wall hangings depicting the Falls themselves and the city of Niagara Falls. All sorts of statuettes cover the coffee table in front of the sofa and shelves which line the room. A large painted bust of Elvis dominates one of the shelves.

At the opening of the scene, the lights are low. The room is mostly illuminated by the lights from the Christmas tree and the other coloured lights around the room. A boy, in his early teens, is sitting on the sofa, watching TV and absently dribbling a basketball. His jacket has been carelessly thrown over the back of the sofa. After a few beats, Gran enters. She is wearing a huge overcoat, with a long knit scarf wrapped around her neck and a tuque on her head. She carries what seems like an endless amount of shopping bags.

Gran: Joseph! *(He starts.)* You little bastard! How many times have I told you not to bounce that goddamned basketball in the living room? Go on! Get it out of here! *(He gets up and heads offstage.)* Get back here and help me with these bags. *(He puts the ball down on the floor and goes over to her.)* No, not **these**. *(She hurriedly picks out certain bags and sets them aside. Gran passes some bags to Joe. He takes them from her and stands holding the bags, sucked in again by the TV She takes off her coat, scarf, and hat.)* I thought my hands were going to fall off. It must be below zero, for sure...Did you take a snack? *(He nods.)* Good. You take those cookies I left you? *(no response this time. Gran raises her voice.)* Would you turn that thing off and put the bags in the kitchen? *(Joe turns off the TV, takes the bags and exits to the kitchen.)* Just leave them on the table. We'll put them away later. Get in here. I got something to show you. *(Joe comes back)*

I hit the Jackpot today. Brought you some real nice surprises. *(Joe rolls his eyes.)* Don't start that, again, mister. You're lucky to get the stuff I bring you. How many other kids have a grandmother who brings them so many presents? Clothes...and toys. Did you get your home work done? *(pause)* Answer me. *(He just looks at her, then shrugs.)* You're real talkative today. What happened? *(He takes two more bags and puts them in the kitchen.)* I said, what happened? *(pause. Joe comes back.)*

Joe: Nothing.

Gran: Bullshit. *(Joe shrugs.)* I always find out, you know. Sooner or later.

Joe: Yeah.

Gran: Was it at school?

Joe: Nothing happened. You finished? I got a lotta homework tonight.

Gran: No, I'm not finished. *(She walks over to the sofa and straightens out the pillows.)* You want macaroni and cheese for dinner?

Joe: Sure.

Gran: Good. That'll make it easy. Tonight's bingo. You coming?

Joe: I told you. I got lots of homework.

Gran: That's what you always say. *(She hands him his jacket, hat and mitts.)* Are your brains in your ass? Put 'em away. *(He does. She bustles around, tidying up.)* What was I talking about?

Joe: I don't know, Gran.

(She stops what she's doing and looks at him.)

Gran: C'mere kid. *(He does. She looks at him for a beat, grabs his face, plants a loud kiss on his cheek and ruffles his hair. This gets a smile out of him.)*

Joe: You're getting mushy.

Gran: Mushy? *(She bear-hugs him.)*

Joe: Ow! You're hurting me.

Gran: Yeah. Some big tough-guy you are. *(excited/y)* You gotta see what I brought you. Stuff for school. This time you'll love it. *(She gets the bags out that she set aside.)* Close your eyes.

Joe: Aw, come on.

Gran: Close 'em!

Joe: Give me a break. *(he closes them.)*

Gran: Put your hands over 'em. *(he does. Gran pulls out three over-sired pencils.)* O.k. Open! Tah-dah!

Joe *(tonelessly)* : Wow.

Gran: Aren't they great?

Joe: They're big.

Gran: You bet your ass they are. I'll bet *you'll* be the only one with pencils like these.

Joe: Thanks.

Gran: I knew you'd like them.

Joe: There's just one problem.

Gran: Huh?

Joe: How do I write with them?

Gran: What do you mean? Like you would with any other pencil.

Joe: It's just that after a while they might get...heavy.

Gran: Oh....Well, don't worry. *I got you* some of these pens.

Joe (*with more interest*): Hey, did Murray let you have the ones where the girl's bathing suit comes off when you turn it upside down?

Gran: What? No! They say Niagara Falls. Guess Murray and I will have a little chat tomorrow about showing filth to my grandson. I knew you were hanging around him too much.

Joe: He didn't show them to me. They're sitting right out front on the counter.

Gran: Don't protect him. The man's a bastard.

Joe: He's your boss. (*as if reciting a lesson*) All bosses are bastards.

Gran: Damned right.

Joe: Murray's not a bastard.

Gran: Don't swear.

Joe: He's nice.

Gran: You don't work for him.

Joe: He's always letting you take stuff.

Gran: Only if it's for you.

Joe: And he knows you're ripping him off.

Gran: I am not.

Joe: Oh, yeah. Just a few things here and there.

Gran: For what that man pays me, it's like---

Joe: Tips?

Gran: How'd you like a punch in the mouth, smart ass?

Joe: I just meant.....What else you do you have in the bags?

Gran: Don't change the subject. You are accusing your grandmother of stealing.
(they look at each other)

Joe: O.k. I'm sorry.

Gran: Do I take anything for myself?

Joe: Not usually.

Gran: Joseph!

Joe: O. k. Never!

Gran: You better mean that.

Joe: I said I was sorry.

Gran: Yeah. Sorry. No one likes a smart ass. Remember that.

Joe *(with mock politeness)* : Yes, Gran.

Gran: That's more like it. Now get over here and look at this sweatshirt I got you.

(She holds it up)

Joe *(groaning)*: It says Niagara Falls. **Again.**

Gran *(amused)*: What the hell is wrong with that?

Joe: I swear, Gran, I'm the only kid in school who walks around in tee-shirts, sweatshirts, sweatpants saying Niagara Falls, using pencils, pens, notebooks saying Niagara Falls.

Gran: Millions of people come here every year to buy this stuff. Murray is getting rich and paying me piss to sell this stuff. I see millionaires from all over the world wearing sweatshirts like I just gave you and all you do is whine about a couple of little words on them. Niagara Falls.

Joe: But I live here. Nobody wears souvenirs from where they live.

Gran: Well, *you* do, buddy. They're nice, they're good-looking and they're free!

(pause)

Joe: How many Mounties this time?

Gran: You really are a little bastard.

Joe: When are you going to get me some lady Mounties?

Gran: Don't get fresh. Here. *(She takes two Mountie dolls out of her bags.)*

Joe: All these Mounties are going to make Mom very nervous.

Gran: Shut up. I saved the best for last.

Joe: Free coupons for the Maid of the Mist.

Gran: No! Close your eyes.

Joe: Again?

Gran: This is something really, really different.

(Joe closes his eyes. Gran clears her throat. He covers his eyes with his hands. Gran takes out three tee-shirts, a sweatshirt, a miniature Statue of Liberty, and a miniature Empire State Building.)

Gran: You ready? I hope you got a good heart! Open your eyes.

(Joe looks and is shocked.)

Joe: But...it's...from...

Gran: New York City!

Joe: Holy shit!

Gran: Don't swear.

Joe: How did you-

Gran: Two whole boxes got shipped to us by mistake. I lifted a few things.

Joe: But if they find out.....

Gran: It's o.k. Murray's gonna tell them the box got to us damaged.

Joe: They're great. I really like the black one. Are you sure it's o.k.?

Gran: Don't be such a worry-wart. Let me see if they fit. Try one on. *(Joe takes off his shirt and picks up the black tee-shirt.)* What is it with you and black? You like to look like you're dressed for a funeral? It's a little big on you.

Joe: Naw. It's perfect.

Gran: Well, I thought you'd get a kick out of the black one so that was for you. Personally, I like to see you in something bright - brings out the color in your face. I don't see why you wanna look like one of those beatniks anyway. Try the red one on. *(He takes off the shirt.)*

Joe: Beatniks aren't around anymore, Gran.

Gran: Well, then like those punkers.

Joe: Whadda ya think?

Gran: That's better. Take it off so you don't get it dirty right off the bat. *(Joe takes off the sweatshirt while Gran folds the rest of the clothes up and gathers up the souvenirs.)* Get your shirt back on and put this stuff away....And that doesn't mean just throwing them on your bed! *(Joe takes everything to his room. Gran exits to the kitchen.)*

Gran *(be/lowing from offstage)*: Did you have practice today?

Joe *(yelling from offstage)*: Yeah.

Gran: What?

Joe: I said yeah. *(Gran comes back.)*

Gran: How many times do I have to tell you not to holler at me from upstairs?

Joe (*comes to the top of the stairs:*) You told me to put that stuff away.

Gran: How'd it go?

Joe: What?

Gran: The practice!

Joe: The same. It's gonna be rough this year.

Gran: How come?

Joe: Seniors aren't as good as last year.

Gran: They giving you a hard time?

Joe: Who? (*Joe comes down the stairs and sits on the steps.*)

Gran: The seniors!

Joe: Naw. Seniors always give the first-year kids a hard time. It's different this year. They stopped bothering me since the playoffs.

Gran: Come on. Nobody likes it when a little kid plays the be-jeesus out of bigger ones.

Joe: I'm not that good.

Gran: Oh, yes, you are. Proudest moment of my life watching those playoffs last year. (*The doorbell rings.*)

Joe: I bet people could hear you screaming in Timbuctu.

(*Gran goes to the door. She looks to see who's there.*)

Gran: Oh lord. (*She opens the door and Howy eagerly bursts in. Gran ignores him.*)

Howy: Hello everybody!

Joe: Hey, Howy!

Howy: I can fix your walkman!

Gran: Hallelujah!

Joe: Really?

Howy: I have the answer!

Joe (laughing): I never told you It was broken.

Howy: Uncle Murray told me.

Gran: Why didn't you tell me your walkman was broken? I would have gotten It fixed for you.

Joe: I don't know. I guess I forgot.

Gran: Seems to me like Murray knows a lot more about what goes on around here than I do.

Joe: It's no big deal, Gran.

Howy (*over-enthusiastically*): I'd be very happy to fix it. Why don't you go get it, Joe, and I'll show you what to do the next time It gets stuck like that.

Joe: Great. (*Gran gives Joe a look. Joe shrugs.*)

Howy: It's just the batteries. See? (*He pulls a little bag out of his coat*) If the batteries are worn-out, the head can jam and that's why you couldn't get the tape out. All you need is to put new batteries in and the tape will come out good as new and you're all set.

G-ran: Howy, you're a genius.

Howy: Thanks. Now let's see if I'm right. (*He waits for Joe to get the walkman but neither Joe or Gran move. They just look at him. After an uncomfortable pause:*) Urn, could you get the walkman, please?

