

Synopsis

Act I opens with Sy and Rita Finberg sitting in their living room having just returned home from their last day at *Sy's Bargain House*, a mom and pop clothing store they operated for 43 years in a working class section of Philadelphia. Sy believes he met his goal "to be the most successful mom and pop shop" in Philadelphia while Rita counters that selling dry goods is not what she ever imagined doing. In addition, she is critical of the store's rundown location and resents his taking over the store from his mother without first consulting her. Goldie, Sy's younger sister, enters. Goldie tells Rita how Sy manipulated their mother into passing on the store onto him even though she had worked there since childhood. Goldie asks Sy if taking the store was worth losing her affection. Sy answers that it was. Goldie exits. Rita has more to say but Sy refuses to listen. Instead, he tells of his own regrets. Hearing this Rita simply asks Sy to acknowledge how much she has done for him. He refuses and enters the kitchen while Rita sits on a sofa looking at the still unwrapped box of pastries.

Act II opens with Rita, sons Ben and Michael, and Michael's Asian girlfriend Jenny returning to Rita's home after visiting Sy's grave upon the second anniversary of his death. Rita goes upstairs to change allowing Ben to speak bitterly about Sy though Michael is willing to move on and let things pass. Ben returns to California, calls Michael, and asks him to visit. Michael enters Ben's office and is shown a letter indicating Ben's date for arraignment. The charge is Medicare fraud. Ben relates how one of their father's best friends, Norm Singer, introduced him to many important people and helped set up his practice. Norm, however, is constantly short of money due to juggling various love interests. He thus asks Ben to falsify medical reports so that Norm can pocket the Medicare reimbursement in order to maintain his lifestyle. Though reluctant, Ben agrees. The FBI comes to investigate. Ben calls Norm into his office whereupon Norm plays ignorant about the entire affair leading Ben to speculate that Norm set him up. Michael suggests that there might have been a conspiracy between Norm and their father.

Act III opens with Michael visiting his brother in prison. The next day Michael visits Norm Singer. Norm admits setting Ben up. Though angry, Michael is nevertheless relieved to learn that Sy had nothing to do with Ben's difficulties. Ben is released from prison and sits with Rita and Michael in Rita's kitchen eating and drinking coffee. They reminisce when the entire family would meet for dinner at the neighborhood diner. Sy appears and the four enter a restaurant. There they recreate the veal cutlet parmigiana scene Ben described in Act II, scene 1 as the play ends.

Character Breakdown

Seymour (Sy) Finberg: Main protagonist. Cold and uncaring, he connives to take the store from his sister Goldie and remains both critical and unappreciative towards his wife.

Rita Finberg: Sy's wife of 46 years. Together they operated *Sy's Bargain House*, a small mom and pop clothing store in a working class section of Philadelphia. Rita's dream of being married to a white collar professional is dashed when Sy comes home to announce that he's taking over the store from his mother. Nevertheless, she does everything to support her husband in spite of his unappreciative nature.

Michael Finberg: Sy's older son. Though he admits that his relationship with his father "was never good", he nevertheless defends him against his younger brother Ben's unsparing attacks. He flies to California to console him after Ben receives a notice to appear in court for an arraignment hearing.

Ben Finberg: Sy's younger son. A highly successful podiatrist living in the Los Angeles area, he expresses contempt for his father at the 2nd anniversary of Sy's death. He later falls victim to a plot hatched by a supposed benefactor.

Goldie: Sy's younger sister. Goldie expected to take over the store from their mother. However, Sy manipulated their mother to hand the store to him even though he had never showed much interest in it. It the play reveals that Goldie spent most of her adult life in low wage retail jobs and died essentially penniless.

Norm Singer: Sy's friend of many years. Ben's supposed benefactor, he lures Ben into criminal activity resulting in Ben's imprisonment.

Jenny: Michael's Asian girlfriend.

Cast of Characters

Seymour (Sy) Finberg: Mid to late 60's. Short, heavy set.

Rita Finberg: Early to mid- 60's. Short, thin to average weight.

Goldie: Sy's younger sister. Early to mid-50's. Average height and weight.

Michael Finberg: Sy and Rita's oldest son. 35-40 years old. Average height and weight.

Ben Finberg: Sy and Rita's youngest son. 30-35 years old. Average height and weight.

Norm Singer: Sy's friend and Ben's benefactor. 70-75 years old. Average height and weight.

Jenny: Michael's Asian girlfriend. 30-35 years old. Slim, average height.

Secretary

Prison guard

Two FBI agents

Suggested Roles

Sy's Bargain House can be performed with a cast of 6 as follows:

Sy Finberg, FBI agent

Rita Finberg, secretary

Michael Finberg

Ben Finberg

Jenny, FBI agent

Norm Singer, waiter

Sy's Bargain House

Act I

There is a living room, circa early 1990's. There is a rather large armchair and foot stool ottoman in one corner of the room, a long sofa, and an end table and lamp between the armchair and sofa. There is a coffee table alongside the sofa. Above the sofa are some wall paintings. There is a hallway leading to the kitchen area. Just before the hallway is the front door with a peephole. The kitchen is generic. It contains a kitchen table and four chairs, a refrigerator, sink, stove, and cupboards. A telephone rests on a small table. There are stairs leading up to a second floor.

It is a summer evening, 1993. Sy Finberg and his wife, Rita are now in the living room having just returned from their last day operating a small clothing store called Sy's Bargain House. Rita sits on the sofa while Sy is just about to fall into the armchair. Sy wears dark pants, and a short white sleeve shirt and loose fitting tie while Rita wears slacks and a simple blouse.

Sy: *(arms outstretched)* One, two, three *(falls into the armchair)*. That's it. Now I can sleep as long as I like. No traffic, no fiddling with the keys, pulling up the gate. And tomorrow's a Wednesday yet. When's the last time I could sleep late on a weekday?

Rita: Any day. You used to work Sundays too, remember?

Sy: Sure. Took almost 200 dollars some Sundays. Used to take Michael down with me though he wasn't much help. Kept complaining he needed a day off too. From high school. Who needs a day off from high school? Every day's a day off in high school. Girls and sports. How hard could that be?

Rita: It wasn't just girls and sports. You know that. He worked very hard in school. You should be proud of him.

Sy: I am if I ever get to see him. Now all I get is a million excuses why he's too busy to visit.

Rita: He is busy. He's a public school teacher.

Sy: *(pause)* I rest my case. And our other son, not much better.

Rita: Ben's in Hollywood. Can't expect him to suddenly stop by for lunch.

Sy: When's the last time he was here? Two years ago, wasn't it? He's so busy being *Foot Doctor to the Stars* (!) I think he forgot about us altogether. You know, he needs to get knocked down a peg or two. That'll wake him up.

Rita: Now stop it. He's very busy out there.

Sy: Too busy to call? Y'know, it's a funny thing about Ben. To this day he thinks I don't know how he suckered up to me all the time he's growing up. The problem is I never called him on it, so now he thinks he's so clever. But let me tell you something. As easy as it is to make money, it's just as easy to lose it... and more.

