**The American Dream**

The Players:  
MOMMY  
DADDY  
GRANDMA  
MRS. BARKER  
YOUNG MAN

The Scene:  
A living room. Two armchairs, one toward either side of the stage, facing each other diagonally out toward the audience. Against the rear wall, a sofa. A door, leading out from the apartment, in the rear wall, far stage-right. An archway, leading to other rooms, in the side wall, stage-left.

At the beginning, MOMMY and DADDY are seated in the armchairs, DADDY in the armchair stage-left, MOMMY in the other.

Curtain up. A silence. Then:

MOMMY  
I don’t know what can be keeping them.

DADDY  
They’re late, naturally.

MOMMY  
Of course, they’re late; it never fails.

DADDY  
That’s the way things are today, and there’s nothing you can do about it.

MOMMY  
You’re quite right.

DADDY  
When we took this apartment, they were quick enough

to have me sign the lease; they were quick enough to
take my check for two months’ rent in advance . . .

MOMMY
And one month’s security . . .

DADDY
. . . and one month’s security. They were quick enough
to check my references; they were quick enough about all
that. But now! But now, try to get the icebox fixed, try
to get the doorbell fixed, try to get the leak in the
Johnny fixed! Just try it . . . they aren’t so quick about
that.

MOMMY
Of course not; it never fails. People think they can get
away with anything these days . . . and, of course they
can. I went to buy a new hat yesterday.

(Pause)
I said, I went to buy a new hat yesterday.

Oh! Yes . . . yes.

PAY ATTENTION.

DADDY
I am paying attention, Mommy.

Well, be sure you do.

DADDY
Oh, I am.

MOMMY
All right, Daddy; now listen.

DADDY
I’m listening, Mommy.

MOMMY
You’re sure!

DADDY
Yes . . . yes, I’m sure, I’m all ears.

MOMMY
(Giggles at the thought; then)
All right, now. I went to buy a new hat yesterday and I
said, “I’d like a new hat, please.” And so, they showed
me a few hats, green ones and blue ones, and I didn’t
like any of them, not one bit. What did I say? What did
I just say?

DADDY
You didn’t like any of them, not one bit.

MOMMY
That’s right; you just keep paying attention. And then
they showed me one that I did like. It was a lovely little
hat, and I said, “Oh, this is a lovely little hat; I’ll take
this hat; oh my, it’s lovely. What color is it?” And they
said, “Why, this is beige; isn’t it a lovely little beige hat?”
And I said, “Oh, it’s just lovely.” And so, I bought it.
(Stops, looks at DADDY)

DADDY
(To show he is paying attention)
And so you bought it.

MOMMY
And so I bought it, and I walked out of the store with
the hat right on my head, and I ran spang into the chair-
man of our woman’s club, and she said, “Oh, my dear,
isn’t that a lovely little hat? Where did you get that
lovely little hat? It’s the loveliest little hat; I’ve always
wanted a wheat-colored hat myself.” And, I said, “Why,
no, my dear; this hat is beige; beige.” And she laughed and said, “Why no, my dear, that’s a wheat-colored hat . . . wheat. I know beige from wheat.” And I said, “Well, my dear, I know beige from wheat, too.” What did I say? What did I just say?

DADDY

(Tonelessly)
Well, my dear, I know beige from wheat, too.

MOMMY

That’s right. And she laughed, and she said, “Well, my dear, they certainly put one over on you. That’s wheat if I ever saw wheat. But it’s lovely, just the same.” And then she walked off. She’s a dreadful woman, you don’t know her; she has dreadful taste, two dreadful children, a dreadful house, and an absolutely adorable husband who sits in a wheel chair all the time. You don’t know him. You don’t know anybody, do you? She’s just a dreadful woman, but she is chairman of our woman’s club, so naturally I’m terribly fond of her. So, I went right back into the hat shop, and I said, “Look here; what do you mean selling me a hat that you say is beige, when it’s wheat all the time . . . wheat! I can tell beige from wheat any day in the week, but not in this artificial light of yours.” They have artificial light, Daddy.

DADDY

Have they!

MOMMY

And I said, “The minute I got outside I could tell that it wasn’t a beige hat at all; it was a wheat hat.” And they said to me, “How could you tell that when you had the hat on the top of your head?” Well, that made me angry, and so I made a scene right there; I screamed as hard as I could; I took my hat off and I threw it down on the counter, and oh, I made a terrible scene. I said, I made a terrible scene.

DADDY

(Snapping to)
Yes . . . yes . . . good for you!

MOMMY

And I made an absolutely terrible scene; and they became frightened, and they said, “Oh, madam; oh, madam.” But I kept right on, and finally they admitted that they might have made a mistake; so they took my hat into the back, and then they came out again with a hat that looked exactly like it. I took one look at it, and I said, “This hat is wheat-colored; wheat.” Well, of course, they said, “Oh, no, madam, this hat is beige; you go outside and see.” So, I went outside, and lo and behold, it was beige. So I bought it.

DADDY

(Clearing his throat)
I would imagine that it was the same hat they tried to sell you before.

MOMMY

(With a little laugh)
Well, of course it was!

DADDY

That’s the way things are today; you just can’t get satisfaction; you just try.

MOMMY

Well, I got satisfaction.

DADDY

That’s right, Mommy. You did get satisfaction, didn’t you?

MOMMY

Why are they so late? I don’t know what can be keeping them.
DADDY
I’ve been trying for two weeks to have the leak in the johnny fixed.

MOMMY
You can’t get satisfaction; just try. I can get satisfaction, but you can’t.

DADDY
I’ve been trying for two weeks and it isn’t so much for my sake; I can always go to the club.

MOMMY
It isn’t so much for my sake, either; I can always go shopping.

DADDY
It’s really for Grandma’s sake.

MOMMY
Of course it’s for Grandma’s sake. Grandma cries every time she goes to the johnny as it is; but now that it doesn’t work it’s even worse, it makes Grandma think she’s getting feeble-headed.

DADDY
Grandma is getting feeble-headed.

MOMMY
Of course Grandma is getting feeble-headed, but not about her johnny-do’s.

DADDY
No; that’s true. I must have it fixed.

MOMMY
WHY are they so late? I don’t know what can be keeping them.

DADDY
When they came here the first time, they were ten minutes early; they were quick enough about it then.
(Enter Grandma from the archway, stage left.
She is loaded down with boxes, large and small, neatly wrapped and tied.)

MOMMY
Why Grandma, look at you! What is all that you’re carrying?

GRANDMA
They’re boxes. What do they look like?

MOMMY
Daddy! Look at Grandma; look at all the boxes she’s carrying!

DADDY
My goodness, Grandma; look at all those boxes.

GRANDMA
Where’ll I put them?

MOMMY
Heavens! I don’t know. Whatever are they for?

GRANDMA
That’s nobody’s damn business.

MOMMY
Well, in that case, put them down next to Daddy; there.

GRANDMA
(Dumping the boxes down, on and around DADDY’s feet)
I sure wish you’d get the john fixed.
DADDY
Oh, I do wish they’d come and fix it. We hear you . . .
for hours . . . whimpering away . . .

MOMMY
Daddy! What a terrible thing to say to Grandma!

GRANDMA
Yeah. For shame, talking to me that way.

DADDY
I’m sorry, Grandma.

MOMMY
Daddy’s sorry, Grandma.

