

Cast (9 actors: 6 male, 3 female, to play multiple roles)

Even Steven Nguyen	a ten-year-old Asian-American boy
William	an African-American boy, Even's friend
Norther	a radical
Brown	a soldier
Roy	a veteran mover
Heinz	a stuffed dog
Commander	an army commander
Eddie	a boy, Even's friend
Steponik	a soldier
Medic #2	
Joey	a ten-year-old American boy(ages to 20)
Quang Cuong	a ten-year-old Asian boy
Lee	a mover
Xenon	a scientist-chef
Corey	a girl, Even's friend
Wilkins	a soldier
Medic #1	
New Girl	
Grandma Olive	a woman in her early-60's
Papyrus	an artist-philosopher
Olivia	a teenage activist (ages to 20)

Time

The present, and thirty-five years in the past.

Place

An old home in a small city; a transformed sewer; a land ten-thousand miles across the ocean.

Let's hop, skip, jump
And take a walk
To heaven's gate
Uncle and aunt
Let me go back;
Goat go to school;
Toad stay at home;
Hen scratch the trash.
Let's dip and bow
Then all fall down.

*From the Vietnamese
"Singing of the Troubadour"*

SCENE ONE : Home

*(The darkened basement of an older house. We see a worn couch, a chair covered with a bed sheet, a stack of boxes. A staircase leading to a second level serves later in this scene as Even's bedroom.
EDDIE trains a lamp on COREY; WILLIAM approaches.)*

WILLIAM

This is your final warning. You must relinquish or prepare to suffer the consequences.

EDDIE

You better do what he says.

COREY

I'm not going to cave like you did, Eddie!

WILLIAM

What about this?

(He pulls a book from a box.)

Your secret journal, my friend. The very journal that contains the names and locations of each participant in your secret organization! A vital document, I'd say.

COREY

How did you find that?

(EVEN enters, silently making his way on hands and knees.)

WILLIAM

I will dispatch this information to headquarters immediately unless you comply.

COREY

No way!

WILLIAM

Do as I say or suffer slowly.

(The lamp light begins to flicker.)

EDDIE

Uh oh...

COREY

Ha! You're losing power.

WILLIAM

What's going on back there?

(An unseen EVEN manipulates a stuffed dog, speaking in a stuffed dog voice.)

EVEN

It is I, super-Heinz, bravest dog on the planet. I rescue the desperate, serve the good and true, and eat the enemy!

(The stuffed dog jumps onto a wooden box; Even advances a toy soldier, speaking in a toy soldier voice.)

Ha ha! You're nothing but a toy mutt, you couldn't hurt a flea!

(The dog eats the soldier.)

Oh no, oh no-- he swallowed the Commander! The Commander is in Heinz!

(The dog burps.)

WILLIAM

You're supposed to be manning the entrance, Even!

(EVEN leaps up onto the back of the couch, holding a flashlight aloft like a torch.)

EVEN

That was before I became a spy for the other side.

COREY

An infiltrator!

EVEN

Prepare to be liberated!

EDDIE

Yeah!

WILLIAM

Traitor! You'll never get away with it. This place is surrounded my troops will--

EVEN

Your troops are tied up at the moment.

(He unloads a bag of shoes onto the floor.)

By their feet!

WILLIAM

No way!

EVEN

Way. I stand before you on this Great Wall in righteous victory!

EDDIE

Even, behind you--

(COREY has freed herself and makes shooting sounds as she hurls pillows at Even.)

EVEN

I try to liberate you and you try to kill me?

COREY

Me and Eddie don't want your stupid liberation!

EVEN

Cool it or I'll make a sausage out of you.

COREY

We can lead ourselves, right Eddie?

EDDIE

I think it would be okay if Even led us.

COREY

Eddie.

EVEN

Sausages it is!

(He yanks the sheet off the couch and wraps it around her.)

COREY

Hey, cut it out-- get William, not me!

*(Someone yanks the lamp cord. There is a great scrambling in the near-dark, then silence.
Two movers, ROY and LEE, enter.)*

ROY

What in Spike's name-?

LEE

Why is it so dark in here?

ROY

The switch, Lee.

LEE

What about it?

ROY

Turn it ON.

