

The Cellar
By George Freek

THE CHARACTERS

GERALD	AROUND FIFTY
HELEN	SAME AGE AS GERALD
SONNY	HELEN'S SON, IN HIS 20s
HONEY	HELEN'S DAUGHTER, IN HER 20s
ROBERT	PLAYED BY THE ACTOR PLAYING SONNY
MR BRIGHAM	AROUND FORTY
TWO MEN	DRESSED IN BLACK SUITS

THE SCENE

HELEN and GERALD'S HOME
A MIDWESTERN CITY OF 160,000

THE TIME

RECENTLY

ACT ONE

1, i

(Lights up slowly and remaining dim on the kitchen; GERALD is at the table talking to ROBERT, who wears dark glasses and is silent, looking afraid)

GERALD

I can talk to you. It's good to have a man to talk to. I'm not saying Helen isn't okay. She just don't understand things like a man does. You're gonna say there's Sonny. I know. But I can't talk to that sonofabitch. (ROBERT looks around nervously) Now you just take it easy and don't worry. I'm gonna take care a you. Okay?

(Suddenly, the phone is ringing in another room)

GERALD

Sounds like the phone. Must be those men calling for Sonny again. I told you he's no good. He's in some kind a trouble. You stay where you are, I'll be right back. (He exits to answer the phone).

ROBERT

(He rises, walks towards the audience, tapping with a cane) Help me. Is there someone here who can help me?.... Please....Someone. Help me...

BLACKOUT

1, ii

(The kitchen. HELEN sits at the table, counting change and a few bills and putting it in a cookie jar; There's a knock off, which she ignores)

GERALD

(OFF) Helen? HELEN

HELEN

(Finishes her counting) Sixty-five dollars and thirty two cents. (She smiles, puts the jar on a shelf and exits).

(She returns, followed by GERALD, who wears a ruffled white shirt and tie; the shirt has a name tag over one of its pockets)

GERALD

Where were you? Didn't you hear me?

HELEN

I heard you. I was counting my money. I thought you might be Sonny. Didn't want him in my cookie jar.

GERALD

You got a point. (He takes a beer from the refrigerator).

HELEN

I got enough for my curtains. And I got them all picked out.

GERALD

What color?

HELEN

Blue. I like blue. It matches the sky.

GERALD

Not today. It's gonna rain.

HELEN

How was work.

GERALD

I sold a few drain pipes, some light bulbs, made a couple a keys. And I went to Bucky Burgers four times today....

HELEN

Must a been hungry.

GERALD

What it is. They're having this contest. Every time you buy something, you get a ticket and you scrape the silver gook off a the ticket and if you're lucky, you win something. I bought four cokes today.

HELEN

You don't like coke.

GERALD

And I like it less now. I never won a thing.

HELEN

Well, I saved my money and I'm gonna have my curtains.

GERALD

Yeah.

HELEN

They giving curtains away at Bucky Burgers?

GERALD

Curtains! They're giving away up to fifty thousand dollars!

HELEN

Curtains are better than nothing.

GERALD

You know something. It's not fair. You make sacrifices. You take risks. You have the courage to dream and where's it get you? I'll tell you. Tomorrow I'm taking six breaks!

HELEN

Listen. You take six breaks....

GERALD

I don't care! I don't care if they do catch me!

HELEN

I was only gonna say bring some a those cokes home.

GERALD

You know one time at the race track the same thing happened to me.

HELEN

What same thing?

GERALD

I had a feeling it was gonna be my day, so I called in sick. I felt like the third race was gonna be it. First race, second race, the excitement's building up. Then it's the third race. I looked over the entries and picked a horse. By the name a 'Uncle Sam.' I put every cent I had on 'Uncle Sam.' He started slow. Then the jockey let him go. Fourth place, third, second....first! Coming down the stretch it was 'Uncle Sam' all the way. My eyes were blurred with tears of joy. People looked at me like I was crazy. I am crazy I wanted to tell them, 'cause I'm gonna win ten thousand bucks! Then the announcer said it was a photo finish. In the end, the winner was some nag called 'Cocaine.' And I had to walk home, I didn't even have enough money for a bus. Some bum bet on 'Cocaine' and won a thousand bucks. What was he gonna do with a thousand bucks?

HELEN

I bet he took a cab home.

GERALD

Okay.

HELEN

(Pause) Bob Hardy's wife got kidnapped.

GERALD

(Looks at her) I know her?

HELEN

That program I watch. On the TV. Bob Hardy's been living with Doc Morgan's daughter, but he's also been fooling around with Judge Tanner's daughter.

GERALD

What about his wife?

HELEN

At first they thought she committed suicide, 'cause Bob found an empty pill bottle in her bathroom. But then Bob got this ransom note. What happened was it took almost a month for him to get that note, 'cause she fell in love with one a the kidnapers.

GERALD

You watch that every day?

HELEN

Religiously.

GERALD

I'd say that's a waste a time.

HELEN

You got a right to your opinion. It's a free country.

GERALD

Free to waste your time.

HELEN

I'm not gonna say anything about people wasting their time. Okay?

GERALD

(Pause) We got another beer?

HELEN

(She gets him one) Now will you tell me why you called in sick just to go to the race track?

GERALD

Yes. I will tell you that. I did it because I love horses. That's why.

HELEN

You love horses?

GERALD

Yes I do.

HELEN

You love HORSES!?

GERALD

What's wrong with that?

HELEN

People are supposed to love other people, not horses.

GERALD

Let me tell you something about horses you don't know.

HELEN

What makes you think I want to know it?

GERALD

Just listen up a minute. Horses don't have feet, they got hooves. And with those hooves, they can run forty-fifty miles an hour. You ever seen a person run fifty miles an hour?

HELEN

You love horses 'cause they can run fifty miles an hour.

GERALD

That is something.

HELEN

I still think you're crazy.

GERALD

No. You don't get it. Horses are perfect. Because they do what they're supposed to do. Run. People never do what they're supposed to do, or if they do, they don't do it right.

HELEN

Sometimes people don't know what they're supposed to do.

GERALD

I know what I'm gonna do. I'm gonna win us fifty thousand bucks at Bucky Burgers.

HELEN

I hope you're not gonna call in sick to go to the race track any more.