Rita: Will you stop it? I'm sure he'll call. Both of 'em.

Sy: Maybe, but let's face it. No one thinks of old people these days. Look at Morris. Hasn't heard from his son in years. You should see him. Jumps like a rabbit every time the phone rings.

Rita: See? Our boys are not like that. And be grateful they're not a burden. Money's not a problem with either of 'em.

Sy: Why should it be? I got both through college debt free. How many kids can say that today? But, it was a good ride. Forty-three years at the same location and

only two break-ins. Not bad considering what's happened to the neighborhood. And we sure had some laughs, didn't we? Such characters. I'll tell ya, between Mary Kennedy, Florence Doople, and Tom Walters there was never a dull moment at *Sy's Bargain House*.

Rita: That's for sure.

Sy: And how 'bout the help we had? First Billy, then Eleanor, then Betty. And all from the neighborhood. Gave the store a real family atmosphere.

Rita: I'd agree with that.

Sy: And all the jobbers on Third Street: Bell, Sussman, Fickler. All gone now. There were no computers then. Business was conducted with a handshake. (*pointing*) That's why I always told the boys: "Your word is your bond." You can't stay in business long with a sullied reputation. Now you walk into some of those big box stores and they check ya when you enter and check ya when you leave. Anyway, no need to worry. The store provided a nice little nest egg and with social security and some other monies (*lower voice*) I never told you about (*normal voice*) we'll be fine. I just have one regret.

Rita: What's that?

Sy: I just wish we could've pass it on. That would have made three generations of mom and pop shops in the Finberg family. Mom had it for thirty-one years, we had it for forty-three and who knows how long Michael or Ben could have kept it going.

Rita: They never did take to business, did they?

Sy: No, isn't that funny? They grew up with the store but never showed any interest in it.

Rita: That is something.

Sy: Well, it might have been my fault. Maybe I was too overbearing. But I couldn't help it. There's a right way to sell and a wrong way and, given the choice, they always picked the wrong way. You need personality to run a store. That's how you sell, but the boys never showed any enthusiasm. Just moping around, looking at their watch, waiting to go home. I thought at least one of them would show *some* interest, but all they ever cared about was the Beatles. Still, we made our goal: to be the number one mom and pop shop in the city of Philadelphia! Now that's saying something especially considering how many mom and pops there were at the time and some in much better locations. And can't say we lived too shabbily either. Trips to London, Paris, getting a new car every few years... And how 'bout those times in the mountains, huh? Such entertainment-Totie Fields, Buddy Hackett, Eddie Fisher. Not like you have today. I was just reading about some singer called Eminem. Imagine naming yourself after a candy bar. And all those Christmas Eves? Could you imagine a mom and pop taking over five thousand dollars in one day? So many customers, I thought the floor would collapse. And all at the same location. I think that's what I'm most proud of.

Rita: (*sarcastic*) Yep, that was some accomplishment.

Sy: What? What are you saying?

Rita: (*resignedly*) Nothing.

Sy: No, come on. I think I heard a little sarcasm in your voice. What are you trying to say?

Rita: Never mind. Forget it.

Sy: 'cause don't start telling me you weren't happy. We did the best we could and came out smelling like a rose.

Rita: Staying at the same location for forty-three years to be the most successful mom and pop shop in Philadelphia?

Sy: That's right.

Rita: And that's smelling like a rose?

Sy: You're damn right it is.

Rita: Well, excuse me, but I think I can come up with some other smells to better describe that.

Sy: *(pause)* Oh, I get it. That again. You still wish I had stayed with Chapman instead of taking over the store.

Rita: I think that sometimes. I'm allowed my dreams too, aren't I? Didn't I just finish 43 years making your dream come true?

Sy: It was your dream too.

Rita: No, it wasn't. It never was. Never did I ever think I'd wind up selling shmatas in Kensington and at the same location yet. If I wanted to sell I could have gotten a job at Gimbels or Wanamakers and not get yelled at. I was sure when I married you I was marrying a professional. The first person in your family to graduate college.

Rita rises and moves into the kitchen area. She is at the stove preparing breakfast. Rita turns, they kiss, and she straightens his tie. They smile, hold hands, and look at each other lovingly.

Rita: You had everything. You were working for a good firm with a chance for advancement.

Sy moves into the kitchen area.

I remember how handsome you were in your suit and tie every morning-a true professional.

Rita turns, they kiss, and straightens his tie.

You were thin then with such beautiful thick, black hair.

They smile, hold hands, and look at each other lovingly.

Then you throw it all away to sell shmatas.

They move center stage.

Sy: That's right. And why did I throw it away? Because I wanted to be my own boss. I never liked working for that firm, taking orders from old man Chapman every day, so upset every time I came home. So when mom wanted to give up the store I pounced on it and from that day on, in spite of the break-ins, the returns, the time the basement got flooded, and all the petty thievery did I have an ounce of regret. That store was my stage and I relished every minute of it. And you know that.

Rita: But at the same location? Sure, at one time it was a great street. There was Ohlbaums, Rosens, the laundromat, Hymie's deli but they all left. Why did you have to be the last Jew in Kensington? But I'll say this. At least you got your

wish- a corner store. Sure, because the city knocked down every building on the right.

Sy: *(points at Rita, almost threatening)* Now stop it. Just stop it.

Rita: And such clientele. You should have sprayed them with cologne the minute they entered. I only prayed they didn't come in for shoes. The smell from those feet could have defeated Hitler without an invasion.

Sy: I said stop it! That's where I stayed. So what? Where should I have gone? The suburbs? Imagine me there. They'd look at me like some kind of freak. "Come see the short, fat Jew!" Sorry the people were not up to your standards. Sorry they offended your pristine sensibilities. But they were good people, every one of 'em. I knew them as kids and later as they got married. I was a fixture in the community and I was proud of that. On Christmas Eve at 11:30 you could still run to Sy's and pick something up. And how many times I'm in the car to go home and it's snowing did I get out, open the locks, pull up the gate, just to sell a single pair of seventy-nine cent Buster Brown socks? Why did I do that?

Rita: Yes, why did you do that?

Sy: Because I had a reputation to uphold. I was reliable. That was important to me. And that you can't find anywhere. Just try walking into Macy's a minute after closing. Look what I'm dealing with on the day I retire yet.

Sy returns to the man's chair and Rita to the sofa. There is a long pause as Sy looks disgusted while Rita sits patiently waiting for the right time to bring up the next topic for discussion.

Author's note: The pause between Sy and Rita could go on for quite some time as older married couples are wont to stop speaking to each other if one or both are angry. It could potentially be quite humorous.

Rita: I want to ask you something.

Sy: What?

Rita: Why didn't you ask if we should take over the store?

Sy: What are you talking about?

Rita: That's right. I'll never forget.

Rita returns to the kitchen area. Sy soon follows.

I was in the kitchen cooking dinner and you come home telling me you have an important announcement. And I'm thinking you got a promotion at work. So you tell me to sit down.