GRANDMA
Well, all right. In that case I’ll go get the rest of the boxes. I suppose I deserve being talked to that way. I’ve gotten so old. Most people think that when you get so old, you either freeze to death, or you burn up. But you don’t. When you get so old, all that happens is that people talk to you that way.

DADDY
(Contrite)
I said I’m sorry, Grandma.

MOMMY
Daddy said he was sorry.

GRANDMA
Well, that’s all that counts. People being sorry. Makes you feel better; gives you a sense of dignity, and that’s all that’s important . . . a sense of dignity. And it doesn’t matter if you don’t care, or not, either. You got to have a sense of dignity, even if you don’t care, ’cause, if you don’t have that, civilization’s doomed.

MOMMY
You’ve been reading my book club selections again!

DADDY
How dare you read Mommy’s book club selections, Grandma!

GRANDMA
Because I’m old! When you’re old you gotta do something. When you get old, you can’t talk to people because people snap at you. When you get so old, people talk to you that way. That’s why you become deaf, so you won’t be able to hear people talking to you that way. And that’s why you go and hide under the covers in the big soft bed, so you won’t feel the house shaking from people talking to you that way. That’s why old people die, eventually. People talk to them that way. I’ve got to go and get the rest of the boxes.

(Grandma exits)

DADDY
Poor Grandma, I didn’t mean to hurt her.

MOMMY
Don’t you worry about it; Grandma doesn’t know what she means.

DADDY
She knows what she says, though.

MOMMY
Don’t you worry about it; she won’t know that soon. I love Grandma.

DADDY
I love her, too. Look how nicely she wrapped these boxes.

MOMMY
Grandma has always wrapped boxes nicely. When I was
a little girl, I was very poor, and Grandma was very poor, too, because Grandpa was in heaven. And every day, when I went to school, Grandma used to wrap a box for me, and I used to take it with me to school; and when it was lunchtime, all the little boys and girls used to take out their boxes of lunch, and they weren't wrapped nicely at all, and they used to open them and eat their chicken legs and chocolate cakes; and I used to say, "Oh, look at my lovely lunch box; it's so nicely wrapped it would break my heart to open it." And so, I wouldn't open it.

DADDY
Because it was empty.

MOMMY
Oh no. Grandma always filled it up, because she never ate the dinner she cooked the evening before; she gave me all her food for my lunch box the next day. After school, I'd take the box back to Grandma, and she'd open it and eat the chicken legs and chocolate cake that was inside. Grandma used to say, "I love day-old cake." That's where the expression day-old cake came from. Grandma always ate everything a day late. I used to eat all the other little boys' and girls' food at school, because they thought my lunch box was empty. They thought my lunch box was empty, and that's why I wouldn't open it. They thought I suffered from the sin of pride, and since that made them better than me, they were very generous.

DADDY
You were a very deceitful little girl.

MOMMY
We were very poor! But then I married you, Daddy, and now we're very rich.

DADDY
Grandma isn't rich.

No, but you've been so good to Grandma she feels rich. She doesn't know you'd like to put her in a nursing home.

DADDY
I wouldn't!

MOMMY
Well, heaven knows, I would! I can't stand it, watching her do the cooking and the housework, polishing the silver, moving the furniture. . . .

DADDY
She likes to do that. She says it's the least she can do to earn her keep.

MOMMY
Well, she's right. You can't live off people. I can live off you, because I married you. And aren't you lucky all I brought with me was Grandma. A lot of women I know would have brought their whole families to live off you. All I brought was Grandma. Grandma is all the family I have.

DADDY
I feel very fortunate.

MOMMY
You should. I have a right to live off of you because I married you, and because I used to let you get on top of me and bump your uglies; and I have a right to all your money when you die. And when you do, Grandma and I can live by ourselves. . . . if she's still here. Unless you have her put away in a nursing home.

DADDY
I have no intention of putting her in a nursing home.

MOMMY
Well, I wish somebody would do something with her!
At any rate, you’re very well provided for.

You’re my sweet Daddy; that’s very nice.

I love my Mommy.

(Enter Grandma again, laden with more boxes)

There; that’s the lot of them.

They’re wrapped so nicely.

(To Daddy)

You won’t get on my sweet side that way...

Grandma!

...telling me how nicely I wrap boxes. Not after what you said: how I whimpered for hours...

Grandma!

(To Mommy)

Shut up!

(To Daddy)

You don’t have any feelings, that’s what’s wrong with you. Old people make all sorts of noises, half of them they can’t help. Old people whimper, and cry, and belch, and make great hollow rumbling sounds at the table; old people wake up in the middle of the night screaming, and find out they haven’t even been asleep; and when old people are asleep, they try to wake up, and they can’t...not for the longest time.

Homilies, homilies!

And there’s more, too.

I’m really very sorry, Grandma.

I know you are, Daddy; it’s Mommy over there makes all the trouble. If you’d listened to me, you wouldn’t have married her in the first place. She was a tramp and a trollop and a trull to boot, and she’s no better now.

Grandma!

(To Mommy)

Shut up!

(To Daddy)

When she was no more than eight years old she used to climb up on my lap and say, in a sickening little voice, “When I gwo up, I’m going to mahwy a wich old man; I’m going to set my wittle were end right down in a tub o’ butter, that’s what I’m going to do.” And I warned you, Daddy; I told you to stay away from her type. I told you to. I did.

You stop that! You’re my mother, not his!

I am?
DADDY
That’s right, Grandma. Mommy’s right.

GRANDMA
Well, how would you expect somebody as old as I am to remember a thing like that? You don’t make allowances for people. I want an allowance. I want an allowance!

DADDY
All right, Grandma; I’ll see to it.

MOMMY
Grandma! I’m ashamed of you.

GRANDMA
Humph! It’s a fine time to say that. You should have gotten rid of me a long time ago if that’s the way you feel. You should have had Daddy set me up in business somewhere... I could have gone into the fur business, or I could have been a singer. But no; not you. You wanted me around so you could sleep in my room when Daddy got fresh. But now it isn’t important, because Daddy doesn’t want to get fresh with you any more, and I don’t blame him. You’d rather sleep with me, wouldn’t you, Daddy?

MOMMY
Daddy doesn’t want to sleep with anyone. Daddy’s been sick.

DADDY
I’ve been sick. I don’t even want to sleep in the apartment.

MOMMY
You see? I told you.

DADDY
I just want to get everything over with.

MOMMY
That’s right. Why are they so late? Why can’t they get here on time?

GRANDMA
(An owl)

MOMMY
You know, Grandma.

GRANDMA
No, I don’t.

MOMMY
Well, it doesn’t really matter whether you do or not.

DADDY
Is that true?

MOMMY
Oh, more or less. Look how pretty Grandma wrapped these boxes.

GRANDMA
I didn’t really like wrapping them; it hurt my fingers, and it frightened me. But it had to be done.

MOMMY
Why, Grandma?

GRANDMA
None of your damn business.

MOMMY
Go to bed.

GRANDMA
I don’t want to go to bed. I just got up. I want to stay here and watch. Besides...
Go to bed.

DADDY
Let her stay up, Mommy; it isn’t noon yet.

GRANDMA
I want to watch; besides . . .

DADDY
Let her watch, Mommy.

MOMMY
Well all right, you can watch; but don’t you dare say a word.

GRANDMA
Old people are very good at listening; old people don’t like to talk; old people have colitis and lavender perfume. Now I’m going to be quiet.

