



*Act Two*



SCENE I

*In the dark, we hear the "train" music and a letter from EDDIE.*

*As the lights come up, we see ARTY in bed, wrapped up in a bathrobe, a comic book on his lap. He is reading a letter as EDDIE's voice continues:*

EDDIE (*Voice-over*) "Dear Boys . . . Sorry I haven't kept up my letter writing. The truth is, I was in the hospital a few days. Nothing serious. The doctor said it was just exhaustion. I remember when I was a boy, if I got sick, my mother used to give me the worst tasting German mustard soup. God, how I hated it. Luckily, they don't serve it in Mississippi. I'll write soon. Love, Pop."

*(The front door opens and JAY comes in carrying a bowl of soup)*

JAY You got it real rough. Reading comic books and missing school. I wish *I* had a fever. Here. Drink this.

ARTY (*Looking at it suspiciously*) What is it?

JAY Grandma made you soup.

ARTY Forget it. I'm not drinking it.

JAY Don't start in with her, Arty. She's in a rotten mood today.

ARTY You mean all those other days she was in a *good* mood?

JAY Just drink it . . . Where's Uncle Louie?

ARTY Taking a nap in Aunt Bella's room.

JAY Well, tell him he got a phone call this morning. One of the guys from the Studebaker.

ARTY But you said you don't know nothin', right?

JAY Right. And he said, "You tell Louie that Friday night the dance is over."

ARTY What dance?

JAY The "Goodbye Louie" dance.

ARTY You mean he's double-crossing the mob?

JAY You got it.

ARTY Wow! . . . You think they're going to kill him?

JAY Maybe all three of us. We work for him, don't we?

*(The front door opens. GRANDMA walks in wearing her candy store apron, looking angry)*

GRANDMA *(To JAY)* It takes twenty minutes to bring up soup? . . . I got one sweeper not sweeping downstairs, I don't need two.

JAY I was just going.

GRANDMA And don't let the kids sit on the stool all day. One buys a malted and the other two steal pretzels. If they steal, you pay for it.

JAY Sure. That's only fair.

*(He crosses to the front door)*

GRANDMA Vot was dot?

JAY I said, "Yes, I hear."

GRANDMA He's fresh to me, dat one. *(She pulls the covers off of ARTY)* Come on. Out of da bed. It's enough lying around already.

ARTY *(He pulls the sheet back up)* I'm freezing. And I'm burning up with fever. You can feel my head.

GRANDMA You lay in bed, you get fever. You get up und walk, da fever looks for somebody else. *(She hits the bed with her cane twice)* Out! Out!

ARTY *(He gets out of bed, stands, and shivers)* My mother always kept me in bed when I had a fever.

GRANDMA *(She straightens the sheets and starts to fold the bed back into a sofa)* You're not in your mother's house no more. *(Pointing to the chair at the living room table)* You sit in dat chair and you do your homework. And no funny books. And you finish dat soup. All of it.

ARTY I tried. I can't get it down.

GRANDMA If you eat it qvick, you von't taste it.

ARTY I would taste this if I didn't have a tongue.

GRANDMA You listen to me. You're not fresh yet like da other one, but I see it coming. No, sir. Not in dis house . . . You live vith me, you don't stay in bed two days . . . You get better quick und you get dressed und you come downstairs und you vash up the soda fountain und you sveep up the store. I didn't ask to take care of you, but if I take care of you, you'll do vot I tell you. *Don't turn away from me!* You'll look at me!! . . . You're not going to vin dis argument, I tell you dot right now. You understand me?

ARTY . . . Yes.

GRANDMA Den put da soup in your mouth right now or I do it for you.

*(He looks at her. She obviously means business. He quickly puts the soup in his mouth. He keeps it there)*

ARTY . . . I can't swallow it. *(GRANDMA crosses to him, pulls his head back, and the soup goes down)* You could drown me like that . . . Why are you so mean to me? I'm your own grandson.

GRANDMA Dot's right. And vot am I?

ARTY What do you mean?

GRANDMA *Vot am I??* . . . Am I a nobody?

ARTY No. You're my grandmother.

GRANDMA Den vere's da respect? Da respect I never got from you or your family since da day you vere born?

ARTY You're just mad at my mother and you're taking it out on me. You don't care about your rotten soup or making me get better. You just want me to be miserable because somebody made you miserable in Germany. Even Pop said it . . . Well, that's not my fault. Take it out on Hitler, not on me.

