

I NEVER SANG FOR MY FATHER

by Robert Anderson

ACT II

Gene Garrison is a forty-year-old widower who is about to remarry and move to California when his elderly mother dies and leaves him with the problem of caring for his father. The father, Tom Garrison, is a self-made man, well respected in his small Westchester community. But his possessive and penurious nature have alienated his children from him. When his daughter Alice defied him and married a Jew, he refused to see her again. Now, with his doting wife gone, Tom makes constant demands on his son; and Gene is torn between the desire to help his father and earn his love, and the need to lead his own life apart from the tyrannical old man.

In the following scene, Alice, the exiled daughter, has come home for her mother's funeral. She advises Gene to plan his own future and accept the practical alternatives (a full-time housekeeper or an old-age home) available to their father. The lights come up on Gene and Alice in the garden.

ALICE: I don't know how you feel, but I'd like to figure out some kind of memorial for Mother. . . . Use some of the money she left.

GENE: Yes, definitely.

ALICE: Maybe some shelves of books for the Children's Library. Christmas books with the stories she liked to tell.

GENE: That's a good idea. *There is a long and awkward pause.*

ALICE: Well, Gene . . . what are we going to do?

GENE, *frowns*: Mother always said put her in an old people's home. She had one all picked out.

ALICE: Sidney's Mother and Father saw it coming and arranged to be in one of those cottage colonies for old people.

GENE: Mother and Dad didn't.

ALICE: I think you should go ahead and get married and move to California. . . . But . . . I might as well get this off my chest, it would be murder if he came to live with us. In the first place, he wouldn't do it, feeling as he does about Sid, and the kids can't stand how he tells them how to do everything.

GENE: I think you're right. That would never work. *There is a pause. Gene looks out at the garden.* I can't tell you what it does to me as a man . . . to see someone like that . . . a man who was distinguished, remarkable . . . just become a nuisance.

ALICE, *disturbed at what her brother may be thinking*: I know I sound hard, but he's had his life . . . and as long as we can be assured that he's taken care of. . . . Oh, I'll feel some guilt, and you, maybe more. But my responsibility is to my husband and my children.

GENE: Yes. That's *your* responsibility.

ALICE: And your responsibility is to yourself . . . to get married again, to get away from memories of Carol . . . and her whole world. Have you called California?

GENE, *frowns*: No.

ALICE: If I were the girl you were planning to marry, and you didn't call me to tell me your Mother had died . . .

GENE, *gets up, disturbed*: I just haven't wanted to go into it all with her . . .

ALICE, *understanding . . . but worried*: Gene, my friend . . . my brother . . . Get out of here!

GENE: Look, Alice . . . your situation is quite different. Mine is very complex. You fortunately see things very clearly, but it's not so easy for me. . . . *Alice looks at Gene, troubled by what his thinking seems to be leading to. After a moment . . . reflective:* We always remember the terrible things about Dad. I've been trying to remember some of the others. . . . How much he *did* do for us.

ALICE: I'm doing a lot for my kids. I don't expect them to pay me back at the other end. *Gene wanders around, thinking, scuffing the grass.* I'm sure we could find a full-time housekeeper. He can afford it.

GENE: He'd never agree.

ALICE: It's that or finding a Home. *Gene frowns.* Sidney's folks like where they are. Also, we might as well face it, his mind's going. Sooner or later we'll have to think about Powers of Attorney, perhaps committing him to an Institution.

GENE: God, it's all so ugly.

ALICE, *smiling*: Yes, my gentle Gene . . . a lot of life is.

GENE: Now, look, don't go trying to make me out some soft-hearted . . . *He can't find the word*. I know life is ugly.

ALICE: Yes, I think you know it. You've lived through a great deal of ugliness. But you work like a Trojan to deny it, to make it not so. *After a moment . . . not arguing*: He kicked me out. He said he never wanted to see me again. He broke Mother's heart over that for years. He was mean . . . unloving. . . . He beat the Hell out of you when you were a kid. . . . You've hated and feared him all your adult life . . .

GENE, *cutting in*: Still he's my Father, and a man. And what's happening to him appalls me as a man.

ALICE: We have a practical problem here.

GENE: It's not as simple as all that.

ALICE: To me it is. I don't understand this mystical haze you're casting over it. I'm going to talk to him tomorrow, after the session with the lawyer, about a housekeeper. *Gene reacts but says nothing*. Just let me handle it. He can visit us, and we can take turns coming to visit him. Now, I'll do the dirty work. Only when he turns to you, don't give in.

GENE: I can't tell you how ashamed I feel . . . not to say with open arms, "Poppa, come live with me . . . I love you, Poppa, and I want to take care of you." . . . I need to love him. I've always wanted to love him.

SEXUAL PERVERSITY IN CHICAGO

by David Mamet

David Mamet's four-character comedy explores contemporary sexual relationships through a series of witty vignettes that are written in a style that might be called surreal. This scene is from the last half of the play.

Deborah has recently moved into Danny's apartment. The "affair" is now giving way to the mundane tasks of "living together." It is morning and they are getting ready for work.

DANNY: Do we have any shampoo?

DEBORAH: I don't know.

DANNY: You wash your hair at least twice a day. Shampoo is a staple item of your existence. Of course you know.

DEBORAH: All right. *I do*. Know.

DANNY: Do we have any shampoo?

DEBORAH: I don't know. Is your hair dirty?

DANNY: Does my hair look dirty?

DEBORAH: Does it feel dirty? *Pause*. It looks dirty.

DANNY: It feels greasy. I hate it when my hair feels greasy.

DEBORAH: Well, I'm not going to look. If you want to know if there's any shampoo, you go look for it.

DANNY: You don't have to look. You know very well if there's any shampoo or not. You're making me be ridiculous about this. *Pause*. You wash yourself too much anyway. If you really used all that shit they tell you in *Cosmopolitan* (and you *do*) you'd be washing yourself from morning 'til night. Pouring derivatives on yourself all day long.

DEBORAH: Will you love me when I'm old?

DANNY: If you can manage to look eighteen, yes.

DEBORAH: Now, that's very telling.

DANNY: You think so?

DEBORAH: Yes.

DANNY: I'm going to wash my hair. Is there any shampoo?

DEBORAH: Yes. And no.

DANNY: Now what's that supposed to mean?

DEBORAH: Everything. And nothing. *Pause*. Would you get my hose?

DANNY: No. Where does this come from? This whole fucking behavior. You're making it up. "Get my hose." You want your hose, I'll get your hose. Here's your fucking hose. *Rummages in dresser*. Where's your hose? *Pause*. What do they call them, anyway? Nobody says 'hose.'

DEBORAH: Pantyhose.

DANNY: Where are they?