

THE UNBROKEN CHAIN

A Play in Two Acts

by

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Cast of Characters

<u>Robert Schoenfeldt</u>	A troubled teen
<u>Frank</u>	A figure of menace in the community
<u>Carl Schoenfeldt</u>	The family patriarch
<u>Helen Schoenfeldt</u>	His daughter-in-law
<u>Ernest Schoenfeldt</u>	His son
<u>Vernon Schoenfeldt</u>	His brother
<u>Janet</u>	Robert's sister's best friend

Scene

Deseret Valley, a small town in the middle of the California desert.

Time

The early 1990s

ACT I

Scene 1

SETTING:

The set is a large room which combines a living room and a dining room. In one half there is a couch, a chair, some book shelves and chest of drawers, coffee table with some newspapers and magazines and an archway which leads to bedrooms. Behind the couch there is a fireplace with a mantle on which sits an American flag, folded into a triangle, and a photograph of a teenage girl, VERA. In the other half there is a dining room table with chairs and several cabinets filled with dishes. In the middle of the room, next to the living room chair, a small table holds a telephone. A front door is at the back. There are windows on either side of the looking out at a desert style front yard. It is the winter of 1992.

AT RISE:

The lights rise to semi-darkness as ROBERT sits upright on the couch staring at the kitchen door. After a few seconds FRANK steps though the door. He takes a few steps into the living room and then stops when he sees Robert on the couch.

FRANK

Robert, thought I'd find you back in town.

ROBERT

I know.

FRANK

Really?

ROBERT

I made sure you knew I was in town.

FRANK

Why'd you do that?

ROBERT

So I could give you something.

FRANK

What's that?

ROBERT

This.

(He pulls a gun from under a pillow and fires it three times, striking FRANK each time and throwing him back into the kitchen door.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

ACT I

Scene 2

SETTING: The same house two years earlier

AT RISE: As the lights go up the telephone is ringing and CARL, late sixties, looking dignified but just a bit stuffy, well dressed in tan slacks, a collared shirt but carrying his tie, his glasses hanging from a chain around his neck, enters. He picks up the telephone and speaks. When not speaking he has a tendency to cringe slightly. It is the summer of 1990.

CARL

Hello? No. It is not Shawnfelt. The name is pronounced Show-en-feld. Try it again.

(He hangs up and, staying where is, resumes the tying of his tie. From the kitchen we hear HELEN, mid-40s, sounding loud but friendly.)

HELEN (offstage)

Who was on the phone?

CARL

What?

HELEN

Who was calling?

CARL

Come in here. I can't hear you.

(She enters. She is handsome in a desert way and is dressed in a new pair of blue jeans and a freshly laundered and ironed red t-shirt, managing to look informal but strangely elegant at once. She walks to him and kisses him on the cheek, a move which catches him off guard.)

HELEN

Who just called?

CARL

Some nincompoop.

HELEN

You mean a salesman?

CARL

Precisely.

(The phone rings again.)

CARL

Here he is again. He is persistent. I'll give him that

(He answers the phone. As he speaks, HELEN tries to do up his tie but he waves her away.)

CARL

Hello? No, it is not Shonefelt. Young man I don't think you understand the importance of this name which you are so casually mangling. The Schoenfeldts have a long and honorable tradition of service to their country. My father fought in World War One. What? On the American side. I fought in World War Two. What's that? Yes, on the American side. Why do you keep asking that? My son fought in the Vietnam, on the American side. So I'll thank you to have a little more respect. Now try again.

(He hangs up. HELEN is about to start fussing with the tie again when he steps away from her, stalking over to the couch with her in tow.)

CARL

I suppose it ought not to bother me. I suppose I ought to be patient.

HELEN

If you say so.

CARL

Well forget it. I'm not going to be patient. I haven't got the time to patient.

HELEN

Do you have time to let me finish your tie?

CARL

Yes, of course.

(He turns toward her but won't stop fidgeting, making her job nearly impossible.)

HELEN

I don't know why you dress like that anyway. This is Desert Valley; you've lived here all your life. I thought you'd know by now that a tie is not part of the dress code.

CARL

I can't help it if nobody in the Desert Valley owns a mirror.

HELEN (laughing)

What?

CARL

I was in Kmart the other day. It was disgraceful the way people were dressed. There is no way they could have looked in a mirror and said, "this looks good."

HELEN

I hope you didn't make a scene.

CARL

I kept quiet. Your husband was with me.

HELEN

Good.

CARL

It's just that I take pride in my appearance just as I take pride in being a Schoenfeldt. As I'm certain you do.

HELEN

Actually, I'm a Reynold.

CARL

You were a Reynold. Now you are a Schoenfeldt.

(The phone rings. CARL again abandons HELEN and his semi-finished tie to answer it.)

CARL

Hello? Yes. Very good. I knew you could do it. Congratulations. Now, what is it I can do for you? What is that? You are selling something? What is it? What color is it? Any color I want? How about blue? Green? Purple? That reminds me, when the Model T ford Automobile first came out you could get it in any color you wanted as long as it was black. What? Because black is the only color they came in. Yes, you're right, you couldn't actually get them in any color you wanted. You caught me. It was a joke. You know, my brother Vernon built one from pieces he found in a scrap yard. No, not a joke, a Model T. Of course, you couldn't do that with the cars of today, too complex. But you know the Model T was known as the tin lizzie. I don't know why, it just was. If you saw one pass another you would say "what time is it? Tin past tin." As in past ten. It's a joke. Of course you don't get it. What? Yes, I suppose we are off on a bit of a tangent. Which reminds me of what an interesting word tangent is. Hello?

(He looks mournfully at the receiver before placing it back down. He looks at HELEN who casts him a long, disapproving glance.)

CARL

He hung up.

HELEN

I can see that.

(She descends upon him to finish tying his tie.)

HELEN

Hold still. I'm almost finished.

CARL

You hate to see a job half done.

HELEN

And you hate to see a telemarketer who isn't insane.

CARL

I don't take your meaning.

HELEN

Honestly dad, why do you do it?

CARL

Well, for one thing, I honestly do take a tremendous amount of pride in being a part of this family. You should too.

HELEN

I do.

CARL

Good.

(She finishes the job and steps back to inspect the work. She smiles slightly and gently pats the tie.)

HELEN

I love being married to your son.

CARL

It's good having a daughter again... I mean I love having you as my daughter.

HELEN

Daughter-in-law.

CARL

Correction, daughter, we have no in-laws in this house. In here we are all--

HELEN and CARL together

Show-en-felds.

HELEN

Spelled just the way it sounds, sort of.

CARL

Not sort of, exactly.

HELEN

So what's the other thing?

(He smiles coyly and crosses to the couch where he sits down and picks up a section of the newspaper.)

CARL

I don't take your meaning.

HELEN

What's your other reason for tormenting telemarketers?

CARL

I enjoy it.

HELEN

You do? And keep in mind I once worked as a telemarketer.