(LEE snaps the light on: EDDIE and WILLIAM are trapped under the cushions on the couch. COREY is tied up with the sheet. EVEN sits on a chair, calmly reading.)

EVEN

Hello.

ROY

What are you kids up to?

COREY/WILLIAM/EDDIE/EVEN

Nothing/ Just reading/ Who, us?/ What do you mean?

(GRANDMA enters.)

GRANDMA

Untie your friends, Even.

EVEN

Okay, grandma.

GRANDMA

Everything in here goes on the truck.

LEE

Everything?

GRANDMA

Except the kids.

ROY

No problem, we'll load it right up.

LEE

Can I just say you have a lot of stuff?

GRANDMA

We've lived a lot of lives in this old house.

LEE

How long have you--

ROY

Oh Lee? Could you button it and give me a hand with this sofa?

LEE

Oh my back...

ROY

Yeah, yeah. Okay you kids, move it.

LEE

What do you say we start with something smaller, Roy?

(He lifts an old wooden box.)

How 'bout this weird old box?

GRANDMA

That weird old box can stay.

EVEN

Why is there a lock on it?

GRANDMA

Never mind.

EVEN

I could put all sorts of stuff in it. Why aren't we bringing it to our new house?

GRANDMA

We've got too many things to move as it is. It belongs with this house.

EVEN

But Grandma--

GRANDMA

Leave that box where it is.

(SHE exits up the stairs. ROY lifts one end of the sofa.)

ROY

Over heere, Lee. Grab the other end of this thing.

LEE

Oh my achin'...

ROY

One, two, heave--

LEE

Hooo-boy!

COREY

They're taking our Great Wall.

EVEN(fierce whisper)

Listen up: Are we together?

(The kids give the special hand signal.)
Prepare for covert action. Arm yourselves.
*(EVEN digs into a box and pulls out several pairs of socks
which he tosses to COREY, who tosses them to the others.)*

ROY
Hold your end steady, Lee. I'll come around.

EVEN(whispering)
Lieutenant, request report.

COREY(whispering)
Reporting, sir. All troops armed with M-34 incendiary fragmentation grenades.

EVEN
Well done. Deploy soldiers and prepare for immediate ambush.

(They scatter across the room.)

ROY
Heads up! Watch the doorway--

LEE
Got it. Uh, Roy...

ROY
What do you want now, a backrub?

LEE
I think we're about to get socked, Roy.

ROY
What are you talking now?

EVEN(whispering)
Detonate!

(They mock pulling the rings from their sock-grenades.)

ROY
You're gonna hit that wall, Lee-- look out.

LEE
I'm looking.

EVEN
Disperse grenades!

(They pelt the movers with socks.)

ROY
What in blue blazes-?!

EVEN
Cover me, Eddie!

EDDIE
AAAHHH!

(EVEN dashes across the room.)

ROY
You kids knock it off right now!

EVEN/ COREY/WILLIAM/EDDIE
Get em!/ Direct hit!/ Bullseye!/ Yahoo!, etc.

ROY
Why you little--

EVEN
Mission accomplished!

ROY
I could teach you kids something about fighting!

EDDIE
I think we made the enemy mad.

EVEN
Retreat to safety, retreat to safety!

(ROY grabs EVEN.)

ROY
What's your name, kid?

EVEN
Even Steven Nguyen.

ROY
Let me educate you, Even Steven Nguyen: In real war there's no "safe".

EVEN
I know about war, I've seen it--

ROY

On television? You don't know nothin', kid, you're an armchair kamikazee.

EVEN

My grandfather fought in The War!

ROY

I was there. Got a leg full of metal trinkets to prove it.

LEE

He's just a kid, Roy.

ROY

I don't need any lectures from a...

LEE

Say it. A "coward"? Just 'cause I didn't go?

ROY

You ran away.

LEE

I took a stand.

ROY

A lot of people went to that war before you and after you, mister. It was a good fight!

LEE

We shouldn't fight.

ROY

We have to protect our interests! That's how the world works.

LEE

I mean we shouldn't fight, Roy.

ROY

Oh.

WILLIAM

Excuse me mister?

ROY

What is it, kid?

WILLIAM

Can you walk the dog?

ROY

Walk the-- what dog?

(WILLIAM heaves the stuffed dog at ROY.)

Hey, watch it. Grab him, Lee!

