

ACT I

(TIME: A warm summer night.)

(SCENE: The apartment of OSCAR MADISON's. This is one of those large eight-room affairs on Riverside Drive in the upper eighties. The building is about 35 years old and still has vestiges of its glorious past. High ceilings, walk-in closets and thick walls. We are in the living room with doors leading off to kitchen, bedrooms, and a bathroom, and a hallway to other bedrooms. Although the furnishings have been chosen with extreme good taste, the room itself, without the touch and care of a woman these past few months, is now a study in slovenliness. Dirty dishes, discarded clothes, old newspapers, empty bottles, glasses filled and unfilled, opened and unopened laundry packages, mail and disarrayed furniture abound. The only cheerful note left in this room is the lovely view of the New Jersey Palisades through its twelfth floor window. Three months ago, this was a lovely apartment.)

(AT RISE: The room is filled with smoke. A poker game is in progress. There are six chairs around the table but only four men are sitting. They are simply, MURRAY, ROY, SPEED and VINNIE. VINNIE, with the largest stack of chips in front of him, is nervously tapping his foot and keeps checking his watch. ROY is watching SPEED and SPEED is glaring at MURRAY with incredulity and utter fascination. MURRAY is the dealer. He slowly and methodically tries to shuffle. It is a ponderous

and painful business. SPEED shakes his head in disbelief. This is all done wordlessly.)

SPEED. (*Cups his chin in his hand and looks at MURRAY.*)
...Tell me, Mr. Maverick, is this your first time on the riverboat?

MURRAY. (*With utter disregard.*) You don't like it, get a machine. (*He continues to deal slowly.*)

ROY. Geez, it stinks in here.

VINNIE. (*Looks at his watch.*) What time is it?

SPEED. Again what time is it?

VINNIE. (*Whiny.*) My watch is slow. I'd like to know what time it is.

SPEED. (*Glares at him.*) You're winning ninety-five dollars, that's what time it is... Where the hell are you running?

VINNIE. I'm not running anywhere. I just asked what time it was. Who said anything about running?

ROY. (*Looks at his watch.*) It's ten-thirty.

(Pause. MURRAY continues to shuffle.)

VINNIE. (*Pause.*) I got to leave by twelve.

SPEED. (*Looks up in despair.*) Oh, Christ!

VINNIE. I told you that when I sat down. I got to leave by twelve. Murray, didn't I say that when I sat down? I said I got to leave by twelve.

SPEED. All right, don't talk to him. He's dealing. (*To MURRAY.*) Murray, you wanna rest for a while? Go lie down, sweetheart.

MURRAY. You want speed or accuracy, make up your mind. (*He begins to deal slowly.*)

(SPEED puffs on his cigar angrily.)

ROY. Hey, you want to do me a really big favor? Smoke towards New Jersey.

(SPEED blows smoke at ROY.)

MURRAY. No kidding, I'm really worried about Felix. (*Points to empty chair.*) He's never been this late before. Maybe

somebody should call. (*Yells offstage.*) Hey, Oscar, why don't you call Felix?

ROY. (*Waves hand through smoke.*) Listen, why don't we chip in three dollars apiece and buy another window. How the hell can you breathe in here?

MURRAY. How many cards you got, four?

SPEED. Yes, Murray, we all have four cards. When you give us one more, we'll all have five. If you were to give us two more, we'd have six. Understand how it works now?

ROY. (*Yells offstage.*) Hey, Oscar, what do you say? In or out?

(From offstage we hear OSCAR's voice.)

OSCAR. (*Offstage.*) Out, pussycat, out!

(SPEED opens, and the others bet.)

VINNIE. I told my wife I'd be home by one the latest. We're making an eight o'clock plane to Florida. I told you that when I sat down.

SPEED. Don't cry, Vinnie. You're forty-two years old. It's embarrassing. Give me two... (*Discards.*)

ROY. Why doesn't he fix the air-conditioner? It's ninety-eight degrees and it sits there sweating like everyone else. I'm out. (*Goes to window and looks out.*)

MURRAY. Who goes to Florida in July?

VINNIE. It's off season. There's no crowds and you get the best room for one-tenth the price. No cards...

SPEED. Some vacation. Six cheap people in an empty hotel.

MURRAY. Dealer takes four... Hey, you think maybe Felix is sick? (*He points to empty chair.*) I mean he's never been this late before.

ROY. (*Takes laundry bag from armchair and sits.*) You know it's the same garbage from last week's game. I'm beginning to recognize things.

MURRAY. (*Throwing cards down.*) I'm out...

SPEED. (*Showing hand.*) Two kings...

VINNIE. Straight... (*Shows hand and takes in pot.*)

MURRAY. Hey, maybe he's in his office locked in the john again. Did you know Felix was once locked in the john overnight? He wrote out his entire will on a half a roll of toilet paper! ...Heee, what a nut!

(VINNIE is playing with his chips.)

SPEED. *(Glares at him as he shuffles cards.)* Don't play with your chips. I'm asking you nice, don't play with your chips.

VINNIE. *(To SPEED.)* I'm not playing. I'm counting. Leave me alone. What are you picking on me for? How much do you think I'm winning? Fifteen dollars!

SPEED. *Fifteen dollars?* You dropped more than that in your cuffs! *(SPEED deals a game of draw poker.)*

MURRAY. *(Yells offstage.)* Hey, Oscar, what do you say?

OSCAR. *(Enters carrying a tray with beer, sandwiches, can of peanuts, and opened bags of pretzels and Fritos.)* I'm in! I'm in! Go ahead. Deal!

