

Slocum

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

Slocum

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. POLIANOVSKY 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,

FINEBERG.
A TOURNAMENT AT TWO,
CATLAN.
BILLIARDS, BRIDGE, OR PING-PONG,
RESIDENTS.
IT'S ENTIRELY UP TO YOU!
CHA-CHA-CHA!

SLOCUM.
MOST PEOPLE WORK FOR FIFTY WEEKS
TO GET AWAY FOR TWO,

RESIDENTS.
CHA-CHA-CHA!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.
BUT HERE YOU'RE ON VACATION
EVERYDAY, THE WHOLE YEAR THROUGH!

RESIDENTS.
CHA-CHA-CHA!

FINEBERG.
IT'S LIKE A LEISURE VILLAGE,
WITH ACTIVITIES GALORE,

RESIDENTS.
AND WHEN YOU THINK YOU'VE DONE THEM ALL
THERE'S ALWAYS SOMETHING MORE!
CHA-CHA-CHA!

FROM THREE TO FOUR YOU FOLK DANCE,
AT FIVE YOU LEARN GUITAR,
AT SIX YOU DRESS FOR DINNER,

CATLAN. (To Mrs. POLIANOFFSKY.)
HELLO THERE, MOVIE STAR!

(He dances with her. Speaking over music.) Arriba, arriba! One
more lesson and I'm ready for the Palladium.

ARIAS. But is the Palladium ready for you, Mr. Catlan?

SLOCUM. Probably. It's been closed for ten years. (Singing.)
AND THE RULES ARE NEVER RIGID
YOU CAN ALMOST DO NO WRONG,

RESIDENTS.
CHA-CHA-CHA!

MRS. POLIANOFFSKY.
YOU CAN GO TO BED AT FOUR A.M.

CATLAN.
AND TAKE A FRIEND ALONG!

Peter & Slocum

Scene #1

RESIDENTS.
CHA-CHA-CHA!

FINEBERG.
FOR ANYONE OF ANY AGE
IT'S QUITE A PLACE TO BE—

(GETTLINGER enters.)

RESIDENTS. (Pursuing him.)

IT'S A LOT OF FUN
AND IT'S THE ONE
AND ONLY PLACE FOR . . .
ONLY PLACE FOR . . .
ONLY PLACE FOR ME!
THANK YOU, MR. GETTLINGER!
CHA-CHA-CHA!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 7

Start

Lights up on PETER. He is sitting in his "room." SLOCUM enters.

SLOCUM. Hey, Peter! They're looking for a fourth in a gin rummy
game. You interested?

PETER. No, I never was much for cards. Thanks, anyway.

SLOCUM. There's a good football game on television. Want to
watch it with me?

PETER. No, thanks.

SLOCUM. I'm goin' over to the Crafts Room. Wanna come?

PETER. I don't think so. Thanks, anyway.

SLOCUM. You know, they're beginning to call you "Thanks, Any-
way" around here. What happened to you? You used to be . . .
more with it.

PETER. I don't know. I just can't seem to get interested in any-
thing. Maybe I'm getting old.

SLOCUM. C'mon! We'll go over to the Crafts Room. You'll get
old later.

PETER. Well

SLOCUM. Last chance . . .

PETER. (With a shrug.) All right. Why not? (PETER rises and they
start to walk to the other side of the Stage.)

SLOCUM. What's doing with you and Heloise?

PETER. Nothing's doing. You can't build a fire when the wood's wet. *(They enter the "Crafts Room." A large wooden work bench with a vise on one end stands in the center of a pool of light. PETER seeing the work bench.)* A work bench! When did that happen?

SLOCUM. A couple of days ago. That Gettlinger—he's a magician! He got some tool company to donate it.

PETER. *(Runs his hand over the work bench, appreciatively.)* Must be three years since I picked up a piece of wood . . .

SLOCUM. That's a long time. You must be a little rusty.

PETER. When you've done it for forty three years you don't forget so fast.

SLOCUM. People who work with their hands always amazed me. I was a necktie salesman. I was good with words—but terrible with knots.

PETER. How did you get into that?

SLOCUM. It was an accident. I went to work in my uncle's tie shop one summer. Next thing I knew I was 65 years old and still a tie salesman.

PETER. I started as a delivery boy for the Acme Quality Lumber. And I liked the smell of the wood. Next thing I knew I got a job as cabinet maker's assistant. Four dollars a week. Big money in those days.

SLOCUM. And you became a carpenter . . .

PETER. That's right. — end

"I WORK WITH WOOD"

(Quasi-sung.)

I WORKED WITH WOOD,

THAT'S WHAT I DID

I WORKED WITH WOOD,

THEY USED TO SAY, HEY, KID!

YOU'RE PRETTY GOOD,

FOR JUST A KID—

NOT SO LONG AGO

WHEN I WORKED WITH WOOD.

