

# Precious Sons

Written by George Furth

DRAMA

**SETTING:** *The Small family living room, the South Side of Chicago, 1949.*

*The Smalls are a boisterous, loving, middle-class family, but problems are beneath all the roughhousing and horseplay. FREDDY, a precocious child actor, has just been cast in a well-paying tour, but he opts to make his father happy by turning down the part and going to school. Bea, the mother, has just thrown a wild tantrum in response to FRED'S stubbornness and his often brutal treatment of FREDDY. FRED has vowed to divorce Bea. The following evening, father and son meet for their first real talk.*

*(FREDDY is alone on stage, seated at the dining room table, working on a manual project and listening to "Inner Sanctum". As he works on the project FRED appears on the front porch. He is coming from work and is carrying a large gift-wrapped box of some size and weight and a large bottle of Scotch. He stands outside the window, taking in the living room for a long second, then enters)*

**FRED:** Is this a private party or can any slob join?

**FREDDY:** It's not much of a party, just me.

**FRED:** *(Crosses to radio. Goes to turn it off. Stops)* Mind?

*(FREDDY shakes his head and FRED shuts off radio)*

Where's the old battle-ax?

**FREDDY:** Well, she cleaned the house, got all dressed up and moseyed on out after lunch, and I haven't seen hide nor hair of her since.

**FRED:** Let's hope she got hit by a car.

**FREDDY:** Unlikely.

**FRED:** That broad'd dent the car. Here. *(Puts gift box down on table)*

**FREDDY:** What?

**FRED:** Open it.

**FREDDY:** You gave me the watch.

**FRED:** I only forked over for it.

**FREDDY:** *(Opening gift)* Did you go to work?

**FRED:** A corset. *(“Of course”)* Kennerly give me a bottle of Scotch. *(Puts it on table)* Son of a bitch can't wait to

get rid of me. Let's do some fast living.

*(Takes bottle crossing to highboy for glasses. Stops. Sighs and exits in kitchen Down Left Sounds offstage of opening cabinets and getting glasses and filling them with ice)*

**FREDDY:** I haven't acquired that taste yet.

**FRED:** *(Offstage, Down Left, calling)* Have you ever tried alcohol?

**FREDDY:** Certainly. I'm in show business.

**FRED:** *(Offstage)* Well, the way I sees it, a guy should have his first real drink with his old man so you just get you ready. You can sip it. They say you should sip it. I'm not much one for sipping.

*(Enters. Puts ice-filled glasses and bottle on table)*

I'm going to have a hair of the dog myself. Haven't had a drink from my operation till yesterday. Never did appreciate how it works on me. Beer suits me fine. How's it suit you?

**FREDDY:** Fine.

**FRED:** Pay your fine on the way out. *(Opens bottle and pours)* Stayed at Sandra's folks last night and Jesus does her old man put the booze away.

**FREDDY:** You hardly know them.

**FRED:** Like hell. He was a Demolay as a kid like me and we're Lodge brothers. Plus, like I told them, I knew they had a spare bed with their daughter out shacking up with my son.

**FREDDY:** Are they still passed out on the floor?

**FRED:** Well, I didn't use those exact words.

**FREDDY:** *(Gets package open. Stunned)* A typewriter.

**FRED:** Remington. They're supposed to be good. That's what they say anyway.

**FREDDY:** It's beautiful.

**FRED:** It's portable. So you can bring it when you come home on trips from school.

**FREDDY:** *(Puts his arms around FRED's neck while FRED is holding the two glasses)* I never thought I would have my own.

**FRED:** *(Withdrawing immediately. Self-conscious and uncomfortable but behaving as if FREDDY is spilling the drinks)* Hey, hey, hey, hey, look what the hell you're doing, will ya'? Heads up here. Your mother will murdalize us both. *(A self-conscious pause. FREDDY takes typewriter exiting into Down Right bedroom. FRED calls)* Well, are you joining me or what? *(FREDDY re-enters. Crosses to table and sits)* That Sandra's got to have the most dry ball folks. Jesus Christ.

