

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

written by
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Setting: Various locations in and around Doane University, Nebraska, 1962.

At Rise: A room with a piano. The set must be flexible, as scene transitions will be indicated by props being brought on and offstage, and scene will flow directly into each other.

A college BOY, early 20s, stands at a piano with a PIANIST, 40s. He is singing.

BOY

Will there be love
 Will there be kisses
 What will there be when you're my misses
 Will you greet me
 With kisses and tea
 Or will you lock up
 And throw out the key
 It has been said that
 We are to wed
 Oh, what will it be?
 What will it be?

Say, is this joy
 Is this what bliss is
 Is this our life
 When you're my misses
 Say, will you sing
 When I bring my ring
 Or will you just scowl
 And toss out the thing
 You seem enraged
 That we are engaged
 What will it bring?
 What will it bring?

PIANIST

Good. Very good. But you say your voice hurts?

BOY

Sore, ma'am. After singing.

PIANIST

The song seems to be in your register. You're not straining for notes?

BOY

No, Mrs. Tollefson.

PIANIST

Well, keep up with the exercises I suggested. You will do that?

BOY

Yes.

PIANIST

Sometimes, a voice simply needs to develop.

BOY

Yes. But I worry that I will be hoarse.

PIANIST

Yes?

BOY

For the performance.

PIANIST

Ah, yes. Well, there are a few weeks yet. Keep up with the exercises.

BOY

I will.

PIANIST

And take care of your voice. No shouting. You're not much of a shouter, are you?

BOY

A shouter?

PIANIST

At sporting events and such?

BOY

No. No, not much.

PIANIST

Well, none at all, then. No shouting. And no smoking.

BOY

I don't.

PIANIST

Ugly habit. Roughs up the voice. You might take to wearing a scarf around your neck. Keep the throat warm.

BOY

I will.

PIANIST

(After a beat.) Tea.

BOY

Tea.

PIANIST

With honey in it. I find that to be a tremendous balm.

(There is silence for a moment)

PIANIST

But the exercises, mostly.

BOY

Yes. The exercises.

PIANIST

Perhaps you should do some now. There are other options we can explore if need be, but let's see how this works. In the meanwhile, I have a class to teach.

(The pianist exits. The boy stands in silence for a moment, then begins a vocal exercise.)

BOY

Mah mah mah. Me me me. Moh moh moh.

(A COLLEGE CHUM, early 20s, enters, and as he speaks stagehands silently switch the furnishings. The scene is now a gym. The chum begins jumping rope. The boy sits himself on the floor and watches.)

COLLEGE CHUM

I can't think who he is.

BOY

You've seen his movies.

COLLEGE CHUM

Sure. I know I have. I just can't think of what.

BOY

Quo Vadis.

COLLEGE CHUM

No.

BOY

You've seen Quo Vadis. They show it on television all the time. It's a big spectacle about the early Christians.

COLLEGE CHUM

Was he crucified upside down?

BOY

No. That was Simon Peter. Finlay Currie, I think. Robert Taylor was a Roman who fell in love with a Christian girl.

COLLEGE CHUM

I can't think of what he looked like. What else was he in?

BOY

Robert Taylor was in The Detectives. You've to watched The Detectives, haven't you?

COLLEGE CHUM

Sure! Who did he play in The Detectives?

BOY

Matt Holbrook.

COLLEGE CHUM

The detective?

BOY

They were all detectives.

COLLEGE CHUM

Yeah, but, you know, the captain of the detectives.

BOY

Yeah. The star of the show. It was called "The Detectives starring Robert Taylor."

COLLEGE CHUM

Hey, yeah. I remember. So he went to Doane, huh?

BOY

Yes. But he was called Spangler Brugh back then.

COLLEGE CHUM

What?

BOY

Spangler Arlington Brugh. It's his real name.

COLLEGE CHUM

You know a lot about Robert Taylor.

BOY

I sort of grew up with him. In Filley. He and my mother went to high school together.

COLLEGE CHUM

In Filley?

BOY

Yes.

COLLEGE CHUM

Nebraska?

BOY

Yes.

COLLEGE CHUM

Where is that?

BOY

East of Beatrice.

COLLEGE CHUM

So that's where Robert Taylor is from.

BOY

My mother said she had a terrible crush on him in high school. She still drags us to see all of his movies.

COLLEGE CHUM

And now you're going to serenade him.

BOY

(Startled) Well, not exactly.

COLLEGE CHUM

Well, what would you call it?

BOY

I'm singing a song in a musical production when he comes to visit. It's not the same thing as, you know, serenading.

COLLEGE CHUM

It's a love song.

BOY

Well, it's not the same as standing outside his window with a ukulele. Besides, men don't sing love songs to other men.

COLLEGE CHUM

Not with voices like yours they don't.

BOY

What do you mean?

COLLEGE CHUM

So hoarse.

BOY

Oh, yes, I'm straining it somehow.

COLLEGE CHUM

Hm. *(Thinks for a moment)*. Tea.

(The OLDER GENTLEMAN, 60s, enters now. He is dressed in an elegant suit with a scarf tucked around his neck, a thin, movie-star moustache, a smoking jacket, and slippers.)

His gestures are flamboyant and exaggerated, and he speaks with an affected accent, as someone would who has been through extensive diction training.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Tea?

BOY

(Rising to talk to him.) That's what everybody tells me.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, I suppose it wouldn't hurt. Warm up your throat, don't you know.

BOY

Does it help? I have been drinking a lot of tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

No. No, I don't imagine it would help much, either. Except where restroom duties are concerned. Wonderful diuretic, tea.

BOY

Well, I'm supposed to sing in two weeks.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

For Robert Taylor.

BOY

(Surprised.) Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I had hoped you would say yes. How grand. Robert Taylor! Have you seen Ivanhoe?

BOY

Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Poor Bobby. Wasn't really up to the task of playing a Medieval soldier, but still, he was so very handsome to look at, and the film itself was so utterly marvelous. I knew him, you know.

