

# Renovations

by  
Keith McGregor

Copyright  
Keith McGregor  
P.O. Box 849  
Monroe, WA 98272  
360-668-8304  
[gunnera2@earthlink.net](mailto:gunnera2@earthlink.net)

# Cast of Characters

(In order of appearance)

**Connie Smith** – A novice real estate agent. Any adult age.

**Joseph McReynolds** (58) – Something of a “good old boy.” He is smart and successful, but his life has gone fairly sour over the last several years.

**Edna Brogan** (At least 70) – A nosey, wise, somewhat eccentric, wonderful old lady. Lovable, and usually right.

**Alice Brogan** (40’s) – Edna’s daughter-in-law. Stylish and attractive, but hard and not super bright. A very domineering wife.

**Ann Levering** (Early to mid 20’s) – Bright, likeable, attractive, educated.

**Rick Adamson** (Around 30) – A drifter. Intelligent, but a determined dropout; unwilling to adapt.

**Edward Brogan** (40’s) – Edna’s son. He’s an engineer, a mama’s boy, and a hen-pecked husband.

**Sam Jackson** (Mid to late 40’s) – Joe’s business manager, and his friend. More comfortable in a hard hat than a business suit.

# Synopsis

Approaching 60, Joseph McReynolds is a successful man with failing health and an empty life. He owns a prosperous construction company and has everything that money can buy, but very little else. To kill some time while waiting to die, he decides to try something he's always wanted to do—buy a big old house and fix it up.

**Renovations** is the story of what happens when he finds just the right house: a dilapidated ante-bellum style mansion in a run-down section of town. It is also the story of three other people who become involved in the renovation project. There's Edna Brogan, a meddlesome old biddy-body neighbor who turns out to be a wonderful little old lady; Rick Adamson, a drifter who breaks into the house one night and ends up being hired by Joe to work on the project; and Ann Levering, who is Rick's travelling companion.

Joe attempts to create a surrogate family for himself, using these three people. When Edna's son and daughter-in-law want to put her into an old folk's home, he hires her as his housekeeper and lets her move into the house. He also attempts to remold Rick; offering to bring him into the construction business once the renovation project is complete. A confirmed dropout, Rick resists Joe's efforts; while Ann, who longs for a more stable life than she has with Rick, watches their conflict with concern.

To quote from the Houston Post review of the play, "Everybody's life gets renovated in some way, and although everyone doesn't live happily ever after, they do live wiser ever after. **Renovations'** finale may not be as sweet or 'Isn't that nice?' comforting as those in popular fairytales and TV situation comedies, but it is a lot more realistic and true-to-life."

## Time and Place

The play is contemporary. The action is set in an unspecified southern metropolitan area, over the course of a summer.

# The Setting

The play takes place in the front parlor and entry hall of an old mansion in a run-down, inner-city neighborhood of any southern metropolitan area that's old enough to have such homes. The house, built in 1912, is a pseudo-Victorian interpretation of the Colonial Georgian style mansions popular in the South before the Civil War. It is vacant and has been on the real estate market for almost two years.

The entry hall is upstage right, elevated several steps above the parlor, and it is visible through a wide archway. The front door is off to stage right, probably invisible to all or most of the audience, although the door itself may be visible when it is opened. At the back of the entry hall, going off left, a flight of stairs—partially visible to the audience—goes up to the second floor. Downstage of the stairway a hall leads off left to the rear of the house. In the back wall of the entry hall, centered in the archway, is a large, translucent, stained glass window.

In the parlor there are French doors in the stage right wall that open onto the front porch. They are covered with tattered sheers and faded old drapes. Outside, there are shutters. A fireplace with an elaborate mantle is in the stage left wall of the parlor. Upstage of the fireplace is a swinging door that leads off to the dining room, and on through to the kitchen. In the upstage wall of the parlor, two or three wide steps lead up to the entry hall. To the left of the entry archway, there are built-in bookcases with cabinets below them.

The walls of the house are wainscoted up to a chair rail. Around the top of the walls is a heavy, dark wood cornice molding. On either side of the archway opening, there is a square wooden column. Spaced around the walls are pilasters which copy the design of the columns and which break up the walls into a number of inset panel sections.

At the beginning of the play, these inset panels are covered with faded, worn, spotted wallpaper in shades of tan or beige, and the drapes are also beige or light brown. There is no color on the set except the stained glass window. At the act break, the panel inserts are replaced to suggest the repainting of the walls to a lighter, brighter color—perhaps a pale blue.

The play is about the renovation of the house and the rejuvenation of several of the characters. It is important that, as much as possible, the set go from a faded, colorless, lifeless, "dead" beginning to being, by the end, full of color and life. The wall inserts, the drapes, the furnishings—all should work to bring the house back to life.

ACT I Scene 1

I-i-1

(The front parlor of a large, old, run down, vacant house, which was once quite a showplace—see the set description for full description. In the darkness the stained glass window in the rear wall of the entry begins to glow, casting the set into silhouette. Each scene of the play should begin with this effect. More lights come up on the set dimly. After a moment, we hear the sound of someone unlocking the front door. The door opens and a shaft of harsh sunlight pours through the entry. **CONNIE SMITH**, a novice real estate agent, enters, calling over her shoulder.)

CONNIE

Careful. That porch has some soft spots.

(She moves into the room, crossing to the French doors. **JOSEPH McREYNOLDS** (58) enters, wearing casual slacks, a short sleeved dress shirt and a tie. He pauses in the entry, then moves into the space, looking around. Connie opens the French doors and outside shutters, letting in a good bit of light. Outside we see part of the front porch and possibly some overgrown shrubbery.)

Needs work, but it could be spectacular—a real showplace. Isn't it wonderful? I mean, it could be. They had a problem with vagrants a while back. But the woodwork is beautiful. The old lady was a real fanatic—spring cleaning every month. But she couldn't afford to keep up with the big stuff. As you saw, it needs a roof. The porches have to be replaced. Fresh paint. And you'll probably want to update the fixtures. Some of them are ancient. You won't believe the stove.

JOE

Wood burning?

CONNIE

Wha...? (she chuckles) Oh, no, not quite that ancient. I think it's gas.

JOE

Best thing in the world for cooking. When was it built?

CONNIE

Nineteen-twelve. They added the garage in thirty-eight.

JOE

How long's it been on the market?

CONNIE

Over a year...almost two actually. But it's a great buy. It's just that nobody who can afford it wants to live in this neighborhood.

JOE

What's wrong with the neighborhood?

CONNIE

Nothing. Nothing at all. ...Some people just can't see the opportunity that's here waiting for them. I mean it really is a wonderful old place, isn't it?

JOE

Miss Smith... How long have you been selling real estate?

CONNIE

...I...I've had my license almost a year.

JOE

So you do know about the full disclosure laws in this state?

CONNIE

...Yes.

JOE

Good. I'll ask again. What's wrong with the neighborhood?

CONNIE

Nothing. Honestly. It's run down; you saw that. But lots of folks are buying up these old places—fixing them up. It'll be wonderful again, when it's all redone.

JOE

Nothing else?

CONNIE

Well...the crime statistics run...a little high.

JOE

I know about that. Anything else?

CONNIE

Well...

(**EDNA BROGAN** enters through the open French doors. Edna is probably in her seventies; but, whatever her age, she is still full of life—active, energetic, and intentionally eccentric. She wears a print house dress and a straw hat. She walks with a cane that is mostly for effect, and carries a large, old, fabric handbag.)

EDNA

Brought another one, have you?

CONNIE

Mrs. Brogan, you know you're not supposed to be here.

EDNA

I was visiting in this house before you were born. Him too. I'll feel welcome here till I'm dead and buried.

CONNIE

We're busy. Why don't you go on home and leave us alone?

EDNA

'Cause I don't feel like it. I want to have a nice, neighborly chat with this gentleman. Know some things he just might want to hear.