DADDY
She never mentioned she wanted to be a singer.

MOMMY
Oh, I forgot to tell you, but it was ages ago.
(The doorbell rings)
Oh, goodness! Here they are!

Who? Who?

GRANDMA
Oh, just some people.

MOMMY
The van people? Is it the van people? Have you finally done it? Have you called the van people to come and take me away?

GRANDMA
Of course not, Grandma!

DADDY
Oh, don’t be too sure. She’d have you carted off too, if she thought she could get away with it.

MOMMY
Pay no attention to her, Daddy.
(An aside to GRANDMA)

GRANDMA
My God, you’re ungrateful!
(The doorbell rings again)

DADDY
(Wringing his hands)
Oh dear; oh dear.

MOMMY
(Still to GRANDMA)
Just you wait; I’ll fix your wagon.
(Now to DADDY)
Well, go let them in Daddy. What are you waiting for?

DADDY
I think we should talk about it some more. Maybe we’ve been hasty . . . a little hasty, perhaps.
(Doorbell rings again)
I’d like to talk about it some more.

MOMMY
There’s no need. You made up your mind; you were firm; you were masculine and decisive.

DADDY
We might consider the pros and the . . .

MOMMY
I won’t argue with you; it has to be done; you were right.
Open the door.
DADDY
But I'm not sure that...

MOMMY
Open the door.

DADDY
Was I firm about it?

MOMMY
Oh, so firm; so firm.

DADDY
And was I decisive?

MOMMY
SO decisive! Oh, I shivered.

DADDY
And masculine? Was I really masculine?

MOMMY
Oh, Daddy, you were so masculine; I shivered and fainted.

GRANDMA
Shivered and fainted, did she? Humf!

MOMMY
You be quiet.

GRANDMA
Old people have a right to talk to themselves; it doesn't hurt the gums, and it's comforting.

(Doorbell rings again)

DADDY
I shall now open the door.

MOMMY
WHAT a masculine Daddy! Isn't he a masculine Daddy?

GRANDMA
Don't expect me to say anything. Old people are obscene.

MOMMY
Some of your opinions aren't so bad. You know that?

DADDY
(Backing off from the door)
Maybe we can send them away.

MOMMY
Oh, look at you! You're turning into jelly; you're indecisive; you're a woman.

DADDY
All right. Watch me now; I'm going to open the door. Watch. Watch!

MOMMY
We're watching; we're watching.

I'm not.

DADDY
Watch now; it's opening.

(He opens the door)

MRS. BARKER: steps into the room
Here they are!

MOMMY
Here they are!

GRANDMA
Where?

DADDY
Come in. You're late. But, of course, we expected you to be late; we were saying that we expected you to be late.
Daddy, don’t be rude! We were saying that you just can’t get satisfaction these days, and we were talking about you, of course. Won’t you come in?

MRS. BARKER
Thank you. I don’t mind if I do.

MOMMY
We’re very glad that you’re here, late as you are. You do remember us, don’t you? You were here once before. I’m Mommy, and this is Daddy, and that’s Grandma, doddering there in the corner.

MRS. BARKER
Hello, Mommy; hello, Daddy; and hello there, Grandma.

DADDY
Now that you’re here, I don’t suppose you could go away and maybe come back some other time.

MRS. BARKER
Oh no; we’re much too efficient for that. I said, hello there, Grandma.

MOMMY
Speak to them, Grandma.

I don’t see them.

GRANDMA
For shame, Grandma; they’re here.

MRS. BARKER
Yes, we’re here, Grandma. I’m Mrs. Barker. I remember you; don’t you remember me?

GRANDMA
I don’t recall. Maybe you were younger, or something.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

MOMMY
Grandma! What a terrible thing to say!

MRS. BARKER
Oh now, don’t scold her, Mommy; for all she knows she may be right.

DADDY
Uh . . . Mrs. Barker, is it? Won’t you sit down?

MRS. BARKER
I don’t mind if I do.

MOMMY
Would you like a cigarette, and a drink, and would you like to cross your legs?

MRS. BARKER
You forget yourself, Mommy; I’m a professional woman. But I will cross my legs.

DADDY
Yes, make yourself comfortable.

I don’t mind if I do.

MRS. BARKER

GRANDMA
Are they still here?

MOMMY

MRS. BARKER
Be quiet, Grandma.

Oh, we’re still here. My, what an unattractive apartment you have!

MRS. BARKER

MOMMY
Yes, but you don’t know what a trouble it is. Let me tell you . . .
I was saying to Mommy . . .

MRS. BARKER
Yes, I know. I was listening outside.

DADDY
About the icebox, and . . . the doorbell . . . and the . . .

MRS. BARKER
. . . and the johnny. Yes, we're very efficient; we have to know everything in our work.

DADDY
Exactly what do you do?

MOMMY
Yes, what is your work?

MRS. BARKER
Well, my dear, for one thing, I'm chairman of your woman's club.

MOMMY
Don't be ridiculous. I was talking to the chairman of my woman's club just yester—Why, so you are. You remember, Daddy, the lady I was telling you about? The lady with the husband who sits in the swing? Don't you remember?

DADDY
No . . . no . . .

MOMMY
Of course you do. I'm so sorry, Mrs. Barker. I would have known you anywhere, except in this artificial light. And look! You have a hat just like the one I bought yesterday.

MRS. BARKER
(With a little laugh)
No, not really; this hat is cream.

MOMMY
Well, my dear, that may look like a cream hat to you, but I can . . .

MRS. BARKER
Now, now; you seem to forget who I am.

MOMMY
Yes, I do, don't I? Are you sure you're comfortable? Won't you take off your dress?

MRS. BARKER
I don't mind if I do.
(She removes her dress)

MOMMY
There. You must feel a great deal more comfortable.

MRS. BARKER
Well, I certainly look a great deal more comfortable.

DADDY
I'm going to blush and giggle.

MOMMY
Daddy's going to blush and giggle.

MRS. BARKER
(Pulling the hem of her slip above her knees)
You're lucky to have such a man for a husband.

MOMMY
Oh, don't I know it!

DADDY
I just blushed and giggled and went sticky wet.
MOMMY
Isn’t Daddy a caution, Mrs. Barker?

MRS. BARKER
Maybe if I smoked . . . ?

MOMMY
Oh, that isn’t necessary.

MRS. BARKER
I don’t mind if I do.

MOMMY
No; no, don’t. Really.

MRS. BARKER
I don’t mind . . .

MOMMY
I won’t have you smoking in my house, and that’s that! You’re a professional woman.

DADDY
Grandma drinks AND smokes; don’t you, Grandma?

GRANDMA
No.

MOMMY
Well, now, Mrs. Barker; suppose you tell us why you’re here.

GRANDMA
(As MOMMY walks through the boxes)
The boxes . . . the boxes . . .

MOMMY
Be quiet, Grandma.

DADDY
What did you say, Grandma?

GRANDMA
(As MOMMY steps on several of the boxes) The boxes, damn it!

MRS. BARKER
Boxes; she said boxes. She mentioned the boxes.

DADDY
What about the boxes, Grandma? Maybe Mrs. Barker is here because of the boxes. Is that what you meant, Grandma?

GRANDMA
I don’t know if that’s what I meant or not. It’s certainly not what I thought I meant.

DADDY
Grandma is of the opinion that . . .

