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Memorial Day

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Memorial Day (a work in progress)

By Richard Morris

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CHARACTERS

MARY SCHULTZ, 80, widow of Josiah Schultz, who died 5 years ago. The daughter of German immigrants, her father built a successful hardware business. Highly educated for her time, smart, bold, tough—expects others to be tough as well. Married Josiah after World War I. Had a decent marriage, dominated her husband as well as her two sons and one daughter; her youngest son is deceased. Kept her family together through hard times, including the Depression. Hardworking and healthy most of her life—she's a fairly vigorous 80-year-old until her fainting spell.

In the opening garden scene, Mary wears a nice sun dress with an apron, large gardening gloves, and a big sun hat; in the nursing home, she wears a nice floral nightgown and also has a nice plain housecoat and a pair of fuzzy slippers for when she gets out of bed. In the funeral scene, she is dressed in a gaudy dress (perhaps with big flowers or a horribly femmed-up dress perhaps with lace and/or big bows), no shoes.

Special note on Mary: when Mary goes back to her earlier selves in ACT II, she must never be over-played as a caricature or stereotype of an older person mimicking a younger person—especially in her voice. In these scenes, her younger selves are sifted through the adult Mary.

Josiah Schultz, 78 at his death, husband of Mary, old style farmer in the Grant Wood tradition. Decent, quiet, dull, he suffered a stroke on his left side and never recovered from it.

FAY MILLER, proper farm wife of Herman Miller, only daughter of Mary and Josiah Schultz. Overtly dutiful, tightly reserved, keeps her anger, disappointment, and frustration buried as much as possible. She is not a hick, but a modern small-town matron, respected, high in the social pecking order; has been

sipping a lot of Chablis lately. At odds with her mother all her life.

MICHAEL MILLER, second son of Fay and Herman Miller, mid 20's, working with his family on the family farm, semi-closeted gay. His relationship with his maternal grandmother is close. She's been an oasis for him—understanding and supportive. He's listened to and been fascinated by all her stories about her childhood. His relationships with his parents and his older brother, Bert, have been difficult, strained.

BERT MILLER, first son of Fay and Herman Miller, early 30's, farmer. Ambitious, selfish, arrogant, spoiled, the favored son. He is impatient, reactive, and lacks insight or compassion beyond his own concerns.

DOCTOR NARYAN, late 40s, immigrated to the U.S. from India in his 20s; competent, decent, respected, has been taking care of people in the community for almost 17 years but is still seen as an outsider.

MAVIS BOLTEN, 92, farm wife and small restaurant owner for much of her life. As with most children from her era, educated through 6th grade. Is a tough, no-nonsense, common-sense type of person, serving here as Mary's guide in Act III. Has survived her husband, siblings, three of her children, two of her grandchildren, and all of her friends. She occupies the far bed and sleeps most of the day. She has heavy covers over her (topped by a bright afghan, provided by one of the CNAs) and keeps her back to Mary and the other characters through most of her scenes, moving very little. You can only see the top of her head. When she emerges in the hallucination scene, ACT III, she has the appearance of a 70 year old and wears a plain white night gown.

BETH HIGGS, CNA, late 30s, housewife until her two kids went to school. Strong Southern Illinois dialect. Has worked at the nursing home 10 years. Husband is an auto mechanic. She's dedicated. Likes her job; it allows her to use the nurturing skills her family doesn't need much anymore.

HARVEY JENNINGS, 72, retired mechanic, widowed twice, no kids; down-to-earth but well-mannered, well-spoken; wears neat, clean chambray or flannel work shirts, hair is always combed; working class dapper, but not prissy; a ladies' man.

SET

The stage is divided into three areas.

The center section holds the formal set, a nursing home room. Stage right is the opening garden scene and the swing scene. Stage left is bare until the funeral home scene.

The central set is a typical rural nursing home room. There are two beds. Mary's bed is in front. The beds are parallel but are not perpendicular to the front of the stage; the room--and beds--should be slanted (in regard to the front of the stage) so Mary is closer to the audience and easier to see when her bed is cranked up. A table sits between Mary's and Mavis's beds with an institutional lamp. Another stand sits to the audience side of Mary's bed--at the head--water pitcher and glass on it as called for. A wheel chair is parked by this table, a metal bedpan on the seat. There is a larger, high-backed, vinyl institutional visitor's chair at the end of the bed. Mary's robe is laid over the end of the bed; an unobtrusive waste can sits tucked to the left of the chair slightly in back. The room is worn, but clean. There should be no formal back drop, but a curtain or mobile privacy screen may be placed in back of the center set to facilitate Mary's costume changes.

Stage right in ACT 1 is a garden and should have a lot of plants. Long, low, planter boxes with a few small plants can line the front in the opening scene. These should be moved for the swing scene; larger plants can be in back for the opening scene, but also have to be moved/removed for the swing scene so as not to interfere with the actors and the movement of the swing. Some flowers/plants will be in early spring bloom; there are some bare spaces in the front planter for bulbs to be planted.

Lighting is crucial here. When characters are interacting in real time, real life, that part of the stage should be fully lit. However, when characters break out of reality and step into their collective sub-consciousness, dream, delusion/hallucination, or memory, the set lights should be lowered a little and spots should be put on the actors.

ACT ONE

(The lights are dimmed on stage left and center stage, but come up on stage right where Mary is in her garden on her knees, planting bulbs, tending her flowers/plants, a trowel stuck point down in the end of the planter. A bushel basket and a watering can sit close by. She is totally unselfconscious here, talking to plants, singing and even dancing a little.)

MARY

(talking to a few particular plants)

There, my little darlings, that should take care of you. I expect great things from you in August—just in time for the flower show at the county fair.

(shifting to bulbs; she places a few, but not all, in a long, low planter, talking sternly)

Now you guys, you really disappointed me last year. I've adjusted your soil and put you in stronger light, so you ought to do better. But I'm warning you, don't fuck with me this summer or it's off to the compost pile next fall.

(She reaches for her garden rake--lying in front of her--and uses it to help her get up, muttering)

God, that used to be easier.

(Still holding the rake, she stretches a little, then turns around to look at a low shrub setting off to the far right, down stage.)

Will you give me some magnificent flowers this year? You'd better.

(moves on to a larger, somewhat gnarled, more mature shrub)

And it looks like you survived the winter too, old friend.

(She lays down the rake and examines the leaves.)

A little more bent and gnarled maybe, but we made another one. I expect we've survived close to a hundred and sixty winters between us.

(She pulls out a few dead clumps/branches from the shrub and throws them in the basket.)

At this point, I guess that's the first thing we have to do: survive. But I have faith in you. I know you'll survive another season.

And I know I'll do my damnedest.

(spoken with determination)

I will survive.

(then she starts singing the disco anthem
and dances a little as she sings to and
among her plants getting increasingly
into the song as she sings)

(slowly at first)

I will survive

as long as I know how to love

I know I'll stay alive

(then picks up the pace)

I've got all my life to live

I've got all my love to give

(Michael enters stage right and stays at
the side of the garden set. He smiles as
he watches.)

and I'll survive

I will survive

Hey, heyyyy. (She twirls a little.)

(She sees Michael as she concludes the
song and breaks into laughter. He goes
over and gives her a kiss and a hug.)

MARY

Michael, darling, you've caught your old grannie acting the fool.

MICHAEL

From where I stand, she doesn't look old or the fool.
But where'd you learn that song?