CONNIE

Look, we've been nice. If I have to get your daughter-in-law again, I'm gonna' call our lawyer, and the police.

EDNA

Suit yourself.

CONNIE

(To Joe) Sorry. It's the only way to get rid of her. You want to come along?

JOE

No. I'll wait here.

CONNIE

(She gives him a look as she heads for the French doors.)

Suit yourself. Be back as soon as I can.

EDNA

Oh, would you please tell Alice to bring some cokes? It's warm today.

(Connie gives an exasperated sigh and exits. Edna crosses to the French doors, closes and locks them. She looks around, checking the condition of the place. Joe watches here and waits patiently.)

JOE

(Finally) ...Well?

EDNA

(Touching the old drapes by the French doors.)

If Louise saw this place she'd be just sick.

JOE  
Who's Louise?

EDNA  
The lady who used to own this house.

JOE  
Thought she was dead.

EDNA  
She is. You don't think she'd let this place go to the dogs like this if she weren't?  
Not on your life.

JOE  
Not that bad. A few boards, a good cleanup, fresh paint—be good as new.

EDNA  
It's already better than new. Have you looked at that tinker-toy trash they're  
throwing together these days?

JOE  
(With a chuckle) Yes. I'm a contractor.

EDNA  
Then you know a good thing when you see it. Gonna' buy it?

JOE  
Considering it.

EDNA  
What for?

JOE  
I don't know. Sort of a hobby, I guess.

EDNA  
Mighty expensive hobby.

JOE  
Something I've always wanted to do—buy a big old house; fix it up.

EDNA  
How big's your family?

(Bad question. Joe is immediately cooler, more distant)



JOE  
...Just me.

EDNA  
This place is too big for one person.

JOE  
I'm used to living by myself.

EDNA  
Bachelor or widower?

JOE  
...Divorced.

EDNA  
I'm sorry. (She can't leave it alone) ...How long?

JOE  
Four years.

EDNA  
Kids?

JOE  
...None.  
(Joe is more irritated than should be expected)  
Look, if you're taking a census, I'm fifty-eight, I own a construction company, a house, a car, and a bad heart. Anything else you want to know?  
(Edna doesn't respond. Joe is immediately sorry for his outburst.)  
...Sorry. That wasn't called for.

EDNA  
Sure it was. Meddlin' where I had no business. You want a drink?

JOE  
...Scotch rocks if you've got one handy.

EDNA  
Sorry. No Scotch, no rocks; but I've got some Old Crow that'll get your attention.  
  
(Edna pulls a pint from her bag and offers it to Joe. He gestures for her to go first. She does so, delicately, but with obvious relish. Then she offers the bottle to Joe. He takes it, drinks, and coughs.)

JOE

God, it's been forty years since I had a slug of hot liquor out of a bottle like that.

EDNA

(Pulling a breath spray from her bag and using it)

Brings back some nice memories, doesn't it?

JOE

Shame on you.

EDNA

Shame on me? Shame on you for knowing what I was thinking.

JOE

Mrs. Brogan...

EDNA

Call me Edna.

JOE

I'm Joe. Joe McReynolds.

EDNA

May I call you Joey? Always liked that name.

JOE

I feel awfully old to have anyone calling me Joey.

EDNA

Nonsense. Haven't you heard? You're only as old as you feel.

JOE

Then I died last week. ...That sounded a lot funnier before I heard myself say it.

EDNA

You mean it?

JOE

No, of course not. I... (A thought) You know, you remind me of my shrink.

EDNA

Shrink? You sound fine to me.

JOE

Shows how much you know. I've spent a small fortune on a snotty young psychiatrist who is desperately trying to convince me that life is worth living.

EDNA

'Course life's worth living. What else can you do with it?

(Joe chuckles, in spite of himself.)

How bad's your heart?

JOE

Jesus; nothing gets by you.

EDNA

My hearing is still quite good. What about your heart?

JOE

Had a minor attack last year. Doctor said I should slow down, take life easier.

EDNA

Fixing up this place'll be hard work.

JOE

What I can't handle, I'll hire someone to do.

EDNA

You talk like a rich man. Are you?

JOE

Done all right.

EDNA

So now you plan to run your business, renovate this place, and take it easy—all at the same time.

JOE

No. Got myself a manager. Sam Jackson. Been one of my crew chiefs for fifteen years. Knows the company as well as I do. It's his headache now. ...So, tell me about this place.

EDNA

Well, upstairs there are four bedrooms, with two...

JOE

Whoah! I can count rooms myself. What's it really like?

EDNA

It's a fairy castle—a place where dreams can still live. Been evicted most everywhere else.

JOE

Nobody can afford 'em anymore. When you get right down to it, it's downright depressing what money won't buy. Dreams, long life, love, happiness.

EDNA

Money can buy happiness. You just have to know how to use it. Take you, buying this house—something that will make you happy.

JOE

No. Something that will help me kill some time.

EDNA

Then you don't belong here.

JOE

I don't belong anywhere. Somebody else is running my company. Somebody else is married to my wife. 'Fore long somebody else will be spending my money—what's left after estate taxes.

EDNA

My, aren't we feeling morbid all of a sudden.

JOE

Worst part is—after working so damn hard all my life, there's nobody I really want to leave anything to.

EDNA

If you're plannin' to kick off in the near future, I'll take some.

JOE

(Amused, in spite of himself) How much you want?

EDNA

How much you got?

(Connie and another woman, **ALICE BROGAN**, appear outside the French doors. Alice, around 40, is attractive, but hard. She is dressed in jeans, a colorful top, and expensive cowboy boots. Connie tries to open them and discovers they're locked.)

CONNIE

(Offstage) She's locked it.

ALICE

(Offstage) Well, get it open—now! What do you mean, leaving my mama alone with a strange man? (Alice tries to look in.) Mama, Mama, are you all right?

EDNA

God, that woman! You'd think my son would have loved me enough to marry a girl with more class.

(The women disappear from the French doors, heading for the front entrance.)

Joey, I've made my mind up. You're the right person for this place. And I want to help. Not much with a hammer, but I'm still pretty good with a sewing machine.

JOE

If I buy it, you're on.

(The front door opens and Alice rushes in, followed by Connie.)

ALICE

Mama, are you all right? What's been going on in here?

EDNA

I'll never tell.

JOE

We were just talking.

ALICE

You mean she wasn't bothering you?

JOE

No. She's wonderful company.

EDNA

Thank you, kind Sir.

ALICE

(Turning back to Connie, on the attack.)

You hear that? He liked talking to her! When the police get here, you better have a good excuse ready for them.

CONNIE

I'm sorry, but I...

ALICE

Don't tell me you're sorry! Bustin' in on my pinochle game! Embarrassing me in front of my friends! Callin' my sweet mother-in-law a public nuisance! I ought to sue you! Your company too!

CONNIE

But, Mrs. Brogan...

ALICE

“But Mrs. Brogan” nothin’! We’re leaving. I don’t intend to have my mama here when the police arrive.

(To Edna, excessively sweetly)

Mama, I think it’s time we went home. Don’t you?

EDNA

Where are the Coca-Colas I asked her to tell you to bring?

ALICE

(Moving Edna toward the entry, trying to guide her out.)

Sorry. She didn’t say anything about Cokes. Well, uh, it was nice to meet you, Mister...

JOE

McReynolds. Joe McReynolds.

EDNA

Bye, Joey. Hope I see you again.

JOE

We’ll see. Take care.

(Edna and Alice move into the entry area, almost out.)

ALICE

(As they go out) Mama, you cannot keep comin’ over here anytime you see people here. That woman called the police. They could have put you in jail.

EDNA

I’d just like to see ‘em try. I’d work somebody’s head over with this stick.

(They’re gone. Connie moves up and closes the front door.)

CONNIE

Sorry ‘bout that. Hope she didn’t chew your ears off.