MRS. BARKER
Can we assume that the boxes are for us? I mean, can we assume that you had us come here for the boxes?

MOMMY
Are you in the habit of receiving boxes?

DADDY
A very good question.

MRS. BARKER
Well, that would depend on the reason we’re here. I’ve got my fingers in so many little pies, you know. Now, I can think of one of my little activities in which we are in the habit of receiving baskets; but more in a literary sense than really. We might receive boxes, though, under very special circumstances. I’m afraid that’s the best answer I can give you.
DADDY
It’s a very interesting answer.

MRS. BARKER
I thought so. But, does it help?

MOMMY
No; I’m afraid not.

DADDY
I wonder if it might help us any if I said I feel misgivings, that I have definite qualms.

MOMMY
Where, Daddy?

DADDY
Well, mostly right here, right around where the stitches were.

MOMMY
Daddy had an operation, you know.

MRS. BARKER
Oh, you poor Daddy! I didn’t know; but then, how could I?

GRANDMA
You might have asked; it wouldn’t have hurt you.

MOMMY
Dry up, Grandma.

GRANDMA
There you go. Letting your true feelings come out. Old people aren’t dry enough, I suppose. My sacks are empty, the fluid in my eyeballs is all caked on the inside edges, my spine is made of sugar candy, I breathe ice; but you don’t hear me complain. Nobody hears old people complain because people think that’s all old people do. And

that’s because old people are gnarled and sagged and twisted into the shape of a complaint.

(Signs off)

That’s all.

MRS. BARKER
What was wrong, Daddy?

DADDY
Well, you know how it is: the doctors took out something that was there and put in something that wasn’t there. An operation.

MRS. BARKER
You’re very fortunate, I should say.

MOMMY
Oh, he is; he is. All his life, Daddy has wanted to be a United States Senator; but now . . . why now he’s changed his mind, and for the rest of his life he’s going to want to be Governor . . . it would be nearer the apartment, you know.

MRS. BARKER
You are fortunate, Daddy.

DADDY
Yes, indeed; except that I get these qualms now and then, definite ones.

MRS. BARKER
Well, it’s just a matter of things settling; you’re like an old house.

MOMMY
Why Daddy, thank Mrs. Barker.

DADDY
Thank you.
MRS. BARKER

Ambition! That's the ticket. I have a brother who's very much like you, Daddy... ambitious. Of course, he's a great deal younger than you; he's even younger than I am... if such a thing is possible. He runs a little newspaper. Just a little newspaper... but he runs it. He's chief cook and bottle washer of that little newspaper, which he calls _The Village Idiot_. He has such a sense of humor; he's so self-deprecating, so modest. And he'd never admit it himself, but he is the Village Idiot.

MOMMY

Oh, I think that's just grand. Don't you think so, Daddy?

DADDY

Yes, just grand.

MRS. BARKER

My brother's a dear man, and he has a dear little wife, whom he loves, dearly. He loves her so much he just can't get a sentence out without mentioning her. He wants everybody to know he's married. He's really a stickler on that point; he can't be introduced to anybody and say hello without adding, "Of course, I'm married." As far as I'm concerned, he's the chief exponent of Woman Love in this whole country; he's even been written up in psychiatric journals because of it.

DADDY

Indeed!

MOMMY

Isn't that lovely.

MRS. BARKER

Oh, I think so. There's too much woman hatred in this country, and that's a fact.

GRANDMA

Oh, I don't know.
people think they can do anything, but the truth is that middle-aged people can’t do most things as well as they used to. Middle-aged people think they’re special because they’re like everybody else. We live in the age of deformity. You see? Rhythm and content. You’ll learn.

DADDY
I do wish I weren’t surrounded by women; I’d like some men around here.

MRS. BARKER
You can say that again!

GRANDMA
I don’t hardly count as a woman, so can I say my piece?

MOMMY
Go on. Jabber away.

GRANDMA
It’s very simple; the fact is, these boxes don’t have anything to do with why this good lady is come to call. Now, if you’re interested in knowing why these boxes are here...

DADDY
I’m sure that must be all very true, Grandma, but what does it have to do with why... pardon me, what is that name again?

MRS. BARKER
Mrs. Barker.

DADDY
Exactly. What does it have to do with why... that name again?

MRS. BARKER
Mrs. Barker.

DADDY
Precisely. What does it have to do with why what’s-her-name is here?

MOMMY
They’re here because we asked them.

MRS. BARKER
Yes. That’s why.

GRANDMA
Now if you’re interested in knowing why these boxes are here...

MOMMY
Well, nobody is interested!

GRANDMA
You can be as snippety as you like for all the good it’ll do you.

DADDY
You two will have to stop arguing.

MOMMY
I don’t argue with her.

DADDY
It will just have to stop.

MOMMY
Well, why don’t you call a van and have her taken away?

GRANDMA
Don’t bother; there’s no need.

DADDY
No, now, perhaps I can go away myself...
MOMMY
Well, one or the other; the way things are now it's impossible. In the first place, it's too crowded in this apartment.

(To Grandma)
And it's you that takes up all the space, with your enema bottles, and your Pekinese, and God-only-knows-what-else... and now all these boxes...

GRANDMA
These boxes are...

MRS. BARKER
I've never heard of enema bottles...

GRANDMA
She means enema bags, but she doesn't know the difference. Mommy comes from extremely bad stock. And besides, when Mommy was born... well, it was a difficult delivery, and she had a head shaped like a banana.

MOMMY
You ungrateful—Daddy? Daddy, you see how ungrateful she is after all these years, after all the things we've done for her?

(To Grandma)
One of these days you're going away in a van; that's what's going to happen to you!

Do tell!

GRANDMA
Like a banana?

MRS. BARKER
Yup, just like a banana.

My word!

MRS. BARKER

MOMMY
You stop listening to her; she'll say anything. Just the other night she called Daddy a hedgehog.

MRS. BARKER
She didn't!

GRANDMA
That's right, baby; you stick up for me.

MOMMY
I don't know where she gets the words; on the television, maybe.

MRS. BARKER
Did you really call him a hedgehog?

GRANDMA
Oh look; what difference does it make whether I did or not?

DADDY
Grandma's right. Leave Grandma alone.

MOMMY
(To Daddy)
How dare you!

GRANDMA
Oh, leave her alone, Daddy; the kid's all mixed up.

MOMMY
You see? I told you. It's all those television shows. Daddy, you go right into Grandma's room and take her television and shake all the tubes loose.

DADDY
Don't mention tubes to me.
Oh! Mommy forgot!

(To Mrs. Barker)

Daddy has tubes now, where he used to have tracts.

Mrs. Barker

Is that a fact?

Grandma

I know why this dear lady is here.

Mommy

You be still.

Mrs. Barker

Oh, I do wish you'd tell me.

Mommy

No! No! That wouldn't be fair at all.

Daddy

Besides, she knows why she's here; she's here because we called them.

Mrs. Barker

La! But that still leaves me puzzled. I know I'm here because you called us, but I'm such a busy girl, with this committee and that committee, and the Responsible Citizens Activities I indulge in.

Mommy

Oh my; busy, busy.

Mrs. Barker

Yes, indeed. So I'm afraid you'll have to give me some help.

Mommy

Oh, no. No, you must be mistaken. I can't believe we asked you here to give you any help. With the way taxes

Mommy

are these days, and the way you can't get satisfaction in ANYTHING... no, I don't believe so.

