

TO GO

A PLAY IN THREE ACTS

*THE WAY IT REALLY WAS IN 1984*

RODNEY NELSON

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PLACE: East Fargo, a city in the Midwest

TIME: 1984

ACT I: Kitchen of a new house. Late afternoon in summer.

ACT II: Farmhouse living room. Past that midnight.

ACT III: Same scene (nearly) as in Act I. The following afternoon.

## CHARACTERS

Brad Kiefer

Debbie Kiefer, his wife

George Scott, Debbie's father

Arlene Scott, Debbie's mother

Tim Kiefer, Brad's Brother

## NOTES

*“mania.* A form of psychosis characterized by exalted feelings, delusions of grandeur, elevation of mood, psychomotor overactivity, and overproduction of ideas.” (*Taber's Cyclopedic Medical Dictionary*, Edition 14, 1981)

The tempo of the play is manic, except in the first half of Act III.

The characters may be funny, but they themselves never know it.

# ACT I

*Kitchen of a new house. Disorder, filth. Cupboard door missing, smudges on wall, unwashed dishes heaped in and around sink, etc. Two telephones—one on wall, other (desk model, unconnected) sitting on counter. Kitchen table and chairs, new but junky. A late afternoon in summer. No one on stage.*

*Doorbell rings. Pause. Rings again. Pause. Knocking. Pause. Louder knocking.*

ARLENE SCOTT (*offstage*): Yoo-hoo, Debbie! . . . Debbie? . . . Anyone home? . . . It's me! . . .

*Enter, cautiously, ARLENE SCOTT, a plump, plain woman in her fifties.*

ARLENE: It's Mom, Debbie! . . . Are you here? . . . Brad? . . .

*She looks around, sniffs the air, makes a face.*

ARLENE (*to herself*): Must be over at the new place. (*Sees desk phone on counter.*) Will they have the same number? Let's see, how do you call directory assistance? Oh ya. (*Picks up receiver, begins dialing, then realizes that phone is dead. Sees dangling wire.*) Oops. Wrong phone. (*Takes receiver of wall phone, listens, dials.*) Here we go. . . . Hello, could I speak to directory assistance? That's you? I dialed it right for once, hah? (*Laughs.*) Say, I'm wondering if you have a new listing for Brad Kiefer, K-i-e-f-e-r. In East Fargo. It's my son-in-law and—awright. (*Pause.*) Could you repeat that? 237-7191. Oh-oh-, just a second. (*Checks number on phone.*) That's *this* number. I'm sorry. I guess they haven't had it changed yet, or maybe they're gonna keep it. . . . Well. Could you look under Kiefer Construction? He runs the business out of his home. But they're moving right now. Ya, Kiefer Construction, he builds houses. K-i-e-f-e-r, and then C-o- . . . Awright. (*Pause.*) 237-7192? Oh-oh. (*Looks at number on desk phone.*) That's the number of the other phone here. It's disconnected. . . . I'm not sure. Well, do you have *any* new listings for a Kiefer?

*Enter DEBBIE KIEFER lugging empty cardboard boxes. She is twenty-five, pretty and pleasant. But manic. Eight months pregnant. She dumps boxes on floor.*

DEBBIE KIEFER: Hi Mom! (*Exit.*)

ARLENE (*to phone, startled*): Okay, she's home now. I mean she's *here*. . . . Hello? Wherever you are, I'm sorry. Gotta hang up. (*Does so. Hurries to door.*)

*Enter DEBBIE with another load of boxes. Throws them down.*

DEBBIE: I thought you were at K mart.

ARLENE: I was but—listen. (*Concerned.*) You shouldn't be doing all this. Eight months is quite a ways along, you know.

DEBBIE: Well, I'm sposed to be getting exercise. And the moving won't do itself.

ARLENE: You better come and sit down a minute. (*Guides DEBBIE to chair.*) I can bring in the rest of those boxes.

*As DEBBIE sits, chair begins to collapse.*

DEBBIE: Not *this* chair again!

ARLENE: Uff. . . .

DEBBIE (*finding a solid chair*): Oh it'll be *so* nice to get out of this dump. Everything's just falling apart.

ARLENE: Ya. And you'll have a nice new place to bring the new little stranger.

DEBBIE: Who?

ARLENE: You know, the baby.

DEBBIE: The baby. Right! (*Jumps up.*) Where's Dad? Did he go to the airport too?

DEBBIE's *mania has begun to affect* ARLENE.

ARLENE: He was helping Brad, I thought.

DEBBIE: The plane was due in at four-thirty. What time is it? (*Sees that electric wall clock has been unplugged. Hands indicate 12:10.*)

ARLENE: That's what he said he was going to do. When I left him and went to K mart.

DEBBIE: Now who unplugged that clock? I can't even wear a wristwatch anymore.

ARLENE (*checking her own watch*): It's ten to five.

DEBBIE: I get these rashes on the arm.

ARLENE: You do? Lemme see.

DEBBIE: It's only when I have the watch on. Ten to five. I missed them at the new place. So he and Brad *musta* went together.

ARLENE: They were gonna meet somebody at the airport?

DEBBIE: Ya—Tim. Didn't I tell you?

ARLENE: Tim?

DEBBIE: Ya—Brad's brother. He's out of the Marines and on his way home. I musta told you.

ARLENE: No, but I've heard of him. He was planning to spend the night here?

DEBBIE: Here or there. I didn't even tell you, hah? I'm so absent-minded I oughta sign up for therapy. Too much stuff going on. Lemme see. Ya, Dad's truck was over at the new place and they weren't, so he and Brad musta went in Brad's truck and left Dad's truck parked. Otherwise I woulda seen Brad's truck

ARLENE: Were they coming here afterwards?

DEBBIE: Or going there. I don't know. What are you driving? (*Runs to door, looks out.*) Of course, the Plymouth! I just parked behind it a minute ago. See what I mean? Totally absent. (*Taps forehead.*) Awright. I've got the wagon and we could take that or the Plymouth and go and meet them.

ARLENE: Well, if it's almost five now they should be on the way.

DEBBIE: But they might think we're over at the new place.

ARLENE: They'll soon figure out that we're here. They'd have to stop there anyhow. To pick up *our* truck.

DEBBIE: You and Dad's? That's true. Well, I've got time for one more load.

ARLENE: You mustn't overdo things so much. Life is too short. Hurrying around like this is a waste of time. I'll make some coffee and get the rest of the boxes.

DEBBIE: This is all the boxes I have, Mom. And I took the coffeepot in the last load.

ARLENE: I should have brought the thermos.

DEBBIE: I don't have anything to offer you. (*Searches cupboards, finds nothing.*) Nope. I *think* there's a bag of cookies in the wagon.

ARLENE: No, that's fine. Where were you gonna eat?

DEBBIE: Brad was talking about having supper at Howard Johnson's. Up north of K mart, you know? They have a special on hot ham.

ARLENE: Ya. I saw that in the paper. I guess it's real good too. But it's with coupon only.

DEBBIE: He's got a whole bunch of those. If he can locate them. If we have time to eat at all.

ARLENE: I spose you can't cook in the new place.

DEBBIE: Or here either.

ARLENE: Well, you could come out and eat with us. Whenever you're done moving. I have some potato sausage and noodles and so forth.

DEBBIE: Are you gonna go home pretty soon?

ARLENE: I didn't mean *that!* We're planning to stay and help. Whenever we're *all* done, I meant. If Brad and you don't wanna have the sausage I could pick up—

DEBBIE: And Tim.

ARLENE: And Tim? Oh ya, and Tim. I could stop and get a pizza or something. (*Scrutinizes DEBBIE.*) Are you okay, honey? You look kinda peaked.

DEBBIE: I just felt another kick.

ARLENE: A kick? (*Looks around protectively.*) From who? (*DEBBIE indicates belly; ARLENE is embarrassed, laughs.*) Oh, the little one!

DEBBIE: Right.

ARLENE: Well, I think you and I had better sit down a minute. All this rushing around and lifting isn't good. We can make up for it later, work till midnight if we have to. Here, honey. (*Guides DEBBIE to chair.*)

*ARLENE sits at edge of risky chair. But she seems unwilling or too tired to move to another. They lapse into dazed silence.*

BRAD KIEFER (*offstage*): Watch out, that door handle's ready to come off!

*Enter GEORGE SCOTT, BRAD KIEFER and TIM KIEFER. The women don't respond until the men start talking. GEORGE SCOTT is a male version of his wife. He's in work clothes and manic. BRAD KIEFER is twenty five, tall and manic, also in work clothes. TIM KIEFER is two years younger than BRAD, about the same size; hair very short, military shoes. TIM looks relaxed though somewhat bewildered.*

BRAD: If you haven't seen the pits before, you're gonna see 'em now!

GEORGE: (*shaking his head*): Say, where *did* you get them cupboards?

BRAD: Look at this. (*Yanks off a faucet handle, shows it to TIM.*)

TIM: Old fixture, huh?

BRAD: “Old” is right. (*Throws handle into sink, kicks cabinet.*)

BRAD and GEORGE pay no attention to the women, who are on their feet now and manic. TIM nods uncertainly at DEBBIE and ARLENE, hoping to be introduced. They ignore it.

GEORGE: I better get the tools.

BRAD: Naw, the people coming in, they won’t care.

TIM: Some of these older houses—

ARLENE: And it’s a whole year since you built it. Doesn’t seem that long.

DEBBIE: If you think that’s bad, check out the wall. It’s already peeling. Wipe it off and there goes the paint too.

GEORGE: What-a-mess.

BRAD (*to TIM*): Well, kid, let’s have a shot of coffee. Awright? Then we get to work.

TIM: Fair enough.

BRAD: Where’s the brew, Deb?

DEBBIE: The pot’s already gone over.

BRAD: Over there, hah?

GEORGE (*to ARLENE*): Didn’t we bring the thermos?

ARLENE: I could run out and get some at McDonald’s. To go. How many cups do we—

BRAD: Aw, we prolly got a couple of beers in the frig. (*To TIM.*) Help yourself, m’man.

TIM: This I can handle. (*Goes to refrigerator and opens it. No light within. Steps back coughing.*) Well, maybe not.

DEBBIE and BRAD rush over to look.

BRAD: So that’s where you put the cheese and stuff.

DEBBIE: It's rotting! Now who unplugged this refrigerator? It musta turned this afternoon. Mom, come here.

ARLENE (*approaching*): I don't want anything myself.

DEBBIE: Mom, have you ever gagged? I mean *really gagged*?