CARL

Yes, I do. Plus I'm doing a public service.

HELEN

This I've got to hear.

(She sits on the living room chair.)

Keeping in mind that this is how I once made a living, how is what you do a public service?

(He sets his paper aside and turns toward her.)

CARL

What is their reason for being, these tele-what-have-yous?

HELEN

To make a living.

CARL

There are many ways to make a living. How do these tele-whatevers make their living?

HELEN

By selling things.

CARL

Correction, by selling things that people don't want, can't use, don't need and generally can't afford.

HELEN

Really, tell me more.

CARL

They spend every working hour of every working day trying to get one person after another to sign away their life savings.

(HELEN leans toward CARL.)

HELEN

Just one question.

CARL

Yes?

HELEN

This evil man interested in robbing people of their life's savings, what was he selling?

(CARL is about to answer but clearly does not know.)

I see.

CARL

It is very important work which I am doing. This very morning I may have prevented some sweet old woman from being swindled out of her life savings.

(He takes up his paper again.)

HELEN

Good for you, dad.

(She stands and begins straightening up, picking up various papers and such that have collected on the coffee table.)

CARL

Be careful, some of those papers are important.

(She sets all the papers and magazine back on the coffee table, the only difference being that they are now neatly stacked and organized in two distinct piles.)

HELEN

So, once again, what was he selling?

CARL

Who?

HELEN

This human leach who couldn't pronounce our last name because he was too busy plotting our financial ruin, what was he selling?

(CARL thinks about this, setting his paper aside to do so. He is clearly stumped.)

CARL

Well, I--

HELEN

You don't know, do you?

CARL

It doesn't matter.

(She leans over him.)

HELEN

You don't know.

CARL

Where is your husband? Where is Ernest?

HELEN

Are you trying to change the subject?

CARL

Yes, and with no success. Where is your husband?

HELEN

He's getting dressed.

CARL

Yes, of course.

(He takes up his paper again.)

HELEN

So what was he selling?

CARL

Who?

HELEN

This boil on the face of humanity; what was he selling?

CARL

Will you please stop asking me that?

HELEN

I will as soon as you tell me.

CARL

Why does it matter?

HELEN

It matters because you don't know.

(He puts his paper down again. He is clearly becoming frustrated by all of this.)

CARL

I honestly don't remember. I wasn't paying that much attention.

HELEN

But you were paying attention enough to know he was evil?

(CARL picks up his paper then slams it down.
He stands suddenly, forcing HELEN to take a step back.)

CARL

Look. I'm sorry you had to do that for a living. I honestly am. On the other hand I am proud of you for taking the job and for performing it honestly and with pride as I'm sure you did.

HELEN

Thank you.

CARL

I know jobs are hard to come by around here.

HELEN

If you're not from one of the old families.

CARL

It's hard for everyone. Why do you think I took a job which kept me away from home most of the time Ernest and his sister were growing up, it was the same for my father. Do you smell something?

HELEN

Oh my God, breakfast.

(She runs out of the room and into the kitchen.
CARL sits down and takes up his paper again.)

CARL

Thank the Lord she is a terrible cook.

(ERNEST, mid- 40s, well dressed in slacks, a jacket and tie but looking a lot less comfortable in them than his father, enters. As he passes his father he pats the man on the shoulder. He ignores the living room chair and, walking to the dining room table, selects a chair, carries it back to the living room, plops it down next to the couch, plops down upon it and picks up a section of the newspaper. He is about to start reading when he sees the neat piles which HELEN has made on the coffee table.)

ERNEST

I see you've let her organize the mess again.

CARL

Yes, she's very good at it.

ERNEST

So which pile is the important mess and which pile is just the mess?

(CARL looks over his paper and examines both piles but seems baffled.)

CARL

I am not entirely certain but your wife seems to have a handle on things.

ERNEST

It must be the Reynold in her.

CARL
It certainly isn't the Shoenfeldt.

(They take up their papers and begin to read again.)

CARL
So how are things at the shop?

ERNEST
Not bad. Of course all my mechanics are idiots.

CARL
Of course, that's why you hired them.

ERNEST
They're all from the new families, you know that means.

CARL
No, I don't, maybe you should ask Helen, whose in the next room.

ERNEST
Oh.

(He glances in the direction of the kitchen.)

I keep hoping I can get to the point where I won't have to spend all my time at the shop.

(He glances at his newspaper and then looks quickly up again.)

What do you mean, that's why I hired them?

CARL
Never mind.

(They go back to their papers.)

ERNEST
So what's going to be with this Saddam Hussein?

CARL
Who is he, one of your idiot mechanics?

ERNEST
He's a Middle East dictator.

CARL
Which one?

ERNEST
What?

CARL
Which one of your idiot mechanics...

ERNEST and CARL together
Is a Middle East dictator?

ERNEST
Great, try having a serious discussion with you.

CARL
Fine, let's talk about Saddam Hussein.

ERNEST
One day we're friends, the next we're not. Who knows what's going to happen next?

CARL
Have you seen your son?

ERNEST
You always change the subject when you don't know.

CARL
Never mind that, where is Robert?

ERNEST
In his room I think.

CARL
Still?

(ERNEST puts his paper down, stands, and walks to the bedrooms doorway.)

I think he got in late last night.

ERNEST
ROBERT. WAKE UP.

CARL
Perhaps you should let the boy sleep.

ERNEST
Dad?

CARL
All right. He's your son.

ERNEST
Thank you. ROBERT. IT'S TIME TO GET UP.

ROBERT (offstage)
All right. I'm up.

(ERNEST stomps back to his chair and sits down.
He takes up his paper again.)

ERNEST

I just don't want him falling back into his old habits.

CARL

He's a fine young man.

ERNEST

Do me a favor and stay out of this. I'm not about to take child rearing advice from you.

(CARL sets his paper down and turns to his son.)

CARL

Now you listen here.

ERNEST

What?

CARL

Nothing.

(He goes back to his paper. ROBERT, late teens and, true to form a complete mess, dressed in the jeans and t-shirt he apparently fell asleep in, appears in the bedrooms doorway. He reaches up and grabs the upper reaches of the archway and leans into the room.)

CARL

I'm just saying that, despite everything, you turned out all right and so will he.

ROBERT

Thanks grandpa Schoenfeldt.

ERNEST

You need to get dressed.

ROBERT

I am.

(ERNEST stands.)

ERNEST

You're not going to go see your great-grandfather looking like that.

CARL

Actually--

ROBERT

What's wrong with this?

(ERNEST puts down his newspaper and advances on his son.)

ERNEST

Well for one thing.

(He lowers his son's arms.)

ERNEST

Do me a favor. Take your nose, stick it under your armpit and take a good long whiff.

(Like the idiot, aka teenager, he is, ROBERT does this and instantly regrets it.)

ERNEST

So we're all on the same page? It's called deodorant. Use it.

ROBERT

All right. All right.

(ROBERT retreats into the bedrooms with his father in pursuit.)