Joe: Oh....Yeah. (*Joe gets up and goes upstairs. Pause.*)

Howy: You people really do up Christmas great! And for such a long time! (*Another Pause*) Any news from Denise lately?

Gran: No. You?

Howy: Well, I uh...talked to her.

Gran: She called you? (*Gran looks sharply at Howy. He looks away.*)

Howy: Yeah . . . you know. She's still hoping . . . it'll be soon.

Gran: Nothing else?

Howy: No.

Gran: If I'm going to get out tonight, I'd better see to dinner.

Howy: It smells delicious.

Gran: So far it's only water boiling. (*Gran heads over to the kitchen.*)

Howy: Oh . . . What are you making?

Gran: Just a box of Kraft dinner. One little box.

Howy: Oh, no, I can't stay ... A little slow in the shop today, eh?

Gran: It's always a little slow after Christmas.

Howy: It's a good time for clocks and watches though. I'm up to my neck in 'em. Almost seems like they all break at Christmas. Lucky for me. Yep. I can't complain.

Gran: What about all that other stuff?

Howy: The antiques aren't moving now but that's more a summer thing.

G-ran: Seems like they're moving right into my souvenirs.

Howy: They sure take up space, don't they? Winter's a good time for deals in the antique business. I'm going to make a pretty penny on those tables. Anyway, never bring the shop home, right?

Gran: I didn't bring you home.

Howy: No, I meant -

Gran: Yeah, look Howy, this is my Bingo night so we -

Howy: Oh, I know, I'll *only* be a few minutes. (*Joe re-enters at the top of the stairs.*) Uncle Murray told me that this was your Bingo night and that he would . . .

Joe (interrupting quickly): I got it, Howy! (He races down the stairs.) You really think

I can fix it myself? (*Gran looks at this sudden enthusiasm suspicious/y but Howy is visibly pleased.*)

Howy: Absolutely.

Gran: You got about ten minutes. And I want the table set, Joseph.

Howy: I'll be out of here in a couple of minutes, Mrs. Reilly. I promise. I'll be history.

Gran: You and Moses. God's gift to the Jews.

(*She shakes her head and exits.*)

Howy: She's got a great sense of humour.

Joe: You almost told her.

Howy: What?

Joe: About Murray.

Howy: it's a secret? Why?

Joe: If Gran knew Murray was coming over, she'd kill me. Here.

Howy: I'm sorry. I've got such a big-

Joe: It's o.k. I caught cha In time....So how do I fix the walkman?

Howy: This is all you do. (*Howy takes out the old batteries. He puts in the new ones.*) Now you just press Play again. Stop. Eject. See? The tape comes right out. It's all fixed.

Joe: Thanks.

Howy (*ruffles Joe's hair*): Don't mention it. See you. (*Calls out*) Good-bye, Mrs. Reilly. Good luck tonight. (*Gran comes to the door.*)

Gran: Thank you, Howy. (*He accidentally knocks the coats off the hooks.*) It's o.k. I'll get them.

Howy: Take care. (*She opens the iron door for him.*) Cold out, Isn't it?. (*He exits.*)

Gran (*closing the door*): Hope he freezes to death.

Joe: That's not nice, Gran.

Gran: I hate the way he comes around here sucking up to me...and to you.

(They start picking up the coats, hats, etc.)

Joe: Howy's o.k. *(pause)*

Gran: He's Murray's stool pigeon.

Joe: Howy's a pigeon?

Gran: No, I mean he spies on me for Murray. He's always checking up on me.

Joe *(laughs)*: Right. He'd make a great spy.

Gran: What's so funny?

Joe: I can just see him in a trench coat and sunglasses.

Gran: Your mother called him today.

Joe: She did?

Gran: She called me too, at the shop.

Joe: Shit. How come she never calls when I'm around?

Gran: Don't swear. it was the only time she could call. She can't use the phone whenever she wants to, you know.

Joe: Yeah. *(pause)* What did she say?

Gran: She sent her love. I told her you sent yours.

Joe: Like always.

Gran: And she said....she may hear from the Parole Board tomorrow.

Joe: Like always.

Gran: Yeah, I know.

Joe: You going out to see her this weekend?

Gran: Maybe.

Joe: I want to go. (Gran *stops what she is doing and stares at him.*) I mean it, Gran.

Gran: How many times do I have to tell you -

Joe (*imitating Gran*): Prison is no place for children . . . I'm not a baby anymore. This is my second year of high school.

Gran: No.

Joe: I'm not going to go out and rob banks just 'cause I went to see Dinny once.

Gran: Get washed up. It's almost ready. And I don't like to fight when I'm cooking.

Joe: Kraft dinner isn't cooking.

Gran: The answer is no. It will always be no.

Joe: Why? Can't you just for once tell me why?

Gran: Because I'm your grandmother and this is my house and I said so. That's all you need to know.

Joe: That was o.k. when I was a baby. But it's different now. I'm no screw-up and you know it. I do everything you tell me to. I clean up. I do stuff for you. You keep telling me how great I am. I just want to see my mother, o.k.? All I want to know is why you won't let me. (Pause.)

Gran: Because.

Joe: Oh, come on, Gran.

Gran: All right! (Pause.) It's not going to sound like a big thing to you.

Joe: O.k.

Gran: Maybe when you're older you'll understand. Joe - geez. No, I mean it. Listen. I thought of this a lot when Denise went in. And I talked with her about it. She didn't agree with me at first.

Joe: About what?

Gran: You're gonna think it's silly.

Joe: You want me to put my hands over my eyes? Is this gonna be some kind of big surprise?

Gran: No, you brat. Just listen!

Joe: So?

Gran: I didn't want you growing up with this memory of visiting your mother in jail.

Joe: What?

Gran: A kid shouldn't see his mother in jail. It's something that stays with you-

Joe: That's it?

Gran: I knew you wouldn't understand.

Joe: But that's crazy.

Gran: What did you just say?

Joe: No, it's-

Gran: Listen, you little bastard, I didn't want you to have to know what it's like to have a mother in jail. If she wasn't here, well, it was like she was on a trip or something. You didn't have to see her cry when you'd leave. And she wouldn't have given a damn for the way you might feel. She'd just put on some great big act. She does it for me and I wasn't going to let her do it to you.

Joe: I know what she's like.

Gran: Yeah? Well, I know what you're like too. It would have cut you up.

Joe: No, it wouldn't. I'm telling you. I'm older now.

Gran: You're still a kid.

Joe: Bullshit! I am not a baby.

Gran: I can still take you over my knee.

Joe: Try it. Come on, Gran. *(pause. Joe takes a defensive stance.)*

Gran: **You** little bastard.

Joe: I want to see Dinny.

Gran: I'll think about it.

Joe: I know what that means.

Gran: That's enough! Set the table. *(When Joe crosses in front of Gran, she stops him.)* So you're all grown up now? Huh? *(no answer. She tickles him.)* Huh?

Joe: Cut it out....Stop.

Gran: Are you?

Joe: Gran!

Gran: Get in there! *(She pushes him toward the kitchen. They exit. The lights dim.)*

Scene II

(As in the beginning, the stage is only illuminated by the Christmas lights. The doorbell rings. Joe comes in from the kitchen, carrying a bowl of popcorn. He flicks on a light and opens the door. Murray enters, carrying a big black box. He puts the box down, goes back out, re-enters carrying a tool box. He exaggerates sneaking in.)

Murray: Is the coast clear?

Joe: Murray!

Murray: Is she gone?

Joe: Yeah. Bingo started at seven.

Murray: You didn't call me so I assumed we were on for tonight. *(He takes off his boots at the door and hangs his coat up.)*

Joe: Howy almost killed it.

Murray: Howy was here?

Joe: Yeah.

Murray: Good. Did he fix your tape machine?

Joe: Yeah. You want some popcorn?

Murray: You realize that I'm not allowed to have popcorn. *(He takes a handful.)*

Joe: No good for you, eh?

Murray: That's right. It's like Vera always used to say. Go to a doctor with one thing wrong with you, he'll find three. And the things they make you give up!

Joe: Popcorn.

Murray: Only the beginning.

Joe: Sex?

Murray: No, that's exercise. That's o.k. . . . I brought you some chips. *(Takes it out of a bag.)* And some dip. *(Takes that out too.)*

Joe: Great.

Murray: Oh my God. (Goes over *to the shelves dumbfounded Starts to laugh.*)

Joe: What?

Murray: What? I'm having a heart attack. Your grandmother's got half the store here. Look at this. The donkeys, the elephants. My God!

Joe: Come on, Murray, you know she's always taking something.

Murray: But such an accumulation? She's got enough here to put me out of business. (*Starts to laugh again.*)

Joe: Now what's so funny.

Murray: She even took the porcelain sombreros.

Joe: So?

Murray: Who buys sombreros in Niagara Falls? I bought them as a joke.

Joe: Careful. She really likes 'em.

Murray: Sombreros, for God's sake. What time does the game start?

Joe: 8:30.

Murray: We got some time yet. . . . So, what's new?

Joe: Nothing much. I had a practice after school. Howy came over. That's it.

Murray: Did Lucille drop dead when she saw Howy on her doorstep?

Joe: Just a slight heart attack. Why does she hate him so much?

Murray: Because she's a lousy (*He uses the Yidkish pronunciation with the accent on the last syllable pronounced sem-IT.*) anti-Semite. You should pardon me for talking like that about your grandmother.

Joe: I don't know. She thinks Howy'll rat on her if she screws up at the store. 'Course it could be because Dinny likes him which is weird. He's not the kind of guy Dinny usually likes.

Murray: Why?

Joe: 'Cause he's kind of a nerd. (*apologetically*) He's a nice nerd.

Murray: Not like those other tough guys she went out with.

Joe: They were creeps. Howy's too much of a wimp to be a creep.

Murray: You got a name for everybody.

Joe: I can't help it if she always goes out with losers.

Murray: Howy is **not** a loser.

Joe: I didn't mean him. I think he's o.k.

Murray: Has he been to see your mother lately?

Joe: How should I know? I don't get to see her . . . If I can't visit her, why should he?

Murray: I think he's in love with her.

Joe: Oh my God.

Murray: Love works in mysterious ways.

Joe: Isn't that supposed to be the Lord? Gran always says that.

Murray: Well ... love too.

Joe: Dinny never says anything about him in her letters.

Murray: What's she going to say to you?

Joe: We used to talk. I used to tell her which guy I liked and which I didn't.

Murray: I rest my case.

Joe: What time is it?

Murray: Quarter after. (Murray goes over to the knickknack shelf with a bag and elaborately sneaks a figurine out.)

Joe: What are you doing?

Murray: Eh? It fits right in, she might as well have it all. (another figurine)

Joe (laughs): You brought that for Gran.