ARLENE: Oh, a few times. When I was younger. (*Peeks into refrigerator.*) Uff . . . George?

GEORGE: I believe you, I believe you.

BRAD: (*sardonically*): Gag in this house, where do you go? The bathroom? The *bathroom* is another story and I'm not gonna tell you.

ARLENE: I'm just glad you're moving out of here. I was worried about the baby. Think of the germs!

TIM (*to DEBBIE*): Ya, looks like it's comin' right along.

DEBBIE (*glancing blankly at TIM*): The bathroom's so gross we have to keep the door shut all the time. (*Slams refrigerator door.*)

BRAD: (*opening it again*): Naw let it air out. We gotta move the sucker, you know.

GEORGE: You taking most of this junk with?

DEBBIE: Only what we need.

TIM (*to BRAD, resisting mania, trying to be helpful*): Well, gimme a rag and a bucket and I'll clean up this thing. (*Puts hand on refrigerator.*)

BRAD: (*laughing*): Cool it, man! We're gonna chow down in a minute. Have a seat, why don't you.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): We could load *our* truck.

GEORGE: Hafta go get it first. It's over there.

ARLENE: Okay, let's you and I do that. Debbie! Can I borrow your keys?

DEBBIE: We left the place open.

TIM *sits on weak chair. It collapses and he falls, hitting the back of his head.*

GEORGE: (*looking upward*): Now what fell apart?

ARLENE: (*bending over* TIM): Oh no! You're working for Brad, I spose.

TIM (*getting up*): Not exactly. I'm his brother. Tim.

ARLENE: Tim?

DEBBIE (*approaching*): Not *that* chair again!

GEORGE: What-a-dump.

BRAD (*to* TIM): You awright, Lance Corporal?

TIM: Seem to be.

BRAD: (*to others*); Hey, let's give Brother Tim a hand!

*All clap absently.*

DEBBIE (*beginning to focus*): Oh *this* is him? Your brother? Well, I'm Debbie. Are you awright?

BRAD: You can't hurt a jarhead!

TIM (*to* DEBBIE): Pleased to meet you. Wish I could have been here for the wedding. But we had this job to do in Lebanon.

ARLENE *approaches, bringing* GEORGE.

ARLENE: Oh that's who this is. Brad's brother Tim. Hello, Tim. We're Debbie's parents. George and Arlene Scott. I'm Arlene. George, say hello to Tim.

GEORGE (*shaking hands*): You're working for Brad, hah?

TIM: Tonight, at least. I'm his brother.

GEORGE: (*blankly*): Oh.

BRAD (*putting an arm around* TIM): Yep, this is the boy himself. Lance Corporal Timothy Kiefer, U.S. Leatherneck. Yep, him and I go back a few decades.

BRAD *and* TIM *exchange mock punches.*

BRAD: Ouch! I'm not puttin' on the gloves with you anymore, I can see that. (*Laughs.*) Used to be able to take him with one hand. Look at him now! No wonder he survived that bomb blast.

TIM (*good-naturedly*): Thank God I wasn't on duty. Heard it, though. *And* felt it.

BRAD: Bad, huh?

DEBBIE: What was this again?

TIM: Oh that truck bomb that went off. I was lucky. But it meant I hadta stay on in Lebanon. Otherwise I woulda been here for the wedding. (*To group*) Pleased to meet you all at last.

ARLENE: Where was this?

TIM: Right there in Beirut.

GEORGE: Is that where you're from?

TIM (*patiently*): No sir. Brad and me come out of Jamestown. Hundred miles up the road. I'm his brother Tim.

GEORGE (*blankly*): Oh.

BRAD: So you got the discharge.

TIM: Last week. Got it and got out. Ya, I figured to help you with the moving and shoot the breeze and then go visit the folks. Take my time, you know. Adjust to the real world.

ARLENE: Where was that again?

TIM: Well, right here. And in Jamestown. At our parents'. Bob and Edna Kiefer.

ARLENE: *I* get it! Bob and Edna.

DEBBIE (*to TIM*): How's the head now?

BRAD (*raising his arms, restoring order*): Listen up, everybody! We can talk later. We have a lot to do and not so many hours to do it in. We gotta eat, then we gotta finish the moving. Awright? But first I wanna ask the man a question. (*Soberly puts one arm around TIM and gestures at room with other.*) Lance Corporal, you been around. You've seen a lot. Tell me: Have-you-ever-seen-a-pit-like-this?

GEORGE: Here's one example. The floor tile. Brad and me laid it ourself and it cost good money. And what do you think happens? (*Kicks a tile loose, hands it to TIM.*) Might as well nevera done it. That there's just one example.

TIM: (*to tile*): It seems to me like—

ARLENE: And the living room carpet's another thing. Oh boy!

BRAD: It's not that the rug is so bad—

DEBBIE: But it sure can't take the dirt.

BRAD: Naw the rug's okay. Just that it keeps coming up at the edges.

GEORGE: And that carpet was laid professional! Me and Brad helped the man ourself!

ARLENE: (to DEBBIE): You don't want *that* in the new house, do you?

GEORGE (to ARLENE, *brightly*): Hey, we could take it out to our place and burn it in the field instead. The rug. Tonight.

TIM (to *tile*): Well to me it seems—

DEBBIE: 'Member what I said about the bathroom? So gross we hafta keep the door shut? Well we don't go in there *at all* anymore.

BRAD (*wryly*): Really wanna get into this, Deb?

DEBBIE: I think I told Mom already. She's heard our little confession. (To TIM, *darkly*.) We been using a corner of the basement.

BRAD: (to TIM): You see?

DEBBIE: Gotta go, you gotta go.

BRAD: (to TIM): Wanna hear something else? I have even resorted to that. (*Points at sink*.) You get in late, you know? And you've had a few beers and you'd rather not walk downstairs. What's a man to do?

*All laugh except TIM, who half-smiles.*

ARLENE: No, this is one place where you would not want to bring a newborn child. (To TIM.) Thank God they're moving is all I can say.

BRAD: There's seepage in the basement too. Over an inch deep on the floor.

GEORGE (to BRAD): The sump pump I gave you didn't work, hah?

BRAD: Aw I never got around to installing it. No time. It's going in the new place though.

GEORGE: I can help you put it in tonight.

ARLENE: Don't forget you have to burn the rug.

BRAD: Well, we got an extra man to help. (*Slaps TIM on back, takes tile from him and throws it into sink*) Awright Lance Corporal, what's the word? Is this the pits, or-is-this-the-pits?

TIM (*with a small grin*): Ya, I can sure tell—

DEBBIE: Anybody hungry?

TIM's *moment is over. The general mania intensifies.*

GEORGE: Hey, there's an idea. (*To ARLENE.*) We better get out to the feedlot and take care of that.

ARLENE: You're all welcome to eat with us.

BRAD: Listen up now!

DEBBIE: Mom, we're all gonna eat at Howard Johnson's, I said. Remember? The hot ham special with coupon?

GEORGE: You don't hafta do that. Eat with us and save your money.

ARLENE: And where were you planning to sleep again?

BRAD: No, it's all settled.

GEORGE: We got plenty room at the farm.

DEBBIE: That's fine, Dad. But the question is where do we eat.

BRAD: Look. I got this bunch of coupons. (*Removes them from shirt pocket.*)

DEBBIE: And that settles it.

BRAD: (*reading*): "One hot ham sandwich dinner \$2.99 with presentation of this coupon sorry only one per customer." Okay? I got four of 'em.

GEORGE: Twelve bucks right there. Plus beverage. Plus tax.

DEBBIE: They *would* be a dollar more each if it wasn't on special!

GEORGE: *We* wouldn't charge you nothing though.

ARLENE: And then we could put you up for the night.

DEBBIE: Ya but Mom, it's ten miles to the farm and ten miles back again, and if we went out there to eat we'd have to come back and finish moving and we might never get finished, then we'd have to drive back to the farm again and sleep. Unless we slept at the new place.

GEORGE: You don't hafta do that.

ARLENE: You *know* we have three spare beds, Debbie.

BRAD: (*to GEORGE and ARLENE*): You prefer not to eat at a restaurant, is that it? Don't wanna eat out at all?

GEORGE: Well, when you're not dressed up—

ARLENE: Howard Johnson's is pretty fancy too.

BRAD: I don't think it would matter. But this I can understand.

DEBBIE: So what do we do with the coupons? It's a miracle he even found them! (*ITakes a coupon from BRAD, reads.*) "Good until June 30th." Which is tomorrow!

BRAD (*reclaiming coupon*): That's okay, Deb. I've got a plan. Awright. I call Howard Johnson's and order four hot ham sandwich dinner specials *to go*. Plus beverage. Then I pick them up and we all eat at the new place and afterwards we do the rest of the moving, then we drive out to the farm and sleep. Sound like a winner?

ARLENE (*relieved*): Leave it to Brad!

GEORGE (*To TIM*): These businessmen are so good at figuring.

DEBBIE (*going to phone*): Want me to call?

BRAD: No, I'll do it. (*Goes to desk phone, pauses to have another look at coupons.*) Awright. Lemme make sure I got this straight. Here are the four coupons, one-two-three-four. And there are the four customers. (*Points at each as he counts.*) One-two-three-four- . . . (*Seeing there's a "five," TIM, he slaps his forehead.*) Oh-oh. Sorry, m'man.

TIM (*forbearingly*): No problem. Fact, you oughta let *me* get this one. I have more change than I know what to do with.

BRAD: "Change"?

DEBBIE: How come only four? I thought you had a whole bunch.

TIM: Ya—jack, bread, lucre.

BRAD: I have *a* bunch, I said.

TIM: Hazardous duty pays pretty well.

ARLENE: *I know. We can each give him some of ours. There's always too much for me as it is.*

BRAD: That *it!* Good going, Arlene.

ARLENE: (*to DEBBIE*): You could find him a plate and silverware, couldn't you? At the new house?

DEBBIE: Or over here.

BRAD: Are we all set then? (*Takes receiver of desk phone, begins dialing, stops. Picks up whole phone and looks at TIM, grinning but ready to explode.*) I called the phone company and asked them what I should do, turn this thing in or take it along or what. And they said, "Oh we don't have anything to do with telephones." The telephone company isn't even the telephone company anymore! Well, here's my answer to them! (*Throws phone into sink, breaking dirty dishes.*)

*All laugh but TIM. General mania ebbs.*

ARLENE: The other one is working though.

DEBBIE: *I'm getting hungry. I'll make the call. (Goes to wall phone, pauses.)* Oh Brad, do you have the number for Howard Johnson's?