GRANDMA Und if you vere a boy growing up in Germany, you would be dead by now.

ARTY That's right. Maybe I would. And if I ate this soup, I would be just as dead. Would that make you happy then? You want to be happy, Grandma? Watch! *(And he quickly eats six or seven spoonfuls of the soup)* Okay? Now you can stand there and watch me die.

GRANDMA No. You von't die. You'll be better dis afternoon. It's not so important dat you hate me, Artur . . . It's only important dat you live. *(She crosses to the door and opens it)* Dot's something dot I could never teach your father.

*(She exits.)*

*BELLA's bedroom door opens and LOUIE comes out with sleepy eyes and mussed hair. He wears an undershirt, pants, and socks, no shoes)*

LOUIE Ever hear of General Rommel?

ARTY Who?

LOUIE General Irwin Rommel. German tank commander. Right now he's rollin' right across Egypt, cut-

tin' through the whole British army. Tough as they come . . . But if Momma wanted him to eat the soup, he would eat the soup.

ARTY Did you eat it when you were a kid?

LOUIE Oh, yeah.

ARTY I thought you weren't afraid of her.

LOUIE I wasn't. That's how I proved it to her. I hated that soup worse than you. But I would drink three bowls of it and ask for more. She knew she couldn't win with me.

ARTY I wish I was as tough as you.

LOUIE Hey, you're gettin' there. You took her on, kid. That took guts. That took moxie.

ARTY What's moxie?

*(LOUIE stands in a defiant position, in his body and in his face)*

LOUIE *That's* moxie! . . . Where's Jay-Jay?

ARTY Downstairs guarding the pretzels . . . Uncle Louie . . . There was a telephone call for you.

LOUIE For me?

ARTY Jay took it. He told them he never heard of you.

LOUIE But they left a message, right?

ARTY Yeah. They said, "Tell Louie that Friday night the dance is over."

LOUIE *(Smiles)* Yeah. Well, that don't mean nothin'. A couple a Bronx boys like to talk tough. It's just horsin' around. You know what I mean? Huh? . . . Whatsa matter? Grandma got you down?

ARTY I think she loves doing it.

LOUIE Hey, let me tell you somethin'. Guess who hates livin' here more than you? *(He points to GRANDMA'S door)* The old lady with the cane. That's right. Grandma hates runnin' this store. She hates livin' in Yonkers. You know how many friends she's made here in thirty years? . . . Zippo.

ARTY She doesn't exactly put herself out with people.

LOUIE I never said she was a lot a laughs. I'll tell you the truth. I don't like her much myself. She knows it. Why should I? She used to lock me in a closet for breakin' a dish. A ten-cent dish, I'd get two, three hours in the closet. And if I cried, I'd get another hour . . . No light, no water, just enough air to breathe. That's when I learned not to cry. And after a few times in the closet, I toughened up. But I also never broke another dish . . . No, I didn't like her, but I respected her. Hell of a teacher, Ma was.

ARTY Wouldn't it have been easier if she bought paper plates?

LOUIE Then where's the lesson? There's no respect for paper plates. Hear me out . . . She was no harder on us

than she was on herself. When she was twelve years old, her old man takes her to a political rally in Berlin. The cops broke it up. With sticks, on horseback. Someone throws a rock, a cop bashes in her old man's head, a horse goes down and crushes Ma's foot. Nobody ever fixed it. It hurts every day of her life but I never once seen her take even an aspirin . . . She coulda had an operation but she used the money she saved to get to this country with her husband and six kids. That's moxie, kid.

ARTY Did she ever put my father in the closet?

LOUIE Not a chance. She'd open the closet door and he'd tie himself to the radiator. Even if it was hot. No, he was too afraid to go up against her. He was careful. He never broke nothin' except maybe himself . . .

ARTY Didn't you ever want to run away?

LOUIE I did. Twelve times. Still a record in Yonkers. The last time she wouldn't take me back. Told the policeman she didn't know me. I had no place to go so I lived under the house with a couple of cats for two weeks. Dead of winter. Bella would come out and bring me sandwiches, a blanket, couple a candles. Mom caught her and put her in the closet overnight. But Bella don't understand anything so she thought it was kinda fun. Or maybe she thought it was the safest place to be . . . Now, Gert—Gert was more scared than your old man. Gert used to talk in her sleep and Mom heard her one night sayin' things she didn't like. So Gert didn't get supper that week. Until she learned to sleep holdin' her breath.