They sit and watch their new TV all goddamn night. You never seen anything like it. Wrestling and these old cartoons and some silent movie and then these bull-shit artists all sitting around talking to each other. I couldn't fucking believe it. If you excuse the expression. "When are you getting yours?" the mother asked me. "After

looking at this goddamn mindless thing all night I don't give a rat's-ass if I never get mine" I wanted to tell her. But I just said my wife didn't feel they were really perfected yet. And then the old man, who was shit-face by this time from all the hootch he kept slugging down there, I mean really knocking them away bam, bam, bam. Anyway, then he took this fit of laughing at Betty Boop. Pathetic.

**FREDDY:** Did they think it was weird you coming over there?

**FRED:** Who the hell knows what those drips think?

**FREDDY:** You tell them you and Ma had a fight?

**FRED:** A "domestic difference", I said. *(Hands him drink, fills his own glass)* Finish that and I'll pour you another. And to me that wasn't a fight. Takes two to fight. Me, I walk the hell away. *(Indicating the drink)* Finish it.

**FREDDY:** I hate it.

**FRED:** You hate everything. Didn't your mother ever tell you it's not nice to hate. Here. *(Lifts FREDDY's hand, holding the glass, to FREDDY's mouth and FREDDY finishes it)* Good boy. Now that was a man's drink. That'll put hair on your chest. That'll put hair on your hair. See how nice to talk? What the hell are you making? I never saw you make anything in your life.

**FREDDY:** I was putting my diploma in a frame. To hang it. I have two left hands.

**FRED:** Which could be good if you were only left-handed. Here. Let me help you out. *(Pulls it all to him with one hand while pouring two drinks with the other hand)* Hang this on a big wall because it's going to have a lot of company, right?

*(FREDDY lifts glass to drink and FRED, not looking up from his task, reaches out and stops his hand from reaching his mouth. FREDDY stops and FRED's hand goes away. FREDDY lifts the glass again and FRED's hand stops him again. FREDDY stops and as FRED's hand goes away FREDDY switches hands, turns away quickly and drinks. FRED laughs)*

**FREDDY:** I'm going to get tanked.

**FRED:** *(Pouring him another)* So what? Sew buttons on your overcoat.

**FREDDY:** How many times do I graduate from eighth grade any how?

*(FRED downs his drink and pours himself another while he puts the diploma in the frame, fastens it and connects wires in back)*

**FRED:** Who hit Annie in the fanny with a flounder?

**FREDDY:** Who hit Nelly in the belly with the jelly?

**FRED:** Who hit Bea in the knee with the tea?

**FREDDY:** *(Seriously)* Know what?

**FRED:** What?

**FREDDY:** That's what.

*(FREDDY points at FRED and they laugh. FRED holds up arms in surrender)*

**FRED:** I fell. You got me. Christ, do you remember how Arf drove me nuts with that?

**FREDDY:** You nuts?

**FRED:** Us nuts.

**FREDDY:** I thought Ma went to meet you, maybe.

**FRED:** Oh, Christ knows what that mad-woman's up to. I'm telling you right now I'm going to make a few things clear to her when she gets back. Mark my words. Get a few things straight around here once and for all. Just a little too goddamn much interference the way I sees it.

**FREDDY:** Ma has a lot of nervous energy.

**FRED:** Got a lot of nerve is what she's got. Did you call them to turn down the play?

**FREDDY:** Ma said she'd take care of it.

**FRED:** Just so it's taken care of.

**FREDDY:** It's a wonderful play.

**FRED:** Good, we'll all go see it. Subject's closed. Think I'll let them know the first of the week it's Cincinnati. Here. *(Gives him framed diploma and pours him a drink)*

**FREDDY:** Thanks.

**FRED:** How does it look?

**FREDDY:** Professional.

**FRED** *(Nods)* Think you might get used to Cincinnati?

**FREDDY:** How did Cincinnati win?

**FRED:** *(Pours himself a drink. A big one. Drinks steadily and heavily)* Three smart reasons. It's still the mid-west so old-ladybreakdown won't feel so removed. Two, it's close if she wants to come back and visit her asshole friends. And the biggest reason is because we get a full month and a half to pack and sell the goddamn house and not have everybody running around here like a chicken with its head cut off.