MARY

Oh, I guess I heard it on the car radio. I stay tuned to the
disco station . . . keeps me revved up for driving. I don't
wanna end up like your father, driving 10 miles an hour below
the speed limit, pissing everybody off.

MICHAEL

With moves like that, you oughta come out and dance with me
and my friends some night.

MARY

Ach, my dancing shoes turned to stone quite a few years ago.

MIHCAEL

Ah come on. You're gonna live to be a hundred-and at full
throttle.

MARY

Sweetheart, don't confuse a short burst of energy with a way of life—although I do feel pretty good today. The sun is out; it's warm and bright—so I guess I am too.

(picking up the watering can)

Did your mother send you over to see if I was dead yet?

MICHAEL

Grandma! I came because I wanted to see you. And mom doesn't feel that way.

MARY

I wouldn't be so sure.

(She steps over to Michael and rubs his arm affectionately as she says,)

Oh I'm sorry. I don't wanna put you in the middle of our little squabble.

MICHAEL

I guess it's just that I never understood what it was all about.

MARY

To tell you the truth, I really don't know any more—and I don't think your mother does either. We just see the world differently. I think she's a pretentious, tight-assed bitch, and she sees me as a low-class, vulgar whore.

MICHAEL

Grandma!

MARY

We're like turnips and pudding; there just isn't any way to put the two together.

Oh, we can be civil most days, but that's as much as we can hope for.

But let's not talk about all that. Help me finish up with these bulbs, and we can visit a bit.

(They both get down behind the planter bed, and she begins to plant bulbs; he uses the trowel.)

So, what's new with you?

MICHAEL

The corn's all planted; it's too early to start beans. But you probably know that.

MARY

Yes. (resigned) The crops and the weather; two subjects your mother and I can safely talk about—well . . . along with who's sick and who's dying. So I guess that makes four topics we can discuss.

MICHAEL

. . . which probably adds up to the sum total of excitement in Altamont anyway. Not much special or different ever seems to go on in a small town.

MARY

Oh really? I think lots goes on in a small town—it's just that we're all too genteel to talk about it.

Quite a few years ago, your grandfather and I saw this movie down at the Old Main Cinema, *Peyton Place*—with Lana Turner—she was so beautiful and sophisticated, but deep down, you just knew she was a slut—I always liked her—and the next week, (mockingly) everybody was going around town clucking about how they were so shocked by this movie, and I looked at them and thought: my god, what goes on in this town makes *Peyton Place* look like a Doris Day movie.

MICHAEL

(laughs a little)

I guess you've seen a lot, grandma.

MARY

(demurring)

I guess I talk too much . . .

MICHAEL

No. I'm always glad to hear your stories.

MARY

(She pats his cheek.) Michael, you're truly a kind-hearted soul. Here are some bulbs.

(hands him bulbs and continues
nonchalantly)

You said you go out dancing with friends. Is there anyone special in your life?

MICHAEL

Well . . . I . . . I . . .

MARY

It's been quite a while since I heard you talk about anyone.

MICHAEL

Grandma I just don't . . .

MARY

(continues, oblivious to his discomfort)

It's hard to go through life alone. Having a special friend makes it so much easier.

(stops planting, comes into realization)

Michael, I'm sorry. I didn't mean to pry.

MICHAEL

That's ok. I guess I don't know what to say . . .

MARY

Just ignore me. I'm a foolish, nosy old lady.

MICHAEL

No, it's ok. I mean . . . I want to but . . .
(he pretends to plant)

MARY

(There's a short pause. She hands him
some more bulbs and says,)

Make sure this end is down. Not too deep.

(and segues into a story as they work.)

My younger brother, Frank . . . you know, the one who died of
the Spanish Influenza in 1919--on a troop ship in Boston
Harbor--I know I've told you stories about him . . .

MICHAEL

Sure, I remember.

MARY

Spiritually, I think I was closer to him than I've ever been
to any other human being--including your grandfather. I mean, I
loved your grandfather . . .

MICHAEL

I know, grandma . . . I know.

MARY

. . . but Frank and I were just so connected; we finished each
other's sentences; we loved the same books and music; we could
share any thought no matter how silly or serious. And I loved
him. He was my closest friend in so many ways.

But when your grandfather came along, I realized that physical
intimacy takes a relationship to a deeper level, a wonderful
closeness I think all humans need, and I worried that Frank

wouldn't ever have that deep, thrilling kind of intimate human contact.

I mean, he had lots of girls after him. He was a charming, handsome devil, and he talked up his love of the ladies, but he never seemed to really connect with any particular girl.

One day, mother sent me out to the summer kitchen—which used to stand right there (she points to a spot in front of her)—we tore it down after we got refrigerators and freezers—anyway, mother sent me to collect the jars of freshly canned tomatoes, but before I opened the door, I saw a vague outline of someone in the room. At first I thought it was one person, but then I realized it was two people holding each other close—very close—it was Frank and a neighbor boy, Willie Spitzer—and they held each other tightly, their cheeks pressed together. I quietly backed away from the door, down the sidewalk, and made a lot of noise before I approached again. When I walked in, they were standing apart, like nothing had happened.

And I don't know if anything did. But I know that after Willie moved to Chicago to take a job with the railroad, Frank seemed to lose some of his joy—and it was only a few months later when he enlisted in the army and went to France.

We never ever talked about it. And maybe nothing did happen, but to this day, I regret that we couldn't talk and that I didn't get to tell him that I'd love him, no matter who he loved.

(deliberately, with care)

Michael, I want you to know that . . .

HARVEY JENNINGS

(calling out, cutting off Mary's line)

Maaary! Mary Schultz!

(Mary is a little dumbfounded, mouth open, wanting to finish her sentence, but cut off; Harve boisterously enters stage right speaking his lines.)

Where are you woman? In that garden again? Come here and give your daddy some . . .

(he stops when he sees Michael)

MICHAEL

Hello, Mr. Jennings.

HARVE

(finishes his sentence, nonplussed)

. . . sugar. Uhhhh . . . Michael . . . hello.

("straightening up," grasping for an
 explanation for his familiarity)
 Mrs. Schultz, I'm here to help you . . . uh . . . with that .
 . . peony plant? . . . you needed help with . . .

MARY

Don't be silly Harve. Michael's from the good half of the
 family. He's not his mother's son—or his father's for that
 matter.

(to Michael)

Harve's a special friend of mine these days.

(Michael nods knowingly, approving.)

(to Harve)

Come over here and help me up.

(Michael gets up too.)

I'll probably be stiff tomorrow, but I couldn't let such a
 glorious day go by.

HARVE

(Michael finishes tapping in some bulbs
 as Harve leans in and whispers to Mary,)

Don't worry. I'll work the stiffness out of you later.

(Mary only half-seriously slaps Harve's
 hand and tsk-tsks him quietly.)

MARY

That's enough for today. Michael, could you take that rake and
 water can and put them in the shed for me please?

MICHAEL

(He picks them up.)

I'll drop 'em off on my way out. I need to get goin'.

MARY

(disappointed)

Oh, I thought you could stay for supper. We really haven't had
 a chance to talk—or rather, you haven't had a chance.

MICHAEL

I'd love to, grandma, but I've got a semi to load out tonight.
 We're trucking beans to Decatur the next two days. I'll stop
 by Friday.

MARY

Well, I hope to be here.

(Michael leans in to kiss her on the
 cheek.)

MICHAEL

You will, grandma, you will. Mr. Jennings, nice to see you.