Daddy

And if you need help... why, I should think you'd apply for a Fulbright Scholarship...

Mommy

And if not that... why, then a Guggenheim Fellowship...

Grandma

Oh, come on; why not shoot the works and try for the Prix de Rome.

(Under her breath to Mommy and Daddy)

Beasts!

Mrs. Barker

Oh, what a jolly family. But let me think. I'm knee-deep in work these days; there's the Ladies' Auxiliary Air Raid Committee, for one thing; how do you feel about air raids?

Mommy

Oh, I'd say we're hostile.

Daddy

Yes, definitely; we're hostile.

Mrs. Barker

Then, you'll be no help there. There's too much hostility in the world these days as it is; but I'll not badger you! There's a surfeit of badgers as well.

Grandma

While we're at it, there's been a run on old people, too. The Department of Agriculture, or maybe it wasn't the Department of Agriculture—anyway, it was some department that's run by a girl—put out figures showing that ninety per cent of the adult population of the coun-
try is over eighty years old . . . or eighty per cent is over ninety years old . . .

MOMMY
You're such a liar! You just finished saying that everyone is middle-aged.

GRANDMA
I'm just telling you what the government says . . . that doesn't have anything to do with what . . .

MOMMY
It's that television! Daddy, go break her television.

GRANDMA
You won't find it.

DADDY
(Wearily getting up)
If I must . . . I must.

MOMMY
And don't step on the Pekinese; it's blind.

DADDY
It may be blind, but Daddy isn't.
(He exits, through the archway, stage left)

GRANDMA
You won't find it, either.

MOMMY
Oh, I'm so fortunate to have such a husband. Just think; I could have a husband who was poor, or argumentative, or a husband who sat in a wheel chair all day . . . OOOOOHHHH! What have I said? What have I said?

GRANDMA
You said you could have a husband who sat in a wheel . . .

MOMMY
I'm mortified! I could die! I could cut my tongue out! I could . . .

MRS. BARKER
(Forcing a smile)
Oh, now . . . now . . . don't think about it . . .

MOMMY
I could . . . why, I could . . .

MRS. BARKER
. . . don't think about it . . . really. . . .

MOMMY
You're quite right. I won't think about it, and that way I'll forget that I ever said it, and that way it will be all right.
(Pause)
There . . . I've forgotten. Well, now, now that Daddy is out of the room we can have some girl talk.

MRS. BARKER
I'm not sure that I . . .

MOMMY
You do want to have some girl talk, don't you?

MRS. BARKER
I was going to say I'm not sure that I wouldn't care for a glass of water. I feel a little faint.

MOMMY
Grandma, go get Mrs. Barker a glass of water.

GRANDMA
Go get it yourself. I quit.
Grandma loves to do little things around the house; it gives her a false sense of security.

I quit! I'm through!

Now, you be a good Grandma, or you know what will happen to you. You'll be taken away in a van.

You don't frighten me. I'm too old to be frightened. Besides...

WELL! I'll tend to you later. I'll hide your teeth... I'll...

Everything's hidden.

I am going to faint. I am.

Good heavens! I'll go myself.

(As she exits, through the archway, stage-left)

I'll fix you, Grandma. I'll take care of you later.

(She exits)

Oh, go soak your head.

(To MRS. BARKER)

Well, dearie, how do you feel?

A little better, I think. Yes, much better, thank you, Grandma.

That's good.

But... I feel so lost... not knowing why I'm here... and, on top of it, they say I was here before.

Well, you were. You weren't here, exactly, because we've moved around a lot, from one apartment to another, up and down the social ladder like mice, if you like similes.

I don't... particularly.

Well, then, I'm sorry.

(Suddenly)

Grandma, I feel I can trust you.

Don't be too sure; it's every man for himself around this place...

Oh... is it? Nonetheless, I really do feel that I can trust you. Please tell me why they called and asked us to come. I implore you!

Oh my; that feels good. It's been so long since anybody implored me. Do it again. Implore me some more.

You're your daughter's mother, all right!
GRANDMA
Oh, I don't mean to be hard. If you won't implore me, then beg me, or ask me, or entreat me . . . just anything like that.

MRS. BARKER
You're a dreadful old woman!

GRANDMA
You'll understand some day. Please!

MRS. BARKER
Oh, for heaven's sake! . . . I implore you . . . I beg you . . . I beseech you!

GRANDMA
Beseech! Oh, that's the nicest word I've heard in ages. You're a dear, sweet woman . . . You . . . beseech . . . me. I can't resist that.

MRS. BARKER
Well, then . . . please tell me why they asked us to come.

GRANDMA
Well, I'll give you a hint. That's the best I can do, because I'm a muddleheaded old woman. Now listen, because it's important. Once upon a time, not too very long ago, but a long enough time ago . . . oh, about twenty years ago . . . there was a man very much like Daddy, and a woman very much like Mommy, who were married to each other, very much like Mommy and Daddy are married to each other; and they lived in an apartment very much like one that's very much like this one, and they lived there with an old woman who was very much like yours truly, only younger, because it was some time ago; in fact, they were all somewhat younger.

MRS. BARKER
How fascinating!

Now, at the same time, there was a dear lady very much like you, only younger then, who did all sorts of Good Works . . . And one of the Good Works this dear lady did was in something very much like a volunteer capacity for an organization very much like the Bye-Bye Adoption Service, which is nearby and which was run by a terribly deaf old lady very much like the Miss Bye-Bye who runs the Bye-Bye Adoption Service nearby.

MRS. BARKER
How enthralling!

GRANDMA
Well, be that as it may. Nonetheless, one afternoon this man, who was very much like Daddy, and this woman who was very much like Mommy came to see this dear lady who did all the Good Works, who was very much like you, dear, and they were very sad and very hopeful, and they cried and smiled and bit their fingers, and they said all the most intimate things.

MRS. BARKER
How spellbinding! What did they say?

GRANDMA
Well, it was very sweet. The woman, who was very much like Mommy, said that she and the man who was very much like Daddy had never been blessed with anything very much like a bumble of joy.

MRS. BARKER
A what?

GRANDMA
A bumble; a bumble of joy.

MRS. BARKER
Oh, like bundle.
Well, yes; very much like it. Bundle, bumble; who cares? At any rate, the woman, who was very much like Mommy, said that they wanted a bumble of their own, but that the man, who was very much like Daddy, couldn't have a bumble; and the man, who was very much like Daddy, said that yes, they had wanted a bumble of their own, but that the woman, who was very much like Mommy, couldn't have one, and that now they wanted to buy something very much like a bumble.

How engrossing!

Yes. And the dear lady, who was very much like you, said something that was very much like, "Oh, what a shame; but take heart... I think we have just the bumble for you." And, well, the lady, who was very much like Mommy, and the man, who was very much like Daddy, cried and smiled and bit their fingers, and said some more intimate things, which were totally irrelevant but which were pretty hot stuff, and so the dear lady, who was very much like you, and who had something very much like a penchant for pornography, listened with something very much like enthusiasm. "Whoo," she said. "Whooooopeeeeee!" But that's beside the point.

I suppose so. But how gripping!

Anyway... they bought something very much like a bumble, and they took it away with them. But... things didn't work out very well.

You mean there was trouble?

You got it.

(With a glance through the archway)

But, I'm going to have to speed up now because I think I'm leaving soon.

Oh. Are you really?

Yup.

But old people don't go anywhere; they're either taken places, or put places.