BOY

You knew Robert Taylor?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Somewhat. Hollywood is not so large a town, and we Nebraskans tend to clump up together. I put Dorothy Mcguire on to a marvelous parfumery, and Henry Fonda and I share a tailor. Not Robert Taylor, of course. Ha ha.

BOY

You've been to Hollywood?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, my dear boy, did Miss Tollefson tell you nothing about me when she passed my number along?

BOY

Just that you have experience as a voice coach.

OLDER GENTLEMEN

Yes I do. I do have that. I must admit, though, that I am surprised that the Tollefson woman gave you my name. She seems to disapprove.

BOY

Disapprove?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You now how suspicious these rural sorts can be. Where are you from, by the way?

BOY

Filley.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh my goodness. Then you certainly do know. I would think Tollefson would have warned you away from me.

BOY

Well, she did say you were flamboyant.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Flamboyant. I suppose I should thank her for expressing herself kindly. Well, my boy, if you would like some help, I expect that I can give it. Two weeks should be plenty to iron out the roughness in your voice.

BOY

I don't have much money, I'm afraid. I can pay -

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Posh. I won't ask for money. Just take me with you to the performance. I would be delighted to see Bobby again. I have gotten so behind on my gossip. Now come to the piano.

(The older gentleman crosses to the piano, sits behind it. The boy follows him.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Sing through each of these scales.

(He plays through several scales, starting quite low and moving quite high. The boy sings, and as he does the older gentleman listens with a practiced ear.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You have a good range. A nice vibrato as well. Subtle. So many singers warble through their songs like drunken pigeons. But your vibrato is not too pronounced. Have you sung before?

BOY

In school choir. And in church.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Your posture is terrible, however. We shall have to work on that. The wind doesn't pass through you properly, and it is giving your voice something of a reedy quality.

BOY

Is that what is causing my hoarseness?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

No. But, still, you don't want to be reedy for Robert Preston. When I was young, they made boys stand up straight. It is a good habit, and you must promise me to make it your habit. Do you promise.

BOY

Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Good. How often can you come by?

BOY

How often should I come by?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Your performance is in two weeks?

BOY

Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, that Tollefson woman. She should have sent you here sooner instead of forcing tea down your throat. Can you come every day?

BOY

I ... every day?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Is it possible, or are you too busy with school?

BOY

Is it necessary?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

We have very limited time. We might be able to spare a day here or there if your schedule is such, but, yes, I would say it is absolutely necessary.

BOY

Then I will come every day.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You do want to sound as good as possible for Robert Taylor, don't you?

BOY

Yes. And for my mother.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Why your mother? Will she also be coming?

BOY

Yes.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

From Filley?

BOY

Yes. She is quite fond of Robert Taylor.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Yes. It is hard not to be.

(The COLLEGE CHUM returns with two desks, and he and the boy sit as the older gentleman exits. A PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER, 50s, a very severe-looking man with thick spectacles, appears behind them, wheeling in

a metal AV cart with a 16mm projector on it. The lights flicker as though a movie were playing. In the background, the narration and soundtrack to *Boys Beware*, a 1961 educational film about homosexuality, is audible.)

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

The film is meant for high school students. I apologize if the content seems to be immature.

FILM SOUNDTRACK

Then, during lunch, Ralph showed him some pornographic pictures. Ralph knew he shouldn't be interested, but, well, he was curious. What Jimmy didn't know was that Ralph was sick. A sickness that was not visible like smallpox, but no less dangerous and contagious. A sickness of the mind. You see, Ralph was a homosexual.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

The subject matter might be embarrassing. But the topic is important. At your age range, you are particularly susceptible. And those of you who are studying to be teachers, well, you might have students who could be at risk.

FILM SOUNDTRACK

The companionship, the praise, the friendly attitude dispelled any misgivings Mike might have had about going with a stranger. He probably never realized until too late that he was rising in the shadow of death. But sometime that evening, Mike Merrick traded his life for a newspaper headline.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

When any of you visit Lincoln, or Omaha, or any other big city, you might find yourself in contact with an illegal, degenerate underground without knowing it. You might be invited to a small social gathering, or walk into a bar unawares, or find yourself in conversation with a stranger at a diner. As normal as these

activities might seem, believe it or not, every one participating in them might be homosexual.

COLLEGE CHUM

(Raising hand.) Homosexual, sir?

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

I will pause the movie for a moment. *(He fiddles with the projector. The lights cease flickering.)* Homosexual, Mr. Swanson, is a psychological term for a sort of mental illness. To use utterly frank language, it describes men and women who have aberrant sexual interest in romantic partners of the same gender. Perhaps you have already heard about such people.

COLLEGE CHUM

Yes. But I haven't known what to call them.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

You have no doubt heard some of the popular, slang words for the homosexual. Fairy, for example. Flit. Pansy. Am I correct?

COLLEGE CHUM

Yes, sir.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

Homosexual is the proper term. Female homosexuals are sometimes called lesbians. Let us return to the film.

(He starts the film again.)

FILM SOUNDTRACK

Public restrooms can often be a hangout for the homosexual. Bobby and his friends hadn't noticed the man who had been in the restroom when they changed.

COLLEGE CHUM

(Quietly, to boy.) I saw a film like this in 6th grade.

BOY

You did?

COLLEGE CHUM

Yes. It was called Dangerous Stranger. You know, I couldn't wait to see it.

BOY

You couldn't?

COLLEGE CHUM

My older brother saw it the year before. And he had heard about it from older kids. They showed it for years. Everybody knew about the film. All year long, we kept saying, "Is this the week when we watch Dangerous Stranger?" The film legendary.

BOY

How was it?

COLLEGE CHUM

We talked about it for months. The film was confusing.

BOY

Why confusing?

COLLEGE CHUM

Well. (*Beat.*) The film was about strangers coming up to kids and offering them candy. And that was it. You might be in an alley, and a strange man would come up to you, and you were supposed to run. It was years later that I figured out that the people were fairies.

