

GETTLINGER

SLOCUM. (*Urgently.*) Wait a minute! Wait a minute, everybody. Maybe we're all getting excited too soon. (*They ALL stop and look at him.*)

ARIAS. What do you mean?

SLOCUM. We don't know anything about this guy Gettlinger . . .

CATLAN. So what?

FINEBERG. Whoever he is, he's got to be better than Mrs. Stone!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 6

The Stage is split between Mr. GETTLINGER's "office" and the "Community Room." As lights come up, ARIAS is teaching mambo steps to SLOCUM and FINEBERG. GETTLINGER is dictating into machine.

GETTLINGER. . . . Continuing the status report to the Executive Director from Andrew Gettlinger, Administrator. Next, Mr. Alejandro Arias. Sixty-seven year old male, native of Chile. He was admitted to Golden Days on the fourth of September, 1978 after his family perished in a tenement fire. I have returned his Latin recordings to him as he requested. His mental condition appears to be relatively good. However, he is still subject to severe nightmares . . . (*MRS. POLIANOFFSKY enters with her cane and energetically joins the Mambo class.*) Mrs. Esther Polianoffsky, seventy year old widow. No friends have come to visit her in the weeks since I've been here, and she has no immediate family contacts. Thus far, she has refused to discuss anything with me about her needs or desires. I have, therefore, scheduled a series of weekly meetings beginning the day after tomorrow, Thursday at ten a.m. (*CATLAN enters, his baseball cap twisted comically, and waddling like a duck, he joins the class.*) Mr. Mickey Catlan . . . He is receiving his regular radiation treatments . . . Unfortunately, his condition continues to deteriorate. (*GETTLINGER continues dictating into the mike as he exits. The Mambo class spreads Left, and takes Full Stage.*)

ARIAS. That's good, Mrs. P.! Step, step, one, two, three . . . Come on, Catlan. You can do better than that! (*MRS. COOPER enters, passing through.*) Come on, Mrs. Cooper, try it! (*To the GROUP.*) I think Mrs. Cooper is getting old.

MRS. COOPER. I heard that!

(*She goes out. ARIAS continues correcting their mistakes, until finally, the line is moving in perfect unison. As the OLD PEOPLE master the step, they enjoy it more and more. They are a delightful sight.*)

ARIAS. Ready now, halt! (*The music ends.*)

CATLAN. Well, I did that good!

ARIAS. Yeah, especially on the "halt." I'm going to put the record back on. Don't anybody move. (*ARIAS goes Off to start the record again. The RESIDENTS rush for the chairs and sit, exhausted.*)

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. Thank God! What time is it?

FINEBERG. (*Looking at his watch.*) It's four o'clock.

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. I've got to go soon. I've got a guitar lesson.

FINEBERG. Guitar? I thought you were learning the flute.

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. My bridgework couldn't take it.

SLOCUM. (*To MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.*) Say! Have you seen the new Crafts Room? It's got some great equipment.

FINEBERG. I can't believe what he's put in here in three weeks. The place is like Grossinger's.

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. Yes, isn't it wonderful! (*The "record" starts again.*)

SLOCUM. (*Rising.*) I hear he's planning a Christmas party.

FINEBERG. (*Rising.*) A Christmas Party?! How's he going to fit in a Christmas Party?

SLOCUM. We don't have time for a Christmas Party! (*ARIAS comes back on.*)

"THE ONLY PLACE FOR ME"

FINEBERG. (*Singing.*)

CALISTHENICS, 8 A.M.

A SPANISH CLASS AT NINE.

ARIAS.

CHA-CHA-CHA.

CATLAN.

AT TEN YOU'RE OFF TO SHUFFLEBOARD.

SLOCUM.

AT TWELVE O'CLOCK YOU DINE.

ARIAS and RESIDENTS.

CHA-CHA-CHA.

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.

ONE P.M. YOU FINGERPAINT,

Start

End

Start

MY OLD FRIENDS

SCENE 9

Peter

Gettlinger

Fineberg

MY OLD FRIENDS

GETTLINGER's "office," immediately following.

GETTLINGER. Sorry to pull you away from the party like that.

FINEBERG. Oh, that's all right. It had to be done.

GETTLINGER. Times like these I wish I had become an accountant.

FINEBERG. You can't get too attached, Mr. Gettlinger, or you'll be crying every time you turn around. Believe me. I know.

GETTLINGER. Yes. You'd think by now I'd get used to it.

FINEBERG. You never get used to it.

GETTLINGER. (Looking at his papers.) He didn't have any family here today, did he?

FINEBERG. Not that I know of. He said he ate too much.

GETTLINGER. Yeah, well . . . what he thought was heartburn was the onset of a coronary occlusion. (PETER comes into the light, and stands silently for a moment. GETTLINGER looks up.) Yes, Peter?

PETER. The mattress is rolled up. All his things are gone.

GETTLINGER. Yes.

PETER. So fast? This afternoon he lived in that room . . . now it looks . . . no trace he was ever there.

GETTLINGER. That's right. Sidney, would you sign the disposition and the Exec Report, please. (FINEBERG takes out his pen and unscrews the cap, and signs the papers.)

PETER. Who do you send his things to?

GETTLINGER. Like what?

PETER. Whatever was his . . . He owned some things . . .

FINEBERG. They pack them away.

GETTLINGER. The usable clothing goes to the thrift shop. Anything else that's usable goes to the Salvation Army or St. Vincent de Paul's.

PETER. What did you take, Fineberg?