CARL (to no one in particular)

Actually I wanted to talk to you about that.

(There is a knock on the door.)

CARL

Come in.

(The door opens and VERNON, early 70s, frail, well-dressed, albeit in a suit he purchased in the late sixties, enters, walks to the living room chair and sits. He carries a newspaper which he reads while talking.)

VERNON

Good morning Carl.

CARL

Good morning Vernon. I was just talking about you.

VERNON

What about me?

CARL

That Model T you built. Remember?

VERNON

Wasn't that your project?

(CARL thinks about this.)

CARL

No. I believe it was yours.

VERNON

That's right. You wrecked it.

(He lifts his head and sniffs at the air.)

VERNON

Burnt oatmeal?

CARL

I believe it's one of her specialties.

VERNON

I actually rather like it; reminds me of Erin's cooking.

CARL

I feel the same way but don't tell Helen that.

(HELEN enters just as he says this.)

HELEN

Don't tell Helen what? Good morning Uncle Vernon.

(She leans over and kisses the top of his head,
which makes him smile.)

HELEN

Don't tell me what?

CARL

Nothing.

VERNON

We were just discussing your interpretation of oatmeal.

HELEN

Wonderful, if you don't like my cooking--

CARL

No one said that.

HELEN

So you like my cooking?

CARL

No one said that either.

HELEN

Is Robert ready?

CARL

I believe your husband is working on that.

(ERNEST backs out of the bedrooms' archway.
He is shouting.)

ERNEST

And don't come out till you're presentable.

VERNON

That could take awhile.

(ERNEST turns about and seems surprised to see his uncle.)

ERNEST

Uncle Vernon.

HELEN

I see you and dad are ready to go see your father.

CARL

Actually, that's what I wanted--

(He stops in mid-sentence as ROBERT, dressed in a manner which would frighten Greg Brady, appears behind his father and announces his presence loudly.)

ROBERT

All right?

ERNEST

No.

(ROBERT beats a hasty retreat while ERNEST follows.)

HELEN

Did you say something?

CARL

Pardon me?

HELEN

Did you say something just now?

CARL

I was just going to say I wasn't certain I wanted to go today.

HELEN

You don't want to visit your father?

VERNON

Why not?

CARL

It's not that.

VERNON

What is it?

CARL

I just saw him yesterday.

VERNON

I know. I was with you.

(ERNEST appears in the doorway which leads to the bedrooms.)

ERNEST

Helen, we need you back here.

(He disappears just as quickly.)

HELEN

What is it now?

(She follows him.)

VERNON

So what is it?

(CARL puts his newspaper aside and, standing, crosses to the dining room table.)

CARL

It's difficult to describe.

VERNON

Difficult to describe my... What is it?

CARL

He just looked so tired yesterday, so used up.

VERNON

He's over 90 years old. How is he supposed to look?

CARL

Like my father. Like the stubborn, strong-willed old man that he is.

VERNON

He's still that but he's also dying.

(There is silence. VERNON stands and turns to face his brother. ROBERT, now dressed in an ill-fitting suit and obviously hating it, appears in the doorway. He watches but does not speak.)

Did you hear me?

CARL

I heard you.

VERNON

Do you disagree?

CARL

No. it just isn't easy watching it.

VERNON

He's my father too.

CARL

I know, but...

VERNON

But what?

CARL

Nothing.

VERNON

Except that you two are closer then he and I because you too saw the elephant.

CARL

I wasn't going to say that.

VERNON

Good.

ROBERT appearing in doorway)

Hi Grandpa Schoenfeldt, Uncle Vernon

(ROBERT steps into the room. He crosses to the couch and plops down onto it. He pulls his jacket off dramatically and throws it to the floor only to feel his grandfather's disapproving gaze. He stands sheepishly and picks the jacket up and puts it on again and plops onto the couch.)

ROBERT

I'll wear the jacket. Just for grandpa Schoenfeldt.

VERNON

Your grandfather may not be coming with us.

ROBERT

Why not?

(ERNEST appears in the bedrooms' archway.)

CARL

I just don't feel up to it.

ERNEST

Don't feel up to what?

CARL

Going to see your grandfather.

ERNEST

But we're all going. I'm skipping a Chamber of Commerce meeting for this.

I-2-19

CARL

Don't let me stop you.

(HELEN appears in the bedrooms' archway. ROBERT stands. Everyone but CARL heads for the dining room Ernest holds back.)

ERNEST

Why don't we eat in the kitchen?

(The others exit, ERNEST walks to CARL who has walked back to the couch.)

ERNEST

Are you sure you don't want to go?

CARL

I'll see him tomorrow.

ERNEST

I just thought you might want to see him with the rest of the family.

CARL

Well you're wrong.

(ERNEST heads for the door but stops when his father speaks again.)

Don't play that game with me.

ERNEST

What game?

CARL

The family guilt game.

ERNEST

I see.

CARL

And no, I don't wish to talk about it.

ERNEST

No one asked you to.

(ERNEST heads for the kitchen door but stops when CARL speaks.)

CARL

I'm sorry. I know you like to have the whole family together for these things.

ERNEST

It's not often we can get the whole family together. You were away so often.

I-2-20

CARL

It's business. I had to make a living.

ERNEST

Business is definitely business, I know that as much as you do.

CARL

I really am sorry.

ERNEST

It's ok. It's not as if Vera were here.

CARL

No, I guess notsay hello to him for me.

(Everyone parades from the kitchen to the front door.)

CARL

That bad?

ROBERT

Worse.

(All exit except for CARL. After a few moments the telephone rings. CARL walks to the phone and answers it.)

CARL

Hello? Hello? You again? By the way, what are you selling? What? Are you insane?

(He hangs up and walks to the bedrooms. He exits just as the front door opens and ERNEST bursts into the room which he then begins to scour.)

ERNEST

Keys, keys, where are you?

(ROBERT appears at the front doorway.)

ROBERT

Dad?

ERNEST

Yes?

ROBERT

Are you mad at grandpa Schoenfeldt?

ERNEST

No. Why? Do you think he has my keys?

ROBERT

I mean because he's not coming with us.

I-2-21

ERNEST

He has his reasons.

ROBERT
What does seeing the elephant mean?

(This stops ERNEST's search.)

ERNEST
What?

ROBERT
Grandpa Schoenfeldt and Uncle Vernon were talking earlier and one of them said something about seeing an elephant. What's it mean?

(ERNEST resumes his search for his keys.)

ERNEST
It means having been in battle.

ROBERT
Like you?

ERNEST
Yes.

(ERNEST finds his keys on the mantle. He heads for the front door but stops when he reaches ROBERT, who stands in his way.)

ROBERT
Do you think I'll see an elephant?

ERNEST
I hope not.

(ERNEST tries to leave but ROBERT holds him back.)

ROBERT
But it's a family tradition, isn't it? You and gramps and great-grandpa Schoenfeldt and the stories Grandpa Schoenfeldt tells.

ERNEST
Can we talk about this later?