(OSCAR MADISON is 43. He is a pleasant, appealing man. He seems to enjoy life to the fullest. He enjoys his weekly poker game, his friends, his excessive drinking and his cigars. He is also one of those lucky creatures in life who even enjoys his work, a sportswriter for the New York Post. His carefree attitude is evident in the sloppiness of his household but it seems to bother others more than it does OSCAR. This is all not to say that OSCAR is without cares or worries. He just doesn't seem to have any.)

VINNIE. Aren't you going to look at your cards?

OSCAR. *(Sets tray on side chair.)* What for? I'm gonna bluff anyway. *(Opens bottle of Coke.)* Who gets the Coke?

MURRAY. I get a Coke.

OSCAR. My friend Murray, the policeman, gets a warm Coke. *(He gives him the bottle.)*

ROY. *(Opens the betting.)* You still didn't fix the refrigerator? It's been two weeks now. No wonder it stinks in here.

OSCAR. *(Picking up his cards.)* Temper, temper. If I wanted nagging I'd go back with my wife... *(Throws them down.)* I'm out... Who wants food?

MURRAY. What have you got?

OSCAR. *(Looks under bread.)* I got brown sandwiches and green sandwiches... Well, what do you say?

MURRAY. What's the green?

OSCAR. It's either very new cheese or very old meat.

MURRAY. I'll take the brown.

(OSCAR gives MURRAY a sandwich.)

ROY. *(Glares at MURRAY.)* Are you crazy? You're not going to eat that, are you?

MURRAY. I'm hungry.

ROY. His refrigerator's been broken for two weeks. I saw milk standing in there that wasn't even in the bottle.

OSCAR. *(To ROY.)* What are you, some kind of a health nut? Eat, Murray, eat!

ROY. I've got six cards...

SPEED. That figures... I've got three aces. Misdeal.

(All throw their cards in. SPEED begins to shuffle.)

VINNIE. You know who makes very good sandwiches? Felix. Did you ever taste his cream cheese and pimento on date nut bread?

SPEED. *(To VINNIE.)* All right, make up your mind, poker or menus.

(OSCAR opens a can of beer, which sprays in a geyser over all players and table. There is a hubbub as they all yell at OSCAR. He hands ROY the overflowing can, and pushes the puddle of beer under the chair. The Players start to go back to the game only to be sprayed by the beer again as OSCAR opens another can. There is another outraged cry as they try to stop OSCAR and mop up the beer on the table with a towel which is hanging on the standing lamp. OSCAR, undisturbed, gives

them the beer and the bags of refreshments, and they finally sit back in their chairs. OSCAR wipes his hands on the sleeve of ROY's jacket which is hanging on the back of the chair.)

SPEED. Hey, Vinnie, tell Oscar what time you're leaving.

VINNIE. *(Like a trained dog.)* Twelve o'clock.

SPEED. *(To others.)* You hear? We got ten minutes before the next announcement. All right, this game is five-card stud... *(Deals, and ad libs calling cards, ending with MURRAY's card.)* And a bullet for the policeman... All right, Murray, it's your bet. *(No answer.)* Do something, huh?

OSCAR. *(Getting drink at bar.)* Don't yell at my friend Murray.

MURRAY. *(Throwing in coin.)* I'm in for a quarter.

OSCAR. *(Proudly looks in MURRAY's eyes.)* Beautiful, baby, beautiful. *(Sits down and begins to open can of peanuts.)*

ROY. Hey, Oscar, let's make a rule. Every six months you have to buy fresh potato chips. How can you live like this? Don't you have a maid?

OSCAR. *(Shakes head.)* She quit after my wife and kids left. The work got to be too much for her... *(Looks on table.)* The pot's shy. Who didn't put in a quarter?

MURRAY. *(To OSCAR.)* You didn't.

OSCAR. *(Puts in money.)* You got a big mouth, Murray. Just for that, lend me twenty dollars.

(SPEED deals another round.)

MURRAY. I just loaned you twenty dollars ten minutes ago.

(All join in a round of betting.)

OSCAR. You loaned me *ten* dollars *twenty* minutes ago. Learn to count, pussy cat.

MURRAY. Learn to play poker, chicken licken! ...Borrow from somebody else. I keep winning my own money back.

ROY. *(To OSCAR.)* You owe everybody in the game. If you don't have it, you shouldn't play.

OSCAR. ...All right, I'm through being the nice one. You owe me six dollars apiece for the buffet.

SPEED. *(Dealing another round of cards.)* Buffet? Hot beer and two sandwiches left over from when you went to high school?

OSCAR. What do you want at a poker game, a tomato surprise? ...Murray, lend me twenty dollars or I'll call your wife and tell her you're in Central Park wearing a dress.

MURRAY. You want money, ask Felix.

OSCAR. He's not here.

MURRAY. Neither am I.

ROY. *(Gives him money.)* All right, here. You're on the books for another twenty.

OSCAR. How many times are you gonna keep saying it? *(Takes money.)*

MURRAY. When are you gonna call Felix?

OSCAR. When are we gonna play poker?

MURRAY. Aren't you even worried? It's the first game he's missed in over two years.

OSCAR. The record is fifteen years set by Lou Gehrig in 1939! ...I'll call! I'll call!

ROY. How can you be so lazy?

(The phone rings.)

OSCAR. *(Throwing cards in.)* Call me irresponsible, I'm funny that way. *(Goes to phone.)*

SPEED. Pair of sixes...

VINNIE. Three deuces...

SPEED. *(Throws up hands in despair.)* This is my last week. I get all the aggravation I need at home.

(OSCAR picks up phone.)

OSCAR. Hello! Oscar the Poker Player!

VINNIE. *(To OSCAR.)* If it's my wife tell her I'm leaving at twelve.