HARVE

Nice to see you too, Michael.
(Michael exits left)

MARY

Take care, sweetheart.
(to Harve, who moves in and puts his one
arm around her)
I worry about that boy.

HARVE

He seems pretty capable to me.

MARY

But when you don't fit in with your family . . .

HARVE

I think most people feel that way.

MARY

Yah, but most people aren't related to the Borgias.

HARVE

(shaking his head and laughing a little) Mary. He'll be alright. (She looks out to where Michael left while Harve draws her closer, puts both his arms around her.)

MARY

Do you think he noticed us?

HARVE

Probably. Half the town already knows, and the other half can't wait to hear. I say, let's give 'em somethin' to yap about.

(He pulls her close and kisses her passionately. She returns his affection enthusiastically, reaching around and patting his butt as they break.)

MARY

(She caresses his face.)
You've stirred me up something fierce, Harve Jennings - feelings I thought were long stuck to the bottom of the old cooking pot.

HARVE

(taking her hand and gently pulling her towards stage right)
Well I say, let's go stir up that old pot some more.

(Mary holds back.)

MARY

Let me clean up here a little. You go on up to the house and make us a couple of Old Fashions.

(He turns and walks away.)

And Harve . . . put on some nice, romantic music.

(He smiles broadly and walks away jauntily, stage right. Mary turns and picks up the basket and kneels by the front planter to collect some bulbs. Off stage, we hear Glen Miller's "Moonlight Sonata" come on. Suddenly, Mary puts her right hand up to her face and then her left up to her chest and makes a small sound twice.)

Ohhh.

Ohhhhh.

(She faints. From off stage right, we hear Harve yell,)

HARVE

Mary, are we out of bourbon?

(Harve enters and stops,)

Mary?

(then yells again as he runs to her:)

Mary!!

(The lights go down as he reaches her. Harve exits right, Mary goes to center stage to the nursing home scene.)

ACT TWO

SCENE ONE

(The lights are dimmed on Center Stage where Mary and Mavis are in their beds. The head of Mary's bed is raised. Stage left, lights up on Michael and Bert who stand on either side of Fay, all three standing together on one side. Michael stands a little closer to his mother;

Bert stands a little farther away. Dr. Naryan stands opposite them. We join the conversation in progress.)

FAY

But doctor, how long do you think she'll have to stay here?

NARYAN

I'm afraid it's going to be quite a while. That's why we've had to move her to a long-term care facility.

BERT

(irritated)

Nursing home! It's a nursing home. Just call it what it is.
(Naryan remains professional throughout this exchange)

FAY

But she's been in such good health up until now. Why, she even started putting out her garden this spring.

NARYAN

Actually, her health has been failing lately. Hasn't she told you?

FAY

(terse) No.

NARYAN

Her blood pressure has been very erratic—sometimes so high it couldn't be measured. That's what caused this latest incident.

FAY

Surely you can give her some new medicine or some physical therapy or . . . or something and get her back to her old self?

NARYAN

We'll do our best, of course.

Nonetheless, Mrs. Schultz is 80 years old. The truth is, her body's just worn out. It's amazing that she hasn't had a stroke or even a heart attack.

FAY

But she's hardly ever been sick.

NARYAN

All bodies have breaking points. Hers has served her very well for 80 years. We'll do what we can, try some longer term strategies, but there are limits to what we can do.

BERT

Well, it sounds to me like you don't know what to do next. Maybe we should get another doctor and another opinion.

NARYAN

You are, of course, welcome to do that. But surely you've noticed, it's not just her body that is failing. When Mrs. Schultz has come to see me in the last six months, sometimes she's just fine, but I've also found that she is sometimes disoriented, that her memory is failing too.

FAY

(angrily, muttering mainly to herself)

She never even told me she was seeing a doctor.

MICHAEL

Dr. Naryan, what can we do?

NARYAN

We can do all we can to make her comfortable, and we will continue to do what we can to improve her physical and mental condition.

But I do have a suggestion, one perhaps most doctors wouldn't make. In the past two decades, I've found that many people often refuse to acknowledge, much less prepare for the end of life. I find it odd that so many will not reflect on a time that comes to us all.

So, what can you do? Spend time with her. Tell her you love her. Celebrate her life and what she has given you. If there are issues that are unresolved, resolve them. This is a chance for reconciliation, an opportunity to bring the family together.

BERT

(turning and commenting off to the side,
but clearly audible)

What a crock.

FAY

(not really listening)

Doctor Naryan, we live 25 miles away. Can we move her to a facility closer to home?

NARYAN

This has been a very disorienting month for Mrs. Schultz—first she's hospitalized, then moved to this care facility across the street. I wouldn't recommend moving her again at this time.

FAY

Maybe in the future?

NARYAN

Perhaps. But let's allow her to settle in here; then we'll see how she does.

FAY

Thank you, doctor.
(Naryan exits left.)

BERT

Well, I think he's full of shit. We need to get an American doctor in here.

MICHAEL

(perturbed)
Bert, he is American. And he got his medical degree at Johns Hopkins.

BERT

So what!

MICHAEL

I think what he says makes sense.

BERT

Yah, you would think that, pansy boy.

MICHAEL

(annoyed but trying to keep the peace)
She's our grandmother; this time of her life should be about her.

BERT

Yah, bein' in a nursing home's a great way to spend your life.

MICHAEL

You know, Bert, we're all tired of your shit. Why don't you grow up—or else just fuck off.

BERT

(throws out his chest just a little,
lowers his arms to his sides, his hands

in fists—but does not take a step
towards Michael, arrogant)
Like you could make me . . .

MICHAEL
(laughing at the absurdity)
No, no one could make you grow up.
(Fay steps in between)

FAY
(big sigh)
Well, it looks like we're in for a long haul. I can't come over here every day. It's just not possible—with planting still going on . . . and the wheat'll be ready to cut soon after that. Running around doing errands, looking after you boys and your father—and I'm on the planning committee for the new church addition—I just don't have time for this.

(pauses, takes a breath)
You two are going to have to help.
(pauses, looks at them and makes a decision)

This is how we'll do it. We'll do a round-robin. I'll come one day; Bert, you'll drive over the next; Michael, you'll do the third day. Maybe I can talk your Uncle George and Aunt Viv into coming the fourth day. For some reason, your grandmother seems to like Viv. That way, a family member'll be here every day. Nobody's going to say this family parked your grandmother in a nursing home and deserted her.

(to her sons)
So, are you going to help me?

MICHAEL
Of course, mother.

FAY
Bert?
(he doesn't reply, doesn't look at Fay)
Bert!?

BERT
(put upon)
Yah, alright.

FAY
Ok. Then I'll come over tomorrow. Bert next. Michael after that.
(The boys nod in agreement and walk off, stage left.)

I sure hope I can guilt your Aunt Viv into going along with this.

(Fay stays behind and moves to center stage after Bert and Michael have exited left.)

SCENE TWO

(Lights up on center stage. Mary is lying in her bed, sleeping. Fay enters room from stage left. She goes over to the bed and looks at Mary, then goes to the big vinyl chair, sits down, and gets out her knitting. She lets out a big sigh. Beth enters from stage right.)

BETH

(She goes over to Mary, checks on her, adjusts the covers, and addresses Fay.)

Hi. I'm Beth.

(takes one step towards Fay, offers her hand)

FAY

(Fay does not get up or extend her hand, but looks down at her knitting.)

Hello. Mrs. Herman Miller, Mrs. Schultz's daughter.

BETH

(backs off and walks around the bed to check on Mavis)

Pleased to meet you.