(LEE lunges for WILLIAM, who dodges him.)

WILLIAM

Run Even!

LEE

Why you little-!

ROY

He's just a kid.

(ROY tosses the stuffed dog onto the wooden box, and motions to Lee to continue working.)

EDDIE

Let's get out of here!

(They run for the stairs; EVEN turns back.)

EVEN

I can't leave Heinz.

WILLIAM

If you go back in you're a gonner!

EVEN

I've gotta save him.

(He makes his way past the movers, grabs the stuffed dog, and runs up the stairs.)

Thanks for looking after my dog, mister!

ROY

You better run! You kids don't know nothin' about fighting. I WAS THERE! I WAS RIGHT THERE!

(The kids laugh and do the secret hand signal as they enter Even's room. The room is empty except for an open box of knick-knacks and a sleeping bag.)

EVEN

Outstanding ambush!

WILLIAM

Total surprise, they didn't have a chance!

COREY

We creamed 'em!

EDDIE

What about when William threw that old stuffed dog at that one guy!

EVEN

Good old Heinz.

WILLIAM

'Stealth Special Force Bombers destroy the enemy!

(EVEN grabs a camera from the open box.)

EVEN

War correspondent Even Steve Nguyen captures the historic moment on film.
K-chuu, k-chuu, k-chuu!

WILLIAM

This is my best side.

EVEN

K-chuu!

(WILLIAM changes poses.)

WILLIAM

So's this.

COREY

This doesn't even look like your room, anymore.

EVEN

My new room is ten times as big.

COREY

Lucky. I have to share with my weirdo sister.

EDDIE

Are you ever going to get a real dog?

EVEN

I'm going to get ten real dogs.

*(WILLIAM removes a small black
and white photo from the box.)*

WILLIAM

Hey Even-- who's this guy in the picture?

EVEN

That's my Grandpa Olive. I never met him, he went off to the war before I was born.

COREY

He looks too young to go to a war.

EDDIE

Do you miss him?

WILLIAM

That's a crazy-head question, you don't miss someone you never knew. Right Even?

(They all look at Even)

EVEN

I almost forgot!

(He dives into his sleeping bag, and comes up bearing a candy bar.)

WILLIAM/COREY/EDDIE

Chocolate.

EVEN

Supplies are getting low. We'll have to ration.

(Even breaks the bar into pieces, then divvies it out; He considers giving a piece to the stuffed dog.)

Sorry Heinz. Chocolate makes your fur fall out.

(They solemnly consider their rations, look at one another, then gulp the chocolate down all at once.)

WILLIAM

Dee-licious.

COREY

You guys?

(COREY looks at WILLIAM and EDDIE. They nod.)

So anyway, we each got you a going-away present, Even.

(She hands him a tangerine.)

I picked this tangerine off old man Meyer's tree. Whatever.

EVEN

He has the best ones. Thanks, Corey.

(WILLIAM hands over a pair of yellow shoe laces.)

WILLIAM

These glow laces are for good for all sorts of stuff. And they glow.

EVEN

They're cool, William.

(They look at EDDIE.)

EDDIE

I made something for you, Even. Actually, it's a rock.

(He opens his fist to reveal a small, white stone.)

EVEN

Gee... Thanks, Eddie.

EDDIE

It's actual quartz. You can add it to your collection.

(A pause, then:)

COREY

I better get home or my mom will have the Fifty-first Airborn out looking for me.

WILLIAM

Yeah me too.

EDDIE

Me three.

(They rise and salute; EVEN salutes back.)

EVEN

Confirmed.

(He goes to the window seat and opens it, removing a long, heavy knotted rope, which is anchored to the inside of the window seat. He tosses it out the window; WILLIAM gives Even the secret handshake.)

WILLIAM

Gimme five.

(He slaps EVEN's hand, then straddles the rope.)

Fall out, troops!

(He drops out of sight.)

COREY

So long, Even. I'm going to miss you. Whatever.

(She drops out of sight. EDDIE goes to the window.)

EDDIE

I know you don't have a rock collection.

EVEN

I was going to start one. I swear.

EDDIE

I hope you like your new house. And your new school. And all your new friends.

EVEN

It's going to be great...

EDDIE

Maybe I'll ride my bike over.