BRAD: Just a sec. (*Checks coupon.*) Nothing on here. Better look it up.

DEBBIE: You're not gonna believe this. The directory has already gone over.

BRAD: (*sarcastically*): Typical!

ARLENE: Why don't you just call directory assistance? That's what I did before you came. It's 411.

BRAD: Awright. I'll take care of it. 411 you say? (*Takes receiver of wall phone, begins dialing, stops, hangs up gently.*) Arlene. The line is dead, Arlene.

ARLENE: No!

DEBBIE: (*checking receiver*): You said you used it, Mom. *When* did you use it?

ARLENE: (*checking receiver*): Well I—it was right before you got here.

BRAD: The line is dead, Arlene. Did you see a phone company man?

ARLENE: (*uncertainly, glancing at TIM*): I don't *think* so. . . .

GEORGE: (*brightly*): Aw, they can disconnect 'em from the office. Without even coming out. Like they say, don't want nothing to do with telephones. Don't wanna see 'em or touch 'em or nothing.

BRAD: That must be it then. So where does that leave us?

DEBBIE: (*brightly*): But a person doesn't *have* to call in ahead of time. For an order to go. We can drive to the restaurant and place the order and wait.

*The general mania picks up again.*

ARLENE: Then go to the new house and eat.

BRAD: And finish the moving.

DEBBIE: And drive out to the farm.

ARLENE: And sleep.

GEORGE: We got plenty room, you know.

BRAD: Okay, okay. What are we driving? (*Looks out the door, left.*)

DEBBIE: (*joining him*): Okay, there's the wagon.

BRAD: And the truck.

ARLENE (*joining them*): And the Plymouth.

GEORGE: (*joining them*): And then our truck. (*Looks again.*) I mean, our truck's here but it's over there.

DEBBIE: Ya, I saw it parked.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): By the way, did you find the thermos in the cab? (*To DEBBIE.*) If he says he did, you wouldn't have to get any more coffee.

BRAD: So we have one-two-three vehicles here. And a fourth over there.

GEORGE: Or even if I says I didn't, we could stop at McDonald's and get some.

ARLENE: (*to DEBBIE*): We really oughta chip in.

BRAD: Now George and Arlene *can't* drive. Right? That leaves three vehicles and the four of us.

DEBBIE: Why don't we all go in one car? That would be more special. (*To ARLENE.*) It's on us, Mom. Okay?

BRAD: Or we could load up the three vehicles while we're at it. And get the moving done quicker.

DEBBIE: Then how do we make room for the people?

BRAD: We could just load two of them.

DEBBIE: People or vehicles? And which in which?

BRAD: So what are we driving?

DEBBIE: That wouldn't be special at all!

BRAD: Like going to eat out?

GEORGE: We don't have the right clothes on.

BRAD (*to DEBBIE*): Remember what he said?

ARLENE: Well, Dad and I could load up the Plymouth. While Brad and Debbie go to McDonald's.

DEBBIE: Howard Johnson's.

ARLENE: Ya. Then we could drive to the new place and unload and meet you over there.

GEORGE: And eat. Then afterwards I could take our truck back here and Mom could drive the Plymouth.

TIM (*helpfully*): I could stay and load the truck, Brad. While the rest of you go and pick up the chow. Then I could meet you. If you tell me the address.

DEBBIE: For where?

TIM: For where I'll be going.

BRAD: Way I see it, I don't want any vehicle leaving here unloaded. We got three vehicles sitting outside. And this is where all the junk is.

ARLENE (*to DEBBIE*): Dad and I wouldn't have to go along with you. It's just to pick up the food, you know.

TIM (*to BRAD*): Whatever.

GEORGE: Or we could put half a load in each vehicle. Then there'd be room for us.

DEBBIE: Mom, I was hoping we'd all be together.

BRAD: I wish we had your truck here too, George. With that we could load up most of the junk this minute.

ARLENE (*to DEBBIE*): We could all be together at the farm. And eat.

GEORGE (*to BRAD*): Well, why don't you and me go get the thing?

DEBBIE (*to GEORGE*): The food?

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): The thermos? Then we can have coffee!

BRAD (*with elation*): Hey, did I hear coffee? I could sure use a shot. Runnin' out of steam here.

GEORGE: That's true, but there's still another way we could handle it. Brad could drop me off—or Mom and I—at the other place, then Mom and me could bring our truck back here and load and meet you all over there. I and Mom are used to eating late, you know.

ARLENE: (*to BRAD*): Would that make you feel any better?

GEORGE: And as for the thermos, we'll set that on the porch.

BRAD (*wearing out*): Or lemme think. We could drop Tim off and *he* could bring your truck. And pick up the food. (*To TIM.*) Bet you don't have a license though.

TIM: No, but I have a U.S.—

DEBBIE: (*taking charge*): Awright, awright, this is getting out of hand! Let's just get in the wagon and go and eat!

BRAD (*to TIM*): Or somebody could ride along with you.

DEBBIE: Brad! I may be absent-minded but I am also hungry! Listen up now. We all get in the wagon. Drive to Howard Johnson's. Pick up the food. Bring it back here. And figure it out! Okay, Brad? *Please.*

BRAD *and others are too confused to reply at once.*

BRAD (*grudgingly*): So. We hafta leave two unloaded vehicles sitting, hah?

DEBBIE: So what's to lose, half an hour? Whichever other way we did it, it'd take much longern that.

ARLENE: (*to BRAD*): Time is money!

BRAD (*brightening*): Now you're talkin'!

GEORGE (*to BRAD*): Get them new shocks in?

DEBBIE (*trying to herd everyone out*): Okay, let's go. We can figure it out later. I'll put the seats down, Mom, and you and me can sit in back.

BRAD (*to GEORGE*): No, but I *got* 'em at least.

*Wall phone rings. BRAD and DEBBIE race to it. DEBBIE wins.*

DEBBIE (*to caller, coldly*): I'm sorry, whoever you are, but we're just leaving. You'll have to—huh? . . . What do you mean, “service temporarily interrupted”?

BRAD: Is it the phone company. Gimme that. (*Grabs at receiver.*)

DEBBIE (*to caller, fending BRAD off*): Nice of you to let me know, but—

*BRAD and DEBBIE struggle again. Receiver cord is yanked out.*

BRAD (*reproachfully*): Debbie . . .

DEBBIE (*shouting into receiver*): Goodbye! (*Hurls receiver into sink.*) There. That's settled.

BRAD: The phone don't even belong to us, Deb. . . .

DEBBIE (*herding everyone out*): Let's go!

ARLENE (*to DEBBIE*): Just think, we coulda *called* the order in.

DEBBIE: Fine. Let's go!

GEORGE (*to BRAD*): Well, they say you're sposed to have your own equipment now.

DEBBIE: Fine, fine, fine, fine.

*Exeunt in disorder, GEORGE and TIM last.*

GEORGE (*to* TIM): What are *you* driving?

TIM: Nothing yet. I flew in. The airport, remember?

GEORGE (*skeptically*): Oh.

*CURTAIN*

ACT II

*Living room at Scott farmhouse. It is past midnight. Center, downstage, a large old-fashioned couch. BRAD and TIM are sitting on it, grimy and tired. BRAD is withdrawn, fidgety. Left, a television set with "snow" in the screen. DEBBIE sleeps on the floor in front of it, belly up of course. Right, ARLENE and GEORGE are standing. They have been trying to say goodnight. But in mania, it's hard to leave. They've evidently determined who TIM is and accepted him into the clan. On wall near them, a window showing darkness. Table and chair next to that.*

ARLENE (to GEORGE): Well. We've kept the boys up long enough. They've had quite a day.

BRAD: Ya, day *and* night.

GEORGE: I thought we'd never get you moved. But now you can rest easy. The big stuff's done.

BRAD: Appreciated the help.

ARLENE: (*warmly*): You're not still worrying about the coupons, are you, Brad? Losing them, I mean? I hope not. Because it didn't matter. We got along just fine.

BRAD (*with annoyance*): Stick 'em in my shirt pocket and then they disappear! That was the end of it! Sorry you had to go without eating.

GEORGE: Howard Johnson's too expensive anyway.

ARLENE: No, we got along.

GEORGE: And you're not the only one that forgets things. I coulda swore we had the thermos in the truck. And here it was in the house all the time.

ARLENE: Speaking of that. Would you boys like a cup of coffee 'fore you go to bed?

TIM: Well—

GEORGE: Should be drinkable. We could warm it up.

BRAD: Not me. But Deb might want some later.

ARLENE: (*noticing DEBBIE*): There she is. The little mom of tomorrow. (*Going to her.*) We'll leave the thermos next to her so she can find it.

GEORGE: It's out in the kitchen? (*Exit, right.*)

ARLENE (to BRAD): She *could* sleep in the north room, you know. Where she's used to the bed. Maybe I should see if she's awake.

BRAD: Naw, she likes the floor. Says it's good for the back.

*Enter GEORGE, right, with thermos. Gives it to ARLENE, who sets it on the floor next to DEBBIE.*

ARLENE: We'll just leave it here. (*Looking at TIM.*) Unless Tim wanted a cup first?

TIM: No, thank you. I'll pass.

ARLENE: (*to GEORGE, rejoining him, right*): Guess it's time we hit the hay, huh? (*To BRAD.*) Well. Pleasant dreams. You've got the north room and Tim will be sleeping in the south room. Show him where it is so he don't get lost or trip and fall or something.

BRAD: No problem.

GEORGE (*to boys, brightly*): Or you could sleep in here. Me, I just sit and doze a couple minutes. Person doesn't need all that much rest.

ARLENE (*to TIM*): Bet your head is still kinda achy, huh?

TIM: Hardly feel it. But I sure look forward to puttin' it on a pillow.

GEORGE: Or do whatever you want.

ARLENE: Okay, we'll be trundling off to bed. You have a good night now.

BRAD: Night.

ARLENE: You can lay a blanket or a coat on Debbie. And yourself. Well. That should do it. And we enjoyed meeting *you*, Tim.

*TIM is polite but glad to be getting rid of GEORGE and ARLENE.*

TIM: Same here! Thanks for letting me spend the night. I haven't been on an actual farm since I went in. It's interesting.

ARLENE: "Went in"?

GEORGE: Oh, it's not an *actual* farm anymore. Sold most of the land ten years ago, and the remainder I been cash-rentin' out. Me, I just held onto the livestock. What with that and the campground—

TIM (*to ARLENE*): Into the service. (*To GEORGE.*) Oh ya?