JOE

(Smiling to himself) She didn’t.

CONNIE

That’s the problem I didn’t know how to tell you about. She lives down the street, in the next block; only bothers this house. Apparently she knew the owner. The old bat should be put away, for her own good.

(Convinced that the sale is a lost cause at this point.)

Well...I can show you around, if you’re still interested.

JOE

I am.

CONNIE

(Surprised at his positive response, she is a bit flustered.)

...Let's see, this is the front parlor.

(Moving to the connecting door.)

Through here is the dining room. Big enough for a table that seats twelve.  
Beyond that is the kitchen, with...

JOE

I'll take it.

CONNIE

...full pantry and utility... You'll take it?

JOE

Yep.

CONNIE

But you haven't even looked at it.

JOE

I've seen enough. It's what I want.

CONNIE

...Great! Well, if you'd like we can go down to the office, start the paperwork.

JOE

Stan—my lawyer—will call you this afternoon.

CONNIE

Fine. You know, I thought this place might be just right for you. But when Old Lady Brogan barged in... She's scared off a lot of prospects. Not you, though. You want the place in spite of the old screwball.

JOE

(With an odd smile) I wouldn't exactly say, "in spite of."

(Connie gives him a curious look. Joe chuckles to himself. The actors freeze as the lights quickly fade to just the stained glass window, casting the actors in silhouette for a moment before it fades to black. This effect should repeat at the end of each scene.)

End of Act I scene 1

(The light behind the stained glass window comes up, followed by the rest of the lights. It is early morning, some weeks later, shortly after the closing on the purchase of the house. On the floor stage left is a sleeping bag, obviously occupied, although the occupant is evidently fairly small. Beside the sleeping bag are a duffle bag, a pair of faded, cut off blue jeans, a partially empty jug of cheap wine and two coffee mugs. The downstage French door is partially open and a pane of glass near the handle has been broken. Joe enters quietly through the French door. He wears slacks and a short sleeved, pullover shirt, not tucked in. He carries a flashlight and a thermos. Joe steps inside cautiously, taking a moment to study the broken pane in the French doors. Putting the thermos down, but keeping the flashlight as a weapon, he crosses and stands over the sleeping figure.)

JOE

Hey.

(No response. He nudges the bag with his foot.)

Come on, fella, wake up.

(He nudges harder. The sleeping bag jerks and **ANN LEVERING** peeks out. Ann is in her early to mid 20's.)

Jesus! You're a girl! Hey, listen, I'm sorry. I didn't mean anything, with my foot, I mean. Just trying to wake you up.

ANN

Where's Rick?

JOE

That his Harley outside?

ANN

Yeah.

JOE

Must not have gone far. ...Coffee?

ANN

(Surprised by the offer) ...Please.

JOE

You got a cup or something?

ANN

Uh, yeah.



(She points out the mugs, grabs her shorts and disappears into the bag to dress. Joe gets her mug, looks at it and grimaces. He pours the dregs of the wine into the other mug, and moves back to his thermos. He sits on the steps and pours coffee for her, pouring some for himself into the lid of the thermos. As he does this, he watches the movement of her getting dressed in the sleeping bag with amusement.)

JOE

It's decaffeinated. That's all they let me have anymore. But it's hot.

ANN

(From inside the bag) Sounds wonderful.

JOE

It's not, but better'n nothing.

(Ann comes out of the sleeping bag, dressed in shorts and a top that she must have been sleeping in. She finds her brush and quickly brushes her hair as the scene continues.)

You and...Rick been here long?

ANN

Just since last night.

JOE

Didn't your folks ever tell you it's wrong to break into other people's houses?

ANN

No place else to go. It was late.

JOE

Given those circumstances, most folks might find a motel.

(He holds out the mug of coffee for her. She takes it.)

ANN

Thanks. No money.

JOE

So you checked in here instead.

ANN

We didn't hurt anything.

JOE

I take it the storm broke that window?

(He nods at the broken pane in the French doors.)

ANN

Rick did. But he'll pay for it.

JOE

With what? You're broke, remember?

ANN

We've got a little. Not enough for motels. Look, I'll get us packed. We'll go the minute Rick gets back.

JOE

No rush. Enjoy your coffee.

ANN

You really aren't upset, are you?

JOE

(Casually, friendly) I'm mad as hell. Can't you tell?

ANN

You have an unusual way of showing it.

JOE

I'm a very calm person. Have to be—doctor's orders. And my name's Joe.

ANN

I'm Ann.

JOE

You guys on some kind of cheapie vacation, or what?

ANN

"Or what." (Joe looks at her questioningly.) We're like what James Michener romantically calls "drifters." Believe me, there's nothing romantic about it.

JOE

Then why do you "drift"?

ANN

It's what Rick wants to do.

JOE

Just passing through, or gonna' be here a while?

ANN

The money's low. He's been talking about getting a job.

Just like that, huh? JOE

He'll find one. Always does. ANN

What is he? Itinerant brain surgeon? JOE

Better. Manual labor. Road work, construction, landscaping. Anything he can get. ANN  
When he gets tired of it, we move on.

Sounds like a hell of a way to live. JOE  
(Ann shrugs, noncommittally. Joe changes the subject.)  
What do you think of this place?

It's beautiful. ANN

It will be, when I'm done. JOE

You gonna' fix it up? ANN

Yep, a complete renovation. JOE

Somebody's actually going to live here again? ANN

Yep... JOE

(Their conversation is interrupted by **RICK ADAMSON**, who rushes in through the open French door. Rick is around 30. He's not a big guy—he is trim & in good physical shape. He carries a newspaper and a small grocery sack.)

Ann! Are you OK? RICK

I'm fine, no thanks to you. Where'd you go? ANN

RICK

To get food, and a paper. Came back, saw the van... Was afraid that...

ANN

This is Joe.

JOE

(Friendly, extending his hand) Howdi. Coffee?

RICK

(Ignoring Joe) He the only one?

ANN

Relax. Joe won't tell anyone we're here.

RICK

(To Joe, suspiciously) Why not?

JOE

(Still amiable) 'Cause I don't feel like it. Good enough?

RICK

(Antagonistic) I don't think so.

ANN

Rick!

JOE

(Gradually losing his sense of humor with this guy.)

Good enough for me. You want the coffee or not?

RICK

Were you awake when he came in?

ANN

No, he woke me up.

RICK

Probably after he called the pigs. Get packed.

(Rick moves quickly to begin collecting their gear. He puts the jug of wine into the duffel bag, then takes his mug, drinks the dregs and grimaces, and puts it into the duffel bag too.)

JOE

What's the rush? Let the lady finish her coffee.

RICK

You're stalling, aren't you? Till the pigs get here.

JOE

You call 'em? I didn't.

RICK

Then how come you're acting so damn funny?

ANN

Rick!

JOE

(No longer amused) 'Cause I'm a clown. How the hell am I supposed to act? I walk up, find a broken window, and...

RICK

I'll pay for the glass! (Pulling out his wallet) How much you want?

JOE

That's not the point.

RICK

How much?! (No response) Here's twenty—keep the change.  
(He holds it out. Joe doesn't take it, so Rick throws it down.)

Let's go!

ANN

But Rick...

RICK

Last night you were scared of comin' in here—didn't want to end up in jail. Change your mind? (Before she can respond) Grab the rest. I'll load...  
(He starts out.)

JOE

(Finally losing his temper)

Listen here, you jackass! I haven't called the police, yet. But you leave here now, and I will. I will file a complaint, and you will end up in jail. You understand me?

RICK

What's the deal, Man? Give us two minutes—we're gone. Why the hell are you doing this?

(Joe really hasn't stopped to figure out his own motivation here. He tries to make light of the whole thing.)

JOE

I...I just don't want to see your lady here miss out on a cup of coffee that she seems to be enjoying an awful lot.

RICK

You're weird, Mister. Real weird.

