

THE PROPERTY

By

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### Cast of Characters

<u>EDDIE</u> :	Male, about 45
<u>TODD</u> :	Male, 16-18
<u>IRENE</u> :	Female, about 40
<u>GREG</u> :	Male, about 45
<u>VERNON</u> :	Male, about 80
<u>J.J.</u> :	Any gender, 18
<u>Casting Note</u> :	Greg is "White." The others may be of any "race," as long as their looks are not inconsistent with their respective blood relationships.

### Scene

A home in an American suburb. The living room. There is an easy chair and small sofa, with a table in between. A mirror on the wall, an earthen vase, and other conventional furnishings.

### Time

Act I: Late March, 2000, Sunday morning. Act II: August, 2001, Saturday afternoon. Act III, Scene 1: March, 2002, Saturday evening. Act III, Scene 2: April, 2002, Saturday evening.

ACT ONE

Late March, 2000. Sunday morning.

Daffodils in the vase. Eddie,  
sitting, and in a bathrobe, reads a  
book.

TODD

(Off stage.)

No!

(Todd enters from the kitchen.)

No, mother! I refuse to see him!

(To Eddie.)

**You're** my father, right?

(Pause.)

Hey, Eddie!

EDDIE

Todd, let me read.

TODD

You are my father.

EDDIE

Stepfather.

Irene, dressed for gardening and  
housework, enters from the kitchen.

IRENE

(To Todd.)

Honey, he **does** want to see **you**.

TODD

No, he doesn't. You told him he **has** to see me.

EDDIE

Irene, this is a bad arrangement. I need a quiet place to  
read.

IRENE

Go into our bedroom. Close the door.

(To Todd.)

You will see your father.

TODD

After sixteen years?

IRENE

That was **my** fault.

TODD

It was not. You kicked him out, but he was the one who decided to totally disappear.

IRENE

He had every intention of being there for you, Todd, but...oh, he already had kids from before and then, right away, he had more kids with someone else, and...

TODD

...and so what the hell did he need **this** kid for?!

IRENE

Look: he is coming to help you out.

EDDIE

(Putting down his book.)

I want my cottage back.

IRENE

Okay, listen up, you two. We live pretty well. To keep living that way, we have to make adjustments.

EDDIE

Why? We have jobs.

IRENE

Todd doesn't.

TODD

Oh, not that again.

Todd makes for the bedrooms exit.

IRENE

Todd! Stay right there.

Todd turns back.

EDDIE

We even have investments.

IRENE

This property, for instance.

EDDIE

And our mutual funds.

IRENE

I sold them.

EDDIE

You what?!

IRENE

Everywhere I turn, people think they're getting rich.

EDDIE

Yes! They are! Why did you sell?!

IRENE

**You** told me not to buy in the first place.

EDDIE

I was wrong.

TODD

But morally superior.

EDDIE

Don't think I am not mortified, Todd, that we have taken advantage of an obscene system which unfairly allocates wealth. But, Irene, listen: the market keeps going up. I read---

IRENE

All the time.

EDDIE

Oh, please forgive me. I have been inattentive again, haven't I? Hey, let's go to the movies tonight.

IRENE

You can't stand movies.

EDDIE

Not **all** movies. You remember the one...twelve years ago, maybe? With all those beautiful villagers? It was from Senegal, I think.

IRENE

You mean the film with the scrawny goats and the noxious squalor?

EDDIE

Yes! And those thugs! The villagers drove off those oppressive thugs!

IRENE

It was from Burkina Faso.

EDDIE

Yeah, that's right! Great, great film! Anyway, I do read just about everything there is to read about. Including

(MORE)

EDDIE (cont'd)  
 finance. As a result, I understand that what the market does is: go up. It stops from time to time, of course, to catch its breath. Then, after that, it goes up higher!

IRENE  
 I am the one in charge of our finances.

EDDIE  
 Okay: you sold. We pocketed lots of money, right? So why do we have to rent my cottage out?

IRENE  
 For the same reason Todd has to go to work.

TODD  
 Mom---

IRENE  
 You are going to earn an income, boy.

TODD  
 How much? The minimum wage?

IRENE  
 Your summers of lolling around the neighborhood pool, with timeouts for golf and tennis, are over.

EDDIE  
 (Closing his book, and standing.)  
 I will dress now, and go.

IRENE  
 Todd, maybe you won't make much. But I assure you, you won't be flipping burgers. The job your father gets you will be one you can point to on a resumé.

EDDIE  
 And after work today, Irene, I shall come home as always, though you ensconce a stranger in my home's very heart.

Eddie exits to the bedrooms.

TODD  
 It so happens I have been spending my summers constructively.

IRENE  
 Perhaps. But not **productively**.

TODD  
 How do **you** know?

IRENE

Honey, it is time for you to be realistic. You mean so much to me.

TODD

Yeah, yeah. Because I'm your son.

IRENE

Because of that, and more: I love your youthful bloom, your sparkle, your...what? Fervid languor.

TODD

Languid fervor.

IRENE

(Laughing.)

Okay. I want you happy, Todd. Through many, many years...through each and every one you live.

TODD

Summers included?

IRENE

Hey, kid: you gotta pay your way. That being so, you may as well take advantage of your advantageous situation.

TODD

Eddie would say it is wrong to advance on the basis of privilege.

IRENE

Privilege only gives you a leg up. It is merit that will move you along, and you have loads of merit.

TODD

I certainly have a great imagination.

IRENE

Well...a *good* imagination, anyway.

TODD

And a way with words.

IRENE

You speak well when you want to.

TODD

And I have an artistic sensibility.

IRENE

You do?

TODD

Eddie would say that children without influential connections, and who aren't even members of the middle class---.

IRENE

---of "the *contemptible* middle class--."

TODD

Right. He would tell us, if we let him--.

IRENE

We *won't*!

TODD

I am with you on *that*!

Laughing, they high-five.

IRENE

So: In what way have your summers been productive?

(Pause.)

Let me guess, Mr. Artistic Sensibility: you have been writing sonnets to girls.

TODD

I have been writing. But nothing sentimental.

IRENE

Then what is your thing, exactly? Iconoclasm?

TODD

You mean do I try to shock?

IRENE

Or just debunk?

TODD

That would be trivial.

IRENE

So, then: do you rage?

TODD

Why does that idea amuse you?

IRENE

I was just wondering if...if you---

TODD

If I am a typical teenager. Who thinks he is the first human being to see the world as it is, and has to shout it from the rooftops. You want it in a word, do you? What I'm all about? Well...



IRENE

Never mind, Todd. You don't have to tell me.

TODD

Yes, I do. If I'm a writer, I should be able to find that word. In the end, what I write...it will be---will have to be---redemptive.

IRENE

Why?

TODD

Because I want to live. So I've got to find a reason---or create one---to keep on living.

IRENE

Will you show me something you've written?

TODD

No. You would belittle it.

IRENE

Well, between here and the Nobel Prize for literature, as you go on living with or without a reason to go on, you simply have to behave realistically.

TODD

By which you mean I have to let your bourgeois connections initiate me into the wealth accumulation racket. This will displease Eddie.

IRENE

Get this straight: I sometimes disagree with him, but I have the greatest respect for his analytic mind.

TODD

You don't respect anything about him. And I happen to know why you dumped this---this "father"---who will be coming here today. Eddie, for whom you have nothing but contempt, once told me why you did. It was because the man who begot me was a cheat, and you are fanatical about fidelity. So fanatical, you go on sharing your bed with a buffoon because, and only because, he is too sexless to ever screw around. When it comes to men, mama, you have been a lifelong bust.

IRENE

How...how dare you! You...you prick! Don't you ever---! Ever say anything like that to me again!

Irene exits to the kitchen. Pause.  
The doorbell rings. Todd opens the front door.

GREG

(Off stage.)

Hello.

TODD

Okay: now I've seen you. You've seen me. Go to hell!

Todd slams the door. Irene enters from the kitchen.

IRENE

The doorbell rang.

TODD

Yeah.

Irene opens the front door, and exits.

IRENE

(Yelling, off stage.)

Hey! Come back! You...you're Greg, aren't you? Greg, come back! Please! Please, it was a mistake!

Irene comes back in.

IRENE

Go put on some clothes.

Todd ambles off to the bedrooms.

IRENE

(Extending her hand out the front door.)

Come in. Come in!

Greg, dressed casually, enters, leaving the door open. He and Irene shake hands.

IRENE (cont'd)

That was my son. He thought you were someone else.

(Pause.)

I'm married. I mean, my husband...the cottage is my husband's. It's been his...his hangout. It's full of his books, and mountains of ancient magazines, but we're going to stick all that in the basement.

(Pause.)

You had no trouble getting here?

GREG

No. Your directions were excellent, and the train was right on time.

IRENE

Our ad...we had lots of responses.

GREG

Have you already rented it, then?

IRENE

No. No, you're the first to come. That commuter line is so reliable, and with a station just two blocks away, and such reasonable rent, and such a cozy little place set in such a lovely garden, and--.

(Laughing.)

Oh, Greg, I don't know how to do this! I have never been a landlady before.

(Brief pause.)