ARLENE (*blankly*): The service. (*Listens to GEORGE instead.*)

GEORGE: Can't say it's an *actual* farm. But it's enough to keep a man busy. Hafta watch cattle all day and campers all night.

TIM: Campers?

GEORGE: Yep. They come in from Washington, Texas, New York, you name it. Outta season I get the locals mainly.

TIM (*feigning interest*): You have people camping on the farm?

ARLENE: (*to TIM*): Didn't you see 'em?

GEORGE: Didn't you see the new sign on the road? "Scott's Farm Campground With Hookups." Brad and me painted it ourself. Hah, Brad?

BRAD: Yep.

TIM: I musta missed it.

ARLENE (*a bit disparagingly*): Well, it's not exactly the world's *greatest* campground—

GEORGE (*defensively*): I don't know why not. They come here, they get everything they need. The outdoors. 'Lectricity. Rest room. At fifteen bucks per night per unit, who should complain?

ARLENE: Some of them do though.

TIM: I better have a look at it. In the morning (*yawns*).

ARLENE: What they complain about is *him*. (*Points at GEORGE, addresses him fondly.*) Remember that group from Des Moines? They didn't appreciate you *at all*. And they sure told you about it.

GEORGE: Aw, they were just kidding.

TIM: Gave you some trouble?

ARLENE: (*to TIM*): Well, Dad likes to go out to the campground early. Six o'clock. Then he wakes 'em all up and says, "Come on and help with the chores!" He means it too! And those people are on *vacation*. (*Giggles.*) Oh, he's been shouted at and threatened and pelted—

GEORGE (*defensively*): They're here to have a farm experience, right? I got the work for 'em. And they're not doin' anything else, are they?

ARLENE: But they only wanna relax and have fun!

GEORGE: So do the cows. But somebody's gotta milk 'em first.

ARLENE (to TIM): We get dozens of letters of complaint every week. More letters'n campers! And no one has *ever* camped here twice. (*Laughs.*)

GEORGE: It's normal, hating to get up. I don't like it either. So they can shout all they want far's I'm concerned. The words don't affect me one bit. And some *will* pitch in. (*To TIM, trying for dignity.*) You know, I think you should participate in where you are. Visit the country, you accept the country and do as the farmers do. Same goes for me. It's my job to carry on normal. But I'm also the host and gotta look after 'em.

ARLENE: Good thing we don't avvertise all that!

GEORGE: I talk to 'em and—(*distracted*). Hey, this reminds me. (*Goes to window and looks out.*) I oughta check up on the campers 'fore we go to bed. See if they have any questions. Should check on that fire too.

BRAD (*startled*): Fire? (*Hurries to window.*)

GEORGE: Oh, it's burning down okay.

TIM *is too weary to get up.*

ARLENE (to BRAD): You haven't forgotten the carpet already?

GEORGE: Could give it another snort of gas though. That old fabric was too new.

BRAD (*looking out*): Oh. The rug.

ARLENE (*joining them*): It's kinda pretty glowing out there.

GEORGE (*preparing to exit*): Well. I gotta check the camp anyhow so *I'll* take care of it. You boys turn in if you want.

ARLENE: Night, boys! I'll wake you for breakfast. Know you'll wanna get an early start in the morning. Night, Tim!

TIM *waves without turning. Exeunt GEORGE and ARLENE. BRAD returns to couch and sits, face in hands.*

TIM (*yawning*): Oh, man. Feel like showin' me that bunk? (*Pause. Looks at BRAD.*) Least you got some friendly in-laws. Hey. You thinkin' about something?

BRAD (*uncovering face*): Ya.

TIM (*grinning*): Not them coupons!

BRAD: Naw. Business. Go into business, you're always thinking.

TIM: I imagine it's a lot of responsibility.

BRAD: "Ya gotta wanna."

TIM: Say what?

BRAD: That's the motto of business. "Ya gotta wanna." Wanna bad enough, you put up with the crap and win. Succeed!

TIM (*hiding a yawn*): Well, the folks sure are proud of you. Ma writes me how many houses you've built. Two in a single year, hah?

BRAD (*his mania growing*): Yep. I do it by keeping the overhead low. Build one and live in it while I work on another. Yep.

TIM: So you built that place we just moved you out of—

BRAD (*scornfully*): A year ago! Incredible, huh? What a dump!

TIM: —and you and Debbie lived there while you were working on the place we just moved you in to?

BRAD: Which is a real *mansion*! You saw it.

TIM (*nodding*): Beautiful new house.

BRAD: A different *world*!

TIM: You and Debbie plan to stay in this one?

BRAD (*unheedingly*): I get better and better, you know. Each house I do is an improvement on the last. Where we're moving in to is *perfect*. Or nearly.

TIM: Ya. Gonna hold onto it?

BRAD: Wish I knew how much better I can get.

TIM: Wish I knew the way to the bed. (*Glances at wristwatch.*) Quarter to three. Hmmm. I been up for almost—twenty-one hours.

BRAD: Long as there's a chance I can do better, I *have* to keep working. Expanding the operation. Building two-three-four units at a time! (*Looks at TIM.*) So what are *you* gonna do, kid?

TIM (*wryly*): Well, I was thinkin' to sleep . . .

BRAD: "Do," I said. Sleeping is not doing. You got a whole life to invest. And nothin' but a whole world to invest it in. (*Pauses.*) You could do worse'n throw in with me.

TIM: (*concealing reluctance*): Work for you?

BRAD: Me, the builder.

TIM: Well, I hadn't figured to do much of anything. Yet. When I'm all debriefed and adjusted I can put my mind to it. And I don't know anything about construction.

BRAD: "Ya gotta wanna." That's the motto of the construction business—and a lot more. Wanna be a contractor, you are a contractor. Wanna be married (*pointing at DEBBIE*), you are married. Wanna have a child, you have a child. Look at *me*. (*Thumps chest.*) You think I don't get invited to speak at luncheons? For the successful? Ask around! Tim, "ya gotta wanna. Because if ya wanna, *you are*."

TIM: You gotta know *what* though. I don't claim to know that. I'm just twenty-three. 'Member a couple years back when you were my age? You were still planning to go and finish college. 'Member? Well, that's sort of where I'm at now. (*Reflects.*) I might even re-up. Who knows?

BRAD: "Re-up"?

TIM: Ya. Go back in.

BRAD: "In"?

TIM: To the Corps.

BRAD: "Core"?

TIM: Ya. The U.S. Marine Corps. (*Smiles with tired disbelief.*) You wouldn't be doing a mind game on me, ol' brother?

BRAD (*unheedingly*): As what, a lance corporal? And be in twenty years and end up as a sergeant? I thought you had more ambition. Look at *me*. (*Thumps chest.*) Here I am, twenty-five, and I'm the equivalent of a *bird colonel*. I give the orders. Tim, you gotta wanna be on top. Then you are!

TIM (*giving up but trying to bargain*): Okay. Okay. I see what you're telling me. And I do appreciate it. How about if I sleep on it—*sleep*, okay—and we talk some more tomorrow?

BRAD: I don't care what age you are. When you're given a chance, you hafta seize it. You may not get another. If you're given this chance and you don't take it, then you're old. Twenty-three is old.

TIM: (*apathetically*): Whichever.

BRAD: "Talk tomorrow," you said. You can't imagine tomorrow. Where will you be, and I, and Deb, and the Scotts? Talkin' in this room, letting our chances get away? No, Uncle Tim. We're all gonna be at the new house workin' our butt off. There won't *be* any time to talk tomorrow. There is *never* time tomorrow.

TIM: So it's now, huh?

*During the next speech DEBBIE moans and twists, rubbing her belly. BRAD does not notice. TIM does and goes to switch off television. BRAD pays no attention to this either.*

BRAD: Wanna learn the construction business, you start now. With the fundamentals. Awright. I have a garage door to be stained. There's insulation to be put in. The smoke-detectors aren't up yet. Now suppose I asked you to go do these things. Could you do 'em? No. Or not too well. Because you lack the knowledge and experience, awright? Suppose on the other hand I instruct you. Suppose I set you down here and give you a little orientation. Then what?

TIM: What?

*During the next speech BRAD gets up like a somnambulist and switches the television on. TIM shakes his head. BRAD returns to couch.*

BRAD: Then you got an advantage. You'll still hafta have o.j.t., but not as much. Now if I *didn't* instruct you ahead of time, halfa tomorrow would be lost. With me tellin' you this and tellin' you that. And you walking around and mostly gettin' in the way. Nope. You oughta make use of the time you have, then you'll have more of it to come. And the time we have is *now*.

TIM (*indicating television*): Sure you wanted that thing on?

BRAD (*obsessively*): Oh, the construction business isn't all hammer and nails. There's the selling part too. Don't sell what you build, you die.

TIM *glances at watch. He's decided to risk confronting BRAD.*

BRAD: Know that dump we just moved outa?

TIM (*losing patience*): Brad . . .

BRAD: Well, I *sold* it. Someone actually *wanted* it. And why?

TIM: Brad . . .

BRAD: Because I *made* 'em want it. And if you can sell a pit like that, you can do anything. (*Laughs feverishly.*) Of course, there's a lot of dumb-dumbs out there. Lucky for you and me.

TIM (*turning*): Brad!

BRAD: And, of course, it's a sellers' market right now.

TIM (*shaking him*): Brad, we talked long enough! It's late! I wanna sleep!

BRAD *seems to snap out of his mania.*

BRAD (*groggily*): Huh? Tim? You say something?

TIM (*vehemently*): Don't get me wrong. I've enjoyed talking. But I been up almost twenty-four hours and I wanna sleep. Understand?

BRAD (*putting hand to head*): Aaaa! I musta been out cold.

TIM: Just point me in the direction of the south room and I'll be happy. Or forget it. I'll bunk some other place.

BRAD: Right, right. It's through that door. (*Points at audience. Rubs and blinks eyes.*) Tim. I gotta have a shot of coffee. The thermos? . . .

TIM: At this hour?

BRAD: Coffee . . .

TIM (*retrieving thermos and filling its cup*): Comin' up. I'll even help you to your bunk. Then I am going to crash. Period. I enjoy seeing you and listening and all that. Don't get me wrong. But it's not the time. (*Grins wearily.*) Hey. *You're* the one sposed to be old and feeble. What are you plugged in to? I could sure use some of that energy. (*Hands cup to BRAD.*)

BRAD (*offering cup*): Want some too?

TIM: Pass. (*Ready to exit, he stands facing audience; cannot see BRAD.*) You know, I been lookin' forward to this. I really have. Getting' out and home again. I even had something planned what I should do—what *we* should do.