EVEN

I think it's kind of far.

EDDIE

It's got a flat anyway.

COREY/WILLIAM(offstage)

COME ON EDDIE!

EDDIE

You're so lucky you get to go someplace new.

(He looks down at the rope.)

I sure wish you had a ladder.

(He carefully climbs down the rope and drops out of sight.)

WILLIAM/COREY/EDDIE

DON'T FORGET US, EVEN!

EVEN

I won't, I promise!

(He remains, gazing out the window. GRANDMA enters with a bowl of ice cream; she watches him.)

GRANDMA

Any UFOs?

EVEN

Funny, grandma.

GRANDMA

I brought you some ice cream.

EVEN

I'm not hungry.

GRANDMA

You don't need to be hungry to eat ice cream.

(She spills some ice cream onto her shoe.)

Oops. More for my shoe.

(pause)

You'd be surprised what you see if you stand at that window long enough.

EVEN

I've looked out this window a thousand times. I've never seen any UFO's.

GRANDMA

Maybe you weren't looking right. Were you just looking out, or did you look inside out?

EVEN

Inside out?

GRANDMA

Or backwards, or underneath?

EVEN

Underneath what?

GRANDMA

It's a perspective. You're only going to see things differently when you change the way you look. What have we got here?

(She stands next to him at the window.)

EVEN

Just houses.

GRANDMA

Isn't that interesting.

EVEN

Not really.

(She bends sideways and looks out the window.)

GRANDMA

I see the Morales' house stacked onto the Rollins' house which is sitting on old man Meyer's house. Hope there's no strong winds tonight, the whole stack is liable to blow over. Do you see that cat?

(EVEN bends sideways.)

EVEN

It looks like it's hanging from the sidewalk!

GRANDMA

If it's not clever it'll drop right onto the stars.

EVEN

Look at the Morales' car in front of that big sycamore tree.

GRANDMA

The tree is BLOOMING the car! Fascinating.

EVEN

I don't want to move to a new house, Grandma. I like it here.

GRANDMA

You think that now. When we get settled in you'll forget.

EVEN

I don't want to forget. Why do we have to leave?

GRANDMA

This house doesn't fit anymore. It's got too many memories.

EVEN

What if grandpa comes back and we've moved away?
(pause)

GRANDMA

I don't think he's coming back, E.

EVEN

But you don't know for sure. The government said he was Unaccounted For.
They just couldn't find him.

GRANDMA

They only say that.

EVEN

You said it was far away, but I found it in the Atlas.
(He takes an Atlas out of the box.)

Here--

EVEN

'Ten thousand miles across the ocean'.

GRANDMA

Ten thousand miles across the ocean.

GRANDMA

It's been a long time since The War.

EVEN

Maybe he got injured. Maybe he has amnesia. Maybe--

GRANDMA

Don't get your hopes wrong, E.

EVEN

But it's possible, isn't it?

GRANDMA

It's possible.

EVEN

What if he finally came home and we weren't here? Just strangers living in his house. He wouldn't know who to look for. He was at the war when mom was born, and he doesn't even know about me.

Do you think Grandpa would come back if he knew about me?

GRANDMA

I know he would.

(She looks at the old photo.)

EVEN

Do you think he misses us?

(She puts the photo back in the box.)

GRANDMA

No more war stories.

EVEN

Do you still miss him?

GRANDMA

Everyday, for years.

EVEN

Me too. Even if I never knew him.

GRANDMA

We'll leave our new address, in case he shows up. Okay you, foot check!

(EVEN takes off his shoes and socks and wiggles his feet.)

Let's see what you've been up to all day...I see you've been eating chocolate
And you're starting a rock collection.

EVEN

What else do you see?

GRANDMA

That's enough for tonight.

EVEN

How do you do that?

GRANDMA

One day I'll show you. Now into bed.

(He crawls into the sleeping bag. She tucks the dog in with him.)

Don't forget to pack Heinz in the morning.

*(She does a little gesture, a goodnight ritual,
then turns to go.)*

EVEN(softly)

Grandma?

GRANDMA

You're talking in your sleep.

EVEN

Where did that old wooden box come from?

(pause)

GRANDMA

It was your grandfather's.

EVEN

He built it, didn't he?

GRANDMA

It's staying, E.