But you have been a tenant?

GREG

I have.

IRENE

Then tell me how to play **my** role.

GREG

Keep doing what you just started to do. Keep asking me about myself.

IRENE

Okay...what do you do for fun?

GREG

Don't ask **that**! Ask how much I make.

IRENE

How much do you make?

GREG

Not enough to afford the place I live in now. As for the rent you said you want...I can afford that.

Vernon, in sports jacket and open collar, comes in by the front door.

VERNON

There she is! Isabella, Queen of Castile!

IRENE

Oh! Oh, hello, Vernon.

VERNON

How do I look?

Fine. IRENE

Old? VERNON

IRENE  
For a man your age, you look fine. This is---

VERNON  
(Shaking Greg's hand.)  
Ferdinand of Aragon.

IRENE  
No, Vernon. Greg is not my husband.

VERNON  
O-o-h, really?!  
(Brief pause.)  
Sorry. I take that back. **I** was a philanderer, you were...  
(To Greg.)  
...young man, she was the only faithful wife I ever had.  
(To Irene.)  
That's why I came. If any of the others had called me, I  
would have summarily begged off because of the cancer  
gallivanting through my guts.

IRENE  
Oh, no! You didn't tell me--!

VERNON  
But you, Irene, dealt straight with me, so here I am. Where  
is the boy?

IRENE  
He doesn't want to see you.

VERNON  
Can't blame him.  
(To Greg.)  
You have kids?

GREG  
No.

VERNON  
Well, when you have a kid, you are not, it seems, supposed  
to walk away. **Why** you are not...that is a mystery as  
unfathomable to me as the *primum mobile* itself. I have  
had...let's see: eleven. I think. Of which I actually **know**,  
in such a way that I could, say, pick 'em out in a  
lineup...maybe two.

(To Irene.)

(MORE)

VERNON (cont'd)  
 Why don't **you** get your son a job?

IRENE  
 What kind of job could **I** get him?

VERNON  
 Where do you work?

IRENE  
 At a bank.

VERNON  
 You could get him a job...  
 (To Greg.)  
 Fanfare, sir. Make noise like a fanfare.

Greg does not make noise like a fanfare.

VERNON (cont'd)  
 (To Irene.)  
 ...at the bank!

IRENE  
 How, Vernon? I am not the C.E.O.

VERNON  
 No?! What on earth, then, can it possibly be that you do there?!

IRENE  
 I oversee the processing of paperwork.

VERNON  
 Ah. Then, I guess your basket-weaving days are over?

IRENE  
 I never wove a basket in my life.

VERNON  
 Sure you did. That thing in the kitchen. Always full of fruit.

IRENE  
 It was a **bowl**.

VERNON  
 Yeah, that's right! Pottery!  
 (To Greg.)  
 She made great pots.  
 (To Irene.)  
 And now here you are: a back-office girl.

IRENE

**Manager.**

VERNON

(To Greg.)

She made fantastic glazes, too. What's **your** line?

GREG

I teach.

VERNON

You have a strong union, you people.

GREG

I am not a union member.

VERNON

You're not?! Then...let me guess. You are a private school teacher. Yes?

IRENE

Vernon, Greg did not come here to undergo your interrogation.

VERNON

He didn't?!

(To Greg.)

Then why oh whyever, young man---I used to hate being called "young man---."

IRENE

But now...no one calls you that any more, do they?

VERNON

No, Irene. No one does.

(To Greg.)

Why---young man---did you come?

IRENE

He came to rent our cottage.

VERNON

(To Greg.)

How much do you make?

(To Irene.)

Private school teachers...Irene, their pay is pathetic. If his compensation is as far below the union rate as I just know it is, I would be wary, my sweet---

(Nodding deferentially to Greg.)

---with respect---

(To Irene.)

---of renting to the gentleman.

GREG

(To Irene.)

I am hoping for a raise. I have been there five months, and after six their policy is...

VERNON

Where were you before?

GREG

Overseas.

VERNON

Let me guess: at a Swiss school for the spoiled spawn of our country's ruling class.

GREG

No. This is my first teaching job. My first job ever in the States at all, except for summers when I was a student myself.

VERNON

Summers! Yes!

(To Irene.)

So...you don't have the clout to get a summer job at the bank for Ted---

IRENE

Todd.

VERNON

---ergo, you prevail upon me for a favor. Why doesn't he bus tables, or find something in low-life retail, like other kids?

IRENE

Because I want him to get a leg up in the industry that treated **you** so well.

VERNON

But I am "emeritus" now. I do not run the company any more.

IRENE

You still pull strings. I know how you operate.

VERNON

Irene, this is academic. The boy hates me.

IRENE

No he doesn't.

VERNON

He doesn't?! What's wrong with him, then?

(To Greg.)

(MORE)

VERNON (cont'd)

Do you hate me?

GREG

Why should I---?

VERNON

Because, in my professional opinion, you are a loser; and, therefore, a lousy rental prospect.

(To Irene.)

You want my help? Tell this guy to go take a hike.

(Pause.)

Oh, all right Irene. Have it **your** way. I concede to you that, in my oh-so-many years as overlord of our gargantuan property management firm, throughout that storied career during which I bestowed scads and reclaimed oodles of keys, I never once did have the experience of renting out anything as insignificant as a cottage. And I can indeed, Elizabeth the Queen, set your baby up for a super summer with my gang.

IRENE

Doing what?

VERNON

If it please Your Majesty, address your humble servant by name.

IRENE

All right, then, Sir Walter Raleigh. What exactly is the plan?

VERNON

We will be launching your child into archipelagos of wealth, power and everlasting bliss.

(To Greg.)

Overseas, huh? Ever been to Kuala Lumpur?

GREG

I passed through once, on the way to eastern Thailand.

VERNON

Amazing how they built themselves up from nothing so fast. We did well there, for a while.

(To Irene.)

That rental: how many square feet?

IRENE

I don't know. Four hundred, say.

VERNON

Well...how much are you asking for it?

(Pause. To Greg)

There is nothing in eastern Thailand.



GREG

There used to be camps. And many refugees.

VERNON

And your job was...?

GREG

I did...whatever I could.

VERNON

Like what? Hand out buckets for them to shit in?

IRENE

Vernon!

(To Greg.)

What **was** your job when you were there?

GREG

I had a...a job **description**.

IRENE

Which was...?

GREG

I forget. I don't think I even knew what it was back then. But I can remember organizing food distribution, giving vaccinations and, once, fixing the electric generator we put in. Made puppets out of old rice bags, too. The children were wild about 'em. And...

(To Vernon.)

...oh, yes: there was a clamor among the residents for satisfactory sanitary facilities. I helped with the installation.

(To Irene.)

You have other prospects. Call me, please, if it's still available after you've screened them.

(To Vernon.)

Good-bye.

IRENE

(Taking Greg's arm.)

You can't leave now. Come. Come on. You have to see the place.

Irene leads Greg off to the garden. Pause. Eddie, in casual clothes, enters from the bedrooms, looks at Vernon, slinks towards the front door, and starts to exit.

VERNON

Hey! Hey you!

Eddie turns back.

VERNON

Your wife just took off with another guy.

(Brief pause.)

You **are** Eddie, aren't you?

(Brief pause.)

They went that-a-way.

EDDIE

Oh, then...then you're not the one, are you? Our  
renter-to-be?

VERNON

Ah, don't you worry. The woman is a paragon of fidelity. She  
will never two-time you.

EDDIE

No, just move me out.

VERNON

That's what she did to **me**!

EDDIE

Vernon?

VERNON

We meet at last.

They shake hands.

EDDIE

No, she's not moving me out the way she moved **you**.  
She's...just dispossessing me. Your son is a real good boy.

VERNON

But he loathes me, doesn't he?

EDDIE

Yes.

VERNON

How very hurtful.

EDDIE

Oh, teenagers...they get angry about all kinds of things.  
But...no, it would not be fair to say he's just another  
angry teenager. **His** anger is noble. It comes from...from his  
moral sense. I take credit for this: that he has learned  
there is a moral dimension to everything. What is this job  
Irene was talking about?

VERNON

I don't know yet. What with his morality and all, tell me what you think he **wouldn't** do.

EDDIE

Gee...well, I can tell you what **I** wouldn't do.

VERNON

Like...what? Commit murder?

EDDIE

For one thing.

VERNON

Fine. Let us assume that, as a result of your bringing him up, Todd has turned out to be---morally, at least---pretty much like you.

EDDIE

That would please me.

VERNON

So, for starters, then: we will not sign him up to be a hit man.

EDDIE

Vernon, if Irene wants to establish Todd in your corporate world, it is not my place to stop her. But be aware that unjust and greedy practices are not likely to sit well with him.

VERNON

Not with him, not with a humongous number of other bright-eyed sixteen-year-olds. Nor with a negligible number of ex-sixteen-year old nonentities like you. You are refreshing, Eddie, you know that? That's what Irene told me when she met you. She said that, after two years with me, it was "refreshing" to be with a man who wasn't egotistical and avaricious, and who had principles and intellectual curiosity. I smell coffee. Where is it?

EDDIE

Through there.

