



A TOMATO CAN'T GROW IN THE BRONX

by Gary Morgenstein

A SMITH SCRIPT

This script is protected by copyright laws.
No performance of this script – IN ANY MEDIA – may be undertaken without payment of the
appropriate fee and obtaining a licence.

For further information, please contact SMITH SCRIPTS at info@smithscripts.co.uk

A TOMATO CAN'T GROW IN THE BRONX

by

GARY MORGENSTEIN

CHARACTERS:

ELLIOT ABRAMS, a fifteen-year-old boy
SAMMY ABRAMS, father, forty years old
ELEANOR ABRAMS, mother late thirties
HARRY SIMMS, grandfather, early sixties
GLADYS SIMMS, grandmother, early sixties
MADELINE KRAMER, realtor, mid-twenties

**The Play takes place in the Bronx, New York (Act One) and Long Island (Act Two)
June 1968**

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

ACT ONE:

Scene One: Abrams's apartment, late afternoon

Scene Two: Simms's apartments, late afternoon; Abrams's apartment, early evening

ACT TWO:

Scene One: A kitchen in a model home, several days later

ACT ONE, SCENE ONE

It is late afternoon in June 1968. The setting is a small, one-bedroom Bronx apartment, neat with once expensive furniture. The curtain **RISES** and the **LIGHTS FADE UP** on the **Simms apartment**. The living room features a couch covered in plastic, armchair and coffee table. Beyond that is the **Abrams' kitchen**, presently dark.

There are loud, tumultuous voices **Off**. From Right **HARRY SIMMS**, handsome and charismatic in his 60s, drags his daughter **ELEANOR ABRAMS**, pretty in her late 30s. She is on the verge of fainting. Trailing is his grandson **ELLIOT ABRAMS**, 15 years old, holding a handkerchief pressed against his forehead and sipping from a can of soda.

ELLIOT

Look, Mom. Bleeding's almost stopped.

HARRY

(As Eleanor sags in a near faint)

Jumping Jesus Christ, not again.

GLADYS SIMMS, early 60s, limps in and heads toward Elliot.

GLADYS

I said sit with me in the beauty parlor. They got magazines. A new fan. But no, you're Columbus.

ELLIOT

Burning hair makes me nauseous.

ELEANOR

Daddy, vomiting means a concussion.

GLADYS

I'd better get my pot.

HARRY

(Into phone)

Tell Dr. Schultz it's Harry Simms.

If you're cooking, make me coffee, Gladys.

GLADYS

Perk or Sanka?

HARRY

What's easier?

GLADYS

Sanka.

HARRY

Perk, then.

ELEANOR

What were you doing on Clay Avenue, Elliot?

ELLIOT

I like their pizza.

GLADYS

Schvartzer pizza.

ELLIOT

Grandma, you sound like George Wallace.

HARRY

Hey, not even as a joke.

(Into phone)

Ain't Ellie this time. Elliot got mugged. Called hysterical.

ELLIOT

Did not.

ELEANOR

Stop yelling, you'll hemorrhage.

HARRY

Do you hear this nuthouse? Yeah. Thanks.

(Hangs up, Eleanor waits)

Doesn't think it sounds bad. But said we should take him to the hospital for X-rays.

ELEANOR

Oh God, Elliot'll be put in a ward with Puerto Ricans.

HARRY

I hope you're happy what you're doing to your mother.

ELEANOR

Why didn't you just give him your money? Why? Why?

ELLIOT

I was hungry. I was hungry.

HARRY

For once, the boy did the right thing.

We Jews don't run anymore. I been living in this neighborhood for 35 years and no one's chasing me out.

GLADYS

Do you feel retarded, Elliot?

ELEANOR

Why are you asking him a question like that?

GLADYS

Once on *Ben Casey*, a smart boy got hit inna head with a rock. Wakes up, could only grunt. Took Vince Edwards five hours of surgery to fix him.

HARRY

Maybe if the child ever had a friend.
All day long he talks into that stick.

ELLIOT

(Pulls out wooden 'microphone')

This is a microphone.

HARRY

And I'm Ho Chi Minh.

ELLIOT

Getting warmer...

HARRY

(Into phone)

Lieutenant Connelly, please. Harry Simms.

SAMMY ABRAMS rushes in Right. He is early 40s, wearing wallpaper-paste speckled clothing. Eleanor begins crying. Sammy comforts her. Elliot waves from the couch

HARRY (cont'd)

Where the hell were you?

SAMMY

Jackson Heights.

HARRY

You was supposed to do the kitchen on Tremont Avenue.

SAMMY

I think that's tomorrow, Dad.

HARRY

No, today, Sammy. Today.

GLADYS

What're you hocking about a job when Elliot might be having brain surgery?

SAMMY

Surgery?

HARRY

Depends on the X-rays.

ELEANOR

Sammy, look at him and say he'll be okay.

SAMMY

(Examines Elliot, Fake German accent)

Vell vut do ve have here? Und a nose. Und an ear.
Und vee got a bandage...Und a bissel of blood.

ELEANOR

Will there be a scar?

SAMMY

If the girls get that close, he ain't got nothing to worry about.

HARRY

(Into phone)

...need your help. Some kid on Clay jumped my grandson.

SAMMY

I'll break his skull, Cookie, don't worry.

HARRY

Stay cool, Sammy. I got everything under control.

