CHAPTER II

Adumbrations of the Filial Syndrome:

Come Blow Your Horn, God's Favorite,
I Ought to Be in Pictures, The Gingerbread Lady,
Brighten Beach Memoirs and Broadway Bound
Neil Simon's emergence as a distinguished playwright was not entirely unexpected in that he had prior to taking to writing plays for the stage scored notable successes as a writer of Television comedy, especially as a member of the Team fashioning material for the famous NBC's 'Your Show of Shows' (a television comedy weekly) featuring Sid Caesar and Imogene Coca. Moreover, as he said later, "Having read a lot of books on playwriting I knew that you should write about what you know. I figured, OK, I know my family, so I'll do something about how my older brother Danny and I left home and took our first apartment". However, he had to struggle hard for three years to complete his first play, *Come Blow Your Horn* (1961), although years later he remarked that the play in the time it was written, seemed like a monumental effort.
Today, it seems like the crude markings in a cave by the first prehistoric chronicler.

Neil Simon's disparaging comment on his first play need not be taken as an indication of its lacking in value, since it may mean only that its quality is not commensurate with the quantum of effort that has gone into its making. But it cannot be denied that his play has initiated a new trend in American drama - a trend characterised by verbal pyrotechnics as much as by farcical comedy.

The Play, Come Blow Your Horn, traces the growing estrangement between the father, Mr. Harry Baker, and his two sons, Alan and Buddy on one hand and between the brothers on the other and ends on the happy note of reconciliation. With a line from a well known nursery rhyme as its title, it entertainingly
works out the transition of Alan, "Little Blue Boy", from being careless of his duties to becoming conscientious as also that of Buddy from being earnest to becoming irresponsible like his elder brother. The transitions marking the two brothers do not seem incredible, since they not only are rooted in psychological realism but also conform to one's preconceptions concerning them. Alan, a "good looking, bright, thirty-three" year old young man has an apartment into which Buddy wants to move so as to be free of being treated as a babe by his overbearing father and overindulgent mother, which is what triggers off the action in the play.

The play opens with the return of Alan and his girl friend, Peggy Evans, from a ski trip to Vermont where she is supposed to have been introduced to one Mr. Manheim, a Hollywood producer, by him. It so transpires that there
is no such person as Manheim and that not much
of sking done on their trip and Alan obviously
has brought her to his apartment to continue
their 'sport'. Alan sends her away before
his brother, a twenty one year old young man,
"reserved, unsure, shy"\textsuperscript{4}, arrives and tells
him that he has left their home for good for
what seems to be a strange, though funny, reason:

But you know why I really
left home. I don't want
to have milk and cake standing
over the sink any more. I
want to sit in a chair and
eat like real people.\textsuperscript{5}

The conversation that ensues replete with gags:
brings out their perceptions concerning their
parents and their family business, a waxed-
fruit-manufacturing concern, in which they
are employed, as also themselves. Their conver-
sation was interrupted by a telephone call from their mother asking Buddy to return home immediately as their father was wild at Alan's action in not honouring the appointment with a valued customer, Mr. Meltzer. Buddy willing to heed his mother's summons is persuaded by his brother to stay back telling him "when you're sixty-five you get social security, not girls." Alan expecting Peggy to return is surprised to find his father at the doorstep when he answers the door-bell. Buddy hides himself in the bedroom and what follows is revealing of the relations between the father and his sons. Alan defiantly answers his father's accusations and is not cowed down by his tirade against him:

Alan: ... what good does it do coming in? You don't need me. You never ask my advice about the business, do you?

Father: What does a skier know about wax fruit?
Alan: You see? you see? you won't even listen.

Father: Come in early, I'll listen.

Alan: I did. For three years. Only then I was "too young" to have anything to say. And now that I've got my own apartment, I'm too much of a "bum" to have anything to say. Admit it, Dad. You don't give me the same respect you give the night watchman.7

Alan's seemingly parting shot evokes a quick rejoinder from his father who says "At least I know where he is at night."8 Harry Baker's stand on Alan's behaviour is understandable, though not excusable, as it reflects the assumptions that a Patriarch-like father makes with regard to his son. He considers him a good-for-nothing, a wastrel, as Alan is over thirty and still unmarried, besides being 'wayward' as compared to his brother, Buddy. Harry leaves
telling Alan that he will throw himself in front of an airplane the day his brother becomes like him, which remark makes Buddy rush out wanting to telephone to his mother asking her to destroy the letter he has left behind invoking the Declaration of Independence to assert his own independence before his father sees it. But Alan dissuades him by telephoning first to Mr. Meltzer to lie to him for missing his appointment with him which is due to his having been mistakenly in Atlantic City with the girls intended for him and promising him to get them to him immediately and next to one Chickie Parker asking her to meet him with her French roommate at the Hotel Croyden within half an hour, which appears incredible to his brother, since as he remarks, it took three months for him to get a date.

Alan's plans are frustrated by Connie Dayton's
announcement of her arrival by intercom from the lobby which makes him explain to his brother that she is the nicest and different from other girls, although he has no intention of marrying her. The scene that follows is important in that it confronts Alan not only with Connie but also with the choice he has to make between having only an affair with her and getting married to her - a choice between deference to his own present inclination and that to his parents' wishes. Informing Alan that she has given up her travelling job in industrial shows to be near him in New York, Connie declares her willingness to "march down the aisle or into the bedroom." Alan tries to shock her by asking her to "march into the bedroom" only to be rendered speechless by her announcement while leaving:
I just figure if I'm going into business here I might as well get the rest of my merchandise.¹⁰

Buddy soon returns to be told by Alan to play the role of the fictitious Mr. Manheim when Peggy arrives as he has to keep his appointment with their valued customer, Mr. Meltzer, and the fun-girls. Buddy's apprehension concerning the outcome of it is stilled by the arrival of Mrs. Baker, not that of Peggy.

Both Buddy and Mrs. Baker are agitated, he afraid of a confrontation between Peggy and his mother and she worried about her husband's reaction to Buddy's leaving as she puts it;

I know what he's going to say tonight. He'll blame it all on me. He'll say I was too easy with the both of you. He'll say, "Because of you my sister
Gussie has two grandchildren and all I've got is a bum and a letter... I know him.

In sheer desperation Buddy goes out to get a taxi for his mother, who in the meantime has had to contend with messages received continuously on the phone, which confuses her so much that what she says to Mr. Meltzer who does not want Alan to call at Hotel Croyder with 'those certain parties' on account of the sudden arrival of his wife from Atlantic city and to Chickie Parker who wants confirmation of her being required to be at the Hotel is suggestive of the complications that are to follow.

With his mother departing after telling him that she has delivered all the messages to Alan on the phone and Buddy refusing to play the role of Mr. Manheim for Peggy, the scene
is set for a highly entertaining encounter between Buddy and Peggy marked by misinterpretation of each other's remarks as also by cross-talk!

**Peggy:** ...I understand you had some problem at the studio.

**Buddy:** Oh, yes ... we did.

**Peggy:** What ... was it? *(She takes a cigarette and lights it.)*

**Buddy:** It was ...er... *(He sees flame) Er... we had a ... fire.

**Peggy:** Who?

**Buddy:** I beg your pardon?

**Peggy:** Who did you have to fire?

**Buddy:** No, no. A fire. Part of the studio burned down.

**Peggy:** Oh? Was anyone hurt?
Buddy: No... Just a few extras... Say, would you like a drink?

Peggy: Oooh, like a transfusion. I don't mind admitting it, but I'm nervous.

......

Peggy: I'll be perfectly frank with you. I've never been in a picture before.

Buddy: Is that so?

Peggy: But I'm not totally inexperienced.

Buddy: So Alan told me.

Peggy: Last summer when I was on the coast I did an "Untouchables".

Buddy: No kidding.

Peggy: I was a dead body. They fished me out of the river.

Buddy: I think I saw that.
Peggy: Lots of people did. I got loads of work from it. But it's not what I really want to do. That's why I'm taking acting class. With Felix Ungar. He lives in this building. Right under this apartment. In fact that's how I met Alan (She puts her hand on his right knee) I rang the wrong bell one night. (Buddy looks down at his knee and laughs almost hysterically).

Buddy: How about that?