GERALD

That reminds me. At work today, a guy had a stroke....

HELEN

Oh my.

GERALD

Yeah. He was manager of my department. Murphy. You remember me telling you about Murphy.

HELEN

Sure I do. He was manager of your department.

GERALD

He had a stroke while he was selling some paint.

HELEN

That is awful.

GERALD

It's terrible.

HELEN

Yes. It is.

GERALD

I'm just glad it didn't happen to me.

HELEN

Knock wood.

GERALD

What're you saying.

HELEN

You never know.

GERALD

That's true. Anything can happen to anyone at any particular time. In that respect, we are truly equal.

HELEN

We are. Yes.

GERALD

Makes me sick to think about it.

HELEN

Then I wouldn't think about it.

GERALD

No. You wouldn't.

HELEN

Anyway, funny things happen.

GERALD

What's so funny about a stroke?

HELEN

I'm only saying it's been a funny day.

GERALD

How is that?

HELEN

Well, first it was cold. Then it got hot. Kind a makes you wonder what's gonna happen next.

GERALD

What about Robert?

HELEN

What about him?

GERALD

I hope you give him something to eat.

HELEN

I give him a sandwich.

GERALD

He say anything?

HELEN
No.

GERALD
He don't talk much.

HELEN
He don't talk at all.

GERALD
I sure like that about him.

HELEN
It's scary. Sometimes I look at him. And I wonder what it'd be like....

GERALD
What what would be like?

HELEN
Being blind like that.

GERALD
I never asked him that.

HELEN
Gerald, listen. I'm afraid. Why you want him to stay here? I mean he never says anything. He just sits there behind those dark glasses. I don't know why you want him here.

GERALD
You're not prejudiced against the man 'cause he's blind, I hope.

HELEN
You know what. When I was a little girl there was a blind girl who lived up the street and one day coming home from school, she fell down and so I went over to help her get back up....

GERALD
Good.

HELEN
But when I got to her and saw her lying there and I looked at those blind white eyes of hers, I got scared and I ran away.

GERALD
You ran away before you helped her up?

HELEN

I'm telling you I got scared looking at her.

GERALD

Well, they say it's the thought that counts.

HELEN

I thought about kicking her.

GERALD

I guess you never know what you're gonna do when you're scared. You know today when he had that stroke, Murphy's eyes looked like a blind person's eyes. They rolled back and all you could see was white.

HELEN

Gerald, this Robert. Why do you want him here?

GERALD

Because he just sits there and listens to you. You can say anything and he don't interrupt, or he don't contradict you. He just sits and listens.

HELEN

What if he wants to go?

GERALD

Why would he want to go? There's nowhere better than right here. (SONNY now enters, dressed in garish 'touristy' clothing; He goes to HELEN and kisses her)

SONNY

Hello, mom. What's for dinner? (He smiles broadly, then wanders over and opens the refrigerator door).

HELEN

We haven't decided yet, dear.

SONNY

No? Well then why don't we make a decision? How about it, dad? Shall we make a decision? (GERALD ignores him).

HELEN

Now don't pick, you'll ruin your appetite.

SONNY

No. No. I couldn't do that? You know why? Because I am hungry

enough to eat a bear. Literally. A god damn bear. Think about that.

(He smiles at them)

(A pause, during which GERALD bristles angrily)

HELEN

I just don't want you to pick, we'll have supper in a little while.

SONNY

Mom, you know I could eat your wonderful cooking no matter what I'd been eating beforehand. (He smiles at GERALD) How about it, dad. Don't you agree mom is a wonderful cook. Oh, by the way, would you like to know what I did today?

GERALD

No!

HELEN

Gerald! Yes. Of course we want to know.

SONNY

Well, for one thing, I bet some money on a horse.

HELEN

(Uneasy) Where'd you get the money, dear.

SONNY

You know what. I think I'm going to win a lot of money on this horse. And when I do, I'm going to buy you something, mom. What would you say to a new hat?

HELEN

I would say 'Thank you.'

SONNY

Fine. And you, too, dad. When I win this money, I think I'll buy the both of you new goddam hats. What do you say to that?

GERALD

Watch your language in front of your mother, goddamit!

HELEN

Gerald, he's young. Try to be a father. He's trying to be nice because he respects you. (To SONNY) Don't you, dear?

SONNY

Oh god yes. It's mind-boggling how much I respect dad. You know sometimes when I think about how much I respect him, I feel faint. I get weak at the knees thinking of all the respect I feel for him.

HELEN

(to GERALD) There. You see.

GERALD

I wish I could believe that.

HELEN

Don't be so stubborn.

GERALD

(to SONNY) You were telling us how you got the money to make that bet.

SONNY

So I was. Anyway, after I placed my bet, I continued down the street and I saw something that would have made you sick. You want to know what I saw?

GERALD

NO!

SONNY

Okay. I saw this middle-aged lecher propositioning a young girl. She didn't seem to be more than fourteen. I think you'd be proud of what I did about it. I gave him a kick in the balls. Let me tell you, THAT got his attention. My god, I have to ask. What kind of a world are we living in anyway?

HELEN

(to GERALD) He has a point.

SONNY

I left him in an alley, but I'd given him something to think about, and then I took this girl to her room. Because believe it or not, she had her own room, because it turned out while she looked about fourteen, she was actually nineteen.

HELEN

I've seen girls like that.

SONNY

And when we get back to her room, what do you think? To show her appreciation, she propositions ME! That was a surprise!

GERALD

(to HELEN) Do I have to listen to any more of this filth?

HELEN

(to SONNY) I do have to get supper ready.

SONNY

One more point. It seems she was a prostitute. How about that for irony? I mean I save her from this filthy creep and then she comes on and asks me for fifty dollars. Well, if that doesn't shake your faith in humanity, what does? I thought of doing her an injury, but I just got the hell away. I wonder. Where do these people get their values? I don't know, maybe they've never had a home, a family. Maybe we should feel sorry for them after all. What do you think, dad?

GERALD

(to HELEN) I want him out of this house.

SONNY

Let me tell you, dad, you'll change that tune when my horse comes in.

GERALD

(to HELEN) Will you tell him to quit calling me dad!