JOE

Maybe.

RICK

(To Ann) All right! Drink your damn coffee! Then can we leave?

ANN

Soon as you apologize to Joe.

RICK

For what?

ANN

(Smiling sweetly) Being such a jackass.

JOE

I tell you what. I'm going back to where I offered you my hand and a cup of coffee. This time I suggest you take the hand. The coffee's optional.

(Joe offers his hand. Rick crosses to shake hands.)

ANN

Apologize.

RICK

(A pause. When he finally says it, he means it.) ...Sorry.

JOE

Now, what about that coffee?

RICK

I'll pass.

ANN

You guys through butting horns?

JOE

(Chuckling) I hope so.

(Rick nods affirmatively, with a grin.)

ANN

Great. (Picking up the bill) Who gets the twenty?

RICK

He does.

JOE

Forget it. Got glass in the van. Won't take ten minutes to fix it.

RICK

Want me to do it?

JOE

Think you can get it in right?

RICK

Sure. Nothing around a house that I haven't built or fixed at one time or another.

JOE

Is that so? Ok, why not?

RICK

(Moving toward the French doors.) You say the stuff's in the van?

JOE

I'll have to dig it out for you. Let me finish my coffee first.

ANN

What'd you get to eat? I'm starving.

RICK

Cinnamon rolls.

ANN

Want one? (She grabs the sack—going for a roll.)

JOE

No thanks.

(Ann looks at her mug, and holds it out, asking for more.)

You overdose on this stuff, don't blame me.

(He pours more coffee into her mug, and then for himself.)

RICK

You caretaker here, or what?

JOE

Well...

ANN

(Cutting him off.) He's here to fix it up. People are going to live here again.

RICK

You a contractor?

JOE

Uh, actually I am. But...

RICK

Has the son-of-a-bitch got the money to do it right?

JOE

Who?

RICK

The owner. You're not going to have to do a half-assed job, are you?

JOE

No, I plan to give it the works. Say, Rick... How come you call the owner a son-of-a-bitch? Do you know him?

RICK

No, but he's rich, right?

JOE

...Pretty well off.

RICK

If he can afford this place, he's rich. And if he's rich, he's either a crook or a son-of-a-bitch. I was giving him the benefit of the doubt.

JOE

You want to explain the logic there?

ANN

Joe, don't get him started—please.

JOE

I want to hear it.

RICK

OK. A guy's rich, he either made it, inherited it, or stole it. Right?

JOE

Or married it.



RICK

(Ignoring that) If he inherited it, he didn't have a chance. He was born a S.O.B. He'll always be one.

ANN

Sort of like original sin.

RICK

If he stole it, he's a crook. If he made it, as screwed up as things are these days, he's obviously a crook and a son-of-a-bitch.

JOE

(Amused) I guess that explains it.

RICK

What?

JOE

Ann was telling me how you two live—place to place; job to job. I take it you're avoiding any chance of getting rich and becoming a son-of-a-bitch.

(Rick chuckles, realizing that he lost that round, but he enjoyed it anyway. These two men are getting along much better than they have any right to expect.)

RICK

No.

JOE

Then why?

RICK

'Cause I want to.

JOE

You always move on...voluntarily?

RICK

I've been sacked a couple of times. Mostly I just get bored; blow it off.

JOE

All jobs are boring one time or another.

RICK

That's when I quit.

JOE

How long does this process usually take?

RICK

Worked my last job, oh, 'bout four months.

JOE

Got bored?

RICK

Got sick of the smell of tar. Working for a roofer. Got sick of sniffing tar all day so I quit, came here.

JOE

Gonna' stay?

RICK

A while. Got a paper so I can find a job.

JOE

Doing what?

RICK

Anything that looks interesting.

JOE

...Think it'd be interesting working here, for me?

ANN

(Thrilled at the idea) Joe! You mean it?

JOE

Start you at twelve bucks an hour, and you can live here. Probably a good idea—keep out the...vagrants. What do you say?

ANN

He'll do it!

RICK

How's the owner gonna' feel about us living here?

JOE

I'll handle that. (To Ann) Hire you too, if you want. Same pay.

ANN

Honey, let's do it.

What's your time frame? RICK

Couple or three months. Four at the most. JOE

Don't you have a deadline? What's the owner want? RICK

Uh...it's flexible. Said take my time; do it right. JOE

He must have a lot of confidence in you. ANN

Yeah. JOE

What's your budget? RICK

Whatever it takes. JOE

Is he as rich as he sounds? ANN

I guess. JOE

As stupid? RICK

Maybe. You want the job or not? JOE

...We'll give it a shot. RICK

One thing. I want your word you'll see it through. You won't get bored and quit. JOE

What makes you think my word is any good? RICK

Can't hold Ann hostage, so it'll have to do. Got a hunch it will. JOE

...I'll stay.

RICK

(Joe offers his hand again. Rick hesitates, then takes it.)

ANN

When do we start?

JOE

How 'bout right now? Pick out a bedroom, clean it up. There's cleaning stuff in the van.

(Joe tosses Rick the keys. He starts out through the French doors, with Ann following. He opens the second door. Edna is standing just outside, listening. She's wearing a different house dress, with an apron over it, and she has her cane.)

RICK

(Stopping in his tracks, surprised.)

Oh, hello.

JOE

Edna!

EDNA

Joey, it is you. (She moves into the room, crossing to Joe.)

JOE

What were you doing out there?

EDNA

Listening. Saw the van, had to come see who it was.

JOE

It's me. Rick, Ann, this is Edna Brogan. Knows all there is to know about this house.

ANN

Hi.

(Rick nods a greeting.)

EDNA

Nice to meet you.

JOE

They'll be working here.

RICK

We'll get started.

(Rick and Ann exit through the French doors.)

EDNA

Nice kids. Where'd you find 'em?

JOE

They broke in last night, camped out.

EDNA

Not as nice as they look.

JOE

Cup of coffee?

EDNA

Never touch it. Bad for you. (She looks around.) This poor house. When I was a little girl this room used to be so bright. The walls had a rose floral wallpaper, the drapes were salmon and gold brocade, and on the floor was the biggest oriental rug you ever saw.

JOE

Sounds grotesque.

EDNA

It was, but very fashionable. And Louise's bedroom—you should have seen it. She had a passion for green. Lime green. An old woman should never let herself be seen near anything lime green, much less surrounded by it. I came over one morning—Lurlene let me in. Louise was still asleep, so I went up to her bedroom. I walked in and I swear, what with the sun coming through lime green curtains, and Louise lying there in all those lime green bedclothes—the poor woman looked like she'd been dead for weeks. I would have fainted dead away if she hadn't been snoring so loudly.

(Rick and Ann enter. He has a large trash can and two folding chairs. Ann has cleaning stuff: mop, broom, bucket, etc.)

RICK

Thought you might want these. (The chairs)

JOE

Thanks. Set 'em up over there, would you?

(Joe indicates down left. Rick puts down the trash can and quickly sets the chairs up as Joe directed. Then he grabs the tcan and they exit up the stairs. Joe turns back to Edna.)

JOE

They'll be living here. Say—are you in a hurry?

EDNA

A woman my age never hurries.

JOE

Want to go through, tell me how each room used to look?

EDNA

Love to. Remember, I want to help out with drapes and such.

JOE

You're on. Decorating consultant and head seamstress.

EDNA

If you know what you want, I'll start looking for fabric.

JOE

Don't know about the rest yet, but in here I want blue. It'll be perfect with this wood.

EDNA

I'll collect some swatches. You can pick one and I'll start.

JOE

Great. Hey, let me run out to the van and grab a clipboard for notes.

(He exits. Edna moves to sit in one of the folding chairs. Rick and Ann enter to collect their personal things.)

RICK

Where's Joe?

EDNA

Went out to the van.

ANN

Mrs. Brogan...

EDNA

Good grief, child; call me Edna, please.