ARTY I don't blame you for hating her.

LOUIE I didn't say "hate." I didn't *like* her. That's different. How you feelin'?

ARTY I think my fever's gone.

LOUIE Lousy soup but it works . . . When Jay comes up, tell him to bring me some coffee and a doughnut. I'll be in the shower. I wanna clean up before I go.

ARTY You're leaving? When?

LOUIE Tonight. No point waitin' till the dance is over.

*(He winks, then starts for the bathroom)*

ARTY Uncle Louie . . . ? *(LOUIE stops)* Are you in trouble?

LOUIE *(He smiles)* Arty! I was never *not* in trouble.

*(He goes into bathroom and closes the door.)*

*The front door opens and JAY storms in, looking furious. He slams the door closed)*

JAY I hate her! . . . I hate her guts. No wonder Mom never wanted us to come here.

ARTY What did she do?

JAY She charged me for three pretzels. Three pretzels that some kids stole while she was downstairs and I was

upstairs with your soup . . . She says, "No, there were twelve pretzels in the glass when I went upstairs and nine pretzels when I came down." . . . Not even Sherlock Holmes would notice that . . .

ARTY Two cents a pretzel, it's only six cents.

JAY Oh, is that all it is? Then *you* pay it . . . Is Uncle Louie still sleeping?

ARTY He's taking a shower. He's leaving tonight.

JAY Leaving? I have to talk to him.

ARTY About what?

JAY It's private business.

ARTY Jay, you don't *have* any business. All you got is a job that costs you six cents a day . . . Come on, tell me, Jay. I'll find out sooner or later.

JAY . . . I'm going to ask Uncle Louie to take me with him.

ARTY *WHAT???*

JAY Will you be quiet!

ARTY Are you crazy? Go with Uncle Louie?

JAY I have to make money. Get a good job somewhere. But I can't leave here with minus six cents in my pocket. Uncle Louie is my ticket out.

ARTY Running away. That's all Pop has to hear.

JAY Well, we just can't count on Pop anymore. Maybe I can take care of him better than he's taking care of us.

ARTY Doing what?

JAY Maybe Uncle Louie can teach me a few things.

ARTY Oh, great. To become what? A junior bagman? "The Pocketbook Kid"?

JAY If Uncle Louie says yes, you can't stop me.

ARTY . . . Then take me with you.

JAY Take *you*? You're only a kid. Besides, she doesn't treat you the way she treats me.

ARTY I'm afraid of her, Jay. A horse fell on her when she was a kid and she hasn't taken an aspirin yet.

JAY Look, if I can get set up somewhere with a good-paying job, I'll send for you.

ARTY You promise?

JAY I swear on Momma's grave.

ARTY Artur and Yakob, the gangsters. I can't believe it.

*(The front door opens and BELLA comes in)*

BELLA *(To JAY)* Oh, here you are. Momma sent me up to look for you. She didn't know where you were for twenty minutes.

JAY I'm coming right down. I just have to ask Uncle Louie something. He's in the shower.

BELLA (*To ARTY*) Are you feeling better, Arty?

ARTY Oh. Much.

BELLA No more fever?

ARTY No. It got scared away.

BELLA I'm glad. Because we're having company tonight. My sister Gertrude. Do you remember her?

JAY Sort of.

BELLA She hasn't been well. She doesn't breathe right. I think it's because she used to sleep with her head inside the pillow.

ARTY *Inside?*

(*BELLA nods, quickly closes the front door, then crosses closer to the boys*)

BELLA (*Whispering*) Tonight's the night.

JAY Tonight's what night?

BELLA The night that I talk to Momma. About you-know-what.

JAY Just the two of you?

BELLA No. With Aunt Gertrude and Uncle Louie here. And you and Arty. I wouldn't dare talk to Momma without the family here. To back me up . . . You *are* going to back me up, aren't you? You promised.

JAY It's not going to go very late, is it?

BELLA Not if everybody backs me up . . . You're not going anywhere, are you?

JAY Me? No. Where would *I* be going?

BELLA My heart hasn't stopped pounding all day. I'm so nervous, I can't stop eating. I ate three pretzels before and I *never* eat pretzels.