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

Mr. Swanson, is there something you would like to share with the class?

COLLEGE CHUM

(*Dissembling.*) We were just talking and wondering, sir. If homosexuality is a mental illness, why don't homosexuals go to psychiatrists?

PHYSICAL HEALTH TEACHER

A good question again, Mr. Swanson. I will turn off the projector and answer your question. (*He turns off the projector.*) Some homosexuals do look for treatment. Some, however, do not, and try to fight their abnormal feelings by themselves, with varying degrees of success. Some struggle their whole lives.

(The older gentleman enters with the words, seating himself at the piano.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Sing again, please.

BOY

(*Singing as the chum and teacher exit the stage.*)

Why do you taunt me angel
 Why do you tease me so
 There's a heaven waiting inside your arms
 But you shake your heads and say
 Tut, tut, no no

How long will you refuse me
 How long will you tell me to go
 I'd follow you to the ends of the earth
 But you shake your head and say
 Tut, tut, no no.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Ah! Do you hear it?

BOY

Do I hear?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

In the lower notes?

BOY

What is it?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Coup de glotte. The stroke of your glottis is too harsh. You are exploding air out of your lungs with too much force on the lower notes. It is causing a shock to your vocal chords.

BOY

Is that what is causing the hoarseness?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I am sure of it. You are probably also using the root of your tongue to depress your larynx. Do you thrust your jaw out when you sing low notes?

BOY

I don't know.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Sing one.

BOY

Tut, tut, no no. (*Surprised.*) I do!

OLDER GENTLEMAN

(*Spreading hands triumphantly.*) Ah. I expected as much, Glottal shock is common in singers who haven't received formal training.

BOY

You can fix it?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

There are exercises, yes; It is easy to correct. We shall have

OLDER GENTLEMAN (CONT.)

to fill the two weeks with them, though, and we have already lost a day just finding the problem. Do you know, Barrymore had the same problem?

BOY

Who?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Barrymore. John Barrymore. The Great Profile. Although I would have called him "The Great Voice," after he fixed his glottal shock, of course. A little before your time, I'm afraid. He died the year I entered the army.

BOY

You were in the army?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

1942. 3rd Infantry. We smashed our way from Casablanca to Berchtesgarden. I would show you my medals, but I am bored with them myself. Anyway, I am sure you have seen enough medals. Your father must have some.

BOY

No. He had flat feet instead.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, in the end he is probably better off. Just before we left for war, many of us who lived in Omaha went to the Black Diamond, which was a bar we used to frequent. We hung our hats by the rafters, promising to recover them when we came back. Many of the hats were never recovered. And I am sure your father supported the war effort at home, anyway.

BOY

He started a mail order orthopedic shoe business.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

There! Many soldiers came back with special needs, orthopedically speaking. I myself brought home a slight limp, as I am sure you have noticed. A bit of shrapnel as a souvenir, a going home present from the Wehrmacht.

BOY

I'm thinking of going into the army myself.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Not much call for singers in the military. Look into the USO.

BOY

Oh, I don't mean as a singer.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I know. I was teasing. What are you studying?

BOY

Well, I'm studying to be a primary education teacher.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Not much call for that, either, I'm afraid.

BOY

Well, I wouldn't start that job until after the Army. (*Beat.*)
Teasing again.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Yes. Well, good luck to you. It's a great way to see the world. Robert Taylor was in the navy, you know. He directed training films. And you know what else?

BOY

What?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

His degree was in music. He was a cellist. I'd tell you to hang your hat at the Black Diamond before you go off to the army, boy, but it's probably not your sort of bar.

(The pianist emerges, and seats herself at the piano as the older gentleman graciously exits.)

PIANIST

Your voice certain sounds better.

BOY

I think the exercises are working.

PIANIST

My exercises?

BOY

Well, yes. A little. Probably. But also the exercises of my tutor.

PIANIST

Oh. Ah. Yes. Well, good. You have a lovely natural singing voice, and this is a lovely auditorium to sing in. It's quite old, don't you know?

BOY

Yes?

PIANIST

1902. Prairie School. Robert Taylor played cello here. Right here on this spot. Before my time, of course. Sing again.

BOY

I could drown in this dream of love
I fall down and there's no hope of rising
I could drown in this dream of love
Of you, of you, of you

BOY (CONT.)

Clouds roll by and I start a-falling
Will I sigh as I plummet past your window
Clouds roll by as I start a-falling
For you, for you, for you

PIANIST

Nice. Very lovely. Yes. We shall have quite a show for Mr. Taylor when he comes, and, I must say, I am quite excited.

BOY

My tutor knows Robert Taylor.

PIANIST

He ... No, don't be silly.

BOY

Yes. He said they spent time together in Hollywood.

PIANIST

Oh, I find that unlikely. Perhaps professionally, but not as friends.

BOY

Well, not as friends, no. But friendly.

PIANIST

That's silly. He's just boasting.

BOY

Silly? Why?

PIANIST

I honestly doubt that Robert Taylor has the time for a twittering old fool like your tutor. Mr. Taylor is the son of a doctor. He studied medicine himself! He was a soldier. He testified before congress.

BOY

Oh.

PIANIST

You don't understand, and that's fine. I will just say that Robert Taylor is one sort of man, and has one sort of group of friends, and your tutor is another sort of man, and has a different group of friends. Let us leave it at that.

BOY

All right.

PIANIST

(Stares hard at the boy.) How has your tutor been treating you?

BOY

He's very strict. But he has helped a lot.

PIANIST

He hasn't been overly familiar?

BOY

What do you mean?

PIANIST

He hasn't offered you alcohol, for example?

BOY

Alcohol? No.

PIANIST

Does he talk to you much?

BOY

Not much.

PIANIST

Perhaps he shouldn't at all. Can I give you some advice?

BOY

Yes, ma'am.

PIANIST

Go, take your vocal lessons from him. But don't spend much time talking to him. I am told he is a very good vocal coach, which is why I gave you his number. But if he tries to be friendly beyond being a vocal coach, thank him and go your merry way. Will you agree to that?

