

ACT 1

Stage left, crammed into a corner upstage, lit with one spot, small table and mirror, two chairs. It would be kind to call this a furnished closet.

JOEY sits body front, head down, slumped. His arms rest on his knees, his knees apart. If he's looking for something on the floor, he knows he's not going to find it. Seated to his side, in partial shadow, staring at him, is ARLENE. They don't make eye contact. After a few beats there is a knock at the invisible door.

JOEY What?

OFF STAGE VOICE Time.

JOEY slowly stands and gives a quick look at ARLENE who looks away. Lights out.

OFF STAGE VOICE *(with increasing vigor)* And now, ladies and gentleman, the elegant and sophisticated Grand Fort Lauderdale Palace Condominium presents for your comic entertainment, star of the Borscht Belt, movies and TV, direct from a smash engagement at the condo across the street, Mr. Florida Comedy himself, Mr. Joey Green.

JOEY moves quickly to center stage. He has done this before.

JOEY Good evening, ladies and *(looking around)*...ladies and... ladies and nothing. Only ladies? What the hell is this, the woman's house of detention? Where are all the men?

OFF STAGE VOICE Dead.

JOEY *(looking off stage)* All of them?

OFF STAGE VOICE All of them.

JOEY Were they all on the same bus or something?

OFF STAGE VOICE What difference does it make?

JOEY You got a point. Was I with them?

OFF STAGE VOICE We're not sure. We'll know more after the show.

JOEY *(to audience)* My God, that's horrible news! Looks like I got here too late. No Jacks, no Steves, no nothing. What we have here is a magical world of walkers, white hair and women. The three "w's" of "wow, I wish I was twenty years younger." Of course, then I'd want you ladies to be fifty years younger. *(peers out at audience)* Hello. Are you ladies still breathing or are your hearing aids off? Is there anybody out there? It can't be my material. I've been using the same stuff for fifty years

and it always got laughs before. How about a little song; would you like that? Or would I be disturbing your sleep? Okay, here goes:

Hello, hello, hello.
I hope you like my show.
I'll sing a little,
Dance a little,
Tell a couple of jokes.
I hope you like me,
'Cause I like you,
Because you're just good folks.

(he waits a few beats, looking around) So that's it, eh? A staring contest. An oil painting. I came all the way from across the street to entertain, to liven up your lives and you know, my "ex" would fit in here beautifully. You would have loved her. Smart, pretty, and in one hundred percent agreement with you. She also never thought I was funny. Of course, she's very "ex." In fact, she's moved on to that place in the afterlife reserved for critics. I won't tell you where, but if you thought Florida was hot... You know, ladies and ladies, every great marriage is based on give and take. Give and take and ours was no different. I gave and she took. And took. And took. Oy, did she take. From my pockets, from my wallet, she checked the inside of my mouth. She took. And I gave from the bottom of my heart. Really, from the bottom of my heart. What she didn't know was, all the good stuff was at the top of my heart. And we had two kids, my wife and I. Howard and Brenda. One of them was terrific. Unfortunately, we never knew which one that was. Is anyone listening to me? Lady, are interested in this? Are you falling asleep or should I call a doctor? That's all right, sweetheart, close your eyes. I'll call you if I need you. Well, listen, you've all been a wonderful audience, but maybe next time we'll meet under happier circumstances: you'll be up here and I'll be passed out in the audience. But seriously, I hope you invite me back. I need the work. Boy, do I need the work. And ushers, don't wake them, but you might want to bring in some oxygen.

JOEY crosses, returning to the dressing room. ARLENE, in shadow, sits at the table. JOEY enters and begins to change his clothes. He occasionally looks in ARLENE'S direction.

JOEY *(cont'd)* *(to ARLENE)* What are you looking at? So it didn't go. So? The old lady in the third row, the one that took out her teeth. You think it's easy playing to an old lady that takes out her teeth? Last week it was the guy who wet himself, tonight the teeth. What I wouldn't give to see one pregnant woman in the audience. *(beat)* I'd give even more to see a pregnant man.

Stop staring. You're like my audiences. Staring, staring. All right, what?

ARLENE Are you going?

JOEY Am I going? Arlene, I can't stop going. With a prostate like I got...

ARLENE You also can't stop with the stupid jokes. Are you going to New York?

JOEY Of course I'm going. Jason is getting *bar mitzvahed*, Howard invited me, I'm going.

ARLENE He invited you because he felt sorry for you.

JOEY He invited me because he wanted me. If he wants me because he feels sorry for me, I don't care. Besides, he should feel sorry for me. With kids like him, people should feel sorry for me. Did you see that woman with the teeth. Eeech! She had nice gums, though. Besides, I'm going to perform at the *bar mitzvah*.

ARLENE Not this kind of stuff, I hope.

JOEY Actually, I was planning to sing all the parts to Aida.

ARLENE Couldn't be any worse. You staying with Howard?