Murray: Why not?

Joe: She'd take it from you anyway.

Murray: Don't get the wrong impression, she doesn't ... take things. I let her have them.

Joe: Why?

Murray: Well ... I figure she's unlucky at Bingo - she should get something. Everybody needs a little surprise in life ... like my store and the Haunted House. Even Howy's antiques.

Joe: I don't get it.

Murray: Little surprises everywhere. That's the way I like it. That's what brings the tourists to Niagara Falls.

Joe: I thought they just came to see the Falls.

Murray: You can only look at them for so long. No! It's all the things to discover. That's what holds them here...That's what made me decide to stay here when I first came with Vera.

Joe: I thought you were from Niagara Falls.

Murray: Me? No! I'm a big-city boy! I grew up in Toronto.

Joe: Really?

Murray: That's right. Vera and I came here on our honeymoon.

Joe: How did you wind up opening a store?

Murray: Uncle Moishe.

Joe: Who?

Murray: May he rest in peace. Vera had an Uncle Moishe who ran a honeymoon hotel. He wasn't married. He had lots of money and he adored Vera. When he died, he left her everything.

Joe: wow.

Murray: That's what I thought too. Wow.

Joe: What happened to the hotel?

Murray: We sold it. It was too much for Vera and me. We opened the shop and then the Haunted House and lived happily ever after. More or less.

Joe: Which hotel was yours?

Murray: It's long gone now. *(Pause. Murray goes back to the knickknacks. After a moment, he picks one up.)* Boy, it didn't take her long. These only came in day before yesterday. *(He puts it back and looks at the tree.)* This house is amazing. Eternal Christmas.

Joe: We're gonna take it all down soon. We were just waiting for Dinny.

Murray: Maybe you should hold on a little while longer.

Joe: Why? She won't get out for another six months.

Murray: What makes you say that?

Joe: She keeps telling Gran she's getting out and then she doesn't.

(Murray *sighs*.)

Joe: What?

Murray: Never mind. Your mother always loved this guy. (pats *the Elvis bust*)

Joe: Elvis?

Murray: Yeah. I couldn't sell it for anything so when Lucille . . .

Joe: Took it.

Murray: No. No, I told you, I let her have it.

Joe: Right.

Murray: It made a nice present for Denise.

Joe: I don't think so. I mean she didn't take it with her. You know what?

Murray: What?

Joe: Gran really likes it. She thinks it's one of her best pieces.

Murray: Really? Good for her. She's got very good taste, your grandmother.

Joe: You don't care that Gran takes this stuff?

Murray: Not really.

Joe: I guess you can afford it.

Murray: What?

Joe: Gran says you're rich.

Murray: Your grandmother thinks everybody's rich but her. (pause)

Joe: What's in the box?

Murray: This stupid skeleton. (He *pulls the head up.*) I don't know if it's the spring or it needs oil or what but it's busted and if I don't figure out what's wrong with it then, my god, I'm going to smash every bone in this skeleton's body.

Joe: It's just a skull.

Murray: No, it's a challenge. Want to help me?

Joe: No. I don't like fixing things.

Murray: Basketball isn't everything.

Joe: Yes, it is.

Murray: Just 'cause you're good at it. Your grandmother's got you brainwashed.

Joe: I am not! I even had a fight with Gran today.

Murray: Congratulations. Did you apologize?

Joe: I'm not sorry.

Murray: You should be.

Joe: How do you know? You don't even know what the fight was about.

Murray: I fight with her all the time. And I always say I'm sorry. It works very well....
What did you fight about?

Joe: She won't let me visit Dinny.

Murray: Be patient. You'll see your mother sooner than you think.

Joe: Come on, Murray. What's the big deal? if Dinny were in the hospital, I bet Gran would let me go see her.

Murray: A jail is no place for children.

Joe: You sound just like her.

Murray: God forbid.

Joe: You do

Murray: She's right. 'It's a miracle. I agree with her.

Joe: But I'm not a kid anymore.

Murray: Have you been Bar-Mitzvahed?

Joe: Murray, I'm Catholic.

Murray: Doesn't matter. Catholics are forced to be children longer because they don't have a Bar-Mitzvah.

Joe: Ha-ha. We get confirmed.

Murray: Not good enough. I'm sorry. You'll have to wait for adulthood like any other good Catholic....Anyway, if you were a real man, you'd fix this for me.

Joe: I got a better idea.

Murray: What?

(Joe pulls the skull out of the box and looks at it.)

Joe: This thing Isn't very scary. See? I could quit school and do this all day.

(He ducks behind the sofa and comes up doing a scary face. He turns and looks at Murray.)

Murray: You'd get sore knees. Stay in school.

Joe: What are you gonna do about the skull?

Murray: Give it to you....or throw it out....or get Howy to fix it.

Joe: Maybe it needs new batteries. Howy's great at changing batteries.

Murray: Why didn't I think of that?

(Joe does a Frankenstein imitation and speaks in a spooky voice.)

Joe: Welcome to Murray's House of Horrors for Senior Citizens. Nothing works and no one gets scared. A pleasant walk without risk of heart attack awaits you *(He laughs a spooky laugh.)* Ooo-ha-ha-ha-ha.

Murray: Very funny.

(They hear the key turn in the door. They both whip around to look. Gran enters, slams the door, sees Murray and is shocked.)

Gran: That's it! I'm finished with that goddamned, no-good.....Murray!

(Murray recovers his composure quickly and acts delighted to see her.)

Murray: Lucille! Here. Let me take your coat.

(He helps her take her overcoat off. Gran, dumbfounded, lets him.)

Gran: Murray?

Murray: Yes?

Gran: What the hell are you doing here?

Murray: Visiting. You've got a beautiful house, Lucille...And so decorated! I feel very much at home here. It's like being....where? *(pause)* In Santa's workshop.

(Gran immediately becomes self-conscious about the many items she has taken from Murray's store.)

Gran: You like it?

Murray: Absolutely! What's the matter?

Gran: Nothing. I'm just....

Murray: Surprised to see me here?

Gran: No kidding!

Murray: You know how it is. I was on my way home. I knew tonight was your bingo night. I thought I'd check in on little Joseph here.

Gran *(to Joe)*: I knew you had something up your sleeve!

Joe: What?

Gran: You two had this all cooked up! What's going on?

Murray *(to Joe)*: You see how much trouble you got me into, kid?

Joe: Murray!

Murray: Your grandson is a lousy co-conspirator. (to Joe) We'll have to confess.

Joe: Confess what?

Murray: Lucille, he invited me over.

Gran: For what?

Murray: To visit. What do you mean, for what?

Gran: Since when are you one of his "little playmates."

Murray: Surrogate grandfather, more like it.

Gran: My ass! What's going on?

Murray: Nothing. That's the God's honest truth, Lucille. We were just going to talk and maybe watch the game.

Gran: Oh yeah? Who's playing?

Murray: New York and Boston.

Gran: Where's the TV page?

(Joe gets it and hands it to her. She looks and throws it down.)

Joe: See?

Gran: Watch your mouth! How come you didn't tell me?

(Joe and Murray look at each other.)

Murray: Makes it more fun when it's a secret.

Gran: You're an interfering old coot, you know that! Don't I see you enough at the shop?

Murray: Who could see enough of you, Lucille?

Gran: Don't you try that on me!

Joe: How come **you're** home so early?

Gran: That lousy Shirley Nelson! She's got a voice like a fire engine! So help me God, I yelled Bingo ahead of her and that asshole said he never heard me!

Joe: Not again!

Gran: That guy just has it in for me.

Joe: The guy's a creep.

Gran: You said it! I'm taking my money somewhere else.

Murray: Good for you!

Gran: There's other Bingo's in Niagara Falls.

Joe: That's for sure.

Gran: Shut up. You're just sucking up 'cause you're in trouble and you know it! (to Murray) And he's learning that from your oily nephew...You want a cup of coffee?

Murray: You got any tea?

Gran: Sure. A cup of tea, then.

Murray: If I drink coffee now, I'll be up all night.

Gran: I don't have that problem. You know why?

Murray: Why?

Gran (*with great emphasis*): Because I sleep the sleep of the just. (*Murray shrugs*)

Murray: And I sleep the sleep of someone who can't take too much caffeine.

Gran (to Joe): Did you finish **all** of that homework that you had so much of?

Joe: Most of it.

Gran: Go.

Joe (*looking at Murray*): What about the game?

Murray: Quit while you're ahead, Joe.

Gran: Scoot!

(**Joe** goes upstairs glad to have gotten off so easy.)

Gran: I'll go put the water on. (*Gran exits to the kitchen. Murray walks around the room. He picks up a statuette, examines it and smiles. Gran comes back in, sees him looking at the statuette.*) Remember when you gave that to me?

Murray: I've given you lots of stuff. Refresh my memory.

Gran: What's that supposed to mean?

Murray: Nothing. I have a bad memory. (They **look at each other.**)

Gran: That Russian fellow brought it back. He said it was chipped.

Murray: I don't see a chip.

Gran: That's what I said. He thought that fold on the dress there was a chip. You let me have it just 'cause I said I liked it.

Murray: That's an old Israeli custom. If someone says they like something, you give it to them.

Gran: In that case, I could get the whole store.

Murray: You would never take such advantage. (*An uncomfortable pause*) Joe is a good boy, Lucille. Don't be mad at him for having me over to watch the game.

Gran: You think I'm too tough on him, don't you?

Murray: A little...and only sometimes. But, in general, I think he does well with you.

Gran: I don't understand it. I'm no different with him than I was with her. And yet...

Murray: Denise is Denise and Joe is Joe. My kids were as different as day and night too.

Gran: But none of your children wound up in jail.

Murray: I thank god for that. And I knock wood. They're o.k.

Gran: You don't see much of them.

Murray: They're busy. I'm busy.

Gran: It shouldn't be that way.

Murray: We're living in a different world than when we grew up, Lucille.

Gran: And it's not a damn bit better.

Murray: I don't know ...

(Howy appears at the window of the door. Gran and Murray do not see him. He tries to get Murray's attention without getting Gran's but it's a lost cause.)

Gran: Families stayed together.

Murray: They stayed together and very often hated each other's guts.

Gran: who cares? Family is family.

Murray: That's a very Jewish sentiment, Lucille.

Gran: Jewish, my foot! It's the truth.

Murray: Well, I don't think the world is such a terrible place. There's a lot more freedom to do what you want, to be what you want to be -

Gran: It's easy for you to talk. You haven't done so badly for yourself *(Murray finally sees Howy and tries to urge him not to ring the doorbell by shaking his head at him. Howy nods and goes away Murray keeps looking at the window off and on.)* What do you mean, no? Your place is doing great. I should know!