BOY

But why?

PIANIST

He is a silly man. He has strange qualities. I would prefer not to go into it, but, please trust me, he is not a friend you want to make. In fact, I would rather you not go to see him alone.

BOY

Oh?

PIANIST

Take a friend next time.

BOY

Are you serious, Mrs. Tollefson? You talk as though he is dangerous.

PIANIST

Sometimes excessive silliness can be dangerous. You will understand when you are older. Let's not talk about this anymore. Just tell me that you will bring somebody with you.

BOY

Really?

PIANIST

My goodness, yes. Promise me.

BOY

All right, Mrs. Tollefson.

(The college chum enters, and the older gentleman, as the pianist leaves. The older gentleman holds a silver tea tray with two cups.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

If I had known you were bringing a guest, I would have made more tea. Well, I will give up my cup.

BOY

Please, no. He can have my cup of tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Truly?

BOY

I have had enough tea.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

(*Laughs.*) I imagine you have. And to what do I owe this unexpected extra visitor?

COLLEGE CHUM

We're going to Lincoln to see a movie later. I asked if I could tag along rather than wait up.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

How fun! What movie are you planning to see?

COLLEGE CHUM

How the West Was Won.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

With Henry Fonda! Yes, that's excellent. I saw it last week. I particularly liked Richard Widmark. Did you ever see *Kiss of Death*?

BOY

No.

COLLEGE CHUM

No.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, he is so terrifying in it! He played a giggling killer, and at one point he throws a woman in a wheelchair down a flight of stairs. I imagine your father would disapprove: One less customer for orthopedic shoes.

BOY

Have you met Richard Widmark?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Richard and I have shared many a drink. You know, he's a Midwestern boy. He was born in Minnesota!

COLLEGE CHUM

You've had drinks with Richard Widmark?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

We worked for the same studio on many occasions, and he didn't like to drink alone. He once asked me to take him to my favorite bar, but it was the Bijou, and I couldn't take him there.

COLLEGE CHUM

Why not?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, the Bijou has a sort of specialized clientele. It is very déclassé, very, well, working class, and rough. There are all sorts of people there that Richard would not want to be in the company of, despite his tendency to play tough guys in films.

BOY

There were criminals in the bar?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Of a sort. But Cary Grant is fond of it too, as is Gary Cooper, so how terrible could it be, really? Although they would simply have died if anyone had ever snapped their photo at the Bijou. The tabloids can be merciless. Utterly merciless.

BOY

Why did you leave Hollywood?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I didn't want to. Me and my friend Andy made a good living out there. We shared a house with a pool. A beautiful little stucco thing, painted pink, just off La Cienega. But, well, mother got sick, and I decided to move back to Crete to tend to her. Andy kept the stucco and the pool and the poodle, and I got this. (*Gestures at the house.*) Mother willed it to me. I've redecorated, of course. Mother had a taste for little statuettes of ponies that I did not share, although I have kept two of them. There, on the mantle, next to her urn. (*Beat.*) Oh, where are my manners? I should offer guests some cookies as well. I know you're off tea, but some cookies?

BOY

Sure. That sounds great.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I will fetch them at once. Chocolate chip. I bake them myself, and I have been waiting for the opportunity to share them. But afterward we must begun practice. I'll be just a minute.

(*The older gentleman exits. After a moment, the college chum turns to the boy.*)

COLLEGE CHUM

So, do you think he is one?

BOY

What?

COLLEGE CHUM

A fairy?

BOY

(*Startled.*) Are you serious?

COLLEGE CHUM

Yes. He seems like a fairy to me. Has he tried anything with you?

BOY

What sort of things?

COLLEGE CHUM

Has he tried to touch you?

BOY

No. No, he's been very nice, very professional. This has been the longest talk we have had. Usually he just has me practice vocal exercises.

COLLEGE CHUM

Well, maybe he isn't a flit. I could have sworn he was, though. Hadn't that even occurred to you?

BOY

No. He's a war hero, you know.

COLLEGE CHUM

Really?

BOY

He's got a piece of German shrapnel in his leg. They don't let homosexuals in the Army, do they?

COLLEGE CHUM

No, I think they don't. Well, you can never tell who is what. Maybe he's just eccentric.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

(*Returning.*) Cookies! I hope you boys have managed to keep yourself amused while I was in the other room.

(A RECRUITMENT OFFICER, 30s, enters and seats himself. He speaks to the boy as the others leave.)

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

There are advantages to enlisting in the army, son. Do you know your draft status?

BOY

1A.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

I'm not surprised. You look like a solid young man, and, frankly, the army could use you. As an enlisted soldier, you can pick your training. Soldiers who are drafted get no such privilege. Additionally, your enlistment would only be for three years. For draftees, it's four. When do you graduate?

BOY

The summer after this one.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Well, there is no reason not to discuss it now, even if you do not enter the army until the summer of 1964. What is your interest in the military?

BOY

Travel, for one.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

We get that a lot. There are certainly opportunities for travel. The army currently has bases in Germany, The Philippines, Guam, Honolulu. We even have 4,000 soldiers in Indochina, although not

RECRUITMENT OFFICER (CONT.)

all of them are army, of course. Is there any place you would particularly like to go?

BOY

Do you have a base in Los Angeles?

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Los Alamitos, a joint forces training center. You interested in palm trees and movie stars, son?

BOY

Honestly, I'm interested in just about anything, sir. I haven't been further west than Colorado.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

You can go as far west as you like in the army, son. As far east as well. We've even had soldiers in the South Pole since last year, if you can believe it. Now, do you have any questions about the army, son?

BOY

Well, I have one.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Well, all right. I'm here to answer questions.

BOY

I have heard that you don't allow homosexuals in the army.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

That's true, son. Why do you want to know?

BOY

It's just something I had heard.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Well, you don't need to worry about sharing your showers or bunks with a homosexual, son. Before people even enter the army, we ask them, right on their application, if they are homosexual.