ANN

How long have you known Joe?

EDNA

Met him earlier this summer, when he came to look at the house. Afraid I was a bit of a pest. I'm so glad he bought it anyway.

RICK

Hey, whoah! You're glad he "bought" it?

EDNA

I was afraid he wouldn't.

ANN

You mean Joe owns this house?

EDNA

What'd you think?

RICK

He said he was a contractor.

EDNA

He is. Owns a big construction company.

RICK

Why that son-of-a-bitch.

EDNA

What?

ANN

Rick, it doesn't make any difference.

RICK

The hell it doesn't!

EDNA

I don't understand.

JOE

(Entering, with a clipboard) Okay, Edna, let's get... What's wrong?

RICK

You're a son-of-a-bitch! That's what's wrong.

JOE

Huh? What happened.

RICK  
Edna told us you own this place.

JOE  
...I see. (Casually, trying damage control) So what?

RICK  
So we're leaving!

JOE  
What difference does it make?

RICK  
You lied.

JOE  
I tried to explain. You didn't give me a chance. And after all that rich folks garbage, I figured I'd wait.

RICK  
How come?

JOE  
I wanted you to take the job.

RICK  
Why?

JOE  
...Hell, I don't know. I just did. Look, I offered you the job. You took it. We shook on it. Far as I'm concerned, it's settled. So, if you're working for me, get out there and unload the van.  
(Rick starts to say something, but decides against it and storms out through the French doors.)

Is he always that hardheaded?

ANN  
(With a grin) Always. Oh well, back to work.  
(She goes back to gathering the sleeping bag & stuff.)

JOE  
(To Edna) What the hell have I gotten myself into?  
(Quick fade to just the stained glass window, then to black.)

End of Act I Scene 2



ACT I Scene 3

I-iii-29

(Friday afternoon, the second week of the project. The room has become sort of an operations center. The two folding chairs are down left, with a crate between them. Stage right, there is a folding card table with a couple of folding chairs. A phone and phone book sit on one of the shelves. Up center there's an ice chest. The light behind the stained glass window comes up, then the rest of the lighting, along with the sounds of the construction—skill saw and hammer. Ann is in the process of setting a step ladder up at the French doors, so that she can take down the old drapes. The French doors are open and through them we hear, but cannot see, Joe and Rick at work, replacing the porch flooring. The two men are enjoying the work and each other's company.)

JOE

(Offstage) Is that square?

RICK

(Offstage) Perfect. Let me anchor this end.  
(The sound of hammer pounding nail.)

EDNA

(Offstage) Joey...

JOE

(Offstage) Hey.

EDNA

(Offstage) Got some swatches for you to look at.

JOE

(Offstage) Go on in. Be there in a minute.

(Edna comes in the front door. Same housedress as last scene, without the apron, with a sweater, cane and purse.)

EDNA

Oh, this is wonderful. I can't wait to see it finished.

ANN

Be done before you know it. Want a coke?

EDNA

(Looking out) Please. How long's Joey been out there with Rick?

ANN

Most of the afternoon.

(Ann gets a coke for Edna, who sits at the card table. She then crosses back to the step ladder, goes up and begins to remove the old drapes. They should be easily removable.)

EDNA

(An aggravated sigh.) Humf. Ought to know better.

(Offstage we hear a hammer pounding and then we hear Rick yell, having pounded his thumb.)

RICK

(Offstage) Ahhh! Dammit!

JOE

(Offstage) You pound that thumb to a pulp, I'm not paying the doctor bills.

RICK

(Offstage) Ah, throw me a couple of nails.

JOE

(Offstage) Let's take a break.

(Rick and Joe enter. Joe heads for the chair beside Edna. Rick goes to the ice chest, sucking his thumb. Both are in work clothes, and sweaty.)

JOE

Get me a coke, will ya'? (Joe sits, pulls out a handkerchief, and wipes his face.)

EDNA

Are you all right?

JOE

Fine.

EDNA

You look awful. It's too hot out there for you. Let Rick finish it.

JOE

Whole lot easier with two.

EDNA

Not if one of them has a heart attack.

(Rick hands Joe a coke, still sucking his thumb.)

Let me see that.

RICK

What? All it is is a purple thumb.

EDNA

I like purple. Now show it to me.

(Rick holds his hand down for her to see. She looks, then  
grabs the thumb and shakes it. He yelps in pain.)

Good, it's not broken. But you did break the skin. Go wash it off with hot water  
and put something on it.

RICK

It's not that...

EDNA

Do it! Now.

ANN

(Stopping work on the drapes, she descends the ladder.)

Come on, before she breaks your head.

RICK

We need to finish the porch.

EDNA

It'll wait. Joey's done for today.

(Joe reacts, turning to argue the point.)

I don't intend to have you get heat stroke or a heart attack, and he's not getting  
gangrene. The work day is over.

RICK

It's only five-thirty!

EDNA

That's late enough, especially on a Friday.

JOE

We'll quit. (To Rick) When you get that taken care of, pick up the tools, will ya'?

RICK

Sure.

(Rick and Ann exit up the stairs.)

EDNA

He seems very happy.

JOE  
Likes what he's doing.

EDNA  
You do too, don't you?

JOE  
Every minute of it.

EDNA  
Thought you were going to let him handle the heavy stuff.

JOE  
I enjoy it.

EDNA  
You slow down, you'll enjoy it a lot longer. (Joe chuckles) Things are moving along.

JOE  
Rick's great. Been putting in ten, twelve hours a day. He loves it. And he's bright—never have to tell him anything twice.

EDNA  
You were lucky to find those two.

JOE  
God, what a contractor he'd make.

EDNA  
(She decides it's a good time to change the subject.)  
Got some swatches for you to look at.  
(She rises, takes her bag, and pulls out an incredible variety of fabric swatches, spreading them out on the table.)  
Didn't know what you wanted—got a piece of everything that'd go with blue.

JOE  
(Selecting one) That one.

EDNA  
What?

JOE  
I want that one for the drapes.

EDNA  
You haven't even looked at the rest.

JOE

Don't need to. See what I want.

EDNA

I spent two days...! You know, I don't think you'd be any fun to shop with at all.

(The doorbell rings.)

JOE

(Calling out) It's open.

(**EDWARD BROGAN** opens the door and enters. He's mid-forties, an engineer/geek, and a Mama's boy. He's in a suit.)

EDNA

Edward! What are you doing here?

EDWARD

Looking for you.

EDNA

(Doing the introductions) Joey, my son, Edward. Joe McReynolds.

EDWARD

Good to meet you, Sir. Since you started, Mother's talked of nothing else.

EDNA

Except an occasional gripe about Alice. What's up?

EDWARD

I'm on my way home. Was hoping you'd come with me. Got some news. I may need your help with Alice.

EDNA

My help? With Alice?

JOE

(Feeling awkward) If you'll excuse me, I'll go...

EDNA

This is your house. If it's too personal, we'll go; not you. (To Edward) Is it?

EDWARD

It's good news; very good news—but I'm afraid Alice won't think so. I've been offered a promotion. (To Joe) I'm a petroleum engineer. Our company does oil well service and support. They want to put me in charge of a new project. It means a big raise.

JOE

Sounds good.

EDNA

Why do you need my help with Alice?

EDWARD

It means we have to move.

EDNA

Wonderful! About time you got out of my house. Where to?

EDWARD

Scotland. The job's in the North Sea. We'll base in Aberdeen.

EDNA

Scotland? Alice in Scotland... (She starts to chuckle; almost giggle.)

JOE

You don't think she'll like it?

EDWARD

She's never been one for strange places.

EDNA

And for Alice, if it's not the South, it's strange.

EDWARD

Come help me tell her.

EDNA

Joey and I have to take measurements for the drapes.

JOE

We can do that tomorrow.

EDNA

We'll do it now. (To Edward) Go on home; I'll be there in a while.