BRAD *drains cup and immediately falls asleep.*

TIM (*reflectively*): I'd stop in East Fargo and then you and me and Deb would go out to Jamestown and spend a couple days at the folks'. Lying around and talkin' about when we were kids. You know, we always got along awright. Didn't we? (*Turns, sees BRAD, is nonplussed.*) Brad. Brad? (*Checks him for signs of consciousness.*)

TIM (*quietly*): I-do-not-believe-it. (*Paces the room, trying to remember what should be done before he goes to bed.*)

TIM (*to himself*): What did she tell us? Coat or blanket? Ya. (*Looks at DEBBIE.*) Coat or blanket. (*Looks at BRAD.*) And, coat or blanket. (*Searching, he finds two folded blankets behind couch.*) Blanket. Blanket. (*Spreads one over DEBBIE.*) Blanket. (*Spreads the other over BRAD.*) And, blanket. Okay? (*Ponders.*) Let's see. My gear. Duffelbag. Shaving kit. Duffelbag. Shaving kit. Razor. (*Touches cheek and makes a face.*) Toothbrush. (*Licks teeth and makes another.*) Now where did I—? (*Thinks hard.*) Airport. Brad's truck. Aha: Brad's truck. (*Goes to window and looks out.*) Brad's truck! (*Suddenly let down.*) Nope. Took 'em out somewhere. Here? (*Looks around, shakes head.*) Somewhere. The heck with it. (*Checks watch, grimaces.*) This animal's gonna fade.

TIM *begins to exit towards audience.*

DEBBIE (*brightly, not moving*): Honey?

TIM *freezes.*

DEBBIE (*sitting up*): Were you talking to me? I thought I heard a voice. Brad? (*Sees TIM and becomes manic-friendly.*) Oh hi, Tim. It must have been you. I was having this dream and I heard a voice talking and there wasn't anybody connected to it so I didn't know if it was in the dream or what. You ever had that happen?

TIM (*resignedly*): Hearing a voice? Yep. (*Sits on arm of couch facing her.*)

DEBBIE: It musta been you and I wasn't dreaming after all. Huh? Lemme tell you about it. I was in this *huge* department store—*living* in it. And I could live there and have anything I want as long as I didn't try and get out, and there was nobody else in the store and I had all this expensive jewelry and clothes to myself. So when I heard the voice I knew if it was a dream it had to be over. (*Stretches.*) Is it morning?

TIM (*groggily*): Well, yes and no.

DEBBIE: Brad likes to get up early. I better do the same and help Mom so you and him and Dad can eat. Mom and I'll be coming into town after lunch.

TIM (*indicating BRAD*): He's sleeping.

DEBBIE: Hmm. This is not typical. He musta worked so hard that he conked out.

TIM: I think your folks are in bed too.

DEBBIE (*rubbing her back*): You never know. It would have to be pretty darn early for that. Or late. What time is it?

TIM: Late *and* early. I was just about to turn in.

DEBBIE: Now wouldn't a cup of coffee taste good? Wonder if Mom still has that thermos. . . .

TIM: Yep. (*Wearily fetches thermos and cup and hands them to her.*) One thermos.

TIM *takes* DEBBIE's blanket and slowly folds it up, his back turned. Thus he doesn't see her during what ensues.

DEBBIE (*filling cup*): I think it was Macy's.

TIM: Huh?

DEBBIE: That store. Ya, it had to be. 'Cause I was just in there a week ago. To Macy's.

TIM: Ah.

DEBBIE (*introspectively*): And I saw these rows and rows of glass counters. With jewelry in 'em. I *actually* saw 'em when I was there. But in the dream it all looked—(*drains cup.*) And I can almost remember the voice. Almost what it said . . . (*Falls back, asleep.*)

TIM: Or did you wanna have the blanket? I shoulda asked. . . . Debbie? (*To himself.*) Oh well. Four down. (*Tapping his chest.*) And one to go. (*Has a last look around, thinking.*) That should do it. (*With feeble sarcasm.*) "Musta worked so hard he conked out." Jeeez! (*Begins to exit towards audience.*) Oh well. (*Stops in horror, recalling something.*) Better not try *this* route again or you'll be hearin' a voice. (*Goes to couch, sits next to BRAD, takes a share of blanket and gets ready to sleep.*) This animal's gonna fade right here. . . .

*Enter, right, GEORGE and ARLENE; with stealth, in robes.*

GEORGE and ARLENE (*softly*): Yoohoo! Yoohoo!

*Dejected, TIM begins to get up. Then he thinks better of it and lies still, feigning sleep.*

ARLENE (*peering around*): Anybody here? (*Seeing them, with delight.*) My, everybody's here! (*To sleepers.*) I bet you had the same idea as us!

*Throughout, GEORGE and ARLENE address the other three as though the latter were awake. (Which TIM in effect is not.) They seem oblivious to the lack of response.*

GEORGE (*to sleepers*): Ya, mom and me were crawlin' into bed and then she looks at me and I look at her and she says, "How 'bout a little snack?" And that's what I was just getting' ready to say!

ARLENE (*to sleepers*): And we sit there and laugh and laugh! Old married people think alike, you know.

GEORGE (*to ARLENE, with humor*): Maybe we been married too long.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE, playfully*): You didn't have me, who woulda put the bandage on and so forth? (*Becomes serious and looks at GEORGE's temple, where there is a Band-Aid.*) How is that, by the way? Still throbbing?

GEORGE (*touching temple*): Can't feel a thing.

ARLENE: Wish I saw what it was he threw. That man. (*To sleepers.*) George was making his rounds a little while ago. Stopping at the tents and asking if the campers needed anything. Then in this one tent a man shouted and opened the flap and threw some object at him, and it struck him in the head! (*Points out Band-Aid.*) That's a pretty dangerous area, lemme tell you. The head. As Tim would know. (*Eyes the latter.*)

GEORGE: Aw, it glanced right off me.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): What if it had been an *ax* he threw?

GEORGE: It was just a rock or something. Or a marble. And it coulda been a woman. There was two voices. (*To sleepers, philosophically.*) Naw, it didn't effect me one bit. All part of the job, I figure. Gotta accept the unacceptable.

ARLENE: (*to sleepers*); When I looked at it in the kitchen I thought we'd hafta go to the doctor, it was so bad. (*To DEBBIE.*) Spouse I shoulda told you, honey, but I knew you'd get upset. And you have a lot on your mind these days. (*With affection, approaching DEBBIE.*) Preparing for the big event and all. One more month! If you carry it to term. (*To GEORGE.*) I don't think she's gonna have the same problems I had.

GEORGE (*to DEBBIE*): Naw, you have nothin' to fear. You got a build on you like Grandma. And she had ten of us!

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): She's so fortunate not to have what I did—that "misshapen cervix" or whatever.

GEORGE (*pinching ARLENE's cheek*): You weren't misshapen to me! (*Turns to sleepers for approval.*)

ARLENE (*giggling*): Little old George! (*To DEBBIE.*) And little you. Well, we just came in to see if everything was awright. So we'll be trundling off to—

GEORGE (*To ARLENE*): Hey. Weren't we gonna have a snack?

ARLENE: The snack, the snack! I almost forgot! And Deb says *she's* absent-minded! (*Smiles at DEBBIE.*) Okay. I was gonna warm up the leftovers, the cream corn and noodles, then fix some jam sandwiches to go with it. And we *should* finish the coffee.

GEORGE (*to sleepers*): Or maybe you're not in the mood.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): Oh I'm sure the *boys* must be hungry. Considering all the work they put in. *To BRAD and TIM.*) You wanna bite, don't you?

GEORGE (*to boys*): It'll give you a head start in the morning.

ARLENE (*to boys*): Imagine you're all tuckered out, hah?

GEORGE (*to boys, approaching couch from behind*): Ya, we'll call you when it's ready. Okay? (*Slaps TIM on shoulder.*)

ARLENE (*to DEBBIE*): And *you* could help with the sandwiches.

GEORGE (*to ARLENE, rejoining her*): They're just restin' their eyes. A person doesn't need any more'n that. The boys'll be up and at 'em in a minute.

ARLENE (*to boys*): Don't feel you have to do a thing! (*To DEBBIE*) Or you could look in the thermos. See how much coffee's left.

GEORGE and ARLENE *bustle around.*

GEORGE (*finding thermos by DEBBIE*): I can take care of that. (*Opens thermos, looks in.*) It'll be enough. Gettin' cold though.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): Really: Let's drink it quick and I'll make some more. I'll get the cups we used. Haven't had time to wash the dishes. (*Exit right.*)

GEORGE (*to TIM, knowingly*): Well, Tim, how's she going?

TIM *opens his eyes, fearing that he has been discovered. Continues feigning.*

GEORGE (*grinning*): What do you think of this here family? Honest. (*Approaches him from behind, peeks over his shoulder. TIM shows a clenched face.*)

*Enter ARLENE, right, with two cups. GEORGE rejoins her. TIM looks relieved.*

ARLENE (to GEORGE): Sit right down and you and I'll drink this. (*Puts cups on table.*)  
GEORGE *sits.*) And Debbie? You start another pot, okay? And we're gonna hafta have about ten slices of bread. The open loaf. Debbie? (*Looks offstage, right*)

GEORGE (*indicating DEBBIE*): She's over here.

ARLENE: No, she's in the kitchen. (*Sits, fills cups.*) I was just talking to her.

GEORGE (*credulously*): Oh.

ARLENE: (*calling*): And Debbie? The butter's on top of the frig!

GEORGE (*to boys*): Or you guys could have some of this too. Not the freshest coffee, but it'll do the trick.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): Well. We'd better taste and see if it's any good.

GEORGE and ARLENE *drink. Both collapse on table, faces down, asleep.*

*Long pause, during which TIM slowly opens his eyes. He doesn't move. Then, very cautiously, he turns. Sees the Scotts.*

TIM (*with wonder*): Must have been pretty good. Must-have-been.

*Slowly, painfully, he rises and goes to table. Picks up thermos, shakes it, opens it, sniffs.*

TIM (*to himself*): Now. What do you suppose is *in* this stuff? *Fills GEORGE's cup.*) What do you suppose I been missing?