BOY

Does anybody ever answer yes?

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

No. I have never heard of anyone answering yes. I don't reckon homosexuals have much interest in joining the army, and the army don't want them anyway. You know, anybody with a history of mental illness, well, it wouldn't be a good idea to let them near a gun, would it?

BOY

No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

And if a man has strange feelings about other men — well, it wouldn't really do to let him around a lot of other men, would it?

BOY

No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

No.

BOY

What if a homosexual lied to you and did get into the army?

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Well, if they tried any funny business, they would go to jail. And, after that, they'd get a dishonorable discharge, which would follow them for the rest of their lives. So it wouldn't be very smart of a fairy to try to get in the army, would it?

BOY

No.

RECRUITMENT OFFICER

Now, do you have any questions about the army that isn't about homosexuals?

(A WOMAN enters and brings with her a table, the sort popular at restaurants. She sits at in and the boy crosses to her, sitting opposite. The recruitment officer exits.)

BOY

So father won't be coming?

WOMAN

No. He must work on taxes. And he doesn't like this sort of thing, you know. But I will be there, of course. When did you get your hair cut last?

BOY

A few weeks ago.

WOMAN

Let me give you a few dollars before I go. It is getting a little unkempt. You have such a handsome face. We don't want it hidden by girlish curls.

BOY

Well, I haven't started growing curls yet, mother.

WOMAN

You're such a handsome boy. Don't spend all your time at college chasing after girls.

BOY

You don't need to worry about that, mother.

WOMAN

I like to worry about it. Is there anyone special in you life just now? Don't be ashamed to tell your mother.

BOY

I've been very busy with school, mother, and with rehearsals. I haven't had time for that.

WOMAN

No steady girl on your arm? Don't tell me you haven't been dating. With your face, the girls should be throwing themselves at you.

BOY

We go out as a gang sometimes. The girls and my friends.

WOMAN

Well, when you get the moment, ask one of these girls to go out without the gang. You don't want to end up an old bachelor, do you?

BOY

I suppose I don't, mother. Oh, look!

(The older gentleman enters.)

BOY

That's my singing tutor!

WOMAN

You should call him over. Maybe he would like to join us.

BOY

(*Waving.*) Mr. De Silva!

(The older gentleman sees them, crosses.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, good evening, Mr. Krause.

BOY

Mr. De Silva, this is my mother. Mother, this is my singing tutor, Mr. De Silva.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Mrs. Krause.

WOMAN

My son has told me that you have done wonders for his singing voice.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

It's a fine voice to begin with, Mrs. Krause. I just made sure he was using it properly.

WOMAN

What brings you into Lincoln, Mr. De Silva?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I was just taking in a movie. Lolita at the Joyo.

WOMAN

My goodness. How was that?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Very interesting. Have you read the book?

WOMAN

No, but I have certainly heard it talked about. How ever did they make it into a movie, I wonder?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, they couldn't have made the book directly into a movie, but the film had many details from the book. And it kept the deliciously sardonic tone of the book. I am a very great fan of an older film by the same director called The Killing.

WOMAN

Oh! I saw that! With Sterling Hayden! (*Looks around.*) Oh, where are my manners! Are you meeting someone, Mr. De Silva, or would you like to join us for dinner? We haven't ordered yet.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I am not meeting anyone. But I wouldn't dream of intruding.

WOMAN

It's no intrusion. By all means, have a seat.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, thank you. I will join you. (*Sitting.*) And what brings you to Lincoln, Mrs. Krause?

WOMAN

My mother was from Lincoln, Mr. De Silva. She's buried here, right next to Theodore Epp.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Theodore Epp?

WOMAN

From the "Back to the Bible" radio show.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, yes. I remember now. "Tell me the old, old storey of Jesus and his love." Yes, I have heard that show a few times.

WOMAN

I visit my mother every month, and since junior here started attending Doane, we have made it a tradition to eat at King's when I do.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

What a lovely tradition! I am sure he has been telling you all sorts of stories about the school's preparations for Robert Taylor's return.

WOMAN

He has been telling me that he has been too busy to date. When you came in, I was just warning him that if he is not careful, he will end up an older bachelor.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

A good warning. I am an older bachelor myself, and I cannot recommend it.

WOMAN

Oh! I'm sorry, Mr. De Silva! I should have thought before I opened your mouth. I just saw the ring on your finger and I thought ...

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, you thought right. I was married.

BOY

You were?

WOMAN

Sure he was! I would be surprised if you hadn't been, Mr. De Silva. You've got a very elegant, charming quality about you that I am sure many women have simply gone mad for.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, thank you, Mrs. Krause. Unfortunately, elegance and charm is not enough to make a marriage. We have been apart for 15 years, although we were never formally divorced. She and my daughter live in Kansas City.

WOMAN

Oh! You have a daughter! I hope you get to see her, Mr. De Silva. A growing girl needs a man in her life that she can count on.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You are right, of course. I see her as often as I can, but I wish it were more often. It is difficult to travel to Kansas

OLDER GENTLEMAN (CONT.)

City as often as I should, particularly since I was a resident of Hollywood up until three years ago.

WOMAN

My son mentioned the fact. You must have so many interesting stories!

BOY

He knew Robert Taylor.

WOMAN

Really! I went to school with him, back when he was Spangler Brugh.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

What was he like back then?

WOMAN

Very nice looking. A very neat, soft-spoken young man. I sat behind him in many classes, and I found it awfully distracting. What was he like when you knew him?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Still distracting.

(A CIVICS TEACHER, 30s, enters now.)

CIVICS TEACHER

Mr. Krause. Will you stand and read to the class? From where I have underlined.

(The boy rises as the woman and the older gentleman exit. The civics teacher hands him a newspaper, and the boy reads.)

THE BOY

"There is no greater threat to democracy today than the insidious, creeping Red Menace."

CIVICS TEACHER

Stop right there. The quote you just read is the first sentence of a letter to the editor in this morning's newspaper. Can you tell the class what the writer means by the "Red Menace," Mr. Krause?