EDWARD

Don't be too long. (He starts out.)

EDNA

And don't' you dare tell her before I get there. I want to see the look on her face.

JOE

Nice to meet you.

EDWARD

You too. (He exits.)

EDNA

He's a bit of a milquetoast, but he's mine. Oh drat!

JOE

What?

EDNA

I forgot to ask when they're leaving. Can't wait to have my house to myself. Scotland...Alice in Scotland... (With relish) She'll hate it.

(Rick and Ann enter. Joe pulls out their checks.)

JOE

Hey, before I forget. Here are the checks for last week.

ANN

(Taking hers) Thanks. (She looks at it.) Wow! I'm rich.

(Rick puts his into a pocket, not looking at it. Note: If Ann didn't finish taking down the old drapes, she should do it now, and leave the old drapes hanging over the stepladder.)

JOE

Aren't you going to look; make sure it's right?

RICK

(Rick looks, in order to satisfy Joe. He's surprised.) This is too much.

JOE

I pay you what you earn. Nothing more.

RICK

You haven't taken out withholding.

JOE

Got you two down as independent contractors. You're responsible for your own taxes.

RICK

Oh, ok.

JOE

You could be, you know. A contractor. That check—not bad for a week's work, is it? Work for my company; before long you'll be making twice, three times that.

RICK

Thanks, Joe, but no thanks.

JOE

Most guys would jump at a chance for that kind of money.

RICK

I'm not "most guys," Joe. Money's just not that important to me right now.

JOE

What is?

RICK

(Trying to let the subject die) Joe...

JOE

I mean it. I'd like to know what's important to you.

RICK

(Becoming defensive) Why?

JOE

You're bright. Not afraid of hard work. I want to know why you aren't interested in a good job—a good career—doing something you do well, and seem to enjoy.

RICK

You wouldn't understand.

JOE

Do I look stupid, or what?

RICK

No. It's just that...you and I see things differently.

JOE

Ah, the good old generation gap. That's bullshit and you know it.

RICK

(His defensive walls are up full force; flippant and cynical.)

Is it? Ok... For the sake of argument, and this will lead to an argument...

JOE

Not if we don't let it.

RICK

We'll see. What's your...your basic outlook on life?



JOE

Jesus! What the hell do you mean by that?

RICK

What do you expect out, say, the next ten years?

JOE

(Humoring him) ...One thing for sure, I'll get older—guess I might drop dead. Taxes'll go up. Be harder to make it. But we'll manage, the Good Lord willin'.

RICK

You believe that, don't you? That we'll always get by.

JOE

We always have. Don't you?

RICK

No.

JOE

Then what do you believe?

RICK

The people who run this country are too stupid, too crooked to do anything right. Someday soon it's all gonna' come crashing down on us.

JOE

People been saying that for the last two hundred years; the last two thousand.

RICK

I don't think we'll have to wait much longer.

JOE

Having reached this earth-shattering conclusion, what do you plan to do about it?

RICK

Me? Nothing.

JOE

I'm gettin' real tired of this conversation. What's your point?

RICK

Simple. You expect things to keep on, indefinitely, like the world was on some kind of automatic pilot. I don't.

JOE

So?

RICK

So that's why I choose to live the way I do.

JOE

The world's coming to an end, and that's why you don't want a job?!

RICK

I guess you could look at it that way.

JOE

How the hell do you look at it?

RICK

My dad spent his whole life trying to get ahead, so he could retire—"take it easy; enjoy life; see some of the world." The punch line to that joke was a stroke. I don't intend to follow in his footsteps.

JOE

That's the craziest thing I ever heard.

RICK

I told you you wouldn't understand.

JOE

Oh, I undersand. I just don't accept it! By God, I don't!

RICK

And you're getting mad.

JOE

Listen here, you smug son-of-a-bitch...

EDNA

(Realizing that things are getting out of hand. Rising)

My Goodness, I almost forgot about Edward. I've got to go. Joey, could you give me a ride? It's awfully hot out there today.

JOE

I thought you wanted to... Oh, hell, you're right. Can't have me overheating.

RICK

I'm sorry, Joe; but you started it.

JOE

And I'm not finished—not by a long shot. You're wrong, and I intend to prove it to you. All right, Edna, let's get you home.

EDNA

(To Ann as she and Joe start out)

Make sure he keeps a Band-Aid on that thumb.

ANN

I will. Goodnight.

(Joe and Edna exit. Ann closes the door.)

My, aren't we feeling intellectual all of a sudden?

RICK

He started it. I stayed calm—didn't lose my temper once.

ANN

No. This time I think you lost your mind.

RICK

(Chuckling) Maybe. Know what I think? I think it's time for me to "mess up" my mind a little bit. "It's quittin' time."

(He pulls a joint and a lighter out of his pocket.)

ANN

Hey—outside. You don't want Joe coming in here smelling funny smoke.

RICK

It'll be gone by Monday.

(She does reply; she simply gestures—"out!")

Ok, ok, I'm going.

(He starts out.)

ANN

Rick? (He turns back.) You don't actually believe all that crap you were spouting, do you?

RICK

Don't know. I was sort of talking off the top of my head. Made some interesting points though, didn't I?

ANN

You know, when you want to, you can be a real jackass.

(Rick laughs as the lights quickly fade, first to just the stained glass window, and then to black.)

End of Act I Scene 3

ACT I Scene 4

I-iv-40

(Some weeks later. The old drapes are gone and the ladder has been moved. The lights come up—stained glass window first, and then general lighting. Joe is at the table, doing paperwork. Rick enters, with a new shelf for the bookcase.)

JOE

Say, Rick...

RICK

Yeah?

JOE

What'd you buy at Southern Hardware last month that cost seven-forty-two-nineteen? Looks like it starts with a "V".

RICK

Le'me see. (He looks.) Oh yeah—the ventilation fans and stuff for the attic.

(Edna storms in the front door, very upset. She slams the door, crosses to a chair down left, and sits.)

EDNA

I am so mad I could just spit!

JOE

Get her a coke. (Rick goes for one from the ice chest.) Are you all right?

EDNA

No, I'm not! I'm mad as hell. (She starts digging through her bag.)

JOE

But physically, are you ok?

EDNA

Unless I bust a gut. (Rick gives her the open soda.) Thank you.

(Edna drinks some soda, then pulls the Old Crow out of her bag and adds some to her can, creating a boiler maker.)

ANN

(As she enters) What's going on?

RICK

We're trying to find out.

EDNA

Do you know what that bastard who calls himself my son has gone and done? Without so much as “may I,” he’s leased out my house while they’re in Scotland.

JOE

What about you?

EDNA

(Sarcastic) Oh, he thought about me. I have a choice. Either I go with them to Scotland and freeze to death, or into a “home”—“just until he gets back.”

ANN

How long would that be?

EDNA

Who cares? I don’t intend to spend one day in a home! Not one day!

RICK

Then you’re going with them?

EDNA

I most certainly am not. After spending my entire life in the South, I have no intention of living any place where it snows.

JOE

Can’t you talk him out of it?

EDNA

Too late. He signed the papers yesterday. Alice put him up to it. I know she did.

ANN

But how? That’s your house. You own it.

EDNA

No. Unfortunately he does.

JOE

I thought your mother left it to you.

EDNA

She did, God bless her. But my Michael couldn’t stand the idea of his wife owning the house he lived in. So he “asked” me to give it to him. I tried to tell him it was ours. But, “if I loved him, I’d do it.” Like a fool, I did. When he died he left it to Edward. The old jackass just couldn’t stand the idea of having to give it back.

JOE

If you’re not going to Scotland or a home, what are you going to do?

EDNA

I'll think of something.

RICK

You could always strike out on your own. Get a job.

EDNA

What can an old woman who's never worked a day in her life do for a living?

JOE

Have you considered housekeeping?