EVEN

Do you have the key for it?

GRANDMA

I lost it. A long time ago.

EVEN

What's inside of it?

GRANDMA

This is not a bedtime story, E. This is another war story.

EVEN

Have you ever been to a war?

GRANDMA

Just once. That was enough for a lifetime. And now, I want to put all those things that happened over there behind me. Put them in that old wooden box downstairs and leave them in this house. It's time to move on.

(She repeats the goodnight gesture.)

Give the war a rest, Even. Sleep.

(He repeats the gesture to her.)

EVEN

'Night, grandma.

(GRANDMA exits. He picks up the stuffed dog.)

Maybe you and me could live here, Heinz. This would be our house. Mom and dad and grandma could visit and bring us dinner and stuff. And we would wait for grandpa.

(He crawls out of his sleeping bag, tucking the stuffed dog in, then sneaks downstairs to where the wooden box sits. He examines the box, tries unsuccessfully to open it, then he carries the box up to his room. As he enters, JOEY appears, carrying a duffel bag.)

What do you think you're doing in my room?

JOEY

My name is Joseph, but you can call me Joey. This is my room.

EVEN

This is my room!

JOEY

Are you the kid who lives here now?

EVEN

That's right. Six-twenty-three Oakdale Drive.

JOEY

I'm the kid who's moving in. I want to see where all my stuff is going to go.

EVEN

You can't just come in here!

JOEY

It's kind of small.

EVEN

It's big enough. Look, this is my room and no one is allowed in here except my best friends.

JOEY

It's only yours until midnight. My family takes possession at twelve-oh-one.

EVEN

You better get out of here--

JOEY

Make me.

EVEN

I'll fight you!

JOEY

Oh yeah?

(They circle each other; then Joey stops.)

I like my old room better. Plus...I don't know how to fight.

EVEN

Want me to teach you?

JOEY

No thanks.

(pause)

Okay.

EVEN

Come at me.

(JOEY walks towards EVEN; Even puts his fists up in a sparring position and jabs at him.)

Block me, Joey, block me!

(JOEY tries, darting about and blocking Even as though swatting at flies. The sparring is quickly reduced to a laughing slap-fight between the two boys.)

JOEY(breathless)

How was that?

EVEN

We're going to have to work on your strategy.

JOEY

Okay.

EVEN

What have you got in that bag?

JOEY
Marbles.

EVEN
I collect rocks.

JOEY
What kind?

EVEN
Well, just one.

JOEY
Can I see it?

EVEN
Can I see those marbles?
(pause)

JOEY
Okay.
(EVEN sets the quartz out. JOEY dumps the marbles.)

EVEN
Those rock.

JOEY
Actually they're glass.
(He shows off a boldly colored marble.)
This is Cat's Eye. It's my favorite one. It's a shooter. You can rub it for good luck.

EVEN
This is my best one.
(He holds out the quartz.)

JOEY
Want to trade?

EVEN
Are you crazy? One of my best friends gave this to me.
(pause)
Okay.

(They trade.)

JOEY
How come you're moving away?

EVEN
My mom says the schools are better there.

JOEY

That's what my mom said.

EVEN

I guess other school's are always better than the one you're at.

JOEY

I don't want to go to a new school.

EVEN

You have to make all new friends.

JOEY

The teachers mess your name up.

EVEN

You don't get picked for teams just because you're new.

JOEY

I don't get picked for teams and I've been going there since first grade.
What's your name?

EVEN

Even Steven Nguyen.

JOEY

Even? Why did they name you that?

EVEN

I've got both sides in me.

JOEY

Both sides of what?

(EVEN picks up the photo of Grandpa.)

Is that your dad? He doesn't look like you.

EVEN

That's my grandfather at The War.

JOEY

Flying a kite? The war must be fun.
That's a neat old box.

EVEN

My grandfather built it.

JOEY

Do you think he could teach me to build things?

EVEN

He could if he were here.

JOEY

Where is he?

EVEN

I wish I knew.

JOEY

I could store all my records in there.

EVEN

Records are totally historic. No one except my grandma plays records anymore.
(He goes to the window and peers out, sideways.)

JOEY

What are you doing that for?

EVEN

I'm changing my perspective. It's a different way of seeing.