Murray: Come on. You're not doing so bad yourself, for a widow. You've got a nice little house. Your husband must have left you a fair bit.

Gran: My husband? Murray . . . When he walked out, the only thing he left me was a daughter which he was never interested in seeing and -

Murray: But I thought -

Gran: What?

Murray: You told me you were a widow.

Gran: I know what I told you. I'm a widow now.

Murray: This is a night of revelations. . . . **(pause)** How did you manage . . . I mean the house?

Gran: How else? I saved...bit by bit.

Murray: Is the house...

Gran: Paid for? Almost. Though I can barely make the taxes every year.

(Howy appears at the window again and motions frantically at Murray)

Murray: It's not nice to offer a man a cup of tea and try to cajole a raise out of him.

Gran: **Cajole** a raise? You don't scare me with your two-dollar words, Murray.

Murray: I try. It works much better on what's=her-name, that girl that does the supper shift.

Gran: I'm not that stupid.

Murray: Thank God for that. You also happen to be much prettier.

Gran: Get out of here, you old geezer!

Murray: If I don't get a cup of tea soon, I'm going to have to.

Gran: This isn't a fast food joint, you know.

(Gran goes back into the kitchen. Murray rushes to the door and opens it. They talk in stage whispers.)

Murray: You idiot, you didn't tell her.

Howy: Ssssh. I didn't get the chance.

Murray: You should have made one.

Howy: How was I supposed to tell her?

Murray: In plain English. What the hell are you doing here now?

Howy: Denise thought that I should-

Murray: Never mind! You're a wimp, Howard.

Howy: With that old battleax I am. If she finds out that Denise is staying with me, she'll flip.

Murray: You're both stupid! She should have told her mother she was getting out like

a mensch! Why the hell is she hiding out at your place?

Howy: **You know** what Denise is like. Everything's got to be a big surprise.

Murray: But Lucille is supposed to go see her this weekend.

Howy: She's going to -

Murray: I'll make sure of that. Go home and tell Denise to get her tusch over here. Now!

Howy: But she's not home. She's -

Murray: Now! (**He pushes Howy out the door and closes it in his face. Gran enters.**) You're not working this Saturday, right? You're visiting Denise?

Gran: Yeah, She called at the shop today. She sounded all excited.

Murray: Sounds like she's staying at a country club. They let her make long distance calls.

Gran: Sometimes. She says she's going to know when she's coming home this week.

Murray: That's nice.

Gran: Yeah? Well, Joe doesn't believe her . . . and neither do I. She's been going on like this for the last couple of months. She gets our hopes up and then . . . nothing.

Murray: You never know. This could be it.

G-ran: Let me tell *you* something, Murray. Denise really knows how to string people along. That's how she landed in jail in the first place, isn't it? And when she gets out, she's going to go on and on about how she got framed. She never did anything wrong. Because Denise believes herself, all her stories and all her lies. Ask Denise and she'll tell you all those cheques were good. She never touched those credit cards and she never spent a dime of those deposits for tanning sessions at a place that didn't even exist.

Murray: You're right, Lucille. She went too far but why don't you give her a chance? He's not even out yet. Two years in jail has probably changed her.

Gran: I'm her mother. I know her. You got to watch her like a hawk.

Murray: You sound like you're talking about a teenager. Denise is a grown woman.

Gran: She doesn't act like one. She sure doesn't act like a mother. If she had spent more time looking after Joe. . . .oh. never mind. It's not your problem, anyway,

Murray: It's o.k. I don't mind listening. What else have *I got to do?*

(Gran pours the tea.)

Gran: You know, your nephew was running around with Denise for a while.

Murray: I think he mentioned something to that effect.

Gran: Bullshit! You knew all about it, you old liar. Even Joe told me they were seeing each other.

Murray: Your spies are everywhere. So?

Gran: It didn't bother you? Your nephew running around with a....whatchamacallit?

Murray: You mean a shiksa?

Gran: That's it.

Murray: No. Howy's a big boy.

Gran: And it's not like he's your son.

Murray: It wouldn't change a thing.

Gran: Well, I don't like it.

Murray: Why not?

Gran: I'm old-fashioned. Jews should stay with Jews and Catholics with Catholics.

Murray: And never the twain shall meet.

Gran: Right.

Murray: So you never got the chance to tell the little - "hebe" - I think you would say? to stay away from your daughter.

Gran: No. He started seeing her while her case was up and I had other things on my mind.

Murray: I would have thought that you would be glad she was going out with Howy after some of the bums she used to show up at the store with.

Gran: That's not the point.

Murray: Yes. They were Christian bums.

Gran: Don't you get it? She was just going out with him to get to **me**. 'Cause she knew I would -

Murray: And it had nothing to do with the fact that Howy is a nice looking boy who makes a good living.

Gran: If it wasn't for you, he'd be on welfare.

Murray: It's a family business.

Gran: And didn't you say he's planning to move to . . .

Murray: Aha! (*Howy appears at the window again.*)

Gran: What?

Murray: That's it, isn't it? It has nothing to do with Howy being Jewish. You're afraid Denise is going to shack up with Howy and take Joe away.

Gran: To Vancouver. That's what she keeps talking about when I see her. Vancouver. And I know why. It's because of your nephew.

Murray: Relax. Howy's full of hot air himself He's not running off to Vancouver so fast.

Gran: Yeah? Well, neither is she. That kid needs me. I'm the one who makes sure he has a normal life. So you can tell your nephew that -

Murray: No, no. I'm not telling him anything. You tell him. Right now.

Gran: What?

(*Murray makes a beckoning motion with his hand. Gran turns around, gets up and opens the door.*)

Gran: Jesus, Mary and Joseph.

Murray: Not quite. But close.

Howy: Urn, hi, Mrs. Reilly.

Gran: What the hell are you doing here? What's going on tonight? *I go out to play bingo and come home to the Jewish invasion.*

Murray: Come on, Lucille. You can be more hospitable than that....Sit down, Howy. Have some tea.

Gran: I didn't extend him an invitation.

Howy: I'm sorry to come barging in here like this. Without calling or anything. But I really think we have to talk.

Gran: Talk?

Murray: Good opening, Howy.

(Howy gives Murray a dirty look. Murray raises his arms in an elaborate shrug.)

Howy: It's about Denise. Can I sit down? *(He sits at the table with them.)*

Gran: Oh my God. What?

(Murray pours a cup for him.)

Howy: I don't drink tea.

Murray: When in Rome.....try it with milk and sugar. Like these people drink it.

(Murray spoons in sugar and pours milk in. Howy tastes it.)

Howy: This Isn't bad.

Murray: You don't taste it as much as when you have it in a glass with lemon like your grandfather used to drink it.

Gran: I have two Jewish men sitting in my living room drinking tea.

Murray: You've come up in the world.

Gran *(yelling at Howy)*: WHAT ABOUT DENISE? *(Howy jumps. Murray chuckles. Howy looks at Gran and says nothing.)*

Murray: Go on, Howy. She won't bite.

Gran: Like hell.

Howy: Denise called me this week.

Gran: So?

Howy: She asked me to send her some money.

Gran: And did you?

Howy: She really needed it.

Gran: And Denise chalks one more fool up on her list.

Howy: No. You don't understand.

Gran: No. You don't understand.

(Joe **enters.**)

Joe: What's going on? (sees Howy) Hi. You guys having a fight?

Gran: Go back upstairs, Joseph.

Joe: I can't do my homework while you're yelling. You talking about Dinny?

Murray: Yes.

Gran: Shut up, Murray.

Murray (to Joe) : You see how she talks to her boss?

Howy: Maybe it would be better if Joe did go upstairs.

Gran: Don't tell my grandson what to do.

Joe: Yeah. I wanna know what's going on.

Howy: I just thought-

Murray: Why don't you just continue what you were saying, Howy. Denise called you. She asked you for some money. You sent it. Then what?

Howy: That's it.

Murray: What do you mean - that's it?

Gran: You came all the way over here just to tell me that you sent Denise some money?

Howy: No, if you'd just let me finish.

(All at the same time:)

Gran: Talk you idiot. If you've got something to say, say it.

Murray: Are you going to tell her, already?

Joe: Did something happen to Dinny?

Howy: I'M JUST TRYING TO -

(Something hits the kitchen door with a loud thwack.)

G-ran: What the hell was that?

Joe: It came from outside. *(Joe gets up and opens the door. A basketball rolls in. Denise peeks her head out.)*

Denise: SURPRISE!

Joe: DINNY!

*(They hug. Denise brings in a huge gift-wrapped box. **She** plunks it down and throws off **her** coat. Underneath, she is wearing a tight-fitting revealing outfit She throws out her arms dramatically. Gran stares at her for a moment.)*

Gran: *(in quiet disbelief)* Oh my God! Denise.

Denise: Here I am, Mom! I'm back, I'm out and I'm FREE! WHOO-HOO!

(Denise hugs Gran who reluctantly hugs her back.)

Murray: (to Howy): Now, that's **nice!** Let's get out of here.

(Denise sees Howy and Murray leaving.)

Denise: Hey! Where are you two going? Get back here. (To Howy) You done good. *(She goes over to Howy and gives him a prolonged kiss.)*

Joe: Yuck! Dinny!

Denise: (looking around) Were you guys having a party without me?

Joe: Naw. They were just fighting about **you**.

Denise: Really!

G-ran: Not now, Denise! When did you get out? Why didn't you call?

(Murray rushes in and embraces Denise.)

Murray: Welcome home, Denise.

Denise: You're an old smoothie, Murray. *(Turns to Joe.)* Holy shit, Joey! You're a ticking skyscraper now.

Gran: Watch your language, Denise.

Denise: Look at him, Mom. He's a man . . . And I treat my men well. Hold on, baby 'cause this is for you. *(She goes to the door and brings in a wrapped present.)* Open it!

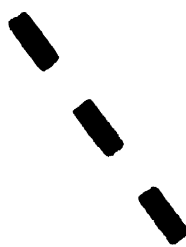
(Joe rips open the package.)

Joe: Wow! A CD player.

Denise: All right! *(She turns it on and the music blares. Then she pulls a bottle from her purse.)* Champagne for everyone!

(Gran moves downstage, away from the others. Blackout.)

End of Act One



Act II

Gran's living room a few days later. Everything looks the same except now there are presents under the Christmas tree. Denise, all dressed up, enters with a tray of snacks, singing "Hark the Herald Angels Sing." She goes to put the tray on the coffee table and finds it covered with the usual statuettes. She puts the tray on the floor and tries to find an empty space on the shelves to put the "stuff," It isn't easy. She rearranges the shelves. Gran enters.

Gran: What are you doing?

Denise: Making room.

