AGENT. …and the dining room.

CLIENT. Oh boy.

AGENT. You see how these rooms were designed to catch the early morning light?

CLIENT. I’ll say.

AGENT. French doors, lovely garden, flowering crabs. Do you like gardening?

CLIENT. Used to.

AGENT. Imagine, imagine having a long, leisurely breakfast in here.

CLIENT. As opposed to instant coffee on Eastern Airlines.

AGENT. Exactly. You know this is a room after my own heart. I grew up in a dining room like this. Same sort of furniture. Everything.

CLIENT. So did I.

AGENT. Then here we are. Welcome home.

CLIENT. (Pause.) What are they asking again?

AGENT. Make an offer. I think they’ll come down.

CLIENT. (Another pause.) Trouble is, we’ll never use this room.

AGENT. Oh now.

CLIENT. We won’t. the last two houses we lived in, my wife used the dining room table to sort the laundry.

AGENT. Oh dear.

CLENT. Maybe you’d better show me something more contemporary.

AGENT. That means something farther out. How long have we got to find you a home?

CLIENT. One day.

AGENT. And how long will the corporation keep you here, after you’ve found it?

CLIENT. Six months to a year.

AGENT. Oh then definitely we should look farther out. (She opens the kitchen door.) You can look at the kitchen as we leave.

CLIENT. You shouldn’t have shown me this first.

AGENT. I thought it was something to go by.

CLIENT. You’ve spoiled everything else.

AGENT. Oh no. we’ll find you something if we’ve got all day. But wasn’t it a lovely room?

CLIENT. Let’s go, or I’ll buy it! (They both exit through the kitchen door as…)

ARTHUR. (…a Brother comes in from the hall, followed by his sister. Both are middle-aged. His name is Arthur, hers is Sally.)

ARTHUR. The dining room.

SALLY. Yes…

ARTHUR. Notice how we gravitate right to this room.

SALLY. I know it.

ARTHUR. You sure mother doesn’t want this stuff in Florida?

SALLY. She hardly has room for what she’s got. She wants us to take turns. Without fighting.

ARTHUR. We’ll just have to draw lots then.

SALLY. Unless one of us wants something, and one of us doesn’t.

ARTHUR. We have to do it today.

SALLY. Do you think that’s enough time to divide up a whole house?

ARTHUR. I have to get back, Sal. (He looks in the sideboard.) We’ll draw lots and then go through the rooms taking turns.

ARTHUR. (He brings out a silver spoon.) Here. We’ll use this spoon.

ARTHUR. (He shifts it from hand to hand behind his back, then holds out two fists.)

ARTHUR. Take your pick. You get the spoon, you get the dining room.

SALLY. You mean you want to start here?

ARTHUR. Got to start somewhere.

SALLY. (Sally looks at his fists.)

ANNIE. (Annie, a Maid, comes out from the kitchen to set the table for breakfast. She sets placemats at either end and two coffee cups, with saucers. Sally and Arthur take no notice of her. Annie then leaves.)

SALLY. (Not choosing.) You mean you want the dining room?

ARTHUR. Yeah.

SALLY. What happened to the stuff you had?

ARTHUR. Jane took it. It was part of the settlement.

SALLY. If you win, where will you put it.

ARTHUR. That’s my problem, Sal.

SALLY. I thought you had a tiny apartment.

ARTHUR. I’ll find a place.

SALLY. I mean your children won’t want it.

ARTHUR. Probably not.

SALLY. Then where on earth…?

ARTHUR. Come on, Sal. Choose. (He holds out his fists again.)

SALLY. (She chooses.)

ARTHUR. (Arthur lowers his hands.)

ANNIE. (Annie comes in from the kitchen, bringing the morning paper. She puts it at the head of the table and then leaves.)

ARTHUR. You don’t want it.

SALLY. Of course I want it!

ARTHUR. I mean you already have a perfectly good dining room.

SALLY. Not as good as this.

ARTHUR. You mean you want two dining rooms?

SALLY. I’d give our old stuff to Debbie.

ARTHUR. To Debbie?

SALLY. She’s our oldest child.

ARTHUR. Does Debbie want a dining room?

SALLY. She might.

ARTHUR. In a condominium?

SALLY. She might.

ARTHUR. In Denver?

SALLY. She just might, Arthur.

FATHER. (A father comes in, from the right. He settles comfortably at the head of the table, unfolds his newspaper importantly.)

ARTHUR. (Shuffling the spoon behind his back again. Then holding out his fists) I don’t want to fight. Which hand?

SALLY. (Sally starts to choose, then stops.) Are you planning to put it in storage?

ARTHUR. I might.

SALLY. I checked on that. That costs an arm and a leg.

ARTHUR. So does shipping it to Denver. (He holds out his fists.)

FATHER. (Calling to kitchen.) Good morning, Annie.