FAY

Do you think she'll wake up any time soon?

BETH

(always keeps busy caring for her patients during her time on stage)

The move from the hospital was kinda hard on her. Doctor Naryan gave her a sedative. She'll probably sleep the rest of the afternoon.

FAY

Oh! Then she won't know I've been here.

BETH

'fraid not. You might as well go home. Come back tomorrow. She'll be awake then.

(pauses a half beat, pleasant)

When she wakes up, I'll tell her you stopped by.

FAY

No. No, I'll stay.

BETH

(exiting right)

Well, if you need anything, let me know.

FAY

Yes. Thank you.

(leans back in chair, sighs heavily)

What a day. What a day.

(Fay leans back, closes her eyes, and falls asleep.)

(The lights go down. A spot comes up on Mary. She gets out of bed and takes a couple of steps downstage.)

MARY

What a day indeed. Who ever thinks it'll come to this?

When we're young, we never envision ourselves as old.

And even as we age, we dismiss the signs of inevitability our bodies send us: a twinge here, an ache there . . . slumping a little more each day. But do we pay attention?

(she stretches her arms and body)

We ignore our bodies and hold tightly to our illusions. In our 30s, we convince ourselves that we still feel and look 20; in our 50s, we cling to 40; in our 70s, well, by then, we can't even begin to face how little time we have left.

Life is . . . struggling to maintain a constant state of denial.

And sweet, dear Dr. Naryan . . . urging us to reflect on our lives . . . to celebrate them . . . to resolve all those

unresolved relationships and unfinished tasks What a lovely, naive man.

The very nature of life doesn't let us resolve anything.

Our lives go on—even when we don't. None of our messes are ever really cleaned up. We just pass them to the next generation, so they can fail to resolve them too.

(She turns towards Fay.)

And there's my loving, dutiful daughter . . . well dutiful anyway.

Ah Fay, how did it ever come to this? I just don't know.

(A spot light comes up on Fay; she rises and moves parallel to Mary and answers her.)

FAY

A good question, mother. How did we get to this . . . this distance, this alienation, this mutual contempt?

(Mary shrugs. She hardly looks at Fay.)

Don't you know?

MARY

All I know is it's not what I wanted.

FAY

Really? What did you want?

MARY

I wanted us to be close. I wanted what every parent wants for their child: for you to be happy.

FAY

(incredulous) You wanted me to be happy? Talk about living in denial!

You wanted me to be you!

MARY

That's not true!

FAY

Isn't it?

MARY

No.

FAY

You never liked the choices I made. You never approved of me.

MARY

Oh my god. Must we drag out the same old, tired mother-daughter clichés?

FAY

Clichés?? You're the one who loves clichés—what did you always say . . . looking for the little bits of truth in them? I say, let's drag 'em out and let the chips fall . . .

MARY

Ok. If that's the way you want it . . .
I didn't want you to make the same mistakes I did.

FAY

(incredulous) Make the same mistakes? How could I make something you'd never admit to?

MARY

How dare you speak to me that way—even if this is a collective dream?

FAY

Oh, goodie . . . you're going to wrap yourself in the invulnerable mantle of parenthood? . . . use your authority to shut down any one who questions you?

MARY

You're not assertive enough to be that arrogant.

FAY

Oh yah? I may not be the hard-bitten bitch you are, but I'm tough enough, mother. I can take you any day of the week.

MARY

Oh yah?

FAY

Yah!!
(The two square off like fighters,
circling each other, heads
down/protected, fists up.)
Come on old lady. Give it your best shot.

MARY

I won't have to. It won't be that hard to take you out.
(Mary throws a punch. It lightly hits
Fay's head. Fay takes it, doesn't
stagger. Mary says,)
You were always a disappointment. I wanted you to be strong .
. . independent.

FAY

You wanted me to obey you. You bullied me . . . just like you bullied father.

(Fay counters with a punch to Mary's middle that hits Mary, who takes it, but doesn't wobble.)

You're losing it old girl. Your time is over.

MARY

The day ain't come when I can't take your shit.

(Mary throws a combo--one to Fay's head, one to her middle, they connect, Fay takes it, but Fay doesn't fold.)

And leave your father out of this. I never bullied him or you.

FAY

What kind of meds are you on?

You always set the rules--always--you made all of us jump through your hoops, you big control freak.

(Fay rushes her. Grabs her by the head. Puts her in a head-lock.)

You criticized everything I ever did or said:
you didn't like my hair;
you didn't approve of the way I dressed;
my boyfriends weren't good enough;
you didn't like what I read.

(Mary breaks free, twists around, and puts Fay in a full nelson.)

MARY

Oh yah, and what did reading all those cheap romances and fashion magazines get you? A husband who treated you like a doormat and neglected you when you weren't young and pretty any more.

(Fay breaks out. The two crouch down in wrestlers' poses and square off again. They circle and feint attacks at each other.)

FAY

It got me money and a big house. And who says I'm still not pretty?

MARY

Look in the mirror sweetie. I don't see any men lining up for you.

(Fay attacks and grabs Mary from behind
by the waist and one arm.)

FAY

You bitch! I don't see you turning down the money I give you every month.

MARY

You give me money so you can keep me on a leash, jerk me around like your god-damn pet Chihuahua.

(Mary counters with an elbow to Fay's
middle and breaks her hold.)

I only took it so you could feel like you were doing something for me. It was the only connection we ever had. God knows, you'd never give yourself—not that anyone would want you anymore.

FAY

I'll kill you for that!

(While Fay runs over and grabs a knitting
needle, Mary says,)

MARY

We'll see about that . . .

(and Mary hustles over to the wheel chair
and picks up the bed pan. They swing
around and confront each other. Mary
holds up the pan defensively; Fay holds
the needle like a knife.)

FAY

You're so self-righteous. Don't you think I know about you and Harve Jennings—you screwing around with him.

(Fay lunges at Mary who holds up the bed
pan and deflects the stab. They continue
to probe and parry as they talk.)

You betrayed dad and all you had together.

MARY

(indignant)

My relationship with Harve had nothing to do with your father.

FAY

You betrayed your children.

MARY

And it sure as hell didn't have anything to do with you.

FAY

Dad was hardly at the funeral parlor before you started fucking Harve—and in your husband's own bed. What happened to loyalty? (thrust, deflect)

MARY

I was physically and emotionally exhausted. I needed the comfort. And your father, even at his worst, I never put him in a nursing home!

(Fay thrusts—charges and Mary deflects her by, like a bullfighter and a bull.)

FAY

(Wheels around again.) Did you ever think of asking me or the boys for help?

MARY

You were busy with your lives. And did I have to beg my own children for help? You should've offered. (Strikes at Fay with the bed pan; Fay deflects.) You should've just been there.

FAY

Right, like you'd allow any of us to intrude on your life. Besides, with us out of the way, it gave you a chance to start luring Harve into your clutches. (thrusts, deflected)

MARY

Jealous? At least I got some in my old age.

FAY

He was a common mechanic—and everyone in town knew you were fucking him.

MARY

Is it that he was common or that everyone knew?

FAY

You're an insufferable bitch, and I've had enough of you.

(Fay charges Mary. The needle goes flying; the pan goes flying; the two women grapple, fall to the floor, and roll around a little. Fay ends on top, but she's not in charge; Mary holds Fay's wrists as the two struggle only a little now; they're at a stalemate.)

Mary

It's no good Fay. You'll never take me. We're too evenly matched.