Gran: There's no room on those shelves.

Denise: Mom, there's no room anywhere. When are you going to get rid of some of this stuff?

Gran: Christmas got held over this year.

Denise: No. I mean the rest of this crap.

Gran: That's my crap if you don't mind and it's not crap.

(Denise finally manages to squeeze the statuettes in between the other knickknacks on the shelf.)

Denise: That'll be o.k...for tonight at least. You know, the tourists don't even buy this stuff.

Gran: Denise, you've never been able to think long-term. Someday, this is going to be valuable memorabilia. People will be hunting these down as collector's items in antique stores. I'm leaving you and Joe a legacy.

Denise: Some legacy. Just make sure I get the house.

Gran: Don't kick me off so soon. *(looking at the tray)* You've sure gone to a lot of trouble.

Denise: Hey. It's Christmas.

Gran: Not to the rest of the world, it isn't

Denise: Who cares? It's our Christmas.

Gran: Our Christmas? Then why the hell did you invite **them?** I thought we were going to do it like we always do. Just us. Family.

Denise: They're almost like family.

Gran: Don't scare me like that.

Denise: Howy's helped me a lot.

Gran: You know when you're on to a good thing.

Denise: Aw, he's sweet. So's Murray.

Gran: They're Jewish!

Denise: You're too prejudiced.

Gran: Howy's not stupid, Denise. You can only get so many stereos and bottles of champagne out of him.

Denise: He's a generous guy. Don't you think that's a good thing in a man?

Gran: Never mind, me! Tell me right out. You're not going to marry the guy, are you?

(Denise laughs.)

Denise: Howy? He's awfully good to me.

Gran: I'll kill you.

Denise: It's not like he'd get Joe circumcised or anything.

Gran: It's not a joke, Denise.

Denise: He hasn't asked me....yet.

Gran: What if he did?

Denise: Guess I'd think about it.

Gran: What does that mean?

Denise: That I'd think about it...Tell you what. I promise I won't elope.

Gran: Nowadays people don't even bother. Who needs a priest when you can just

shack up?

Denise: When I get married it's gonna be one fuck of a party.

Gran: Your mouth, Denise.

Denise: Yeah.

Gran: Just as long as you don't drag me to a Jewish wedding.

Denise: Don't worry.

Gran: That's a relief, anyway. Now all I have to do is get through tonight.

Denise: it'll be fun.

Gran: For you, maybe. Murray makes me nervous.

Denise: Just forget he's your boss.

Gran: How can I?

Denise: I think he likes you.

Gran: Get out of here.

Denise: I think you and Murray would make a good couple.

Gran: Bite your tongue.

Denise: He's loaded.

Gran: Denise, you are a royal pain in the ass and if you don't stop trying to piss me off, I'm going to---

Denise: O.k. O.k. I'm just kidding.

(Joe enters at the top of the stairs.)

Gran: You don't know when to stop. *(pause)*

Denise: Maybe we should put on some Christmas music.

Joe: if you put on Bing Crosby, I'm leaving.

Denise: You always used to like him when you were little.

Joe (*coming downstairs*): Gran played that album fifty times last month.

Gran: I did not.

Joe: Did too.

Denise: Forget it.

Joe: Thanks.

Gran: I thought you wanted this to be just like Christmas.

Denise: it'll be Christmas without Bing.

Joe: Yeah. No Bing.

Gran: I don't care. it isn't really Christmas anyway. it's more like (Mispronounces it) Ha-ny -ka.

Denise: Come on, Mom.

Joe: Yeah, Gran. You're gonna be nice, right?

Gran: A regular peach. I'm getting dressed now.

Denise: O.k.

Gran: You're not gonna come banging on the bathroom door?

Denise: No. I'm ail done. Put on something nice now.

Gran: My bailgown's at the cleaners.

(Gran goes upstairs and exits)

Joe: She's not really mad.

Denise: Naw. Same old grumpiness.

Joe: Yeah.

Denise: I feel like I've hardly seen you.

Joe: Cause Howy's always around you.

Denise: He's just helping me move my stuff. (pause)

Joe: You were kidding around, right?

Denise: About what?

Joe: About Howy.

Denise: What?

Joe: With Gran.

Denise: Boy! You've got big ears.

Joe: No, I don't. You gonna marry him?

Denise: W-e-e-ll, He's got a great house which would have plenty of room for us. And Murray'll probably give him the business some day so he'll always have bucks, but...you think I should marry him?

Joe: I don't know...He's nice....but I can't picture him as my father.

Denise: O.k. Forget it.

Joe: You're not going to?

Denise: You told me not to.

Joe: You're kidding.

Denise: No, I'm not. I got some other ideas up my sleeve, anyway.

Joe: Like what?

Denise: Can you keep a secret?

Joe: Sure.

Denise: You promise not to tell Gran?

Joe: I swear. What?

Denise: I'm thinking of getting out of Niagara Falls.

Joe: What? (pause) With Howy?

Denise: No! With you, creepoia!

Joe: Wow.

Denise: What's the matter?

Joe: Where would we go?

Denise: Toronto. *(She pulls him over to the couch and sits with him.)* You remember Tom Evans and Chuckie Marino?

Joe: Which ones were they?

Denise: They worked at the big garage on Stanley.

Joe: No more mechanics, Dinny.

Denise: No! They're not mechanics anymore. They're really loaded now. They've opened up a car lot around Mississauga.

Joe: So?

Denise: They wanna give me a job! How many people get out of the can and walk right into a job? I'm really lucky, Joey.

Joe: But I'm in the middle of school. .

Denise: Schools are probably ten times better there. We'll find you a good school. With a really good basketball team.

Joe: But where would we live?

Denise: That's the beauty of it. Chuckie's a landlord now. He said he's got a really nice apartment for us. He owns his own building.

Joe: How did these guys get so rich being mechanics?

Denise: Sweetheart! That's a question you never ask.

Joe: I don't know-

Denise: it's gonna be so much fun! You'll see.

Joe: Can't we do it when school's over?

Denise: Jobs just don't sit there waiting for people, Joey. This is a chance for me to

start over. For both of us.

Joe: What about Gran?

Denise: What about her?

Joe: Is she gonna come too? *(pause)*

Denise: I don't think so. She likes it here. I know she wouldn't be happy in a big place like Toronto. Anyway, this is a chance for us to be together, like a real family. Nobody else telling us what to do.

Joe: But what if we don't like it there?

Denise: We can always come back...or go somewhere else.

Joe: it just seems weird without Gran.

Denise: You're not gonna tell her, right? You promised.

Joe: Yeah....Does Howy know?

Denise: No, and it's important that you don't tell him either. Real important. Got that?

Joe: O.k...You're not going to do this without me.

Denise: Hey! *(she puts her hand under his chin)* You afraid I'm gonna take off without you? *(Joe tries to look away.)* Listen to me, Joseph Reilly. I am never ever gonna leave you again. The next time we split up, it's cause you're grownup and you want to. I am not going back to jail. I am not getting married and I will never leave you.

Joe: You promise?

Denise: About which part?

Joe: All of it! *(They play fight for a few minutes.)* You promise?

Denise: I promise everything except the not-getting-married part.

Joe: Hey!

Denise: You never know. Some day Mr. Right may come along, even for me.

(Gran's voice is heard from upstairs:)

Gran: You two aren't messing up my living room, are you?

Denise and Joe: No!

Gran: Check the oven, Denise. That pie should be almost done.

Denise: O.K. (To Joe) Remind me when we have our own place that I am not allowed to call the living room "**my** living room." (She *exits to the kitchen. Then yells from offstage.*) I'm taking it out of the oven, Mom. It's done.

Gran: (*Still from offstage*) What?

Joe: She said it's done!

Gran: Tell her to put it on the rack to cool and not to burn my counter.

Joe: Dinny? Gran said - (*The doorbell rings.*)

Denise: I heard her. Get the door.

Joe: Yeah. They're here.

(*Joe goes to the door and lets Murray and Howy in. They enter, **carrying** presents.*)

Murray: Ho, Ho, Ho. Merry Christmas.

Joe: You got anything for me, Santa?

Murray: You'll find out. Take these and put them under the tree.

(*Joe takes the presents from Murray and Howy and puts them under the tree. Howy crosses over to Joe and ruffles his hair.*)

Howy: How's it going there, Joey?

Murray: Howy, he's not a dog.

Joe: O.k.

Howy: You like having your Mom home?

Joe: Yeah.

Howy: I bet your walkman is working great now, right?

Joe: I don't know. I haven't used it. But the stereo Mom gave me is great.

Denise (yelling from the kitchen): Be out in a minute. (She enters.) Hi. (She crosses to Murray and kisses him on the cheek.)

Howy: What about me?

(She kisses him on the cheek us well.)

Denise: You gentlemen want a drink?

Howy: I'll have a beer.

Murray: Me too. *(Murray stops Denise.)* No, no. I'll get it. Come on, Joe. I want to have a sneak preview of what smells so good in the kitchen.

Joe: Right.

Murray: Big mouth. *(Murray pulls Joe by the sleeve to the kitchen.)*

Howy: God, I've missed you. *(He lunges at Denise and gives her an impussioned kiss. Denise pushes him away.)*

Denise: Take it easy.

Howy: When are *you* coming back?

Denise: Howy -

Howy: Tell them.

Denise: What?

Howy: That we're moving in together.

Denise: Tonight? Cool your jets, Howy.

Howy: but when you got out, you said -

Denise: Howy, I got a kid for chrissakes. I can't just move in with you.

Howy: There's room for him.

Denise: Not **yet**.

Howy: You moved all your stuff in when you got out of jail. I thought you were staying.

Denise: I never said I was moving in right away.

Howy: You sure gave me that impression.

Denise: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to.

Howy: I love you, Denise.

Denise: I love you too, Howy. But I just can't move in with you now. I need time. You know? Just give me some more time.

Howy: But you'll think about it.

Denise: Sure, baby. (She kisses *him*. *Howy looks at her adoringly*.) Hey, Mom! Are you hiding up there? We got company!

Gran: I'm coming! Keep your pants on.

Denise: Hear that? Keep your pants on. (*Denise socks Howy in the arm then yells toward the kitchen*.) It doesn't take that long to get two beers out of the fridge.

(*Joe and Murray return from the kitchen with the beer*.)

Joe: Murray was exploring the kitchen.

Denise: Don't let Mom find out.

(*From upstairs, Gran enters all dolled up in a loud dress, big earrings and slightly too much makeup*.)

Gran: Find out what?

Murray: Lucille, you are a vision!

Joe: Wow! Gran, you look great!

Gran: Bull! I'm an old broad and I sure as hell look like one! (*She comes down the stairs. Murray sings the first line to "A Pretty Girl is Like a Melody"*.) Oh, shut up, Murray. (*Joe laughs*.)