SALLY. (Almost picking a hand, then stopping.) I know what will happen if you win.

ARTHUR. What?

SALLY. You’ll end up selling it.

ARTHUR. Selling it?

SALLY. That’s what will happen. It will kick around for a while and you’ll end up calling a furniture dealer.

ANNIE. (Annie comes out with a small glass of “orange juice” on a tray.)

ARTHUR. I am absolutely amazed you’d say that.

SALLY. I don’t want to fight, Arthur.

ARTHUR. Neither do I. Maybe we should defer the dining room. (He starts for door, right.)

SALLY. (Following him.) Maybe we should.

ANNIE. Good morning, sir.

FATHER. Good morning, Annie.

ARTHUR. Selling the dining room? Is that what you told Mother I’d do?

SALLY. (Following him.) I told her I’d give you the piano if I can have the dining room…

ARTHUR. I’ll be lucky if I keep this spoon.

SALLY. I’ll give you the piano and the coffee table if I can have the dining room. (Arthur and Sally Exit into the hall.)

FATHER. Annie…

ANNIE. (Annie is almost to the kitchen door.) Yes sir…

FATHER. Did I find a seed in my orange juice yesterday morning?

ANNIE. I strained it, sir.

FATHER. I’m sure you did, Annie. Nonetheless I think I may have detected a small seed.

ANNIE. I’ll strain it twice, sir.

FATHER. Seeds can wreak havoc with the digestion, Annie.

ANNIE. Yes, sir.

FATHER. They can take root. And grow.

ANNIE. Yes, sir. I’m sorry, sir. (Annie goes out.)

FATHER. (Father drinks his orange juice carefully and reads his newspaper.)

GIRL. (A little Girl sticks her head out through the dining room door.) Daddy…

FATHER. Yes, good morning, Lizzie Boo.

GIRL. Daddy, could Charlie and me-

FATHER. Charlie and I…

GIRL. …Charlie and I come out and sit with you while you have breakfast?

FATHER. You certainly may, Lizzikins. I’d be delighted to have the pleasure of your company, provided-

GIRL. Yippee!

FATHER. I said PROVIDED you sit quietly, without leaning back in your chairs, and don’t fight or argue.

GIRL. (Calling off.) He says we <i>can!</i>

FATHER. I said you <i>may</i> sweetheart.

GIRL. (The Girl comes out adoringly, followed by a little Boy.) (Kissing her father.) Good morning, Daddy.

BOY. (Kissing him too.) Morning, Dad. (They settle into their seats.)

ANNIE. (Annie brings out the Father’s “breakfast.”) Here’s your cream, sir.

FATHER. Thank you Annie.

ANNIE. You’re welcome, sir. (Annie goes out.)

BOY. (The children watch their father.)

BOY. Dad…

FATHER. Hmmm?

BOY. When do we get to have fresh cream on our shredded wheat?

GIRL. When you grow up, that’s when.

FATHER. I’ll tell you one thing. If there’s a war, no one gets cream. If there’s a war, we’ll all have to settle for top of the bottle.

GIRL. Mother said she was thinking about having us eat dinner in here with you every night.

FATHER. Yes. Your mother and I are both thinking about that. And we’re both looking forward to it. As soon as you children learn to sit up straight…

GIRL. (They quickly do.)

FATHER. then I see no reason why we shouldn’t all have a pleasant meal together every evening.

BOY. Could we try it tonight, Dad? Could you give us a test?

FATHER. No, Charlie. Not tonight. Because tonight we’re giving a small dinner party. But I hope very much you and Liz will come downstairs and shake hands.

GIRL. I get so shy, Dad.

FATHER. Well you’ll just have to learn, sweetie pie. Half of life is learning to meet people.

BOY. What’s the other half, Dad?

FATHER. (Pause. The Father fixes him with a steely gaze.) Was that a crack?

BOY. No, Dad…

FATHER. That was a crack, wasn’t it?

BOY. No, Dad. Really…

FATHER. That sounded very much like a smart-guy wisecrack to me. And people who make cracks like that don’t normally eat in dining rooms.

BOY. I didn’t mean it as a crack, Dad.

FATHER. Then we’ll ignore it. We’ll go on with our breakfast.

ANNIE. (Annie comes in.) (To Girl.) Your car’s here, Lizzie. For school. (Annie goes out.)

GIRL. (Jumping up.) O.K.

FATHER. (To Girl.) Thank you, Annie.

GIRL. Thank you, Annie… (Kisses Father.) Goodbye, Daddy.

FATHER. Goodbye, darling. Don’t be late. Say good morning to the driver. Sit quietly in the car. Work hard. Run. Run. Goodbye. (Girl goes off.)

FATHER. (Father returns to his paper. Pause)

BOY. (Boy sits watching his father.) Dad, can I read the funnies?