SONNY

Look, dad, I'll tell you what. Why don't we have a little chat? Just the two of us, a man-to-man discussion. How about it?

HELEN

Gerald, he is your son.

GERALD

Step-son.

HELEN

I hope you don't hold that against him.

GERALD

You know what I hold against him? He stole my fishing cap. The fishing cap my dad gave me. That bastard stole it. (To SONNY) You had your own cap, why'd you steal mine?

SONNY

Mom, if I may say it, I think dad needs medical attention.

HELEN

I'll tell you what I think. I think it's disgraceful the way you two gone on.

SONNY

That reminds me. Dad, I have something for you.

HELEN

(to GERALD) There. What do you say about that?

GERALD

I don't trust him. Where did he get the money?

SONNY

As a matter of fact, I took it off that pervert, the one who was propositioning that girl. I took his money because I hoped it might teach him a lesson and I decided to buy you and mom something with it.

HELEN

Now, aren't you ashamed of yourself, Gerald?

GERALD

First, let me see what he bought.

SONNY

(He smiles, reaches in his pocket and takes out a screw driver)
Here it is. It's a beauty, isn't it?

GERALD

A screw driver?

HELEN

It's very nice. I can use it to put up my curtains.

SONNY

What it is, dad, it's a Phillip's head.

GERALD

(to HELEN) What's he driving at here? (To SONNY) Okay. Wait a minute. What are you trying to prove by this? Listen. I make the rules around here, you understand? And another thing. Why don't you get a job?

SONNY

(to HELEN) Oh. One more thing. Can I ask, mom, what are you hiding in the cookie jar?

HELEN

The cookie jar? What do you mean?

SONNY

Okay. I'll bet it's a secret. Well, I love secrets. (He smiles, exits).

GERALD

(Holds up the screw driver) Find out where he got this, I'll get a refund.

HELEN

Gerald, he knows about my cookie jar. That money is for my curtains.

GERALD

I got to talk to somebody about this.

HELEN

I love him. Of course I do, he's my boy. But I want my curtains.

GERALD

I'm gonna talk to Robert. That's what I'm gonna do.

HELEN

Robert? Listen, you know what I think? This is all his fault!

GERALD

What're you talking about?

HELEN

I'm talking about that Robert. All this is happening because of him.

GERALD

Well, you know what I think?

HELEN

Yes. I do. I do know what you think, Gerald. And I don't like it. I don't like it one tiny bit! (They look at each other, and....)

THE FIRST ACT IS OVER

ACT TWO

(GERALD sits at the table gluing trading stamps in a book; HELEN enters, goes to her cookie jar)

HELEN

(Counts her money) It's all there.

GERALD

You're kidding. He didn't take it?

HELEN

Five more dollars, I buy my curtains.

GERALD

(Pastes the last stamp in the book) I'm working on that speedboat.

HELEN

That sounds nice. We'll have fun in that speedboat.

GERALD

That's why I'm gonna get it.

HELEN

How you coming along? Good?

GERALD

Let me tell you I am.

HELEN

That's good.

GERALD

Only eight hundred and twelve books to go.

HELEN

It'll be fun to have a speedboat.

GERALD

Never had a speedboat, just dreamed about it.

HELEN

I never had a speedboat either. But when I was a girl I had this pretty pair of shoes.

GERALD

Shoes? Why are you talking about shoes?

HELEN

I loved those pretty little shoes. I wore 'em everywhere. But I wasn't supposed to do that. And my mom was wondering how I wore those shoes out so darn fast.

GERALD

You making some kind a point here?

HELEN

I am. Yes. See, this afternoon I was cleaning out the cellar....

GERALD

The cellar? You didn't bother him.

HELEN

No. I didn't go near him. But I came across those shoes. I'd saved them in a box all these years...

GERALD

You're talking about memories.

HELEN

No. Yes. In a way. But what I am saying is they were just an old pair of shoes. They didn't mean nothing. Is that sad? I guess so. I mean once, they meant so much to me, and now they're just a dirty old pair of worn-out shoes. At first, I thought they were an old pair of Honey's.

GERALD

Of Honey's? She home yet?

HELEN

You seen her?

GERALD

It's late. She ought a be home. Why's she out so late?

HELEN

You remember that time when she was a little girl, she ran away?

GERALD

The hell you say. She never ran away.

HELEN

No. She didn't exactly run away. She climbed up the neighbor's

tree, and she wouldn't come down. So I went out there and told her to get down out a that tree and you know what she said?

GERALD

What?

HELEN

She said she wasn't up there.

GERALD

Funny thing to say.

HELEN

Honey's not up here, she told me. Nobody's up here. Honey's run away and she's never coming back. She kept saying that and all the time, there I was looking at her up in that tree.

GERALD

How old was she?

HELEN

About thirteen, I guess.

GERALD

Must a been playing a game with you.

HELEN

Maybe so. I mean she did come down.

GERALD

Of course she did. She's a good girl.

HELEN

She's a wonderful girl.

GERALD

She's the light of my life. And then, when I think of Sonny. You know, at night sometimes, I think of sneaking into his room and starting his bed on fire. And I fall asleep, thinking of that.

HELEN

That's nasty.

GERALD

Maybe things'll be better when I get that speedboat.

HELEN

That's something we'll be able to enjoy, as a family.

GERALD

That's what I had in mind.

HELEN

We can all have fun in that speedboat.

GERALD

Everybody but Sonny. I'm not letting him near my speedboat.

HELEN

You'll change your mind.

GERALD

Not on your life.

HELEN

Deep down, you want to get along with him.

GERALD

I wonder if all stepfathers have problems like this.

HELEN

It's a matter of getting adjusted. You got to get to know each other. Then you can understand each other. And once you understand each other, then you can get along. You just got to try. Promise me. Okay?

GERALD

I know what I got to do. I got to talk to Robert about it.

HELEN

Gerald, listen. Robert wants to leave here.

GERALD

Well, he can't. I got to talk to him.

HELEN

There. You see. If Robert was gone, then maybe you and Sonny could get together and talk like a real father and son.

GERALD

Get this into your head. I hate Sonny.

HELEN

He told me he thinks a lot of you.

GERALD

He thinks a lot about killing me.

HELEN

Just the other day he was telling me how nice it was having you for a father and how you used to take him to ball games and take him fishing. He remembered all that.

