

## ACT I, Scene 1

*(The HOOVER's living room. It is neat and conventionally tasteful. Prints are hanging by MONET and other impressionists. BERNIE and WALLY are drinking beers. BERNIE also has a shot)*

BERNIE Taxes!

WALLY What do you mean?

BERNIE You got your taxes, didn't you?

WALLY *(He nods)* They are getting high.

BERNIE *(Snorts)* High, he says!

WALLY Way too high—

BERNIE I mean who has got the money to pay them?

WALLY *(Alarmed)* You can't pay your taxes?

BERNIE Of course I can pay my taxes!

WALLY Because if you need any help—

BERNIE It's not that. It's the principle of the thing!

WALLY And exactly what principle would that be?

BERNIE Do I have to explain The Law of Diminishing Returns?

WALLY Please do.

BERNIE Well—look, these taxes—Now where does it go? The roads, civic improvement, okay, I understand, but who knows what these things actually cost? Do you?

WALLY Of course there are the schools.

BERNIE Oh sure, I know if you got a kid in school you want him to have all the best.

WALLY *(Reluctantly)* Within reason, of course—

BERNIE So how is Austin doing in school?

WALLY Oh, fine, just fine, Bernie.

BERNIE You got a great kid there.

WALLY June and I think we have done all right.

BERNIE How are his grades?

WALLY *(Pause)* Actually, they could be a *little* better. You know we hope he gets into the university next year.

BERNIE And the girls—I'll bet he has plenty of girls.

WALLY I don't think he actually has a girl at this time.

BERNIE Playing the field, huh? That's the way to go. My God, the girls these days! *(Pop-eyed)* I mean have you seen the things they put on the Internet? They have no shame. And what's more they have no inhibitions. It's—*(He shrugs)*—

WALLY It's disturbing.

BERNIE *(Grunts)* Hunh!

WALLY But then you don't have a daughter.

BERNIE And I get down on my knees and I thank God for that every day!

WALLY *(Pause)* Austin is pretty involved with the basketball team. You know they have the big game with Middleville this week. He doesn't have much time for girls.

BERNIE *(Disbelieving)* No? I mean what with the booze and the drugs and the sex a poor kid doesn't have a chance these days, and when I think of what we had to go through just to grab a feel! I really hate to think about that!

WALLY Do you often think about that?

BERNIE Let me tell you I do! I met my wife Sherry in high school.

WALLY You never told me that.

BERNIE But my point is if I'd gotten some at that time I might have been satisfied. What would have been the mystery? And I might not now be married to the loopest woman in our city. And if I ever tried to divorce her, she'd take me for everything I got, and probably ask the judge to throw in a little blood just for spite!

WALLY You have your girl friends, don't you?

BERNIE Of course, and if I ever catch you saying a word about that to you know who, I'll do something very nasty to you!

WALLY You could get in serious trouble for that.

BERNIE *(He sighs unhappily)* I should have been a monk! But they probably wouldn'ta let me in.

WALLY Well, you are right about one thing. There is an awful lot of temptation out there these days.

BERNIE It's all this freedom, my friend. I mean girls pregnant at fifteen, sixteen! At least Sherry and me never had any kids!

WALLY *(A bit uneasy)* The way June and I feel about it is if you set an appropriate example, then your child will follow it.

BERNIE Does that actually work?

WALLY *(Shakes his head)* I have no idea.

BERNIE *(He finishes his whiskey)* You got another shooter?

WALLY Sure. *(He exits. Then pours BERNIE a whiskey).*

BERNIE Do you know my wife still plays with dolls?

WALLY I understand these dolls are collector's items, worth a lot—

BERNIE I mean she actually *plays* with them. She gets them out and dresses them up and talks to them like they're real people. It gives me the creeps!

WALLY Why does she do that?

BERNIE She says it brings back her childhood.

WALLY Oh.

BERNIE You don't need to bring it back, I tell her. You are still there! And do you know what she says to that? *(He snorts)* She says thank you.

WALLY That's strange.

BERNIE *Strange!* Let me tell you, my friend. I really hope they broke the mold when they made her, otherwise there is some other poor schmuck somewhere who deserves your pity as much as I do! I really got to get her over to see Doc Porter.

WALLY I don't know. I remember when they took Lacy Gorman to him. *(He shakes his head)* She saw elves ever after.

BERNIE You win some. You lose some. *(He drinks his whiskey)*. You got another?