Vernon exits to the kitchen. Eddie starts for the front door, then stops and turns back.

EDDIE

(Calling to the bedrooms.)

Todd!

TODD  
(Off stage.)

What?

EDDIE  
Come here, Todd.

Todd, now casually dressed, enters  
from the bedrooms.

EDDIE (cont'd)  
**I** can get you a summer job.

TODD  
Where? At the bookstore?

EDDIE  
Sure. It's a family business, and I've been there so long  
they think of me as one of their own.

TODD  
All you make in that place, Eddie---and they wouldn't pay me  
anything even close to that---is pocket-money.

EDDIE  
We are talking about your very first job. No one is going to  
pay you much.

TODD  
You make next to nothing, and you are in a dead-end line of  
work.

EDDIE  
That isn't kind.

TODD  
Then mom's not kind.

EDDIE  
Did **she** say that?  
(Pause.)  
She's tired of me.  
(Pause.)  
Are you ambitious?

TODD  
No.

Laughing, he shakes his head and  
flops into an easy chair.  
But I will do what she tells me.

EDDIE

You are a good son.

TODD

I am a coward. I would take off right now, and not look back, if I wasn't afraid of starving out there on my own.

EDDIE

You can't leave. You're still a school boy. Todd, you are still becoming. You are a good person becoming better.

TODD

Eddie, I don't want to be better. So don't start in. With your economic justice, and social justice, and human dignity, and horrors of war. I don't want to be better, and I don't even want to be **good**. I just want to **feel** good.

Irene and Greg enter from the garden.

IRENE

...but it **is** more spacious than it looks.

GREG

No doubt: I'm sure it is.

IRENE

This...this is my husband, Eddie.

GREG

(Extending his hand.)

Pleased to meet you.

IRENE

Eddie, this is Greg.

(To Greg.)

When Eddie's off this Tuesday, he's going to pack everything up and...

(To Eddie.)

Honey?

Eddie holds out his hand, and shakes Greg's.

IRENE (cont'd)

...and we will have appliances installed by the weekend. All spanking new.

GREG

That's a great pear tree you have. **We** have a pear tree. And a plum, and two filberts.

IRENE

Who does?

GREG

Oh, I mean in my parents' yard. The house where I grew up.

IRENE

And they still live there?

GREG

Yeah.

IRENE

Where's that?

GREG

Over a thousand miles from here. Dad still works at the grain elevator. At a desk job now, since his health is failing. And mom, at last, seems to be giving up on me, pleading less insistently than before that I move back in with them. I have finally convinced her, I think, that though I am back in the States to stay, I can't return to a life as narrow as that.

IRENE

You are a cosmopolitan man.

GREG

(Laughing.)

Well, that is so, isn't it! A man who has been around, and ought to know better, but still won't abandon his dogged pursuit of futility.

IRENE

You think your work is futile?

GREG

Sometimes. The rest of the time, I try not to think about its efficacy at all. And I think, right this very moment, that the cottage is...big enough.

IRENE

Oh, good! As soon as we clear the place out, I will bring in a maid and get it scrubbed and---

GREG

Fine, Irene. I will take it.

IRENE

You will?! Oh, that's wonderful! I have a standard month-to-month lease for you, Greg. Be right back.

Irene exits to the bedrooms.

GREG

(To Eddie.)

This is a terrible imposition on you.

EDDIE

It's...Irene's decision.

TODD

Sorry about the mix-up, mister.

GREG

(Laughing.)

Oh, I have been told to go to hell before. Your mother says you're a strong-minded fellow.

Irene enters from the bedrooms.

IRENE

(To Todd.)

Hey! Have you seen your father yet?!

Todd, smirking, shakes his head.

IRENE

(To Eddie.)

Where is he?! Where did he go?!

EDDIE

In the kitchen.

IRENE

Todd, do not chase him away.

Irene exits to the bedrooms.

GREG

(To Eddie)

That is an impressive library you have.

EDDIE

Thank you.

GREG

I am sorry you'll have to clear it out.

(To Todd.)

She said you are strong-minded and very smart.

TODD

Strong-minded **but** very smart. She's counting on my intelligence to stifle my will.

GREG

(To Eddie.)

May I borrow a book from you? I mean, not now, but when...after I've been around a while?

EDDIE

Which book?

GREG

None in particular. Whichever---when the time comes---whichever may strike my fancy?

EDDIE

You like ideas, then, do you?

GREG

(Laughing.)

I hadn't thought of it that way. I read for...for companionship. Does that sound strange?

Irene enters from the bedrooms, with a legal-sized document, and stands unnoticed until she speaks.

EDDIE

Companionship is a woman. But ideas...without ideas, you are lost.

GREG

You are lost when you are alone.

(Brief pause.)

As for companionship, Eddie: you couldn't be more right. Real companionship *is* a woman. I get by quite nicely, though, with the not-so-real companionship of my school kids and the occasional good read.

EDDIE

You're a teacher?

GREG

Yes.

EDDIE

I like that.

GREG

I'm glad you do.

(To Todd.)

Why should your intelligence be at odds with your will?

TODD

Because I want to act unspeakably, while I know prudence is what pays.



EDDIE

No, Todd.

TODD

Yes, Eddie. I want to gratify myself; and smash anybody who gets in my way.

GREG

So, then: circumspection saves you.

TODD

Or damns me.

IRENE

Todd, lighten up!

GREG

(Laughing.)

Oh, he's just being romantic.

TODD

Hey, man! Don't you patronize me!

IRENE

(To Todd.)

Don't **you** talk to him like that!

GREG

It's okay, it's okay. I'm used to it. Let's go over the rental agreement.

IRENE

First, Todd will apologize.

GREG

But he doesn't want to.

TODD

How do you know what I want? I apologize.

GREG

There it is: the triumph of prudence over will.

EDDIE

Where do you teach?

GREG

At a foundation-funded school. For students who have no families, no resources, and no...

(To Todd.)

...circumspection.

(To Eddie.)

It is a philanthropic last chance for kids who have failed, over and over, at everything they ever did. For kids who are

(MORE)

GREG (cont'd)  
 so far gone, the public schools had to kick them out. The day I walked in there, I truly felt I had come home.

IRENE  
 But home...isn't that a place where the companionship is **real**?

GREG  
 (Pause, as his gaze meets Irene's. Then, to Eddie.)  
 When I was young, I thought I was just another human being, a citizen of the world. So I went abroad, and discovered---it took me decades, but I did---that I am much narrower than I had imagined. And that I had hoped. I know some languages, but only one of them is my own. I have taken on and, after a while, inevitably shed the customs of a parade of other peoples, tribes, nations...what-have-you, but it is the culture here---easily disparaged though it be---that is **mine**. I am American, through and through. What that means...I have no idea.

EDDIE  
 I'll tell you what it means.

IRENE  
 Eddie, don't!

EDDIE  
 To be American is to be complicit in, and a beneficiary of, exploitation and subjugation.  
 (To Irene.)  
 This man is a flag-waver. I do not want him living here.

IRENE  
 "This man" is educating the very children your heart keeps bleeding for.

EDDIE  
 I commend him, I commend him! But to proclaim, unapologetically, that he's American---

TODD  
 He did not proclaim anything. He only said---  
 (To Greg.)  
 ---correct me if I am wrong---  
 (To Eddie.)  
 ---that he came home because he wants to feel good. He wants to backslide into what's easy and familiar.  
 (To Greg.)  
 How am I doing?  
 (To Eddie.)  
 Unlike you, Greg has given up on living at odds with his beliefs.

GREG

There, Todd, you are wrong. I never had "*beliefs*." No, all I ever had were sundry and ever-shifting points of view. And I have never lived at odds, for long, even with them.

TODD

(To Greg.)

Okay.

(To Eddie.)

Can you say what he just said?

EDDIE

No. I have beliefs. And, like anyone else, I am sometimes inconsistent. However---

TODD

However, Eddie: you are a lunkheaded, tiresome fool.

Eddie, crushed, turns and slowly exits out the front door.

IRENE

That was cruel.

TODD

Why don't you dump him, mom?

IRENE

Todd, I have given you warning: do not ever talk to me like that.

(To Greg.)

Come on. Sit down at the kitchen table and look this over.

Irene and Greg exit to the kitchen. Todd stays seated. Long pause. Vernon enters from the kitchen with a mug of coffee and a cigar. He glances at Todd, who glowers back at him. He then turns to address himself in the mirror.

VERNON

She is waiving the security deposit! She lines through the offending clause, initials her emendation, turns to him, and...smiles.

Vernon, his gaze always averted from Todd, sits and puffs on his cigar.

TODD

You are no father of mine.

Vernon, oblivious, picks up his coffee and sips.

TODD (cont'd)

You are grotesque. A living, wheezing gargoyle.

Vernon, oblivious, puts his coffee back down.

TODD (cont'd)

You look feeble-minded, too.

Vernon, oblivious, puffs on his cigar.

TODD (cont'd)

And most of all, you...you are o-o-oh, so fucking old!

Vernon winces; then, oblivious, he goes on smoking while Todd just sits. Long pause. Irene enters from the kitchen.