GERALD

He was lying. Me and Honey did all that. And he stoled my fishing hat. You think I'd take him fishing after he did that?

HELEN

Maybe he stoled it because you wouldn't take him.

GERALD

He stole my hat, then he took it in the cellar and he burned it. He burnt it to a crisp. The hat my dad gave me..

HELEN

Gerald, listen to me. I got to say something....

GERALD

What is that?

HELEN

All this hate, it's because a that Robert. He has to go. He's causing trouble for the whole family. If he goes, you'll talk to Sonny.

GERALD

No. I won't. I don't want to talk to Sonny. I can't talk to Sonny. Because I hate him. And he hates me.

(Pause; then HONEY enters, followed by a shy MR. BRIGHAM; He's dressed in an expensive suit)

HONEY

(Looks tired but smiles) Hello, everyone.

HELEN

Hello, dear. It's late.

GERALD

(Goes and kisses her on the cheek) Evening, Honey. That's wonderful perfume you are wearing.

HONEY

(Pulls MR. BRIGHAM into the room) I want you to meet Mr. Brigham. This is my mom and dad.

MR. BRIGHAM

(Extremely uneasy) Look, I think I should probably be on my way...

HONEY

No. No. Don't do that. I just haven't sen them all day.

GERALD

(to MR. BRIGHAM) This girl is our pride and joy.

HELEN

That's right. You know she gives us half of everything she makes.

HONEY

Boy oh boy. It's sure getting chilly out. (To MR. BRIGHAM) Isn't it?

HELEN

(Cheerfully, to MR. BRIGHAM) They say it's gonna freeze tonight. Everything's gonna be frozen stiff.

MR. BRIGHAM

Perhaps. Look, maybe it would be best...I'm kind of in a hurry....

GERALD

Keep it in your pants, friend. We're just having a little chat. (To HONEY) You say it's getting colder, huh?

HONEY

Yup. (to MR. BRIGHAM) Okay. Come on. There's time. Look, mom, dad. We'll have that chat later, okay? (She leads MR. BRIGHAM off).

GERALD

Wait just a minute. You remember that time we went fishing?

HONEY

We went fishing?

GERALD

Yup. And Sonny stole my fishing hat.

HONEY

No. I don't remember that.

GERALD

(Slightly defiantly, to HELEN) Well, it still happened.

HONEY

Okay. Well, I'll see you later. (She takes MR. BRIGHAM to her room).

HELEN

(Pause) He seems like a nice man. Well mannered.

GERALD

(Gloomy) She don't bring in any trash.

HELEN

That's what I meant.

GERALD

You know, there are times, I feel....old....

HELEN

(Pause) We could try....you and me....

GERALD

We have tried.

HELEN

We could try again.

GERALD

You think there's any point in that?

HELEN

(Sighs) I guess I should do the vacuuming.

GERALD

I need to talk to Robert.

HELEN

You got to let him go, Gerald. That's a fact.

GERALD

No. I can't do that. I got to talk to him. That's a fact.

(SONNY now enters, wearing a red fishing cap)

GERALD

(Sighs) This just about makes my day.

SONNY

Hi, mom. Hi, dad.

HELEN

Hello, dear. Gerald, can't you say 'Hello.'

GERALD

I'm going to the bathroom.

SONNY

You might want to hear what I have to say. It's about that horse.

HELEN

You telling us that horse won?

SONNY

The race is tonight. I had to arrange a little loan.

GERALD

He made that bet with a bookie.

HELEN

(to SONNY) Well, don't skip out on your loans, otherwise you won't have any friends.

SONNY

Yes. That is so very true, mom.

GERALD

He's making illegal bets. That's it. I want him out a here. Now.

SONNY

But dad, this horse is a sure thing. In fact, would you like me to put something down for you? No? Well, what I am saying is, I need to give this man, because in fact, I already owe him a little money, some reassurance that I am good for what I owe him. It's only a simple formality.

GERALD

Maybe so. But you got no money. Where you gonna get any money?

SONNY

I have to go.

GERALD

Wait a minute. Answer me. Where you think you're gonna get any money?

SONNY

You know, before I leave there is one thing I'd like to say....

HELEN

What is it, dear? (She looks at GERALD).

GERALD

Alright. Say it. Then go.

SONNY

I just want to say how wonderful it is to have a family. To know there are people who care, people one can count on when the world suddenly becomes difficult to bear. And if suddenly one finds himself lost and uncertain of who he may be, it's beautiful to have the support of a family to give one his bearings in a cruel and unfriendly world. That is all I wanted to say.

HELEN

Your dad and I appreciate that. Don't we, Gerald?

SONNY

Well, on that note, I must go. I have business. (He puts on a pair of dark glasses).

GERALD

Wait just a minute. Where'd you get that hat?

SONNY

You bought it for me, dad. You must remember.

GERALD

No. That's my fishing hat. That's the hat MY dad gave ME.

SONNY

Your memory is failing, dad. Well, I have to go.

HELEN

Just remember, dear. We love you.

SONNY

I never forget it. That's what keeps me going. Oh and dad....

GERALD

(to HELEN) Tell him not to call me that. It makes my blood run cold.

SONNY

I only want to say 'Thanks for the hat,' It means a lot to me. (He smiles and exits).

GERALD

(Pause) I wonder what the name a that horse is.

HELEN

He says he's gonna win a lot of money.

GERALD

He'll never give us any of it.

HELEN

He might. If we're nice to him.

(A pounding is heard, coming from the cellar)

HELEN

Listen, Gerald. It's him.

GERALD

Sounds like he wants something.

HELEN

I know what he wants. He wants to go home.

GERALD

No. He wants to talk to me.

(The pounding suddenly stops; then HONEY enters with MR. BRIGHAM; He's tying his tie; HONEY leads him to the door and kisses him on the cheek, after he gives her some bills, then he rapidly exits)

HONEY

(Sighs) I'm exhausted.

HELEN

You got to slow down a little.

HONEY

(Lights a cigaret) Half the time I don't know which end is up. I probably need a vacation.

GERALD

We all do. You know what. We ought to start doing things together, as a family. That's what I think.

HELEN

That's what I been saying.

GERALD

What do you think, Honey?

