

Mrs. Cooper

Group Scene #1

MY OLD FRIENDS

SCENE I

The Community Room of The Golden Days Retirement Hotel. As lights come up the RESIDENTS are engaged in their usual pastimes: MRS. POLIANOFFSKY is watching television, WALLY SLOCUM is eating, MRS. COOPER is writing a letter of complaint, ARIAS is practicing his mambo steps, SIDNEY FINEBERG is reading a book of poetry. MICKEY CATLAN, observing them ALL, turns to the audience, stands, walks Downstage, and addresses them directly.

Star!

CATLAN. (*Lightly.*) Hi! My name is Mickey Catlan and I am very glad to be here. A couple of years ago my doctor said if I don't give these up— (*He waves his cigar.*) it's all over. What could I do? (*A pause.*) I changed my doctor. I went to another doctor. A specialist. You know the kind of guy. Gets a hundred dollars just to say hello. He looked me over and said, "you got six months." I said, "Doctor, at your RATES I can't pay your bill in six months!" What could he do? (*A pause.*) He gave me another six months.

FINEBERG. Jokes! Mickey is always full of jokes. He can make a friend out of anybody—except his children.

SLOCUM. Hey! When do we eat around here? I'm hungry!

ARIAS. You're always hungry!

SLOCUM. You! Look at you! You could eat anything! With me, there's a thousand things I can't eat—and the list is easy to remember . . . If I really like it—I can't eat it! (*His head following an UNSEEN "PERSON" walking by.*) Hey, look! Here comes Cathy again. (*ARIAS whistles, appreciatively.*)

CATLAN. What a pair of bazooms!

FINEBERG. Please! Do we have to have this kind of talk? Don't misunderstand, I'm not against sex. But there is such a thing in the world as gentleness . . . there's music . . . art . . . poetry . . .

CATLAN. Pinochle! Don't forget pinochle!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. Shut up! I can't hear my program!

MRS. COOPER. (*Looking up.*) You don't have to! I'll tell you what happens: Somebody gets pregnant, somebody gets hit on the head, somebody dies—commercial!

SLOCUM. Commercial? If it's the Franco-American Ravioli, call me! If I can't eat it, at least I can look at it!

ARIAS. Food, all you ever do is talk about food, Slocum!
 SLOCUM. All you ever do is talk about mambo! Mambo Number Five . . . Mambo Number Twelve . . . You're *passee*, Arias!
Passee!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. Shut up! I can't hear my program!

CATLAN. (*Groaning.*) Sometimes I think I should have followed my Doctor's advice and died! (*A pause.*) What a bunch of old ladies!

ARIAS. Old? Who's old?!

SLOCUM. Who you calling old?

MRS. COOPER. I don't want to be around any old people!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. Neither do I!

FINEBERG. At least we agree on *something!*

"I'M NOT OLD!"

— END

FINEBERG. (*Singing.*)

OLD IS CRANKY,

SLOCUM.

OLD IS TIRED,

SLOCUM, MRS. COOPER and MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.

OLD IS ALWAYS FEELING COLD,

CATLAN.

OLD IS EATING MASHED POTATOES

ALL.

THANK THE GOOD LORD

I'M NOT OLD!

ARIAS,

OLD IS BINGO,

SLOCUM.

EVERY FRIDAY.

SLOCUM, MRS. COOPER and MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.

DOUBLE LOCKS ON EVERY DOOR,

OLD IS MAKING BIG DECISIONS—

CATLAN.

CHANNEL TWO OR CHANNEL FOUR!

FINEBERG.

IF YOUNG IS DRINKING PEPSI COLA,

SLOCUM, MRS. COOPER and MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.

IF YOUNG IS "I DON'T GIVE A DAMN!"

ARIAS.

IF YOUNG IS ALWAYS OUT OF MONEY,

ALL.
 THEN YOUNG, YOUNG, YOUNG,
 IS WHAT I AM!

SLOCUM.
 GREY-HAIRED LADIES
 SURE DRESS FUNNY,

CATLAN.
 CLUNKY SHOES, AND STOCKINGS ROLLED,
 FINEBERG.
 AND THE OLD MEN LOVE OLD LADIES

ALL.
 THANK THE GOOD LORD
 I'M NOT OLD!