FAY

(Stops struggling; gets off Mary; stands up; recognizing the truth, lets out an angry, frustrated, blood-curdling scream and then,)

Will I never be free of you?

MARY

(gets up, dusts herself off)

Not bad for an old dame.

(matter-of-factly, not remorseful)

Sorry Fay. As you get older you learn, some ghosts never leave you.

FAY

(looks off to the side, her back to Mary; frustrated, tired, upset, but not crying or breaking down)

Why can't I just have a little peace? I've done all the things I was supposed to do, why can't it (holding it back, tightening it down)

MARY

(relenting a little, earnest)

Fay, I'm sorry. I really . . .

FAY

(cuts her off; has collected herself)

It doesn't matter, mother. There's nothing more to say.
(Fay goes back to her chair.)

MARY

(reaches out to her)

Fay, please . . .

Fay . . .

(Fay re-enters her sleep. Mary turns slowly, goes back to her bed, gets in and goes back to sleep. The spots go off the women.)

(Beth comes back in from stage right, she surveys the room, goes over to Fay and gently shakes her arm.)

BETH

Mrs. Miller. Mrs. Miller. It's time to go home. Visiting hours are over.

SCENE THREE

(Lights up on center stage. Mary is sitting up in her bed, awake. Bert enters room from stage left.)

BERT

Hello, grandma.

He kisses her on the cheek perfunctorily, and moves to the end of the bed, looking around the room)

How are you today?

MARY

I'm feeling a little under the weather. And how are you?

BERT

(moves to the big chair and takes a seat)

I'm good. The kids are good. Mom and the rest of the family send their love.

MARY

And give them my love too.

BERT

We all hope you'll get better soon.

MARY

Well, that's really nice, but I expect to be up and moving about later on today.

BERT

Oh, they're going to walk you down the hall a little?

MARY

More than just the hall, silly. Oh, there's plenty to do. Mama needs me. I need to get up and get going.

BERT

(confused)

Huh? I . . . I think it's going to take a little bit longer than today . . . grandma, are you . . .

MARY

(ignoring him, moving on)

It looks like it's nice outside today.

BERT

It's sunny and warm. Seems like it'll stay that way for a while.

MARY

I love my garden on days like this. The lilacs are in full bloom, and my day lilies are just opening.

BERT

(bored already, half-listening)

Yah, that's nice.

MARY

Spring is the best season. Everything just comes to life.

BERT

(looking at a hangnail on his right hand,
chews on it, unconsciously jiggling one
leg)

Sure does.

MARY

It's almost time to plant green beans.

BERT

Yah, everybody's planting. That's why I can't stay too long. I need to get back and help.

MARY

Is the planting close to finished?

BERT

I'd say we're more than half done, but a lot of farmers aren't as far along as we are.

MARY

The store will be very busy today . . .

BERT

(just a little bewildered)

Well, sure, all the seed and fertilizer stores'll be busy.

MARY

The hardware store of course.

BERT

(a little bewildered)

What??

MARY

Farmers buy a lot of hardware during planting season . . .

BERT

I guess they do.

MARY

Something always seems to break when you need it most.

BERT

That's the truth. We had to change out the gears on the planter boxes this morning.

MARY

And tools always get lost . . . a hammer or wrench.

BERT

Yah, ya lay it down for a second and then it's gone.

MARY

Papa will be so busy.

BERT

Papa?

(trying to put it together)

Grandma? I don't know what you . . .

MARY

(cuts him off)

Papa will need a lot of help today, Frank, so you go back to work in the store whenever you need to.

BERT

Frank?

MARY

I'll help mama with chores this afternoon, but maybe I'll work in the store tomorrow.

BERT

Grandma, you're not working in a store tomorrow.

MARY

Why Frank, I can help if I want. Papa loves having me at the store.

BERT

(mounting panic)

Grandma, I'm not Frank!

MARY

You and I have so much fun there.

BERT

Grandma, I just don't . . .

MARY

Everybody says I'm really good with the customers—even grouchy old Mr. Saunders.

BERT

Grandma, you're not making sense . . .

MARY

I can get Mr. Saunders to smile every time . . .
(conspiratorially) and I think he spends more money because I know how to charm him.

BERT

(standing)

Grandma!

MARY

Frank, why are you acting so funny?

BERT

Grandma, I'm not Frank.

MARY

(a little disturbed for the first time)

Are you . . . are you trying to play a joke on me?

BERT

(rising anger)

I'm not your brother. I'm your grandson, Bert!

MARY

(panic begins to set in)

I don't know what you're talking about?

BERT

(almost a shout)

Grandma!

(There's an uncomfortable silence. Bert sits down. After a short interval, Bert breaks the silence.)

Michael'll be over to visit you tomorrow.

MARY

(regrouping, a little indignant)

Well, I hope your friend will have better manners than you do.

BERT

I'm really trying here.

MARY

We've never really argued before.

BERT

(softening a little)

I don't want to argue.

MARY

Neither do I.

BERT

You were always good to me—buying me presents, baking us treats.

MARY

It's because you're my favorite, Frank.

BERT

(stands up quickly—shouts angrily)

I'm not your brother!

MARY

(upset, plaintive)

Frank! Why are you angry with me?

BERT

(moves towards Mary one step)

Just stop it!

MARY

(Mary starts to cry.)

What have I done to make you mad?

BERT

(Bert walks over to her—between the two beds--and grabs her arm. Not yelling but intense.)

Just . . . stop . . . it.

(Mary cringes and begins to sob quietly. Bert's voice is angry, deliberate, trembles a little at points.)

You . . . are . . . my . . . grandmother. I . . . am . . . your . . . grandson . . . Bert. Your brother Frank has been dead for . . . for years. Your parents are dead. Our family doesn't even own the hardware store anymore.

(Mary starts shaking, continues crying softly, but watches him, scared.)

You're in a nursing home. You've been sick.

(Bert starts to tear up a little.)
 But if you don't stop this, you'll never get better, and
 you'll never go home.

MARY

(quietly, lost)
 I just . . . Frank . . . I don't . . .

BERT

(shaken, harshly)
 Do you want to stay in here until you die?

MARY

(in a small, plaintive voice, then
 crying)
 I'm sorry . . . I'm sorry . . .

BERT

You've got to pull yourself together.
 (Beth enters, stage right; Bert lets go
 of Mary when he hears her come in.)

BETH

Uh, hello.

BERT

(backs away from Mary; guiltily, trying
 to justify his actions)
 I'm her grandson.

BETH

(unsure of what's happened)
 Ok.

So, how are you today, Mary?
 (Mary doesn't answer.)

BERT

(backs off farther as Beth moves in to
 check Mary's pulse, standing between the
 two beds)
 (defensive) I think she's a little confused. She thought I was
 her brother.

BETH

She looks a little upset. What happened?
 (Bert shrugs. In a little bit louder
 voice,)
 Mary, what's wrong? Do you feel bad? Where do you hurt?

(Beth picks up and looks at the arm Bert grabbed, examines it, rubs it a little.)

MARY

(shaky)

I . . . I I . . .

BETH

(takes Mary's pulse)

She's a little warm and her pulse is racing.

(to Bert)

I think we better call the floor nurse. You go on now. We'll take care of her.

(He backs off.)

Would you stop at the nurse's station and ask Sally to come down here . . . please?

BERT

Sure.

BETH

(coldly)

Thank you.

(Bert flees, stage left, without looking back. Beth moves closer and sits on the bed with Mary, takes Mary's one hand and puts an arm around her shoulder. She soothes her.)