HONEY

Yeah. Where's Sonny?

HELEN

He just left.

HONEY

He did? Where'd he go?

HELEN

He had some business. Something about a horse.

HONEY

Oh god. Is he doing that again? He's gonna get in trouble doing that. Real big trouble.

GERALD

That's what I'm hoping.

HELEN

He says he's gonna win a lot a money off that horse.

HONEY

He's just gonna get in more trouble, He ought to get an honest job.

HELEN

He will. He's still young.

GERALD

(Getting irritated) May I say something here?

HELEN

I know. You're gonna say he's trying to find himself.

GERALD

I am? HIM? No, what I'm gonna say is let's forget about Sonny, because he is pulling us apart. He's destructive, so we got to fight against his influence. (No one is listening) Am I getting through on this?

HONEY

One time, when I was young, Sonny gave me something....

HELEN

I just know he's got a lot of good in him.

GERALD

You are kidding me.

HONEY

He gave me this post card and it had a picture of Hawaii on it. You could see a beach, and far off, the ocean and the sky came together. It was so beautiful....

GERALD

Hold on. Sonny never gave that to you. I gave you that.

HONEY

He just put it in my hands and said, 'How'd you like to be there, huh? Lying on that beach, feeling the hot sun warm your body, and when it gets too hot. You can just run into the sea and let it cool you off again.' (Pause) Maybe I should go away for the rest.

GERALD

Yeah. Yeah. You should. We all should do that.

HELEN

(to GERALD) That's just what I been telling you.

GERALD

(to HONEY) Hey. Did you know your mom's gonna buy new curtains for the kitchen?

HELEN

I'm buying blue ones.

HONEY

That's nice.

GERALD

I hope to tell you it's nice. Because here's what we're gonna do. When you get those curtains, we're gonna have a curtain hanging party.

HELEN

My. I never knew you were so excited about them curtains.

HONEY

I don't think Sonny would go for that much.

HELEN

I'll tell him anyway.

GERALD

Listen to me! Ain't I getting through to anyone here? We are gonna forget about Sonny. What we are gonna do is we are gonna get us some coke and some chips and some dip and some steaks and we are gonna have ourselves an old-fashioned family cook-out. Now, what do you say about that?

HELEN

I think it sounds like a wonderful idea.

GERALD

Sure it does. Honey?

HONEY

(Indifferent) Yeah.

HELEN

It sounds like a wonderful idea.

GERALD

Then that's what we'll do. Right, Honey?

HONEY

Yeah.

HELEN

Five more dollars and I can get them.

HONEY

Oh. That reminds me. (She hands them each a bill).

GERALD

You see this? Ten dollars.

HELEN

That's all I need. I can get them in the morning.

GERALD

Then we can have our party tomorrow night. How about it?

HELEN

I can hardly believe it.

GERALD

Honey?

HONEY

Yeah. Sure.

GERALD

Tomorrow night, we'll have a big bash.

HONEY

I think I'll go out for a while. For a walk.

GERALD

You think you ought a do that. I mean it's getting late. Now I don't wanna scare anybody, but last week a woman went for a walk one night. She just stepped out her door and never came back. She just vanished into thin air.

HELEN

I never heard that.

GERALD

Lot a things happen you don't hear about them.

HONEY

Where'd you say Sonny went.

HELEN

He never said where.

GERALD

Listen to me. Can we forget him? And Honey, something else we never mentioned. I'm gonna get a speedboat.

HONEY

When are you getting that?

GERALD

Soon. Real soon.

HELEN

Soon as he gets the rest a them stamps.

HONEY

I'm gonna take that walk now. See you later. (She exits).

GERALD

In my opinion, it's very late for a young girl to be out alone.

HELEN

Tomorrow I get my curtains! We ought a get to bed.

GERALD

I don't feel like going to bed.

HELEN

Me neither. I'm too excited about getting my curtains.

GERALD

Let me tell you something. I'm not that old.

HELEN

How old is that?

GERALD

Just old. I'm saying I'm not old.

HELEN

No. You're not. Neither am I.

GERALD

I mean I'm fifty. Okay, a few years over fifty. That's not OLD. I mean I don't FEEL old.

HELEN

Why should you?

GERALD

I feel YOUNG.

HELEN

Yeah. Me, too. Sometimes.

(Suddenly, they hear the pounding from the cellar)

HELEN

Gerald, it's him again!

GERALD

He wants to come up.

HELEN

Now Gerald, listen to me. You got to let him go.

GERALD

Listen, I got an idea. Let's have a party.

HELEN

We're gonna do that. Tomorrow night.

GERALD

I mean now. Right now.

HELEN

Now? There's nobody here.

GERALD

Sure there is. There's you and me and Robert. I'll get him.

(GERALD runs off; HELEN stands silent, upset; GERALD returns, holds his finger to his lips)

ROBERT

(As the lights dim, he enters, tapping with his cane) Hello? Who's there? Can you help me? I want to go home. I was out

walking, I lost my way and came here for help. Help me, please.
(He advances towards the audience) Is there someone there who can help me? (ROBERT taps towards the audience, HELEN backs away in terror as lights fade to...)

BLACKOUT

ACT THREE

(Lights up on the empty kitchen; The phone rings off, as SONNY enters, hears the phone ringing)

SONNY

Christ. (He sees some cheese on a board on the table, cuts a piece, spits it out, replaces the knife).

(He goes to the cookie jar, looks in it, finds only the stamps, swears, tears them up, puts them back, takes another jar, puts his hand in it, as HELEN enters)

HELEN

You want something?

SONNY

You caught me with my hand in the cookie jar.

HELEN

If you want money why don't you just ask?

SONNY

Alright. Fine. I want money.

HELEN

I ain't got none.

SONNY

Mom, listen. This is very important. I need some money.

HELEN

Why is that?

SONNY

Let's just say something important has come up.

HELEN

What come up?

SONNY

Look, mom, I don't have time for a lot of details, but I have to take a trip and I have to leave right away.

HELEN

A trip? You know we're having a party tonight?

SONNY

I won't be able to make it.

HELEN

Why you got to go away?

SONNY

Well, I guess I'll have to tell you. What it is, mom, I got a job.

HELEN

No? You got a job?