Rita sits at the kitchen table. Sy sits across from Rita and mimes telling her something.

I'm all excited, and then you say we're taking over the store.

Rita appears shocked and highly disappointed.

Just like that. No discussion. No consideration how I felt. Just we're taking over the store. Didn't my opinion count for anything?

They continue speaking at the kitchen table.

Sy: Frankly speaking, no. I wanted the store and that was that.

Rita: But it was my life too. You could have at least asked. I think I deserved that.

Sy: I can't believe we're discussing this forty-three years later. What did you want me to do, get a ballot box? (*displays an imaginary piece of paper in his left hand and*

points to it with his right) “Here, check A or B. A, we're taking over the store. B, we're not taking over the store. Mark your ballot.”

Sy stands, angry.

Well, life doesn't work that way. It's not always so democratic. I wanted the store and that was that.

Rita stands.

Rita: But you could have at least asked.

Sy: Okay, Rita, do you think we should take over the store? Oh, wait. We can't. I just sold the building to the Hispanics and they're turning it into a grocery or a *bodega* I think they call it.

Rita: Well, I'm sure he asked *his* wife.

Sy: Maybe he did or maybe he didn't. But I know one thing. He did what he felt was best, the same way I felt. But don't put all this on me. Why didn't you say something at the time?

Rita stands.

Rita: What could I say? I was already pregnant with Michael and the 1950's was not exactly the heyday of the Women's Liberation Movement. I was trapped and you knew it. That's why you didn't ask. You didn't need to. And how I became your slave I'll never know. Finally, after five years living on top of the store, another one of my dreams, we move to the northeast and here I am calling every 10 minutes

Rita picks up the receiver and speaks into it.

Are you busy? You need me down there?

Sy: *(answering)* Don't worry, everything's fine. I can handle it."

Rita: OK.

Rita hangs up phone.

Rita: Then you'd come home and get angry at me for not coming down. That somehow I should have detected in your voice that you needed me making me feel guilty all night. Such a life. Then all the times I did come down you'd get mad if I couldn't find something. Can you believe? I drop everything, drive down and you still get mad.

They move center stage.

Sy: Better you stayed home. You could never sell anyway.

Rita: How could I sell? How could anyone sell in that building? The place was such a mishmash. You had men's dungarees in the basement but men's khakis on the landing. Women's blouses near the register but women's sweaters on the second floor. Trying to find anything was like playing Treasure Hunt. *(holds up an imaginary piece of paper, acts out the directions)* "Oh, here's a clue. Walk to the front door, turn left, middle row, third box from the top." You had forty-three years. In all that time you couldn't make a men's section, a ladies section? You had no system.

Sy: I had a system. You just didn't understand it. Anyway, the bottom line is you couldn't sell.

Rita: Is that what you think?

Sy: That's right. You never got it. How many times did I have to remind you the minute they walk into the store they are holding our money? They were keeping it

warm, but it was still our money. That's how you have to think when you're in business-the customer is the custodian of our money. And it is our job to extract it from him no less than a dentist extracting a bad tooth. But time after time you let them leave with our money. If we don't have what they want then you offer them something else-a belt, a tie, shoelaces even- but you never let them leave with our money. That's why they wanted me to wait on them. They wanted to part with money and you wouldn't let them.

Rita: But if we don't have it, we don't have it.

Sy: *(screams, near primal)* We have it! We always have it! *(normal tone)* If a man measures an 11 shoe and we only have a 10 ½, you take the shoe in the back, you get the stretcher and you *(makes a twisting motion with his hand)* twist, and twist, and you twist until he has an 11. Or maybe he wants a long sleeve shirt of a certain design and we only have it in short sleeve, then you tell him, "Spring is just around the corner." I don't care if it's the first week of November. Spring is just around the corner. And if you say it nice enough, he'll believe it. Hell, I once sold a kid mittens in August because *(raises index finger as if giving helpful advice)* "You have to get ready before the weather changes." And how many times did I cut the label off a boy's jean? He wants a 14, we don't have it, so I cut *(tears an imaginary label)* the label from a 16 and walla' (!) *(holds up an imaginary jean)* he has a 14 jean. Did they ever return it? No. Why? Because they figured he'll grow into it. That's how you do business. I sold crap for forty-three years because people actually enjoy parting with money. The only thing you need to do *(smiles mockingly)* is be pleasant. I mean really *(takes dollar bills out of his*

pocket and holds it out) what good is this if you're not using it? Who else but your father takes money out of his pocket (looks at money) just to look at it?

They return to the living room area, Sy in the man's chair, Rita on the sofa. There's a knock on the door.

Sy: Now who is it?

Rita goes to the front door and looks through the peephole.

Rita: It's your sister.

Sy: What the hell does she want?

Rita: Probably say congratulations (*opens door*). Goldie!

Goldie enters. She is a plain looking middle age woman but with a strong moral compass. She gives the appearance of someone who has worked low wage retail most of her adult life. She wears a short sleeve blouse, loose-fitting pants, and a light-weight jacket.

Goldie: Hello, Rita.

Sy: What do you want this time of night? It couldn't wait till tomorrow?

Goldie takes off her jacket and places it on the sofa.

Goldie: Sit down. I want to ask you something.

Sy: Ask me what?

Goldie: Just sit down.

Sy: (*exasperatedly*) Oy, Goldie.

Sy returns to the armchair. Goldie sits on the sofa closest to Sy. Rita remains standing.

Rita: Can I get you anything?

Goldie: I'm fine, thanks. Please sit down.

Rita sits at the other end of the sofa.

Goldie: Today you retired, right?

Sy: That's right.

Goldie: So now I want to ask you something. *(pause)* Was it worth it?

Sy: Was what worth it?

Goldie: You know exactly what I'm talking about. Was it worth it?

Rita: Goldie, what are you talking about?

Goldie: *(to Sy)* You never told your wife, did you? Well then, let me tell her. *(turns to Rita)* Rita, you remember when we first met I was working in the store with mom?

Rita: Sure.

Goldie: In fact, I had worked with mom for many years. I think I was about ten when I sold my first item there. You know I had such long, curly hair then. Everyone used to call me Goldilocks. I loved that place and loved working with my mother and I was sure one day she would hand the store over to me once it got too hard for her. I mean, who was I? I just barely graduated high school but at least I could sell. Everybody said so, even your husband. Correct me if I'm wrong, but I think when we first met he said, "This is my sister, Goldie. She's a great saleswoman." Am I right?

Rita: I think you're right.

