

—Build After Crisis—

SCENE 3

ARTY (*Voice-over*) "Dear Pop . . . Things are really bad here. Really, *really* bad. I wish you were home. Even just for a weekend. Last night I cried for you . . . and for Mom . . . but Jay was afraid Grandma would hear, so he stuck a sock in my mouth. I miss you and love you. Your son, Arty . . . Not Artur."

(*Sunday, the following week. About midday.*)

ARTY *is seated at the table, writing in his notebook.*
JAY *stands looking out the window*)

JAY Where do you think Aunt Bella could be? Missing for two nights, somewhere out there in the city. I'm worried.

ARTY Maybe Uncle Louie took her with him.

JAY If he didn't take me, you think he's going to take Aunt Bella and her forty-year-old usher from the Home? . . .

(*The door to GRANDMA'S room opens and AUNT GERT comes out*)

GERT I'm going now. I think Momma feels better since—(*A breath*)—Aunt Bella called me.

JAY No idea where she is?

GERT Yes. (*She moves away from GRANDMA'S door*) . . . She's at my house.

ACT TWO

JAY *Your house?*

GERT Shhh. She doesn't want Momma to know.

ARTY You mean she's been there all the time?

(*GERT nods "yes"*)

JAY Is she ever coming back?

GERT She's meeting with that man today . . . We'll know soon.

ARTY Do you think they'll get married?

GERT Who knows? . . . She's been crying for—(*A breath*)—two days now. I'm sorry. It's hard for me to talk.

JAY Isn't there anything the doctors can do about that, Aunt Gert?

GERT I don't have it that much. It's mostly—(*Sucks in*)—when I come here.

JAY Oh.

GERT You boys take care of Grandma now. If Bella doesn't come back you're all she has.

JAY I know.

GERT If you run into trouble, do you have my number?

JAY I don't think so.

LOST IN YONKERS

GERT It's Westchester seven—(*Sucks in*)—four-six-six-nine.

ARTY What?

GERT Westchester seven—(*Sucks in*)—four-six—

JAY I have it! I have it!

GERT Goodbye, darlings. Take care. I love you. (*She goes, closing the front door*)

ARTY It could be worse. Suppose we were left with *her* instead?

JAY That's not funny.

ARTY Yes, it is.

JAY Alright. It's funny. But I feel sorry for her. I feel sorry for this whole family Even Grandma Don't you? (*ARTY looks at JAY, says nothing*) Well, I do. And you should, too. (*GRANDMA's door opens. She comes out, looking tired*) Hi, Grandma. How you feeling?

ARTY Is there anything we can get you?

GRANDMA (*She sits*) Vot are you doing in the house on Sunday? Vy don't you go for a walk or something?

JAY We thought we'd keep you company.

GRANDMA I don't need to be kept company.

ACT TWO

ARTY You want the radio on, Grandma? They have Sunday news on today.

GRANDMA I had enough news already this week.

JAY Things are getting better in North Africa. They captured twenty thousand Germans this month.

GRANDMA Twenty thousand Germans . . . Goot. Dot's goot news.

ARTY The football game is on now. Sometimes they interrupt the game for news reports.

GRANDMA Don't trick me into listening to football. (*She turns her head*) Vas dot the phone? Did you hear the phone downstairs?

JAY No.

GRANDMA No. It don't ring on Sundays . . . How is your father?

JAY He's feeling better. He thinks he could be home for good in about eight months.

GRANDMA Eight months . . . You'll be glad to go home, ya?

ARTY Ya . . . Yes . . . Sort of.

JAY But we'll still come out and visit you, Grandma.

GRANDMA Maybe I von't be here . . . Maybe I'll sell da store.

LOST IN YONKERS

JAY Sell the store? What would you do without the store?

GRANDMA Don't worry so much about your grandma. Your grandma knows how to take care of herself, believe me . . . Go on outside, both of you. You talk too much.

JAY You sure you don't mind being alone?

GRANDMA (*She sits back and closes her eyes*) . . . Maybe dis is da first Sunday I'll get some rest.

(The front door opens and BELLA comes in. She is wearing a hat and coat and carries her purse and a small suitcase. She also has a cake box)

JAY Aunt Bella!

ARTY Are you okay?

GRANDMA (*She doesn't react to this. She remains sitting back with her eyes still closed*) Go already. How many times do I haff to tell you?

(The boys look at her, then turn and leave, closing the door. BELLA stands there looking at her mother, who has still refused to open her eyes)

BELLA Hello, Momma . . . (*GRANDMA doesn't respond*) . . . Would you like some tea? It's chilly in here . . . I bought a coffee cake at Grossman's. It's still warm . . . It's alright if you don't want to talk to me, Momma. I know you must be very angry with me.