THE BOY

Communism, sir.

CIVICS TEACHER

Communism, yes, Mr. Krause. And please read the name of the author of the letter, Mr. Krause.

THE BOY

Irwin Fielder, Sfc., US Army, Company A.

CIVICS TEACHER

I won't have you read the entire letter, Mr. Krause. But in it Master Sergeant Fielder explains that he is a veteran of the Korean conflict. Why do you think he would be writing about communism now? After all, we fought the communists in Korea 10 years ago, and 10 years is a long time. And why should we worry about communism anyway — I mean, Russia, China, Korea — they are so far away. Don't you agree, Mr. Krause?

THE BOY

Well, there are communists in Cuba.

CIVICS TEACHER

Yes there are. In fact, those of you who have following the news might have heard about a little thing called an embargo. Have you been following the news, Mr. Krause?

THE BOY

Yes. President Kennedy is proposing that we refuse to buy good made in Cuba.

CIVICS TEACHER

More than that, Mr. Krause, he is proposing that we as a nation refuse to buy any goods from anywhere in the world made from or containing Cuban material. Why would he do that?

THE BOY

So that we don't provide economic support for a communist country?

CIVICS TEACHER

But why should we care? Cuba is a very little Caribbean island, after all. If they want to be communists, why shouldn't we let them?

THE BOY

I don't know, sir.

CIVICS TEACHER

Well, that's the subject of our discussion today, so hopefully by the end of the class you will be able to answer that question, Mr. Krause. Because you cannot understand current events without understanding the threat of communism – what our letter-writer called the "insidious, creeping Red Menace" – and what our country is doing to stem that menace.

(The older gentleman enter, sits at the piano.)

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Sing it again, please.

THE BOY

(Hands the newspaper back to the civics teacher, who exits.)

I'm bewildered and I'm startled
Is this just the wine
Did I hear that you adore me
Could it be your mine

THE BOY (CONT.)

We've both drunk a little too much
 And won't be invited again any time soon
 I've lost my hat and your purse string's open
 Now is a good time to serenade the moon
 I've acted the fool, I act it often
 My hair's a mess and I sing off tune
 If it makes you smile I'll act the fool dear
 If it makes you smile I will serenade the moon.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Fine, fine. You must relax your jaw more, but you're improving.
 Are the exercises helping.

THE BOY

I haven't felt hoarse all week. Do you have exercises for
 nerves?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You're nervous about performing.

THE BOY

Yes. Very.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I can't help you with that. Some of my friends in Hollywood left
 the theater because they couldn't get over stage fright. They
 could act in front of a camera with no problems, but to perform
 live, onstage, in front of an audience – it was simply too much.
 I told them they left the theater for the wrong reason.

THE BOY

What was the right reason?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Because movies pay so much better. Look, I was under contract to
 Paramount, and all I did was lead actors in some simple vocal
 exercises. I did that for 10 years, and I would be surprised if
 I am not the richest man in Crete.

THE BOY

Do you plan to go back?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I don't think so.

THE BOY

Why not?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

That's a very hard question for me to answer completely. Let me ask you a question. What do you think of the song that you just sang?

THE BOY

It has been very helpful with my vocal exercises.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

But do you like it?

THE BOY

I don't know.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Yes, I've noticed that you don't seem to have strong opinions about things in one way or the other. Let me rephrase the question – do you dislike the song?

THE BOY

No.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

I am glad of that, because I wrote it.

THE BOY

You did?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, you can't be a vocal coach without eventually trying your hand at songwriting. When I moved out to Hollywood, it was still possible to bump into Cole Porter or Irving Berlin in the studio cantina. I suppose I always aspired to write songs like they did. Not much of a market for it, but I find it helps me express my feelings. That particular song I wrote about someone I fell in love with.

THE BOY

Yes?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

It's a sort of gimmick. You fall in love, you write a song, you sing it to the object of your affections, and sometimes they fall in love right back.

THE BOY

Did it work?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

For a little while. But in Hollywood, it is easy to get your heart broken. And I have dozens of such songs, and every one represents a broken heart. So when I moved back to Crete, after my mother died, I thought I would just stay here and be a rich local eccentric, and I would not get my heart broken any more. You don't mind that I am telling you this?

THE BOY

No.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

You're young, and to hear your mother tell it, don't date much. When you're older, and have been on at least a few dates, you might understand this. It is very easy for a person to get lonely, and, no matter how many times a heart gets broken, it wants to love again. Perhaps I can starve my stupid heart into submission in Crete.

THE BOY

I wouldn't give up hope. Maybe you will meet a nice spinster and fall in love again. Maybe an old maid working at a library.

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Oh, now you're teasing me? I wouldn't worry about that. I am not interested in old maids. And if I do fall in love with some librarian, perhaps there is something I can do about it. Perhaps there is some sort of surgery.

THE BOY

Surgery? Are there doctors who will remove somebody's heart?

OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, not exactly, Mr. Teasy. Perhaps one day I shall tell you.

(The pianist enters now, with ROBERT TAYLOR.)

PIANIST

Mr. Krause, I would like you to meet Robert Taylor. Mr. Taylor, This is Michael Krause, Jr. He will be our featured vocalist tonight.

ROBERT TAYLOR

(*Extends hand. The older gentleman exits.*) Mr. Krause. Excited about tonight?

THE BOY

(*Shaking hand.*) Nervous.

ROBERT TAYLOR

I understand. When I used to play cello on this stage, I would feel like I was going to throw up.

PIANIST

Mr. Taylor is taking a tour of the campus this afternoon, Mr. Krause. He asked if he could peek in on rehearsal.

ROBERT TAYLOR

If you don't mind.

THE BOY

I don't mind.

ROBERT TAYLOR

What are you working on?

THE BOY

A song for the production.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Can I hear it?

PIANIST

You don't mind, do you, Mr. Krause?

