

Act One

Scene One

The well-appointed living room of an upper middle class family's home on Manhattan's Washington Square, summer 1939. Up center is an entry hall stage right of which (unseen) is the front door while stage left goes to Oren's study. There is an arch stage right leading into the back stairs going up to the bedrooms, and stage left that leads to the dining room and kitchen. Up right is a writing desk and chair. Up center in the hall, a table with drawers. Up left, a piano, down right a sofa or loveseat, and down left a chair and hassock. (It could be different, but that's the scheme the physical bits assume in this writing.)

At curtain we hear Mrs. Parnell speaking in the dining room, but her words are indistinguishable. Larry enters from the dining room. He's in shirtsleeves with a cloth hat folded into his back pocket, and is eating an apple. He crosses towards the front door, sees a shiny object on the writing desk, deftly pockets it, and continues out.

Maryann and Denny enter, also from the dining room, seeming dispirited. Denny pulls out a pack of cards, and spirits instantly improved, they begin a game of rummy. Dorine follows them in, catches their glance, rolls her eyes, takes a deep breath and returns to the dining room.

There are three knocks at the front door. Dorine bounds out, glad to have an excuse to leave, and admits Cleo Redding, a quick-witted and amiable lawyer in his thirties.

CLEO

I came as soon as I could.

DORINE

She's driving us nuts.

Is he back yet? CLEO

Oren or Truffle? DORINE

Oren. CLEO

Any minute now. DORINE

And Truffle? CLEO

Larry's pulling around the car. Buddy's dressing. DORINE

He's taking the car? CLEO

(from the dining room) Dorine! PARNELL

They're going shopping. DORINE

Shopping? CLEO

Dorine, I need you at once! PARNELL

On your brother-in-law's credit. DORINE

Where are you, girl?! PARNELL

Excuse me. We're in the middle of an historical reenactment of the Inquisition. DORINE

Dorine rushes back to the dining room. Denny and Maryann are too involved in a viciously enjoyable game of rummy to notice Cleo. So, he opens the piano and plays a jazzy rendition of "It's Only a Paper"

Moon”.

After a moment, Emanuel “Buddy” Truffle, a handsome, clean cut young man, enters somberly from the back hall reading a Bible. Cards disappear, the music stops, and everyone looks, for a moment, very serious. Parnell's rant increases in volume. Buddy surveys them with the glance of one who is misjudged to be harsher than he is, then exits towards the front door. Activities and music resume.

PARNELL

(off) Flippy! We're going! I've had more than my fill of this family!

Mrs. Parnell sweeps in from the dining room with her dithering maid in tow who dumps Mrs. P's coat on the sofa and heads out for more. Maryann and Denny groan, gather their cards, and hide them. Cleo gently closes the piano and turns to face the room.

ELMYRA

(off) Mrs. Parnell? *(entering)* Why are you running? I can't keep up [with you.]

PARNELL

(interrupting) Don't bother showing me out. I'd never expect it of you anyway. Flippy!!

ELMYRA

Nonsense, you're my mother-in-law, I would *enjoy* showing you out.

PARNELL

Hmph. Flippy, where are you?

ELMYRA

Was it something we said?

PARNELL

Actions speak louder than words.

ELMYRA

What did we...?

Flippy enters all a-frazzle with Parnell's wrap and purse which she manages to tangle and snag on whatever she passes. This is her mode with everything.

Where have you been girl?

PARNELL

Did we...?

ELMYRA

Dorine runs in with some things that Flippy forgot.

You all behave as if I were invisible.

PARNELL

DORINE
(with Flippy, wrestling Mrs. Parnell into her things) We only...

PARNELL
Hush! A maid's job to serve, discretely and *quietly*.

DENNY
(besides himself) Gramma, we... I just... we can't...

PARNELL
What eloquence! I took one look at Dennis in his crib and said to my son, that child is slow.

DENNY
Gramma, I just...

PARNELL
I was right then.

DENNY
If you would only...

PARNELL
And I'm right now.

MARYANN
Well, what I think is...

PARNELL
You actually *think*? Will wonders never cease!

ELMYRA
Mother, really...

Don't you call me Mother!

PARNELL

Please don't leave angry [with us.]

ELMYRA

PARNELL
(interrupting) You are my daughter-in-law, not my child. As an act of charity towards my son, I turn a blind eye towards all that goes on in this house, but really! I am famously tolerant, but you, young lady, stretch my patience too thin.

Wha...?

ELMYRA

PARNELL
 Dressed like some starlet, parading around, indoors and out. Are we trying to catch someone's attention?

What? No! I just...

ELMYRA

PARNELL
 Well, it's not my son you're after. You've already snared him, didn't you?

Mrs Parnell, really...!

CLEO

PARNELL
 Oh, the professor stands up for his sister! Honor among thieves. It's not your lawyerly obsession with logic that offends me, sir, it's that you insist upon logic from others. In matters of faith the only logic necessary is that which supports what we already know to be true.

(bursting) I've gotta say it!

DENNY

(a warning) Denny...

ELMYRA

Truffle... Truffle is a... he's a...

DENNY

PARNELL
 Saint! He resides far and beyond your ignorant remarks. Or as Buddy warns...

Brother Truffle.

CLEO

PARNELL

As my dearest Buddy warns: Better to be silent and be thought a fool than to speak and remove all doubt.

CLEO

That was Lincoln.

PARNELL

What is?

CLEO

Who said that.

PARNELL

It was Buddy. I heard it with my own ears! Did you hear it from Mr. Lincoln?