Peggy: And look how it turned out. Through a silly mistake, I'm being auditioned by one of the biggest producers (taking hand off knee) in the business. Life is funny, isn't it?

Buddy's interlude with Peggy is interrupted by the arrival of his father. Though managing to send her away through the kitchen door he
has had to lie to her that the caller is not his father but a writer nicknamed 'Dad' like Hemingway's being known as Poppa. The fact that Buddy is able to lie effortlessly to see himself through as also his being able to stand up to this over-bearing father is indicative of his having changed perceptibly. Buddy tries in vain to convince his father why he wants to be independent and try his hand at writing for the theatre or television rather than his father's business, and just as he persuades his father to trust him for the night, Peggy suddenly returns and upsets everything. Greeting the stunned father as 'Dad', Peggy leaves them telling them that she will go to the liqour shop for Buddy's supposed favourite drink. Thoroughly shaken and convinced that his second son also has become a 'bum' the infuriated father is intercepted by the appearance of
an agitated Alan. Harry Baker deliberately walks slowly towards the door to overhear Alan's conversation on the phone with Mr. Meltzer who threatens him with a lawsuit being furious at the complication created by the simultaneous arrival of Mrs. Meltzer and a French girl as a result of Mrs. Baker's missed-up message. Hearing the word, 'lawsuit', Harry Baker takes the phone from Alan and finds out that Alan is responsible for arranging the 'party', which convinces him that he is beyond redemption as also Buddy whose activities seem to be no better than his brother's. Disgusted and acutely disappointed Harry leaves telling him what is tantamount to a typical benediction pronounced by a despairing father:

May you and your brother live and be well. God bless you, all the luck in the world, you should
know nothing but happiness. If ever I speak to either one of you again, my tongue should fall out. 13

It is a veritable conspiracy of circumstances that has brought about the impasse which threatens to separate the father from his sons for ever, which exemplifies the role of contingency in one's life. The departure of their father is almost followed by Connie's arrival with her bag and baggage, which hardly gives the brothers any breathing time, let alone any time to 'digest' what has happened. Confessing that he loves her, Alan tells her that they cannot get married, on the pretext that he has lost his job which makes Connie angrily declare;

I don't take prisoners. If that's the way you'll marry me, I don't want it. 14

Interrupted by a call from his mother telling
him that his father has decided to move to Aunt Gussie's place, Alan promises to spend the night in his boyhood room, and finds that Connie refuses to believe that it is a call from his mother. The scene ends with his mother asking him what he would like to have for dinner, which underlines her abiding concern for him.

Act-III opens after a lapse of three weeks during which an incredible transformation of the personalities seems to have taken place. While Alan is dejected Buddy is cheerful and confident playing Mr. Manheim without a twitch of conscience when Peggy appears and dismissing her by telling her that he has to look at 'some locations'. Indeed, he seems to have stepped into the shoes of Alan whom he infuriates by asking him to stay out till one O' clock as he has a date with a Miss Snow.
Buddy: You don't mind going to a movie, do you?

Alan: You're damned right I mind!

Buddy: What's wrong, Alan? That was our arrangement, wasn't it? If one fellow had a girl --

Alan: That was my arrangement. I did the arranging and you went to the movies. Where do you get this OUR stuff?

Buddy: I thought we were splitting everything fifty-fifty?

Alan: We were until you got all the fifties. Becoming increasingly peevish and irritated at his brother's insufferable behaviour Alan threatens to slap him which provokes Buddy to say that he is moving out. Before either of the threats materializes, Mrs. Baker enters with a suitcase telling them that their father's behaviour has become so unbearable that she has decided to quit the place.
Their conversation is interrupted by the door bell and Mrs. Baker hurriedly drags her suitcase into the bedroom as the visitor is presumed to be Buddy's date although it is Mr. Baker who arrives fuming to take her home saying:

She should be home. I'm still her husband.  

He announces that he has tickets in his pocket for a four month trip around the world and that he is planning to sell his waxed fruit business. Mrs. Baker stoutly refuses to accompany him declaring that she is "not going around any worlds" till all is well with her sons and is undeterred by her husband's threat to take Aunt Gussie in her place.

The doorbell rings and once again the visitor happens to be not Buddy's date but Connie who has come to see Alan from Cincinnati where she has been 'Miss Automatic Toaster' before accepting the Electrical Dealers' offer to
go to Europe. Alan refusing to allow her to go to Europe declares his love for her and is about to propose to her when the telephone rings. Mrs. Baker receiving the call at the instance of Alan, has as usual not been able to make out the name of the caller and Harry who takes the phone from her is pleasantly surprised that the caller is no other than the long sought after customer, Mr. Copeland of Begley's Department Store in Texas, who has phoned to confirm a large order for waxed fruit. As the order is secured by Alan, Harry Baker and Mrs. Baker are delighted to accept Connie's invitation to go out to dinner all together. Left behind as he is expecting his date Buddy is surprised to find Aunt Gussie walking in when the doorbell rings, not his long-awaited date, Snow.

The play *Come Blow Your Horn*, is a remarkably successful one despite its over-reliance on
two gadgets, the doorbell and the telephone, to realize surprise and suspense needed to sustain interest. Significantly, the doorbell is used on about thirteen occasions, each time to usher in an unexpected visitor, starting with the entry of scowling father instead of Peggy whom Alan is expecting in Act-I. Like wise, Neil Simon exploits the tremendous potential of the telephone to spring surprises that leave his characters groping for a way out of the impasse created by the call concerned. For instance, Alan is taken aback to receive a telephone call from Connie (p.32). Three calls from Meltzer, Chickie Parker and Alan respectively (pp. 56,57,58) to the befuddled mother, Mrs. Baker, an unexpected call from the father of Buddy (p.63), that from Meltzer to Alan (p.71) and the most unexpected by the most devoutly wished for telephone call from Mr. Copeland of Texas to Alan (p.98) all in different ways generate
tensions, shocks, and surprises, both pleasant and unpleasant. It may be pointed out that the last telephone call, the one from Mr. Copeland of Texas, at one stroke resolves the crisis that threatens to break up the Baker family, which, if it were allowed to happen, would have turned the play into a tragedy. Further, the call intimating the placing of a large order by Mr. Copeland represents a stroke of genius in the sense that Harry Baker shaken by the loss of a large order from Meltzer, is not only delighted to receive one from Mr. Copeland but relieved of the tension created by Mr. Meltzer's threat to file a lawsuit against Alan.

Neil Simon's comedy is distinguished in that it presents, instead of 'flat' characters as in most comedies, 'round' characters like Harry Baker, Alan and Buddy in *Come Blow Your Horn*. 
Harry Baker, a "completely fascinating - although in some ways awful - person" changes from being tyrannical and harshly inconsiderate in his dealings with his sons and wife to being sympathetic and relenting enough to agree to dine with his son and his bethrothed which is, perhaps, as expressive of the change of heart as of his being thankful to Alan for securing the order from Mr. Copeland. But the change in Harry is not so significant as that in Alan, "charming, persuasive best in attempting to lure" girls like Peggy who becomes responsible and mature enough to confess to his father:

Dad, I don't know how to say this to you... but ... well, you were right about so many things. (Father nods...). I guess every boy's got to be a bum even for a little while.
I just ran into overtime (Father nods..) There is a lot more I want to say to you, Dad, but not now. Look, why don't we all go out to celebrate? To a night club.20

The transformation of a shy boy who allows himself to be bullied by his parents and brother into a defiantly, pleasure-seeking playboy is not entirely unexpected in that it represents a reaction to Buddy's highly sheltered life caused by an over-bearing father and a highly possessive mother. However, it is startling enough to cause concern to his brother and parents who, in the end seem to be reconciled to it, perhaps, in the expectation that Buddy will eventually become as responsible and mature a person as Alan. Interestingly, the sons never seem to have wanted to cut themselves off from their parents, which accounts for Alan's
negotiating a highly profitable order for his father, which comes as a kind of epiphanic revelation to Harry Baker in the sense he feels that he has misjudged his son. Thus, the play ends by underlining the value of preserving family ties, made possible in this case by the father's giving up some of the patriarchal powers which he has relentlessly been exercising as also Alan's realization of the need to commit himself to what is regarded as valuable in life.