THE BOY

No. (*Singing.*)

Will there be love

Will there be kisses

What will there be when you're my misses

Will you greet me

With kisses and tea

Or will you lock up

And throw out the key

It has been said that

We are to wed

Oh, what will it be?

What will it be?

Say, is this joy

Is this what bliss is

Is this our life

When you're my misses

Say, will you sing

When I bring my ring

THE BOY (CONT.)

Or will you just scowl
And toss out the thing
You seem enraged
That we are engaged
What will it bring?
What will it bring?

ROBERT TAYLOR

(*Applauding.*) Very nice! You've obviously been practicing very hard.

THE BOY

In fact, I have been studying with an acquaintance of yours from Hollywood.

ROBERT TAYLOR

You have?

PIANIST

Oh, now, Mr. Krause. I don't think Mr. Taylor —

ROBERT TAYLOR

Who have you been studying with?

PIANIST

Abraham De Silva.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Abraham De Silva! That's right — I forgot he was from Nebraska.

PIANIST

You knew him?

ROBERT TAYLOR

Well, we had mutual friends. Abraham De Silva and Henry Fonda used to play cards together every weekend. And, of course, we saw each other at the studio. How is Abe?

THE BOY

Good.

ROBERT TAYLOR

I'm glad to hear that. He left Hollywood to take care of his mother, didn't he?

THE BOY

Yes. She passed away, though.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Well, I hope he will be coming tonight. He seemed quote depressed last time I saw him, so it will be good to see him in better spirits.

(The older gentleman enters now, dressed in a shiny gold suit, holding a drink, obviously a little drunk.)

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Bobby!

ROBERT TAYLOR

Well, Abe! I heard you might be here tonight. • (*Others enter, dressed in evening clothes, milling about holding drinks.*) Look at your suit!

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Less flamboyant than you're used to?

ROBERT TAYLOR

Well, you did have that red silk double-breasted suit.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, Crete isn't Hollywood. You need to dress down a little in Nebraska.

ROBERT TAYLOR

You must be very proud of your student.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Didn't he sing magnificently? He's a little song bird.

THE BOY

Thank you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Wasn't he handsome up there? Every eye in the Conservatory was on him. That must have been strange for you, Bobby. (*To the boy.*) Usually he's the center of attention.

ROBERT TAYLOR

It was a welcome change.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

So, how is the old gang?

(*At this moment, the women, the boy's mother, enters.*)

ROBERT TAYLOR

Everybody is well. Of course, you must have heard about Andrew.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Andrew? No. I haven't been in touch with anybody for quite a while.

THE WOMAN

(*Crossing to the boy, applauding.*) Bravo! Bravo!

THE BOY

Thank you, mother.

THE WOMAN

You were magnificent. Absolutely magnificent! Doesn't everybody agree?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

You should be very proud of your son, Mrs. Krause.

ROBERT TAYLOR

We were just saying that he stole all the attention from me tonight. You are Mr. Krause's mother?

THE BOY

I didn't get a chance to tell you earlier, Mr. Taylor. We are from Filley.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Oh, my goodness. Then I probably already know your mother. (*He looks at her closely.*) From school? Tell me we weren't in the same class together.

THE WOMAN

We were!

ROBERT TAYLOR

What's your maiden name?

THE WOMAN

Kurtz.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Not Lois Kurtz?

THE WOMAN

Yes!

ROBERT TAYLOR

(*To the boy.*) How many more of my acquaintances do you know?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Excuse me, Bobby. You were going to tell me something about Andrew.

ROBERT TAYLOR

I'm not sure I should be the one to tell you, Abe.

THE WOMAN

We even went on a date once!

THE BOY

You did?

ROBERT TAYLOR

I remember, Lois. We bussed to Omaha with a gang of other kids and went to the Orpheum. What did we see?

THE WOMAN

Oh, Mamie Smith. Butter Beans and Susie. A bunch of acts.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I have been out of touch, Bob. I really would appreciate it if you told me.

ROBERT TAYLOR

There was an accident, Abe.

THE WOMAN

The Rhythms Pals.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Lois, may I interrupt you for a moment?

THE WOMAN

Certainly.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Abe, there was an auto accident. Andrew Swerved wrong driving down from the Hills. He had been drinking. I'm sorry, but I'm afraid he's dead.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

When?

ROBERT TAYLOR

A year ago. I can't imagine why nobody told you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well. It didn't end very well for us.

ROBERT TAYLOR

I'm really very sorry, Abe.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, thank you for telling me, Bobby. It wasn't my intention to put you in an awkward spot like that.

ROBERT TAYLOR

Are you alright?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Stunned. I think I will step out and get some air.

ROBERT TAYLOR

All right. Be sure to say something to me before you go. I would hate to leave without a goodbye to you.

(The older gentleman leaves. The woman looks on, flabbergasted.)

THE WOMAN

Oh, my goodness!

ROBERT TAYLOR

A ... mutual friend. They were roommates. Listen, Mr. Krause, would you do me a favor and look after Abe for a moment. (*The boy nods, exits.*)

THE WOMAN

My God. What a shock for him!

(Now the stage clears of actors, set, and properties. The Older Gentleman returns to the stage, staggering slightly, a dull expression on his face. He pauses and looks up in the air.)

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Have you ever looked at the sky from the observatory? (*A beat.*)
I know you're here, Mr. Krause.

(The boy emerges. He crosses to the older gentleman sheepishly.)

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Answer my question.

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I did, once. When I was a boy here in Crete. Our elementary class would sometimes take day trips. Once we came to Doane and everybody looked through the telescope. What is its name?

THE BOY

The Boswell Observatory.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Boswell. Yes. We came at noon and watched the time ball drop. It's not in use anymore. It was a big metal ball that would drop down a pole every day at noon. You could see it everywhere in Crete. Afterward, we took turns looking through the telescope. All we could see was blue, of course, because it was daytime, but our teacher told us that at night you could see into space for a million miles. Have you looked through the telescope at night?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Did you see for a million miles?