There, there, Mary. It's ok. He's gone now. We'll look after you.

Everything'll be just fine.

Don't you worry anymore.

(Beth reaches down and brings up a call button and pushes it.)

(Lights down.)

SCENE FOUR

(Michael and Fay enter stage left. Lights up. Bert comes on after them. Fay is carrying white wine in a plain glass goblet. Bert wipes his greasy hands on a shop towel.)

FAY

(to Bert)

So, how was your visit with your grandmother yesterday?

BERT

(emphatically)

I won't go back there!

FAY

(to Bert)

Honey, what's the problem?

BERT

She thought I was her brother Frank.

FAY

Frank? Good Lord, Uncle Frank's been dead since World War I.

BERT

Yah! It was just crazy. And she kept calling me Frank—even after I told her who I was.

FAY

She really loved her older brother—probably more than anybody else. She never did get over losing him.

MICHAEL

She loved telling us stories about their childhood together. They sounded like . . . a magical time.

FAY

(Disdainfully) Magic! It takes more than magic to care for the elderly, Michael. And maybe if she'd cared as much for her living family as she did her dead brother . . .

MICHAEL

(cuts her off)

Mother, that's not really fair . . .

FAY

(to Bert, cutting off and ignoring Michael)

I can see how her behavior might be a bit unsettling, honey, but what does it really matter?

BERT

What do you mean? She didn't even know who I was.

FAY

Reverend Harris told me that last week she thought he was your Uncle Jim—and he's been dead 10 years.

BERT

But it's just not right.

FAY

It's not a matter of right or wrong, it's a matter of duty.

BERT

Yah, right.

FAY

(instructing)

You go, you take a magazine, talk about the weather, farming, how the Cardinals are doing against the Cubs, talk about anything, who cares? You don't even have to listen to her. Just keep her company. How hard can that be?

BERT

(emphatic) I'm not going back.

(exits left)

FAY

(to Michael)

Are you bugging out on me too?

MICHAEL

No, mother, I'm in. I don't think it's a problem. I'll be there tomorrow.

FAY

Good. This may go on for some time.

Your grandmother's a tough old bird.

(taking a sip of wine)

Quite honestly, I think she's been a lot easier to handle since she went in the home.

(pauses to think a second)

. . . talking about Uncle Frank. Hmmm.

(takes a drink of wine, walks off left

saying to herself)

I wonder if I can get Sarah Chesney to take Bert's day? She's a cousin after all . . .

(lights down; Michael walks over to center stage)

SCENE FIVE

(Lights up on center stage on Mary and Mavis. Michael enters from left.)

MICHAEL

(Goes over to Mary, gives her a kiss, takes her hand.)

How are you today? It's good to see you.

MARY

I'm fine really. The hours seem so long, but the days go quickly.

MICHAEL

I know what you mean—I look up and another day has passed, then a week.

MARY

I'm afraid I don't know what day of the week it is.

MICHAEL

Does it matter?

(He walks around to the other side of the bed--between the two beds--and stands close to her. He takes her hand again.)

MARY

Well, someone is always coming in and asking. They ask me my name and what the date is. I can't imagine why?

MICHAEL

(upbeat)

Well, I say let's just have a nice visit. No worries, not a care in the world.

MARY

I'd like that, Frank.

(Michael takes a deep breath and nods his head just a little at being called Frank, but he doesn't betray any sign of shock.)

It's just that I do worry . . .

MICHAEL

(jumping right in, getting into character—a shift in his personality; Michael is more jaunty here, more upbeat and sassy)

Now, what's a pretty girl like you got to worry about, Mary Klein?

MARY

You joining the army . . . I don't want you to go.

MICHAEL

Ah, come on, sis, France isn't that far away . . .

MARY

It's the other side of the world!

MICHAEL

(kidding her, "Frank" chucks her under her chin as he says each of the lines of an "in joke" his grandmother has often told him)

It's not Borneo.

(Mary giggles a little)

It's not Katmandu.

(Mary giggles more, and they say the last line together.)

MARY AND MICHAEL

It ain't even downtown Terra Haute.

MARY

(They both laugh, Mary takes his hand in hers.)

Oh Frank, you're so silly. That's why I love you so much. You make me laugh.

MICHAEL

We always have fun when we're together, don't we?

MARY

But why do you have to go?

MICHAEL

For the mademoiselles, of course!

MARY

No wonder Pastor Moeller called you in and lectured you about the sin of lust.

MICHAEL

That ole windbag. He's just jealous because he doesn't have any lust left in 'im--not surprising the way Mrs. Moeller looks.

(they both laugh)

MARY

You're so scandalous, but I'm serious, this war--it'll be dangerous for you.

MICHAEL

I'm not afraid.

MARY

Well, you should be! I don't see why you're so determined to go.

MICHAEL

I just have to, Mary. I've hardly been out of Altamont all my life. I want to see something of the world—besides county fairs and old Germans farting sauerkraut.

MARY

(She laughs a little . . .)

Oh Frank!

(but gets serious again.)

Aren't there other ways for you to see the world?

MICHAEL

This is the only way papa'd ever let me leave.

MARY

So many have died in France already.

MICHAEL

(gentle and reassuring)

I'll be fine, Mary. I will.

(light and kidding)

Besides, if anything happened to me, Kaiser Willy'd have to deal with you, and then he'd really be in trouble.

(they both laugh)

He'd lose the war for sure.

MARY

Oh stop.

(fake slaps his hand)

(Beth enters, stage right, with a bunch of seasonal garden flowers in a vase, places them on the night stand in front of the bed.)

BETH

Here are your flowers, Mary. Aren't they beautiful?

MICHAEL

See, I brought you a present.

MARY

Oh . . . they are beautiful. Thank you so much, Frank.

MICHAEL

I brought them from your garden.

MARY

Oh Frank, you're such a doll.

MICHAEL

Well, as one doll to another, whadda ya say we get out of here, toots?

MARY

Whatever do you mean?

MICHAEL

Well, we've got a horseless buggy here that has your name on it (points at wheel chair) . . . whadda ya say we go for a ride?

BETH

We have a lovely solarium. The sunshine would do you good, Mary.

MARY

(hesitant) Well (then brightly) ok.

MICHAEL

Then, let's get you loaded up.

(Beth pushes the wheelchair forward; Michael gets the housecoat. Mary sits up and Beth and Michael help her into her housecoat and then the chair. Michael puts her fuzzy slippers on her feet, gets up and grabs one flower from the bouquet and gives it to Mary.)

MICHAEL

One to hold onto for the ride.

(Beth goes over to Mavis's bed, checks on her a second, then exits left with the water pitcher.)

BETH

Go right and then to the end of the hall.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Beth.

(Michael pushes Mary to stage right,
close to center stage, and turns her
chair around facing the audience.)

MARY

It's lovely here.

MICHAEL

It sure is.

MARY

It even smells good. I love the garden in spring best of all.
Everything smells so clean and looks so new. Old troubles just
fall away.

Frank, push me on the swing.

(Michael takes ahold of the wheel chair
and slowly and gently pushes it back and
forth.)

Some days seem so hard and lonely . . . I don't even want to
get out of bed . . .

MICHAEL

Not you, Mary. You've always been so strong . . . sooo . . .
indomitable . . .