Well, this old person is different. Anyway... things started going badly.

Oh yes. Yes.

WEEEELLL... in the first place, it turned out the bumble didn't look like either one of its parents. That was enough of a blow, but things got worse. One night, it cried its heart out, if you can imagine such a thing.

Cried its heart out! Well!

But that was only the beginning. Then it turned out it only had eyes for its Daddy.

For its Daddy! Why, any self-respecting woman would have gouged those eyes right out of its head.
all sorts of terrible things about it, like: it didn’t have a head on its shoulders, it had no guts, it was spineless, its feet were made of clay... just dreadful things.

MRS. BARKER
Dreadful!

GRANDMA
So you can understand how they became discouraged.

MRS. BARKER
I certainly can! And what did they do?

GRANDMA
What did they do? Well, for the last straw, it finally up and died; and you can imagine how that made them feel, their having paid for it, and all. So, they called up the lady who sold them the bumble in the first place and told her to come right over to their apartment. They wanted satisfaction; they wanted their money back. That’s what they wanted.

MRS. BARKER
My, my, my.

GRANDMA
How do you like them apples?

MRS. BARKER
My, my, my.

DADDY
(Off stage)
Mommy! I can’t find Grandma’s television, and I can’t find the Pekinese, either.

MOMMY
(Off stage)
Isn’t that funny! And I can’t find the water.
GRANDMA
Heh, heh, heh. I told them everything was hidden.

MRS. BARKER
Did you hide the water, too?

GRANDMA
(Puzzled)
No. No, I didn’t do that.

DADDY
(Off stage)
The truth of the matter is, I can’t even find Grandma’s room.

GRANDMA
Heh, heh, heh.

MRS. BARKER
My! You certainly did hide things, didn’t you?

GRANDMA
Sure, kid, sure.

MOMMY
(Sticking her head in the room)
Did you ever hear of such a thing, Grandma? Daddy can’t find your television, and he can’t find the Pekinese, and the truth of the matter is he can’t even find your room.

GRANDMA
I told you, I hid everything.

MOMMY
Nonsense, Grandma! Just wait until I get my hands on you. You’re a troublemaker . . . that’s what you are.

GRANDMA
Well, I’ll be out of here pretty soon, baby.

MOMMY
Oh, you don’t know how right you are! Daddy’s been wanting to send you away for a long time now, but I’ve been restraining him. I’ll tell you one thing, though . . . I’m getting sick and tired of this fighting, and I might just let him have his way. Then you’ll see what’ll happen. Away you’ll go; in a van, too. I’ll let Daddy call the van man.

GRANDMA
I’m way ahead of you.

MOMMY
How can you be so old and so smug at the same time? You have no sense of proportion.

GRANDMA
You just answered your own question.

MOMMY
Mrs. Barker, I’d much rather you came into the kitchen for that glass of water, what with Grandma out here, and all.

MRS. BARKER
I don’t see what Grandma has to do with it; and besides, I don’t think you’re very polite.

MOMMY
You seem to forget that you’re a guest in this house . . .

GRANDMA
Apartment!

MOMMY
Apartment! And that you’re a professional woman. So, if you’ll be so good as to come into the kitchen, I’ll be more than happy to show you where the water is, and
coming to see me about buying a bumble. Don't you see? It really presents quite a problem. ... I'll have to think about it ... mull it ... but at any rate, it was truly first-class of you to try to help me. Oh, will you still be here after I've had my drink of water?

GRANDMA

Probably ... I'm not as spry as I used to be.

MRS. BARKER

Oh. Well, I won't say good-by then.

GRANDMA

No. Don't.

(MRS. BARKER exits through the archway)

People don't say good-by to old people because they think they'll frighten them. Lordy! If they only knew how awful "hello" and "my, you're looking chipper" sounded, they wouldn't say those things either. The truth is, there isn't much you can say to old people that doesn't sound just terrible.

(The doorbell rings)

Come on in!

(The YOUNG MAN enters. GRANDMA looks him over)

Well, now, aren't you a breath of fresh air!

YOUNG MAN

Hello there.

GRANDMA

My, my, my. Are you the van man?

YOUNG MAN

The what?

GRANDMA

The van man. The van man. Are you come to take me away?
YOUNG MAN
I don't know what you're talking about.

GRANDMA
Oh.
(Pause)
Well.
(Pause)
My, my, aren't you something!

YOUNG MAN
Hm?

GRANDMA
I said, my, my, aren't you something.

YOUNG MAN
Oh. Thank you.

GRANDMA
You don't sound very enthusiastic.

YOUNG MAN
Oh, I'm... I'm used to it.

GRANDMA
Yup... yup. You know, if I were about a hundred and fifty years younger I could go for you.

YOUNG MAN
Yes, I imagine so.

GRANDMA
Unh-hunh... will you look at those muscles!

YOUNG MAN
(Flexing his muscles)
Yes, they're quite good, aren't they?

GRANDMA
Boy, they sure are. They natural?

YOUNG MAN
Well the basic structure was there, but I've done some work, too... you know, in a gym.

GRANDMA
I'll bet you have. You ought to be in the movies, boy.

YOUNG MAN
I know.

GRANDMA
Yup! Right up there on the old silver screen. But I suppose you've heard that before.

YOUNG MAN
Yes, I have.

GRANDMA
You ought to try out for them... the movies.

YOUNG MAN
Well, actually, I may have a career there yet. I've lived out on the West Coast almost all my life... and I've met a few people who... might be able to help me. I'm not in too much of a hurry, though. I'm almost as young as I look.

GRANDMA
Oh, that's nice. And will you look at that face!

YOUNG MAN
Yes, it's quite good, isn't it? Clean-cut, midwest farm boy type, almost insultingly good-looking in a typically American way. Good profile, straight nose, honest eyes, wonderful smile...
Yup. Boy, you know what you are, don’t you? You’re the American Dream, that’s what you are. All those other people, they don’t know what they’re talking about. You ... you are the American Dream.

Thanks.

Who rang the doorbell?

(Shouting off-stage)

The American Dream!

What? What was that, Grandma?

(Shouting)

The American Dream! The American Dream! Damn it!

How’s that, Mommy?

(Shout)

Oh, some gibberish; pay no attention. Did you find Grandma’s room?

No. I can’t even find Mrs. Barker.

What was all that?
Sorry.

GRANDMA
I don't mean I'd mind. I don't know whether I'd mind, or not. . . . But it wouldn't look well; it would look just awful.

YOUNG MAN
Yes; I suppose so.

GRANDMA
Now, stay there, let me concentrate. What could you do? The folks have been in something of a quandary around here today, sort of a dilemma, and I wonder if you mightn't be some help.

YOUNG MAN
I hope so. . . . if there's money in it. Do you have any money?

GRANDMA
Money! Oh, there's more money around here than you'd know what to do with.

YOUNG MAN
I'm not so sure.

GRANDMA
Well, maybe not. Besides, I've got money of my own.

YOUNG MAN
You have?

GRANDMA
Sure. Old people quite often have lots of money; more often than most people expect. Come here, so I can whisper to you. . . . not too close. I might faint.

Oh, I'm sorry.

GRANDMA
It's all right, dear. Anyway. . . . have you ever heard of that big baking contest they run? The one where all the ladies get together in a big barn and bake away?

YOUNG MAN
I'm. . . . not. . . . sure. . . .