*(JOEY joins him at the window; a faint but steady
beat begins, intensifying as it approaches.
It is the sound of marching.)*

JOEY

Look-- soldiers!

EVEN

What are soldiers doing here?

JOEY

Don't ask me, it's your neighborhood.

EVEN

There are hundreds of them.

JOEY

Thousands!

(EVEN goes to the window and tosses the rope out.)

What are you doing?

EVEN

Escaping. Those soldiers might know where my grandfather is. I have to find out about him.

JOEY

What about your parents?

EVEN

They don't have to know, they'll only worry. We just have to make sure to be back by morning.

JOEY

"We"?

EVEN

You said you wanted him to teach you to be a carpenter.

JOEY

Yeah, but...

EVEN

Bring the picture, Joey.

JOEY

Why?

EVEN

So we know him when we see him.

JOEY

But I don't--

EVEN

You want to help me find him, don't you?

JOEY

Do you want to be best friends?

(pause)

EVEN

Okay.

(JOEY picks up the photo.)

JOEY

I hope nobody asks what we're doing because I can't lie. I blink.

EVEN

You won't have to lie. We'll be back before anyone knows. Come on!

(He grabs the rope and jumps up onto the window sill.)

JOEY

When I learn how, I'm going to build you a real ladder.

EVEN

That's great, Joey.

(EVEN drops out of sight.)

JOEY

Jeepers creepers.

(JOEY grabs the rope, holds his breath, and drops out of sight. Immediately there is a rustling in Even's sleeping bag.

An agitated, muffled voice is heard and HEINZ pops his scruffy head out of the bag.

**Heinz's costume should be suggestive: maybe army green khakis, furry gloves, a bandana with ears. He is, after all, a stuffed dog, as opposed to a "real dog" come to life.)*

HEINZ

PHHHRMPPMMPFFF...Get out of my way, I gotta go after my master, I gotta find him and protect him and stuff like that!

(He squirms out of the sleeping bag.)

His friends think I'm just a 'stupid old stuffed dog', but I'm rrruff. I'm tough. And I'm just as good as a real dog!

(He sniffs, following a trail to the window, then sniffs the same trail back to the bag and crawls inside.)

BRRRGGMPPHMMFFTTT...can't believe how dark it is in here!

(He emerges from the bag with the remains of Even's candy bar in his mouth; tears of joy. He unwraps it, humming a happy tune, about to take a huge bite.)

What do you think you're doing? Dogs don't eat chocolate, it makes their fur fall out! Put the candy down, Heinz.

(He does.)

Now: focus. You've got to protect your master. That's what dogs do. You have to devise a logical strategy. Okay, first you're gonna go find Even. Then you're gonna bring him back home before his parents find out. Then you're gonna eat this chocolate bar 'cause I don't care if my fur falls out it would taste really really good!

(He paws through the open box and pulls out the atlas.)

I'll need this atlas.

(He begins removing the things named from the box:)

And this camera. And this hat, I'll need this hat.

(He fills a backpack and puts the hat on. He looks like a tourist.)

I'm rrruff!

(He boldly goes to the window.)

I'm tough!

(He looks out the window, pauses, then:)
And I'm going to take the stairs.
(He runs down the stairs and exits.)

SCENE TWO: On The Road

An open space, outside. Lights come up under the sound of music and marching. EVEN and JOEY enter as the marching fades.)

EVEN
That many soldiers couldn't just disappear, Joey. They have to be around here somewhere.

JOEY
Maybe we should go back.

EVEN
We can't go back yet, we've hardly been gone.

JOEY
I found a quarter!

EVEN
Heads we keep going, tails we go back home.

(JOEY tosses the coin; it lands near Even.)

JOEY
I guess we're going back.

EVEN
One more try.

(As EVEN bends to pick the quarter up, a hand shoots up through the floor and begins an up and down sawing motion, describing a circle around Even. The "sawing" is vocalized.)

JOEY
Don't move, Even...

(The hand pauses, then, suddenly, grabs EVEN by the ankle.)

EVEN
Let me go!

NORTHER(unseen)
GET OFF MY MANHOLE, MAN.

EVEN
I can't until you let go of me!

NORTHER
IF I LET GO OF YOU, HOW DO I KNOW YOU'LL GET OFF THE MANHOLE?

EVEN
I just will!