(Into phone)

Thanks, buddy. Your Scotch is on the way.

SAMMY

I thought you guys had a baseball game.

GLADYS

I made it later to go to the beauty parlor.

ELEANOR

That's why this happened?

ELLIOT

Don't blame Grandma. She's the coach.

GLADYS

I needed a touch up.

HARRY

I don't see a difference.

GLADYS

Like you would notice.

ELEANOR

So you let him roam the Bronx alone?

GLADYS

Excuse me, darling. What was your day? Sleeping on the couch or cleaning the toilet 28 times?

ELEANOR

I was doing the laundry.

ELLIOT

Mom, don't tell me you forgot to pick up my new sneakers.

SAMMY

When does she got time with you in trouble with gangs on Clay Avenue?

GLADYS

Sammelah, he likes the colored pizza there.

SAMMY

He got good Jew pizza right down the block.

ELLIOT

Tony's charges a nickel more a slice.

HARRY

Jumping Jesus Christ, you almost get killed to save a nickel? All right, let's get this X-ray over with.

GLADYS

What do I do with the coffee? It's Chock Full O' Nuts.

HARRY

Bring it.

GLADYS

I also gotta seeded rye if anyone wants.

SAMMY

Good, I'm starving.

ELEANOR

I need cigarettes.

HARRY

We'll stop at Olinsky's.

GLADYS

Whose car we taking?

HARRY

What's it matter?

GLADYS

Sammy's windows don't roll up all the way so
the wind blows my hair.

SAMMY

I'm almost on empty from going to Queens.

HARRY

Big surprise. We'll take mine.

The adults exit, except for **Elliot**, who watches in amazement.

ELLIOT

And so our brave pioneers head west across the
Rocky Mountains...

HARRY/OFF

Jumping Jesus Christ, who was supposed to bring
Elliot?

GLADYS/OFF

Elliot!

Lights Fade Out. It is evening, two hours later. Lights Fade In Right on the Fire Escape off
the Abrams' apartment. **Eleanor** sits on a pillow, smoking, **Sammy** by her side.

SAMMY

The place's gone to hell inna handbasket.
Joey Patrick got jumped last week.

ELEANOR

You didn't tell me.

SAMMY

Because I knew you'd be upset. Six AM, opening the
the store. Two Spanish kids with knives.

ELEANOR

Knives. God. Elliot could've been stabbed. He could be dead.
And we'd be making plans for his funeral.

SAMMY

That's why we gotta get outta here once and for all. Take some more wine.

(Pours her wine)

Grapes are good for you. Woman said it's from Lisbon. That's in Spain, right?

ELEANOR

Portugal, honey. But they're near each other.

SAMMY

Same Spanish. Joey's got a sign in the window now, 'Se Habla Espanol.' Soon we'll be the last Jews in the Bronx.

ELEANOR

Don't start again. Elliot had no business in a Negro neighborhood.

SAMMY

Kid's 15, what happens when he dates?

ELEANOR

There are plenty of nice girls on the block.

SAMMY

Where? I only see old Jews and Puerto Ricans.

ELEANOR

He's fine if he stays near the building.

SAMMY

Joey's candy store is two blocks away. Next time we're not so lucky.

(As Eleanor pours more wine)

My Uncle Jimmy said there's a new development going up by him.

Police sirens roar past. **Eleanor** flinches. **Sammy** takes her hand.

SAMMY (cont'd)

Your nerves wouldn't be jangled from hearing that crap all night. Think, Ellie. Our own patio, under the moon and stars with crickets. Be like that weekend we went to the Concord.

ELEANOR

That was so relaxing.

SAMMY

And fun.

ELEANOR

And where will we get the money for this house with the patio?

SAMMY

Uncle Jimmy. Even he agrees it's a gold mine out there. My own business. A house. My last chance to do something, Ellie.

ELEANOR

You're only 40.

SAMMY

And the next birthday I'm 65. Like your parents. You want to end up like them, trapped in the Bronx?

ELEANOR

It's not so bad.

SAMMY

Will be if our son's murdered.

ELEANOR

That's not fair.

SAMMY

I know.

ELEANOR

Daddy would kill me if we went to your family.

SAMMY

Then Harry. I was gonna talk to him tomorrow on a break. Just us guys, shooting the breeze.

ELEANOR

Sammy, really. You know better than to come right out and ask Daddy. There's a right way and a right time.

SAMMY

And you got the magic password. Abra, kadabra...

ELEANOR

Not always.

SAMMY

When you really want something, you do.

ELEANOR

(Looks along fire escape)

Your tomato plants look terrible.

SAMMY

Nah, I think I saw life in them.

ELEANOR

Sammy, they're dead.

SAMMY

(Stands, little wobbly, goes to plants)

Plants, is you dead?

(Little voice)

No, we not, Uncle Sammy.

(Normal voice)

How's about a song?

ELEANOR

(Rising, also wobbly)

It's after twelve.

SAMMY

Shank of the evening.

(Sings)

"When Irish eyes are smiling..."

ELEANOR

Ssh. You'll wake Daddy.

SAMMY

Daddy who? Daddy-o?

ELEANOR

I think I'm drunk.

SAMMY

Not my little valedictorian.

(Hugs her tightly)

So you'll ask him?

Lights Fade Out. End of **Scene One**.