Howy: You look really nice, Mrs. Reilly.

Gran: Thanks, Howy. I see everybody's gotten served. Get me a beer, Denise.

Joe: Can I take a Coke, Gran?

Denise: Sure. (Joe *looks at* Gran.)

Gran: Go ahead.

Denise: Come on. (Joe *and Denise exit. Pause.*)

Murray: So...

Howy: So...I think this is such a great idea having a special Christmas for Denise.

Gran: It was her idea.

Howy: Oh.

Gran: She was going to soak us for presents no matter what.

Denise (from *offstage*): I heard that.

Howy: Still. It's nice for Joe, isn't it?

Gran: Yeah. More presents for him too.

Murray: You should talk.

Gran: What?

Murray: You're always bringing him stuff home from the shop.

Gran: What about you?

Murray: I'm not ashamed of it. Lucille, there's nothing like celebrations to keep life interesting.

Gran: That's why the Jewish Christmas lasts eight days.

Howy: It isn't really Christmas.

Gran: Thanks for the lesson. How do you pronounce it?

Howy: It's Hanukkah.

Murray: No, actually, it's Chanukkah.

Gran: Sounds likes you got a chicken bone caught in the back of your throat.

Murray: Hebrew is a very guttural language.

Gran: And it can stay in the gutter, for all I care. (Denise and Joe enter. *They hand out drinks.*)

Murray: Thank you. (to *Gran*) What's the matter?

Gran: Nothing.

Joe: Can we open the presents?

Gran: Not yet. Give people a chance to eat something.

Denise: Naw, let's get to the presents.

Gran: O.k. It's your party.

Denise: You open yours first.

Gran: Me?

Murray: Do you think we would forget you?

Gran: You gave me a bonus.

Murray: That was your boss who gave you a bonus.

Gran: So?

Murray: Do I look like your boss, tonight?

Gran: There sure as hell is a striking resemblance.

Murray: I'm disappointed.

Joe: Aw....

Murray (to Joe) : Don't I look more like Prince Charming?

Denise: To me you do.

Murray: You know, Denise, if I was thirty years younger....

Gran: Here he goes again. Just open the presents. (*They all go over to the free.*)

Joe: We're not going to take turns, are we?

Denise: Gran goes first. Go on, Ma.

Murray: Why not do something a little different?

Gran: It figures.

Murray: Lucille, we are not talking about a Marxist-Leninist revolution. We're talking about opening presents.

Gran: We have a tradition in this family.

Joe: Yeah. We all gotta sit nice and quiet while I hand out the gifts. And then, Gran opens her presents, then Dinny, then me.

Howy: That sounds nice.

Murray: Nonsense! Too long to wait. We count to three and then we all hunt down our presents and rip them open.

Denise: That sounds like fun.

Gran: It sounds like animals ripping apart raw meat.

Denise: Why don't we give it a try?

Gran: Denise!

Murray: Doesn't it sound just a little bit appealing?

Joe: Yeah, Gran. It's not like it's really Christmas. This is just a pretend one.

Denise: So it's not sacrilegious or anything.

Gran: What you know about religion, Denise, wouldn't fit on a match cover.

Denise: Look, Mom-

Murray: Wait a minute, wait a minute. I didn't want to start a fight. I just thought we might have a little fun, that's all.

Gran: Are you saying that I don't know how to have fun?

Denise and Joe: Yes.

Gran: Bullshit.

Joe: Don't swear, Gran.

Gran: Shut up...O.k., I'll do it.

Murray: Very generous of you.

Gran: I know. *(Gran and Murray exchange a look.)*

Joe: Who's gonna count to three?

Denise: Go ahead, Joey. *You* do it.

Howy: Wait. I don't remember-

(Everyone else groans.)

Joe: We count to three. You look for your present and open it as fast as you can, right, Murray?

Murray: Right. You got it, Howard?

Howy: I got it. But one thing won't work-

Denise: Forget it. Just go with it.

Murray: His father's the same way.

Joe: You ready?

Everyone else: Yeah!

Joe: O.k. One....two....two-and-a-half *(an elongated pause)*...THREE!!

(Everyone races around the tree, looking for their presents. Howy manages to trip over everyone and get in their way, provoking screams of "watch it!". In the confusion, Gran gets a nightgown from Denise and an expensive bottle of perfume from Murray. Denise gets a loud T-shirt from Gran, a shoulder bag from Joe, a watch from Howy and a coffee maker from Murray. Joe gets a basketball shirt from Denise, a remote-controlled car from Howy and a basketball from Murray, Murray gets a box of cigars from Denise and Howy gets a pair of boxer shorts with hearts from Denise. Once the presents are all opened, they all talk at once, admiring their gifts.)

Gran: This is a beautiful nightgown. Thanks, honey.

Denise: Glad you like it! (crossing to Murray) Murray! You angel! You remembered!

Murray: You should use it in good health. Thanks for the cigars.

Howy: These are some shorts, Denise.

Gran: Murray, you had no right to go out and spend this much money.

Murray: *It's* not every day a daughter comes home.

Joe: Thanks for the ball...Dinny?

Denise (laughing): No, I bought you the shirt.

Murray: The ball's from me.

Joe: And the car....

Howy: From me. You like it?

Joe: Yeah.

Gran (to *Murray*): I didn't get you anything.

Murray: That's o.k.

Gran: I didn't know you were going to buy me something.

Murray: Don't worry about it.

Gran: But you spent so much money...

Murray: Lucille! Cut it out. You're making me feel guilty for buying it, already. You want me to take it back? I'll take it back.

Denise: No, you won't.

Gran: Darn right, he won't.

Denise: Howy, go put on the shorts. I want to see if they fit.

Howy: Denise, it's underwear!

Denise: They're shorts! Model them for us.

Murray: Go ahead, Howard.

Denise: Yeah, Howard. Murray thinks it's o.k. and he's a gentleman.

Murray: Thank you, Denise. (Murray *looks at Gran.*)

G-ran: If Howy wants to make an idiot of himself, it's all right with me.

Howy: You see what I mean, Denise?

Joe:(*chanting over and over again*) Howy! Howy! Howy!

(*Murray and Denise join in. Gran shakes her head*)

Howy: No!

Denise:(*bellowing*) Howy! Stop being such a chicken shit and put on the goddamned shorts.

(*Howy takes the shorts upstairs to the chants of "Howy! Howy!"*)

G-ran: You're not going to think it's so pretty when your son starts using that language.

Denise: Aw, Joey's smart. He only uses it with his friends, right?

G-ran: Well?

Joe: No fair. It's Christmas. Hey, Howy. Let's see the shorts. (*Starts chanting again.*)

Denise: Come on, Howy. Don't be shy.

(*Denise gets up and starts up the stairs at a fast clip. Howy enters awkwardly at the top of the stairs, wearing his shirt, jacket, and the shorts. They all break up laughing. Denise whistles. She goes up and takes Howy by the arm and pulls him halfway down the stairs.*)

Denise: Whoa! Get a load of those legs. Whoo! Hoo! Is this not a manly physique?

Murray: Bravo!

(*Murray claps. Joe joins in. Fianlly, Gran does too. Denise hugs Howy.*)

Joe: All right, Howy!

Howy: Can I put on my clothes now?

(Joe stops applauding and digs in to the food. Murray and Gran follow.)

Denise: Thank you. You've made my Christmas.

Howy: You owe me, Denise.

Denise: Sure.

Howy: I mean - what we were talking about before.

Denise *(quickly)*: O.k. Fun's over. Go get dressed. (She practically pushes him up the stairs. Howy exits. Denise comes back downstairs.) Murray, you're not eating enough. Here. *(Hands him a tray)* How's your beer?

Murray: I'm fine, Denise.

Denise: Here, Joey, don't let this food go to waste.

Gran: Relax, Denise. We can help ourselves. *(looks at her quizzically.)*

Murray: This is very good.

Denise: Thanks. I made it all myself.

Gran: Excuse me?

Denise: Mom made the pie.

Murray: Perhaps you should think about going into catering.

Denise: Wow. You think so?

Murray: I can see you have a real flair.

Denise: Hmm. Catering. I never thought of that.

Murray: You should be thinking about getting a new career.

Denise: I'm working on it, Murray. Don't worry. *(Howy enters.)* I figure now's the time to make some changes.

Howy: I agree with you a hundred per cent. It's a good time to-

Denise: Clean up and you promised to help me.

Howy: I know but-

Denise: That's it for Christmas. Me and Joe'll do the lights and we'll take down the tree last. Howy, you can take Mom's Christmas stuff off the shelves.

Gran: Slow down, Denise. What's the rush?

Denise: Hey, It's no problem, Mom. Relax.

Gran: Just a minute! You two be careful there! Joe, take Howy down into the basement and bring all the boxes up.

Joe: Gran! There's a million of them.

Denise: I'll help. Come on, boys. (They exit to the kitchen.)

(Gran gets a garbage bag, starts gathering wrapping paper and shoving it into the bag.)

Gran: This is going to be a mess.

Murray: That was the fastest Christmas I've ever seen. *(pause)* Why not relax and let them do it?

Gran: 'Cause next year, I won't know where anything is.

Murray: So you're going to supervise the effort.

Gran: I sure am.

(Murray reluctantly and slowly helps Gran pick up the paper.)

Murray: He's crazy about her. Anyone can see that.

Gran: He's crazy period. He should know better.

Murray: Your daughter's a good looking girl. I think it's the first time he's had such an attractive woman pay him so much attention.

Gran: And you think that's wonderful.

Murray: Of course.

Gran: Don't hold your breath.

Murray: What are you going to do - forbid them to get married?

Gran: Are you kidding? Since when can I forbid Denise to do anything? Anyway, that would be the fastest ticket to the wedding.

Murray: What are you going to do?

Gran: It's what **you're** doing that's worrying me.

Murray: I'm not doing anything.

Gran: I've seen Fiddler on the Roof. You're trying to be a matchmaker, what was her name?

Murray: Yente.

Gran: That's it. You wanna be Yente the matchmaker? Find him a Jewish girl.

Murray: I'm not matchmaking. They like each other.

Gran: You're pushing him at Denise.

Murray: I think Denise has been doing a bit of pushing herself.

Gran: What's that supposed to mean?

Murray: Where do you think she went the minute she got out?

Gran: Here. What are you talking about?

Murray: You don't know the whole story.

Gran: You better tell- *(Denise, Joe and Howy enter with boxes.)*

Denise: Mom, we'll be at this ail night.

Howy: No problem. We'll have your home de-Christmased in no time.

(They dump the boxes on the floor.)