JOEY Naw! I'd just be in his way, the party and all. And now he's such a swinger. Besides, I haven't seen much of Brenda lately so I figure...

ARLENE Does Brenda know?

JOEY Oh, yeah. It's all set. Actually they were kind of fighting over me, but like I said, I haven't spent much time with Brenda lately...I guess you're coming, huh?

ARLENE To the gig?

JOEY To New York.

ARLENE Try and stop me.

JOEY Stop you from following me? Fat chance. You've become like a Joey Green groupie. I'm still not sure this was such a good thing.

ARLENE It was your idea, Joey.

JOEY'S mood changes from feisty to depressed. He sits, leans forward arms on knees, head bowed. Finally, he sighs, picks up a suitcase and, followed by ARLENE,

crosses to stage right. Lights down on s.l. up on s.r. as JOEY and ARLENE enter HOWARD'S living room.

HOWARD is staring blankly at the TV. He has no recognition of ARLENE.

JOEY Wadda ya mean, you're not ready for this. You knew three weeks ago I was coming.

HOWARD But you were supposed to go to Brenda.

JOEY Are you sure?

HOWARD I'm sure.

JOEY Brenda has a teeny, tiny, itsy, bitsy, apartment. It's so small that...

HOWARD Yeah. Okay, Pop. Let's hear. How small is it?

JOEY Hear what? I just said it was small, that's all. That's why I came to my wealthy, doctor son, the one that spends his life looking up women's whatsises. And gets paid.

HOWARD Well, it's a nasty job, but somebody has to do it.

JOEY That's why I came here. You got room and you don't mind doing nasty jobs. I could fit right in. (pause) Mind if I sit down?

HOWARD *(still focusing on the TV)* Wherever you want, Pop.

JOEY slowly places the suitcase upstage and then slowly, achingly returns and sits on a chair at the table. ARLENE had waited for his return. She takes a seat near him at the table.

JOEY groans. There is no reaction. He groans again.

HOWARD *(cont'd)* Okay, Pop. What's happening?

JOEY It's five years.

HOWARD Five years since what?

JOEY Five years since... you know.

HOWARD I know it's been five years since you've been here. Is that what you mean? That five years?

JOEY I meant about your mother. You know.

ARLENE *(to JOEY)* Say it, you big dope.

HOWARD Died, Pop. Arlene died. It's not disrespectful to say she died. Some of the best people do it. And for your information, I knew it was an anniversary. I just chose not to celebrate it.

JOEY Is that why I don't see the memorial candle?

HOWARD You don't see a candle because lighting candles is an archaic, pagan ritual and I'm not a pagan.

JOEY I'll get you a candle tomorrow.

HOWARD And I'll throw it in the garbage. No memorial candle, Pop.

JOEY *(after a significant pause)* Well, we'll see. Maybe tomorrow.

HOWARD I'm going to put you back on the plane, Dad. Get it? Candle equals bye-bye.

JOEY *(pause)* When is Brenda coming over?

HOWARD *(sigh of resignation)* I guess when she feels she has to.

JOEY I'd like to see her.

HOWARD I'm sure she's dying to see you, too.

JOEY Arlene was a good woman, Howie. A good woman.

HOWARD Do you want some coffee? I think I want some coffee.

JOEY It's a little late for coffee, don't you think?

HOWARD Do you want coffee, Pop?

JOEY You got tea?

HOWARD I have coffee, Pop. Do you or do you not want coffee?

JOEY *(with a shrug)* So let it be coffee.

HOWARD exits.

JOEY *(cont'd)* *(to ARLENE)* Maybe it wasn't such a good idea to come up here.

ARLENE I think it was the phrase "good woman" that threw it off.

JOEY Why?

ARLENE Because we all know I wasn't and we all know you didn't think so. Other than that it was perfect.

JOEY That's a reason for a son not to give his father a cup of tea?

ARLENE Why did you come, Joe?

JOEY *(angry)* You know why.

ARLENE This isn't going to mean anything unless you're honest.

JOEY The *bar mitzvah*.

ARLENE Bullshit.

JOEY Me? Bullshit? I'm hurt.

ARLENE Okay. Let's start from the beginning. Why did you take everything you own?

JOEY Because everything I own fits into that three thousand year old suitcase of mine. I think Moses used the thing when he *schlepped* around the desert. Then it was handed off to Jesus for his *schlep*. I don't know if Mohammed or Buddha used it or not, but now it's my turn.

ARLENE You're comparing yourself to those guys?

JOEY Why not? We had something in common. We were all late bloomers, we attracted a crowd, and we were on the road a lot.

ARLENE You also took your will. You needed that for the *bar mitzvah*?

HOWARD enters with a tray on which are two cups and saucers. Neither JOEY nor ARLENE are aware of his presence.

JOEY Some light reading before I go to bed.

ARLENE You're a wise-guy, Joe, but remember what I told you. Unless you're honest with them...

