



WILLUM. Tansy McGinnis you've met. Axel, this is the man who's letting me design his hotel—.

AXEL. I've seen you on the finance page. The self-made man. Warnock Waldgrave, rags-to-riches—.

WALDGRAVE. (*Holding up a hand.*) Ticky.

AXEL. Pardon?

WALDGRAVE. Ticky. Call me Ticky.

AXEL. Well, I'd rather swallow glass, but if you insist—.

WILLUM. Axel Hammond, friend and tenant. (*He smiles and exits to porch.*)

WALDGRAVE. (*Offering hand.*) Axel?

AXEL. (*Shaking hands.*) Gumbo. Just call me Gumbo.

TANSY. Don't you dare. (*Waldgrave chuckles uncertainly. Willum opens the door again and in comes Clelia Waldgrave with their eight-year-old son, Thor. Clelia is a picture of tasteful, studied patience, but not because her life is devoid of anxiety. As for Thor, we know that there are good little boys; there are also precocious little boys, which is to say bad little boys whom we can somehow find it in our hearts to forgive. Thor is neither. Thor is a monster, and might well usurp the action from our other characters were he not soon relegated to another room.*)

WALDGRAVE. Dear, this is Willum, Tandy, and—.

TANSY. Tansy.

WALDGRAVE. Tansy, and—Gumbo?

TANSY. Axel.

WALDGRAVE. Axel, right. (*Axel shrugs at a wondering Willum.*)

Uh, my wife Clelia—.

WILLUM. (*To Clelia, warmly.*) Oh, yes. (*Trying to remember.*)

Now, what is it you're involved in?

CLELIA. (*Very slowly and clearly.*) I work with slow learners.

WILLUM. Oh. Uh, right. You know Tansy?

CLELIA. (*Nods.*) Tansy?

TANSY. Hi.

WALDGRAVE. And my son Thor.

WILLUM. Thor?

THOR. (*Whining.*) Daa-yad!

WALDGRAVE. What, son?

THOR. (*Whining.*) I hate it here.

WALDGRAVE. No you don't, son.

THOR. Daaa-yad! I do toooo! (*He begins to whimper. Axel has quietly removed a poker from the fireplace.*)

TANSY. Axel! (*He replaces the poker.*)

THOR. You promised me I could go play with A.J. Morovek!  
WILLUM. Who?

THOR. Pleeeee-ease?

CLELIA. A.J. Morovek. His little friend.

AXEL. He has a little friend named A.J. Morovek? Funny—all *Willum's* friends have names like Pinky and Winky and Dean the Bean. (*To Waldgrave.*) Doesn't that strike you as funny, Mr.—uh, Ticky? (*Thor starts sobbing loudly now, collapsing under the weight of his grief till he is being upheld only by Waldgrave's grip on his arm.*)

WALDGRAVE. (*To Clelia.*) What's gotten into him all of a sudden?

CLELIA. I can't conceive.

AXEL. We all wish.

WALDGRAVE. I don't understand it. He's never done anything like this before. (*Thor stamps on Waldgrave's foot, runs screaming into the bedroom, and slams the door. Waldgrave grabs the doorknob, but the door is locked.*) Damn it, Clelia, he's done it again! Thor! Thor, come out of there!

CLELIA. Ticky—*reason* with him.

WILLUM. Is there anything I can do?

AXEL. You get the mortar, I'll get the bricks.

WALDGRAVE. Thor! Come out or I'm going to break your arms.

CLELIA. Ticky! Please—if you treat him as an adult, he'll respond as an adult.

WALDGRAVE. (*Running a hand through his hair.*) Yeah, okay. Thor? Thor, come out of there and I'll give you thirty bucks.

CLELIA. Ticky!

WALDGRAVE. (*To Clelia.*) It's okay, I can spare it. (*To Thor.*) Thirty bucks, son. That's five more than last time.

CLELIA. Ticky! You've offered him *money*, to—?

WALDGRAVE. Honey, let me handle this, dammit! (*Angrily explaining.*) I'm here, a., for *business*, and b., for *fun*! I'm in no mood for psychology! (*To Thor.*) How about it, son? Thirty bucks. Straight business deal.

THOR. (*Offstage.*) Fifty.

WALDGRAVE. What?

THOR. (*Offstage.*) Fifty dollars and I come out!

WALDGRAVE. You little bloodsucker! I'll see you in hell first!

WILLUM. Uh, can I take your coats or anything?

WALDGRAVE. (*To Thor.*) Okay, buddy! I can stonewall as well as you can! I'm going to enjoy myself out here with these real nice people and this great-looking macaroni salad. I just hope there's stuff in there that's that much fun!

THOR. (*Offstage.*) There is. (*Willum gives Axel a worried look.*)

WILLUM. Oh, I'm sure everything will be fine. Here, want to see the new kitchen?

WALDGRAVE. Okay. (*To Thor.*) I'll deal with you later, pal! You're a big, fat disappointment to me, I hope you know that!

CLELIA. Come on, Ticky.

WALDGRAVE. (*Exiting with Willum, Tansy and Clelia toward the kitchen.*) Damn kid. Damn kid'll be president of General Motors someday, mark my words. (*And they are out. Axel watches them leave, then crosses to phone, whistling "Happy Birthday to You." The receiver rests on the answering machine. He dials, we hear it ring and another machine answer.*)

KEMP'S VOICE. This is Kemp Hall. I'm tied up at the moment, but if you'd care to leave your— (*Axel pushes a button on the beeper, and Kemp's voice stops. We hear a dial tone in its place.*)

AXEL. Okay, sugar. (*Looking for the right button.*) So how do I hang up? (*He picks a button, pushes it, and we hear the tape on Willum's machine rewinding. He pushes another button, muttering "Hell." The machine starts replaying midway through the tape, slowing down as it does.*)

WILLUM'S VOICE. Hello, hello. This is Willum—.

AXEL. (*Pushing yet another button.*) Hell, hell. (*The tape speeds forward. He tries another button.*)

WILLUM'S VOICE. (*Getting slower.*) —t'll— you —hear— the —tone. Okay?

WILLUM. (*Having entered during this.*) What's the news in here?

AXEL. Robbie the Robot's going into self-destruct, here. (*Willum moves to the beeper.*)

WINK'S VOICE. (*Very slow.*) Yeah . . . this . . . is . . . Wink . . .

WILLUM. (*Pushing the magic button which stops the tape and shuts off the machine.*) Yeah, it does that. Take it back in, I guess. Any word from—? (*He jerks his thumb toward the bedroom.*)

AXEL. From little Damien? No, he's been pretty quiet.