*Holding cups, he hobbles back to couch. Sits, reclines, arranges blanket. Then he quickly drains cup.*

TIM (*to himself, sighing*): I shoulda gone straight home to the folks! . . . (*Passes out.*)

CURTAIN

ACT III

*Kitchen of new house. Identical to scene in Act I, only here everything is immaculate and shipshape. No desk telephone. It is the following afternoon. The plugged-in wall clock indicates 1:00. A new automatic coffeemaker is in operation.*

*DEBBIE and ARLENE are seated at table with coffee cups. They seem very depressed. Long faces. Slow articulation and physical movement.*

DEBBIE (*leadly*): They must be finishing up at the old place. Nothing more to be done here.

ARLENE (*almost to herself*): Ya. No. Nothing more to be done . . .

DEBBIE: You want a refill?

ARLENE: Huh?

DEBBIE (*painfully getting up*): Coffee.

ARLENE: Oh. (*sighs*.) Might as well.

DEBBIE *takes cups to coffeemaker, fills them.*

ARLENE (*shaking her head*): Nothing more to be done at all. . . .

DEBBIE (*returning with cups, sitting*): Not here at least. We're moved in. And that's that.

ARLENE: AT least that's over. (*Making a superhuman effort to be amiable.*) Well. It sure is a beautiful new house.

DEBBIE (*surveying room, bleakly*): It's perfect . . .

ARLENE: You and Brad have done quite a job. Quite a job.

DEBBIE: Dad and you helped.

ARLENE: And here you are.

DEBBIE (*darkly*): I just hope we can live up to it.

ARLENE: All a person can do is try. . . .

*Pause. Both brood.*

DEBBIE (*with anguish, thinking of something*): We owe you thirty dollars, huh?

ARLENE (*dully*): Thirty dollars?

DEBBIE: The flat tire. The service call.

ARLENE: Oh. Don't give it another thought.

DEBBIE: Sorry, Mom. (*Almost to herself.*) I'll have to ask Brad to pay you back. When I see him.

ARLENE: Don't think about it. Thinking only makes it worse.

DEBBIE: If Brad had been along I would never have had the flat.

ARLENE: If only we'd driven the Plymouth . . .

DEBBIE: I *thought* I had some money. I don't know what I did with it. Or the credit card.

ARLENE: If George has been there . . .

DEBBIE (*covering face*): It hurt me to impose on you. Why do these things have to happen?

ARLENE: Well. You called the garage and they sent the truck and changed the tire. And we handed over the money. What's done cannot be undone.

DEBBIE: We lost a whole hour too.

ARLENE (*sadly*): It could have been more. But it could have been less. Cheer up.

DEBBIE (*uncovering face*): There is nothing to cheer up about. Nothing. Wish I could lock myself in a dark room..

ARLENE: You've got a beautiful new house, Debbie. Look at this kitchen.

DEBBIE (*surveying room*): Ya. It's like it doesn't belong to me though. Or I don't belong *here*. It's not a room to be miserable in.

ARLENE: You can be miserable in any room in the house. They're all the same.

DEBBIE: I hadn't thought of that.

*Pause. They look down, slowly sip coffee. DEBBIE takes a deep breath, evidently resolved to be strong. However, she only becomes resentful.*

DEBBIE (*with surliness*): You *will* get that money back, you know!

ARLENE (*as before*): It wouldn't matter.

DEBBIE: You *will*. I always settle my debts. You'll have the money tonight.

ARLENE: Tonight, tomorrow, next month—it wouldn't matter. I'm not even thinking about it.

DEBBIE (*angrily*): I feel bad enough as it is without you pressuring me. So you can just stop. I'll get you the money, and I don't wanna hear another word!

ARLENE (*sullenly*): I haven't said a thing and I'm not going to. It's not important to me. You can *have* the money for all I care.

DEBBIE: I-am-paying-it-back, I told you! Are you deaf?

ARLENE: (*smiling bitterly*): People do forget.

DEBBIE (*vindictively*): Is that so? Well, I'm gonna charge you for this coffee then! If that's how you're going to be! Fifty cents a cup, awright?

ARLENE (*with a sneer*): Alright. And you can just deduct it from what you owe.

DEBBIE: This is unreal! You'd think I had borrowed a thousand dollars or something! (*Slumps down, head in hands.*)

*Pause.* DEBBIE *becomes subdued again, remorseful.* ARLENE *retreats into herself.*

DEBBIE (*gloomily*): Sorry, Mom. Sorry about the flat and the money and the whole rotten mess. (*Shakes head.*) I don't deserve to live.

ARLENE (*dully*): It doesn't matter. Nothing matters.

DEBBIE (*clutching her belly*): Oooo!

ARLENE: Hah?

DEBBIE: It's kicking. (*Points at belly.*)

ARLENE (*looking*): Think you're miserable *now*, just wait till you go to the delivery room. *That's* a room to be miserable in. No, you haven't seen the worst yet.

DEBBIE: I'm gonna have 'em put me under.

ARLENE: You might not wake up again. (*Sighs.*) But if you do, at least you'll have company. What misery loves.

DEBBIE: I don't care . . .

ARLENE: I don't blame you . . .

*Enter BRAD, right. He too is depressed and slow. Opens cupboard, takes cup, fills it. Does not look at women, who do not notice him immediately.*

DEBBIE (*without emotion*): Brad?

BRAD (*dully*): What?

DEBBIE: Where were you?

BRAD: In the living room. With George. (*Leans against counter, as though too weak to stand.*)

DEBBIE: We didn't see you or the truck. Thought you were at the old place.

BRAD: We finished. We're done. The truck's right outside.

DEBBIE: I must not have been looking.

BRAD: Must not.

DEBBIE: I spose you've eaten.

BRAD: Naw, I skipped it. No appetite.

ARLENE (*to herself*): I wonder if George ate.

BRAD: Can't answer for George.

DEBBIE: And Tim.

BRAD (*bitterly*): Tim? You oughta know.

DEBBIE (*to herself*): I didn't have any lunch either.

ARLENE (*to herself*): I didn't feel like it.

*Pause. BRAD eyes wall clock.*

BRAD: So Tim isn't here, hah?

DEBBIE: He rode in with you and Dad, I thought.

BRAD: *I thought he was coming in with you. (Puts hand to head.): This is all I need! A missing person.*

ARLENE (*resignedly*): Maybe we didn't live up to his expectations.

DEBBIE: Ya. Maybe he took one good look at us and thought about it and left.

BRAD: He mighta gone home to Jamestown. Hafta call the folks. No choice. (*Goes to wall phone, dials. Pause.*) Ma? . . . Is he there? . . . Tim, who else? . . . No? . . . Okay. (*Hangs up, grimaces.*) This *really* helps!

DEBBIE: How's Edna and Bob?

BRAD (*falling into chair at table*): I don't know.

*Pause. They sit staring into themselves.*

DEBBIE: I guess he took off then.

BRAD: The folks haven't seen him. Prolly got mugged or shot or something. And I'll be the one to blame.

DEBBIE: No, it was more my fault. I hardly even talked to him. While he was still with us.

ARLENE: He was a newcomer. I spose he was out lookin' at the sights when—

BRAD (*sullenly*): In East Fargo? What's to look *at*?

ARLENE: When it happened, I mean.

BRAD (*forgetting it*): Oh. When it happened . . .

DEBBIE: At least it wasn't the *only* bad thing that happened today. (*To BRAD, with great pain.*) I had a flat tire. On the county road. No money. No credit card. No nothing. (*Hides face.*) I could just kill myself . . .

BRAD (*apathetically*): You had to walk in, eh?

DEBBIE: I asked for help, Brad. They sent a truck from the garage. (*Almost breaking down.*) And I had to—let Mom pay.

BRAD (*sighing*): Is that right, Arlene?

ARLENE: The money doesn't matter. What do *I* have to spend it on?

BRAD (*producing wallet, tossing it on table*): Arlene. See that? Take it. It's yours.

ARLENE (*feebly, picking it up*): This whole wallet?

BRAD: Take it all.

ARLENE: Everything? (*Opens bill compartment.*)

DEBBIE: Do as he says, Mom.

ARLENE: There's more'n two hundred dollars.

BRAD: I don't need any of it.

ARLENE (*dejectedly*): Uff . . .

BRAD: If you don't want it, throw it in the river. You'll be savin' me the trouble.

ARLENE: If only we'd driven the Plymouth . . .

*Pause.*

DEBBIE: The river. I bet that's where Tim ended up.

BRAD: No doubt. (*Puts face in hands.*) Ya. Well, hafta call the police.

(*Doesn't get up.*)

DEBBIE: I better do it. I'm the one who's responsible. (*Doesn't move.*)

BRAD (*starting to rise*): No, I will. He was *my* kid brother.

DEBBIE: Let me do it, Brad. Otherwise I'll never do anything again.

ARLENE (*rising*): I'm the one who should call. It's the least I can do after the way I treated him.

BRAD (*to DEBBIE*): I know you hate me.

DEBBIE (*to BRAD*): Hate's a pretty strong word. I'm not strong enough to handle it. I want to use the last of my strength to call the police. Or to shoot myself.

BRAD (*sitting down, wounded*): Okay! Just leave me alone then! (*Face in hands.*) Just tell 'em to come and shoot the both of us.

DEBBIE *goes painfully to wall phone and dials.*

ARLENE (*to herself*): And me too. If I'm worth the bullet.

DEBBIE (*into receiver, after pause*): Hello. (*With self-loathing.*) This is "Deborah Keifer." (*Apathetically.*) I have to report a missing person. (*Pause.*) Hello. I'm reporting a missing person . . . huh? . . . I don't know . . . Hold on. (*To BRAD.*) What was his name?

BRAD (*with effort*): Whose?

DEBBIE: Tim's.

BRAD (*nearly breaking down*): His name was—Timothy.

ARLENE: (*to herself, quoting*): "Unto Timothy, my own son in the faith. Grace, mercy and peace . . ."

DEBBIE (*to phone*): Timothy Kiefer . . . K-i-e-f-e-r. (*Pause*) What? . . . Hold on. (*To BRAD and ARLENE.*) When and where did we last see him?

BRAD (*with anguish*): Here? Over there? Wish I knew!

ARLENE: Or at the farm. I don't know if I ever *did* see him. I was so blind.

DEBBIE (*to phone*): I'm not sure . . . huh? . . . I'm not sure, I said. (*Waits some time.*) Hold on. (*To BRAD.*) What did he look like?

BRAD (*bitterly*): Like *me*! You have to ask? They said we were like a couple of twins!

DEBBIE (*to phone*): He was six foot one. A hundred eighty pounds. Brown hair and eyes. Twenty-five years old. Lived at 4132 Sixty-third—no, at 6341 Thirty-second Avenue South, East Fargo. . . . huh? . . . Well, he had a four-inch scar on the back of his right calf . . . I was his sister-in-law. . . . At the same address . . . No, he didn't live here. (*Pause.*) Just a minute. (*To BRAD.*) Was he a mental patient?