GRANDMA
Not so close. Well, it doesn't matter whether you've heard of it or not. The important thing is—and I don't want anybody to hear this. . . . the folks think I haven't been out of the house in eight years—the important thing is that I won first prize in that baking contest this year. Oh, it was in all the papers; not under my own name, though. I used a nom de boulangerie; I called myself Uncle Henry.

YOUNG MAN
Did you?

GRANDMA
Why not? I didn't see any reason not to. I look just as much like an old man as I do like an old woman. And you know what I called it. . . . what I won for?

YOUNG MAN
No. What did you call it?

GRANDMA
I called it Uncle Henry's Day-Old Cake.

YOUNG MAN
That's a very nice name.

GRANDMA
And it wasn't any trouble, either. All I did was go out
and get a store-bought cake, and keep it around for a while, and then slip it in, unbeknownst to anybody. Simple.

YOUNG MAN
You're a very resourceful person.

GRANDMA
Pioneer stock.

YOUNG MAN
Is all this true? Do you want me to believe all this?

GRANDMA
Well, you can believe it or not ... it doesn't make any difference to me. All I know is, Uncle Henry's Day-Old Cake won me twenty-five thousand smackerolas.

YOUNG MAN
Twenty-five thou—

GRANDMA
Right on the old loggerhead. Now ... how do you like them apples?

YOUNG MAN
Love 'em.

GRANDMA
I thought you'd be impressed.

YOUNG MAN
Money talks.

GRANDMA
Hey! You look familiar.

YOUNG MAN
Hm? Pardon?

GRANDMA
I said, you look familiar.

YOUNG MAN
Well, I've done some modeling.

GRANDMA
No ... no. I don't mean that. You look familiar.

YOUNG MAN
Well, I'm a type.

GRANDMA
Yup; you sure are. Why do you say you'd do anything for money ... if you don't mind my being nosy?

YOUNG MAN
No, no. It's part of the interviews. I'll be happy to tell you. It's that I have no talents at all, except what you see ... my person; my body, my face. In every other way I am incomplete, and I must therefore ... compensate.

GRANDMA
What do you mean, incomplete? You look pretty complete to me.

YOUNG MAN
I think I can explain it to you, partially because you're very old, and very old people have perceptions they keep to themselves, because if they expose them to other people ... well, you know what ridicule and neglect are.

GRANDMA
I do, child, I do.

YOUNG MAN
Then listen. My mother died the night that I was born,
and I never knew my father; I doubt my mother did. But, I wasn't alone, because lying with me in the placenta there was someone else... my brother... my twin.

GRANDMA

Oh, my child.

YOUNG MAN

We were identical twins... he and I... not fraternal... identical; we were derived from the same ovum; and in this, in that, we were twins not from separate ova but from the same one, we had a kinship such as you cannot imagine. We... we felt each other breathe... his heartbeats thundered in my temples... mine in his... our stomachs ached and we cried for feeding at the same time... are you old enough to understand?

GRANDMA

I think so, child; I think I'm nearly old enough.

YOUNG MAN

I hope so. But we were separated when we were still very young, my brother, my twin and I... inasmuch as you can separate one being. We were torn apart... thrown to opposite ends of the continent. I don't know what became of my brother... to the rest of myself... except that, from time to time, in the years that have passed, I have suffered losses... that I can't explain. A fall from grace... a departure of innocence... loss... loss. How can I put it to you? All right; like this: Once... it was as if all at once my heart... became numb... almost as though I... almost as though... just like that... it had been wrenched from my body... and from that time I have been unable to love. Once... I was asleep at the time... I awoke, and my eyes were burning. And since that time I have been unable to see anything, anything, with pity, with affection... with anything but... cool disinterest. And my groin... even there... since one time... one specific agony... since then I have not been able to love anyone with my body. And even my hands... I cannot touch another person and feel love. And there is more... there are more losses, but it all comes down to this: I no longer have the capacity to feel anything. I have no emotions. I have been drained, torn asunder... disemboweled. I have, now, only my person... my body, my face. I use what I have... I let people love me... I accept the syntax around me, for while I know I cannot relate... I know I must be related to. I let people love me... I let people touch me... I let them draw pleasure from my groin... from my presence... from the fact of me... but, that is all it comes to. As I told you, I am incomplete... I can feel nothing. I can feel nothing. And so... here I am... as you see me. I am... but this... what you see. And it will always be thus.

GRANDMA

Oh, my child; my child.

(Long pause; then)

I was mistaken... before. I don't know you from somewhere, but I knew... once... someone very much like you... or, very much as perhaps you were.

YOUNG MAN

Be careful; be very careful. What I have told you may not be true. In my profession...

GRANDMA

Shhhhh.

(The YOUNG MAN bows his head, in acquiescence)

Someone... to be more precise... who might have turned out to be very much like you might have turned out to be. And... unless I'm terribly mistaken... you've found yourself a job.
What are my duties?

MRS. BARKER

(Off stage)
Yoo-hoo! Yoo-hoo!

GRANDMA

Oh-oh. You'll ... you'll have to play it by ear, my dear ... unless I get a chance to talk to you again. I've got to go into my act, now.

But, I ... 

YOUNG MAN

Yoo-hoo!

MRS. BARKER

(Coming through archway)
Yoo-hoo ... oh, there you are, Grandma. I'm glad to see somebody. I can't find Mommy or Daddy.

(Double takes)
Well ... who's this?

GRANDMA

This? Well ... un ... oh, this is the ... uh ... the van man. That's who it is ... the van man.

MRS. BARKER

So! It's true! They did call the van man. They are having you carted away.

GRANDMA

(Shrugging)
Well, you know. It figures.

MRS. BARKER

(To YOUNG MAN)
How dare you cart this poor old woman away!

YOUNG MAN

(After a quick look at GRANDMA, who nods)
I do what I'm paid to do. I don't ask any questions.

MRS. BARKER

(After a brief pause)
Oh.

(Pause)
Well, you're quite right, of course, and I shouldn't meddle.

GRANDMA

(To YOUNG MAN)
Dear, will you take my things out to the van?

(She points to the boxes)

YOUNG MAN

(After only the briefest hesitation)
Why certainly.

GRANDMA

(As the YOUNG MAN takes up half the boxes, exits by the front door)
Isn't that a nice young van man?

MRS. BARKER

(Shaking her head in disbelief, watching the YOUNG MAN exit)
Unh-hunh ... some things have changed for the better. I remember when I had my mother carted off ... the van man who came for her wasn't anything near as nice as this one.

GRANDMA

Oh, did you have your mother carted off, too?

MRS. BARKER

(Cheerfully)
Why certainly! Didn't you?
GRANDMA

(Puzzling)
No . . . no, I didn’t. At least, I can’t remember. Listen dear; I got to talk to you for a second.

MRS. BARKER

Why certainly, Grandma.

GRANDMA

Now, listen.

MRS. BARKER

Yes, Grandmá. Yes.

GRANDMA

Now listen carefully. You got this dilemma here with Mommy and Daddy . . .

MRS. BARKER

Yes! I wonder where they’ve gone to?

GRANDMA

They’ll be back in. Now, LISTEN!

MRS. BARKER

Oh, I’m sorry.

GRANDMA

Now, you got this dilemma here with Mommy and Daddy, and I think I got the way out for you.

(The YOUNG MAN re-enters through the front door)

Will you take the rest of my things out now, dear?