In God's Favorite (1974) the theme of reconciliation is worked out in terms related to the Book of Job which makes it stand apart from Neil Simon's other comedies. The play relies on the skilful use of gags and turns of expression to make physical pain to which both its protagonist and his Biblical counterpart are subject amusing, if not funny. It was, as explained by the author himself,
an attempt to release or exercise some of anguish I was going through following the death of my wife. I was not able to rationalize why somebody like Joan could die of cancer at the age of 39. I was very angry, and writing that play was a kind of cathartic experience for me... It was depressing, yet it was something I wanted to do at that point in the middle of the ocean, looking for a log to hang on to, and God's Favorite was the log I grabbed.  

As the play was written "under the most grueling circumstances" he was least objective about it, which could partly account for its being the least successful of his comedies apart
from the fact that what was created in the place of the original material of the Biblical story was palpably inadequate.

Broadly based on the Book of Job, the plot of God's Favorite centres on the steadfastness with which the protagonist, Joe Benjamin, clings to his faith despite his suffering financial losses, acute physical pain, and desertion by his wife (Rose) his children (Ben, Sarah and David) and his servants (Mary and Morris), as predicted by Sidney Lipton (a messenger of God and mysterious visitor to his palatial home) who tries in vain to make him renounce his religion. The play, like any other comedy, has a happy ending as evidenced by the miraculous cure of his son David's blindness by lightning resulting in his becoming a devout follower of religion and the return of the repentant members of his family and also his own recovery of health.
The scene of action is Joe Benjamin's palatial house on the North Shore of Long Island and the play starts on an intriguing note with someone (who turns out to be one known as Sidney Lipton) trying to sneak into the living room. When the burglar alarm starts ringing, Lipton runs out and Joe and his children, Ben and Sarah (twins), rush downstairs. Joe, who is "in his late fifties" finds "a pair of steel-rimmed glasses" in the snow outside as the only clue to the identity of the intruder. Soon the phone starts ringing and answering it Ben is asked by a woman whether Mr. Lipton has come to which he replies that no one of that name has come to their house. Soon Joe's wife, Rose, who is "in her early fifties" enters wearing earplugs which virtually prevent her from hearing what is spoken to her and also from noticing her husband and her children
with vases in their hands to hit the intruder. After they retire, leaving Joe alone, their elder son David comes from the balcony dead drunk and indulges in smart talk with his father and later with Ben and Sarah who return to discover that he is the 'intruder'. Their black servants, Mary and Morris, arrive on the scene to tell them that they have seen the prowler running away and are sent away by Joe but not before Mary remarking:

It's gettin' dangerous around here. I don't like livin' in rich neighborhoods, which makes David mockingly observe:

She's right, Dad. Why don't you buy us a nice poor neighborhood, so we'd all feel safer?

Rose comes back, this time holding on fast to her jewel box and assures them that she
will not be upset if she is told what is happening she then swoons but recovers quickly exclaiming "My Jewels!". Joe with difficulty calms her and tells her and her children that whatever happens it is God's will, which underlines his unshakable faith in God. Asking others to retire for the night Joe talks to his son David to find out why he is bent on failing. Ignoring his flippant answer to his serious question:

I don't know who you are. Do you know who you are, David? 28

Joe tells David who he is:

...Quick with a flippant answer. Fresh, disrespectful, unambitious, lazy, no interests, no principles, no beliefs, no scruples, a drunkard, a gambler, a playboy, a lover, a bum, a television watcher
and a lousy guitar player, that's who you are. 29

Joe is pained because he is the smartest one in the family:

Three college degrees, finished first in your class, and you didn't even show up for your senior year. So why do you throw it all away, David? Why do you drink so much? 30

David replies that when he is sober he gets "a single vision" 31 which makes him see the most frightening things in this house... Money, money, money, money, money, money, money, money... 32

Joe promptly tells him that he would not worry if the house is destroyed by fire the next
day as it would be God's will, and as if to vindicate his faith, he vividly describes his poverty-stricken state in his early years:

...I grew up in a tenement in New York. My Mother, my father and eleven kids in one and a half rooms. One winter we all had the whooping cough at the same time, eleven kids throwing up simultaneously in one and a half rooms - my mother nursed us on roller skates...through all that pain and heartache and suffering, she never complained or cried out against the world, because she knew it was God's will.\textsuperscript{33}

To clinch the argument as it were Joe says:
All I wanted for my wife and children was not to suffer the way I did as a child... But such riches, such wealth? I never asked for it. I never needed it. But when I ask myself, "Why so much? Why all this?" I hear the voice of my mother say, "It's God's will." I give half of what I have every year to charity, and the next year I make twice as much.  

Joe's testament of faith does not impress David who retires leaving him to say his prayers:

It's enough already, dear Lord.
Don't give me any more...Just David. Give me back my David...
If it be your will, dear God,
that's all I ask...Amen.35

Echoing 'Amen' loudly which startles Joe, Lipton enters searching for his glasses without which he is virtually blind. The scene that follows is climatic in that Joe confronts one who engages him in a guessing game which so exasperates Joe that he is about to throw him out as a lunatic. Lipton then says:

Very well. Forgive me, my son.
I have taken these extraordinary measures, this bizarre form, so that I might present myself to you in some acceptable dimension, for had I told you the truth straight of my identity, even I could not have given you the power to accept or comprehend.
Yes, Joe - I am - who you think I am! 36

Joe concludes that Sidney Lipton is God himself come to visit him only to be contradicted promptly by Lipton:

Who?...God? GOD? Is that what you thought? That I was going to say I was God? My God, that I never figured on. Nothing personal, but that's really crazy. Why? Do I look like God? Would God wear a filthy Robert Hall raincoat and a pair of leaky Hush Puppies? In the winter? Would God wear glasses? I mean, if anyone's going to have good eyes, it's going to be God. He's the one who gave them out...No, Joe. I'm sorry
to disappoint you, but I am not God. 37

Seeing Joe perplexed Lipton tells him that even though he is not God he performs "certain services" for God and that he is a messenger of God who does not live in Eternal Paradise or any such place but in Jackson Heights, Queens, and to convince him he discloses a big 'G' emblazoned on his shirt. Impatient to get the message from God which Lipton is supposed to deliver to him but which he is not prepared to disclose till Joe accepts him as God's messenger, Joe assuring him that he believes him asks him:

Why would God send a message to me,
Joe Benjamin, a plain, simple, ordinary man? 38
Answering his question, Lipton tells him:

To test your faith, that's why.\(^\text{39}\)

which makes Joe exclaim:

Test my faith? My faith? My lifeblood is my faith! Are you saying that God doesn't believe my faith in Him?\(^\text{40}\)

Lipton assures him that it is not God but 'the other one', Satan, who does not believe his faith and then proceeds to inform him of the argument between God and Satan and their wager. Joe declares that whatever calamity may befall him he will not renounce God and then is surprised to see Lipton pull out a little paper, 'the official message' which they read together kneeling down.

His mission accomplished Lipton is about to
leave when Joe says that he still cannot understand why he, who has believed in God all his life, should suddenly renounce Him, which makes Lipton tell him that if he wants theological advice he should call Billy Graham. Joe declares:

I am the servant of God. He is my Maker. I fear Him and love Him but come hell or high water, I will never renounce Him.

In response, Lipton says:

Can I be honest? You can count on the hell and high water. Good luck, Joe. I know you've got what it takes.
And no matter what terrible things happen to you, remember that God loves you. \(^{42}\)

(italics mine)

Joe solemnly exclaims:

And I love Him! \(^{43}\)

which makes Lipton say:

But in case the romance falls apart, here's my number. Renouncements are toll-free calls. \(^{44}\)

They are startled to hear the sound of fire-engines and Joe soon learns that his factory has been reduced to ashes, which is the first catastrophe, as predicted by Lipton, that strikes him as he has not insured believing God to
be his only insurance. Lipton promptly tells him that it is a mistake and goes away.

The next scene opens two weeks later disclosing the abject condition to which Joe and his family are reduced. Lipton's nightly calls, however, do not make Joe renounce God. Joe tells his bewildered family that whatever is happening is "meant to happen," and that he is being tested for his courage and strength. Rose asks him whether the 'tests' are 'for an insurance policy', which makes Joe tell them about Lipton's visit. Joe's disclosure evokes such responses as are characteristic of the attitudes and temperaments of the members of his family. Rose wants to know whether the messenger was from UNICEF and without being sarcastic exclaims:

Ohhhhhh ! Ohhhhhh, I see...

