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DAMIEN. I have a good job—if you give up theater or only do it once in a—

IRENE. That's not living. Now this silly talk is over.

DAMIEN. We could be in love and have a life together. A marriage.

IRENE. Oy. Darling. I had all that. I'm saving you from that *(He kisses her. Then kisses her again passionately. There is a bang on the window. It is Sid.)*

DAMIEN. *(Getting out of car.)* I should be going. Get tuxes inside. *(He runs to the back of the station wagon, mimes opening the back, mimes grabbing the suit bags and running to the theater. Sid gets in the car.)*

IRENE. This never happened back at Civic Players of Reading. You respected my privacy at C.P.R. You knocked like a person at the Players.

SID. It wasn't my company then.

IRENE. Why did you—

SID. I noticed you AND Mr. AC/DC was talking awful long, I knew something was—

IRENE. Don't say AC/DC, you don't know—

SID. How much you wanna bet?

IRENE. If you will excuse me, I am about to produce O'Neill's *Great God Brown* in Berks County and if that's not a journey up a hill with a cross on my back I don't know what is.

SID. Irene?

IRENE. Yes?

SID. No.

IRENE. No?

SID. Yes, no. You? And Damien? No.

IRENE. It's really none of your business, Sid—

SID. It becomes my business when you do something that puts this company that I founded with you—

IRENE. He's practically twenty.

SID. Eighteen is practically nineteen, cradle-snatcher.

IRENE. Oh, drop it and admit it. You're just in love with me.

SID. Not for years. Now all I got is "stuck-with-you-ness." Whatever that's called.

IRENE. Well then, you are sulking over Madeline and you are taking it out on—

SID. Madeline is dead to me and moved to Harrisburg and you got no right bringing her up.

IRENE. GOD, Sid, you cling to me so you don't have to let go of

Madeline. So obvious.

SID. You said you'd never bring that up.

IRENE. I didn't need it then. She just leaves a note that she had met a guy in Harrisburg, and she was going to marry him and she had a job lined up—This was not a spur of the moment thing. How long does it take to get a job working for the governor on some arts council? A year? And you had just taken her to dinner night before to the Crystal for opening with Clive and me and everybody and—

SID. Shut up you!

IRENE. And the scarf you—

SID. You got no business bringing this up!

IRENE. Well, you have no right to bring up Damien to me. We're done here. *(Irene gets out of the car.)*

SID. Irene. No. We're not done. You're not going with Damien. And you got no right to talk MADELINE! *(Irene just walks off.)* WHORE!!!

IRENE. *(Over her shoulder as she goes.)* DYKE!!!

SID. *(Running after her.)* DIRTY WHORE!!!! *(They're gone. Car gets up as his adult self.)* **STOP**

CAR. AND THEY LEFT ME IN THE CAR! *(Removes first two chairs.)* And gosh what a primer it was for little Car to have for his future grown-up relationships. *(Removes other two chairs.)* Oh wait. You ain't seen nothin'. But first, I wanna talk to you about what Reading was like when I was a kid. It was a little town—a little trapped in another era. A large courthouse, Art Deco. And hanging over a hill—magically and incongruously, a Japanese pagoda lit with red neon. *(The other actors all line up along the stage and speak simultaneously as Car hands them, from his folder, pictures to hold up for the audience.)*

DAMIEN. *(Overlapping with Maria, Clive, Sid, and Irene.)* A large billboard on the way into town said, "Who rents good trucks?" The next one said, "Christ is the Answer." And then there was a third sign, a crude drawing of a drunken man striving to leave a huge oversized bottle. And all it said was "A friend of Bill's." WELCOME TO READING!!!

MARIA. *(Overlapping with Damien, Clive, Sid, and Irene.)* A real Mayberry R.F.D. kinda town square. Two department stores, Whitner's and Pomeroy's. And then lots of little shops. No chains really. Penn Avenue had all the stores. And outside Farr's Footwear a really big boot.