IRENE

How is it going?

(Pause.)

You **have** started talking, yes?

VERNON

"Talking?!" Woman, we have been **bonding**!

IRENE

Good. Keep at it.

Irene turns to exit to the kitchen; then, a tear in here eye, she turns back.

IRENE

Vernon, the...the cancer: how bad is it?

VERNON

What cancer?

IRENE

You said---

VERNON

Oh, yeah. I did, didn't I? That fellow Greg...he seems a decent sort.

IRENE

He is very nice.

VERNON

Why are you upset? Is it because you love me still?

(Pause.)

Irene, guess what? I have no cancer.

IRENE

You don't?!

VERNON

Nah, I was just playing with you.

IRENE

Oh, thank God!

VERNON

We always used to play. Oh, the fun we had! I still love you.

(Pause.)

Well...Eddie is your true love now. I bet you have heaps of fun with **him**.

IRENE

Have you made our son an offer of employment?

VERNON

It is, undeniably, a great virtue to be true to a worthy spouse.

IRENE

Enough playing, Vernon.

(Taking Vernon's cigar, and dousing it  
in his coffee mug.)

Answer my question.

VERNON

It **is** a virtue. I mean it. To be true to a **worthy** spouse.

IRENE

When did that dawn on you?

VERNON

Too late. Unless you...

IRENE

Forget about it. What did you offer Todd?

VERNON

Eddie is not worthy.

IRENE

How can you talk like this in front of *him*?

VERNON

Who? Is there someone in the room besides you and me? You think *Greg* is worthy? At the rent you're charging, he will be robbing you.

IRENE

(To Todd.)

What did your father offer?

VERNON

It is wise, Irene, to go, as you have done, with a month-to-month: no lengthy lease.

IRENE

Vernon! What will Todd's job be?

VERNON

With a month-to-month, you will be free to send young Greg away as soon as the novelty wears off, and you discover he is just another bore.

IRENE

Vernon!

VERNON

Mailroom! Yes. I will get the boy into the mailroom.

IRENE

How about that, Todd?

TODD

I am going to work at Eddie's store.

IRENE

(To Vernon.)

How long in the mailroom?

VERNON

Mid-June till the end of August. That's what you want, isn't it?

IRENE

I want two weeks in the mailroom. Then he gets a month's training in your department of industrial parks and offices. From there, he moves on to entertainment and retail properties.

VERNON

This is not strictly nine-to-five work, Irene. And it spills over into Saturday more often than not.

IRENE

Fine. What do you say?

(Pause.)

You, sirrah: my Knave of Hearts...what do you say?

VERNON

The word of the Queen of Hearts is my command.

**###END OF ACT ONE###**

ACT TWO

August, 2001. Saturday afternoon.

Lilies in the vase. Irene enters through the French doors from the garden, holding some fresh-pulled red onions by their shoots. The doorbell rings. She sets the onions down, and opens the front door. Vernon, dressed casually, stands at the threshold.

VERNON

Queen Guinevere!

IRENE

Wrong. Guinevere was an adulteress.

VERNON

Admit it, Irene: you have missed me.

IRENE

I thanked you last year for your help. When I did, Vernon, I then told you to keep away.

VERNON

Does Greg still live here?

IRENE

Yes. I have garden work to do. Good-bye.

VERNON

Don't you want to know why I came?

IRENE

You came to play with me.

VERNON

I am here to tell you about your son.

Irene opens the door wide, Vernon enters, and she shuts it.

IRENE

What about him?

VERNON

Am I simply too old for you now?

IRENE

**I** am too old for **you**. You don't chase a woman if she's over thirty.



Twenty-eight. VERNON

What is it about Todd? IRENE

You keep me away because I'm old. VERNON

All right. The remark about my son was a ploy. IRENE

Deny it, Irene! VERNON

It worked: you got me to let you in. Good for you. IRENE

Deny you think I am too damn old! VERNON

You look tired. IRENE

I am not tired! VERNON

Sit down. Rest a while. IRENE

I do not need rest! VERNON

I have wax beans to pick. IRENE

Irene starts for the garden exit.

Have you jacked up Greg's rent? Have you at least demanded a market rate from the...young man? VERNON

Rest a **short** while, Vernon. When I come back, I expect you to be gone. IRENE

Irene starts for the garden exit.

After all I have done for your son. VERNON

IRENE

I appreciate it. So does he.

VERNON

The hell he does.

IRENE

He quite understands the value of his experience at your company. He may not like the long hours and heavy work load, but---

VERNON

He doesn't like anything about the job.

IRENE

Oh, come on. He did fine last summer, and he was delighted to go back this summer.

VERNON

The hell he was. You made him go back. And they re-hired him because---**only** because---**I** told 'em to. Irene, your little prince will be home early today. It seems his perpetual petulance, indefatigable sloth and flamboyant contempt have finally compelled the splendid people who did me the favor of hiring him, to kick him out on his good-for-nothing ass.

(Pause.)

Speechless, huh? **He** wasn't. When they informed him of his termination, he responded with a line whose limpid originality stunned my buddies, confirming the solemn and repeated assurances he had given them that he is a literary giant-to-be: "You can't fire me! I quit!"

(Pause.)

If you haven't raised the rent, let's up it by...oh, say fifty percent. That's still below fair market value, but...

IRENE

Can Todd rely on them? I mean, in the future, will they give him a good reference?

VERNON

Not a chance. Is young Greg home?

IRENE

I don't know.

VERNON

We'll give him written notice. I will take care of it. All you do is sign.

IRENE

Leave Greg alone.

VERNON

But I like him. I mean, he's not a dolt, like Eddie. Business matters aside, I would enjoy just schmoozing with the guy.

(Pause.)

Stop brooding, will you? Your kid's no good. So what? What's Greg's phone number?

IRENE

I don't remember.

VERNON

On the fridge, right? You used to keep phone numbers on the fridge.

Vernon exits to the kitchen. Irene sits, and buries her head in her hands. Long pause. Vernon enters from the kitchen with a pad and pen.

IRENE

When did you last speak to Todd?

VERNON

Hmmm...let me think.

IRENE

I mean: when did you last have a conversation with him, so as to appreciate his dynamism, and his intellect, and his great big heart?

VERNON

I last spoke to Todd...yes: it was that day I complied with your demand that I leave. He said---I remember this distinctly---he said: "goo-goo, dada." Whereupon I replied---and I am quite certain I have never uttered one single word to him since that poignant moment---"goo-goo, yourself."

Vernon sits, and writes.

VERNON

Longhand. The old-fashioned way. Has Greg always paid on time?

IRENE

Yes.

VERNON

Okay, then...let's go easy on him for now:

(Writing.)

"I agree to maintain your rent at this new level for a period of not less than six whole months."

(Ripping off the paper he's written on.)  
You have a photocopy machine?

(Brief pause.)

No, of course not: this enterprise of yours is but a **cottage** industry.

(Laughing.)

Oh that was terrible! I'll write a duplicate myself.

(Writing.)

There! No, wait: I forgot the security deposit.

(Pause.)

What's on your mind?

(Pause.)

Adultery?

IRENE

**Todd**, you creep.

VERNON

**Now**, maybe. But not when I first got here...Guinevere. You have to have a security deposit.

IRENE

I am not signing that.

VERNON

(Crossing out what he's written.)

Okay...no security deposit.

A tap on the French doors. Vernon tears the paper off the pad, and stands.

VERNON

(Handing the papers to Irene.)

One copy for your files, and one for him.

Vernon opens the French doors, and Greg, casually dressed, enters from the garden.

VERNON

(Pumping Greg's hand.)

Hey! Greg! How have you been?!

GREG

Well, thank you. Mostly. Hello, Irene.

IRENE

Hello.

GREG

Vernon called. He told me to come.

IRENE

(Pocketing the papers.)

It was a mistake. There's a fresh pot of coffee. Help yourselves.

Irene exits to the bedrooms.

VERNON

It was no mistake, Greg. Sit down.

Greg sits. So does Vernon.

VERNON (cont'd)

I like you. I just told Irene: I like him, I want to schmooze with him. You see, I don't go to the office any more, don't spend my days with other guys. And the guys I do get together with now and then...all of them are business types. I thought talking to **you** would...would be refreshing.

GREG

You referred---on the phone---to a matter of importance.

VERNON

Oh, let's just ramble. Man-to-man. Tell me about the guys **you** hang out with.

(Pause.)

Okay, then: tell me about the **gals**.

(Pause.)

You have been well, you say. But only "mostly" well. Is that because you've been riding passion's roller-coaster?

GREG

I had an appendectomy last winter.

VERNON

But clearly: you have made a superb recovery.

GREG

Between the doctor and hospital, I owe thousands.

VERNON

Lousy insurance, huh?

GREG

No insurance.

VERNON

You should have got yourself a union job. I detest organized labor. But...you should have.

(Pause.)

Irene wants to raise your rent.

(Brief pause.)

Care to know how much?

GREG

I would like to know why I am talking to you, and not to her.

VERNON

As I said, this is an opportunity for me to chat with a fellow who promises to be interesting. A fellow who has been to refugee camps, and who teaches, and who doesn't bellow bullshit like my own crowd does.