SLOCUM. (*Over music.*) Here comes the only normal person in the whole place.

(HELOISE MICHAUD *enters looking as if she were going to a garden party.* EVERYBODY *turns to look at her.*)

CATLAN. Hi, Heloise!

HELOISE. (*With a little, cheery wave of her hand.*) Hi! . . . (*She goes Off.*)

ARIAS. Why does Heloise always dress like she's going to the Waldorf Astoria?

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. (*From across the room.*) What?

ARIAS. (*Louder, to MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.*) Waldorf Astoria!

MRS. COOPER. (*Turning to CATLAN.*) What did he say?

CATLAN. A story! He's going to tell you a story later. But don't worry, Mrs. Cooper, it's got an unhappy ending! (*They ALL laugh.*)

SLOCUM. (*Singing.*)

OLD IS BEING ABSENT MINDED,
 BUT REMEMBERING IRENE DUNNE,

FINEBERG.

OLD IS SAYING YOU'LL BE EIGHTY,
 WHEN YOU'RE REALLY EIGHTY-ONE!

ALL.

OLD IS HAVING GROWN UP CHILDREN,
 CHILDREN NOW TOO BIG TO SCOLD.
 THANK THE GOOD LORD
 THAT THE CHILDREN
 WILL SOMEDAY BE ALSO OLD!

MRS. COOPER. Now *that's* democracy! (*They dance a little dance, still seated, and using only their feet.*)

AND OLD, RELIABLE DIGITALIS,
SO I DON'T WAKE UP DEAD!

(Sung.)

SO I CAN LIVE,
LIVE, LIVE, LIVE, LIVE!
TO FEEL THE PAIN IN MY HEAD!

OH, HOW SWEET,
FRIENDS OF MINE,
IF YOU SHOULD DROP IN
WHEN I'M SICK,
THEN I'M FINE.
AND EVERY PILL KNOWING,
JUST WHERE IT IS GOING!
TO AN ARM THROBBING WITH ARTHRITIS,
OR THE COLON, CRYING WITH COLITIS,
OR A TRIP TO A HIP WITH BURSITIS.
MY OLD FRIENDS,
BLESS YOU ALL,
NIGHT OR DAY
YOU ARE THERE
WHEN I CALL.

(He peers at one of the "labels," unable to read it. He takes out his eyeglasses, puts them on, and bends closer to see.)

(Spoken.)

No, no. I wouldn't forget you . . .
MY LITTLE BOX OF BORIC ACID,
IF MY EYES START TO TEAR,
AND MY OLD PAL, AURALGAN
FOR THAT ACHE IN MY EAR.

(Sung.)

SO I CAN HEAR, HEAR,
HEAR, HEAR, HEAR!
WHAT I WOULD RATHER NOT HEAR!
Look at all those colors!
BLUE AND GREEN!
RED AND WHITE!
THE PHARMACEUTICAL FLAG I SALUTE
EVERY MORNING, NOON, AND NIGHT!
AND EVERY PILL KNOWING

Mrs.
Cooper

Group Scene
#2

JUST WHERE IT IS GOING!

(Spoken.)

BUT TO BE HONEST MY FRIENDS,
NOTHING COMES FOR NOTHING,
EVERY NOTHING'S GOT TO COST YOU SOMETHING,

(Sung.)

WITH THE PILL, COMES THE BILL—
AND IT'S FOURTEEN DOLLARS!

(Music continues under. PETER speaks, as if looking at someone.)

What? . . . Drugs? No, no! They're pills! I take them some-
times . . . if I have a headache, or— (A pause.) Hey! What are
you doing? Hey! Don't take— (A long pause, then to himself.) Take
it easy . . . They must know what they're doin' . . . Must be a
good reason . . . (Singing softly, as he looks off after them.)

MY OLD FRIENDS,

BLESS YOU ALL.

EVER STRONG, EVER TRUE.

HERE I AM SOMEPLACE NEW,

WISH ME WELL,

MY OLD FRIENDS,

WISH ME WELL . . .

Start

SCENE 2

The dining room. The RESIDENTS walk into the "dining room" and arrange the chairs as if they were sitting around various tables.

SLOCUM. What's for lunch?

ARIAS. If it's Wednesday, it's turkey giblets.

SLOCUM. It's Wednesday.