We all have to suffer because
God loves you so much. Oh, Joe, I'm so proud of you. You must be thrilled to death.46

The irreverent David suggests:

Well, at least let's stand up and fight Him! I mean, the Man's been pushing people around for twenty-five thousand years. I don't think we have to take any more crap from Him.47

Considering David's remark blasphemous, Joe says that he will not have that sort of language used in his house, to which David replies:

Then how about outside the house? Hey, God, you want to test us? Here we are! You want us to show you what we're
made of! What about it...

Big Fella, show us a little muscle! 48

As though God responded to his challenge, there is a flash of lightning which misses David narrowly and Joe asks his family to go to the basement, staying back to pray. Lipton enters with his raincoat burning and it transpires that he has been under a tree when David challenged God to show His wrath. After a few light-hearted remarks, Lipton produces papers from his suitcase telling him to sign an authorization for a small 'ad' in the Sunday Times stating that he has renounced God in order to save himself and his family from further suffering. As is to be expected, Joe refuses to do so and soon experiences a series of physical tortures, each announced by Lipton, and is told by Lipton:

Don't ask for doctors. They can't help you and they'll
charge you a fortune. Think it over, Joe. If it gets worse...
you've got my number. 49

The next scene starts with a short dialogue between the servants Mary and Morris which reveals that only Joe's mansion has been destroyed by the fire, that Joe is suffering from excruciating pain and that David has deserted the family. Rose urges Joe to renounce God in order to be relieved of all suffering and on his refusing to do so she declares:

If you don't renounce Him, Joe... then I'm going to renounce you! 50

She leaves with her twins followed unwillingly by his servants and that too after his assuring them that he does not need them:

What does a suffering man living all alone in ashes need two in help for? Go with Mrs. Benjamin Morris. She needs you. 51
After their departure where Joe asks God what in the next calamity he has to suffer, he is answered by a voice telling him that the test is over but that "as a final tribute" of his love for God, he should say "I renounce God." Disbelieving what he has heard and recognising the voice as that of Lipton despite his vehement denial, Joe finds Lipton standing behind the fireplace that has collapsed holding cordless microphone. Refusing to renounce God Joe tells Lipton that he is only waiting to die and is surprised to learn from Lipton that for death he has to wait for several years and that in any case has brought with him a list of physical tortures he has still to undergo. On hearing that Joe is prepared to endure them also, Lipton tells him that he has been dismissed and that the trick he played is to save his job. Joe sympathising him tries to console him by saying they must carry what burdens God gives them,
but Lipton retorts saying

Sure. The poor carry their burdens
and the rich have them delivered.
Where's the justice?53

and goes on to renounce God, which act shocks Joe. Joe tries to comfort Lipton by telling him that all will be well and promising to write a letter of recommendation for Lipton and also to put in a word to God. When Lipton is about to report, he and Joe are startled to see "a burning bush" the significance of which is not lost on them. Though sceptical, Lipton says:

He never makes house calls. But with you, who knows?54

Ignoring his request to stay back Lipton departs leaving Joe alone, who soon discovers a ray of light that follows a clap of thunder that it is David who is not 'blind drink' but totally
blind. Unable to bear the sight of his blinded son, Joe bursts out:

Is this your work? ... Is this your test of faith and love? ... You blind my first-born son and still expect me to love you? Punish me, not him! Blind me, not my son ... Where is your love? Your compassion? Your justice? ... I AM ANGRY AT YOU, GOD! REALLY, REALLY ANGRY! ... And STILL I don't renounce you! How do you like that God? 

As if in answer to his outburst, there is a bolt of lightning and a crack of thunder which make David cry out and hold his eyes. David finds his eye sight restored and Joe expresses his thanks to God apologising for his outburst. Rose arrives carrying two bags of food won on a TV game show and is followed by Sarah still talking of her being stalked.
by a would-be rapist. With Joe's faith vindicated and his health restored, Benjamins are reunited and go into the kitchen leaving David alone who looks up to God and exclaims:

Okay, God... If you got room for one more, count me in ...
I just wanted to thank you for sparing my father's life...
That's all I wanted to say ... Amen.56

But it is Lipton who has the last word which imparts to it an enigmatic note:

Don't worry, it's not who you're thinking... I wonder if I could talk to you for a minute, young man... Guess who's absolutely crazy about you?57

Though the play, God's favourite, is about
Joe's unflinching faith in God which is severely tested as his Biblical counterpart's in the Book of Job, it is Sidney Lipton with a touch of mystery about him because of his unusual errand, though otherwise seedily non-descript being poor, insecure with a nagging wife who does not believe in him, who literally and literarily makes the play click as an unusual but entertaining comedy. With his marvellous gift for repartee and wiseracks Lipton enlivens the proceedings that are tragical in their import and verging on the fantastic. Indeed, he helps 'humanize' what is essentially a mystic encounter and in the process helps the play to stay within the limits of magnification characterising a farce. The play adds a new dimension to the theme estrangement threatening to break up the family as a unit centred on the parental faith rather than on any temperamental or material cause.
I Ought to Be in Pictures (1980) centres on the inability of Herb divorced from his wife, Blanche, and separated from his children Robby and Libby for sixteen years to commit himself either to Steffy, the woman living with him, or in life because of his fear of attachment to others as also the efforts of Libby to win her father's affection and help bridge the breach between her parents. The attempts on the part of Herb and Libby to break into pictures, he as a writer and she as an actress, reflect their travails in achieving fulfilment of their emotional needs. The action in the play is triggered off by the arrival of Libby Tucker unannounced at the West Hollywood bungalow where her father, Herb lives trying to make his mark as a writer for films. Libby has not met him since he left them and divorced her mother sixteen years ago. Greeted by Steffy with whom Herb has been having an affair.
Libby is hurt at being snapped at by her father not realizing that his behaviour is due to his feeling guilty on account of his not having communicated with her or her brother, Robby and angrily leaves the house. Coaxed by Steffy, Herb goes after Libby, takes her to dinner and persuades her to stay with him explaining to her that because of their incompatibility, he had to choose between divorcing her and allowing his children to grow up in a tension-ridden home and that he chose the former course for their sake.

Libby sets about making the house attractive and within two weeks transforms it out of all recognition. Knowing of her father's ambition as also of the decline in his career as a writer, she encourages him to be bold enough to present his latest work at a film studio meeting only to learn in the evening that not having the
courage he has not gone to the meeting but instead to the race track. Acutely disappointed she goes away to attend to her night-time job without informing him where she works when she will return, which worries Herb so much that he ignores Steffy. Being deeply concerned about her relationship with Herb, Steffy asks him to make an abiding commitment to her and is disappointed at his refusing to do so. Sitting up till Libby returns Herb learns that she is engaged in parking the cars of the movie celebrities attending parties at Beverly Hills homes in order that she may make contacts with them. Telling him about the sexual advances to her co-worker has been making, Libby asks him frankly what he actually feels while having sex. She tells him about her mother's frustration and her frigid behaviour and holding back her tears she admits her longing and fear of physical affection. Herb is so moved that he clasps
her which comforts her being starved of parental affection.

Libby, a few days later, finally decides to give up her attempt to seek a career in movies and tells her father that she is going back east. She then telephones her mother informing her of her decision and persuades her father to talk to her brother, Robby, and her mother, Blanche. Herb reluctantly agrees to receive Robby the next summer. After Libby's departure, Steffy who comes to bid good-bye to her asks Herb to spend the rest of the day with her to which he does not agree as he is going to work on a script for the movies. The play ends with Steffy making the promise to be with her at some other time.