FATHER. Certainly. Certainly you may. (He carefully extracts the second section and hands it to his son.)

BOY. (Both read, the Son trying to imitate the Father in how he does it.)

FATHER. (Finally:) This won’t mean much to you, but the government is systematically ruining this country.

BOY. Miss Kelly told us about the government.

FATHER. Oh really. And who is Miss Kelly, pray tell?

BOY. She’s my teacher.

FATHER. I don’t remember any Miss Kelly.

BOY. She’s new, Dad.

FATHER. I see. And what has she been telling you?

BOY. She said there’s a depression going on.

FATHER. I see.

BOY. People all over the country are standing in line for bread.

FATHER. I see.

BOY. So the government has to step in and do something

FATHER. (Long pause. Then:) Annie!

ANNIE. (Coming out of the kitchen.) Yes, sir.

FATHER. I’d very much like some more coffee, please.

ANNIE. Yes, sir. (Annie goes out.)

FATHER. You tell Miss Kelly she’s wrong.

BOY. Why?

FATHER. I’ll tell you exactly why: if the government keeps on handing out money no one will want to work. And if no one wants to work, there won’t be anyone around to support such things as private schools. And if no one is supporting private schools, then Miss Kelley will be standing on the bread lines along with everyone else. You tell Miss Kelly that, if you please. Thank you, Annie.

ANNIE. (Annie comes in and pours coffee.)

FATHER. (Father returns to his paper.)

ANNIE. (Annie has returned to the kitchen.)

BOY. (Boy reads his funnies for a moment. Then:) Dad…

FATHER. (Reading) Hmmm?

BOY. Could we leave a little earlier today?

FATHER. We’ll leave when we always leave.

BOY. But I’m always late, Dad.

FATHER. Nonsense.

BOY. I am, Dad. Yesterday I had to walk into assembly while they were still singing the hymn.

FATHER. A minute or two late…

BOY. Everyone looked at me, Dad.

FATHER. You tell everyone to concentrate on that hymn.

BOY. I can’t, Dad…

FATHER. It’s that new stoplight on Richmond Avenue. It affects our timing.

BOY. It’s not just the new stop light, Dad. Sometimes I come in when they’re already doing arithmetic. Miss Kelly says I should learn to be punctual.

FATHER. (Putting down the paper.) Miss Kelly again, eh?

BOY. She said if everyone is late, no one would learn any mathematics.

FATHER. Now you listen to me, Charlie. Miss Kelly may be an excellent teacher. Her factoring may be flawless, her geography beyond question. But Miss Kelly does not teach us politics. Nor does she teach us how to run our lives. She is not going to tell you, or me, to leave in the middle of a pleasant breakfast, and get caught in the bulk of the morning traffic, just so that you can arrive in time for a silly hymn. Long after you’ve forgotten that hymn, long after you’ve forgotten how to factor, long after you’ve forgotten Miss Kelly, you will remember these pleasant breakfasts around this dining room table.

MOTHER. (Mother glides into the room from the R.)

FATHER. And here is your mother to prove it.

MOTHER. (Kissing Father.) Good morning, dear. (Kissing Charlie.) Good morning, Charlie.

FATHER. (Remaining seated.) I know people who leap to their feet when a beautiful woman enters the room.

BOY. (Charlie jumps up.)

MOTHER. Oh that’s all right, dear.

FATHER. I also know people who rush to push in their mother’s chair.

BOY. (Charlie does so.)

MOTHER. Thank you, dear.

FATHER. And finally, I know people who are quick to give their mother the second section of the morning paper.

BOY. Oh! Here, Mum.

MOTHER. Thank you, dear.

FATHER. Now Charlie: take a moment, if you would, just to look at your lovely mother, bathed in the morning sunlight, and reflected in the dining room table.

MOTHER. Oh Russell…

BOY. (Charlie looks at his mother.)

FATHER. Look at her, Charlie, and then ask yourself carefully: Which is worth our ultimate attention? Your Mother? Or Miss Kelly?

MOTHER. Who is Miss Kelly?

FATHER. Never mind, dear. Which, Charlie?

CHARLIE. My Mother.

FATHER. Good, Charlie. Fine. (He gets up, taking his section of the paper.) And now, I think you and I should make a trip upstairs before we say goodbye, and are on our way.

MOTHER. (Mother smiles sweetly.)

BOY. (Charlie gives his Mother a kiss.)

FATHER. (Father and Son leave the room.)

ANNIE. (Annie enters, carrying a coffee server.)

MOTHER. Good morning, Annie.

ANNIE. Good morning, Mrs.

MOTHER. Tell Irma I’ll have poached eggs this morning, please, Annie.

ANNIE. Yes, Mrs. (Annie goes out.)

MOTHER. (Mother sits sipping coffee, reading her section of the paper.)