ARIAS. It's turkey giblets.

SLOCUM. Yeech!

MRS. COOPER. Hey! Polianoffsky! You're sitting in my chair!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY. So I'll tell you what you can do about it. You can write a letter to City Hall. It'll only be your fourteenth letter this week. I could go to Miami on what she spends on postage. (HELOISE laughs.)

MRS. COOPER. You can laugh if you want to, but one of these days there's gonna be some action around here. You'll see.

SLOCUM. Sure, sure. Hey! How come Jose is serving? Where's Cathy?

HELOISE. She went bike riding. It's her day off.

CATLAN. She always goes bike riding on her day off.

ARIAS. That's why she looks the way she does. Exercise!

SLOCUM. Very good for the . . . pachangas . . .

CATLAN. You ought to try it, Mrs. Cooper, don't you want to be a sex symbol?

MRS. COOPER. *(Rising.)* I am a sex symbol. *(PETER enters and comes over to SLOCUM and HELOISE who are seated at the same "table.")*

PETER. *(To SLOCUM.)* Excuse me, is this table six?

SLOCUM. *(Friendly.)* Sure is.

PETER. Anyone sitting here?

SLOCUM. No. Sit down.

PETER. *(Sitting.)* Thanks.

SLOCUM. My name is Wally Slocum, 309. And this is Heloise Michaud, 224.

HELOISE. How do you do. If we can help you with anything, please don't hesitate.

PETER. My name is Peter Schermann. Yes, as a matter of fact, there is something. Some woman took my pills away when I came in. Who do I talk to about getting them back?

HELOISE. Did she look a little like a bull dog with glasses?

PETER. *(After considering a moment.)* Yeah!

HELOISE. That's Mrs. Stone—and she's the one you have to talk to—or you could talk to the wall, it's the same thing.

SLOCUM. Don't worry, Mr. Schermann. They'll give you everything you need.

MRS. COOPER. Only trouble is by the time you get it you won't need it anymore.

CATLAN. Shh! Here comes Mrs. Stone.

PETER. *(Calling as if "she" were passing by the table.)* Mrs. Stone? Could I see you for a minute?

VOICE OF MRS. STONE. Yes, Mister Schermann?

PETER. I'd like to have my pills back if you don't mind. That way I don't have to bother you all the time. If I need . . . whatever . . .

VOICE OF MRS. STONE. *(Pleasantly.)* We administer all the medication, Mr. Schermann. That way you won't get confused. And do you find the food satisfactory?

PETER. Er . . . the taste is fine, but this is the big meal, I like to have the big meal at night.

VOICE OF MRS. STONE. We find that it's better for the digestive

system if the big meal is eaten in the afternoon. We eat less at night and sleep better.

PETER. That may be, but I'm accustomed to—Mrs. Stone? . . . *(He rises quickly from his chair and follows after "her." He stops Upstage, by the "staircase" and calls upstairs after "her," his hand resting on the "newel post.")* Mrs. Stone . . .

VOICE OF MRS. STONE. I'm busy now, Mr. Schermann, but I'll take the matter up with Doctor Keller, and maybe we can talk about it tomorrow.

PETER. *(Shakes the newel post and notices that it is loose.)* While you're at it, you better tell him about this newel post. It's loose. People lean on a newel post for support. Someone could fall and get hurt. *(PETER waits for the reply, but there is no response from MRS. STONE. PETER returns to the table.)*

SLOCUM. How'd you make out?

PETER. Well, she says she's going to talk to Dr. Keller.

CATLAN. Dr. Keller? There is no Dr. Keller!

SLOCUM. He's joking. Of course there's a Dr. Keller!

MRS. COOPER. Would you like me to write a letter to the Food and Drug Administration? They're in Washington, you know.

CATLAN. Yes! You can expect immediate results!

SLOCUM. But in the meantime do yourself a favor, don't make trouble.

PETER. Where is this Doctor Keller?

SLOCUM. In the office.

PETER. I think I'll go talk to him.

HELOISE. I'm going that way. C'mon, I'll show you where it is.

(PETER and HELOISE walk Off. MRS. POLIANOFFSKY and FINEBERG go Off in different directions. CATLAN and SLOCUM remain seated, eating.)