SONNY

Yes. I did. But it's an out-of-town job. And that's why I need the money, to get out of town.

HELEN

What about that horse?

SONNY

The horse lost.

HELEN

The phone was for you a while ago. A man said he was coming to get what you owed him.

SONNY

Well, I have to be going.

HELEN

What kind a job you got?

SONNY

Selling. Avon. I'm going to be an Avon man.

HELEN

This all happened kind a quick, didn't it?

SONNY

No. I've been thinking of getting away for some time, mom. I feel I'm becoming a burden to you and dad and when this job came up, well, it seemed like a golden opportunity.

HELEN

I want to tell you something.

SONNY

What is it?

HELEN

Your dad's gonna be proud of you.

SONNY

I certainly hope so, mom.

HELEN

Awful proud.

SONNY

That will be wonderful. But the thing is, mom, do you have any money?

HELEN

I got a hundred dollars.

SONNY

That's all?

HELEN

That's the money I been saving for my curtains.

SONNY

Where is it?

HELEN

You really got a job?

SONNY

You think I would lie to you?

HELEN

It's just that your dad had his heart set on that party.

SONNY

You know what? When he hears I'm leaving town, he will definitely want to have a party.

HELEN

I been saving for them curtains for a long time.

SONNY

Mom, listen to me. I don't want to sound unkind, but why are you standing here, wasting my time, babbling about curtains when I need that money? Don't I come before CURTAINS? I am depending on you, and if you cannot depend on your own mother, then who in this world can you depend on?

HELEN

I was hoping we could have a talk before you went away.

SONNY

What is there to talk about?

HELEN

Robert.

SONNY

Alright. What about him?

HELEN

I want to get rid of him.

SONNY

What for?

HELEN

'Cause he's a bad influence.

SONNY

I don't see that.

HELEN

Yes. He's a terrible influence and I want to get rid of him. He's destroying the family. We can never be a family with him around.

SONNY

And so you want to get rid of him?

HELEN

I want us to be a family.

SONNY

You know what, mom. I think I can help you.

HELEN

That's what I was hoping.

SONNY

Yes. I think I can. Yes. I'll tell you what you do. First, you put my wallet in his pocket. (He gives her his wallet).

HELEN

This's gonna help?

SONNY

Take my word for it. And then you put my hat on his head. (He hands her the fishing cap) Then bring him up and sit him at the table. Okay?

HELEN

I don't want him up here.

SONNY

Look, mom, some men will be coming here soon and they'll be looking for me. They will probably want to take me for a little ride with them....

HELEN

But you're going away.

SONNY

Yes. Exactly. And since these men have only seen me in dark glasses and wearing my fishing hat, if you bring Robert up and give him my hat and my glasses these men will think Robert is me and they'll take him away with them.

HELEN

He'll tell them he's not you.

SONNY

I don't think they're going to believe him.

HELEN

They won't bring him back?

SONNY

I really think he'll be off your hands for good.

HELEN

Who are these men?

SONNY

That's not important. What matters is they'll take Robert with them and you won't have to worry about him any more. Okay? I mean I would go with them, but this job came up. What can I do?

HELEN

Your dad's gonna be proud to hear about that job. (She kisses him) And I'm real proud of you too.

SONNY

I'm very glad of that. Now, where is that money?

HELEN

The money's in my purse. I'll get it. (She exits).

SONNY

Hurry, will you, mom?

HELEN

(Returns, upset) I must a left my purse at the supermarket.

SONNY

You what? You WHAT!?

HELEN

I went to the market, I must a left my purse there.

SONNY

Jesus Christ, mom, sometimes you can be a real idiot! Okay. Alright. Get down to the fucking supermarket and pray they have your purse, huh? Can you do that? NOW?

HELEN

Yeah. (She exits).

SONNY

Christ! There are many times when I really have to ask myself: What is this goddam life all about!

(HONEY now appears, carrying her suitcase in one hand and her post card in the other)

SONNY

I suppose you're going to tell me what the hell you're up to.

HONEY

You're going away somewhere, aren't you.

SONNY

I don't have time to discuss that with you.

HONEY

I want to go with you.

SONNY

Don't be silly, you're my sister.

HONEY

Half sister. Take me with you.

SONNY

Listen, you are wasting my valuable time.

HONEY

I love you.

SONNY

You what!

HONEY

You know.

SONNY

No. No, I don't know. I'm your brother, for Christ's sake. You can't love your brother!

HONEY

But I do love you.

SONNY

Stop saying that!

HONEY

I've always loved you.

SONNY

Alright. Fine. Now tell me. Just what the hell are you up to?

HONEY

I've loved you since I was a kid. Since you gave me this post card. You remember?

SONNY

This is a joke.

HONEY

You gave this to me and you told me about Hawaii.

SONNY

Hawaii? What the fuck do I know about Hawaii?

HONEY

You told me.

SONNY

No. Absolutely not. No.

HONEY

Yes. You told me and then you took me in your room, and then you made love to me. You remember.

SONNY

No. No, I don't. You're crazy. Or else you've been dreaming and you've been having some very sick dreams.

HONEY

You were the first. And when we laid down together I felt like I was that beach and you were the waves washing over me.

SONNY

No. No. You're making this up. But why are you? That's what I'm asking.

HONEY

It happened. You know it happened.

SONNY

No! Jesus Christ, where is mom?

HONEY

Take me with you. I can make you happy.

SONNY

No. I can make myself happy.

HONEY

(Tries to embrace him) Give me a chance.

SONNY

(Shoves her) Get away from me, for Christ's sake! You're a whore!

HONEY

As a girl, I used to lie in bed, pretending you were with me....

SONNY

My god! I'm listening to a talking sewer!

HONEY

You've got to take me with you.

SONNY

Why are you doing this? What are you up to?

HONEY

You know, even now, when I'm with somebody else, I close my eyes and I pretend I'm with you.

SONNY

This is degrading.

HONEY

No. It's love. So you see, you've got to take me with you.

SONNY

I wouldn't take you anywhere.

HONEY

Did you know I used to wash your underwear. I used to ask mom to let me do it.

SONNY

Mom! Is there anyone you haven't infected with this filth!

HONEY

I used to put lots of bleach in it, so it would come out nice and white and it would smell fresh and clean. Remember how fresh it smelled?