EDNA

I don't intend to scrub floors or wash windows for anybody.

JOE

No; like they used to do, when the housekeeper managed a staff of servants.

RICK

Nobody lives like that anymore.

JOE

I do, or plan to—right here. Not with full time help, but I'll have to hire people to take care of the place. You could show 'em what to do.

EDNA

Joey, that's sweet, but I couldn't.

JOE

Why not? You've always loved this house. You could live here. What else will you do?

EDNA

I don't know, but...

JOE

Then it's settled.

RICK

(This exchange has hit Rick as very wrong.)

It's always so simple, isn't it? Whenever things don't go to suit you, you whip out your checkbook and fix it. When are you going to learn that your money can't cure everybody's problems?

JOE

I know it now. Edna's a friend. If I can make her happy and get a damn good housekeeper in the bargain, why the hell shouldn't I?

RICK

Don't you see? You're...

JOE

What I don't see is where this is any of your Goddamn business!

(Rick starts to respond. Without Joe seeing, Edna signals him not to. He storms out the front door.)

EDNA

(To Ann) Honey, go see what you can do.

(Ann exits after Rick.)

He's right, you know.

JOE

Now don't you start in on me too. All I did was offer you a job. You want it or not?

EDNA

Depends. How much you plannin' to pay me?

JOE

Enough.

EDNA

Need to see what I can make. Don't want 'em cutting the social security Michael left me.

JOE

I, uh, think you're old enough that won't be a problem.

EDNA

How old do you think I am? Don't answer that! I probably am, but I want to be certain. Uncle Sam owes me that money and I plan to get it—every penny of it—if I have to live to be a hundred to do it.

JOE

(With a chuckle) Suit yourself. Deal?

EDNA

Deal.

(She extends her hand and they shake hands. The lights fade to the stained glass window, and then to black.)

End of Act I Scene 4

ACT I Scene 5

I-v-44

(Another workday, a week later. The stain glass window comes up, and then the full lighting. Edna's cane and purse are on the card table. On the back of each chair is a large lace doily. The dining room door is open and from offstage we can hear the sound of a vacuum cleaner. Edna enters, vacuuming the bare wood floors with a vengeance. She has a lightweight cleaning duster over her dress. After a moment, Joe enters through the front door. He's in work clothes.)

JOE

Good God, Edna, what the hell are you doing?

(She keeps vacuuming, as if she didn't see or hear Joe.)

Turn that damn thing off!

(No response. Joe crosses to her and taps her shoulder.)

Turn it off.

(She finally turns it off. Immediately she pulls a dust rag from her apron and begins to dust the bookshelves intently.)

What on earth are you doing?

EDNA

Performing the duties of a housekeeper.

JOE

But the house isn't ready to be kept yet.

EDNA

(She pulls a check from her pocket.)

When I found this check, I assumed you wanted me to begin at once. So I did. Would you care for anything, Mr. McReynolds?

JOE

Edna...

EDNA

There was a telephone call from...

JOE

Edna, stop it!

EDNA

(Crossing to him, holding out the check.)

Then take this and tear it up.

JOE

But...



EDNA

When I do the job, I'll take your money.

JOE

(He takes the check and tears it up.) Better?

EDNA

Much.

JOE

Good. Now get rid of those damn doilies. Never could stand those things. What was that about a phone call?

EDNA

(Collecting the doilies) Somebody named Sam Jackson. He's on his way over.

JOE

Great. You seen Rick?

EDNA

He took off a while ago. Needed some more paint pads.

JOE

Damn. Wish he'd checked with me. Sam's my manager. I asked him to come over, take a look at the place. Want to get those two together.

EDNA

(Immediately skeptical) How come?

JOE

If they hit it off, Rick might change his mind about working for the company.

EDNA

One of these days, you're gonna' push that boy too far.

(The phone rings. Joe answers it.)

JOE

Hello?... It's for you. It's Alice.

(Edna continues collecting the doilies and folding them carefully. She makes no move to take the receiver.)

EDNA

Joey, that infernal machine is the only thing you've done that I don't approve of. The world was a whole lot better place before they invented the telephone.

## EDNA (CONT'D)

(Joe holds the receiver out, insisting she take it. She does, finally.)

Hello?... Yes, Alice, I'm here. ...What are you so upset about?... Alice, calm down. I can't understand a word you're saying. ...Edward, what's wrong with Alice? ...Oh.

(She covers the mouthpiece.)

The moving people called to see when I wanted my things moved.

(Back into the phone)

Edward—I've been meaning to talk to you about that. I'm not going to Scotland. ...I'm moving in with Joey. He's asked me to be his housekeeper, and...Housekeeper! ...Why didn't you tell me that you were going to lease out my house?

(The doorbell rings. Joe moves to answer it.)

Now, don't go getting' upset. I'll be home later. We can talk about it then. ...I've got to go now. Bye.

(Edna hangs up as Joe opens the door and **SAM JACKSON** enters. He's middle aged and wearing slacks, a short-sleeved shirt and a tie.)

## SAM

(Noticing Joe's appearance—he doesn't see him in honest-to-God work clothes often anymore.)

Well if it isn't the Real McCoy. How's it going?

## JOE

Great. Here—want you to meet somebody. Edna, this is Sam Jackson. Sam—Edna Brogan; friend and housekeeper.

## EDNA

How do you do?

## SAM

Hi. This place is incredible. Everything you said.

## JOE

We're moving right along. Started painting upstairs yesterday.

## SAM

Where's this whiz kid you've been beating my ear off about?

## JOE

He'll be back in a few minutes.

## SAM

(Checking his watch) Gotta' meet the architect downtown at four.

JOE

He'll be right back. Come on, let me show you my new home. Through here's...  
(He opens the dining room door and Sam exits. Joe pauses.)  
...the dining room. (To Edna) When Rick gets back, tell him to come fine us.

EDNA

I wish you wouldn't do this. It's not going to work.

JOE

Don't be such a pessimist.

EDNA

Don't you be such an idiot.

(Chuckling, Joe exits. Edna moves to put away the vacuum.  
She is winding the cord when Ann comes down the stairs.)

ANN

I thought I heard a vacuum cleaner. What are you doing with...?

EDNA

Just trying it out.

(The doorbell rings, followed immediately by loud knocking.)

ANN

Got it.

(She opens the door. Edward rushes in, followed by Alice.)

EDWARD

Mama, we need to talk.

EDNA

I said I'd be home later.

ALICE

You're coming with us right now!

EDNA

I most certainly am not.

ALICE

(To Ann, polite but demanding)  
If you'll please excuse us, this is personal.

(Ann looks to Edna, who nods. Ann exits.)

EDWARD

Mama, what's gotten into you?

EDNA

Me?! You rent out my house and give me a choice between an old folks home and...Siberia!

ALICE

Scotland.

EDNA

Same thing.

EDWARD

It was for your own good. If you'd stayed here, you'd be all by yourself.

EDNA

I was looking forward to that.

ALICE

Who'd take care of you?

EDNA

Take care of me? I like that. I do more laundry and cooking in that house than you ever thought of doing. And if you ever picked up a dust rag, I think I'd faint.

ALICE

I have other responsibilities.

EDNA

Like pinochle?

EDWARD

Don't start, Mother. Face it—you're not as young as you used to be.

EDNA

Neither are you. I'm old—so what?

EDWARD

I don't want to go half way around the world and be worried about you living alone.

EDNA

I won't be. I'm moving in here with Joey.

ALICE

You can't do that. How do you know that man isn't...something horrible?

EDNA

I've always been a good judge of character. Wish I could say the same for my son.

ALICE

What the hell do you mean by that?

EDNA

Think about it. I'm sure you'll figure it out, eventually.

EDWARD

I told you, don't start. Now, Mother...

ALICE

Edward, this is ridiculous.

EDNA

It certainly is.