ACT TWO

GRANDMA (*She looks away from BELLA*) You're home for goot or dis is a visit?

BELLA I don't know . . . I thought I'd come back and talk to you about it.

GRANDMA Like you talked to me da night you left? . . . Vidout a vord?

BELLA You're the one who didn't talk, Momma. You never gave me a chance to say anything.

GRANDMA I heard vot you had to say. I didn't haff to hear no more.

BELLA (*Nods*) Look, Momma, I'm not crying . . . I know you're very angry with me but I'm not crying. And it's not because I'm afraid to cry. It's because I have no tears left in me. I feel sort of empty inside. Like *you* feel all the time.

GRANDMA How would you know how I feel?

BELLA You don't think I know anything, do you? You think I'm stupid, don't you, Momma?

GRANDMA No. You're not stupid.

BELLA Then what? Am I crazy? Do you think I'm crazy, Momma?

GRANDMA Don't use dot word to me.

BELLA Why not? Are you afraid of it? If that's what I am, Momma, then don't be afraid to say it. Because if

I'm crazy, I should be in the Home, shouldn't I? But then you'd be alone and you wouldn't like that. Is that why you don't use that word, Momma?

GRANDMA . . . You want to know vot you are, Bella? . . . You're a child. Dot's vot da doctors told me. Not crazy. Not stupid . . . A child! . . . And dot's how I treat you. Because dot's all you understand . . . You don't need doctors. You're not sick. You don't need to live in da Home. *Dis* is vere you live. Vere you can be vatched and taken care of . . . You'll always be a child, Bella. And in dis vorld, vere dere is so much hate and sickness and death, vere nobody can live in peace, den maybe you're better off . . . Stay a child, Bella, and be glad dot's vot Gott made you.

BELLA Then why did he make me look like a woman? . . . And feel like a woman inside of me? And want all the things a woman should have? Is that what I should thank him for? Why did he do that, Momma, when I can do everything but *think* like a woman? . . . I know I get confused sometimes . . . and frightened. But if I'm a child, why can't I be happy like a child? Why can't I be satisfied with dolls instead of babies?

GRANDMA I'm not so smart I can answer such things.

BELLA But I *am* smart, Momma. Maybe only as smart as a child, but some children are smarter than grown-ups. Some grown-ups I've seen are very stupid. And very mean.

GRANDMA You don't haff responsibilities, Bella. And responsibilities is vot makes meanness.

BELLA I don't want to be your responsibility. Then maybe you won't be so mean to me.

GRANDMA Den who will be responsible for you? Yourself? Dot man you ran away with? Who wants money from you? Who wants other things from you? God only knows vot else. Things you would never know about. Stay the way you are, Bella, because you don't know vot such feelings would do to you.

BELLA Yes, I do, Momma. I know what other things you're talking about . . . Because they've happened to me, Momma . . . Oh, yes . . . They've happened because I *wanted* them to happen . . . You angry at me?

GRANDMA (*She turns away, dismissing this*) You don't know vot you're saying, Bella.

BELLA You mean am I telling you the truth? Yes. I know what the truth is . . . Only I've been afraid to tell it to you for all these years. Gertrude knows. She's the only one . . . Do you hate me, Momma? Tell me, because I don't know if I did wrong or not.

GRANDMA You're angry so you tell me lies. I don't want to hear your childish lies.

(*She waves BELLA away*)

BELLA No! You *have* to listen, Momma . . . When I was in school, I let boys touch me . . . And boys that I met in the park . . . And in the movies . . . Even boys that I met here in the store . . . Nights when you were asleep, I went down and let them in . . . And not just boys, Momma . . . men too.

LOST IN YONKERS

GRANDMA Stop dis, Bella. You don't know vot you're saying . . . You dream these things in your head.

BELLA I needed somebody to touch me, Momma. Somebody to hold me. To tell me I was pretty . . . *You* never told me that. Some even told me they loved me but I never believed them because I knew what they wanted from me . . . Except John. He *did* love me. Because he understood me. Because he was like me. He was the only one I ever felt safe with. And I thought maybe for the first time I *could* be happy . . . That's why I ran away. I even brought the five thousand dollars to give to him for the restaurant. Then maybe he'd find the courage to leave home too.

GRANDMA (*She looks at her disdainfully*) Is dis someting else you dreamed up? Vere would you get five thousand dollars?

(*BELLA opens her purse and takes out a stack of bills tied in rubber bands. She puts it on the table*)

BELLA Does this look like a dream, Momma?