SONNY

It smelled like dead rats.

HONEY

No. Like roses. I did that.

SONNY

Rats.

Roses. HONEY

Rats! SONNY

You're just teasing me. HONEY

(Walks away) Mom, mom, mom!! SONNY

You're going to Hawaii, aren't you. HONEY

Why do you say that? SONNY

That's where you ought to be going. HONEY

Probably so. SONNY

Aren't you going there? HONEY

Listen, I've about got enough money to get to Des Moines. SONNY

(Takes money from her purse) I've got money. (She hands it to him) HONEY

My god. How did you get this? SONNY

I've been saving. HONEY

How much you got here. SONNY

About three thousand dollars. Couldn't we go to Hawaii on that? HONEY

SONNY

This is all so sudden.

HONEY

Not for me. I've been dreaming about this ever since you gave me that post card. You know what I did the day after you gave it to me?

SONNY

Dare I ask?

HONEY

I climbed a tree, looking for Hawaii. I just knew we'd never be really happy until we were in Hawaii.

SONNY

You know, maybe you're right.

HONEY

You mean that?

SONNY

It just might be okay.

HONEY

You mean you'll take me with you?

SONNY

It just might be alright at that.

HONEY

I can't believe it.

SONNY

Sure. It might be a lot of fun.

HONEY

This is all I've ever wanted.

SONNY

But we have to wait for mom.

HONEY

You mean to say goodbye.

SONNY

Yeah. What do you have in the suitcase.

HONEY

Nothing. I was afraid you were going to leave without me.

SONNY

Alright. Look. Why don't you go fill it. You'll need a lot of stuff.

HONEY

Okay. I love you. I used to wash your underwear. Now I'll do it again.

SONNY

I can't wait. Now, why don't you go pack your stuff.

HONEY

When will mom be home.

SONNY

An hour or so. You have plenty of time.

HONEY

Sonny?

SONNY

Yes?

HONEY

Your underwear smelled like roses, didn't it.

SONNY

Oh yeah. It smelled like a whole garden.

(GERALD suddenly appears, unseen by them)

HONEY

Those things you said. You were just teasing me, weren't you?

SONNY

You know what a terrible tease I am.

HONEY

(Puts her arms around him) Kiss me. Okay?

SONNY

(Kisses her on the cheek) Alright. Get moving.

HONEY

Okay. I won't be long. (She exits with her suitcase).

(GERALD enters, in a rage; SONNY smiles at him)

SONNY

This is a pleasant surprise. Hello, dad.

GERALD

You bastard! You scum! Leave that girl alone!

SONNY

There is nothing I would rather do, dad.

GERALD

See you do it.

SONNY

The trouble is, she crawls all over me.

GERALD

(He advances on SONNY, who holds his ground, smiling) You touch her, I'll break your goddam head. You hear me!

SONNY

You would really do that, dad?

GERALD

You can bet on it!

SONNY

Alright, dad. Why don't we have a go at it. A friendly go. One round, winner takes all. How about it?

GERALD

(Backs down) You should a been killed when you were born.

SONNY

You know something, dad, you're quite a guy.

GERALD

You'll find out one of these days.

SONNY

No one could accuse you of being a phony.

GERALD

You know, there's something I want to say to you.

SONNY

A good old-fashioned father-and-son chat. Let's hear it.

GERALD

I want to ask you. When you were a kid and you spent so much time down in the cellar, what did you do down there?

SONNY

(Slightly confused for a moment) What I did in the cellar? To tell you the truth, dad, I just liked to get away. It was a retreat. Yes. See, I could only take so much of watching mom put her nickels and pennies in that cookie jar, saving for curtains or towels or god knows what crap, then watch you rip it off and sneak away to the track, or watch you paste those pathetic stamps in booklets, so you could get yourself an alarm clock or a fucking ball point pen....

GERALD

You don't know what it's like to save for something, to earn it with your own sweat....

SONNY

And there was something else about the cellar. I wasn't alone.

GERALD

I've heard enough.

SONNY

Honey used to keep me company.

GERALD

That's a filthy lie.

SONNY

No, no, dad. Word of honor. We used to sit there together, in the dark, whispering to each other....

GERALD

You are no good.

SONNY

And you know what we were whispering about, dad. You.

GERALD

What?

SONNY

It was Honey really. She used to whisper about how you'd sneak into her room at night....

GERALD

No. That's a lie.

SONNY

When you thought she was asleep and you'd stand there, staring at her. And then after while you'd reach out your hand and touch her....

GERALD

Her hair! I touched her hair!

SONNY

So anyway, dad, I would say she was probably a whore because of you.

GERALD

I'll kill you. I swear, if it's the last thing I ever do, I'll make you dead.

SONNY

I hope you're not looking for sympathy.

GERALD

You know, your ma said you were asking about your dad the other day.

SONNY

You're my dad, dad.

GERALD

Your real father. And I was thinking, he used to go into the cellar, too...

SONNY

It's a popular place.

GERALD

Your ma told me. He used to go into the cellar and do strange things down there. I mean he used to take little girls from the neighborhood down there....

SONNY

That sounds like fun.

GERALD

They'd go down there and they'd burn things.

SONNY

Did they?

GERALD

Yeah, they did. Like if this girl had a doll or something, or maybe they had a fishing hat, they'd start it on fire and they'd sit there, watching it burn up and they would laugh like crazy....

SONNY

(He picks up the cheese knife and slowly advances on GERALD) You don't say....

GERALD

Oh yeah, I do say. He would laugh like crazy, because in fact, he was crazy, nutty as a fruitcake....(He suddenly realizes SONNY is upon him with the knife)....What're you doing! Get away from me!

SONNY

You know what, dad, you sound hungry, I'll bet you haven't eaten all day. How about a piece of cheese on me. (He cuts a piece of the stale cheese and shoves it in GERALD's mouth, forcing him to swallow it).

GERALD

(As SONNY releases him, he gags and chokes, trying to spit out the cheese) You bastard....You're crazy....

(SONNY simply smiles at him, as HELEN enters)

HELEN

It was there. Somebody found it and turned it in. (She sees GERALD, choking) What's the matter with your dad?