The play, I Ought to Be in Pictures, thus centres on Libby, Herb and Steffy and their
emotional responses to one another in a fast changing scenario. Steffy is sensitive enough to sense that Libby's arrival is going to spell changes in her relationship with his wife and children with whom he has had no contact for sixteen years. But Herb refuses to countenance it even though Steffy tells him:

Nothing stays the way it is...
It moves on and there's not a damn thing you or I can do about it. 58

What Steffy intuitively guesses comes to pass as the play careers towards its end. As anticipated by Steffy, Libby brings about changes, starting with the house and ending with Herb's relations with his family - changes which stem from her need to love and be loved not by her mother alone who has lavished all her affection on her and her brother after her separation
from her husband which has destroyed something vital within her. Libby has loved her sagacious grandmother who is dead and loves not only her mother but also her father whose love she wants to have despite his cutting himself off from them for sixteen years. But she is not selfish enough to want to monopolise her father's affection and displace Steffy in his affection or in his life; and actually urges her father to love Steffy all the more. Determined to have her way, she is able to make Herb telephone to her mother and brother, which underlines her persuasive powers as much as her determination, Libby is conscious of her being fat and not as attractive as her father makes her out to be or as she hopes to be and yet she strives for breaking into films, though naive enough to believe that she will be able to do so by leaving a card with her name written on it.
on the windshield of a film luminary's car. Indeed, though she is twenty, she does behave at times as a thirteen year old girl, tactless and aggressive.

While Libby is at the centre of action in the play, Steffy is on the periphery of it, though she makes the shrewdest of observations on persons and purposes figuring in the play. Dissecting the motive behind Libby's seeking her father after sixteen years, she says:

Maybe saying "Get me into the movies"
is just another way of saying"Let me back into your life.". Maybe she just wants you to do something for her to prove that you never really stopped caring.59

Equally perceptive is her observation concerning
Herb when she tells him that his tending the two trees in his compound is a symbolic substitute for not having helped nurture his two children. Again, her observation to Herb:

To love someone is to be scared every minute of your life.  

sums up not only the crux of the matter with him but also the core of the theme of the play as reflected in Herb's refusal to marry Steffy and in Libby's wanting to win Herb's affection, though sacred of love. Steffy is interesting in that while disclaiming being a psychiatrist, she makes assessments of persons' motives and urges which only a psychiatrist can make, apart the role of a foil to Blanche that she plays in the drama.
Herb seems to be an emotionally burnt-out case possibly because of long suppression and at no stage does he manifest any significant emotional response suggestive of mental conflict. Being unsure and apprehensive of forging any lasting attachment to anyone traceable to his having married twice after divorcing Blanche, Herb merely speaks of his fear of attachments, which does not signify that he has learnt anything from his marital ventures. Moreover, having been a fairly successful writer it is amazing that he does not examine his fear which seems to be corroding his personality and his declaration at the end of the play that he is going to resume serious writing based on "an old idea" which occurred to him "sixteen years ago" only implies that the darkness which has descended on him on account of his separation
from his wife, Blanche and his children has lifted on his resuming contact with them.

The play, *I Ought to Be in Pictures*, dramatizes the predicament stemming from a sense of insecurity from which both Herb and Libby suffer as also "the undeveloped heart" in the Forsterian sense characterising Herb and his family, which accounts for the break-up of the family.

*The Gingerbread Lady* focuses on the relations between Evy Meara, an alcoholic former singer divorced from her husband, and her daughter, Polly, wanting to live with her having obtained her father's consent, which are complexified by Evy's attachment to her callous brutal lover, Lou Tanner. Evy's advice to her middle-
aged friend, Toby Landau, not to worry about her fading beauty but concentrate on her husband offers an ironic comment on her own situation in the play which ends on a happy note with her agreeing to attend a lunch arranged by her ex-husband for her and her daughter. The play represents Neil Simon's attempt to disprove his critics who have come to consider him only as a writer of effervescent comedies. Objecting to the people's tendency to categorize all his plays based on some of his plays, Neil Simon observed:

I don't write the same play over and over... I've tried to turn this whole thing around by flirting with danger a lot more...
I began trying things like
The Gingerbread Lady - about an alcoholic former singer.

The play has sharply drawn, individualized characters, Evy Meara, Jimmy Perry, Lou Tanner, Toby Landau and Polly, although they are all in a sense 'losers' with the exception of Polly, Evy's seventeen year old daughter, who is not bruised by 'life'. The protagonist, Evy, is an incorrigible alcoholic, while the others around her are each marked by a striking inadequacy, psychological or physical or both, which suggests a fractured personality. Jimmy Perry, a forty year old homo-sexual and unemployed actor, is aware of though refusing to admit his not having any chance of becoming a star, while Lou Tanner is a brute who conceals his gift for using other people by pretending to have a gift for musical composition. Toby Landau is obsessed with her personal appearance and is worried about the fading of her beauty.
Polly, though only seventeen, exhibits a maturity beyond her years which is not incredible in that having an alcoholic mother and growing up in a home charged with tension, she has been able to 'survive' only because she has matured early. Moreover, living with her father and her step-mother since her father divorced her mother, Polly has learnt to be observant and understanding as evidenced by her reminding her mother of a gift given to her eight years before:

Polly: Don't you remember the gingerbread house with the little gingerbread lady in the window?

Evy: If you say so.

Polly: I always kept it to remind me of you. Of course, today I have the biggest box of crumbs in the neighborhood. Come on, be a sport. Buy me another one this Christmas.
Evy: I don't know if I could afford it.

Polly: What are you afraid of?

Evy: Of leaving you with the crumbs again ...

It is obvious that Evy knows herself too well to pretend that she will improve, since the gingerbread lady that she is she will crumble sooner or later. Polly herself is shrewd enough despite her courageous attempt to cure her mother of alcoholism to eventually acknowledge that her rescue operation is, indeed, an exercise in futility.

The play opens in a third floor apartment in a brown-stone building in the West Seventies, which has fallen into disrepair suggestive of the depressing state to which the occupant, Evy, a former night-club singer, has been reduced as a result of her dissolute ways. Jimmy Perry
is waiting for Toby Landau to bring back Evy from a ten-week stay in a sanitarium where she has been admitted when discovered floating face down in her bath-tub. While awaiting Evy's arrival, Jimmy tries to brighten up the place and is disturbed by Manuel, a delivery boy, who bringing in groceries demands payment refusing Jimmy's contention that Evy has a 'charge account'. Jimmy is finally made to part with the money but not before the sighting of his unemployment Pass-book by Manuel, which reveals Jimmy's present condition. Evy, who has shed forty-two pounds during her treatment and paid twenty seven hundred dollars for it, arrives exhorted by Toby and their conversation is illuminating in that Evy tries to mask her neurotic condition with her quips, which is pathetic. Toby departs for a dinner with her husband and Jimmy for an audition for a role
in an off-Broadway show, leaving Evy alone. The neurotic Evy would have lost control over herself if her daughter has not arrived with her suitcase telling her that she has received her father's permission to stay with her. Evy, though glad to have her, is apprehensive of her not being able to 'mother' her and tells her:

You wanna hear something? My whole body is shaking. I'm scared stiff. I wouldn't know the first thing about taking care of you.64

Polly telling her that she is seventeen years old, asks her "How hard could it be?"65 to which Evy replies:

I'll level with you - it's not the best thing I do. I was
feeling very motherly one time,
I bought a couple of turtles,
two for eighty-five cents, Irving
and Sam. I fed them once-in
the morning they were floating
on their backs. I don't think
I could go through that again.66

Refusing to be kept out, Polly answers her
in the same strain:

I'm a terrific swimmer.67

To clinch the argument, as it were, Evy says:

What kind of influence would
I be on you? I talk filthy...
I'm a congenital filthy talker.68

Polly is not prepared to be shocked by any
revelation by her mother, not even her illicit
relationship with Lou Tanner, declaring that
she does not want to judge her but want to
live with her, which makes Evy say:

You're seventeen years old, it's time you judge me. I just don't want you to get the idea that a hundred and eighty-three pounds of pure alcohol is something called Happy Fat... Many a night I would have thrown myself out that window if I could have squeezed through... I'm not what you'd call an: emotionally stable person. You know how many times I was really in love since your father and I broke up 69 (Italics mine)

Even though Polly tells her that she does not have to tell her any of her experiences, Evy insists on informing her of all "the human
...and if I blow it this time, they'll probably bury me in some distillery in Kentucky... And if this is the kind of person you'd like to live with, God has cursed me with one of the all-time-great schmucks for a daughter.70

Her speech suggests her relying on alcohol and sex to survive, which is confirmed by her attempted suicide when she is jilted by Lou Tanner, the guitar player, for the sake of an eighteen-year-old Indian hippie. It is not surprising that when Tanner walks in wanting to resume their former relationship she politely but firmly asks him to leave, saying:
Lou, I'm forty-three years old and I'm trying to be a grown-up lady. The doctor told me I'm not allowed to drink any more or have affairs with thirty-three-year-old guitar players...
I thank you for this visit.
Now go home, find someone your own age and light up some Astro-Turf or whatever you're smoking these days. 71