Goldie: And I was honest. I never cheated anyone. Of course, people came in to buy, but I think a lot came in just to talk to me. Everyone loved Goldie. In fact, mom and I discussed changing the name of the store to *Goldies* once she retired. Then in 1950 mom suddenly falls ill and her eyesight is starting to fail her. Well, you can't

exactly sell merchandise with faltering eyesight. So now I figure it's only a matter of time before she hands the store to me. But lo and behold your husband goes to our mother and says that *he* wants the store using all kinds of reasons twisting her mind. And here's my favorite. A man who barely steps foot in synagogue except on Yom Kippur is now this great Talmudic scholar and tells mom that as the oldest son of a Jewish family he's *entitled* to the store. I work there since I'm a child but he's entitled to it like he's from some great line of Hassidic rabbis. Moreover, he tells mom if he doesn't get the store he may need to relocate to another part of the country. *(to Sy)* You bastard. Using that line when you knew damn well Chapman was entirely based in Philadelphia. Of course I tried to convince mom otherwise, but she was afraid to lose you. *(to Rita)* So mom calls me in the back room and tells me she's decided to give the store to your husband but that I could work for him if I wanted to. *(to Sy)* Hell, if I'd move one corpuscle making your life easier. But just explain one thing to me. You get out of the service, go to college, graduate with a degree in accounting. In all your life you never gave that store a second thought. Do you remember?

Goldie stands.

The store would be crowded and I'd say, "We could really use your help right now." Then you'd give me some crazy look and run off to be with your friends. Meanwhile, mom and I are running up and down steps while you're outside having a good time as if giving us a half-hour was going to ruin your chance to play for the Yankees. So just tell me. What possessed you to suddenly want the store?

Sy: I had my reasons.

Goldie: I'm sure you did. Betrayal being one of 'em. So now I ask you again.

Goldie bends and grabs Sy's shirt collar with both hands. Rita stands.

Rita: Goldie!

Goldie: Was it worth it? Was it worth losing my affection all these years?

Goldie breaks down and cries while bent over Sy. Sy pulls Goldie's hands from his collar and stands.

Sy: Yes! It was worth it. Now get out of my house!

Goldie looks at Sy, retrieves her jacket from the sofa, walks to the front door, turns and turns to face Sy.

Goldie: The bottom line is this. You took advantage of an ignorant old woman in failing health to take what was rightfully mine. Enjoy your retirement.

Goldie slams the door behind her.

Sy: The nerve of her coming in my house like that. She should be ashamed of herself.

(pauses, uncertain) I'm going in the kitchen. The Phillies are on.

Sy begins to walk to the kitchen. Rita steps in front to block the path.

Rita: No, you're not! You're not going to bury things watching TV. That's always a convenient out for you. There's still things we need to talk about.

Sy: We talked enough! The past is past and you can tell Goldie that too. You took me for better or worse, remember? I'm sorry life didn't turn out the way you wanted, but I did the best I could. I didn't hear much complaining when the store was doing well, now did I? No, you were happy then. Trips to London, Paris, the mountains. You were in your glory. So don't start telling me about regret. You

wanna hear regret? I have regret too. Think I enjoy being a short, fat man my whole life? Think I enjoy being out of breath every time I climb (*points to stairs*) those steps? And how about this one? Think I enjoy seeing my old friends get sick and die? And here's a good one for ya. Think I enjoy having two sons who can't stand the sight of me? They only see me 'cause they want to see you. (*pounds the air with his fist*) And why can't they call? And here's a real doozie for ya. Think I'll enjoy getting up tomorrow morning with nothing to do all day? So don't start telling me about regret. You want to think your life was one giant mistake, go ahead, think that way. You want to wallow in misery, be my guest. But not me. I'm gonna enjoy whatever time I have left. Now if you'll excuse me, I'd like to watch the Phillies!

Rita: (*trying to break the tension*) Wait, you forgot one. The soup.

Sy: (*laughs*) That's right. I forgot. Think I enjoy going to a restaurant and the soup always coming out cold? How can French onion soup come out cold?

Both laugh.

Sy: Can I go now?

Rita: One more thing.

Sy: What?

Rita: Just tell me how much you appreciate all I've done for you.

Sy laughs then looks at Rita piercingly.

Sy: No.

Rita appears stunned as Sy passes her on the way to the kitchen. Sy enters the kitchen while Rita returns to sit on the sofa. Sy turns on the television and a baseball game is heard. Gradually both sound and lights fade.

Act II

Scene 1.

Rita, Michael, Ben, and Jenny (Michael's Asian girlfriend) are outside the front door of Rita's home waiting to come in. They have just returned from the cemetery on the second anniversary of Sy's death.

Rita: Do you have it?

Michael: Wait, I got it.

Michael opens the front door and everyone enters. Michael and Ben are wearing suits and ties while Rita and Jenny are in well-tailored pants suits.

Ben: Ok, good. You don't mind if I take my jacket off, do you?

Rita: Go ahead, relax. It's been a long day. I know you kids are tired. Let me go up and change, then I'll put something together for lunch.

Ben: Sounds good to me.

Michael and Ben take their jackets off, loosen their ties and place the jackets on the far end of the sofa. Ben stretches.

Oh, that's better.

Michael: Sure you don't want to go out? We can go over to the diner.

Rita: It's no problem, relax. I'm sure you two have a lot to talk about. I'm just happy we could all be together today.

Michael: That's right.

Rita: Really, it was wonderful. We said the prayers, you boys talked to him...it was good.

Ben: You still miss him?

Rita: All the time. I know he wasn't easy to be with, but it's certainly better than being alone.
I'm sure you boys miss him too.

Ben: Absolutely. I'm just sorry Sherri and the kids couldn't make it, but you know with school and all it would have been hard.

Rita: As long as you're here that's all that matters. Well, let me go up and change. I got some delicious cold cuts at Hymies. You remember Hymies, don't you? They had a place near the store.

Michael: How can we forget Hymies? *(to Ben)* Hey, remember what we used to say when we went in there?

Ben: No, I forget.

Michael: We'd walk in and say, "Hey, Hoagie! Give me a Hymie."

Ben: *(laughs)* Oh, yeah. That's right.

Rita: We sure had some good times down there, didn't we? Well, let me go up and change. I'll be down soon.

Ben: Take your time.

Rita goes up the stairs. Ben sits in the armchair while Michael and Jenny sit on the sofa with Michael closer to Ben.

Ben: It's hard to believe. Two years already.

Michael: Tell me something? Do you miss him?

Ben: Let me tell you, Mike, you wouldn't believe the kind of people I hobnob with. I mean real Hollywood hitters- movie stars, producers, directors. And you know what? These people are as dumb as rock salt. Then I think of Pops slaving away forty years in a rag shop and I think what a waste. With his intelligence and ability to sell he could have been something. A mogul even. I mean I know billionaires who can't complete, and I mean this, a simple grammatical sentence. But do I miss him? No. But at least I learned one thing-how to hustle. Because if you don't hustle out there you're dead. How 'bout you? Do you miss him?

Michael: To be honest, not really. It was never good. You know that. All we ever seemed to do was fight.

Ben: That's because you didn't know how to play the game. See, I never challenged him. Of course I knew he was full of crap, but whatever he said I acted like he was a sage. But you with your high-minded ideals you made him feel inadequate. So I got treated like a prince, and you got treated like an orphan. So he not only paid my Bachelor's degree...

Michael: He paid mine too.

Ben: Yeah, but he threw in med school too while you had to go nights to finally get your Masters. Say, did you ever tell Jenny about the time you were in the hospital?