Murray: See, Lucille? He has such a positive attitude.

Gran: It sounds like he's disinfecting us for fleas.

Howy: Next load! *(They exit again.)*

Gran: Talk fast, Murray.

Murray: She went to his house first. Days before she came here. She even called you from there.

Gran: That slut!

Murray: Lucille! It's not such a big thing nowadays. She's not a baby.

Gran: My ass! (pause,) You knew she was out of jail?

Murray: Howy mentioned it.

Gran: Why didn't you tell me?

Murray: They begged me not to.

Gran: So why the hell are you telling me this now?

Murray: I want you to be prepared for the inevitable.

Gran: Inevitable, eh? We'll see.

Murray: It's not so terrible. I can make sure that he takes good care of Denise and Joe. I can set him up.

Gran: He wants to go west. He'll take Denise and Joe away.

Murray: I'll make sure he doesn't.

Gran: How can you?

Murray: I'll make him a partner. I'm getting old. The place is getting too much for me. It'll give me a chance to take it easy.

Gran: Why? What's it to you?

Murray: To me? Nothing. It's just right, that's all.

Gran: Denise and Howy are **right**?

Murray: Sure. They'll make a great couple.

Gran: Murray, you've lost your mind.

Murray: You'll see, Lucille, it'll all work out. Everything always does.

Gran: Not this time.

Murray: Don't be so pessimistic.

Gran: You'll see.

Murray: Wanna bet on it?

Gran: Yes.

(Denise, Joe and Howy come up with another load of boxes.)

Denise: O.k. everybody! You know your jobs?

Joe: No.

Denise: Shut up, kid. Eat, drink, and get to work.

Gran: Just a minute. *(She goes to the boxes where there are crumpled up balls of newspaper.)*
Howy, you wrap up the porcelain like this. *(She rolls a statuette in the newspaper. Howy watches attentively. Meanwhile, Denise hands a Joe a box to put the Christmas lights in. Gran spots this.)*
Denise, don't you knot those lights up and be careful with the bulbs.

Denise: I know.

Gran: They break easy.

Denise: Yeah, yeah.

Gran: Don't yeah, yeah me. You'll thank me next year when the lights aren't all tangled up and you're trying to figure out which bulb got smashed.

(Joe looks at Denise when Gran says "next year", Denise shrugs.)

Murray: I myself like the eat and drink part. *(He helps himself to the goodies on the tray and settles down on the couch. Everyone else gets to work.)*

Joe: What about the pie, Gran?

Gran: It'll still be hot.

Murray: What kind of pie?

Gran: Apple.

Murray: I like warm apple pie.

Denise: I'll bring it out.

Gran: Use the good dishes and that nice-

Denise: Mom! *(She goes out to the kitchen.)*

(Joe pulls the lights off the wall by himself.)

Gran: Careful there, Joe.

(Howy goes to take another statuette and knocks the Elvis bust to the floor. It smashes. Howy looks at it helplessly. Gran stares at him in silent fury. Denise races back in.)

Denise: What the hell was that?

Joe *(amused)* : Howy broke Elvis.

Denise: Oh shit....

Howy: I'm sorry. I'm really sorry. I can't believe —

Denise: Aw, don't worry about it. I always thought the thing was pretty tacky anyway.

Gran *(quietly)* : That was one of my best pieces.

Denise: Come on, Mom, there's a million more where that came from.

Gran: Shut up, Denise.

Howy: Mrs. Reilly-

Murray: Lucille, —

Gran: Goddamnit!

Denise: Mom, It was an accident. He didn't mean to break it.

Murray: I'll get you another one. I know the supplier.

Gran: It was discontinued and that was the last one in the shop!

Murray: I'm sure I can get you another-

Gran: That's not the point! I told him to be careful.

Howy: How much was it? I'll pay you for it.

Gran: Isn't that just like a Jew!

Joe: Gran! Denise: Mom!

(pause. Gran looks at Murray.)

Gran: I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that.

(Murray looks at her for a few beats. Then breaks out into a smile.)

Murray: You're a lousy goy, you know that?

Gran: Yeah, well, I'll get the broom. *(She exits.)*

Howy: Murray, I just wanted to—

Murray: Schlameel! Why can't you watch what you're doing?

Howy: God, I'm a klutz.

Denise *(putting her arm around Howy)*: She'll get over it.

Howy: Now she really hates me.

Joe: Hey, she just says that kind of stuff to bug you. She didn't really mean that. Murray and Gran kid about that stuff all the time, right?

(Pause. Howy looks at Denise.)

Howy: Denise, we've got to tell her about us, how it is.

Denise: You think now is the right time? After you smashed her favourite Elvis.... thing?

Murray: She's right. Now is not the time for big confessions.

Howy: I'm tired of this, Denise. I visited you for months at a time, I sent you money, I took you in when you got out—

Joe: What? But I thought you—

Denise (quietly): Howy, shut up.

Howy: I've done my best to be nice to Joe...(Gran enters.) Nice to your mother.
(Gran stops in her tracks.)

Murray: Howard...

Howy: And ail you do is hide me from your family like I'm a...iike I'm...I don't know.

Denise: I said shut up!

Howy: No! For once I'm going to finish what I've got to say! Denise, are you moving in with me or are we finished-

Gran: Listen, you! My daughter may be many things but she's not stupid enough to shack up with a guy who is more of a mouse than a man!

Murray (to Joe) : Oy vey.

Howy: Your daughter came to me first when she got out! What the hell do you think that means, huh?

Gran: I'll tell you what it means. She's using you for everything you're worth and... you're such a sap, you can't even see it.

Denise: if you'd ail **just-**

Gran: She's staying right here with her family, buddy boy, so you can just clear out!

Denise (*yelling*): OH, NO, I'M NOT! For God's sake. What the hell are you two talking about? You think *you're* gonna decide where I live and what I'm doing? I got news for the two of you. in a coupia weeks, Joe and I are out of here.

Gran: What the hell are you talking about?

Denise: I got a job in Toronto.

Howy: What? (*pause*)

Murray: Well, this is news,

Gran: Toronto?

Denise: Yeah, Mom, Toronto. (to *Howy*) And don't start in on me.

(*Howy rushes for his coat and goes to the door.*)

Howy: You are no better than a whore. (He exits.)

(Denise shrugs.)

Denise: I didn't think he had it in him.

Murray: I'm disappointed in you.

Denise: I know how you feel Murray, but -

Murray: You can't explain it away. What you've done isn't nice. *(Looks at Lucille then back at Denise)* And what you're doing to her isn't nice either.

(Murray goes to get his coat and puts it on. Lucille watches him.)

Murray: Thanks for everything, Lucille. I'm sorry.

(He goes to the door, changes his mind and goes over to Lucille and kisses her on the cheek. She squeezes his arm. He exits. Denise roughly takes the broom and dustpan back from Gran and cleans up the broken Elvis. Joe looks at Gran and goes over to her. Awkwardly, he hugs her. She then continues putting away the Christmas decorations.)

Gran: How long have you known about this?

Joe: She just told me tonight before they came over.

(She pats his hand and goes over to Denise.)

Gran: I've found out a lot about you tonight.

Denise: It's my life.

Gran: You've messed it up once before and it cost you two years of your life.

Denise: It's none of your business.

Gran: You're a tramp!

(Denise goes to hit Gran. Joe stops her.)

Denise: Don't say that to me in front of him.

Gran: He's finding out the whole truth about you, isn't he?

Gran: Have you seen the place?

Denise: No **but-**

Gran: Do you know what you're moving into?

Denise: I know Chuck. He wouldn't stick me in a dump.

Gran: I don't believe you, Denise. Don't you want to at least make sure?

Denise: My mind's made up, Mom.

Gran: And what about Joe?

Denise: He's coming with me, right Joey? (They both *look at him.*)

Joe: I guess so.

Gran: What about school?

Denise: Kids transfer into new schools all the time.

Gran: He's happy here. He loves playing on the team and he's getting good marks. What's this going to do to him?

Denise: He'll be all right.

Gran: Just that easy. (pause) He's not going, Denise.

Denise: It's not your decision.

Gran: There's nothing sure about what you're getting yourself into. You wanna mess up your life again? Go ahead. Leave Joe out of it.

Denise: I'm not leaving him again.

Gran: Then find another job.

Denise: I don't want to. I want this job. There's a lot of opportunity in a big city, Mom. I'm sick to death of Niagara Falls. I've got to get out of here or I'll go nuts.

Gran: That's you. Only thinking of yourself.

Denise: And what about you? You just want to hang on to Joey. Ever since he was born you've acted like he was your kid, like I was just his older sister.

Goddamnit! I'm his mother. And he goes with me. And that's all there is to it.

Gran: You're his **mother**? Where the hell have you been then?

Denise: I wasn't on vacation. I was in jail. I didn't want to be there.

Gran: What about before? When you were running around with every low-life in Niagara Falls. Always a date or a party or, God help us, some business to take care of Were you his mother then?

Denise: All right! I know I fucked up! I fucked up royally! But I'm older now. I've changed.

Gran: You haven't changed a bit -

Denise: Give me a chance! Shit! You've been down on me ever since I walked in the door!

Gran: Denise, do you call getting out of jail and shacking up with **Howy** changing?

Denise: I didn't want to come home empty--handed after not seeing Joe for 2 years. I wanted it to be special for Joe and for you.

Gran: Oh, you made it special, all right!

Denise: I know damn well you weren't happy to see me out. For all you cared I could have rotted in the can, just as long as you had Joey here.

Gran: You want me to get out my violin? Denise the unloved child! It always comes back to you, doesn't it?

Denise: Yeah! Maybe it does! But it's different now because, no matter what you think about me, there's fuck-all you can do about it. Joe's coming with me.

Gran: I'll take you to court.

Joe: Can I say something?

Gran: No!

Denise: That's exactly what I mean. No one can ever open their mouth without your permission. Two whole years I was in jail and you wouldn't let me see Joe even once. Just because you wanted to keep him to yourself!

Gran: That's crazy, Denise!

Denise: Damn right it is! But I'm out now and if he wants to come with me, there's nothing you can do to stop him. Nothing. (To Joe) Are you coming with me?

Joe (looking **at Denise**): Do we have to go?

Denise: You want to stay with her? Fine. It's your life, kid. I'm not gonna force you to go. But I'll be damned if I spend the rest of my life working in a fucking souvenir shop, selling crap to tourists.

Joe: I didn't say I wasn't going.

Denise: What **are you** saying?

Joe: I want to be with you, Mom, but . . . I want to stay with Gran too. (He looks **at Gran**.) What if I hate it there?

G-ran: You can always come back here. You know that. But you don't have to go either. Denise, don't drag him off against his will.