I LEARNED MY TRADE,

IT TOOK SOME TIME

BUT I LEARNED MY TRADE,

AND OUT OF WOOD JUST LIKE THIS

OH, THE THINGS I MADE!
FROM WINDING STAIRS
TO ROCKING CHAIRS,
AND ALL OF THEM STILL STANDING
AS THEY STOOD,
WHEN I PUT THEM UP,
WHEN I WORKED WITH WOOD.

I MUST HAVE BANGED THIS THUMB
ABOUT A HUNDRED TIMES,
I MADE MISTAKES SO DUMB
AT LEAST A THOUSAND TIMES,
BUT WHEN I'D BOTCH IT UP
I'D BEGIN AGAIN,
TAKE IT ALL APART,
IF IT TOOK ALL NIGHT,
BUT I ALWAYS FELT
BEFORE I WALKED AWAY
THAT THE JOB WAS RIGHT.

(PETER rolls up his sleeves, examines a piece of wood, and begins preparing his project.)

SLOCUM. Well, what are you going to do?

PETER. I think I'm going to make a Christmas present for my grandson. You want to be a carpenter's assistant?

SLOCUM. *(Exiting, smiling.)* No thanks. Thanks anyway. *(The music continues, and as PETER works we feel a passage of time. HELOISE appears.)*

HELOISE. *(Softly.)* Too busy to talk?

PETER. *(After a moment.)* How've you been, Heloise?

HELOISE. Okay. *(Blurted out very quickly.)* There's a Fred Astaire movie in town on Thursday and I thought if you weren't doing anything you might like to go. It's got Ginger Rogers, too. *(PETER doesn't respond.)* Well, what do you say?

PETER. *(After a moment.)* Sure . . .

HELOISE. *(Pleased.)* Then it's a date. We'll go Dutch, okay?

PETER. No, I'll pay, but I think you should know something, Heloise. I don't kiss on my first date. *(She turns to go. Then turns back at the "door.")*

HELOISE. Peter . . .

PETER. Yes?

HELOISE. (Softly.) I'm glad you decided to stay. (She goes out. PETER continues working.)

SLOCUM. (Entering.) Hey, Peter, I wanted to ask you something . . . what's that smell?

PETER. (Cheerily.) A glue pot. I'm cooking up some glue.

SLOCUM. It sure stinks, doesn't it?

PETER. (Happily.) Yeah.

SLOCUM. Hey, that's coming along pretty good.

PETER. (Singing.)

THIS PIECE OF WOOD
COULD BE THE START OF MANY THINGS,
A LITTLE MUSIC BOX THAT PLAYS TUNES,
OR MAYBE HOLDS A LADY'S RINGS.

SLOCUM. I thought you were going to make a present for your grandson?

PETER. I am. It's going to be a rocking horse.

SLOCUM. A horse?

PETER. (Holding up an unfinished piece of wood. He sings.)

THIS IS A HORSE
IT MAY NOT LOOK THAT WAY TO YOU
BUT, ALL YOU NEED TO SEE A HORSE HERE
IS ELBOW GREASE, FOUR LEGS, AND GLUE.

(Music continues under. SLOCUM exits. FINEBERG enters with package, his right hand in a sling.)

FINEBERG. Hey, Peter! I was in Gettlinger's office. He asked me to give you this. He said you'd know what it is. (He hands PETER a small package.)

PETER. (Taking it.) Oh, yeah. Some old friends . . . They're reliable . . . they're dependable, and they never talk back . . . except for the Bromo Seltzer . . .

SLOCUM. (Seeing the sling.) What happened to your arm, Fineberg?

FINEBERG. They took my training wheels off yesterday.

PETER. (Putting the package aside.) How bad is it?

FINEBERG. It's just a slight sprain. See? (He takes his arm out of the sling and raises it easily, then slips it back in.) I can take the sling off, Saturday.

SLOCUM. . . . and then it's back to the open road!

FINEBERG. Well, maybe . . . maybe not.

PETER. What do you mean?

Peter & Slocum

FINEBERG. I don't know . . . I'm almost seventy. What am I kidding myself about?

PETER. C'mon. Don't give up, now, Fineberg. Remember Grandma Moses started when she was eighty-two!

FINEBERG. Yes, but she wasn't trying to ride a bicycle. (FINEBERG turns and walks out. PETER continues to work.)

SLOCUM. (Entering and watching PETER for a moment.) It's a pleasure to watch you handle tools. You make it look so easy.

PETER. Why are you watching? Make something!

SLOCUM. Me? The last thing I made was in Junior High School. A belt rack. It fell apart when I tried to hang a belt on it. (Singing.)

IT ISN'T EVERYONE
WHO CAN BE A CARPENTER,
A CLUMSY MAN LIKE ME
CAN'T BE A CARPENTER.

PETER.

I'LL BET YOU IF YOU TRY
YOU COULD BUILD A BENCH.

SLOCUM. (Spoken.) I could built bench?