FINEBERG. Nothing. I don't want anything.

PETER. But you . . . you knew him a long time . . .

FINEBERG. (Matter-of-factly.) Yes, but now he's gone. People die here.

PETER. I know that. But this was his home. I would think . . . something should be left to show that the man lived! Isn't that right? Well . . . he made a bench! I want it! I want Wally Slocum's bench!

GETTLINGER. It's yours.

FINEBERG. Death is one thing we don't have to be reminded of. PETER. Why not? Why not? If you really lived your life, then what's so terrible?

FINEBERG. Because here we face—

GETTLINGER. Take it easy. Calm down.

PETER. (Angrily.) Calm down? Doesn't anybody mourn around here?

GETTLINGER. Peter, my job is to keep these people happy.

PETER. Happy! Anyone who is always happy is already dead. What are we, cripples? That we can't have a moment of sorrow? You can always go back to your cha-cha-cha five minutes later. Slocum! This afternoon he lived. He made something! That's when happiness comes. From the working . . . and in the living!

GETTLINGER. Well, here you can work.

PETER. We don't work here. We just keep busy.

FINEBERG. Legitimate! We're all friends, we have a good time. What's wrong with that?

PETER. You're gonna die, Fineberg. Isn't there something else you want to do before you die? (FINEBERG does not respond.)

GETTLINGER. (Exploding with anger.) Wait, wait a minute. What do you want, Peter? You want it all! You can't get it! Since when are you the great expert? What do you know about it? You don't like this place? I've seen the real places, I worked as a State Investigator, I saw places where the stench alone would stain your clothes—places where no matter what I asked, the patients wouldn't look at me. And when they did they said, "Please don't beat me today." Now, that is the business I'm in! And this place is the best! The best there is. Sure, it's a waiting room . . . for a lot of people . . . people who have nowhere else to go and no better place to die—and it's the best there is! (PETER stares at him silently, then slowly turns and walks out. To FINEBERG.) You want coffee?

-end

THE LIGHTS FADE

SCENE 10

Music starts under, softly. TWO COUPLES are waltzing quietly Upstage. PETER enters. He crosses down to HELOISE.)

PETER. I've been looking for you, Heloise.

MRS. COOPER.
YOU?
FINEBERG.
ME!
MRS. COOPER.
NO!
FINEBERG.
YES!
MRS. COOPER.
HOT DAMN!
FINEBERG.
YES, MA'AM!
I BOUGHT A SLAM BAM,
GOD-DAMN, BICYCLE!
ALL. (*Shocked.*)
FINEBERG!
FINEBERG. Sorry . . .
ALL.
TODAY!

Peter &
Carpenter
(Larry)
Same actor as Gettlinger

(*They ALL exit in a row, still riding their "bicycles."*)

Start

SCENE 5

The Community Room. Some time later. LARRY, a young handyman in overalls, walks on carrying a carpenter's toolbox. He stops by the newel post, kneels, and takes out some tools. PETER enters.

PETER. (*Crossing to piano.*) Fixing the newel post, eh? That's good. (*He studies the piano.*) Say! Can I borrow a large Phillips Head from you?

LARRY. (*Without looking up.*) Nope.

PETER. I just need it for a little while. I'll give it right back.

LARRY. Sorry, Pop. I'm not supposed to let anybody touch the tools.

PETER. Look, it's kind of important. I'll bring it right back.

LARRY. I told you. I'm not supposed to let anybody touch the tools.

PETER. (*A little exasperated.*) Terrific! Well, then, is there a hardware store around here where I could buy one?

LARRY. Uh huh.

PETER. Uh, huh, what?

LARRY. Around the corner and two blocks down, Carter's. But you didn't hear it from me.

PETER. Thanks.

LARRY. That's okay, Pops! (*PETER watches a moment as LARRY works.*)

PETER. You'll have to start in the basement. (*No response.*) Now look, young fella, my name is Peter Schermann. (*LARRY pays no attention. A pause.*) I'm union. (*LARRY doesn't reply or look at PETER, as he continues working.*) What happened? You suddenly go deaf?

LARRY. (*Finally turning to PETER.*) Everything's cool, Pop. Your name's Peter Schermann, you're union, you want me to start in the basement.

PETER. I'll go down to the basement. You pry the trim.

LARRY. Look, Pop. Just sit down somewhere and watch. Okay?

PETER. Now look! I know every joint in a house like this. It's an easy job, but it has to be done right. Do you have some fillets? I think it has to be wedged again. The wood on the stringer is a little spongy.

LARRY. I'm not going to build a new staircase, I'm just going to screw down a good, tight bracket.

PETER. Bracket?

LARRY. Bracket. That'll hold it till the house falls down. That's all it needs.

PETER. Are you really a carpenter?

LARRY. (*Angrily.*) What does it look like?

PETER. Listen to me. I know how this stair is built and if you don't, I'll tell you.

LARRY. You're not going to tell me nothing!

PETER. It's constructed—it goes through the sub-floor and down along the joist. It needs repair, but you don't jam a piece of iron in up above. Black walnut leans to cracking . . .

LARRY. I just want to make it safe.

PETER. (*Grabs screwdriver from LARRY's hand.*) Learn your trade!

LARRY. Let go!

PETER. You don't do that!

LARRY. (*Threateningly.*) Okay, Pops, okay! (*Calling out as he exits.*) Mix. Stone!

PETER. (*To no one in particular.*) And don't call me "Pops." (*PETER begins to "unlock the piano" as the RESIDENTS enter.*)

End