CLIVE. *(Overlapping with Damien, Maria, Sid, and Irene.)* Sunday mornings in Reading were my favorite. Trees. Dogwood trees that

## ACT TWO

*Car enters.*

CAR. Let's do Act Two. The ballroom of the Abraham Lincoln Hotel, yeah it's still there. Built in 1930 by the Reading Railroad, President Herbert Hoover stayed here. John Philip Sousa died here.—And, uhm. *(Beat.)* I'm sorry I'm looking at this space and thinking. How much of my time is spent in rehearsal rooms. Days. Months. Years. Changing lines changing scenes changing words trying to make people sound more like people. *(Beat.)* I think it was at a rehearsal room in the West Fifties that a casting director told me that no one wanted to do my play and there was only one actress who might do it. So we hired her. And she got the Tony Award. It was in a rehearsal room on lower Broadway that George Kaufman's daughter said, "My father would have loved you." It was in a West Forties rehearsal that I met the guy I would marry. And it was at a dance call at 890 Broadway when I got the call from Guatemala saying that I had been assigned a child to adopt. "Congratulations, you are a father," the woman said. I could barely hear her over the tap dancing. *(Beat.)* It's September of '73. And this is a cocktail party. Imagine the hair! Buffet table, a ham, a turkey. Hot hors d'oeuvres passed—This is classy. *(Applause and a catcall. Irene enters. Car stands off to the side and watches.)*

IRENE. Welcome all of you! Fellow citizens of Reading! Did you have a little nosh? WELL, who knew we would open such a can of worms when we got our grant from the state of Pennsylvania? According to tax laws we now have to be an official not-for-profit entity. Isn't that just a relief of a burden off our shoulders! I know I feel it. But according to that status—we must form a board of community leaders. A board. It sounds so—solid and dullish—but ours is going to be far out and groovy, no you'll see. But still respectable. And who is already on our board? Well let's have our associate artistic director, co-founder, and technical director tell us all about it. Patricia Shlarb. *(Applause. Sid enters in a dress.)* As you all know, this is Patricia. But you can call her Trish.

SID. You got me in the dress Reenie, don't push—

**START**

IRENE. And watch out boys, she's single. Sid, let's talk about the board we have to form for our theater this month.

SID. Should I start with the phone call that nearly broke my soul?

IRENE. (*A light laugh.*) We have—and this is a biggie—as an honorary member for our board, the governor of the commonwealth of Pennsylvania, yes that would be Milton Shapp. (*Applause.*) And graciously graciously agreeing also to be honorary is our own mayor, Winton Lackey. Howzabout that for headliners?

SID. Not bad. And joining our board also is the—ooh what's the word?

IRENE. I would call her a doyenne or in the language of my people...a— (*The most exotic word ever.*) Maven.

SID. Oooh. Mrs. Alicia Toomey. Where is she?

IRENE. She's seated right next to the mayor. Let's hear it for Alicia Toomey and Winton Lackey. (*Applause.*) Those two—I tell you—they have been so supportive of us getting into our new theater. And leaving this dumpy...old...block behind.

SID. Wouldn't you know we'd finally do a show that was a hit?

IRENE. In our third month! Breaking the record of any run of any show in Berks County. They've put off the wrecking ball twice now!

SID. I mean even the critics from Philadelphia came and loved!

IRENE. *The Inquirer*—and they did a whole article about the block coming down, too. But—now we have our own theater, and the community support to help us move!

SID. One hundred twenty seats.

IRENE. Twenty more seats than they have at Civic Players—funny how I can't stop saying that.

SID. Kurt thinks it's hilarious.

IRENE. Isn't it the most goddamndest beautiful thing you ever saw in all your days? You just had the hard-hat tour.

SID. I thought she was gonna go all colonial blue with it inside but the wallpaper with the red and gold and the flocking? And the tiny chandeliers! Why do theaters always look like warehouses?

IRENE. I think the answer's in the question.

SID. So we invite you to think of joining Governor Shapp, Mayor Lackey, and Mrs. Toomey on our board. **STOP**

IRENE. I, of course, as artistic director, would have to present my season to you for approval, but with a season like this you know you can trust me. And our first show for the season—A world



Lester Polakov who has a room she's renting out on Bank Street—you would be an actor. I would be a writer.

DAMIEN. Get dressed.

CAR. *(Not as confident. Shy even.)* You just go down to Third—we're on Seventh—there's a bus terminal—you get on a bus—three hours. It's all possible.