JAY *You* ate the pretzels? . . . If you eat anything else, would you tell Grandma first?

BELLA Oh, she knows I ate the pretzels. She even said to me, "Why are you eating so much? You nervous about something?" . . . I'd better get downstairs. (*She crosses to the door*) You too, Jay. I don't want to do anything to upset Momma before tonight. (*She opens the door*) Arty, if you want more soup, just let me know.

(*She goes and closes the door*)

JAY (*Furious*) She *knew* Aunt Bella ate the pretzels!! . . . Grandma's crazy, Arty. Where did that horse fall, on her *head*?

(*LOUIE comes out of the bathroom, his hair wet and combed straight back. He has a towel around his neck and he carries the little black satchel*)



LOUIE Perfect timing, Jay-Jay. *(He looks around)* You got my coffee and doughnut?

ARTY Oh. I forgot to tell him.

LOUIE So tell him.

ARTY *(To JAY)* Uncle Louie wanted some coffee and a doughnut.

JAY Coming right up . . . Would you tell Grandma it's for you? Because doughnuts are expensive.

LOUIE *(Smiles)* What is she doing, charging you for missing doughnuts?

JAY No. Missing pretzels. How did you know?

LOUIE It's her favorite trick. I once owed her two dollars for a missing bag of pistachio nuts. One minute they were on the counter, the next minute they were gone. She blamed me. Until I found them in her drawer. She said, "You're responsible if somebody steals from this store. Even me." . . . Hey, Arty. Get my shirt, will ya? It's on the bed.

*(ARTY crosses into BELLA's room)*

JAY Did you pay her the two dollars?

LOUIE No. I stole the nuts back that night. But I got the lesson.

JAY You've learned a lot in your life, haven't you, Uncle Louie?

LOUIE No one takes me for pistachios no more.

*(ARTY comes out with LOUIE's shirt)*

JAY I can see . . . A guy could learn a lot from you, I bet.

LOUIE *(He takes the shirt and puts it on)* I could write a book.

JAY You wouldn't have to write. I mean, if someone just hung around you watching, they would pick up a lot, don't you think?

LOUIE *(He sits on the sofa and begins to shine his shoes)* A lotta what?

JAY A lot of anything.

LOUIE I don't think so. 'Cause I don't like nobody hangin' around watchin' me.

JAY *(He looks at ARTY, then at LOUIE)* Uncle Louie . . . I have an important question to ask you.

LOUIE Don't ask questions, kid. That's probably the best thing I could teach you. Never ask questions.

JAY I'm sorry . . . I'll just tell you then . . . I want to leave here . . . Tonight . . . I made up my mind. I'm definitely going . . .

LOUIE Where you goin'?

JAY As far away as I can get.

LOUIE How far away is that? Five-dollars far? Ten-dollars far? A dozen pretzels far?

JAY No. Just a-pair-of-shoes far. Until they wear out.

LOUIE And then what? You better have better transportation than a pair of shoes.

JAY I never did this before. That's why I'm asking your advice.

LOUIE You're gonna make your grandma very unhappy, Jay-Jay.

JAY No, I won't. Besides, that never stopped you.

(LOUIE stops brushing and looks at JAY)

ARTY Would you like me to brush your shoes, Uncle Louie?

LOUIE (To ARTY) Hey! One guy work on me at a time, okay? (He brushes again; to JAY) So why you wanna go? It's cold out there. It's lonely out there . . . and it's dangerous out there.

JAY I know that . . . but there's money out there.

LOUIE Oh, I see . . . You lookin' to get rich fast?

JAY Not for me. For Pop.

LOUIE Ain't that nice? Like Robin Hood, heh?

JAY I don't want to rob people.

LOUIE No? . . . Who *do* you want to rob?

JAY No one.

LOUIE That sorta rules out gettin' rich fast.

JAY *Some* people do it.

LOUIE Yeah? How?

JAY You'll think this is a question.

LOUIE (*Angrily*) Then don't ask it. I can't help you, kid. I got nothin' to teach you and nothin' I *wanna* teach you . . . Is that what you think I do? Rob banks? Rob liquor stores? Grocery stores? Little old ladies in the park? Is that what you think I am?

JAY No . . . I don't think so.