Denise: I'm not dragging him. He can stay if he wants. **(Pause)**

G-ran **(to Joe): You** could always go to your mother after. When school's over. (To **Denise**.) At least let him finish out the year.

Denise: No. Once I go I may never see him again.

G-ran: You trust me that little?

Denise: It works both ways, Mom. (Pause.)

Gran: When do you plan on leaving?

Denise: A couple weeks. A month. Depends on how I can get everything together.

Gran: Think about it, Denise.

Denise: I have thought about it.

Gran: Think about it again. Harder this time.

Denise: You're not gonna talk me out of this, Mom. **(Denise looks at Joe.)** You're not gonna talk me out of this either. I'm doing what I want. You can do the same.

Joe: Either way, I don't get what I want.

Denise: Joe, just give me one chance . . . come with me.

Joe: I'll be o.k.

Gran: What if you just wait and finish up this year and then go?

Joe: I think it's better to go with her now.

Gran: Why? *(pause)*

Joe: Because it'd get harder to go if I wait. I'm sorry, Gran. She's my mother. I gotta live with her. It'd be weird not to.

Gran: She may be your mother but she's all screwed up. What if she just takes off and leaves you?

Joe: She promised she wouldn't.

Gran: How can you believe her? Damn it, Joe,! You know what a liar she is!

(Joe just looks at her and shrugs)

Joe: I don't know.... *(pause)*

Gran: You'll take care of yourself?

Joe: Yeah.

Gran: If you need me oh Jesus *(She's starting to cry. Joe hugs her.)*

Joe: Don't cry, Gran. You can come visit us. Just like you used to go visit Dinny.

Gran: I know. But it won't be the same.

Joe: You can come watch my games. If I ever get on another team.

Gran: You better. Don't let that slide, Joseph Reilly.

Joe: I promise.

Gran: I'm getting mushy again, aren't I?

(Gran kisses him and goes over to sit on the sofa. Denise enters with the pie and plates. She starts dishing it out Gran sits on the sofa, staring out..)

Denise: Here we go. *(to Gran)* You want a big piece or a small piece? *(She doesn't answer.)* Mom?

(The lights fade out. A Bing Crosby song begins to play)

Scene ii

(The lights come up and Gran is in the same spot. The Christmas tree is gone. The room is in the same state of clutter. The Bing Crosby song is still playing. She sighs and gets up. She is about to go out to the kitchen when the doorbell rings. She opens the door and it is Murray, carrying a box from a bakery.)

Murray: Don't close the door.

Gran: I wasn't going to.

Murray: Can I come in?

(Gran makes a welcoming motion. Murray comes in and takes his coat and hat off. Gran takes them from him and hangs them up.)

Murray: I brought you a little something.

Gran: A little what?

Murray: Cheesecake.

Gran: Thank you.

Murray: Your welcome.

Gran: Don't you ever phone?

Murray: I hate telephones.

Gran: Because you like to-

Murray: I like to give people pleasant surprises.

Gran: Like cheesecake?

Murray: Exactly.

Gran: You want some now?

Murray: What do you think I bought it for?

Gran: Your doctor would kill you. *(She goes to the kitchen to get dishes and cutlery.)*

Murray: He's killing me, anyway. Life is killing me. You might as well go happy.

Gran (from *offstage*): You want coffee with it?

Murray: Don't bother. I'll just have milk.

Gran: Milk?

Murray: If I drink coffee now -

Gran: Yeah, I know. Who's at the store?

Murray: Howy.

Gran: Again?

Murray: I told him I was desperate.

Gran: He falls for everything, doesn't he?

Murray: The store is good therapy for Howy right now. *(Pause. Gran comes back with a tray. She has two glasses of milk.)* That looks wonderful. You always serve with a flair.

Gran: I got that from Denise. I hate to admit it but I actually feel sorry for Howy. Denise really left her mark on him.

Murray: I told you.

Gran: No. I told you.

Murray: He's convinced he'll never love anyone else.

Gran: Runs in the family.

Murray: What?

Gran: Look at you. It's been ten years since Vera died.

Murray: That's different. I'm an old man. He'll find someone else.

Gran: He's getting a little old for that himself

Murray: It's never too late, Lucille. What about you?

Gran: Eat your cake.

(An awkward pause. They dig into their cake.)

Murray: You hear from Denise?

Gran: Joe called me.

Murray: Yeah. You told me.

Gran: I did?

Murray: Yesterday. Why doesn't Denise call you?

Gran: Joe says she's busy but I think she's hiding something.

Murray: What?

Gran: I don't know. I keep asking to visit but Joe tells me the place isn't ready for company yet.

Murray: Oy vey.

Gran: Oy vey is right. God knows what condition that place was in when they moved in.

Murray: She's got to make her own mistakes, Lucille.

Gran: And what about Joe?

Murray: He'll survive. He likes his new school.

Gran: How do you know?

Murray: You're not the only one with a telephone.

Gran *(amused)*: I thought you hate phones.

Murray: They have their uses. Anyway, he said they have a good coach and a better basketball team. That's all he cares about.

Gran: Yeah. *(pause)*

Murray: I miss him too, you know. I didn't realize how much I had gotten used to him

coming by after school.

Gran: Don't start.

Murray: You should talk about it. Talking is good.

Gran: You would talk the backside of a horse. It's not my way.

Murray: I've been watching you, Lucille. It's not healthy.

Gran: You old....yente.

Murray: You're quiet at work. You don't kvetch anymore. You don't razz me.

Gran: Doesn't that make you happy?

Murray: You don't go out after work. No more Bingo.

Gran: How the hell do you know?

Murray: You never complain about that momza who cheats you at Bingo anymore.

Gran: My work is o.k.?

Murray: That's not what I'm talking about.

Gran: Then it's none of your business.

Murray: As your boss, no. As your friend, yes.

Gran: Who said you were my friend?

Murray: You did.

Gran: When?

Murray: I'm eating cheesecake in your home, aren't I?

Gran: That's only because you're my boss and I can't kick you out.

Murray: Wrong. I'm the best friend you've got.

Gran: Since when?

Murray: In fact, I'm the only friend you've got. And you know why?

Gran: Murray-

Murray: Because for all the time you had Joe, you did nothing for yourself. Everything was Joe, Joe, Joe...with a little Bingo thrown in once a week. That's a life?

Gran: Better than yours. What the hell do you do that's so great? Go to work, go home and watch TV?

Murray: No different from what you're doing now, is it?

Gran: At least I had Joe.

Murray: I don't see him here now. Eventually, all the little birds leave the nest.

Gran: So? I can come home and take it easy now. And by god, it's much cheaper.

Murray: You're lying to me. You hate being alone and you miss him.

Gran: You've got a lot of nerve.

Murray: We call it chutzpah.

Gran: Of course I miss him. He's my grandson.

Murray: What about Denise?

Gran: What do you care? She tap danced all over Howy.

Murray: He asked for it.

Gran: I told you.

Murray: I know you told me. You were right. I was wrong. I should have seen it coming. Happy?

Gran: That's better than the cheesecake.

Murray: I'm so glad. Do you miss Denise or not?

Gran: Yes. I miss Denise. She's a pain in the butt but...you can't be bored around her.

Murray: That's true.

Gran: I'm worried about her. Joe's level-headed but Denise....

Murray: We'll wait and see. Vera always used to say that worry is a river without an end.

Gran: That sounds more like one of yours, Murray.

Murray: Maybe. (pause) You ever miss your husband?

Gran: He wasn't to me what Vera. was to you. In fact, Denise is a real chip off the old block. He liked to drink and have a good time. That's about all he was good for.

Murray: You weren't happy with him?

Gran: The first year was o.k. It was all downhill after that.

Murray: That's too bad.

Gran: Not really. I had Denise and then Joe...working to make a home for them. I had some good years. Even when Denise was in jail. You just learn to get used to the routine. (pause)

Murray: That's it! That's the problem!

Gran: What?

Murray: Lucille, it's time for a change.

Gran: Here we go. I'm too old to change.

Murray: You are not. Anyone can see that.

Gran: What do you suggest? Sky-diving? Going over the Falls in a barrel?

Murray: Something a little less risky, perhaps.

Gran: You're the same way in the store. Every week, you gotta rearrange the displays. You just can't leave well-enough alone and it never makes a difference anyway.

Murray: Of course it does.

Gran: What? What difference? Do you make more money? Are you a millionaire because one week the phony vomit is in the back shelf rather than the front? No.

Murray: That's not the point.

Gran: What is the point? (pause)

Murray (shaking his finger at Gran): Variety is the spice of life.

Gran: Put away the finger, Murray.

Murray: You're not listening to me.

Gran: I never listen to you.

Murray: I know. And I should have fired you for it years ago.

Gran: if it wasn't for me, you'd be broke.

Murray: Don't change the subject. We're talking about you, not me.

Gran: Leave me alone.

Murray: No, I will not. That is not what a friend does in times of need. Listen-

Gran: I don't need you, Murray.

Murray: Ah, ah, ah. Don't interrupt me. Now, you listen to me, Lucille Reilly. I know what you need.

Gran: What? (pause)

Murray: A night on the town. Finish your cake. We're going out.

Gran: Where?

Murray: Somewhere. I don't know. Let's go to the Falls.

Gran: Are you crazy?

Murray: No. We'll go to the Dancing Waters.

Gran: Do you know how many times I've been to-

Murray: The colours are beautiful...Better put on something warm.

Gran: I never said I was going.

Murray: I never gave you a choice. (pause) Dress up nice like you did the last time

I was here.

Gran: All right. So I dress up. We go out and stand in the freezing cold, watch those coloured water fountains piss around while your knee is killing you and my feet are aching. Then what? We go to some cha-cha bar for drinks that cost too much and an accordion player who plays “In the Mood” like a mambo. What are we gonna do there? Dance all night? Drink too much? With your knee and stomach and my feet?

Murray: All right. All right. I should have known I was wasting time on a killjoy like you.

(Pause.)

G-ran: Top Hat is on after the news. (Murray looks *back at her blankly.*) Top Hat! Fred Astaire! Ginger Rogers!

Murray: I know Top Hat! Old people watch Top Hat! Old people watch Top Hat and kvetch about how no one dances like that anymore.

Gran: Sounds more fun than freezing your ass off, doesn't it?

Murray: That's your idea of a change?

Gran: You got it.

Murray: O.k. You win. Tonight.

Gran: Thank you.

Murray: But next time . . .

G-ran: Sure, Murray. You can rent the parachutes. *(Pause.)*

Murray: What size are you?

(She stares at him in disbelief Then Murray shovels a big forkful of cheesecake in his mouth. He loos at her while chewing, smiles and Gran slowly smiles back. The lights dim slowly.)