Michael: The infection?

Ben: Yeah.

Jenny: What happened? *(to Michael)* You were in the hospital?

Ben: Do you want to tell her or should I?

Michael: I'll tell her. I think I was around 28 at the time. I developed some kind of infection on my hand so I went to Temple Hospital. The doctor looked at it and said I needed to stay a few nights. I called my parents and told them the story. That night they came to visit me and my father asked if I needed any money. I told him they put my clothes in a locker so I could use a few dollars.

Ben: Go on. This is rich.

Michael: So my father gives me a ten dollar bill. Two days later I get out and we meet for lunch. That's it.

Ben: Come on!

Michael: That's enough.

Ben: Tell her.

Michael: *(pause)* He asked for the ten dollars back.

Jenny: You're kidding.

Ben: No, he's not. Can you believe it- asking for the money back? What father on this planet could do such a thing? And while we're at it, how did he get the store? From what I understand Goldie expected to take it over from grand mom. Then suddenly Pops has the store and Aunt Goldie's selling shoes at Sears. How did *that* happen?

Michael: I don't know. No-one ever talks about it.

Ben: Jenny, I don't know what the two of you are planning, but just remember one thing. This family has more skeletons than a science lab.

Jenny: What?

Michael: I'll explain later.

Ben: I'm sorry,

Michael: It's OK.

Ben: Oh, and how 'bout those times we went out for dinner? *(to Jenny)* You gotta hear this. *(stands)* See, the four of us would go into a restaurant and the first thing he'd do is tell us where to sit. *(imitates Sy, points)* "Ben, you sit there. Mom will sit here. Michael, you sit there and I'll sit here." And this is not just with us. We'd be a party of ten and he'd do the same thing. He's telling people where to sit who don't even know him which caused all kinds of problems if you can imagine. Then the waitress would come and bring us the menus. Well, you could never order the right thing. No matter what you ordered he'd say, *(imitating Sy)* "When are you gonna learn how to order? Who orders that? You order something normal like fried chicken or chopped sirloin. That's how you order." Well, one time I took a chance and ordered veal cutlet parmigiana. *(imitating Sy)* "Veal cutlet parmigiana? What- veal cutlet's not good enough? You don't need the cheese. If you want something on top, you can get more tomato sauce. There's no charge for that." I mean this went on for years. So now I have a confession to make. It wasn't until I was 20 years old when I finally experienced the taste of cheese which, by the way, was the same year I lost my virginity. And you know what? They taste about the same. *(laughs)* Sorry.

Michael: You're disgusting.

Ben: You just found out? This is what we had to deal with growing up in this house.

Ben sits back in the armchair.

Michael: You're right. Anyway, it's over. Let it go.

Ben: What are you so equanimitable about? *(aside)* Is that a word? You don't remember the last year of his life when he couldn't drive anymore and you had to take days off to

schlep him all over the city for this and that? Then you stop for lunch and he'd never pick up the check. You used to complain about that all the time.

Michael: So what am I supposed to do? Carry that around the rest of my life? These are the cards we were dealt. Some have Einstein as a father and we had Sy Finberg. Meanwhile, we're not starving and to be honest, I think it's a sign of maturity to stop blaming others. Look, we went to his grave...

Ben: Oh, that grave. *(laughs)* I love that stone: *(waves hand across)* Seymour (Sy) Finberg. *It was a great ride.* It should really read: *It was a great ride... on us.* Honestly, Mike, do you think he ever saw you, me, and mom as anything more than a source of cheap labor? I don't. Oh, and you remember his goal? *(stands, imitating Sy)* "To be the number one mom and pop shop in the city of Philadelphia!" What an accomplishment! I mean why wait for the Phillies to win the World Series? Just have the mayor declare *Sy Finberg Day* and have a ticker tape parade down Broad Street. Then maybe you, me, and mom could wave *(waves)* from one of the cars in the back *(waves and smiles)*.

Michael: *(stands, confronts Ben)* Now you're going too far. Stop it. Let it go.

Ben: Yeah, you're right. *(sarcastically)* I mean why let an upbringing marked by constant abuse and browbeating ruin a perfectly lovely day?

Jenny: Come on, sit down.

Michael: I should sock you one.

Ben: *(sticks out chin)* Go ahead. *(points to chin)* Right here.

Michael: Shmuck.

Ben: Putz.

Both sit. There's some pause. They soon smile.

Michael: How's everything in la la land? Pretty good I guess.

Ben: Like the goyim play bingo, Jews visit foot doctors. And I'll tell you why. Their kids are out of the house and too busy to visit, and the grandchildren are so zoned out on the latest piece of technological crap they don't even know what a grandparent is. So their only opportunity for some type of normal conversation is with a doctor. They come in, I cut their nails, listen to their bobbe-mysehes- their son this, their daughter that, leave and come back two weeks later. I mean how much can a toenail grow in two weeks?

Michael: That's sad.

Ben: It is. And how you doing? You're teaching first grade this year, right?

Michael: That's right.

Ben: You like it?

Michael: I do. I get kids who can't read and by mid-year they're reading.

Ben: That's nice. Gives you a real sense of accomplishment.

Michael: It does.

Rita comes down the stairs wearing more casual clothes.

Rita: How you kids doing? Hungry yet?

Ben: We can eat.

Rita: Just a few minutes. Let me get things ready.

Jenny: Can I help?

Rita: What she say?

Michael: She asked if she could help.

Rita: That's ok, dear. You just relax. It's no trouble.

Rita goes into the kitchen to prepare lunch. She takes various items out of the refrigerator and places them on the counter near the sink then sets the table.

Ben: Did you hear what she said? "We sure had some good times down there." I mean talk about selective memory. I don't think she enjoyed one day in 43 years.

Michael: Yeah, but you got to admit-he was a character. Remember how he'd tear the labels off the pants? How he could sell those pants with a straight face I still can't believe.

Ben: What are you talkin'? Remember my job? The shoe stretcher.

Jenny: What's that?

Michael: It's this kind of thing that stretches shoes to make them bigger.

Ben: *(to Jenny)* That was my job. I'd be sitting in the back and he'd bring me a pair of shoes. He'd say, "Here's an 8. Make them an 8 1/2." And there I am *(makes a motion twisting the shoe stretcher)* stretching shoes all day. I was just thinking about that, in fact. I wonder if that's why I became a podiatrist. I felt sorry for anyone who left the store wearing our shoes.

Michael: I have a funny story. I was looking through the pictures the other day and I noticed something. There's not one picture of the two of them holding hands. So I asked mom about it and she told me it was true. He never held her hand. So I asked why not. You ready? He said it didn't look right for a short Jewish man to hold a woman's hand. Did you ever hear such nonsense? I mean what did being Jewish have to do with it?

Ben: It's a good thing they weren't on the Titanic. She'd say, "Take my hand!" And he'd say, "I can't. It doesn't look right for a short Jewish man to hold a woman's hand."

All laugh hysterically.

Rita leaves the kitchen and walks into the living room.

Rita: What's so funny?