SONNY

I think he ate something that didn't agree with him.

HELEN

Oh. Well, the money was all there. Can you imagine? Every cent. (She hands SONNY the cash).

GERALD

What's going on here?

HELEN
Didn't he tell you?

GERALD
Tell me what?

HELEN
(to SONNY) Why didn't you tell him?

SONNY
I thought you would want to tell him.

GERALD
Tell me WHAT!

HELEN
He got a job. A real job.

GERALD
You got a be kidding me.

HELEN
(to SONNY) Tell him.

SONNY
You just did.

GERALD
Then why'd you give him that money?

HELEN
This job is out of town. He's got to go out of town.

GERALD
No. No. My god. This is the most wonderful thing I've heard in years.

HELEN
(to SONNY) I told you he'd be happy.

SONNY
I kind of thought he might be.

GERALD
(to SONNY) When are you leaving?

SONNY
I'm on my way out.

HELEN

Now don't you forget to write.

SONNY

(He kisses her) Every day. And dad, what can I say to you? You have always been an inspiration...

HELEN

We love you, dear. And you come back soon.

GERALD

He does, I'll kill him. A promise.

SONNY

And tell Honey goodbye. Tell her I couldn't wait.

GERALD

I think this is the happiest day of my life.

SONNY

Oh, dad, by the way, I think something might have happened to your stamps. (He is gone)

GERALD

(At his cookie jar) The bastard! The son-of-a-bitch! He tore up my stamps!

HELEN

(Sadly) He's my boy. I'm gonna miss him.

GERALD

Well, it won't do him any good, I can still trade them in.

HELEN

What?

GERALD

Sure I can. And the best part is, when I get that speedboat, he's not gonna set foot in it!

HELEN

I gave him every cent I saved for my curtains.

GERALD

All of it?

HELEN

I just got to start saving all over again.

GERALD

Well, I'll tell you. We are still gonna have that party. So you tell Honey and I'll get everything we need right after work.

HELEN

Alright.

GERALD

Hey, you know what? I won a coke today.

HELEN

How'd you do that?

GERALD

At Bucky Burgers. I won a free coke.

HELEN

What did you do with it?

GERALD

Poured it out.

HELEN

Why did you do that?

GERALD

I already had the one I paid for.

HELEN

By the way, you remember Bob Hardy's wife. The one who got kidnapped. She won't go home. She refused to go home. So the kidnappers just left her in a motel room, all by herself.

(Suddenly, the pounding is heard from the cellar)

HELEN

Gerald. He's pounding again. What are you gonna do?

GERALD

I'm gonna bring him to the party.

HELEN

You're never gonna let him go, are you.

GERALD

I ain't got time for that now. I got to get back to work. Listen, you tell Honey about our party.

HELEN

The party. I'm already missing my boy.

GERALD

(Pause) You know what I was thinking about this morning?

HELEN

What?

GERALD

I was thinking about that time we took Honey to the zoo, when she was just a little girl.

HELEN

What you remember about that?

GERALD

I remember this monkey climbed up to the top a this tree in his cage, and he sat there, looking at the branches of that tree that were growing outside of his cage, looking like he wanted to somehow get out to those branches, but they were outside the bars, so he couldn't get to 'em....

HELEN

You remember that?

GERALD

...and after he sat there for a while, staring at them branches on the outside of his cage, he just started, you know, sort of fiddling....

HELEN

He had a fiddle?

GERALD

With himself I mean.

HELEN

This was a monkey?

GERALD

That's what I'm saying.

HELEN

Listen to me. Before you go to sleep tonight, you drink some hot milk.

GERALD

I got to get back to work.

HELEN

Okay.

GERALD

I got some more stamps.

HELEN

Oh yeah. I got some more for you at the market.

GERALD

We'll have that speedboat in no time.

HELEN

That's gonna be fun.

GERALD

Yeah. Now you tell Honey about our party. (He exits).

(After a few moments, HONEY re-enters the room)

HONEY

Hi, mom. Where's Sonny?

HELEN

He just left.

HONEY

(Pause) What do you mean he left?

HELEN

I mean he's gone.

HONEY

No.

HELEN

Yeah. He got a job out of town.

HONEY

No. No. That can't be.

HELEN

I never thought it'd ever happen neither. But it's true.

HONEY

No. He was waiting for me. No. He couldn't have gone yet.

HELEN

He had to go. He said to tell you he couldn't wait any longer.

HONEY

(Dazed) He....left?

HELEN

(She has the wallet, the hat, the glasses and is ordering everything in her mind) He got a job as a salesman. Isn't that wonderful?

HONEY

He really left.

HELEN

But we're still gonna have a party tonight. A celebration.

HONEY

He really left. (She sees the post card, tears it up, then notices the knife, picks it up and drifts towards the exit in a daze, then walks out)...

HELEN

Now don't you forget the party tonight.

(The pounding is heard; HELEN checks to see that she has everything in order, then exits; the lights slowly begin to fade as She returns with ROBERT; He is wearing the glasses and the fishing hat)

ROBERT

Where am I.

HELEN

(She sits him in a chair) You just sit there, you'll be fine.

ROBERT

Where am I?

HELEN

I know Gerald's gonna be awful mad at me for this, but nothing's been right since you been here. We're not a family. But that's all gonna change now. (The hat falls off ROBERT's head; HELEN picks it up and puts it back on him) You keep that on your head and sit quiet if you want to get out a here. Alright? (ROBERT seems to perk up) Now you do what I say and everything's gonna be okay. You understand what I am telling you? It's okay now. Everything's gonna be okay. (She adjusts the hat, takes a final check and then exits).

(ROBERT sits in the fading light as TWO MEN now appear, dressed in dark suits, They stand silently, looking at ROBERT)

ROBERT

(Seems to be aware of them) Who's there? Are you the ones who've come to take me away? (The TWO MEN look at each other) Who's there. Are you going to take me away from here? Can you take me home? Tell me who's there. Please. Who is it? (The TWO MEN look at each other, then back at ROBERT, as the lights slowly fade into a blackout, and....)

THE PLAY IS OVER

Performance rights must be secured before production. For contact information, please see the *The Cellar* information page (click on your browser's "Back" button, or visit <http://www.singlelane.com/proplay/cellar.html>).