ARIAS. *(Rising and calling after PETER.)* While you're at it, see if you can get my cha-cha records back.

CATLAN. *(From his chair.)* Or better yet, see if you can get him to put some chicken in the chicken salad!

MRS. COOPER. Mr. Arias, I want you to know that I've sent a long letter to the Human Rights Commission about your records.

ARIAS. Thank you, Mrs. Cooper. Tell them Mrs. Stone is the one who had them recognized.

MRS. COOPER. You mean, requisitioned. Do you have any other complaints? I can include them in my next letter.

ARIAS. Yes, I do. English

MRS. COOPER. English? What do you mean?

ARIAS. It is a very difficult language, English. I do not understand it sometimes. For instance, everything here has come from someplace else. It's all been thrown away. But some things, when they get old, they are worth a lot—you call them antiques. Other things when they get old, you call them junk. I don't understand. How is that?

MRS. COOPER. I don't know.

ARIAS. Maybe you could write a letter.

MRS. COOPER. I will. (A pause, then to herself.) Who do I send it to?

ARIAS. I don't know. (Mrs. COOPER exits.)

SLOCUM. Hey, what's Cathy doing here? I thought it was her day off.

CATLAN. She's talking to Fineberg.

ARIAS. On her day off?

SLOCUM. She's always talking to Fineberg.

CATLAN. What do they talk about? What could those two people possibly have in common besides their height?

SLOCUM. Well, for one thing they both read a lot. They talk about Fitzgerald, Faulkner, Hemingway . . .

CATLAN. (Approving.) And a lot of other musicians.

ARIAS. (Looking Off.) Man, look how close she stands to him.

CATLAN. Yes, it's very literary. (Calling Off.) Hey! Fineberg!

SLOCUM. Leave him alone, Mickey. He's having a good time.

CATLAN. I just wanna find out if he's having a good time. (FINEBERG enters.)

FINEBERG. (To CATLAN.) Did you call me?

SLOCUM. I hope we didn't break up anything.

FINEBERG. No, it's all right. Cathy was just leaving. She only came by to say hello.

ARIAS. She came by to say hello on her day off?

FINEBERG. Well . . . yes . . . And also, she wanted me to go bicycle riding with her.

CATLAN. You know, Fineberg, I think she's attracted to you.

FINEBERG. Cathy? Don't be ridiculous. I'm almost 70 years old!

SLOCUM. And she's twenty-eight, so what?

FINEBERG. Twenty-nine. But what's the difference? For a man of my age—

SLOCUM. Sidney! Opportunity knocks! Open the door!

CATLAN. Or give her the key to my room.

FINEBERG. Please! Do we have to have this kind of talk?

CATLAN. Yes! We have to have this kind of talk! It's good for my heart! What are you afraid of, Fineberg? Take a chance!

SLOCUM. Fineberg, what's the matter with you? Just look at her . . .

"FOR TWO MINUTES"

— end

(Singing.)

I GET SO MANY CRAZY, SEXY FANTASIES
WHEN SHE COMES INTO VIEW,
AND I STOP AND I WONDER

WHAT WOULD HAPPEN
IF WHAT I'M THINKING CAME TRUE:
IF SHE CAME UP, AND SAID,
'SLOCUM, TAKE ME TO BED.'
I'D START TREMBLING FROM HEAD TO TOE,
AND NINE TIMES OUT OF TEN,
THAT'S AS FAR AS IT WOULD GO!
BUT EVERY ONCE IN A WHILE—

(He sighs.)

FOR A FEW MINUTES,
TWO MINUTES,
OOO, WHAT I FEEL!
WATCHING CATHY GO BY,
IT'S TOO GOOD TO BE REAL.

FOR A FEW MINUTES,
TWO MINUTES,
I'M A NEW MAN!
TWENTY YEARS MIGHT NOT DO
WHAT THOSE TWO MINUTES CAN!
Let me put it to you another way, Fineberg . . .

(Singing.)

I SIT DOWN TO MY LUNCH AND GEE, I'M LOOKING
AT
SUCH A NICE PIECE OF FISH,
AND I HOPE AGAINST HOPE THAT THE TASTE'LL
GET THROUGH TO ME!
BUT IT'S NO USE TO WISH!
IF YOU COOKED A SURPRISE,
AND YOU COVERED MY EYES.