(Pause.)

Irene loves to have fun. "Ah," you are thinking, "don't we all?" But you, Greg, are in error. Some people don't even know what fun is. Eddie, for instance. Have you spoken much with Eddie?

GREG

I borrow books, we discuss them when I'm done. He is a very thoughtful guy. Sweet, too, and very kind. If you are looking for someone unlike yourself to talk to man-to-man, try him.

VERNON

(Pause.)

I have been fucking my best friend's wife.

GREG

How much is my rent going up?

VERNON

I'll tell you later. She's twenty-three, and my own wife is thirty-one. But that is not why I have been doing it. Irene thinks that what I want in a female is youth. And I will grant: when she plumped up with that fetus (now devolved, at long last, into an adolescent brat), I did go about enjoying a slenderer lady who had only just attained legal majority. But, no: I do not **seek** youth in a woman; I **settle** for it, never finding what I seek. What I seek are a sense of humor and a yearning to care, and be cared for. I will meet a woman and she'll seem---each one will seem in her own devious way---just to want to be with me...be happy with me. So I treat her---and I know I am very lucky I can afford to---I treat her royally. I buy her clothes, antiques and art. Cars, and boats, and houses. We mingle with the elite, travel all over in luxury beyond extravagance. And then there's jewelry: they never get enough of dazzling stones, of gold and platinum filigree. In such abundance, a woman glows; all of them glow. But the more they glow, the more they disappear. As companions, I mean. First, they're no longer there, even when they're with you. Then, they...aren't with you. They do tell themselves that all they want, and ever wanted, was laughter and affection. But what they really want's adventure. Now that they're rich, and have the power that comes with being rich, they **command**

(MORE)

VERNON (cont'd)

adventure. You, young man---and do not deny it---are thinking: "they cheat on this windbag because he is old. Can't get it up any more" But no: that isn't it at all. Sure, I'm closing in on eighty, but that doesn't stop me from drillin' 'em till they scream. Same way I used to drill Irene. She had hairy armpits. Does she still?

(Pause.)

Your friend Eddie has an unhappy wife. Have you not at least **tried** to do something about it?

(Pause.)

When Irene and I were together: I laughed, she laughed. Does Eddie ever laugh?

(Pause.)

So...there Greg sits: all prim, and contained, and severe. Okay, you have convinced me: you are a man of virtue. I no longer suspect you. But still, you do think, don't you, that **I** am way too old for her?

GREG

Your age has nothing to do with anything.

VERNON

It has everything to do with Irene. As far as she's concerned, I have gone from ripeness to rot. And she can't stand the stench.

GREG

You were always rotten, Vernon, even when you were green.

VERNON

But I want her happy. **That's** good, isn't it?

(Pause.)

It can't be rotten for me to want her happy.

GREG

You want her any way you can have her.

VERNON

Maybe you're...maybe you're wrong. Maybe I don't. I gave her a simple diamond solitaire when I married her: six hundred fifty bucks. No other jewelry then, or later...no pricey stuff at all. She never wanted any. The only woman I ever knew who never wanted **stuff**. I used to lie in bed, and she would put on music. Sinatra, sometimes. Sometimes, The Beatles. Chopin nocturnes, too. Coltrane, blowing ballads. And she would dance. In a necklace made of...nothing but **seashells**, she danced and danced around...those seashells, and her naked body...so smooth, save for her pits and...and that bush below. Is this not an image that appeals to you?

(Pause.)

Greg, I know you are a down-to-earth kind of guy. So, surely, you can not possibly prefer shaved.

(Pause.)

My age *is* repulsive to Irene. And, guess what? It is repulsive to...to *me*, as well. I *do* want her to be happy. Yes, really; so don't look at me like that. I want happiness for her, now, more than I have ever wanted anything for me or anyone else in my entire life. I have been jealous, young man. Of you. No more. So, Greg, dream about her. Go on, dream about her dancing. There *is* such a thing as joy, and it can be yours. But first, you have to put your scruples aside.

(Pause.)

It is not my betrayal of my friend that is contemptible. What is contemptible is that I persist in that betrayal, even though there can never be any love between his wife and me. Between Irene and you, though, there smolders holy fire.

GREG

We hardly ever see each other.

VERNON

The blood rushes when you do.

(Taking a ring from his pocket.)

She gave me back that solitaire. My other wives kept everything they got, then sued for more. Ah, she had hair in her pits and a great fluffy bush down below. *We* were on fire then. *Then* she was happy.

Vernon puts the ring back in his pocket, and exits to the kitchen. Greg stays seated. Eddie enters by the front door, dressed as at the end of Act One.

EDDIE

Damn capitalism! They screw you every time you turn around!

GREG

Eddie, do you ever laugh?

EDDIE

I will laugh when the people who have screwed me hang.

GREG

Do you ever enjoy yourself?

EDDIE

I enjoy myself when I'm with *you*.

GREG

Lecturing.



Talking ideas. EDDIE

All **I** do is listen. GREG

Turn the tables. Go on. EDDIE

I have no ideas. GREG

Then formulate one. EDDIE

Out of thin air? GREG

Sure. EDDIE

I can't. GREG

Are you my friend? EDDIE

Oh, all right. Okay. Here: ideas themselves---. Eddie, this...this is ridiculous. GREG

Ideas themselves...? Proceed. EDDIE

Ideas are the principal source of human misery. GREG

Which ideas? EDDIE

I'm talking about what people do to one another. Not plagues and earthquakes and all that natural stuff. GREG

Naturally. EDDIE

They laugh. GREG

Which ideas? EDDIE

GREG  
Well...certain religious ones.

EDDIE  
Very, very good!

GREG  
And...and secular ideas, too.

EDDIE  
Specifically?

GREG  
Ideologies.

EDDIE  
Ideologies are not ideas. They investigate ideas, and deploy them.

GREG  
Well, then, I guess ideas are not the principle source of human misery, after all.

EDDIE  
Of course they aren't. Go on.

GREG  
Well, then the source of misery...the principle source is **ideology**. Religious and secular. Both.

EDDIE  
No it isn't. Do you approve of misery?

GREG  
Of course not.

EDDIE  
Actually, you want to eliminate it, don't you?

GREG  
I want to do no more than what is possible.

EDDIE  
Certain ideologies do contribute to human misery, Greg, but the **source** of human misery is: **greed**.

GREG  
Okay.

EDDIE  
It is not okay for you to state a position, then give up as soon as someone attacks it. Argue with me! Oh, I am aching to argue with someone who argues back!

GREG

Why not...just go dancing with Irene, or something?

EDDIE

We don't dance.

GREG

**You** don't dance.

EDDIE

Damn capitalism! Damn, damn, damn! Listen once again: they screw me, and they screw you.

GREG

That is so simplistic.

EDDIE

Your cut in pay last month: was that simplistic?

GREG

It was understandable. Stocks are down, and the economy is soft. Resources for charity aren't what they were last year. You've spent lots of time with me, Eddie. You have been generous with your attention. But, let's call a hiatus. No more of these "sessions" we've been having. All right?

EDDIE

No. I am going to convince you yet.

GREG

Of what? That life's unfair?

EDDIE

I am going to make you understand once and for all that when you are down, it is because someone else is up.

GREG

Don't waste your time with me. You have a family. Spend the time with them.

EDDIE

Oh, Todd thinks I'm silly and Irene...she doesn't even listen to me any more.

GREG

Do you listen to **her**?

EDDIE

She doesn't say anything.

GREG

You come home to a caring woman. I would like to do that.

EDDIE

Ah, go on! You're married to your work.

GREG

My work is...sure, it's what I do. What I **have** to do. But it's not as if it's an intellectual challenge; and there's no thrill in it, either, like there might be when you play...say, the money game. My work is...taxing, Eddie, that's all: nothing but disconcerting human give-and-take.

EDDIE

You give, they take.

GREG

I come home, and I have peace. But no comfort. You come home to Irene. Doesn't she...hint? That if you behaved, for example, in such-and-such a way, it might make her happy?

EDDIE

I can't make her happy. I mean, I can be around, and make love to her when she wants, but...anyway, Todd makes her happy.

Vernon enters from the kitchen with a mug of coffee.

EDDIE (cont'd)

Todd makes her very happy, because he is moving up. High up into those echelons where our oppressors conspire. I failed that boy.

(To Vernon.)

I failed. You won. You bastard.

VERNON

I **am** his father, Eddie.

EDDIE

No. You threw him away. Then he was mine. But you stole him back, and he has capitulated. **I** am his father, and I failed.

Irene enters from the bedrooms.

IRENE

(To Eddie.)

You're home early.

EDDIE

This man is not Todd's father! He is a pig!

VERNON

Eddie, come on. Let's go for a walk.

EDDIE  
You exploit the worker, then you cast him off!

VERNON  
Yes, yes.

EDDIE  
You corrupt the young.

VERNON  
That's right. Every chance I get. Come on.

EDDIE  
I will have nothing to do with you until the day I slit your throat.

VERNON  
May I defend myself, please? Will you have the decency to hear me out?