MARY

Maybe it always seemed that way. If you're going to live in
this world, you've got to be hard, or it'll eat you up. And
lately, I've felt like life has been slowly chewing on me . .
. bit by bit—just about to swallow me whole . . . but today I
feel different. Frank . . . (she turns a little to look at and
address him, reaches over her shoulder for his hand—which he
gives) . . . today, with you here I feel . . . whole again .
. . renewed . . . I feel . . . almost transported . . .

(At Mary's words an old-fashioned swing
is lowered onto stage right—to the right
of the wheel chair. It has a broad,
board seat and is held up by rope. A
spotlight lights the area. Mary gets up
on her own and walks unassisted—
strongly, not feebly—to the swing.
Michael follows her. Mary buttons her
house coat, sits, and gently tucks the
stem of the flower in her house coat,
letting the flower stick out. Michael
pushes her gently.)

(Note: During the swing piece, the
actors shouldn't get into one pattern

and just stand/swing. They should "work"
the scene physically somewhat, having
their positions/actions/reactions flow
with the action of the scene. Mary
continues:)

These are the best days—you and me, sharing thoughts, telling
secrets.

MICHAEL

Secrets? Are you gonna tell me secrets?

MARY

(coyly)

Well, maybe.

MICHAEL

Come on. I've told you so many of my secret thoughts.

MARY

Well, ok.

(thinks a second)

I've let Josiah kiss me.

MICHAEL

That's no surprise. Hasn't just about everybody caught you two
smooching behind a tree or in the shadows?

MARY

And I've let him take liberties . . .

MICHAEL

(surprised, smiling)

What?

MARY

I've . . . I've let him caress my bosom.

MICHAEL

(laughing lightly)

Grandmother! Second base??

MARY

(confused by his response)

Frank . . . I don't . . .

MICHAEL

(catching his faux pas)

I mean . . . Heavens to Betsy, what would mother say?

MARY

Mother? Oh she'd probably lock me up . . .

MICHAEL

And throw away the key . . .

MARY

And Josiah . . . I could see he was excited too!

MICHAEL

(kidding her)

You hussy. And I'm the scandalous one?

MARY

If momma and papa ever found out . . .

MICHAEL

They'd shoot Josiah . . .

MARY

And make me go to church and confess my sins to the whole congregation.

MICHAEL

(responding as Michael)

That's harsh.

MARY

Well, you know how they are. It may be the beginning of the 20th Century, but a lot of people are stuck in the old ways.

MICHAEL

Yah, and I don't think they'll change much at the end of the century either.

MARY

Sometimes I think people make themselves unhappy, and then they have to make others unhappy so they won't be alone in their misery.

MICHAEL

Wow. That's deep.

MARY

(looks at him quizzically)

You talk so funny sometimes, Frank.

MICHAEL

I suppose, but you and Josiah . . .

MARY

(cutting him off)

Well, it's not as bad as you think. I haven't told anyone . . .
 . Josiah asked me to marry him.

MICHAEL

Did he?

MARY

And I said yes.

MICHAEL

That's wonderful. I know you two will have a good life together.

MARY

I don't know when the actual date will be. I mean we have to tell papa and mama in the right way.

MICHAEL

Oh, I think they'll be happy for you. After all, Josiah is a good man—and a pretty good farmer as well. But . . .

MARY

But what?

MICHAEL

But . . . let him have his way sometimes; don't (looking for the right word) . . . boss him around too much . . .

MARY

Boss around???

MICHAEL

You're a strong woman, Mary Klein. Let him have his way some times.

MARY

I don't know what you're talking about. He'll be the husband, and I'll be his dutiful, obedient wife. Of course, he'll be the head of the household . . .

MICHAEL

(snapping out of his faux pas,
apologetic)

Oh, never mind . . . sorry. Forget what I said. I was just having a *Back to the Future* moment there.

MARYS

Huh?

Sometimes you say such odd things. Maybe you shouldn't read *The National Geographic* so much.

(ponders what Michael has just said)

But really, I think men often need a strong hand. They can do such stupid things.

MICHAEL

That's the truth.

(to himself)

I wish you'd taught your daughter that.

MARY

And now all everyone talks about is going to war. I mean, Josiah even told me he was thinking about joining up—as if you going wasn't bad enough. But I put an end to that! I told him, once and for all, that he was not going to enlist.

MICHAEL

Hmmm. That's really obeying your husband.

MARY

Well, he's not my husband yet, so I guess I can tell him what to do until then.

MICHAEL

Uh huh. You sure kicked obedience out the door pretty quickly.

MARY

(laughing a little at herself)

Well, after we're married, we'll see.

MICHAEL

Uh huh.

MARY

But really. Men. I swear, you don't have any sense.

MICHAEL

Sometimes we don't have a choice.

MARY

I know. I'm so afraid Josiah is going to be conscripted. And he's just so . . . so complacent about it all.

I just don't know what I'd do . . . with both of you . . .
(she falters a little here, but doesn't
cry)

MICHAEL

(kneels, take her hand, looks up at her,
gently. reassuring)

Mary. It'll be ok. If Josiah gets drafted, I'll look after him.

MARY

(with hope)

And he'll look after you?

MICHAEL

He'll be fine. I'll be fine. We'll come back to you.

MARY

(She stands—just in control of her emotions, but not hardened. Michael stands up just a second after she does. She takes two or three steps forward. Michael stays behind for now.)

You don't know how hard it is to wait for someone—not knowing if they'll come back to you. Men run off on adventures, and those of us left behind, we wait and we fear. Women's jobs are much harder than yours—the not-knowing wears us down. We have no choice in this. And no one can help us—after you've made your choices.

We cling to hope—any way we can—telling ourselves stories we don't really believe, living in denial of the harsh realities, even clinging to the sentiment in some silly song.

(Mary sings the refrain to "Keep the Home-Fires Burning" a capella. Not loud or boisterous, but not timid and weak either. Strong but just a little soft. At the end of the third line, Michael walks up to her left side, puts his right arm around her waist loosely, and gently and lightly takes her left hand in his.)

Keep the home fires burning
While your hearts are yearning
Though your lads are far away
They dream of home.
There's a silver lining
Through the dark cloud shining
Turn the dark cloud inside out
Till the boys come home.

MICHAEL

(gently)

Don't worry, Mary. We'll always come home to you. You've got to believe that.

MARY

(doubtful, but humoring Michael, she pats his left hand with her right)

Frank, I'm tired. I'd like to go lie down now.

MICHAEL

Of course.

(He helps Mary back to the wheel chair. She walks a little feebly to the chair. As Michael wheels Mary back to center stage, Beth enters center stage from stage left with a metal pitcher, which she puts on the stand. Michael parks the wheel chair in front of Mary's bed. They help her back into bed.)

BETH

Mary, did you have a nice time?

MICHAEL

I think she's tired.

BETH

I heard your song, Mary. It was really pretty.
(Mary doesn't respond.)

MICHAEL

My grandfather used to play it on the piano while she'd sing. It always brought tears to his eyes.

BETH

It's a lovely tune.
(As they finish putting Mary to bed, put the wheel chair back, and move around the bed straightening the bed covers, Beth starts to hum the refrain. Michael joins her. They continue until they finish.)

MICHAEL

Thanks, Beth.

BETH

No problem.
(Beth exits right, humming the tune as she leaves.)

MICHAEL

(to Mary, takes her hand)
I'm gonna leave now. I'll let you get some rest.

MARY

(a little worn out and concerned)
Frank, will you come back?

MICHAEL

Don't worry. I'll come back whenever you need me.

MARY

I love you.

MICHAEL

And I love you too, Mary Klein.