NORTHER
YOU WANT ME TO TRUST YOU?

EVEN
Yes.
(pause)

NORTHER
I'M HIP.

(The hand releases EVEN with a dramatic gesture, then disappears. Even jumps off as the hand pushes the lid off the hole. Two feet in colorful shoes pop out.)

Peek a boo!

(NORTHER pops his head out, then hoists himself up as though he were resting over the manhole. He appears to be very short.)

EVEN
Who are you?

NORTHER
I'm Norther, citizen of The Underneath.

JOEY
Why are you down there?

NORTHER
I have a right to be here!

JOEY
I was just asking.

NORTHER
What are you cats doing here?

EVEN
We found a quarter.

NORTHER

Oh yeah? That might be mine. Who's on the front?

EVEN

George Washington.

NORTHER

Is there an eagle on the back?

EVEN

Yes.

NORTHER

Yep, sounds exactly like the one I just lost. If you don't mind--

(He reaches his foot out for the quarter. EVEN quickly steps forward, pinning his foot.)

That hurt!

EVEN

It's Joey's, he saw it first!

NORTHER

Finder's keeper's.

EVEN

You can't just take it.

NORTHER

I have rights, you know!

EVEN

So does Joey!

(They engage in a foot-fight over the quarter, then NORTHER flicks his shoes off and we see that they are actually on his hands. He grabs the money and pockets it, standing up fully now in the manhole, where he was merely squatting before.)

NORTHER

Sure he has rights, but I have the quarter!

(EVEN grabs Norther's shoes.)

EVEN

And I have your *shoes*.

NORTHER

Those are my special shoes, give 'em back!

EVEN

Give him his quarter.

NORTHER

Ownership is theft, man.

EVEN

Did you need some new shoes, Joey?

JOEY

Sure!

(EVEN tosses the shoes to JOEY.)

NORTHER

You don't get it, you gotta let me have those!

EVEN

Give Joey the quarter or he's going to toss your shoes into the future.

(JOEY winds up as if to throw them.)

NORTHER

Okay, okay. I was just testing you, man. Here.

*(He sets the quarter out on the ground and smiles.
JOEY hands the shoes over. Norther grabs the quarter.)*

JOEY

Hey! It's supposed to be a trade.

NORTHER

Never trust the enemy, kid. You dig?

JOEY

I dig. Let's go Even, we're not going to find anything here.

NORTHER

What are you looking for?

JOEY

None of your business.

EVEN

We're looking for my grandfather. He's a soldier and he-

(NORTHER ducks down the manhole.)

Mister Norther?

NORTHER(under)
YOU WON'T FIND ANY SOLDIERS HERE.

EVEN
Do you know where we can find them?

NORTHER
OVER THERE.

EVEN
Where?
(NORTHER pops up.)

NORTHER
What do you want from me, man?

EVEN
We thought the soldiers came this way.

NORTHER
SSSSssshhhh! The Law's everywhere and they're looking for me.

JOEY
Why?

NORTHER
Because I want to live, that's why.

JOEY
Everyone wants to live.

NORTHER
Yeah, but not everyone wants everyone to live. There's a War out there, you know. That's why we had to go under.

EVEN
What war?

NORTHER
"What war"!? Look, I can't talk about this here. I gotta go-

EVEN
Can we talk about it down there?

(NORTHER peers suspiciously at them.)

NORTHER

Are you experimental?

(EVEN and JOEY look at each other.)

EVEN

I think so.

NORTHER(quickly)

Okay, you're in. Follow me.

(He disappears down the hole.)

JOEY

I don't think this is such a great idea, Even.

EVEN

Don't be afraid.

JOEY

I didn't say I was afraid!

EVEN

He knows all about The War, Joey. He's going to help us find out where my grandfather is.

(They peer over the edge.)

JOEY

What if we get there and don't like it?

EVEN

We just climb back out.

JOEY

I mean The War. What if we don't like The War?

EVEN

Don't always worry, Joey.

(EVEN scrambles down the hole.)

JOEY

How is it down there? Even..?

EVEN(under)

IT'S COOL JOEY!

JOEY

Jeepers creepers...

(JOEY disappears down the hole. Norther's hand reaches out and replaces the lid over the hole. It falls into place with a concrete thud.)