DAMIEN. Would you get dressed? Jesus! This is...our secret, right?

CAR. You don't want anyone to know because of Irene.

DAMIEN. Dressed. Now.

CAR. That's kind of bullshit. Irene knows about everyone you've done. Maria tells her. 'Cause Maria wants you. So really. Why?

DAMIEN. Because. Honestly, you're not a sexually desirable person. And I don't want it getting out that I did you.

CAR. *(Hurt, then getting dressed quickly in his nightshirt and top hat.)* Fine. Then stick with your lady with the husband. Stay here. *(Irene enters. She looks and sees Damien is deep in thought. She tousles Damien's hair.)*

IRENE. Are you alright?

DAMIEN. Yeah—just...don't hang on me. Jesus, I'm not your husband. *(Damien storms off. Irene pauses and hears crying from behind the changing screen. After a moment, she exits.)*

CAR. *(As a grown-up.)* One month later!! It's opening night of my first play! We're at the new theater on Tenth and Walnut. Where's the tape for Tenth and Walnut? There isn't any tape. Oh right—Because I wasn't there. I didn't get that far. I was on my way to the theater and all the press, but Sid saw me on the street. Saw that I was drunk, for the first time. And grabbed me. And drove me in her Gremlin to her place. To sober up or let me sleep it off, so she could then get back to the theater before places. To call the show. And play Mama Shnickel. The wise-cracking Amish woman with a butter churn. Okay. This is a lesbian's apartment circa 1973—use your imagination. Be sure to include the Pampas grass in the corner. Beige of course. White Haitian sofa. And cats. A lot of cats. I had forgotten this.

SID. You're a piece of work, you little pisser, you hear me? That was—you are jeopardizing a lot, but no, you don't care about that—you just wanna have a good time.

CAR. *(Younger self, drunk.)* I'm sad, I'm suffering, that's why I've drowned my sorrow in whiskey—

SID. That ain't whiskey, what the—you smell like you blew a roll of Life Savers.

CAR. Uhm...Peppermint schnapps.  
 SID. Great, you throw up it'll smell like a Certs.  
 CAR. I couldn't find whiskey in the cabinet above the fridge at home—actually I found whiskey but it was gross.  
 SID. You so nervous about tonight? You gotta get over that. Or learn to enjoy. That's what frosts me about you kids. You don't know when it comes to theater you better love all of it, even the parts that hurt and scare you, 'cause otherwise you're gonna be miserable. Say to yourself—"Hell at least I'm alive, at least I feel something."  
 CAR. I gave someone my heart and they smashed it—stabbed it.  
 SID. That's what happens to hearts. Boo-hoo for you. Here I got coffee in a cardboard cup—that's a song from a show—"Coffee in a Cardboard Cup"—you'd be surprised—  
 CAR. *(Taking a sip.)* Yuck!  
 SID. Kid you don't like whiskey and coffee—why are you here? You take away mashed potatoes and I'm officially out of the game.  
 CAR. The room is spinning. When does it stop? *(He curls up on the sofa. Places his head on her lap and hugs her. This makes Sid uncomfortable. She stands up and gets away.)*  
 SID. It's from...70, *Girls, 70*. The coffee song. You can say almost anything it's a song title. Get Fred Swavely and Clive going on it. It...kid? Don't—  
 CAR. I just wanted to get loved back—Was that such a—And they love me too, I can tell they would if they'd let themselves. I can tell.  
 SID. Why would you get involved with someone who wasn't able to love you back? I'm not Buddha, I'm just old and don't have time for this shit.  
 CAR. It just hurts so...much.  
 SID. You're young, you're dramatic, you're drunk—I'm sure whatever little high school girl that didn't— *(Car shoves script at her.)*  
 Yeah honey, the script. Big whoop, I read it befo— *(He points at the title page, she looks.)* What the hell—  
 CAR. I made just one title page that way and gave it and...and I found it in the trash later.  
 SID. "For Damien, who pushed the clouds away and showed me the rainbows."  
 CAR. Do you know what that means?  
 SID. It means I am one hundred dollars richer as soon as I tell Irene and Clive.

**STOP**

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