WALLY *(A little nervous)* You might want to go easy on that. *(Pouring him one)*.

BERNIE *(Snorts)* Hunh! Do you tell a man in hell to take it easy? *(He tosses it down)*.

WALLY Maybe I'll have one, too. *(He pours a small shot)*

BERNIE How's the act for the Legion Amateur Show coming along?

WALLY *(Pause)* To tell you the truth, Bernie, I'm not sure I'm going to enter this year.

BERNIE What? You're the star attraction! I mean Amateur Night just wouldn't be the same—

WALLY I know. I know... and you're also going to say that I came in third last year and Walters died.

BERNIE Yeah! If somebody knocked Martin off, you'd be a shoo-in!

WALLY I don't find that funny. The point is I would have to come up with a whole new set of jokes.

BERNIE Well, you got a whole month, man! Now listen to me, seeing that act of yours is very important to some people!

WALLY Who?

BERNIE Well—

WALLY There, you see!

BERNIE Now hold on a minute. This goes beyond that! This is about tradition. For three years you have entertained us at Legion Amateur Night. If that don't mean anything to you, it means something to the rest of us. Certain traditions are sacred, and the Legion Club Amateur Night is one of them, and I don't care if you think I'm being a sentimental slob about it. That is how I feel! *(He suddenly seems near tears)*. Gimme another shot.

WALLY *(Weakening, ignoring the request)* Naturally I care about tradition.

BERNIE If we can't pass tradition on to our kids, what can we give them!

WALLY I know, but look. But I'm beginning to feel a little silly. I'm just getting too old to dress up in that ridiculous costume and tell corny jokes—

BERNIE That ridiculous costume and those corny jokes are part of the tradition! Of course if you think you are *above* it all!

WALLY Now hold on. I never said I *wasn't* going to do it.

BERNIE (*Shakes his head sadly*) You'd be letting us down, buddy.

WALLY I'll think about it, okay?

BERNIE (*He looks a little green*) Look, I uh, got to use your—

WALLY You know where it is.

BERNIE Just a quick one to settle my nerves. (*He takes a slug from the bottle as he exits*).

(*Then as BERNIE exits, AUSTIN enters a few seconds later. He is texting*)

WALLY Hello, son.

AUSTIN (*Grunts noncommittally*) Unh—

WALLY A good day in school, son? (*AUSTIN gestures incomprehensibly*).

(*BERNIE then emerges from the washroom, swaying. He knocks into a table*)

BERNIE I coulda swore that table was over there. (*He chuckles*).

AUSTIN Hi, Bernie. Did you know your wife is having a tea party?

BERNIE She is, is she?

AUSTIN She's having a tea party in your front yard with, like, dolls and everything.

BERNIE (*To WALLY*) What did I tell you? (*He makes a 'loopy' sign*).

AUSTIN It seems kind of cold for that.

BERNIE No, it isn't. If you're nuts it isn't! (*He looks at AUSTIN*) Let me give you some advice, son. Do not ever, under any circumstances, marry a woman who has a couple of screws loose. Oh, I know you'll say she's beautiful. But I don't care if she was the Homecoming Queen or she was Miss America or Miss Whatever! Believe me, you'll pay a big price! Now you remember that! (*And he staggers off*).

AUSTIN I always figured she had a few screws—

WALLY Now that is a very sad thing, Austin.

AUSTIN I'm glad mom doesn't do nutty things like that!

WALLY Look son, when people do strange things it doesn't necessarily mean they're nutty. And by the way, nutty is an inaccurate way to describe someone with—mental problems. There is normally a deep cause for their problems, so we should feel sorry for these people.

AUSTIN But aren't you glad mom doesn't do things like that?

WALLY *(Pause)* How was school, son?

AUSTIN Oh, man, it was great!

WALLY *(Delighted)* I'm glad you're beginning to get so enthusiastic about school.

AUSTIN Yeah, we had a pep rally. They introduced the team and everything and then they did a few cheers—

WALLY *(Smiling fondly)* I remember that from my high school days.

AUSTIN And then Mitzi Hoyt did a striptease to the school song—

WALLY She *what*?

AUSTIN It was great! She didn't go all the way. Before she got too far Miss Dixon, the girls' gym teacher—We all call her Miss *Dyke-son*—she grabbed Mitzi and took her to the girls' locker room. You should have seen it, dad! Mitzi was really—

WALLY But what were the kids doing?

AUSTIN Most of them were cheering.