Lou departs but not before making another attempt to persuade her:

What are you going to tell me, you're cured? You had butter-milk for twelve weeks and now you'll live happily ever after?...
There is still a whole life
to get through, Evy...I'm not coming in here offering you any phony promises. Sure, in six weeks I may find another cute- asses little chick, and in eight weeks they might find you under the piano with a case of Thunderbird wine. Then again, may be not. Together, Evy, we don't add up to one strong person. I just think together we have a better chance.\(^7_2\)

Unmoved, Evy answers:

What I need now is a relative, not a relationship. And I have one in there unpacking.\(^7_3\)

Polly's presence seems to have had some salutary effect on Evy but still three weeks later she
is worried about her mother lapsing into her old ways and anxiously telephones a bar to know where she is. Evy returns beaming and tells Polly of her having met an old friend of hers whose husband may give her a job as hostess in one of his four restaurants. She is rather hurt because Polly is behaving like "a seventeen-year-old cop" grudging her the little celebration she has had on being "alive and noticed and even wanted". However, she promises only to pour the champagne she has bought for Toby's birthday but not to taste it. Polly tells her of the luncheon engagement with Mr. Meura at Rumpelmayer's the next day because

He just wants to have lunch with us, talk, see how we're getting along.
Jimmy is the first to arrive for the party but he is terribly upset because he has been fired three days before the staging of the play by "a nineteen-year-old producer". He is feeling humiliated:

You know how it feels for a grown man to plead and beg to a child, Evy? A Child! ... I said to him, "you're not happy, I'll do it any way you want. Faster, slower, louder, I'll wear a dress, I'll shave my head, I'll relieve myself on the stage in front of my own family - I'm an actor, give me a chance to act" ... He turned his back on me and shoved a Tootsie Roll in his mouth.
Jimmy breaks down sobbing and Evy unable to bear the sight tries to comfort him saying that he is a good actor, and takes a drink of champagne, which shocks Jimmy, although she assures him that she is only sipping it. They then decide to be cheerful for the party they have for Toby. Toby arrives without her husband looking beautiful in a new dress and informs them casually that her husband is seeking a divorce, which shocks Evy and Jimmy who is dismayed seeing Evy take another drink.

Trying to put on a brave face, though shaken by the turn of events in her life, Toby narrates her varied experiences with men so as to emphasise that men have always found her irresistible, though her husband does not find her so, which is to boost up her spirits rather than offer any explanation to her friends. As she details her 'escapades' chronologically she not only
seems to be working herself up to a high pitch of self-righteousness but also has been making it abundantly clear that she has not nurtured herself inwardly to cope with life concentrating as she has done only on her outward physical appearance. She gushes forth:

Did you know... that in 1950 I was voted the prettiest girl at the University of Michigan?...
In 1951 I switched schools and was voted the prettiest girl at the University of Southern California... I received, on the average, fifteen sexual proposals a week - at least two from the faculty -

Though asked to stop by Evy, Toby goes on describing the affairs she has had and ends up saying:
I have had more men - men in politics, in the arts, in the sciences, more of the most influential men in the world - in love with me, desirous of me, hungry for me, than any woman I ever met in my entire life... And that son-of-a-bitch four-hundred-dollar-a-week television salesman (her husband) tells me he isn't interested?... Then let him get out, I don't need him!

(And she begins to sob uncontrollably) Evy... Evy!

Sipping the champagne given to her to calm her, Toby declares boastfully:

I'm not a stupid woman, I know that. I've travelled a lot,
I'm well-read, well educated,
I went to two Universities.
I have had marvelous intellectual
conversations with some of the
most brilliant men in the world...
but the thing that men admire
most in woman is her feminity
and her beauty... That's the
truth, Evy, I know it is. 81

She thus tries to justify her obsession with
her appearance, saying:

I know I'm vain, Evy. I never
pretended I'm not. I devote,
my whole day to myself, to
my face, to my body... 82 (Italics
mine).

Evy's idea of enlivening the party is to drink,
and by the time Toby leaves, she is thoroughly
tipsy, which makes Jimmy leave in disgust, Evy herself leaves without telling her daughter who lies awake throughout the night waiting for her. The next morning Toby arrives and soon Evy follows with her face battered by her lover Lou Tanner provoked, she said, by her smashing his guitar to pieces. Evy tells Toby that they are alike in that they allow people to beat the crap out of them, the truth of which Toby acknowledges grudgingly. Toby is candid when she says:

We all hold each other up because none of us has the strength to do it alone... I know what I am, Evy. I don't like it and I never have. So I cover the outside with Helena Rubenstein. I use little make-up jars, you use quart bottles-
and poor Jimmy uses a little of both. Some terrific people.\textsuperscript{83}

Before leaving she advises her saying:

The way I see it, you've got two choices. Either get a book on how to be a mature, responsible person... or get her out of here before you destroy her chance to become one.\textsuperscript{84}

And in turn Evy advises her:

Go home, wash the crap off your face, put on a sloppy house-dress and bring him a T.V dinner. What the hell could you lose?\textsuperscript{85}

Toby departs, saying that she will blow up the beauty parlor on her way home, leaving
the mother and daughter alone. Admitting that she had a drink to stop throbbing in her head, Polly asks Evy:

Is that what it's like, Evy? Is that what it does? Make things bearable.  

Evy is a little taken aback:

Jesus, three weeks and I turned my daughter into a lush.  

Polly reminds her of their luncheon appointment with her father and despite her insistence on keeping it Evy refuses to go as she is painfully aware of her own infirmity. Evy asks her to be away for a couple of weeks to enable her to pull herself together, and assures her that though she needs her she does not want to use her like her friends. Overruling
all her objections Evy sends Polly away and does not answer the phone when it rings and refuses to let in Jimmy who has had to break open the door to enter. Seeing her bruised condition Jimmy swears that he will wreak his vengeance on Lou Tanner. Jimmy leaves promising to return within an hour so as to allow her to rest. Evy is surprised to see Polly back who tells her that she has forgotten her wallet. Searching for her wallet Polly finds a half empty bottle and turning on the lights she manages to persuade her to go out to lunch with her father. Seeing how determined Polly is and admiring her for it, she makes a remark that sums up what she needs to face up to the crisis in her life:

When I grow up, I want to be just like you.
It is, however, apparent that Evy will never grow up but that she wishes it is what points to what a beneficent influence her daughter's presence has been on her frail nature. Evy is, indeed, a gingerbread lady, who will crumble and the play underlines the vulnerability of the human condition as perspectivized through the mother - daughter relationship.

The play *The Gingerbread Lady* dramatizes the attempts made by a daughter to bring about a reconciliation between her estranged mother and father, divorced and living apart for years, which is one of Neil Simon's favourites, though he considers its a faulty play and which, as he observed,

> Led me into unchartered waters
> where I discovered new directions for the future.\(^{89}\)
Brighton Beach Memoirs (1984) is a comedy revolving round seven pious and generous members of a middle-class Jewish family living in Brooklyn and struggling to survive the onslaught of the great Depression. The focus is on Eugene, a brilliant student, experiencing the agony and ecstasy of sexual awakening and the abortive attempt of his aunt, Blanche, to find a husband, which brings out the psychological impulses governing family relationships. The play has as the author admitted, a greater autobiographical content than any of his other plays, which accounts for the intensity of the emotion surging through the play as also for the occasional lack of objectivity in the presentation of the characters' responses to the situations in which they find themselves. The play draws on the emotion generated by the fate of the European Jews facing extermination at the hands of
the Nazi hordes under Hitler, which invests it with a significance that is attributable to the historical tragedy involving his people.