PETER.

YOU COULD START IT NOW.

SLOCUM. (Singing.)

I WOULD BUILD A BENCH
IF YOU SHOW ME HOW!

(SLOCUM rolls up his sleeves. PETER gives him a ruler, and under PETER's direction SLOCUM begins to scribe the wood. The music continues, time passes, CATLAN walks into the light.)

CATLAN. Hey, Pete! Can I see you a minute? (Sniffing the air.) Whew! What died in here? Smells like a horse I used to bet on! Peter, Gettlinger asked if you could build a platform for the Christmas Party?

PETER. Sure. How big?

CATLAN. What do I know?! A platform! (As he goes Off.) And Peter, I think you ought to change your perfume! (SLOCUM's small bench has taken shape.)

PETER. So you never got married, huh, Wally?

SLOCUM. No, I never did. I was always on the road, you know, another gross of neckties, a little more wine, another woman, another hotel room . . . There were a couple of times I almost did, I guess. But what woman is going to be happy with a man who

Scene
2

start

spends forty weeks a year on the road—and likes it? So I never built anything. You know . . . between me and anybody else . . . Never built anything . . . not until this bench . . . Actually, this bench is the only thing of me that I put into the world . . . I know it's just a bench . . . and I know how dumb that sounds, but I take more pride in this bench than in all the neckties I ever sold, all the women that I've ever known, and all the places I've ever been to. Somebody could sit on that bench and it won't break, will it?

PETER. No, it won't.

SLOCUM. So somebody will come along and maybe sit on that bench . . . take a rest, or look at the sky, or whatever . . . because I made that bench!

PETER. Yes. It's a good feeling, isn't it?

SLOCUM. It sure is. *(The lights change slightly. There is the feeling of time having passed.)* I missed you yesterday. Where were you?

PETER. Downtown. Want to see what I bought?

SLOCUM. Sure! *(PETER reaches into his pocket, takes out a small ring box and flips it open. SLOCUM stops working and is silent.)*

PETER. Well? What do you think?

SLOCUM. *(Seriously.)* Is that for Heloise?

PETER. Sure! Who'd you think it was for?

SLOCUM. *(Turning away.)* Jesus!

PETER. *(Concerned.)* What's the matter?

SLOCUM. Don't you know?

PETER. Know what? What are you talking about?

SLOCUM. She's married. Heloise is married!

PETER. Heloise is *what*??!

SLOCUM. Don't you *talk* to each other? Dammit! Where do you think she goes every Sunday?

PETER. *(Furious.)* I don't know??!

SLOCUM. She goes to a nursing home to see her husband. Not that he knows she's there. The man's had two strokes and the only thing left he can do is breathe. And he can't even do *that* without assistance. *(PETER does not respond.)* I thought you knew . . . *(Slowly,*

PETER rolls down his shirt-sleeves, buttons his cuffs, and places the finished rocking horse on the work bench. The brightly painted top, sparkling in the light, is in bizarre contrast with his mood. Singing softly.)

WELL, LOOK AT THAT!

I ALWAYS KNEW, OF COURSE, YOU COULD!

BUT I'LL BE DAMNED, THAT'S REALLY GOOD!

PETER. *(Detached, as he sings.)*

I GUESS IT IS,

IT'S PRETTY GOOD,

BUT AFTER ALL, IT SHOULD BE GOOD,

THAT'S WHAT I DO

I WORK WITH WOOD.

Why the hell didn't she tell me!

BLACKOUT

SCENE 8

In the darkness we hear CATLAN'S VOICE.

CATLAN'S VOICE. Hey! What happened? Who turned off the lights?

MRS. COOPER'S VOICE. I've never seen you look so good, Mickey!

CATLAN'S VOICE. Ah, the sweet voice of Mrs. Cooper! Sheer sandpaper! Well, folks, there's not much we can do in the dark—

ARIAS' VOICE. Speak for yourself, Catlan!

CATLAN'S VOICE. If Arias is shooting his mouth off, folks, it's because he just had his teeth capped!

(Suddenly, the lights come "back on." The Christmas Party is in progress.)

CATLAN. Aha! I see somebody finally put a penny in the fuse box. So now I can actually see all of your shining faces out there. *(Calling Offstage.)* Turn off the lights! . . . No, I'm kidding. Show Time. Show Time. *(Mounting the "stage" platform Up Center.)* I want to thank you visitors for coming . . .

ARIAS' VOICE. *(From the "wings.")* Come on, Catlan, get on with it!

CATLAN. *(To the wings.)* All right! All right! I am working solo. Do you mind? *(To the audience.)* Ladies and Gentlemen! We've had a slight change in program. Wally Slocum was supposed to do a number at this point, but Wally informs me that he ate something that disagreed with him. I think it was his knife and fork. However, we're in luck because Heloise Michaud has written a poem expressly for this occasion, and guess who's going to read it to us? So let's

end-