HOWARD *(to JOEY)* Did you say you wanted something to read before you went to bed?

JOEY You found some tea?

HOWARD No. I told you. I have coffee. And you didn't answer my question.

JOEY What question?

HOWARD I came in and I thought I heard you say you wanted something to read when you went to bed.

JOEY You're hearing things, Howie, and I don't want any coffee.

They stare at each other a while. HOWARD shakes his head in disbelief, then pours a cup and drinks.

JOEY *(cont'd)* When do I see Brenda?

HOWARD You haven't asked about the kids.

JOEY Kids?

HOWARD My kids, Pop. Jason and...

JOEY ...Loretta. Jason and Loretta. I remember.

HOWARD Laura. Jason and Laura.

JOEY Yeah, great kids you got, Howie. Great.

HOWARD How would...never mind.

JOEY How would I know? I remember back before I moved to Florida.

HOWARD You weren't around too much then either.

JOEY That's also true. *(beat)* So, Brenda. Does she know I'm here?

HOWARD Yeah. But she's home.

JOEY I'm here, but she's home?

HOWARD Right. She was expecting you there. Do you know why she was expecting you there?

JOEY No.

HOWARD *(enraged)* BECAUSE THAT WAS THE PLAN. YOU WERE GOING TO STAY THERE, REMEMBER. IT WAS YOUR IDEA TO STAY WITH HER. *(now softer)* Now do you understand?

JOEY You got quite a temper on you, Howie. Where did that come from?

HOWARD Can't imagine.

JOEY Oh, I see. I'm here two minutes. I come all this way to be with my family at my grandson's *bar mitzvah* and this is how it starts out. Not even my foot in the door and already I'm yelled at. Next you're going to tell me it's because of me you got this anger. That I'm responsible for all of your problems in life.

HOWARD Just to keep this from getting too melodramatic, the only problem I want to deal with right now is that YOU WERE SUPPOSED TO GO TO BRENDA, NOT TO ME. But this is you, Pop. It may sound like small potatoes to you. Me, Brenda, what the hell difference does it make, right? Only it isn't small potatoes, Pop. It's big, fat, plump potatoes because this is what

you've always done. You've always done what ever the hell you've wanted to do and the hell with any one else.

JOEY *(after a significant pause)* What the hell does potatoes have to do with this?

HOWARD rises to exit.

HOWARD I can't do this alone. It's too much to ask.

HOWARD exits. JOEY takes a cell phone from his pocket.

ARLENE What are you doing?

JOEY Calling Brenda. Busy. Father comes up from Florida you'd think she'd come see him. Damn cell phones never work right.

JOEY puts the phone away.

JOEY *(cont'd)* I thought he was made of better stuff.

ARLENE Whatever that stuff was, it was kicked out of him a long time ago.

JOEY Not by me. I'm not going to be the fall guy here.

ARLENE Fall, Winter, Spring and Summer, Joe. All the seasons of the year.

JOEY And you, Ms. Pure. You had nothing to do with this?

ARLENE Not by choice, Joe. I became the bitch by default.

JOEY You were born to it.

ARLENE When you married me?

JOEY *(after pause to reflect)* No.

ARLENE Before we had Howard?

JOEY No.

ARLENE Before Brenda, when you started touring the clubs?

JOEY Yeah, around there.

ARLENE Right. You were away a lot, remember?

JOEY I was working.

ARLENE You were away.

JOEY Working.

HOWARD enters.

ARLENE Away.

JOEY We all got into a bad habit: eating.

ARLENE And I got into a bad habit: resenting.

HOWARD I remember you at the table, Dad. It wasn't a habit, it was an addiction. And what makes it bad?

JOEY What are you talking about?

HOWARD You just said eating was a bad habit, so I said...Never mind. I don't want to get into what I just said.

JOEY Just as well. I wasn't paying attention anyway.

HOWARD I just called Brenda. She's furious and on the way over to get you. Apparently the great event of your arrival caused her to clean the apartment or something like that. You explain to her why you didn't go to her because I still don't get it. (*realization dawns*) Were you just talking to...

Joey stands and begins walking toward his suitcase. Getting the suitcase, JOEY heads for the door.

HOWARD (*cont'd*) I just asked you a question. Were you just talking to...Where the hell are you going?

JOEY It been a really long day, Howie. I'm going to bed. Which one is my bedroom?

HOWARD You leave now, it's in the garage. I said, Brenda, my sister, your daughter, is coming over. You asked me to get her over here. Ten times you asked. Now you're going to sleep?

JOEY Like I said, I'm tired. I'll see her tomorrow.

JOEY exits, suitcase in hand, followed by ARLENE.

Lights dim and then quickly relight. There is a loud banging at the front door. HOWARD enters from the kitchen with a glass of wine in one hand, a bottle in the other. After putting the bottle on the table, he opens the door and BRENDA enters.

BRENDA All right, where is he?

HOWARD He went to bed.