THE BOY

I saw the big dipper. That must be at least a million miles away.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

A million miles. That's how far I wanted to get away from Doane. I moved to Omaha when I was 16, you know. Sold furniture. I took singing lessons as night. But Omaha isn't a million miles away, is it.

THE BOY

No.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

No. When I went to the army, I went to Casablanca. Left a wife behind. You know Casablanca? Like in the movie?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

It's in Morocco, which might as well be a million miles away. When I came back, with shrapnel in my leg, I figured that I had gone too far. Hollywood seemed just far enough. Didn't figure I would be coming back here.

THE BOY

Are you okay.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

No. Andrew was my lover in Hollywood. You must have figured that out.

THE BOY

No. I wondered, though.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

There you have it. Here it is, on the night of your public performance, and you find out your tutor is mentally ill, and you watch his sick heart get broken. You know, I think you're ready for opera. (Beat.) Homosexuality isn't frowned on in Hollywood like it is here, you know. Or, at least, people aren't as openly disapproving. Look at Robert Taylor. He named names before the House of Un-American Activity Committees. Apparently he hates communists. And yet he's very cordial to an old queen like me.

THE BOY

Does he know?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Of course he knows. Not every place in the world is filled with naive lumps. (Beat.) I'm sorry. I didn't mean to be short. You're a very quiet boy. Do you know that?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

You're not quick with an opinion either. Either you don't think very much about anything at all, or you play your cards close to your vest. For example, looking at you right now, I can't imagine what you think about me.

THE BOY

What do you mean?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I'm a queer, boy. You must have some sort of opinion about that. Mustn't you? Honestly, I can't believe that you are so dull that you don't. So, do your old tutor a favor, and share with me what you are thinking right now.

THE BOY

(Long beat.) I'm wondering if I am like you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I'm going to sit down on the ground. You don't mind, do you. Usually, it is polite to tell someone to sit down before you tell them something like that. *(He sits down.)* Do you know what you are saying to me?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Then I pity you. I spent my life wishing I didn't have these feelings. I have a wife and a child I will never see again because of it. And it is not like we mentally ill are capable of terrific relationships with each other, either. I have dozens of songs for dozens of broken hearts, boy, and I hoped in Crete my heart would never break again.

THE BOY

Is there a cure?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

There are a few. I've tried shrinks. Maybe you might have some luck with them. I didn't. I have, when I have felt the least sympathy for my conditions, considered contacting a specific doctor. He travels the country in a camper van outfitted for surgery. He can take away these desires.

THE BOY

How?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

With an ice pick, if you can believe it. Right through the tear duct and into the brain. A quick couple of jabs, and it's over, and all you have is two black eyes and a headache.

THE BOY

Through the tear duct?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I've looked into it, boy. Your memories, your ability to reason, your personality – they all remain intact. But you lose your desires. And I have often wanted to lose mine. I often have wanted to feel nothing. I feel that way right now.

THE BOY

You wouldn't really, would you?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Would I? I expect eventually I shall. You know, your prediction is probably right. Sooner or later I will fall in love with a spinster librarian, but, in this case, the spinster will be a Marty rather than a Marian. And it will go bad, as it always does, and people will talk, as people in small towns always do, and I will be alone in my dead mother's house. And I will not be able to stand it, and I will make a phone call. A camper van will arrive, and I will spend the rest of my life in that house, supported by my savings, needing nothing and, more importantly, wanting nothing. It will happen, boy – it's a foregone conclusion. But it could be worse.

THE BOY

How?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I could get drunk and decide to swerve off the road one night. Andrew wasn't the first homosexual to think of that, and I am sure he won't be the last. At least my suicide plans leave me alive. And, boy, let me suggest to you that you make your suicide plans now. This is not the sort of thing that should be improvised at the last moment.

THE BOY

May I sit down?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

It's your campus.

(The boy sits.)

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I shouldn't be surprised as I am, boy. After all, I can't be the only fairy to come out of Crete, Nebraska. You've got such a quiet, angelic quality to you, though. You didn't seem like you thought about romance one way or the other. You didn't seem like you thought about anything at all, for that matter, (*Sourly.*) Ah, what a wretched evening. What a conversation to have after you recital!

THE BOY

My father suspects.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Eh?

THE BOY

It's why he isn't here tonight. He never came to any of the school plays I was in. He considers it all to be sissy. He used to call me "Little Nancy" whenever I would talk about a movie or a play. When my mother would take me back home after seeing a Robert Taylor film, he would say, "Well, Little Nancy, did you like watching the pretty man?"

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I hope you called him "Flatfoot" in response.

THE BOY

I'm sorry about your friend Andrew. But I do have an opinion about something.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

What?

THE BOY

I think the ice pick is a bad idea.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Well, there are some days I have nothing to pick from but bad ideas.

THE BOY

I have a question, too.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

What?

THE BOY

How did you get into the army if you are a homosexual.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

I lied to them, of course. When they asked, "Are you a homosexual," I said "No." I mean, it's not like I was fondling other soldiers as they slept. Nobody ever knew, or, in truth, if they knew, they didn't care. There was a war on. You still thinking of joining the army?

THE BOY

Yes.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Want to go to Cuba and fight some communists?

THE BOY

Anywhere.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Anywhere but here, eh?

THE BOY

Anywhere but here.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Honestly, look into the USO. Sooner or later there will be another war on, and they are going to want somebody to sing to the troops. You have a real talent, son.

THE BOY

Thank you.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Do you mind if we don't discuss all this awfulness any more.

THE BOY

No.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

It is your night, after all. Enjoy it.

THE BOY

It's Robert Taylor's night.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

So enjoy that. But let's sit in silence. I won't bother you with my thoughts of ice picks, and you can entertain your own thoughts of Robert Taylor, which are far more enjoyable, anyway.

(They sit in silence for a while. The boy breaks it.)

THE BOY

Do you know what?

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

What?

THE BOY

I don't like silence very much.

THE OLDER GENTLEMAN

Two opinions in one evening. You're off to a good start, kid.

END