ROBERT
OK.

(They exit.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

I-3-22

ACT I

Scene 3

SETTING: The same house many hours later.

AT RISE: Lights go up partially. It is late at night. CARL enters from the bedrooms. He is wearing a bathrobe and carrying a magazine. He sits on the couch, puts on his reading glasses and works on a crossword puzzle.

CARL

Let's see, eight-letter word for reason to stay awake. I should know that.

(ERNEST appears in the bedrooms doorway. He is also wearing a bathrobe.)

ERNEST

You should know what?

CARL

An eight-letter word for reason to stay awake.

(ERNEST thinks for a moment. He paces and shakes his fists while providing the answer.)

ERNEST

Let's see. How about c-h-i-l-d-r-e-n?

(CARL writes it in. He smiles.)

CARL

It fits. Wait. No.

(ERNEST continues to pace.)

Where is he?

ERNEST

Off celebrating, I think.

CARL

Celebrating what?

ERNEST

Who knows? Does it matter?

CARL

You're worried?

ERNEST

After what happened to his sister? Of course I'm worried but what can I do?

I-3-23

CARL

You could stop him.

ERNEST

I couldn't stop her.

CARL

You could try.

ERNEST

I did try. I tried everything I could think of. Yelling. Pleading. Bargaining. Praying. Nothing worked but I did try.

CARL

I'm not trying to imply you were a bad parent. I was just saying that—

(ERNEST stops pacing and turns his attention to the back of his father's head.)

ERNEST

I know what you were just saying but you don't know. You weren't the one who had to bail her out time and time again. You weren't the one who stayed up night after night wondering where she might be, worrying about what might be happening to her. You weren't the one who had to go down to the hospital at two a.m. in the morning and look at a dead little girl and say, yes, that's my daughter. You weren't there.

(He walks to the living room chair and sits. He fights back the tears and will not look his father in the eyes.)

CARL

You may be right, but what about Robert?

ERNEST

Good question. I see him making the same mistakes his sister made. I know he doesn't want to but it's like he can't help it. And try as I might I can't help him. If only I had more time.

(CARL leans toward his son. He takes his glasses off and places them on the arm of the couch.)

CARL

What do you remember most about the war?

ERNEST

What? Why do you ask?

CARL

Just passing the time, what do you remember most?

(ERNEST glances toward the bedrooms. He looks at his father.)

I-3-24

ERNEST

There was this bar in Saigon. Actually it was a whorehouse.

CARL

Really?

ERNEST

I never did anything but drink beer there.

CARL

You were behaving yourself?

ERNEST

I was scared to death of catching something.

CARL

Conscience doth make coward of us all.

ERNEST

What?

CARL

That's what Shakespeare said but I think he got it backwards.

ERNEST

Great.

(He stands and walks to a small family portrait, a teenage girl, that stands on the fireplace mantle. He looks at it as he continues to speak.)

ERNEST

There was this one girl there, sometimes she served drinks and sometimes she did other things.

CARL

But with you she just served drinks.

ERNEST

She had the saddest eyes.

CARL

I remember a girl in Italy. It was right after Monte Casino.

ERNEST

You were just off the line. You'd had your fill of death and you wanted a little bit of life and there she was.

CARL

Have I told you this before?

ERNEST

Once or twice.

I-3-25

(We hear a badly tuned automobile pulling into a driveway. Ernest turns. He moves

toward the front door but Carl motions him
to step back.)

CARL

Wait a minute.

ERNEST

What?

CARL

What are you going to say to him?

ERNEST

I'm not sure. I'll know when I've said it.

CARL

Let me talk to him.

ERNEST

Dad?

CARL

Please. Let me do this.

ERNEST

If you're trying to make up for something.

CARL

I'm not.

ERNEST

All right.

(ERNEST exits. CARL goes back to his crossword
puzzle. We hear ROBERT walk slowly up the front
walk. He steps through the front door and sneaks
through the living room, seeing CARL on the couch
but hoping the old man did not hear him come in.
He is almost through the living room when CARL speaks.)

CARL

Robert. I am very glad to see you. You can help me with this puzzle.

ROBERT

What?

CARL

This crossword puzzle. It's going to kill me.

(CARL pats the couch next to him. ROBERT sits on
the spot. We see he is wearing the first outfit
his father rejected earlier in the day.)

CARL

This one clue has me stumped. It's an eight-letter word for reason for not sleeping.

(ROBERT thinks about this.)

ROBERT

How about children?

CARL

That's funny. That's what your father said.

ROBERT

Is he here?

(ROBERT stands but his grandfather, without looking up from his puzzle, reaches up and pulls him down.)

CARL

He's asleep. Let's talk.

ROBERT

Are you going to yell at me?

CARL

Fathers yell. Grandfathers talk. I want to ask you about your sister.

(ROBERT stands and walks toward the kitchen door.)

ROBERT

Why?

CARL

No reason. I just want to know a little more about what happened.

(ROBERT turns to face his grandfather.)

ROBERT

Well, she died. You'd know a lot more about it if you'd been around.

CARL

That's something else your father said.

ROBERT

I guess that's something we agree on.

(ROBERT walks toward the bedrooms archway but stops when his grandfather speaks.)

CARL

Your Uncle Vernon. He was around. He was of some help.

ROBERT

He tried.

I-3-27

CARL

Please sit down.

(ROBERT slumps to the couch and sits down.)

ROBERT

What?

CARL

Your sister, she used to get into trouble a lot?

ROBERT

It's Deseret Valley, what else is there?

CARL

So that's a yes?

ROBERT

Yes.

CARL

When did it start?

ROBERT

About four years ago.

CARL

When you were fourteen?

ROBERT

And she was about sixteen, yeah.

CARL

When did you start getting into trouble?

ROBERT

About the same time, why?

CARL

I'm just asking questions.

(ROBERT stands, CARL motions him to sit down, he does.)

ROBERT

Is this going to take much longer?

CARL (suddenly tired)

No, you can go.

(ROBERT stands and walks to the bedrooms archway
but turns back toward his grandfather.)

ROBERT

I never thought much about her until after she was gone. I went down with dad
when he went to identify her. Mom sent me to take care of him. When he

I-3-28

ROBERT (Cont.)

saw her he collapsed in a heap. And then he couldn't stop crying. When I was growing up the only time I saw him was when I visited him at the garage. He was always doing something, fixing something and I thought he must be the strongest man in the world. Then, suddenly, he couldn't even stand up.

CARL

What about you?

ROBERT

I don't know what I felt, nothing really. I knew that what she had done had hurt my father terribly and I knew I didn't want to end up like that.

CARL

So you decided to be good?

ROBERT

Yeah.

(He turns to leave but stops when CARL speaks.)

CARL

It's not always easy, being good, is it?

ROBERT

No.

CARL

Even if you want to be, you get out among your friends and there are so many temptations, so many reasons to just go along.

(ROBERT steps forward until he is directly behind his grandfather.)