BRAD: He never said.

DEBBIE (*to phone*): He never said. . . . No, *I'm* not a mental patient. . . . I already gave you my name. (*In a bleak rage.*) What do you mean? . . . You too, hah? . . . So you're not going to help me, hah? . . . Well *thanks!* . . . I'll be seein' you—when you pull me outta the river! (*Hangs up, breathes deeply, returns with effort to chair.*)

BRAD: Where did they find him?

DEBBIE (*covering face*): They wouldn't tell me. They just told me I better not call again. Or I'd be in for it. They don't realize I'm in for it anyway.

ARLENE: They proly took him right out to the dump.

BRAD: Ya. And they woulda stuck him in a plastic bag too. He was a Marine.

*Enter GEORGE, right. Also depressed and slow. Band-Aid still on. Others do not take note of him at once. Mechanically fetches cup and fills it.*

DEBBIE: Oh, no. Here's Dad.

ARLENE (*dully*): George?

GEORGE: What do you want?

ARLENE: Not a thing. Where were you?

GEORGE: In there. Sittin'. (*Goes reluctantly to table and takes a chair.*) Sittin'.

ARLENE: Oh.

GEORGE (*after a pause*): Thought Brad woulda had an extra job for me. Like washin' the truck. But no. No, he says, it's all over. It's done. (*Strokes head pathetically.*) No more work for the old guy.

ARLENE (*to herself*): Well, when it's over, it's done. . . .

BRAD (*with total apathy*): Thanks for the help, George.

GEORGE (*with grim irony*): Sure.

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): I spose you could give the truck to Brad and Debbie. That's what I'm 'onna do with the Plymouth.

GEORGE: Right. I'll be walkin' home. Or somewhere.

ARLENE: Should be easy. It's all downhill.

GEORGE: With a hole in the earth at the end of it. Then they can throw all the marbles they want. (*Touches Band-Aid.*)

BRAD: Walkin's too slow. I got a thirty-ought six in the closet.

GEORGE: You can save a round for me.

ARLENE: And one for me.

DEBBIE: And me.

*Pause. GEORGE surveys room bleakly.*

GEORGE: *(with effort:)*. Well. Least you got moved in.

BRAD: Seems we did.

GEORGE: Sure is beautiful.

DEBBIE *(looking at room)*: Ya. Too beautiful.

ARLENE *(bravely)*: That's a real nice 'frigerator. And stove.

DEBBIE: Too nice.

GEORGE: The painting. You did a good job there.

BRAD *(shaking head)*: Too good a job, if you ask me.

GEORGE: And the floor tile. Nothin' wrong with that.

BRAD: Nothing at all.

ARLENE: It's a perfect house.

DEBBIE: Ya. Too perfect.

BRAD: Nothing more to be done.

GEORGE: Nothing.

ARLENE *(ironically)*: Except to live here and be happy.

*All sigh, cover their faces. Pause. The doorbell rings. No one looks up. It rings again.*

BRAD *(darkly)*: Well, I guess this is it. *(Shouts in despair.)* Come in! I'm ready!

BRAD *folds his hands, mouths a silent prayer. Others see him and do likewise.*

*Enter TIM, left. He is lugging a seabag and a shaving kit. TIM is unchanged: low-key and forbearing. Sets gear down.*

TIM *(jokingly)*: You're "ready," hah Brad? *(Noting the prayer session, he looks chagrined. Lowers voice.)* Oh-oh. Didn't mean to butt in. *(Steps back and folds hands. Does not pray. Eyes them cautiously.)*

BRAD *slowly becomes aware of TIM's identity. Gets up and approaches him with hesitation.*

BRAD: Tim? It can't be . . .

*Now TIM thinks that BRAD is kidding, that the prayer session has been staged for his amusement.*

TIM (*laughing*): Yessir. I'm back from the dead. Up from the grave. (*Slaps BRAD on shoulder; BRAD looks wounded.*) So you can hold them prayers awhile. (*To others.*) Hey. The corpse wasn't able to make it!

*All stare at him.*

BRAD (*starting to anger*): What is this?

TIM (*going along with "game"*): This here's a genuine resurrection, ol' brother. (*Extending arm.*) Wanna check the pulse?

BRAD: Don't you understand? I been goin' through hell.

TIM (*laughing*): Me, I didn't get that far.

DEBBIE (*to TIM, severely*): So you decided to come back to us, huh?

TIM (*gamily*): Well. Didn't wanna miss the funeral. Seein' how it was mine.

ARLENE (*to TIM, tragically*): Sorry for the way I treated you. When you were among us. You didn't deserve that of me

TIM (*with mock-solemnity*): Thou-art-forgiven.

GEORGE (*looking at TIM in awe*): So that's what they look like. Afterwards . . .

DEBBIE (*to TIM*): And you took the time to come and visit us. You really thought we were worth it.

TIM (*doubling up with laughter*): This is too much! *Too much!* Wish I had it on film!

BRAD (*in a rage*): "Too much" is right! That's what you put *me* through—"too much"!

*Sensing the truth, TIM sobers up immediately.*

TIM (*to all, with worry*): Hey. Something wrong here?

DEBBIE (*darkly*): Why don't you tell us?

TIM (*to BRAD*): Mean you actually thought that I—you're puttin' me on!

BRAD (*grimly*): I'm givin' you one chance to speak for yourself. That's all. So you better make it good.

TIM (*in disbelief*): Okay. Okay.

*During next speech the others stare at TIM in sorrow and anger. All are unresponsive.*

TIM (*earnestly*): You wanna know what happened, huh? Well. 'Member what I said at breakfast? I said I couldn't find my bag and kit and was going to look around the farm, 'case they had been dropped somewhere. I told you. And that's what I went and did. (*Grins*) Course, we were none of us too alert this morning. After three-four hours' sleep. You prolly never heard me. (*Earnest again.*) So I go out and search and check in the vehicles and I find nothing. No shave for this animal, I thought. But walkin' in the yard I get to feeling better than I was. I start to come to. You know? Then I see the trucks drive off. It's Brad and Mr. Scott. And I figure I was sposed to ride in with the ladies. But I'm feeling so good that I wanna walk into town instead. Get the kinks outa my legs. That's when I told you, Debbie. 'Member? Came in and told you what I was gonna do? (*Getting no response, he sighs.*) Must notta heard, hah? Anyway. I start walking and it's longer than I thought, so I crawl into a ditch and next thing I know it's eleven o'clock. I been sleepin'! But now I'm in *real* good shape and I walk along that road and pretty soon I'm in East Fargo. I went to a public phone and tried callin' you, Brad. To ask if you found my gear. Then I could limit the search—if you hadn't. You know? (*No response.*) Well. Nobody answered so I just hike over to your old place and check it out. And what do you think I see? On top of the trash heap in that dumpster? (*Smiles, kicks seabag.*) Yep. The shaving kit was there too. So that was it. I grab my stuff and walk over here hopin' to find you all. And so I do. (*Becomes very earnest.*) Listen. If there was a mixup, I'm real sorry.

BRAD (*softening a bit*): You coulda called twice. It wouldn't have hurt.

TIM: Spouse I coulda. But I thought the ladies woulda let you know.

DEBBIE, GEORGE and ARLENE *begin to show signs of recovery. They blink, stretch, rub their limbs. It's as though they've been in coma.*

BRAD (*still softening*): George and I coulda used some help too.

TIM: Ya. Sorry, ol' brother.

DEBBIE (*seeing TIM at last*): Hello, Tim.

BRAD (*to TIM*): But we managed it okay.

ARLENE (*smiling wanly*): Tim! Haven't seen you for a long time.

GEORGE (*beginning to focus*): Howza boy, Tim?

TIM (*with some confusion*): Hello again! (*To BRAD.*) Oh. There's something else I found.

BRAD: "Found"?

TIM: 'Member these? (*Takes coupons from shirt pocket, gives them to BRAD.*)

BRAD (*in disbelief*): You—where?

TIM: They were lyin' on the ground. Yep. Right next to that dumpster my stuff was in.

BRAD (*to others, displaying coupons, grinning*): Hey! See these? Tim had 'em!

*General mania slowly builds from here. TIM is immune to it.*

DEBBIE: The Howard Johnson coupons?

ARLENE (*to BRAD, groggily*): You're not still worrying about them, are you?

TIM (*to DEBBIE*): They were with the trash over at the old place. Who dropped 'em there I'll never know. Or my stuff. Things were movin' pretty quick last night, I guess.

GEORGE (*coming to life*): You drop something?

BRAD (*checking coupons*): Four of 'em. Same ones too.

DEBBIE: But are they any good? Lemme see. (*Takes coupons and reads.*) "Good until June thirtieth." (*Puzzles.*) That would be—today?

TIM: Today's the thirtieth.

DEBBIE (*brightly*): Well!

BRAD (*to TIM, a bit reprovngly*): You know, we shoulda had these coupons last night. That's when we needed 'em.

TIM (*patiently*): You didn't understand what I said? I was just over at your old place? Just found 'em?

GEORGE (*to TIM*): No, we got done over there.

BRAD (*smiling*): What the heck. The coupons are as good today as they were then. (*To others.*) Awright. Let's give the lance corporal a hand!

*They applaud, not too energetically. TIM looks pleased but he wants to clear the air.*

TIM: *Ex-lance corporal, he means! (Earnestly.)* Look. I wanna apologize. For takin' off and not being where I was sposedta. I didn't make the very best impression on you all. And if it's okay with you I'd like to start over.

*Others exchange looks of puzzled amusement.*

TIM: If you want I should go, that's awright too. You prolly don't need an extra body underfoot. What with the moving and getting settled. *(Waits for a reaction.)*

BRAD *(to TIM, kiddlingly)*: Don't even wanna have another meal with us, hah?

TIM *(in confusion)*: Well ya, but—

DEBBIE *(checking coupons again)*: Well I for one am relieved. My only worry is losing 'em again. This time I'll hang onto 'em. *(Reconsiders.)* Oh, better not. Here. *(Gives coupons to TIM.)* Least you don't forget things.

TIM *thinks that DEBBIE's gesture is a token of forgiveness and acceptance. Pockets coupons with a broad grin.*

TIM *(warmly)*: Will do! Whenever you want 'em, just say.

BRAD *(playfully punching TIM)*: This is more to your likin', eh kid?

TIM *just smiles and returns punch.*

ARLENE: You know, I hadn't even thought of eating.