EDDIE  
You want to argue?

VERNON  
I do.

EDDIE  
All *right!*

VERNON  
(Putting down his coffee. To Greg and Irene.)  
We are going for a walk.

Vernon wraps his arm around Eddie's shoulder and propels him toward the front door.

EDDIE  
Hands off me, you scum!

Vernon and Eddie exit.

GREG  
How much?

IRENE  
What?

GREG  
The rent increase: how much?

IRENE

Oh, that Vernon! Why did my husband come home early? Did he say?

GREG

No.

IRENE

I have things to do. Pick yourself tomatoes, if you like.

GREG

First: what are your intentions with regard to the rent?

IRENE

Greg, when did we last talk?

GREG

Two or three weeks ago, wasn't it? I bumped into you at the mailbox.

IRENE

We said very little, as I recall.

GREG

We said hello.

IRENE

Do you ever get time off?

GREG

Yes: weekends, holidays, summertime.

IRENE

You worked last summer, and you're working this, too. Eddie says you're doing it for the money.

GREG

I'm doing it because these are my kids, Irene. You know how I feel. You have a son.

IRENE

Do they ever disappoint you?

GREG

(Laughing.)

That's about all they do.

IRENE

And you find that funny?

GREG

The worse things get, the more I laugh. Whatever happens, somehow they...well, just like Todd makes you happy, they make me happy. Your son writes.

IRENE

Doesn't every teenage boy?

GREG

No. Just the literate ones. I found him scribbling away in the garden one day. He told me to go get lost.

IRENE

What are your students like?

GREG

If you were walking in the city, and one of my kids came along, you would give him the widest berth you could. One look, and you would know that kid was trouble. If he came close, you would run. And if you couldn't run, you would take a great deep breath and try beating him off like a dog.

IRENE

You must think I am an awful woman.

GREG

Not at all. Just prudent.

IRENE

You're prudent, too.

GREG

No I'm not. I see trouble, and I run right towards it.

IRENE

Except when you don't.

GREG

In my professional life, I do.

IRENE

Yes. In your professional life, you are very caring.

GREG

I care about myself. I have always done what's suited me, and I intend to keep on doing only what suits me. I wasn't cut out for the grain elevator.

IRENE

*I* wasn't cut out for the bank.

GREG

Open a nursery.

IRENE

Wouldn't that be nice?

GREG

A boutique. You could sell exotic plants the big chains never heard of.

IRENE

Oh, Greg! What a great idea! Would...would you help me?

GREG

How?

IRENE

Just...I don't know. Be there with me?

GREG

I, uh...I am cut out for nothing but the life I am living.

IRENE

I suppose so. And *I* am cut out for the compensation I get. The salary, the insurance coverage, the retirement plan. Those years you spent abroad: who was it that employed you?

GREG

Oh...lots of outfits. "Humanitarian organizations." That is what they like to call themselves. One after another after another.

IRENE

Did you never move up along the way?

GREG

"Up?" Where is that?

IRENE

So, then, all your moves were...lateral?

GREG

Ha! "Lateral," yeah. I did have opportunities, though.

IRENE

Such as...?

GREG

To take a position of what they call "importance."

IRENE

But...?

GREG

Well, I am unable to sit still for long.

IRENE

Oh! Then I swear I will never ask you to sit still for long.



GREG

Around big tables, I mean. I am unable to sit around big tables with others who...who specialize in sitting around big tables.

IRENE

Yes, I know those people all too well.

GREG

They sit there and they...they make noises about their "mission."

IRENE

They do have to have a common understanding, don't they? About what they're...what they're about?

GREG

They make these noises, see, and...and they have hustled all this money, right? Then they...they just squander it.

IRENE

But, Greg, your people are completely different. What they do, they do for an unselfish cause.

GREG

I wonder. I wonder what their real cause is. No, I know what it is. Where you work, where I work...it's actually all the same. Everybody's aim is to move...what a strange word to use.

IRENE

"Up?"

GREG

"Up."

IRENE

I want security. Do you understand?

GREG

Of course. Which is why you earn whatever you can. And own income property, which you should rent out for as much as you can.

(Brief pause.)

No, I never moved up when I was abroad, and I am not moving up now. I am the way you would be in that nursery. I turn my back on organizational shenanigans, and tend to the lives around me.

IRENE

I tend to my own life. You don't tend to yours. To your need for security. And your need for companionship.

GREG

Irene, for as long as I have been here, we have never given each other more than the time of day. I hardly think you are in a position to make observations about my needs.

IRENE

Why haven't you given me more than the time of day?

GREG

Why should I? You're only my landlady. How much are you raising the rent?

IRENE

Shall I tell you why **I** haven't given **you** more than the time of day?

GREG

No. Todd's writing is not too bad.

IRENE

I thought he told you to go get lost.

GREG

He did. Then I said my students write better than spoiled kids like him, and I dared him to show me his work.

IRENE

He won't show **me**. What's his writing like?

GREG

Stilted. He's too disciplined.

(Laughs.)

**My** kids aren't. They go with their impulses.

IRENE

When they write?

GREG

**And** when they don't.

IRENE

Yes, Eddie told me you told him about some girl who lost control, and bludgeoned her mother.

GREG

Oh, she was desperate.

IRENE

You got the court to let her off.

GREG

All I did was tell the judge the girl's mother had been spending her grocery money on drugs, and sleeping with a parade of strangers.

IRENE

You didn't have to do that.

GREG

Yes I did. One of them tried to rape her. As for Todd...when he comes to trust himself, Irene, I think he will write quite well. Now, won't that please you?

IRENE

It would please me to know he is getting solidly established in the world.

GREG

Please you, but still not make you happy?

IRENE

Todd, whatever he does, could only make the mother in me happy.

GREG

Not the banker?

IRENE

Oh, the banker! A happy banker! Yes! I want that on my tombstone: "a perfectly miserable woman, but she was a happy, happy, ever-so-happy **banker!**"

(Pause.)

Greg, you bring to mind something Wordsworth wrote: "...that best portion of a good man's life, his little, nameless, unremembered, acts of kindness and of love." I never gave you more than the time of day because I have thought---because I have **known**---**you** could make me happy. All of me. But I am committed to someone else. You have had my heart, Greg, so I don't have the heart to raise your rent. Now, go.

GREG

But I...I pay too little. That's unfair to you.

IRENE

You care, unlike the husband I had once; and you act, unlike the husband I have now. You help people. Consider my gesture a contribution.

GREG

I am not a beggar.

IRENE

It isn't for you, this contribution. It is for your kids.

GREG

I can't accept it.

IRENE

On their behalf, you can't refuse it. I owe them something. Every single one of us who lives even modestly well owes something to the children in our midst who were born into despair. No, this isn't for you, Greg; it isn't personal. I am doing it to keep you on an even keel, so you can keep on tending to them.

GREG

Well, then...thank you.

Greg extends his hand, and Irene shakes it.

IRENE

You are very welcome.

Greg turns and exits by the French doors. In a moment, he re-enters.

GREG

The reason I never gave you more than the time of day...it was because **I** had lost my heart to **you**. I was afraid I...I would be unable to contain myself. That I would try to...to compromise you.

IRENE

You were avoiding me for **my** sake, then?

GREG

Yes.

IRENE

(Extending her hand to Greg.)

Thank you.

Greg shakes her hand, then turns and exits by the French doors. In a moment, he re-enters.

GREG

You're welcome.

Greg turns to exit, then turns back.

GREG

You are very, very welcome.

IRENE

Oh...please---

(Tentatively stepping toward Greg.)

---compromise me!

Arms slowly opening, they approach each other. Before they can clinch, Todd comes in the front door, leaving it ajar. In a suit, with shirt unbuttoned, tie loosened, and briefcase in hand, and with no more than the most fleeting glance at Greg and Irene, he proceeds straight on through the bedrooms exit. Greg and Irene compose themselves. Pause.

GREG

I...I'll go pick tomatoes.

IRENE

Do that. But...but just the red ones, Greg. The yellows aren't ripe.

GREG

Okay. Just the red ones. Then I'll make a salad.

IRENE

Yes. Make yourself a salad.

GREG

A Greek salad.

IRENE

You will need cucumbers for that.

GREG

I will. That's right.

IRENE

So, then pick some cucumbers, too.

GREG

I have oregano.

IRENE

Oregano. That is essential.

GREG

And feta cheese. I have nearly a pound.

IRENE

Oh, that's more than enough.

GREG

And I have plenty of olives.

Kalamata? IRENE

Kalamata. GREG

Onions! IRENE  
(Picking up the onions, handing Greg a couple.)  
Here. Your olive oil: is it Greek?

It's...actually...well, it's the store brand. Generic. I also have a lemon. GREG

Aha. IRENE

A lemon I...I can squeeze. GREG

Over the salad. IRENE

Over the...yeah. My...my salad. GREG

Vernon enters by the front door, with Eddie at his heels.

Irene, your husband has news for you. VERNON

I have news for **you**, you bastard! **Your** day is coming! EDDIE

Todd enters from the bedrooms, carrying a suitcase.