ROBERT

What are you getting at?

(CARL pages through his magazine until he comes to an envelope, which he removes and waves about.)

CARL

The rewards of a good life are so tenuous and difficult to perceive.

ROBERT

What's that?

CARL

It's a letter for you. It came in the mail today.

(He stands and takes a few steps away from ROBERT, who dutifully follows.)

ROBERT

Who's it from?

I-3-29

CARL

Deseret Community College I believe. Let me see. Yes, I was correct. Shall I open it for you?

(ROBERT catches up with his grandfather but stops suddenly. He eyes the envelope with a mixture of curiosity and fear.)

ROBERT

What do you think it is?

(CARL starts to open the envelope but then stops.)

CARL

I know that you are trying to be good but I also know it's not easy.

ROBERT

Gramps?

CARL

Don't call me that. You go out and meet your old friends and they want to do the hanging around and the drinking maybe and sometimes it's hard to say no.

ROBERT

Gramps?

CARL

Or maybe it's just easier to say yes. Am I right?

(ROBERT reaches for the envelope but CARL pulls it out of his grandson's reach. They continue this game as they speak.)

CARL

Am I?

ROBERT

I suppose.

CARL

Sometimes it's hard to be strong, to stand up for yourself, but I know you can do it if you really try. You are a Schoenfeldt and that is a very special thing.

ROBERT

Grandpa Schoednfeldt?

CARL

I must admit I had my doubts.

ROBERT

Grandpa!!

CARL

But when you went ahead and took your GED test.

I-3-30

ROBERT

My GED?

(He lunges and grabs the envelope and takes a few steps away from CARL but then stops and stares at the thing.)

CARL
What's wrong?

ROBERT
It's the results.

CARL
The what?

ROBERT
The GED results.

CARL
Yes, I know, so open it.

(ROBERT starts the process but then stops.
He stares at the envelope.)

ROBERT
I can't.

(CARL crosses to his grandson.)

CARL
You really care about this?

ROBERT
The night Vera died I swore I wouldn't end like that, not because—

CARL
Because you didn't want to hurt them.

ROBERT
Right.

(He offers the envelope to his grandfather.)

Open it.

(CARL takes the envelope.)

CARL
So you want me to open this?

ROBERT
Yes.

CARL

Are you sure?

ROBERT

Yes!!!

CARL

All right.

(He opens the envelope and removes the letter
but does not unfold it.)

CARL

I had a hell of a hard time keeping this away from your father. I had to hide it from him by placing it right where the mail is supposed to go.

ROBERT

Grandpa Schoenfeldt?

CARL

All right

(He unfolds the letter and looks at it.)

Oh dear.

ROBERT

What is it?

CARL

I left my glasses on the couch. Would you get them for me?

(ROBERT hurries to the couch, grabs the glasses and
hurries them back to CARL, who slowly places them on
his face and then slowly examines the document.)

Oh dear.

ROBERT

What is it now?

CARL

It looks as if you are going to have to stop all this fooling around and go to college.

(He smiles and then ROBERT smiles.)

ROBERT

Are you serious?

CARL

You passed.

ROBERT

You passed? I mean I passed? I passed.

I-3-32

CARL

Take a look.

(CARL tries to hand his grandson the letter but ROBERT responds by giving his grandfather a huge bear hug and screaming at the top of his lungs.)

CARL

Robert, please, you'll wake your parents. You'll wake my parents and one of them is dead.

(ROBERT does not hear this. He dances around the room, screaming at the top of his lungs while continuing to hold his increasingly befuddled grandfather in a bear hug. ERNEST and HELEN enter and are confused by the spectacle.)

HELEN

Robert?

ERNEST

What the hell are you doing? Stop killing your grandfather.

(ROBERT, seeing his parents, lets CARL go and hugs HELEN and ERNEST both at the same time.)

ERNEST

What is it? Are you drunk?

ROBERT

Look.

(He tries to show them the paper but realizes that CARL still has it so he runs to CARL, grabs the Paper from him and runs it to his frightened parents who look at it and then look at their son.)

ERNEST

Does this mean what I think it does?

HELEN

I think it does.

ERNEST

What does it mean?

HELEN

It means a big party.

(She hugs her son while ERNEST pats him on the shoulder until ROBERT and HELEN begin screaming and jumping up and down while dancing around the room.)

CARL

Please, the neighbors.

I-3-33

(They become quiet.)

HELEN

All right, have it your way.

(They exit into the kitchen, jabbering party plans to each other. ERNEST turns his attention to his father.)

ERNEST

He did it.

CARL

That means I owe him ten dollars.

ERNEST

Why?

CARL

I told him if he passed his GED I would give him ten dollars.

ERNEST

I think he'll probably frame that money and keep it forever.

CARL

In that case I'll write him a check.

(ERNEST exits. CARL crosses to the couch, sits down and picks up his magazine. ROBERT enters.)

ROBERT

Thank you.

(ROBERT crosses to his grandfather.)

CARL

I keep telling you, you are a Schoenfeldt, there is strength in you, you may not be aware of it now but when you need it, it will be there.

ROBERT

Are you sure?

CARL

It was true for your great-grandfather, for me, for your father. Someday it will be true for you.

ROBERT

Are you talking about the elephant?

CARL

Maybe. What do you know about the elephant?

ROBERT

Just that it's kind of a family tradition.

CARL

That's right. Every generation has sent someone to serve his country, to see the elephant.

ROBERT

It makes you different. It makes you special.

CARL

In a way.

(ROBERT leans forward and kisses his grandfather on the forehead, which catches CARL off-guard.)

ROBERT

By the way, an eight-letter word for something that keeps you from sleeping? Try insomnia.

(CARL does some erasing and then some writing.
He smiles.)

CARL

Very good.

ROBERT

You have to know these things when you're a high school graduate.

(He exits, leaving CARL alone with his puzzle.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

Scene 4

SETTING: The same house, the next morning.

AT RISE: When the lights come up it is the next morning. HELEN enters from the kitchen. She is dressed for church and carries a large pitcher of orange juice which she sets on the dining room table just as ERNEST, also dressed for church, enters from the bedroom.

ERNEST

Is everything ready?

HELEN

Yes.

ERNEST

Good, you wake up Robert and dad, I'll, uh, be in the kitchen.

(They cross each other, meeting in the center of the room where she impulsively wraps her arms around him and, after a few second, he wraps his arms around him and kisses her gently on the forehead.)

May I have this dance, madam?

HELEN

There's no music.

ERNEST

There's always music

(He hums a Strauss waltz as he dances her around the floor.)

My grandfather loved Strauss waltzes. He insisted his grandchildren learn how to dance. Father would have objected but he was never around.

(They bump into a table and knock over a knick knack.)

HELEN

We need a bigger living room.

(He embraces her again.)

ERNEST

Can you believe it? He actually did it.

HELEN

I knew he could.

I-4-36

ERNEST

I didn't.

HELEN

Why not?

ERNEST

I was just worried he'd end up...