(To MRS. BARKER, while the YOUNG MAN takes the rest of the boxes, exits again by the front door)

Fine. Now listen, dear.

(She begins to whisper in MRS. BARKER’s ear)

MRS. BARKER

Oh! Oh! Oh! I don’t think I could . . . do you really think I could? Well, why not? What a wonderful idea . . . what an absolutely wonderful idea!

GRANDMA

Well, yes, I thought it was.

MRS. BARKER

And you so old!

GRANDMA

Heh, heh, heh.

MRS. BARKER

Well, I think it’s absolutely marvelous, anyway. I’m going to find Mommy and Daddy right now.

GRANDMA

Good. You do that.

MRS. BARKER

Well, now. I think I will say good-by. I can’t thank you enough.

(She starts to exit through the archway)

GRANDMA

You’re welcome. Say it!

MRS. BARKER

Huh? What?

GRANDMA

Say good-by.

MRS. BARKER

Oh. Good-by.

(She exits)

Mommy! I say, Mommy! Daddy!
GRANDMA

Good-by.
(By herself now, she looks about)

Ah me.
(Shakes her head)

Ah me.
(Takes in the room)

Good-by.
(The YOUNG MAN re-enters)

GRANDMA

Oh, hello, there.

YOUNG MAN

All the boxes are outside.

(A little sadly)

I don’t know why I bother to take them with me. They
don’t have much in them . . . some old letters, a couple
of regrets . . . Pekinese . . . blind at that . . . the
television . . . my Sunday teeth . . . eighty-six years
of living . . . some sounds . . . a few images, a little
garbled by now . . . and, well . . .
(She shrugs)

. . . you know . . . the things one accumulates.

YOUNG MAN

Can I get you . . . a cab, or something?

GRANDMA

Oh no, dear . . . thank you just the same. I’ll take it
from here.

YOUNG MAN

And what shall I do now?

GRANDMA

Oh, you stay here, dear. It will all become clear to you.
It will be explained. You’ll understand.

YOUNG MAN

Very well.

GRANDMA

(After one more look about)

Well . . .

YOUNG MAN

Let me see you to the elevator.

GRANDMA

Oh . . . that would be nice, dear.
(They both exit by the front door, slowly)

(Enter MRS. BARKER, followed by MOMMY and
DADDY)

MRS. BARKER

. . . and I’m happy to tell you that the whole thing’s
settled. Just like that.

MOMMY

Oh, we’re so glad. We were afraid there might be a
problem, what with delays, and all.

DADDY

Yes, we’re very relieved.

MRS. BARKER

Well, now; that’s what professional women are for.

MOMMY

Why . . . where’s Grandma? Grandma’s not here!
Where’s Grandma? And look! The boxes are gone, too.
Grandma’s gone, and so are the boxes. She’s taken off,
and she’s stolen something! Daddy!

MRS. BARKER

Why, Mommy, the van man was here.
(Startled)
The what?

MRS. BARKER
The van man. The van man was here.
(The lights might dim a little, suddenly)

MOMMY
(Shakes her head)
No, that's impossible.

MRS. BARKER
Why, I saw him with my own two eyes.

MOMMY
(Near tears)
No, no, that's impossible. No. There's no such thing as
the van man. There is no van man. We ... we made
him up. Grandma? Grandma?

DADDY
(Moving to MOMMY)
There, there, now.

MOMMY
Oh Daddy ... where's Grandma?

DADDY
There, there, now.
(While DADDY is comforting MOMMY, GRANDMA
comes out, stage right, near the footlights)

GRANDMA
(To the audience)
Shhhhh! I want to watch this.
(She motions to MRS. BARKER who, with a secret
smile, tiptoes to the front door and opens it.
The YOUNG MAN is framed therein. Lights up full
again as he steps into the room)

MRS. BARKER
Mrs. Barker, if you don't mind.

DADDY
Yes. Mommy? You remember now? About the bumble
... about wanting satisfaction?

MOMMY
(Her sorrow turning into delight)
Yes. Why yes! Of course! Yes! Oh, how wonderful!
THE AMERICAN DREAM

MRS. BARKER

(To the young man)

This is Mommy.

YOUNG MAN

How... how do you do?

MRS. BARKER

(Stage whisper)

Her name's Mommy.

YOUNG MAN

How... how do you do, Mommy?

MOMMY

Well! Hello there!

MRS. BARKER

(To the young man)

And that is Daddy.

YOUNG MAN

How do you do, sir?

DADDY

How do you do?

MOMMY

(Herself again, circling the young man, feeling his arm, poking him)

Yes, sir! Yes, sirree! Now this is more like it. Now this is a great deal more like it! Daddy! Come see. Come see if this isn't a great deal more like it.

DADDY

I... I can see from here, Mommy. It does look a great deal more like it.

THE AMERICAN DREAM

MOMMY

Yes, sir. Yes sirree! Mrs. Barker, I don't know how to thank you.

MRS. BARKER

Oh, don't worry about that. I'll send you a bill in the mail.

MOMMY

What this really calls for is a celebration. It calls for a drink.

MRS. BARKER

Oh, what a nice idea.

MOMMY

There's some sauterne in the kitchen.

MRS. BARKER

I'll go.

YOUNG MAN

Mommy

Will you? Oh, how nice. The kitchen's through the archway there.

(As the young man exits; to Mrs. Barker)

He's very nice. Really top notch; much better than the other one.

MRS. BARKER

I'm glad you're pleased. And I'm glad everything's all straightened out.

MOMMY

Well, at least we know why we sent for you. We're glad that's cleared up. By the way, what's his name?

MRS. BARKER

Ha! Call him whatever you like. He's yours. Call him what you called the other one.
**Mommy**

Daddy? What did we call the other one?

**Daddy**

(\textit{Puzzles})

Why...

**Young Man**

(Re-entering with a tray on which are a bottle of sauterne and five glasses)

Here we are!

**Mommy**

Hooray! Hooray!

**Mrs. Barker**

Oh, good!

**Mommy**

(Moving to the tray)

So, let’s— Five glasses? Why five? There are only four of us. Why five?

**Young Man**

(Catches Grandma's eye; Grandma indicates she is not there)

Oh, I'm sorry.

**Mommy**

You must learn to count. We're a wealthy family, and you must learn to count.

**Young Man**

I will.

**Mommy**

Well, everybody take a glass.

(They do)

And we'll drink to celebrate. To satisfaction! Who says you can't get satisfaction these days!

---

**Mrs. Barker**

What dreadful sauterne!

**Mommy**

Yes, isn't it?

(To Young Man, her voice already a little fuzzy from the wine)

You don't know how happy I am to see you! Yes sirree. Listen, that time we had with... with the other one. I'll tell you about it some time.

(Indicates Mrs. Barker)

After she's gone. She was responsible for all the trouble in the first place. I'll tell you all about it.

(Sidles up to him a little)

Maybe... maybe later tonight.

**Young Man**

(Not moving away)

Why yes. That would be very nice.

**Mommy**

(Puzzles)

Something familiar about you... you know that? I can't quite place it...

**Grandma**

(Interrupting... to audience)

Well, I guess that just about wraps it up. I mean, for better or worse, this is a comedy, and I don't think we'd better go any further. No, definitely not. So, let's leave things as they are right now... while everybody's happy... while everybody's got what he wants... or everybody's got what he thinks he wants. Good night, dears.

**Curtain**