Where are you going? IRENE

Away. TODD

Todd, I know they fired you. It's all right. IRENE

They fired him?! Fantastic! EDDIE

TODD

Shut up, Eddie.

EDDIE

But you've escaped! You are out of their clutches!

IRENE

Shut up, like he told you.

VERNON

It seems, Irene, that the shop in which Eddie has toiled for so long just succumbed to the merchandising superiority of the corporate players in his industry.

IRENE

No?!

(To Eddie.)

They went under?

EDDIE

Uh-huh. Sold their inventory to a middleman, and closed up just like that.

IRENE

On Monday, you start looking for a job.

(Taking the suitcase, and placing it behind her. To Todd.)

In in less than three weeks, **you start** your senior year.

TODD

No I don't.

IRENE

In the fall, we will go visit colleges. Just you and me. For a whole week. Won't that be fun?

TODD

No. Over a year ago, mother, I did what **you** wanted. I took a job **I** did **not** want. My birthday is---

IRENE

September the twelfth.

TODD

Which is less than one month from now.

IRENE

And what a celebration we will have!

TODD

On that day---on September the twelfth, 2001---I turn **eighteen**.

IRENE

Yes! Yes, how would you like---?

TODD

In exactly three weeks and four days, you will no longer have any business telling me what to do!

IRENE

Would you like us to throw you a great big party, or---?

TODD

Listen to me! For once in your life, listen to me! I am as good as eighteen right now!

IRENE

No, you're not. You can't be. You're...you're seventeen.

TODD

Right now! Yes! I am every bit as good as eighteen! So from this very minute, and forever after, I am going to do what **I** want!

IRENE

Oh, no you won't! You are...Todd, you are still my boy.

TODD

Mom, give me back my bag.

IRENE

I will not. The world out there is ruthless, Todd. Go to your room.

TODD

I am a free spirit now.

IRENE

What you are is pampered, disagreeable and ungrateful.

TODD

And **you** are fucked-up. You still get wet over this revolting geezer, you are dying to straddle this loser, and you are determined to hang onto this moron no matter what. You, mother, are a mess, and you are making a mess out of **me**.

Pause. Irene picks up the suitcase, and sets it beside the front door. She then takes the rent notice copies from her pocket, sets them on a table, bends over, signs them, and straightens back up.



IRENE

(To Greg. Handing him the notices.)

Sign these, please, and return one copy promptly. My husband is unemployed. We can no longer keep you on the cheap.

(To Vernon.)

I have no further use for you. Do not write, do not phone, and do not come back.

Irene exits to the bedrooms. A door slams off stage. Todd picks up his suitcase, and strides out the front door, as the three men watch.

**###END OF ACT TWO###**

ACT THREE, SCENE ONE

March, 2002. Saturday evening.

Daffodils in the vase. Eddie, in a security guard's uniform and fanny pack, enters by the front door.

EDDIE

(Taking off the fanny pack.)

Honey, I'm home!

Irene, in an apron, enters from the kitchen.

IRENE

(Arms around Eddie, kissing him.)

Oh, my sweet, dear Eddie. How was your day?

EDDIE

Not bad. Not bad at all.

(Pulling a pruning shears from the fanny pack.)

This is for you.

IRENE

Pruning shears!

EDDIE

Look at those blades.

IRENE

Wow! They are really shiny.

EDDIE

Chrome-plated. Rust-resistant.

(Handing the shears to Irene.)

Here. Grab.

IRENE

What a fantastic feel!

EDDIE

That, Irene, is a non-slip grip.

IRENE

(Kissing him.)

Oh, Eddie, thank you, thank you, thank you.

EDDIE

(Sniffing.)

What's for dinner?

Your favorite. IRENE

Pot roast? EDDIE

Uh-huh. IRENE

Wonderful! EDDIE

Sit down. IRENE

Eddie sits. Irene exits to the kitchen, then returns with a glass of whisky and hands it to Eddie.

Cheers, my love. EDDIE

He raises the glass to her, and sips. Irene kisses him on the forehead, then exits to the kitchen. Eddie picks up a TV remote control, and channel-surfs. He gets a snippet of commercials on each station. There is a tap on the French doors. Eddie hits the mute, gets up, opens the French doors. Greg stands there. He is dressed casually, as before.

Hey, Greg! Long time no see. EDDIE (cont'd)

How you doing, Eddie? GREG

Well! Very well, indeed. Come in. EDDIE

Greg enters.

Have a drink? EDDIE (cont'd)

No, thanks. GREG

EDDIE  
Oh, that's right: you never drink.

GREG  
Sure I do. Once in a while. I thought **you** never drank.

EDDIE  
**I** used to drink once in a while, too.

GREG  
I need to speak to Irene.

EDDIE  
Now, I have a shot every day. One single shot, when I come home.

GREG  
Where is she?

EDDIE  
Cooking. Do not disturb.

GREG  
Can't she talk while she cooks?

EDDIE  
About what?

GREG  
It...doesn't concern you.

EDDIE  
Aha! You want to be alone with her. Yes! Alone with her...**again**.

(Pause. Then laughing.)  
Don't look so guilty, Greg. I know all about it: her crush on you, and your befuddled passion in her moment of weakness. We have talked about it, and we laugh about it. Let me go pour you a glass.

GREG  
No, thank you.

EDDIE  
(Sitting back down, and sipping his drink.)  
I have one single shot. One drink, and then...  
(Draining the glass.)  
...I stop.  
(Taking a nail scissors from his fanny pack.)  
Want a nail scissors?

GREG

What?

EDDIE

Stainless steel. With a matte finish. It will last you a lifetime.

(Paring his nails.)

One shot, and I am relaxed. Never did used to have a drink when I came home from the bookstore. Lord knows why.

GREG

*I* know why.

EDDIE

(Taking a pocket knife out of the fanny pack.)

How 'bout a pocket knife?

GREG

I have a pocket knife.

EDDIE

Not like this one, you don't.

GREG

When you came home from the bookstore, you found a quiet spot, and you read.

EDDIE

Not when *you* were home.

GREG

No. When I was home, you came over to the cottage, and held forth. You used to exercise your mind after work, not blunt it.

EDDIE

Yes, I used to think non-stop. To go 'round and 'round and come to preposterous conclusions.

(Examining the pocket knife.)

Look at this handle: mother-of-pearl!

(Placing the knife on a table, then paring his nails again.)

Now, after a shift at work, I take it easy. I have my drink, watch TV, and eat. I take pleasure in my wife, and in my home, and in the realization that, in this job I was so fortunate to get, I provide security to my country. I have a cuticle scissors, too. Made in Italy. You want it?

GREG

Do you perchance have any dental instruments?

EDDIE

I will. Bound to, sooner or later. What exactly do you need?

GREG

I need to talk to Irene about Todd.

Greg heads for the kitchen.

EDDIE

Do not go in there!

Greg stops.

EDDIE

(Taking out another pocket knife from  
the fanny pack.)

Look at this one!

(Opening the knife, one component at a  
time.)

Big blade, little blade, corkscrew, file, screwdriver,  
saw...can opener. You're not a dentist.

GREG

No, but I have a mirror. If I do the work myself, I can save  
a bundle.

EDDIE

Hey, another screwdriver! A Phillips! **And...a *toothpick!***

(Holding up the toothpick.)

A dental instrument!

GREG

That won't do it, Eddie. Three of my teeth need crowns. And  
then there's the endodontist.

Greg turns, and makes for the  
kitchen.

EDDIE

Greg, stop! Don't you dare!

GREG

But Todd---

EDDIE

Todd?! There is no Todd.

GREG

How can you say such a thing?

EDDIE

As far as his mother is concerned, he simply does not exist.  
So leave her be.

(Pause. Taking out a couple more pocket knives.)

I like it at the airport. I, Eddie: defender of the gates.

(Offering pocket knives.)

Take one, Greg. This one here. It has a magnifying glass. Come on, take it. We confiscate this stuff by the truckload.

Irene enters from the kitchen.

IRENE

Oh, Greg. Hello.

GREG

Hello.

IRENE

(To Eddie.)

Dinner is in five minutes.

EDDIE

(Standing.)

Wash-up time.

Eddie exits to the bedrooms.

IRENE

My marriage---you understand, don't you?---is my life.

GREG

So you have told me.

IRENE

Have I?

GREG

Yes. At the mailbox. Three or four times.

IRENE

My husband and I work, and we save, and we take pleasure in each other. When we retire, we will travel when we like, and we will play, and I will garden to my heart's content.

GREG

I got a phone call.

IRENE

Hang on a second.

Irene exits to the kitchen, then re-enters with an envelope.

IRENE

I was going to slip this under your door, but since you're here...

(Handing the envelope to Greg.)

Okay: you got a phone call.

GREG

Yes. About twenty minutes ago. Is this what I think it is?

IRENE

It is not excessive, Greg. It is the market rate. And it does not take effect for a month. Who called?

GREG

My commuter ticket, you know, costs nearly twice what it did when I first moved in. And my blood pressure and cholesterol medicines cost over two hundred dollars a month.

IRENE

And your salary?

GREG

First they raised it, then they cut it. It's been flat now for about a year.

(Brief pause.)