LOUIE You don't think so? What is that, a compliment? . . . You wanna know what I do? I'm a businessman. I'm a free-lance money manager. A twenty-four-hour-a-day investment adviser. You been dyin' to ask me that all day so now I told you. School's out. You graduated. Now find a girl and go to your prom, okay?

JAY Thank you . . . I just have one minor question to ask.

LOUIE (*Smiles*) You got balls, kid . . . Did you know you got balls?

JAY I'm aware of them, yes.

LOUIE (*To ARTY*) I love your brother . . . Reminds me of me. (*To JAY*) What's your minor question?

JAY Are there any openings in your business?

LOUIE (*Staring at him*) . . . You got balls but I think they're in your head.

JAY I'll do anything and I won't ask any questions.

LOUIE There are no openings. The reason there are no openings is because there's no business no more. I'm relocating. I have urgent opportunities in a more desirable and advantageous territory. It's a one-man operation outa town . . . That's the end of this conversation. As far as I'm concerned, this conversation is deceased. Okay?

JAY . . . Take me with you . . . I'll get off wherever you want me to, but please, take me with you tonight.

LOUIE Are you deaf or somethin'? (*To ARTY*) Is he deaf? Doesn't he hear what I just said? Did *you* hear what I just said?

ARTY I caught most of it, yeah.

LOUIE (*To JAY*) Take you with me for what? For company? Your company's starting to pester me already. What do I need you for? What can you do for me? Heh?

*(He exits into the bathroom)*

JAY . . . I could carry your little black satchel.

*(LOUIE comes out, wearing his shoulder holster. He has fire in his eyes. LOUIE moves toward JAY)*

LOUIE . . . You interested in my little black satchel?

JAY No . . . I just thought—

LOUIE No? But you want to carry it . . . Why? Does it look heavy to you? . . . You think I got a broken arm, I can't carry a little bag like that?

JAY No.

LOUIE So maybe you have some other interest in it . . . You been foolin' around with this bag?

JAY I swear. No.

LOUIE So what are you curious about? How much it weighs or something? . . . You want to pick it up, go ahead, pick it up.

JAY I don't want to pick it up.

LOUIE Pick it up, Jay. It ain't gonna bite you . . . You won't be happy till you pick it up. Go ahead, kid. Pick it up.

JAY I really don't want to.

ARTY Come on, Jay. Please pick it up.

JAY Stay out of this.

LOUIE No, no . . . Arty, come here.

ARTY Me?

LOUIE That's right. You're Arty. (*ARTY comes to him. LOUIE puts his arm around ARTY's shoulder*) I want you to go over to that stool and pick up the black bag.

ARTY Jay is closer.

LOUIE Jay is not interested. I want you to do it.

(*ARTY goes over and stands next to the stool where the black bag sits*) Okay, Arty. Pick it up.

ARTY (*His face screws up*) I don't know why but I think I'm going to cry.

LOUIE Just pick it up, Arty.

(*ARTY picks it up*) Is it heavy?

ARTY No.

LOUIE Is it light?

ARTY No.

LOUIE So what is it?

ARTY . . . Medium.

LOUIE Okay, so it's medium . . . So what do you think is in the bag? . . . Money? . . . Fives and tens and twenties and hundreds all stuck together with rubber bands? . . . WHAT?? . . . I said *WHAT!!!*

ARTY I don't know.

LOUIE You don't know . . . Well, then, maybe you'd better look in the bag and see . . . Why don't you do that, Arty? . . . Open the bag . . . Okay?

ARTY Please, Uncle Louie—

LOUIE (*He takes a step closer*) I'm only gonna ask you one more time, Arty . . . because I'm runnin' out of patience . . . Open—the bag!

(*ARTY looks at him, helpless, terrified . . . and then suddenly*)

JAY Don't do it, Arty . . . Leave him alone, Uncle Louie. You want the bag open, do it yourself. (*He takes the bag from ARTY and tosses it at LOUIE's feet*) Maybe you don't rob banks or grocery stores or little old women. You're worse than that. You're a bully. You pick on a couple of kids. Your own nephews. You make fun of my father because he cried and was afraid of Grandma. Well, everyone in *Yonkers* is afraid of Grandma . . . And let me tell you something about my father. At least he's doing something in this war. He's sick and he's tired but he's out there selling iron to make ships and tanks and cannons. And I'm proud of him. What are *you* doing? Hiding in your mother's apartment and scaring little kids and acting like Humphrey Bogart. Well, you're no Humphrey Bogart . . . And I'll tell you something else—No. That's all.