HELEN

How?

ERNEST

It doesn't matter. He did it and now he's going to go to college, maybe UCLA.

(She kisses him on the cheek and then rubs the spot with her thumb.)

ERNEST

I only wish...

HELEN

What?

ERNEST

Nothing. I'd better get to work.

(They let each other go and, after a moment's hesitation, he walks into the kitchen while she remains locked in place. She takes a few steps toward the bedrooms when there is a knock at the door. She answers the door and JANET, late teens, perky and a bit dense but not to the point where you want to smack her, dressed in the latest late 80s teen style, enters. She clearly enjoys being in this house.)

JANET

Hey, where's Rob?

HELEN

Janet. Good morning.

JANET

Hey, did you hear?

HELEN

That Robert passed his GED?

JANET

He did? Hey, that's great.

HELEN

Yes, what were you talking about?

I-4-37

JANET

Uh, nothing.

(She takes a few steps away from HELEN and stops or at least greatly reduces the intensity of her bouncing.)

HELEN

Janet? What is it?

JANET

Nothing, really.

(HELEN crosses to JANET. She carefully places her hands on JANET's shoulders, if only to hold the girl in one place.)

HELEN

What is it? And don't lie to me because I'll find out.

JANET

Frank is back in town.

(JANET winces slightly as HELEN tightens her grip on the girl's shoulder.)

HELEN

Frank, you say, is back in town.

JANET

Yes.

HELEN

That's not good news, is it?

JANET

No.

HELEN

You remember when Robert started getting into trouble, becoming involved with drugs, skipping school, who was his friend?

JANET

Frank, but—

HELEN

And when Robert broke into that house last year, who was with him?

JANET

Frank, but—

HELEN

One last question.

I-4-38

(HELEN leans forward and speaks directly into JANET's ear.)

HELEN (Cont.)

Do you know why Frank went to jail while Robert didn't?

JANET

I don't know.

HELEN

It was because we convinced Robert to testify against Frank. It wasn't easy.

JANET

Oh.

HELEN

Is that why you came by; to warn us about Frank being back in town?

JANET

Yeah.

HELEN

Thank you. You care for him, Robert that is, don't you?

JANET

Yeah. I care about all of you.

(HELEN's hands slip easily off of JANET's shoulders and she embraces the girl.)

HELEN

And we care about you.

JANET

Thank you.

HELEN

Good.

JANET

He's going to find out.

HELEN

Yes, but not now, not today.

JANET

OK.

HELEN

Thank you. I'll go find him for you.

(HELEN crosses toward the kitchen, leaving JANET to stand in the middle of the living room, looking as if she is afraid to touch anything. Ernest enters. He has an apron on and holds a spatula in one hand.

I-4-39

HELEN stops him and removes the spatula from his possession.)

HELEN (Cont.)

No you don't. You think you do, but you don't.

(She exits into the kitchen. ERNEST looks slightly embarrassed. He turns sheepishly toward JANET.)

ERNEST

Janet, how are you?

JANET

Good, I guess.

ERNEST

Anything new and interesting?

JANET

Not a thing, I swear it.

ERNEST

No need to swear, is there? Staying for breakfast?

JANET

OK.

ERNEST

Good.

(He exits into the kitchen. CARL, also dressed for church, enters.)

CARL

Good morning.

JANET

Fine, nothing, fine, what?

CARL

Is something wrong?

JANET

No, Mr. Schnowfelt, everything's fine.

(CARL steps forward, speaking as he does.)

CARL

Janet, the family name is... never mind. Are you here to see Robert?

JANET

OK.

(He has crossed to her.)

I-4-39

CARL

Have you heard the news about Robert?

JANET
What news?

CARL
He passed his GED exam.

JANET
What? Yeah. I heard.

CARL
Well?

JANET
What?

(He holds his arms out.)

CARL
Don't I get my hug?

(She smiles and embraces the old man.)

CARL
Come and sit down. We can talk.

(He leads her to the couch where they sit.
As they speak HELEN appears in the doorway.)

CARL
So, how did you and Robert meet?

JANET
We met through Vera, actually. She and me was lab partners and we become friends.

CARL
How did that happen?

JANET
I don't know. We just did. I loved, I mean I really liked how neat and tidy she always was and I think she liked how messy I always was. I loved, I mean I liked the way she talked to me even if I was just one of the welfare people. One time she actually asked if she could come to my house, of course I said no... Anyway, Rob used to hand out with us.

CARL
Now tell me, what is wrong?

JANET
Nothing.

I-4-41

CARL
Janet, something is wrong. I can tell these things. Don't forget, I was a salesman, spent years on the road. You have to know how to read people.

JANET

Well—

HELEN

Janet is worried about what will happen when Robert goes away to college.

(CARL turns to HELEN and then turns back to JANET.)

CARL

Is that true?

JANET

OK

(He pats JANET lightly on the knee and smiles with the confidence of a man who doesn't know how wrong he is.)

CARL

I knew it.

JANET

Did you?

CARL

I have a way of knowing these things. But, of course, family is a strong thing. It survives separations.

JANET

Does it?

(They do not see that ERNEST has reentered and watches his father speak.)

CARL

You see, when my father came back from World War One he had to move his family out here because his lungs were damaged in the war, mustard, gas, but work was hard to find so he traveled all through the desert looking for it; he was very rarely at home.

JANET

Oh my God. That is so sad.

(CARL thinks about this for a second.)

CARL

Well yes, but we survived, most of us, then when I grew up I had the same problem; even though I wanted to raise my children here I couldn't make a living here so I was gone a lot of the time too.

I-4-42

JANET

Oh my—

CARL

But we survived.

ERNEST

Most of us did. We had Vernon to look after us.

(CARL looks up sadly at his son.)

CARL

He was a good uncle.

ERNEST

He is a good uncle. Back then he was a good father.

(CARL stands.)

CARL

I am your father.

(They stare at each other for a moment.)

ERNEST

I know that, now.

(ERNEST retreats back into the kitchen. HELEN follows him. CARL watches her go and then turns back to JANET.)

CARL

So, what's really wrong?

JANET

I don't think I should tell you.

CARL

Of course you should.

(She looks to the archway that leads to the bedrooms and then looks back at CARL.)

JANET

Frank is back in town.

CARL

I think I've heard of this person. He was in jail, wasn't he?

JANET

Yes.

CARL

He was a welfare person?

JANET

Like me.

No, not like you.

CARL

Huh?

JANET

I think Robert had something to do with Frank being in jail.

CARL

I--

JANET

This latest bit of news, are we going to tell Robert?

CARL

Not yet.

JANET

(ROBERT enters through the bedrooms archway.)

Janet. Grandpa Schoenfeldt. What are you two talking about?

ROBERT

I was just telling her some war stories.

CARL

(ROBERT crosses to the sofa and sits on one of the arms.)

Don't stop.

ROBERT

(CARL stands and walks to a nearby cabinet where he fishes in a drawer.)