Michael: Nothing. We're just talking. Lunch ready?

Rita: Let's go.

Ben, Michael, and Jenny stand and proceed into the kitchen area.

Jenny: *(to Rita)* Anything I can do?

Rita: *(to Michael)* What she say?

Scene 2.

Michael is standing in front of a whiteboard on which are written examples of irregular verbs: swim-swam, write-wrote, run-ran, drink-drunk. He is holding a pointer while speaking to a class. There is a teachers' desk and chair near the whiteboard

Michael: We only have a few minutes before lunch. Let's quickly go over our verbs. Ready? I will point to the words and you repeat: swim-swam *(pause)* write-wrote *(pause)* run-ran *(pause)* drink-drunk *(pause)*

Michael hears the vibration on his cell phone and answers it.

Michael: I'll be done in a minute. I'll call you right back.

Michael: Ok, boys and girls, time for lunch. Everyone line up at the door. Let's go. Now walk quietly through the hall. I'm watching.

Michael watches his class leave the room. He returns to the teacher's desk and calls Ben.

Michael: OK, I can talk. How's everything? *(pause)* You can't tell me over the phone?
(pause) It's that bad? *(pause)* I don't know. I'll have to check. *(pause)* All right! I'll try to catch a flight Friday night or Saturday. Just calm down. Whatever it is it can't be that bad. I'll be there as soon as I can. *(pause)* Alright. See you soon. Bye.

Scene 3.

Ben's office. Ben is sitting at his desk writing something. He is wearing a white doctor's uniform. The intercom sounds. Ben hits a button on the intercom.

Ben: Yes?

Secretary: Your brother's here.

Ben: Send him in.

Michael enters.

Ben: Mike!

They embrace.

Thanks so much for coming. How was the flight?

Michael: Not bad.

Ben: Let me pay you. How much was it?

Michael: Never mind. Just tell me the problem?

Ben: Sit down.

Michael sits down on a chair across from Ben's desk. Ben stands in front of his desk and hands him a piece of paper.

Ben: This is the problem.

Michael looks at the paper.

Michael: You made me travel 3,000 miles to tell me you have jury duty?

Ben: Read it.

Michael reads the paper.

Michael: What's this? Your date for arraignment.

Ben: That's right. The day the judge decides if there's enough evidence to make me stand trial.

Michael: Trial for what?

Ben: Medicare fraud.

Michael: Wait a minute. Stop. What's going on here? What are you talking- Medicare fraud? How can they get you for fraud?

Ben: You remember a guy named Norm Singer?

Michael: Sure, he was one of Pop's best friends. He helped set you up.

Ben: That's right. Soon after I got my license Pops gave him a call and asked if he could do something for me. Norm said yes so I fly out here and find that Norm's king of the Jews- president of the synagogue, head of the men's club, knows everybody. He takes me under his wing, introduces me to the Hollywood elite, finds me a shiny new office, and before you know it, I'm *Foot Doctor to the Stars*. There's only one problem. The man's shtuping every korva in Beverly Hills and is always short of money. I mean it takes a lot of money keeping even a mid-level whore happy in this neighborhood. So Norm comes in for his monthly clipping which I should tell you is not covered by Medicare, and tells me about an idea he has.

A flashback with Michael watching. Norm enters Ben's office from upstage left center and sits across from Ben as Ben fills out information in Norm's folder. He is a white haired man of around 70-75 years old. He wears a sport jacket and well pressed khakis. Michael stands watching.

Norm: Look, I have an idea. Instead of putting down I had my nails clipped, put down I came in for a nail avulsion.

Michael: *(to Ben)* What's that?

Ben: *(turns to Michael)* It's a procedure in which a part or even the whole toenail is removed. It usually requires an anesthetic. I've done it hundreds of times.

Michael: Why does Norm want you to put down a...

Ben: Nail avulsion.

Michael: Nail avulsion.

Ben: Because a nail avulsion is covered by Medicare.

Michael: Which means...

Ben: Which means I get paid by Medicare which is a lot more than I get doing a simple clipping and polishing.

Michael: So Norm wants you to say he got a nail avulsion in which case he keeps the money you get from Medicare so he can continue his sport fucking.

Ben: Bingo!

Michael: And what did you say?

Ben: So I tell him...

Ben speaks to Norm in his office.

Ben: I can't do that. It's unethical and besides I could go to jail. Let me just give you whatever money you need.

Norm moves upstage, back to audience and takes a talis bag and yarmulke from his sport jacket pocket.

He puts on the talis and yarmulke. Ben stands up from his desk and moves in front of it.

But Norm doesn't want to hear from that. He then goes on about how much he's done for me, setting me up, the introductions, and then makes a comment about all the young podiatrists in the area looking for work. So now I envision Norm going up to the pulpit on the High Holidays and saying:

Norm moves downstage between Ben and Michael wearing the yarmulke and talis. He addresses the audience as if speaking to a synagogue congregation. He holds a piece of paper.

Norm: First, I'd like to wish everyone here a very happy, healthy, and prosperous new year. I have just a few brief announcements. *(reads from the paper)* The Men's Club will meet this Thursday night at 7 PM. Herb Adelman will talk about his recent trip to Israel. Our Sisterhood will hold their annual donor dinner this Sunday starting at 6:30. *(looks up)* And, finally, stop seeing Ben Finberg. He's a lousy podiatrist.

Norm returns up stage, takes off the talis and yarmulke, puts them in the talis bag and exits.

Ben: So I get scared and put down nail avulsion. I send in the claim and fortunately nothing happens. Medicare sends me a check, I cash it and give the money to Norm. Now everyone's happy. I get Norm off my back, I continue my business, and Norm gets to fuck. Except Norm comes in two weeks later and tells me he's started to fuck his secretary and needs more money. The man's 75 years old and he's fucking his 40 year old secretary. Thank God for vitamin V, right? So he wants me to file another claim. In the meantime I'm looking on the internet and there are podiatrists all over the country doing this. Sure, they get caught but not until filing hundreds of claims costing Medicare

millions of dollars. So I figure what's the harm? Who's gonna care about a few nail avulsions when the government is losing billions of dollars a year? So I file another one. Eventually, I submit a total of six at which point we agree to stop. Fine. Except last week I get a visit from the FBI

Two FBI agents enters. Ben shows them Norm's files.

who want to see my files concerning Norm's nail avulsions. I show them my notes which, of course, were completely made up and I'm telling one lie after another. So now not only did I commit fraud, I'm now lying to the FBI which is another offense.

FBI agents exit.

As soon as they leave I call Norm. He comes to the office but now decides to play dumb.

Norm enters Ben's office as before. Ben stands facing him from behind his desk. Michael remains standing some distance from the conversation.

Norm: What's the matter?

Ben: The FBI was just here.

Norm: The FBI? For what?

Ben: They were investigating your nail avulsions.

Norm: Nail avulsions? What's a nail avulsion? What are you talking about?

Ben: The procedure I wrote down instead of a clipping.