(*LOUIE has hardly blinked an eye. He shifts his body and takes one small step towards JAY*)

LOUIE (*Smiles*) That was thrilling. That was beautiful. I had tears in my eyes, I swear to God . . . You got bigger balls than I thought, Jay. You got a couple of steel basketballs there . . . You know what you got, Jay? You got moxie.

JAY What's moxie?

LOUIE Tell him, Arty.

(ARTY makes LOUIE's gesture of what moxie is)

ARTY (*To JAY*) That's moxie.

LOUIE Yeah . . . Your father's a lucky guy, let me tell you . . . That's why I don't think you should go with me, Jay. You take care of Arty here. And Momma and Bella. And maybe one day you'll be proud of your old Uncle Louie, too. (*He picks up the bag and puts it on the table*) And don't worry what was in the bag. It's just laundry. Dirty laundry, boys. That's all.

(*He crosses to the mirror to finish getting dressed as GRANDMA walks in*)

GRANDMA (*Sternly, to JAY*) Are you a banker? Is dis your lunch hour? Well, dis is not a bank. Go down and help Bella close up da store . . . Artur, get your clothes on. Ve haff company tonight.

(ARTY runs into the bathroom)

LOUIE I don't think I can stay, Ma.

GRANDMA I didn't ask you to. Bella asked you. You'll stay. (*To JAY*) You haff something to say to me? No? Den get downstairs . . . Und you und I haff someting else to talk about later.

JAY About what?

GRANDMA About a jar of pistachio nuts dat are missing, dot's about what.

(*JAY looks at LOUIE, then goes. LOUIE puts on bis suit coat and hat. GRANDMA looks at bim. It's more of a scowl. She takes a few bills out of ber pocket*)

GRANDMA You're getting careless, Louie. You dropped money on my dresser this morning.

LOUIE Louie's never careless, Ma. It's for you. I had a good week.

GRANDMA A good week for you is a bad week for someone else . . . I don't want your profits, Louie.

LOUIE It's just a hundred bucks. Happy Birthday, Ma. It's tomorrow, right?

GRANDMA (*She puts the money on the table*) Don't pay me for being born. I've been paid enough.

LOUIE (*He picks up the money*) Then take it for putting me up. You know how I hate hotels.

(*He offers it to ber*)

GRANDMA (*Angrily*) I don't take from you!!! . . . Not what you haff to give . . . You were always the strongest one. The survivor . . . *Live*—at any cost I taught you, yes. But not when someone else has to pay the price . . . Keep your filthy money, Louie. (*She starts to go*)

LOUIE (*Smiles*) You're terrific, Ma. One hundred percent steel. Finest grade made. Eddie's out there lookin' for scrap iron and the chump doesn't know he's got a whole battleship right here . . . Nah. You can't get me down, Ma. I'm too tough. You taught me good. And whatever I've accomplished in this life, just remember—you're my partner. (*He blows her a ferocious kiss*)

*Blackout*

*In the dark, we hear the voice of EDDIE again.*

EDDIE (*Voice-over*) "Dear Momma . . . The boys tell me you're getting along fine with them. I told you they wouldn't be any trouble. Enclosed, I'm sending you twenty-five dollars to cover their food and Arty's medicine . . . Yakob tells me some kids have been stealing pretzels and pistachio nuts. It's amazing that hasn't stopped in almost thirty years . . . Love, Eddie."

*(Later that night.*

BELLA and JAY are clearing the dining table of its remaining dishes and straightening out the chairs.

GRANDMA sits in her usual chair, wearing a sweater and crocheting or doing needlepoint. LOUIE, wearing his suit jacket, paces, looking like he's anxious to go. AUNT GERT, in her mid-to-late thirties, sits on the sofa. She holds a purse and her handkerchief, which she uses now and then to wipe her mouth. ARTY is in the kitchen, unseen, helping clean off the dishes)

BELLA Would anyone like more coffee? Momma? Gert?

*(GRANDMA doesn't answer)*

GERT (*Nods*) Mmm.

BELLA Strudel with it?

GERT (*Hoarsely*) No.

BELLA Jay, go in and get Aunt Gert some more coffee, but no strudel. (JAY goes in) Louie? Wouldn't you like another piece?