Actually, I was just going to show her some of my medals, if I could just... here that are. I should have then up on the wall, an I-love-me wall.

CARL

(He takes a small cigar out of a drawer and carries it back to the couch where he sits and opens the box.)

This one--

CARL

Is the one you got for taking part in D-Day.

ROBERT

Actually it was the invasion of Sicily.

CARL

Right.

ROBERT

CARL
Not quite as impressive as D-Day.

ROBERT
But it still helped get the job done.

CARL
Right.

ROBERT
He was in the first wave.

CARL
Actually, no, if I had I probably wouldn't be here today.

ROBERT
I thought you were.

CARL
Honestly, Robert, I must have told you this story often enough before.

ROBERT
Not this one.

CARL
Now, when we were in Italy, once we would take over an area, the people would come out and welcome us like liberators.

ROBERT
Grandpa.

CARL
From invaders to liberators in one easy step.

ROBERT
Grandpa—

CARL
I had a fellow in my platoon whose name was Dagostino. His family was from Italy.

ROBERT
Grandpa, this story we have heard.

(CARL turns to face his grandson.)

CARL
Maybe Janet hasn't heard it yet.

ROBERT
She's heard it more often than me.

CARL
More often than I have.

JANET

I haven't heard it for awhile.

(CARL turns his attention back to JANET.)

CARL

As I said his ancestors were from Italy. On the way over he told me how nice he thought it would be to meet family.

ROBERT

Uh huh.

(CARL casts him a sideways glance and continues.)

CARL

Once we got there he couldn't help but meet family, or people who said they were family.

JANET

What do you mean?

ROBERT

Yeah, gramps, what do you mean?

(CARL casts his grandson another sideways glance before continuing.)

CARL

Don't call me that. They would hear his name and they would say, oh, we're cousins, and they would have a huge story about how they were related somehow to this American GI. Here's the strange part, his family was from Sicily but even when we got to the main part of Italy he still kept finding cousins. Of course they all wanted money so he was always broke because he never had the heart to say no. He would tell me, with my luck the one person I say no to probably will be my cousin.

ROBERT

Whatever happened to him?

CARL

You know.

ROBERT

No I don't.

(CARL pauses a moment before answering.)

CARL

He died at Monte Casino.

JANET

That's so sad.

I-4-46

CARL

He was a brave little guy. He was only about five foot something, just about an inch taller than you have to be to get into the Army.

JANET

Oh, wow.

CARL

Yes, oh wow, but as I said he was very brave. He was always out front in every battle.

ROBERT

Even the last.

(CARL looks up with disapproval at ROBERT then looks back at JANET.)

CARL

Did I ever tell you about Johnson?

(HELEN and ERNEST enter, carrying plates of food.)

HELEN

Breakfast is ready.

CARL

Come and eat and then we'll go to church. Janet, you can come with us if you'd like.

(ERNEST casts his father an evil glance, which no one else sees.)

Just a moment, I think my son wants to talk to me.

(He pulls his son over to the center of the room.)

CARL

What's wrong?

ERNEST

Nothing.

CARL

Then what was that look about?

(ERNEST casts a glance at the others and then pulls his father further from them.)

ERNEST

You never spent a lot of time here so you don't know about the politics.

CARL

Why don't you enlighten me?

I-4-47

ERNEST

Don't get me wrong, I love Janet like crazy, like she was my own daughter, maybe.

CARL

But—

ERNEST

She's a welfare person.

CARL

I know that.

ERNEST

Do you know what they are?

CARL

They are people on welfare.

ERNEST

They are everything that has gone wrong in this community for the past 20 years. They are crime and vandalism, drugs and worse.

CARL

I don't think—

ERNEST

OF course you don't. You come and go as you like. The one think you don't do is think.

CARL

If I left it's because I had to.

ERNEST

I know that.

(He leans close to his father.)

ERNEST

What do you think I'm doing with the shop? I'm trying to build a life where I don't have to go away to make a living. In order to to that you have to play the game.

CARL

What game?

ERNEST

Politics. Do you know what it would do to my standing in this community if we walked into church with her?

CARL

I don't care, she's family.

ERNEST

Why is she family?

CARL

Because she needs to be family.

(ERNEST is about to speak but CARL turns abruptly away from him and toward the others.)

CARL
Janet, please join us for church.

JANET
OK. Save me a place at the table?

CARL
All right.

(He crosses to the dining room table. ROBERT, who has remained on the couch, crosses to the dining room but is met halfway by JANET who pushes him back to the far side of the room. While they talk the others dish up food.)

JANET
We'll be just a minute.

ROBERT
What's wrong?

JANET
What is wrong with you? Thus was a very important part of your grandfather's life and all you can say is I've heard this story?

ROBERT
But he tells it over and over again.

JANET
And don't you think there's a reason that that?

ROBERT
What do you want me to do?

JANET
Just listen to him.

(They turn their attention back to the dining room table.)

ROBERT
Gramps, I mean grandpa Schoedfeldt, can I ask you something?

CARL
You may.

ROBERT
Going in the Army, going to war, did it help you?

CARL
I don't know. I suppose.

ROBERT

How?

(CARL turns in his chair and looks at ROBERT.)

CARL

I think it gave me a different perspective on life, changed what I thought was important and what I thought wasn't.

ROBERT

Did it settle you down?

CARL

Well, it helped me appreciate my family a little more.

ERNEST

Are you two going to sit down?

ROBERT

In a minute.

(He turns his attention back to JANET.)

Did you know Frank is in town?

JANET

How did you know?

ROBERT

It's still a small town, remember?

ERNEST

Will you two please come and eat?

(ROBERT begins to cross but JANET grabs him by the arm and stops him.)

JANET

You just don't get it, do you?

ROBERT

Get what?

JANET

You just don't know what you have.

(He pulls himself out of her grip. They cross to the dining room table and sit as the lights go down.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

I-5-50

ACT I

Scene 5

SETTING: The same, after the family has returned from church.

AT RISE: CARL and ERNEST are sitting in the living room. Their Sunday clothes are now much looser as they read the Sunday paper. ERNEST looks up from his paper to speak to his father.

ERNEST
So what were you and Janet and Robert talking about this morning?

CARL
I just told them a few war stories.

ERNEST
Nothing gory, I hope.

CARL
Of course not, I don't even like to think about those things, much less talk about them.

ERNEST
I know. I feel the same way.

CARL
Maybe it's harder for you.

ERNEST
I don't see why?

CARL
Well, your war was—

ERNEST
--not popular? I don't think popularity makes fighting a war any less
difficult-

CARL
Of course not, what I mean is your war was a bit more futile than mine.

ERNEST

And what did your war accomplish? Nuclear terror? Forty-five year of cold war? My war?

CARL
We made the world safe for democracy.

ERNEST
You're confused. That was your father's war.

CARL
Oh, well, we got rid of a despot.

ERNEST

Right, I guess in Vietnam we were the despots.