**FREDDY:** The play goes to Cincinnati.

**FRED:** Closed subject. Did I ever tell you I have my will in my top drawer of my chifferobe?

**FREDDY:** The one Ma says she'll never touch?

**FRED:** Anyway, it's in the top drawer of my chifferobe. Pay no attention to her unless you're doing a study on severe mental illness. It's on the left side behind my Masonic books. I divided everything equal between you and your brother. Even though you got all the savings. I'd never want you to some day entertain any notion I played

favorites. So everything's divided equal. Fifty-fifty. Right down the line.

**FREDDY:** In Ireland the oldest son gets it automatically. It's called "Primogeniture".

**FRED:** Not here. Not in this house. Here everything's divided equal. Same way I should have been dividing my time between you two. But half the time I'd be coming home from work just as you'd be going out to work. And see, that wasn't right because I wasn't really there for you. I acknowledge that. I regret that. I say it to your face. I deeply regret that.

**FREDDY:** You feel I shouldn't have been acting?

**FRED:** Yes, I do. Even though I know we never pushed you. You chose it.

**FREDDY:** But see I really didn't choose it. It's more like it chose me. I wanted to act before I even knew what it was. If it didn't exist I bet I would have invented it. When Ma would come pick me up in your car every night after the play I used to get her to drive past the Ellwyn and the Harris and the Erlanger so I could get to watch the other actors coming out of their theatres before we'd drive home. The only hard thing for me doing a play ever was not to turn around and laugh with the audience when they laughed. And the best part of all was if it was a Wednesday or a Saturday, because then I got to do it two times. Every play I was in I knew everybody's lines in the script. And I bet I could still do all their parts, do them word perfect almost, even today, I bet. I have everything, everything ever written about every show that ever came to Chicago in my boxes in the basement. I got boxes and boxes. Because I think, out of all the things there are or ever will be, a stage play is, far and beyond, the most wonderful, wonderful of things.

**FRED:** Hard to figure. It's just hard to figure. So now how come you want to stop and go on to the Lab School then?

**FREDDY:** You'll laugh.

**FRED:** I think I'm too looped to laugh.

**FREDDY** (*Thinks. Then*) Because if you know more you can communicate more.

(*Pause*)

Do you understand?

**FRED:** Yes.

**FREDDY:** Really?

**FRED:** I'm not a dumb as I look.

**FREDDY:** The more I know the more I can be. The less I know the less I'll be

**FRED:** At fourteen you know this? How?

**FREDDY:** I don't know how. Maybe when you don't talk much you think more.

**FRED:** You'll never believe this but when I was a kid I was just like you. Well, very similar. See, I had those rickets so I didn't really walk till I was five.

**FREDDY:** I always forget that.

**FRED:** Sure. And I was always quiet and reading just like you. When my father started me working at the factory when I was fourteen is really when I changed. I soon picked up the lingo there and I hung around the guys more and I got on their baseball team and I became accepted – started to fit in. It's why you gotta admire Artie. Right from the beginning he knew how to fit in. I admire that

*(FREDDY has an elbow on the table and FRED lifts the arm and brings it down on the table hard)*

**FREDDY:** Owww.

**FRED** *(Quickly)* Sh, sh, sh. I hope you just might be coming out of yourself. Look. In your whole life you never talked as much as tonight

**FREDDY:** In my whole life I never drank as much as tonight

*(FRED pulls FREDDY toward him and affectionately and playfully rubs his knuckles into his head)*

**FREDDY:** *(Pulling away, struggling)* OwWwW.