Norm: Why would you write down nail avulsion? I just came in to get my nails cut. *(pause)* Oh, so that's it. You know some officers came to my house yesterday. One had a camera and took pictures of my feet. I couldn't understand why. Now I get it. They wanted to see if I got this, uh, what do you call it? Nail what?

Ben: *(pauses, realizes he's been played)* Nail avulsion. *(to Michael)* Then as he left he said something that really hurt.

Norm: You know, your father was right. You're not very smart.

Norm exits.

Ben: So there you have it. Obviously, I was set up. But why would Norm do that? He was one of Pop's best friends. He's here to help not hurt me, right?

Michael: Let me sit.

Michael sits on the sofa thinking. He then closes his eyes and shakes his head as he begins to conjecture what might have happened.

Michael: Unless...

Ben: Unless what? Talk! Unless what?

Michael: *(pause)* Unless Pops conspired with Norm to do you in.

Ben: You're insane. He wouldn't do that. What father on this planet would do such a thing?

Act III

Scene 1.

The waiting room at a prison. There is a long table with two chairs on either side. A prison guard stands more or less at attention. Michael paces the room waiting for Ben to enter.

Guard: He'll be out shortly.

Michael: Good. I haven't seen him in almost a year. How's he doing?

Guard remains silent.

He look OK? Lose any weight?

Guard stays silent .Ben enters wearing prison garb.

Ben: Michael!

Michael: Ben!

They are about to hug.

Guard: No touching!

Ben and Michael drop their arms.

Ben: Let's sit down.

They sit across from each other.

Ben: How's mom?

Michael: She's doing fine. We're just waiting for you to get out.

Ben: I'll visit right after my release. Tell her that. And how you doing? How's Jenny?

Michael: Everything's fine. Don't worry about me. How you doing?

Ben: You can't see? I'm at the Ritz. How you think I'm doing?

Michael: Three more months. You can do it. Try to stay strong.

Ben: You plan to see Norm?

Michael: I'm thinking about it.

Ben: I'm gonna kill him when I get out.

Michael: No, you're not. You're gonna take care of your family, find a job, and get your life back.

Ben: What life? I lost my license. I can't practice anywhere.

Michael: You'll find something.

Ben: What- greeter at Walmart?

Michael: Don't worry about that. Just concentrate on getting out.

Ben: I know. *(pause)* Hard to believe, huh? I was Pop's golden boy. Now look at me. You get to walk and I go back into this hell. When you seeing Sherry?

Michael: We're all going out for dinner tomorrow night.

Ben: Good. Just tell 'em I love 'em very much.

Michael: They know that.

Ben: Try to see Norm. I want to know what he says.

Michael: Alright.

Guard: Time!

Michael: It's not much longer. You can do it. I'll be here the day you get out. I promise.

Both stand.

Ben: Thanks. You're the best.

Michael: Shmuck, I love you.

Ben: I love you too.

The guard walks Ben back to his jail cell. Michael and Ben wave goodbye.

Scene 2.

An elderly secretary sits at a desk squinting at a computer screen, typing slowly. Norm Singer sits at his desk which is divided from the secretary's office space. He wears a long sleeve white shirt and tie. A sports jacket hangs over his chair. He reads some report and turns pages. Michael enters. He wears slacks and a sports jacket.

Secretary: Can I help you?

Michael: Yes, my name is Harold Kasner. My family just moved into the area and we're looking to join a synagogue. I was hoping I could speak to your president if he or she's available.

Secretary: Just a moment.

She calls Norm on an intercom. Norm answers.

Norm: Yes?

Secretary: There's a young man who'd like to see you. He just moved into the area and is interested in becoming a member.

Norm: Good. Tell him to wait. I'll be right there. What's his name?

Secretary: *(to Michael)* What's your name?

Michael: Harold Kasner.

Secretary: *(to Norm)* Harold Kasner.

Norm: Thanks.

Norm puts on his sport jacket and straightens his tie. The secretary opens a small bottle of Wipe-Out and applies it to the computer screen. Michael notices.

Michael: I'm sorry, you can't erase with White Out. Here let me show you.

Michael leans over desk and hits a key on the computer keyboard.

You hit this key. It will erase what you typed.

Secretary: Thank you. This is all very new to me. I think I need to take a course.

Norm opens the door.

Norm: Mr. Kasner, please come in.

Michael: Thank you.

Michael enters Norm's office.

Norm: I'm Norm Singer, president of the synagogue. My secretary tells me you just moved into the area. Please take a seat.

Michael: Thank you.

Michael sits across from Norm.

Norm: Where are you from if I may ask?

Michael: Philadelphia.

Norm: Philly! I had a great friend there. Died a few years ago. Maybe you know him? Sy Finberg? Had a mom and pop store in the Kensington area if I remember. Forty years at the same location. Can you believe it? I kept telling him, "Sy, you got two sons. Expand!" Never did. Could have had an empire by now.

Michael: Mr. Singer. I knew Sy Finberg

Norm: Really? How did you know him?

Michael: I'm his son, Michael.

Norm: Oh.

They look at each other. There's a long pause.

Well, *(pause)* how's your mom?

Michael: Good.

Norm: Her health?

Michael: Good.

Norm: Happy to hear it. Important to stay active as you get older. And how you doing? I think your father said you were a teacher. Is that right?

Michael: Yes.

Norm: What grade?

Michael: First.

Norm: First? That must be quite a challenge.

Michael: It is.

Norm: Yeah, your father never stopped talking about you boys. Michael this, Ben that. He was really proud of you kids. I'm sorry I only got to Philly once after the war. I think you were about five and your brother was just born.

Michael: Yes, I remember that.

Norm: So sorry your father passed. I wanted to attend the funeral but it was too hard to get away. I really loved that man. I'm sure you know we were in the army together. You

should have seen him then. Short, but very strong. 'specially those legs. Could have been a fullback. Yeah, I'll never forget. Soon after the war ended we were given a week pass. So your father and I went to Paris. The things we did there (*laughs then serious*) But that's not why you're here.

Michael: No.

Norm: How's he doing?

Michael: He'll be out in three months.

Norm: Happy to hear that. He's a good kid.

Michael: He's not a kid.

Norm: I know. So what do you want?

Michael: The truth.

Norm: Whether I had something to do with Ben getting in trouble?

Michael: That's right.

Norm: Like maybe I set him up which you're probably thinking.

Michael: That's what we think. Did you?

Norm stands and moves to where Michael is sitting.

Norm: Alright, (*sarcastically*) Mr. Kasner. I suppose I could say no and ask you leave. (*points to door*) But you're Sy's son so I will answer you. Yes, I set him up.

Michael: Why?