CLEO

I stand corrected.

DORINE

Denny, you were about to say?

DENNY

I was gonna say that Buddy's a...

OTHERS

Denny...! (*or other vocal warnings*)

PARNELL

You must call him *Brother* Truffle.

DENNY

He's... (*Mrs Parnell turns on him and glares*) ...two-faced, a blowhard, a liar, a thief, and a... a...

PARNELL

(*holding her glare*) Flippy!

DENNY

...a grump!

PARNELL

Now! Flippy!

DENNY

(following her) Maryann whispered me a joke the other day and I laughed a *little bit* and he made me *apologize!*

PARNELL

(to Elmyra) That boy is pathetic! *(to Denny, loudly)* He will save you from sin. *(turns to go)* As if even Buddy could help the likes of you.

ELMYRA

Don't you want to stay until Oren gets back?

DORINE

Denny's right, Truffle's a fake!

ELMYRA

(trailing off) He'll be so disappointed that he missed you.

PARNELL

(a gasp, stagger, then...) Do you hear that Elmyra? You have not controlled that girl in years, and it's high time you do so. High time!

ELMYRA

Yes, Dorine, you go too... [far]

PARNELL

(big change) All Buddy asks is that you love him. Love him! And you will see how that love opens your hearts to a world filled with righteousness.

DENNY

Pop loves him.

Maryann and he try to stifle sniggers but fail and burst out in messy laughter.

PARNELL

Elmyra, you are not even in control of your own children! Oh, I tell you, I am grateful to God in His goodness that He sent dear Buddy to save this family from the depths of sin and error.

MARYANN

Him and Larry both scare the beezes out of *me*.

DENNY

Give me the creeps.

PARNELL

Where did your children learn English, Elmyra, dear? At the theater?

ELMYRA

(reprimanding them) Denny, Maryann...!

PARNELL

Brother Truffle is the soul's physician and Truth is his medicine. If it is occasionally bitter, that is because it is doing you good. His intention is to raise you up!

DORINE

The thing he wants to raise up has nothing to do with our souls.

ELMYRA

Dorine...!

DORINE

'Scuse me ma'am, but his eyes are all over you.

DENNY

It's a prison, here! Our friends are afraid [to come over...]

PARNELL

Your hoards of so-called friends, showing up at all hours, spilling out in all states.

DENNY

Wait a minute...!

PARNELL

Uh, ho, ho! I am not alone in this opinion! Ask anyone in the neighborhood, as I have, and you shall see!

CLEO

Maybe they gossip because they're jealous?

DORINE

Oh, no, you think so?

PARNELL

Hark, the wisdom of the law!

DORINE

I know who it is!

MARYANN

Who??!

DORINE

Daphne Harris and her little husband, Doc. Right?

PARNELL

(Dorine is right, Parnell's embarrassed) They may be *among* those holding a low opinion of this house, it would be indiscrete for me to say.

DENNY

I saw her watching our door yesterday!

DORINE

People in glass houses...

PARNELL

Excuse me?

DORINE

She hasn't always been so "virtuous" herself, you know.

PARNELL

It is not what she was that is important, but what she has become.

DORINE

A snoop?

CLEO

Bitter?

PARNELL

The Harris' are not the only ones distressed by the depravity of this family.

DORINE

Oh yeah? Who else?

ELMYRA

Dorine, leave it... [alone]

PARNELL

Orianna Mills.

An astonished pause, then Dorine laughs out loud, Maryann and Denny convulse into a fit of sniggering. Parnell, over them...

PARNELL

She has not had one good word to say about any of you in years!

DORINE

That's a relief. *(more giggling)*

ELMYRA

Please, be...

PARNELL

There are a great many others who share in her opinion.

MARYANN

She has a swell telescope.

DENNY

And she chaws tuhbakki.

PARNELL

I pity you.

DENNY

Watch out below!

PARNELL

I pity you, and your dear father for having you as a son.

ELMYRA

Mother Parnell! Really, this is...

PARNELL

I have said all I can say...

DENNY

(mumbling) That'll be the day. *(Cleo laughs)*

PARNELL

You find something amusing, Attorney Redding? You, with your superior knowledge of the law? But do you know *God's* law? *That* is the question! Flippy, I have stayed too long! Look lively girl, will nothing keep you alert?

Mrs. Parnell sweeps out, Flippy does her best to follow. Everyone breathes a sigh of relief. She suddenly returns, Flippy lurches behind her.

PARNELL

(wounded) Have none of you the manners to see me to the door?

ELMYRA

Sorry, Mother Parnell, we just...

Flippy! Don't be in the way, move!

PARNELL

All leave except for Dorine and Cleo.

Scene Two

Cleo plays a flourish on the piano.

(*throwing herself into a chair*) Uhooh! Why does she come over if she hates us so much?

DORINE

She loves battle. Is this Truffle fellow really so bad?

CLEO

You'll see. Buddy belches, Mr. Oren passes out the Tums. Buddy yawns, suddenly it's bedtime. Buddy sneezes, he turns up the boiler. His world revolves around Buddy Truffle. We've all become his tiresome house guests.

DORINE

Scene Three

Elmyra, Denny, and Maryann return.

There *was* more.

ELMYRA

Dancing "corrupts our young."

DENNY

And she read Maryann the riot act for wearing a blouse with a ruffle. Are you upset, dear?

ELMYRA

No. (*she is*)

MARYANN

The sound of a car horn out front.

He's home.

DORINE

Come, children, let's leave Uncle Cleo alone with your father.

ELMYRA