CARL

I suppose.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

I-6-52

ACT I

Scene 6

SETTING: The same, just before a celebration for ROBERT.

AT RISE: HELEN and JANET enter from the kitchen. They are dressed casually and carry large amounts of decorations which they proceed to put up in various parts of the living room and dining room. This includes a banner which reads, "Congratulations, Robert." They speak as they work.

HELEN
Thank you so much for helping.

JANET
I don't mind. I really love coming over here. It's a nice change of pace.

HELEN
From your house?

JANET
It's a little less hectic over here... actually it's a lot less hectic.

HELEN
How are your parents?

(JANET thinks about this for a second.)

JANET
They have their moments of clarity.

(She laughs nervously and briefly.)

HELEN
That's nice.

JANET
But I still like coming over here. I like that you let me come over.

HELEN
Why wouldn't we?

JANET
You know.

(HELEN embraces JANET, who is not certain what to make of the gesture.)

HELEN
Stop that now, stop it.

I-6-53

(She lets the girl go and makes a point of straightening her clothes.)

HELEN (Cont.)
Anyway, you know you're always welcome.

JANET
Thanks.

HELEN
You were almost like a sister to Vera.

JANET
Yeah.

(She stops what she is doing and walks over to HELEN
and hugs her. This catches HELEN somewhat by surprise.)

HELEN
What was that for?

JANET
Just, sometimes, just saying thanks isn't enough.

(HELEN hugs her back. She does not see that
JANET is fighting back tears.)

HELEN
You're so sweet.

JANET
It's just I love this family so much.

HELEN
Thank you. We love you too.

(The lights go down. As the lights come up we are
in the midst of a celebration. ROBERT is flanked by
his parents and grandfather. JANET stands several feet
away. They all hold glasses aloft)

ERNEST
Here's to my son, who proved to be much less dumb than I thought he was.

ROBERT
No one is as dumb as you thought I was.

CARL
That remind me, Robert, I owe you a dollar.

ROBERT
Actually, it was ten dollars.

(CARL speaks while pulling a bill out of his pocket.)

I-6-54

CARL
I told Robert I would give him ten dollars if he passed his GED.

(He hands the bill to his grandson.)

ERNEST

What are you going to do with it?

ROBERT

Probably frame it.

CARL

In that case, give it back and I'll write you a check.

(CARL makes a half-hearted attempt to get the bill back. HELEN speaks.)

HELEN

Where's Vernon?

CARL

He went to get grandfather.

HELEN

Why's he taking so long?

CARL

You know how he drives.

HELEN

Of course, Janet can you help me with something?

JANET

OK.

(They exit into the kitchen. CARL and ERNEST lead ROBERT to the couch where they sit him down. CARL sits next to him and ERNEST stands behind him.)

CARL

So, what are your plans?

ERNEST

College? Trade School? What?

ROBERT

I'm not really sure. I got a lot to think about today.

CARL

Well, I guess there's no rush.

ERNEST

I didn't have any plans until after I got back from the Army.

I-6-55

CARL

Neither did I.

ROBERT
I'm thinking of maybe joining the Marines.

ERNEST
Why would you want to do that?

ROBERT
You know, family tradition.

(CARL and ERNEST exchange glances.)

ERNEST
You don't have to do that.

CARL
Don't feel you have to join the military just because we did.

ROBERT
Maybe it would be good for me.

ERNEST
Other things might be good too.

CARL
That's right.

ROBERT
I just think this is what I need right now. The discipline, you know, the hard work.

ERNEST
Don't rush into this.

CARL
Think about it.

ROBERT
OK.

(Their side of the stage goes dark. JANET and HELEN enter carrying dishes of food and plates and silverware which they place on the table. They begin setting the table.)

HELEN
I hope your uncle, Robert's uncle, gets here soon.

JANET
It wouldn't be the same without him, or your grandfather.

HELEN
You're right.

JANET
And Vera... sorry.

HELEN

That's all right. I was thinking the same thing. I think of Vera every day.

JANET

So do I. I'm sorry I didn't... I mean I'm sorry I wasn't.

HELEN

I understand.

JANET

I don't think you do because I don't think I can explain it right.

(HELEN stops what she is doing and looks directly at JANET.)

HELEN

Try.

(JANET stops what she is doing and looks directly back at HELEN.)

JANET

I really loved Vera a lot. So much so I didn't see what a bad influence I was being on her. I was always wild and my parents never cared.

HELEN

I'm sure they—

JANET

No, they didn't. Try. That's what you were going to say, right?

HELEN

Yes.

JANET

Well, they didn't.

(She lets out a deep sigh.)

JANET

Listen, in Deseret Valley there are two kinds of kids who do drugs, the kind that has to hide their drug use from their parents and the kind that has to hide their drugs from their parents. Guess which kind I was.

HELEN

I don't—

JANET

I was born into that world. I had no choice. But I didn't have to pull Vera in with me.

I-6-58

HELEN

Believe me, you didn't pull, she went willingly.

JANET

This is your daughter.

HELEN

Believe me, it's not easy for me to say that, but it's the truth.

JANET

Is truth an important thing?

HELEN

It's the most important thing.

(She looks around.)

The napkins.

(They exit. The lights go up again over CARL, ERNEST and ROBERT.)

ERNEST

Understand; we just want you to be happy.

ROBERT

Yes.

CARL

You don't feel like you have to leave town for some reason, do you?

ERNEST

Dad.

ROBERT

No, no way.

CARL

That's good. Running is never the answer.

ROBERT

I know.

ERNEST

What's keeping Vernon?

CARL

I don't know. Let's go outside and wait for him.

(They stand and cross to the front door.)

ERNEST

Helen, we're all going outside.

I-6-58

HELEN (off-stage)

Alright.

(As they exit, HELEN and JANET reenter with more

food and napkins, which JANET begins placing around the table. When HELEN speaks, JANET stops in her place.)

HELEN

How did it happen?

JANET

What?

HELEN

When Vera died, how did it happen?

JANET

What?

HELEN

How did it happen?

(JANET stares at HELEN. She lets a napkin slip to the floor.)

JANET

Why are you asking me this now? Why now, after all this time?

HELEN

I always wanted to, believe me, I always wanted to but I couldn't. Sometimes the question would be on the edge of my tongue, begging to be asked but I couldn't do it.

JANET

Why didn't you?

HELEN

Because somewhere in my mind or my heart or my soul I knew what the answer was going to be and even though I knew I needed to hear it I knew I wasn't ready to hear it.

JANET

You think you're ready now?

HELEN

I know for a fact that I am not ready to hear it but I need to.

(JANET leans over and picks up the napkin. She holds it in front of her as if it will protect her from what she knows is coming.)

JANET

How much do you know?

I-6-58

HELEN

All I know is it was an overdose. I want to know the whole story.

JANET

Are you sure?

HELEN

Yes.

(JANET drops into the nearest chair. She is overcome with sadness and despair. She begins to twist the napkin in her hands. She continues to stare at HELEN.)