The focus of the play is Eugene Jerome, fifteen years' old, witty and brilliant, who is aspiring to become a writer and it is through his statements to the audience, "memories" that the relevant details concerning the family and its struggle for survival are made known. Writing around, he says:

(To the audience) If my mother knew I was writing all this down, she would stuff me like one of her chickens.

and goes on revealing that her thirty-eight year old aunt, Blanche Morton, left penniless by her husband who dies of cancer six years ago,
has been invited by his 'big-hearted' mother to come with her daughters, sixteen year old Nora and thirteen year old Laurie, and live with them:

So they broke up our room into two small rooms, and me and my brother Stan live on this side, and Laurie and her sister Nora live on the other side. My father thought that it would just be temporary, but it's been three and a half years so far and I think because of Aunt Blanche's situation, my father is developing (He whispers)-high blood pressure.91

Laurie is pampered which makes Eugene wish that he was born a girl. Finding his mother,
Kate, and aunt solicitous about Laurie Eugene says:

She gets all this special treatment because the doctors say that she has kind of a flutter in her heart ... I got hit with a baseball right in the back of the skull, I saw two of everything for a week and I still had to carry a block of ice home every afternoon. Girls are treated like queens. Maybe that's what I should have been born - an Italian girl...

Act I introduces not only all the characters but also helps define their characteristic responses to the developments that take place as the play progresses. Nora comes home from her dance class flushed with excitement at
having been selected by a producer, Mr. Beckman, for an audition for a Broadway show Blanche tries to dissuade her from taking it up as it would interfere with her schooling and spoil her chances of getting a decent job, apart from the risk involved in taking up dancing as a career. Nora brushes her objections aside only to be told that the decision lies with her aunt and uncle, which makes Nora tell Laurie:

How would you feel if your entire
life depended on what your Uncle, Jack decided?... Oh, God, I wish Daddy were alive.\textsuperscript{93}

In contrast to Nora who resents the imposition of restrictions on her actions, Stanley is prepared to be guided by his father whose values are ingrained in him. He tells Eugene how he has had to incur his employer's wrath for standing up for his office's coloured sweeper,
Andrew, who had inadvertently knocked a can of linseed oil over the table ruining three new hats for which their employer, Mr. Stroheim, has taken him to task severely, and how as a result he has had to do Andrew's job while Andrew is asked to do his of going to the factory to pick up new hats. Concluding his account he says that he has infuriated Mr. Stroheim by sweeping a pile of dust all over his shoes (which Andrew has that morning finished shining) so much that pulling him into his back office, asks him to write him a letter of apology. Refusing to apologize if Andrew is made to pay for the hats, he has walked out of the office ten minutes early. Asked by Eugene whether he is going to write the letter, Stanley says 'No' and adds:

Except I'll have to discuss it with Pop. I know we need
the money. But he told me once, you always have to do what you think is right in this world and stand up for your principles. (Italics mine)

This incident not only shows Stanley as a principled, responsible young man but also brings out the kind of upbringing he has had - an upbringing marked by filial piety and principled conduct enjoined by his father in the midst of stark penury.

Jacob Jerome arrives carrying two heavy boxes and announces the folding of his company Del Mars Party Favors, which would make it difficult for him to make both ends meet with what he makes at Jacobsons, especially because of his having to feed seven people.

Eugene's adolescent curiosity about girls'
bodies grows into a feverish sexual awakening as evidenced by his admission. Speaking of his sitting opposite Nora at the dinner table, he says:

I kept dropping my napkin a lot so I could bend down to get a good look at those virginal creamy - white legs. She was really deep in thought because she left herself unguarded a few times and I got to see halfway up her things that led to the Golden Palace of the Himalayas.95

Eugene who attempts to bring up Nora's problem to his father's notice, is interrupted by her mother, Blanche, which makes Nora cry. Jack is so moved by her tears that he suggests their taking a walk on the beach saying:
We'll take a look at the ocean. My father always used to say, "Throw your problems out to sea and the answers will wash back up on the shore." 

Answering Nora's question whether they did, he says:

Not in Brighton Beach. Orange peels and water-melon pits washed up. That's why it's good to take someone who knows how to give advice.

Like Nora, Eugene also has a problem which is of puberty and is surprised to know from Stanley that everyone including girls go through the experiences that he has been having. Hearing that Eugene is crazy about Nora, Stanley forbids him saying:
Because it's against the laws of nature. If she was your stepsister, it would be dirty, but it would be okay. But you can't love your own cousin.  

Reacting to Eugene's longing to see Nora naked, Stanley confesses having done so and cursing himself for her being his first cousin, which makes Eugene observe that that night he discovered that lust and guilt were very closely related.

Aware that their house is too small for all of them as also that their upkeep is burdensome for Eugene's overworked father, Jack, Blanche finds it necessary to find a new husband as soon as possible. Though encouraged by her sister Kate, Blanche shocks her by telling her that she is dining with an Irish Catholic
and alcoholic, Frank Murphy, living across the street with his aged mother. Speaking of her attempts to get a job being unsuccessful because of her bad eyesight, Blanche says that though she respects her sister's views, she cannot live off her for the rest of her life. Jack leaves the decision to Nora but advises his son Stanley to write the letter of apology to his boss, telling him:

His money helps put food on our dining table.\(^99\)

adding

You did a courageous thing.
You defended a fellow worker.\(^100\)

which, he assures him, is

that's something to be proud of

... That's standing up for your principles.\(^101\)
Stanley asks his brother Eugene to draft the letter for him who demands that he be paid not in cash but in kind which is to tell him how Nora looked when naked. Stanley reluctantly does so:

Her breasts were gorgeous. Like two peaches hanging on the vine waiting to be plucked...
Maybe nectarines. Like two nectarines, all soft and pink and shining in the morning sun...102

A week passes during which Jack has a heart-attack due to over-exertion (as he has been trying to make extra money by driving a cab (taxi) at night) which makes him fear that he may lose his job to his employer's brother-in-law if he is to follow the doctor's advice to remain in bed for three weeks. Stanley comes home losing his entire
salary at a poker game, which makes his mother mad and all the more harried. When Blanche is all dressed up to go out with Frank Murphy on a date, she receives a letter from his mother informing her of his not being able to keep his dinner engagement with her as he is in hospital with injuries sustained in a car accident while driving in an intoxicated condition and that they will be moving out to up state New York for treatment. Kate is so upset by it that she gives vent to all her pent-up feelings when Blanche expresses sympathy for Murphy:

I did enough in my life for people. You know what I'm talking about.

............... 

You! Celia! Poppa, when he was sick. Everybody! ... Don't you ask me "What people"!
How many beatings from Momma did I get for things that
you did?  How many dresses did I go without so you could look like someone when you went out?  I was the workhorse and you were the pretty one.  You have no right to talk to me like that.

Kate's outburst upsets Blanche who decides to leave despite Jack's advice that they should have it out with each other so as to get over it:

Go on, Kate!  Scream at her!  Yell at her.  Call her names, Blanche, Tell her to go to hell for the first time in your life ... And when you both got it out of your systems, give each other a hug and go have dinner.

But Blanche does not accept Jack's advice, saying:

I love you both very much.
No matter what Kate says to me, I will never stop loving her. But I have to get out. If I don't do it now, I will lose whatever self-respect I have left. For people like us, sometimes the only thing we really own is our dignity ... and when I grow old, I would like to have as much as Mrs. Mathew Murphy across the street.  

Stanley takes the blame upon himself and decides to go away and join the army promising to send home his pay-check. Eugene breaks down and asks Stanley why he is leaving, which makes Stanley say:

Because of me, the whole family is breaking up. Do you want Nora to end up like one of those cheap boardwalk girls?
Hearing that Eugene does not care as he is no longer in love with her, Stanley tells him:

Well, you should care. She's your cousin. Don't turn Out to be like me.  

This conversation shows how much Stanley is fond of Eugene and how much he cares for him.

Nora comes home late and is surprised to learn that her mother is leaving the next morning as she and her aunt have had a quarrel. Nora is bitter as she feels that she may lose the one chance that she has to become a star if her mother leaves them:

So I have to give up the one chance I may never get again, is that it? I'm the one who has to pay for what you couldn't do with your own life.
She complains of her being starved of affection as her mother showers it all on her sister, Laurie.

Blanche is shocked to hear it:

I'm not going to let you tell me that I don't love you or that I haven't tried to give you as much as I gave Laurie ... And if you keep on feeling that way, you'll end up like me - with something much worse than loneliness or helplessness and that's self-pity.  

Being assured of her love, Nora gives up her defiant attitude and their reconciliation is followed by that of Blanche and Kate when they realise that they are dependent on each other:

Blanche tells Kate:

You and I never had any troubles before tonight, Kate. And as God's in heaven, there'll never be an angry word between us again ... It's the girls I'm thinking of now. We
have to be together. The three of us. It's what they want as much as I do.  