LOUIE (*Distracted*) I had enough, Bella.

BELLA You always have two pieces.

LOUIE One strudel is enough tonight, okay, Bella?

(*He looks at his watch . . . BELLA starts to put the chairs from the dining table into the circle of seats in the living room*)

BELLA Don't help me with the chairs, anyone. I know just how I want it to be.

(*LOUIE looks at his watch as BELLA puts a chair in the right spot*)

LOUIE Listen, Momma. I'm gonna run along, now. I'll call you next week. Gert, it was good seein' you, sweet-heart. You're lookin' terrific.

BELLA Louie, you're going to sit right here.

LOUIE Bella, I'm sorry. I really gotta go. It was a top-notch dinner, no kiddin'. (*He kisses her cheek. He calls off into the kitchen*) Jay! It'll work out. Trust me. Where's Arty? I'm leavin'.

BELLA Noo!! You can't go yet, Louie . . . You promised.

LOUIE I promised I'd stay for dinner. I stayed for dinner. How many dinners you want me to stay for?

BELLA But the family hasn't had a talk yet.

LOUIE We did. We talked all through dinner. I never had a chance to swallow nothin'. I'm all talked out, Bella.

BELLA There's still something that hasn't been talked about. It wasn't something that could be talked about at dinner . . . You sit here. This is your place.

LOUIE (*Exasperated*) I told you I had to go right after the coffee. I had my coffee. I had my strudel. I had my dinner. I have to go, Bella.

BELLA (*Nervously*) Momma! Gert! Tell him to stay . . . Louie, you can't go. You have to be here. The whole family has to be here. Momma, tell him.

GRANDMA (*Sternly*) You're getting excited, Bella.

BELLA I won't get excited. I promise. I'm fine, Momma . . . Just ask Louie to stay. Let me get the boys in.

GERT He'll stay, Bella.

BELLA (*Calls out*) Jay? Arty! Forget the dishes. We'll do them later . . . Everybody inside.

(*JAY comes in with GERT's coffee. ARTY follows, eating the last bite of a piece of strudel. He is dressed now*)

JAY Here's your coffee, Aunt Gert.

GERT Thank you.

BELLA Jay! Arty! Sit on the sofa with Aunt Gert. Momma, you stay there. I'll sit here and, Louie, sit on the chair.

LOUIE I've been sittin' all night, Bella. I can stand up, okay?

BELLA But it would be so much better if you were sitting, Louie. I pictured everybody sitting.

LOUIE *I don't wanna sit!!* Change the picture. Picture everybody sittin' and me standin', alright?

*(This is the first time we hear AUNT GERT say her first full sentence, where her affliction becomes apparent. She speaks normally for the first half of the sentence and then somewhere past the middle, she sucks in her breath, so the words go to a higher pitch and it sounds very difficult for her)*

GERT Louie, can't you just sit for a few minutes until Bella tells us what it is—*(She sucks in now)*—she wants to talk to us about.

*(ARTY and JAY look at each other)*

LOUIE Okay. Okay. *(He sits on the window seat)* Here? Alright? Is this the way you pictured it, Bella?

BELLA No. I pictured you sitting on the chair I picked out.

LOUIE *(He crosses to "bis" chair, but doesn't sit)* Bella! It's very important that I leave here soon. Very important.

I don't want to upset you, sweetheart, but I can't spend the rest of the night getting the seating arrangements right . . . I'm gonna stand up, I'm gonna listen, and then I'm gonna go.

BELLA *(She puts her head down and sulks, childlike)* I pictured everybody sitting.

LOUIE Jesus!

GERT Louie, stop arguing with her and sit down, for God sakes, before—*(She sucks in)*—she gets into one of her moods again.

GRANDMA Louie, sit! Gertrude, stop it.

LOUIE Louie sit! Louie stand! Louie eat! . . . You don't scare me anymore, Ma. Maybe everyone else here, but not me. You understand?

GRANDMA *(Still crocheting)* Sit down, Louie!

*(LOUIE sits)*

BELLA Alright. *(She sits)* Are we all seated now?

LOUIE Yes, Bella. We're all seated. You wanna take a picture of what you pictured?

GERT Stop it, Louie.

BELLA *(She looks around, then smiles, content with the seating)* Now . . . who wants to start?