GEORGE *(to BRAD)*: And you and me skipped lunch, right?

BRAD *(thinking back)*: I believe we did.

TIM *(to DEBBIE, in a relaxed tone)*: I thought the plan was to have lunch here. Weren't you'n Mrs. Scott gonna bring it in?

DEBBIE: Was that it? I can't remember.

TIM: But I coulda heard you wrong.

ARLENE *(to herself)*: It *sounds* logical enough.

DEBBIE: Ya. I'm not prepared to do much cooking. Here. *(Forms an idea.)* We could go out whenever, I spose. To Howard Johnson's.

TIM *(to all)*: Whenever's fine with me. I'll just tag along. *(To BRAD.)* Unless you have some more you wanted to do first?

BRAD (*a bit sourly*): No, 'fraid not. Everything's done that *we* can handle.

GEORGE (*to BRAD*): Wasn't there an inspector gonna come?

BRAD: Doesn't work Saturdays.

GEORGE (*snorting*): I was hopin' he'd see something we missed. Then we coulda done that.

DEBBIE: Mom, are you getting hungry?

ARLENE (*pondering*): I'm trying to think if I am.

DEBBIE: Well I think *I* am. But I won't be sure till the food's right in front of me. (*To TIM.*) You know. "Hot ham sandwich dinner" is just a bunch of words on a coupon. 'Less you can see it and smell it.

TIM (*grinning*): Yep. And words don't fill a stomach. (*To others.*) What say we go and eat now? I could drive. Rest of you could kick back and enjoy.

BRAD (*in deep thought*): Could do, I imagine . . .

DEBBIE (*puzzling*): Long as we haven't overlooked anything . . .

ARLENE (*to GEORGE*): It *would* be fun to go to Howard Johnson's, wouldn't it? Been years.

GEORGE: Wish I had better clothes on though. Pretty fancy. (*To BRAD.*) Or one of us could pick up the food.

BRAD (*to TIM*): Or *I* could drive . . .

*Sensing danger, TIM wants to keep them calm. He smiles, moves around as though preparing to leave.*

TIM: Naw, lemme be the chauffeur. I haven't done much to earn my keep today. (*To all.*) And you been workin' hard. (*Surveys room with admiration.*) Ya. You're all moved in and what not and *I* think you've earned yourself a little rest. Yep. It's a beautiful new house you got!

*TIM has temporarily arrested the general mania. The others stop talking, look at room with displeasure. But since they're almost "normal" at this point, they do not lapse into depression. They seem annoyed, bored.*

TIM (*helplessly*): Oh-oh. Whatever I said, better *unsay* it, huh? (*No response.*) You're not still mad at me for going over the hill, are you?

*Pause. BRAD sighs, approaches TIM, lays a hand on his shoulder.*

BRAD (*To TIM, didactically*): Nobody's mad. You just don't understand. But it's not your fault. Look, Tim: I've put a lot into this house. So's Debbie and George and Arlene. We've busted our butt for months. Gone without food, sleep, recreation. Personally, I have invested my *soul* here. Okay?

TIM (*cautiously*): Okay . . .

BRAD: True, this is an investment. I built it to sell it. To make money. As I built the old house. But consider the scope of the investment. It wasn't just money and time and labor. No. (*Vehemently.*) It was my life! I put *everything I had* into this house! *Everything I was!* Because I the investor would have to come and live in it!

TIM: I see . . .

BRAD (*more placidly*): Then, one day, it's over. The work is finished. We're moved in. And I look at the house and it seems perfect. *Perfect.* Like a church. (*Glances ironically at room.*) Tim, this is the hard part. Having to say goodbye to the dream. Having to live with what's *done.* (*Smiles, takes TIM by arm and leads him.*) So. What do I do? I go around checking this and that. Hoping to find something I did that isn't perfect. Here. (*Guides TIM to sink, turns faucet.*) I test the fixtures: perfect. (*Guides TIM to wall, left.*) I run my hand over the paint: perfect. (*Indicates floor.*) I kick the tile. (*Does so.*) Perfect. All's left to do on the house is clean it. And you can only clean it so many times a day,

TIM (*smiling cautiously*): Ya. Must be a hard row . . .

BRAD (*shaking head*): It's tough. (*Guides TIM to cupboard.*) And I check the cabinets. (*Open cupboard door.*) Perfect. (*Door comes off, falls.*)

BRAD *laughs.* *General mania resumes.* DEBBIE, GEORGE and ARLENE *become suddenly animated, delighted.*

ARLENE: I don't believe it!

GEORGE (*chuckling*): You got a problem there, Brad?

BRAD (*picking up door, showing it*): See? Hinges weren't tight.

DEBBIE (*inspecting door*): No it's the wood they were in. Too soft.

GEORGE: That's how they make 'em.

ARLENE: Typical!

BRAD (*to TIM*): Ya. These new houses get old pretty fast.

TIM (*still cautiously*): That's just one small defect.

BRAD: Maybe! (*Throws door in corner, right.*) But one defect's one too many in *my* house!

DEBBIE (*getting up*): Brad, have you sat in this chair? It's kinda wobbly, I think.

DEBBIE *overturns chair. All but* TIM *gather round it.*

BRAD (*joyously*): Bought 'em all yesterday! Nothin' wrong with 'em then!

GEOOGE (*pointing*): Well, well. Four screws loose.

ARLENE: Can't they do *anything* right?

DEBBIE: And I coulda been hurt, you know!

ARLENE: George, you wanna fix it?

BRAD: Nope. No wife of *mine's* gonna sit in this piece of junk! (*Winks at* TIM, *throws chair in corner, right.*) Not when we're expecting!

TIM (*wearily*): We all ready to go and eat?

*Others ignore him.*

GEORGE: Speakin' of fix. I thought that one of them tiles looks *just* a bit—(*Crawls on floor, center, searching. All others but* TIM *gather round.*) bumpy. Aha. Lookit this. (*Peels up a tile, hands it to* BRAD.) It never set flat.

BRAD (*checking it*): Not enough glue either. (*Shows it to* TIM.) What do you say, m'man?

TRIM (*shrugging*): Not a word.

BRAD (*approvingly*): Not-a-word! (*Throws tile in corner, right.*)

ARLENE (*to* TIM): Were you going someplace?

TIM (*hopefully*): We all are. To Howard Johnson's.

GEORGE: Who?

DEBBIE (*to* BRAD): Seems to me earlier the faucet didn't turn quite right. Not the one you tested. The other.

*All but* TIM *follow* DEBBIE *to sink.*

BRAD: This'n you mean? (*Yanks off handle, displays it.*)

ARLENE (*giggling*): Of all the shoddy!—

DEBBIE: I *thought* so!

GEORGE: We just put 'em in. We don't make 'em.

BRAD (*giving handle to TIM, pointing at corner, right*): Your shot, Lance Corporal!

TIM: Pass.

BRAD (*grinning*): Seen enough violence, hah? (*Throws handle in corner.*) Bet you never saw anything lie that!

DEBBIE (*surveying room*): I think we should look around. I mean, *really look*. See if this is the kinda place that's fit to live in.

GEORGE: Ya. Because if it's not—

ARLENE (*enthusiastically*): If it's not it's not!

DEBBIE, GEORGE and ARLENE *go searching. Pull out drawers, open doors, etc. They create a mess but little damage. Meanwhile BRAD takes TIM aside.*

BRAD (*warmly*): A person has to be philosophical. Either that or go bananas. But I'll tell you one thing: I sure will be happy to move outa this dump!

TIM (*blankly*): You're movin' *again*?

BRAD: You didn't know? Ya. The new place is under construction. Be ready in a month. Wanna go see it?

TIM *has made up his mind to leave. Thus he's become stronger.*

TIM: Aw. I'll be leavin', I guess.

BRAD (*obliviously*): Who'd want to live here? Would you? And if you had a family? This-is-the-pits!

TIM (*moving towards his gear*): So I'll just be takin' off then.

BRAD (*indicating others' activity*): Look at all that crap. Gimme a new house any day. (*To DEBBIE.*) *Whatcha find, Deb?*

DEBBIE (*happily*): What *haven't* I found! And I have the rest of the house to go.

ARLENE: To go? I spose we *could* call in the order.

DEBBIE, GEORGE *and* ARLENE *abandon their tasks. They half-focus on* TIM.

DEBBIE (*to* TIM): That's right. Howard Johnson's. We were planning to go and eat.

TIM (*with a sad smile*): Were.

GEORGE (*to* TIM): You still workin' for Brad?

ARLENE (*to* TIM): Or simply order it at the restaurant. And wait.

BRAD (*to* TIM): I imagine you're all set, huh?

TIM (*to all*). Yep. Well, this has been a lot of fun. Pleasure to meet you. Talk to you next time. (*Picks up gear.*)

BRAD (*to all but* TIM): Tim and me were figuring to have a look at the new house. Why don't you all ride along?

TIM (*shaking head*): It's not where *I'm* goin'.

DEBBIE (*to* BRAD *and* TIM): Stop in on the way to Howard Johnson's you mean?

ARLENE (*to* TIM): Or where did you wanna go?

TIM (*with gentle irony*): I wanna go someplace quiet.

DEBBIE: Well, we could stay here.

TIM (*as before*): Someplace quiet. Like New York City.

BRAD (*to* TIM, *not getting it*): That a fact?

TIM (*as before*): Ya. And if I can't stand it there, I'll try Belfast.

DEBBIE: What's wrong with Howard Johnson's?

GEORGE: Too expensive.

DEBBIE (*to* TIM): But if you had some other place in mind—

TIM (*still ironically*): I been thinkin' of Kabul. I hear that's not too noisy.

BRAD (*not getting it, slapping* TIM *on shoulder*): You're the guest!

ARLENE (to TIM): So where do you think we should go?

TIM (as before): If all else fails, I'm headin' for Beirut. I *know* that's quiet.

BRAD (not getting it): That a fact?

GEORGE (to TIM): Leavin' now?

TIM (beginning to exit): Yep. So long, everybody.

BRAD (to DEBBIE, GEORGE and ARLENE): Or you can come with us if you want. (*Follows TIM.*)

TIM *makes a face.*

DEBBIE (brightly): Brad, weren't you listening? Tim's going to Howard Johnson's and order the food. And we're sposed to meet him over there. (*To TIM.*) Isn't that right?

TIM: Well no, I'm— (*Seeing the light, he stops himself. Grins.*) That's right, that's right. I'll meet you over there! (*Exit.*)

*CURTAIN*