As reported in Eugene's memoirs Stanley returns the next night as suddenly as he has left and tells Eugene that when he is about to sign up for the army after passing the physical test he felt that he couldn't do to his father:

Right now he needs me more than the Army does... I know Mom didn't really mean it when she said she'd never forgive me for losing the money, but if I walked out on the family now, maybe she never would. 

Stanley tells his father the truth and promises to make amends by working hard:

I'll get the seventeen dollars back, Pop, I promise... I'm not afraid of hard work. That's the one thing you taught me. Hard work and principles. That's the
code I'm going to live by for
the rest of my life.

(Italics mine)

Stanley is surprised that instead of reprimanding
him Jack tells him that he too has gambled and lost
money, and that he is not so perfect as he appears
to be, which is a revelation to him. Stanley learns
that he has been forgiven by his father because
of the pleading of his case by Eugene who idolises
him. Stanley realizes how much Eugene cares for him
and presents him with the picture of a naked woman
which makes Eugene cry out with joy:

I have seen the Golden Palace
of the Himalayas... Puberty is
over. Onward and Upwards!

Jack elated that his cousin Sholem has got
out of the war-ravaged Poland to come to America
and the Jerome family prepares to receive them
and put them up, which shows the strong bond
of kinship that binds the Jewish families
The play ends with Eugene's getting over the pangs of puberty and the ending of tensions in the family, which underlines the importance attached to the family unit bound by a piety that stems from both their profound religious faith which characterizes the Jewish community and the deep sense of attachment which binds the members of the Jerome family.

*Broadway Bound* (1987), the third of Neil Simon's trilogy of autobiographical plays (the others being *Brighton Beach Memoirs* and *Biloxi Blues*) dramatizes the struggle waged by Eugene in the face of the disintegration of his family to make a career in letters for himself and is memorable for the portrayal of his parents, especially his mother, who nourishes herself and her son on the memory of her having once danced with the film star, George Raft, which is a kind of a life-line for her.
The play is set in the Jerome House on Brighton Beach, Brooklyn, New York, and it is about
6 p.m. on a cold day in February, 1949, when it opens disclosing Kate Jerome "fifty and graying" engaged in setting the table for dinner.
Her father, Ben Epstein, about seventy five years, comes out of his room with a brown paper bag and is stopped despite his remonstrations from going out as it is snowing outside. Eugene comes in running and cracks jokes with his grandfather without amusing him. Conversing with Ben, Eugene learns that his mother had been a good dancer and that she once danced with George Raft who was not a star then at the Primrose Ballroom and that she gave up her dancing career because of an accident in which half the skin on her back was burnt while twelve girls died in the fire that broke out in the shop. Eugene startles Ben and Kate by announcing that he is in love with Josie
who is engaged to a Harvard Law student though she is not in love with him. Josie, he tells them, is the daughter of the owner of a music company on the same floor where he works, writes poetry, paints and hums Bach and Beethoven, has been to Europe, and has jet black hair and olive skin. Eugene concludes his description by saying:

If I live to be a hundred, I'll never meet a girl like her again.

Stanley comes in highly excited and calling out to Eugene to tell him that they have got to start working immediately having no time even for dinner on a sketch to be handed over to the CBS the next morning at ten O'clock. Finding Eugene sceptical as they have only so far sold three comedy monologues to one who plays at wedding, Stanley tells him:
How do you think I got into CBS? My friend Mort Garfield, the press agent, showed the monologues to the head of comedy development... Eugene, I'm going to get us everything we ever dreamed of. If you don't have faith in us, I have enough for both.\textsuperscript{115}

But Eugene, though bent on meeting Josie to talk her into rejecting her fiance, yields to Stanley's request to write the sketch. Blanche comes in looking very prosperous and wanting to talk to her father about her mother who is sick. Blanche offers to send both of them to the warmer climate as she can afford to, which Ben rejects saying:

\textit{Comfort doesn't make me happy.}\textsuperscript{116}
and quotes Trotsky in support of his contention that to want more is a crime against those who were born without. Blanche, though exasperated at his turning everything into politics, tries to take him into agreeing to her proposal. Relenting, Ben tells her that he cannot leave the house as Jack is preparing to leave Kate, since he has suddenly realized that at fifty-five "he only has a few years left to do what he thought he had a life-time to do,\textsuperscript{117} and that he has to look after Kate who only knows how to serve but not to take care of herself. Eugere declares why he wants to write comedy, since

> Even God has a terrific sense of humor. Why else would He make Grandpa a dedicated socialist, fighting against the wealthy class, and then give him a daughter who marries the richest guy
in the garment district? I wonder if we could sell it to CBS?\textsuperscript{118}

The two brothers struggle to find a usable idea for their sketch and reject one idea after another as it strikes them till they hit upon one which seems suitable.

Jack comes in and is surprised to see Kate waiting for him and Kate informs him that their sons are thinking of moving out as they want to become writers for the television. Jack feels that Stanley is better off at Abraham and Straus where he is employed and says:

\textit{What you want to do and making a living are two different things. You don't keep a roof over your head doing what you want to do. You do what you have to do.}\textsuperscript{119}
Jack's observation underlines what he has been doing all his life despite his being drawn to a well read, sophisticated widow with whom he has been having an affair. When questioned by Kate about his having changed he confesses to her:

There was a woman (Kate stares at him). About a year ago I met her in a restaurant on the Seventh Avenue. She worked in a bank, a widow. Not all that attractive, but a refined woman, spoke very well, better educated than I was... It was a year ago, Kate. It didn't last long. I never thought it would... and it's over now... I didn't tell it to you just now out of a great sense of
honesty. I told you because I couldn't carry the weight of all that guilt on my back any more.

Kate informs him that she knew of it a year ago through a phone call from a friend and tells him:

I didn't expect to get through a lifetime without you touching another woman. But having feelings for her is something I can never forgive.

Act-I ends with Stanley and Eugene struggling for an idea for their sketch and Act-II opens a month later during which their sketch has been included in an experimental comedy show, "The Chubby Waters Show" to develop new talent, not on the Television, but on small time radio.
Stanley is angry that they are mentioned as Geraud, not Jerome by the radio announcer and anxious to know his father's opinion, is startled that he is not pleased with it as it not only features their family in disguise but also exposes them to the ridicule of their neighbours, who can easily identify them. Stanley is hurt and bursts out:

But what kind of principles does a man have when he tells his sons the woman he's seeing on the side is a wonderful, decent human being?\footnote{122}

Jack goes up to his bedroom telling him:

Either you've grown up too fast...
or I've outlived my place in this house.\footnote{123}

Stanley considers his father to be so paranoid.
as to think that the sketch is all about him. Eugene confesses that the sketch is really about his parents and tells Stanley that one part of his head is what makes him a nice, likable, funny kid while the other is the one "that writes, that's an angry, hostile real son of a bitch". Stanley leaves to meet his girlfriend, and Eugene who is unwell converses with his mother asking her about George Raft. She tells Eugene how when her family was mourning the death of their Aunt Sipra, she sneaked out to dance with George Raft, reliving the most thrilling experience she had had. The next morning Jack gets dressed early and tells Ben that he is leaving before Kate gets up as he does not love her any more. Ben tells his daughter that Jack has moved out, which news she receives bottling up her emotions. Stanley returns flushed with the news that
they have been hired for "The Phil Silvers Show" on four hundred dollars a week. He also informs Eugene that he met their father who was heart-broken because the lady he was seeing, Audrey, was taken to the hospital as she was not expected to last out the week. Asked if he would return after Audrey's death his father told him that he would not return and giving him two letters addressed to him and Eugene to be read after his death, departed. Eugene gets married to Josie and his father to another woman after two years while his mother continues to live as she has been doing considering herself lucky that she did once dance with George Raft, which strikes a poignant note that is moving.
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10. Ibid., P. 44.

11. Ibid., P. 54.

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84 Ibid.
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91 Ibid., pp.10-11.
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109 Ibid., P. 115.
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111. Ibid., P. 120.
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113. Ibid., P. 130.
115. Ibid., pp. 20-21.
117. Ibid., pp. 27-28.
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