ALICE

Maybe later she'll listen to reason. I'll get her bag. You help her to the car.  
(Edna grabs her bag and cane from the card table.)

EDWARD

What?

ALICE

She is obviously upset. She's not rational.

(As things continue, Joe and Ann move silently into the entry from the hall, followed by Sam. Alice and Edward don't notice them.)

EDNA

Edward, that is not a good idea.

EDWARD

(Moving hesitantly toward his mother)  
Mama, you know I love you. I only want what's best for you.

EDNA

(Brandishing her cane as a club)  
I love you too. But if you try to lay a hand on me, I'll beat your brains out with this stick.

EDWARD

Mama!

ALICE

Take it away from her!

EDNA

You want it! Come get it. I'd like that.

(Edward makes another move toward her.)

Honey, I love you but I'll kill ya'.

JOE

Mr. Brogan, I don't think I'd do that if I were you.

(Alice and Edward are surprised to see the others.)

ALICE

This is none of your business.

JOE

Sure it is. Edna works for me. This is my house and she's my friend.

EDWARD

She's my mother!

JOE

Then act like it. She's made up her mind.

ALICE

We know what's best for her.

EDNA

Who says?

ALICE

She's upset. Her mind isn't too clear anymore. It's up to us to take care of her.

EDNA

You stop making cracks about my head, or I'll work yours over with this stick.

JOE

If you're actually concerned about Edna's mind, I suggest you call a doctor, instead of assuming she's senile just because she won't let you run her life. Ed, go home. Calm down. She'll be there later. You can talk this out then.

EDWARD

(A sigh) ...Maybe you're right.

ALICE

He is not right! Edward Brogan, you tell him to...

EDWARD

(Cutting her off) Alice, we'll talk about this at home.

ALICE

Do you mean to tell me that you're honestly...

EDWARD

(Interrupting again) I mean we're going home. Now. (To Edna) Sorry, Mama. You'll be home later?

EDNA

After supper.

EDWARD

Let's go.

(He gestures for Alice to exit first. Angrily she starts out.)

JOE

Ed, I don't think I really need to say this, but if Edna doesn't show up tomorrow, "for work," afraid I'll have to come find out why.

EDWARD

Don't worry. We won't lock her in her room.

(Alice and Edward exit.)

JOE

(To Edna) Are you all right?

EDNA

I haven't felt this good in years.

JOE

Think they'll try anything?

EDNA

Nothing we can't handle.

SAM

Hey, listen, Joe. I got to go.

JOE

You haven't seen the upstairs yet.

SAM

(Checking his watch) Five minutes.

(Joe and Sam turn to start out. At that moment Rick enters through the front door carrying a paper sack.)

JOE

Rick, you're back. Good. Somebody I want you to meet. My manager, Sam Jackson. Sam, this is the guy who's rebuilding this house for me.

RICK

Howdi.

(Rick crosses down to Sam and they shake hands.)

SAM

(Good naturedly) So you're the hot-shot stud who wants to be a contractor.

RICK

Huh?

SAM

Can't talk right now, but I can put you on a crew when you're done here.

RICK

"Put me on a crew?"

SAM

You want to learn the business, that's where you start—at the bottom. Right, Joe?

JOE

Actually, Sam, I was thinking...

RICK

Hey, hold it! Hold on just a Goddamn minute! I can guess what he's been feedin' you, but I don't want the job. When I finish here, I plan to put a lot of miles between me and this town, this house, and the son-of-a-bitch who owns it!

ANN

Rick!

RICK

(To Joe) Look—it's my life! I don't want your help, your advice, or your friendship! I said I'd finish this job, but I warn you—you bring this up one more time, I'm walkin', right then and there. Understand?! (He storms out.)

ANN

I'm sorry, Joe. I'm so sorry. (She rushes out after Rick.)



SAM

What the hell is going on around here?

JOE

Nothin'. Nothing at all.

SAM

Bullshit. I'm not blind. Two minutes ago your "housekeeper" had to fight off her own son, who seemed to be tryin' to kidnap her.

JOE

They want to put her in a home. She wants to stay here.

SAM

What about the kid? You said he wanted to be a contractor.

JOE

He could be. A damn good one.

SAM

Only if he wants to.

JOE

He's mule-headed, but bright. And he works hard. We could teach him so much.

SAM

Not if he won't listen.

JOE

I'll make you a deal. Help me get him to stay—learn the business. When I go, I'll leave the whole thing to the two of you.

(Sam pauses—surprised. He begins to understand.)

SAM

...Jesus. Now I get it. You're not just rebuilding this house. You're trying to put together a family to go in it.

JOE

That's crazy.

SAM

It sure as hell is.

JOE

It's not true.

SAM

Bull. This is Sam, Joe. I know how bad it hurt ya'.

JOE

(Walls up immediately) You better go if you're gonna' meet that architect.

SAM

Joe, listen to me. I'm your friend.

JOE

Then you better go. Now.

SAM

It won't work. He's dead. You can't replace him.

JOE

For God's sake, Sam, leave. Please.

(Sam looks at Joe for a moment, then exits. A silence.)

EDNA

You want a shot of Old Crow or a nitroglycerin pill?

JOE

The Old Crow sounds good.

(Joe is exhausted from the encounter. He moves to sit in one of the chairs stage left. Edna crosses down to him, pulling the pint from her bag. She sits beside him and offers him the bottle. He takes a shot and hands it back. She takes a sip and offers it back to him.)

No thanks. That was plenty.

EDNA

(She puts it down on the crate between them.)

I'll just leave it here then. I might want another little taste. ...I know curiosity killed the cat, but this old cat would die happy if I knew what that was all about.

JOE

Not now, Edna.

EDNA

He right? About you tryin' to rebuild a family with us?

JOE

I don't know. Maybe.

EDNA

That make me your wife or your mother?

JOE

(Chuckles a bit, in spite of himself.)

Little of both, I guess.

EDNA

Then I'm doubly entitled to know what's bothering you.

JOE

Edna...

EDNA

I take it "he" was your son? (Joe nods.) And he died? ...When?

JOE

...Six years ago.

EDNA

How?

JOE

Construction accident.

EDNA

Working for you?

JOE

...His name was James. He was in college, studying architecture, planning to come into the business. Junior year, he came home at Christmas, said he wanted to talk. He didn't want to be an architect anymore. Didn't know what he did want to do, but not architecture. He needed time to..."figure things out." He wasn't saying definitely that he didn't want to work with me—just that he needed some time. Hoped I'd understand. ...I threw a fit. Said I'd cut off his college money—let him see what the real world was like. Didn't phase him. He "understood" how I felt. I didn't, but he did. That's when I got the bright idea that if he worked construction for a while, maybe he'd realize that life wasn't quite so simple. (A pause and a sigh) It was a stupid accident. Nobody's fault.

EDNA

Not yours either.

JOE

Catherine could never forgive me. He was our only child. She tried—she just couldn't. We separated for a while, then decided to go on and get the divorce. ...Think I will have another shot. (He reaches for it.)

EDNA

Help yourself. Keep it. Got another one in my bag.

JOE

You're a walking liquor store.

EDNA

Have to be. Get too many funny looks if I walk into a bar by myself. Guess it comes with gettin' old.

JOE

You're one of the youngest people I know.

EDNA

True, but my external camouflage is damnably effective.

JOE

How can I make him see it's for his own good?

EDNA

You can't "make" him do anything. Best you can do is stop pushing so hard. "Let it ride."

JOE

We'll be done here soon and he'll "ride" off into the sunset.

EDNA

Don't like feelin' powerless, do you? If it'll make you feel better, there is one thing you can do.

JOE

What?

EDNA

Remember the day we met? I told you this house is special, a place where dreams can still come true. Make a wish—leave it up to the house.

JOE

That's crazy.

EDNA

Joey, the whole world is crazy these days, or haven't you noticed?

(The lights fade to the stained glass and then to black.)

End of Act I