Norm: Why? That's easy. But there's a better question-why would a sharp guy like Ben fall for such an obvious trick? But ok, let's start at the beginning. One day I get a call from your father. Tells me Ben just graduated med school and asks if I could do something for him. Of course I can't refuse your father so I say yes. So there I am at the airport waiting for Ben to arrive, and no offense to your father but I'm expecting someone short, maybe a little heavy set, glasses, you know the type. Then suddenly this tall, handsome young man comes up to me. "Are you Mr. Singer?" he says. I'm in shock. Here I am expecting some nebbish and I'm looking straight at King David. A few months go by, I set up his practice, introduce him to some Hollywood honchos, and before you know it he's *Foot Doctor to the Stars*. Marries a lovely young lady, has two adorable children, and becomes active in the synagogue- so active, in fact, many begin to see him as a future president. All good, right? Except for one thing. You see, I've been skimming off this place for years, and there's no way I can let your brother get near the books.

Michael: So you set him up.

Norm: What choice did I have? Thousands of dollars pass through this place. A tsaddik couldn't resist. Plus you have the idiot secretary, there's money on chairs, on desks, and I'm soon gonna give that up? Well, excuse me, Michael, but blank you. It took me too many years to reach this position and no way am I going to give it up for some young up- start no matter whose son he is. So now the question becomes how do I get rid of him? Well, that wasn't hard. I mean after all I had done for him, he simply couldn't refuse to help me out.

Michael: Falsifying medical reports.

Norm: That's right. Probably thought I was helping out of some sense of kindness or something to do with your father.

Michael: That's what he thought.

Norm: I know and had he been anything less none of this would have happened. But he simply posed too much of a threat. Anyway, it worked. He filed some false claims, I contacted the authorities, and he was gone. I just don't understand how Ben could have fallen for it and so easily.

Michael: He was afraid you'd steer business away from him. You threatened as much.

Norm: Pure bluff. I couldn't even if I wanted. He was too popular and rumors had been spreading about me for years. Anyway, like you said, he'll be out in a few months.

Michael stands, grabs the lapels of Norm's sports jacket.

Michael: Then what? You ruined his life!

Norm pulls Michael's hands down.

Norm: Better he should ruin mine? *(points)* Let me explain something to you and I'm surprised your father never told you this. People like me are everywhere. We burrow into different organizations, establish ourselves as men of honor, then when no-one's looking or maybe when everyone's looking we steal.

Michael: And you call yourself a Jew?

Norm: That's right. The best there is, buddy boy- a survivor. Hey, don't be so naïve. Let me ask *you* something. Did you ever wonder how your father was able to afford a middle-class life style selling crap? How'd he do it? Huh? Had a good home, drove a nice car, put you boys through college, one through med school. How'd he do it?

Michael: He worked hard.

Norm: You're as dumb as your brother. *(mockingly)* He worked hard.

Michael: Then you tell me.

Norm: He cheated! They all did. You had to or you would never get anywhere. It was all cash and carry in those days so you under-reported your income. *(laughs)* He worked hard. *(laughs then serious)* Why do you think your father wanted that store so much, huh? He graduated with a degree in accounting. You understand? Accounting. Imagine with that kind of knowledge in a cash and carry business that place became a goldmine. So don't start questioning me about being Jewish. You want your Jewish pure, join a yeshiva. I prefer *real* life. Anything else? I have to get to a Shiva soon.

Michael: One last question.

Norm: What?

Michael: *(pause)* Did my father have anything to do with it?

Norm: You mean with your brother?

Michael: Yes.

Norm: Why would you think that?

Michael: I just want to know.

Norm: No and what a strange question. *(pause)* Let me tell you a story about your father then I must get going. You know we fought in the war together. Anyway, one night your father and I were sent on patrol, just the two of us. We were coming around the side of a church and there we were face to face with a German soldier. *(recreates*

scene) Your father had his gun out so he had the drop on him. All he had to do was shoot. Your father looks him in the eye and with his gun (*makes waving away motion*) waves him away. I said, "Sy, why'd you do that? You let him get away." He didn't say anything and we never spoke about that again. That's the kind of man your father was-a lot of bark but basically a decent man. Feel better now?

Michael: Yes.

Norm: I know your father didn't treat your mother very well and what he did to your Aunt Goldie was terrible. But, well, life goes on. Anyway, it was good seeing you and if you think of going to the police I have my tracks covered.

Michael: Maybe I'm wearing a wire.

Norm: No you're not. Nice Jewish boys don't do that. Anyway, give my best to your mom.

Michael stands up. Norm puts on his jacket.

And give my best to Ben. (*pause*) No, maybe not. The secretary will see you out.

Scene 3.

Michael and Rita are standing in Rita's kitchen stage right. She is making coffee. There is a plate of Danish in the center of the table. Stage left is a restaurant table with four chairs. The table is covered with a white table cloth and place settings. Menus are stacked in the middle of the table.

Michael: (*shouts*) Come on, everything's ready.

Ben: (*off stage*) Be right there.

Ben enters the kitchen.

Michael: There he is. *Foot Doctor to the Felons.*

Ben: *(amusingly)* Shut up.

Rita: Leave him alone. Let's just be thankful we're all together.

Michael and Ben sit. Rita pours each coffee and sits. Each takes a Danish from the plate.

Michael: Have you given any thought what you might do?

Ben: I don't know. I mean there's always Israel. I think I can practice there.

Rita: Oh, so now it's Israel? California's not far enough?

Ben: I'm just thinking. Nothing's definite. I just need to recover. How 'bout you?

Rita: Didn't Michael tell you? I'm getting a cat.

Ben: Good. *(to Michael)* How's school?

Michael: I'm having problems with my principal. He wants me to do certain things in class which I don't agree with.

Ben: What are you gonna do about it?

Michael: Bend down and pucker up.

Ben: That's it? You're not gonna fight?

Michael: I can't.

Ben: Hey, where's all those high-minded ideals?

Michael: Got lost in a paycheck I'm afraid.

Ben: Yeah. I know all about that.

There is an uncomfortable pause as all drink and eat. Michael puts his hand over Ben's hand.

Michael: You'll be fine.

Ben: Thanks.

All eat and drink.

Michael: Mom, do you ever think about those Sunday dinners at the diner?

Rita: All the time. 7 o'clock sharp. Oh, how your father got so angry if either you boys came late.

Sy slowly enters stage left and stands midway between the kitchen and the restaurant table.

Ben: I remember.

Rita, Michael, and Ben stand and walk towards the restaurant table. Sy meets them.

Sy: *(to Michael and Ben)* Why can't the two of you ever get here on time?

Waiter enters.

Waiter: How many?

Sy: Four.

Waiter leads them to the table.

Waiter: Here you are. I'll be back in a few minutes to take your order. Menus are on the table.

Sy: Thank you.

Waiter exits.

OK. Ben, you sit over there *(points)*. Michael, there *(points)*. Your mother will sit here and I'll sit next to your mother.

All sit. They pass around the menus and look what to order.

Ben, you know what you want?

Ben: I think I'll get veal cutlet parmigiana.

Sy: What-veal cutlet's not good enough? You don't need the cheese. If you want something on top you can get more tomato sauce. There's no charge for that. How 'bout you, Michael?

Michael: I think I'll have chopped sirloin.

Sy: Good. *(to Ben)* See, now that's ordering like a normal human being.

All look at Sy as Sy looks peacefully at the table. Lights fade.

End of play