You laugh about me. About my...affection for you. Eddie said---

IRENE

Oh, Greg, we had a single awkward moment together. **You** ought to laugh it off, too. And find yourself a woman who's available. You're a nice guy, and you're pretty good-looking. You could be a real catch, if you stopped giving your hard work away, and went about advancing yourself.

GREG

I need to be useful.

IRENE

But **are** you useful? What good have you done those kids you used to tell Eddie about? The one who got life in prison, the one who---?

GREG

Irene, don't go there. I am aware of my...my too many failures.

IRENE

All right, Greg. But if you want to keep pretending that you're "useful," understand this: "useful" people get used.



GREG

It was an emergency room doctor who called. She explained that she had a distraught patient whom she was unable to help. Then she put your son on the phone.

IRENE

What son?

GREG

Todd told the doctor to call *me* because he was afraid of *you*. I told him there was nothing to be afraid of.

IRENE

I have no son.

GREG

I asked him if he had enough to pay for a taxi ride. He said yes.

(Opening the envelope, taking out a piece of paper.)

He has a habit, Irene. Heroin.

(Reading.)

Oh, no!

IRENE

He is a drug addict?!

GREG

This is...it is just too much!

IRENE

A filthy addict!

GREG

(Crumpling the paper.)

Irene, this is impossible!

Greg exits by the French doors.  
Long pause. Sound of key in the front door lock. Todd, haggard and dressed shabbily, opens the front door, and takes one step into the room.

TODD

Mama?

Irene takes one step back, away from him.

TODD

(Approaching Irene with trepidation, and crying.)

(MORE)

TODD (cont'd)

Oh, mama!

(Falling to his knees.)

Mama, I am so scared!

Irene melts, goes to Todd, cradles  
his head.

**###END OF ACT THREE, SCENE ONE###**

ACT THREE, SCENE TWO

April, 2002. Saturday evening.

Irises in the vase. Eddie, in his uniform, sits drinking. There is a whisky bottle on the table beside him. The doorbell rings. He stands, shakily, then staggers to the front door and opens it. Vernon, in suit and tie, enters and closes the door behind him.

EDDIE

In the shower. Todd is in the shower. You gotta wait, Vernon. Want a drink?

(Pause. Sitting back down.)

He's all cleaned up. All cleaned up inside, and now he's cleaning outside. Scrub-a-dub-dub. How much did it cost you? That residential detoxi---detoxification and rehab---habilitation program?

VERNON

A lot.

EDDIE

Yes, Todd came home from that program today clean...as a whistle. Hmmm. I just made a simile. The boy is clean, and Irene could not be happier. I used to read. And I had opinions about what I read. And I had opinions about how what I read was written. As for similes: I hated them. Same as I hated pigs like you. I do not hate any more. I love. No I don't. I would like to love. To be loved, too.

(Drinking.)

Irene loved me, for a while. Then Todd came back, and she sent him off into that resi---residensh---into that program, and all her love...she turned it all to him. I don't hate her for it, though, or hate him either. Hate is evil. **You** don't hate. You just take advantage, and do not bother to care. And so, Vernon, I am on your side now. Have been ever since September.

(Drinking.)

You are ava---. Avarish-sh---

VERNON

Avaricious.

EDDIE

Yeah. And you are overbearing. But...you do not hate. Though the harm you cause may be irrep---irreparable and vast, it is not deliberate. It is incidental. Hatred is not your thing. Am I correct?

VERNON

Yes you are.

EDDIE

Therefore, you do not fly Boeings into buildings. You merely rent the buildings out.

(Drinking.)

**We** have a building. And, as of next week, a brand new tenant.

VERNON

Oh. Then the luggage at the curbside must be Greg's.

Irene, dressed as in Act One,  
enters from the bedrooms.

IRENE

Good afternoon, Vernon. Todd will be right out.

VERNON

He had better behave, Irene.

IRENE

He will.

VERNON

I am doing this for you, Irene. He is not going to get another chance after this.

IRENE

Todd will go back to work. He will take classes at night, and get his high school diploma. He will then go on to earn a degree, taking courses consistent with his career path. And, Vernon, at every step, when he comes up against doors that are closed, you will make them open.

VERNON

Have you checked the cottage?

IRENE

Why?

VERNON

Your tenant is leaving, isn't he?

IRENE

I will check it after he goes.

VERNON

With no security deposit, you can't hold him accountable once he's out of here. I will take a look.

Vernon exits by the French doors. Irene looks at Eddie, shakes her head, then exits to the bedrooms. Eddie drinks. A tentative knock at the front door. Then a slightly louder knock. Eddie gets up, staggers over, and opens it.

J.J.

(Off stage.)

Hey there, man. J.J. here. Good, uh...good evening. Yeah, J.J. is the name. I am looking...looking for a certain guy, see? **His** name...uh, sir. Sir, his name is Greg.

Eddie reels back to his chair, and falls into it. J.J. enters just within the front door threshold. S/he is dressed like a parody of opulence, a caricature of good taste.

J.J. (cont'd)

Can I...like, come in? Nice place. Greg is my teacher. He **was**, anyway, and I need to see...sir, I would very much like to see him. Okay, no: I won't come in. I will just hang by the door.

(Pause.)

I know he lives here.

(Pause.)

He was my teacher. Right up till a couple days ago. Then he was gone. Just like that.

(Pause.)

Say something, will you? Sir?

(Pause.)

He's leaving town, they told us. But first, I gotta---I have to---talk to him. He **is** still here, ain't he? I mean, I saw his file, man. I got his address. This is where he lives.

(Pause.)

What's your poison? Whisky, huh?

(Pause.)

Yeah, I snuck into the office and checked out his file. Big trouble if they caught me. So go get him, will you?

(Pause.)

Me, sometimes **I** drink, too. Gin. So I don't care if you do. Sir. Just go tell Greg I got some news.

(Pause.)

Talk to me, you! It ain't as if I am nobody no more. I got into college, see?! I just got in, and I am going places. I am gonna live in a penthouse, man! In the poshest building---I picked it out already---with a certain uppity scumbag doorman. Yeah, I am gonna go to college, and get whatever I want, and that doorman...when I jangle my keys, he will snap right to, and he will tip his fucking hat to me.

(Pause.)

Sir.

(Pause.)

Wow, you are gone, ain't you? That's cool. I came to school pukin' drunk one day, myself. They killed this friend of mine the night before. I saw them do it. Don't matter who, don't matter why. Wasn't much of a friend, either. Just a hunk of meat, it turns out, anyway. Meat in blood soup. I show up at school in the morning and I'm stinkin', and...and there is Greg. He don't kick me out. Don't even yell at me. He says: "stop calling me 'mister.' Call me by my first name, kid." And he takes me to the teachers' room, and gets me a pillow, and lies me down on the sofa. After all that instructing he used to do, and telling me I could go places I used to keep telling him they would never let me in, he...finally, like that: he just helps me out. Yeah, he gets me this pillow, and throws a blanket over me and...he tucks me in. Nobody ever tucked me in before. So I need to tell him, see...to tell him I am a success. To tell him **now**, before he leaves. Right now, so I can see...so I can see his face.

Irene enters from the bedrooms.

IRENE

Who the hell are **you**?!

J.J.

I...uh---

IRENE

Get out!

J.J.

But---

IRENE

Go!

(Picks up the vase and flings away the irises.)

Get out of here!

J.J.

I only wanna---

IRENE

(Wielding the vase.)

Out! Out! Out!

J.J. bolts out the front door.  
Irene slams it shut.

IRENE (cont'd)

Damn it, Eddie! Was s/he looking for Todd?

(Looking around.)

Did s/he get anything?!

(Scurrying around the room, looking on shelves, and in drawers.)

How could you let that...pusher into my house?! What did s/he take?!

No response from Eddie, who has passed out. Vernon enters by the French doors.

VERNON

The cottage is ship-shape. And the airport van is on its way. It is off to the grain elevator for Greg.

Todd, in a business suit, enters from the bedrooms.

IRENE

(Kissing Todd.)

Sweetheart, you look great.

TODD

Why did I have to get dressed up?

IRENE

Your dad is taking you to dinner with the firm's top people.

(Pause.)

What do you say?

TODD

I...I am grateful.

IRENE

What do you say to **him**?

TODD

(To Vernon.)

Thank you.

IRENE

"Thank you...?"

TODD

Thank you...**father**.

IRENE

Now: isn't there something you should **do**?

TODD  
I...I should hug him.

A quick knock on the French doors.  
Greg then opens them, and enters.

GREG  
(To Vernon.)  
Here's the key.

VERNON  
Don't give it to *me*. The property is *hers*.

IRENE  
Greg, I wish you all the best.  
(Pause.)  
You have been avoiding me at the mailbox.  
(Pause.)  
Talk to me *now*. Please?  
(Offering her hand.)  
Can't you at least say good-bye?

Greg drops the key on the floor. He  
opens the front door, and exits.  
Irene turns to Todd, and gestures.  
Todd goes up to Vernon, who, arms  
at his side, stands stock-still;  
and envelops his father in an  
embrace as Irene watches.

###THE END###