(Michael kisses Mary as she drifts off to sleep. He exits stage left, humming the song. Lights down.)

ACT THREE

SCENE ONE

(The lights are dimmed on Center Stage where Mary and Mavis are sleeping in their beds. Mary's bed is lying flat now. Stage left, lights up on Beth with a clipboard, which she is filling out. She has a small white towel draped over her shoulder. In the background we hear the faint patter of rain and once in a while see a very faint strike of lightning—whose thunderclaps are not threatening or ominous. Michael enters stage left, dripping wet.)

BETH

Michael!

I guess it's really comin' down out there!

MICHAEL

Yah. I shouldda grabbed a rain poncho when I left the farm.

BETH

Here, use this towel. It's small but clean.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Beth.

What are you doin' here this late?

BETH

Jenny called in sick again—she's probably out gettin' shit-faced with her friends—so they asked me to do a double.

MICHAEL

Won't Ben and the kids mind?

BETH

Well, the boys are teenagers now—they don't seem to need me much anymore—they're hardly ever home--and Ben . . . as long as he has the Cubs game on TV, a stack of frozen pizzas in the frig, and clean shorts on Monday mornin', he's pretty much set.

MICHAEL

A double—that sure makes for a long day.

BETH

Yah, but I feel like I'm doin' some good here--and we can sure use the money.

(He finishes with the towel, but doesn't know what to do with it. Beth holds her hand out for it, and he hands it over.)

MICHAEL

How is she today?

BETH

(doesn't know what to say)

Welll . . .

MICHAEL

(disappointed)

Oh.

BETH

I'm not really supposed to say . . . but . . .

MICHAEL

But what?

BETH

Dr. Naryan put her on some new medications a couple of days ago.

MICHAEL

Are they doing any good?

BETH

You really should talk to him about that . . .
(Beth returns to her clipboard, then)

MICHAEL

Come on, Beth.

BETH

Well, he thinks . . . we hope . . . these new meds have a chance of restoring some of her brain functions.

MICHAEL

Really? A chance to make her her old self?

BETH

Maybe. And Michael, that's a big maybe.

MICHAEL

It's something. When will we know if they're working?

BETH

Michael, I don't think even Dr. Naryan knows. It's only a chance. He talked to your mother about it, but I really shouldn't have told you.

MICHAEL

It's ok. I understand. And I won't mention this to anybody.

I know it's after visiting hours, but can I see her?

BETH

Of course. You're always welcome. Dr. Naryan encourages family to visit--no matter when--as long as you don't disturb the residents. Now, if Dr. Gordon were her doctor, that'd be a different story.

(Michael follows Beth as she walks to center stage--where the lights come up--into Mary's room.)

She's probably asleep. That's a side-effect of the new meds.

MICHAEL

(Beth goes to the opposite-far side of Mary's bed. Michael stays in front of Mary's bed. He touches her forehead, repositions a stray lock of hair. Mary moans a little and stirs but does not awaken.)

She seems . . . agitated . . . like she's having a bad dream.

BETH

That's a side effect of the meds too.

When she gets too distressed, I just take her hand and talk to her. That seems to soothe her some--for a while anyway.

(Beth takes Mary's hand and rubs it gently.)

Mary. You're with friends; we love you; everything's gonna be just fine.

(Mary calms a little. Beth gently lays Mary's hand down; Michael picks up and holds her other hand.)

MICHAEL

It's hard to see her like this. She was the strongest person I ever knew.

(lets go of her hand)

BETH

Well she's not dead yet, Michael.

MICHAEL

Sorry. I'm just tired—and she's been here two months; I guess I thought . . .

BETH

I know. You wanna have hope, but you really can't see how this is gonna end.

MICHAEL

There aren't that many options here—and I'm afraid she's just gonna give up.

BETH

Well, I've only known Mary for two months, but one thing I do know is she's a strong person.

MICHAEL

Strong people get weak; strong people eventually die.

BETH

My, you're a gloomy Gus tonight.

MICHAEL

I'm afraid she's slipping away.

BETH

Let me tell you somethin': when you've worked here as long as I have, you can usually tell who's lettin' go, who's not gonna make it. And one thing I know for sure, your grandmother hasn't given up. She's not about to move on.

Her spirit's strong; you have every reason to have hope.

MICHAEL

It's just that when I look around, I don't see much hope here. Maybe Bert was right. This is no way to live.

BETH

Your brother's an asshole. I went to school in Altamont, and even though he was a few years behind me, I remember 'im well. He was an asshole then; he's an asshole now.

MICHAEL

Beth, sometimes you really surprise me.

BETH

Sometimes I surprise myself.

MICHAEL

The thing is, I see a lot of people who used to be healthy, able-bodied . . . they once had productive lives . . . and now, so many of them seem crumpled up by life . . . like discarded pieces of paper about to be tossed out . . .

BETH

I would have never expected Bert to see it, but I'm surprised at you. There's more life goin' on here than most people ever try to see—than they wanna see.

People still love here. They enjoy company and ice cream and a hug. They share a joke, celebrate a birthday. Some even get closer to God. And sure, they even experience sufferin' and loneliness—just like they used to on the outside—just like you an' me an' everybody else. So maybe it's not the kind of life we all take for granted, but it is life, Michael. It is living.

MICHAEL

(He looks at Mavis. Not really confrontational, but more wondering.)

And Mrs. Bolten? I don't think I've seen her awake since I've come here these last 2 months. Is this living?

BETH

(She walks towards the foot of Mavis's bed, pats Mavis's covered foot gently. Smooths the cover out a little.)

Ah, Mavis. 92 years old, been here 7. Only got one son left, and he don't come around much any more.

It's true; she sleeps most of the time, but we do get her up and feed her and change her and bathe her; we turn her and put lotion on her. And we talk to her—and care about her.

Is this any different than what we'd do for a newborn? We gladly—and without even thinkin' about it--do all this for the newest human beings on earth, and we don't question the quality of their lives. Is it so strange to do it for the oldest?

I've come to see that our lives have a kind of . . . what's that word . . . sem . . . or sym . . . ??

MICHAEL

Symmetry?

BETH

Yah, that's it. We seem to end up pretty much like we started out. And I don't find that so bad. It makes sense—at least to me.

MICHAEL

Wow, Beth. That's pretty deep.

BETH

I watch a lot of afternoon talk shows—especially Oprah. She's got this new show. It's on while I get dressed for work.

And who knows? Maybe Mavis's sleep gives her the rest she needed all these years.

MICHAEL

Maybe she dreams . . .

BETH

Exactly—and maybe they're wonderful dreams—of all the good things she ever did—or even the things she wanted to do but didn't get a chance.

MICHAEL

But maybe they're terrible.

BETH

Maybe. Some just might be horrible. That's the price we pay for bein' alive.

And that's where I come in—to nudge her awake or steer her into a better dream.

(Mary stirs again, moans. Beth walks towards Mary, assesses the situation, then looks intently at Michael and nods at him. Gently.)

Go ahead.

(Michael walks over to Mary and picks up her hand and gently rubs it.)

MICHAEL

Grandma. It's ok. I'm here. You're safe. We love you; we won't abandon you.

(Mary calms down.)

BETH

(nods approvingly)

I need to go do rounds.

(starts to exit stage right)

Stay as long as you want.

MICHAEL

Thanks, Beth.

You're a guardian angel.

BETH

Wish you'd tell my husband that. He thinks I work for the other side.

(Beth exits right. The lights go down on Michael at the bedside. He then goes over to the large vinyl chair, sits down.)

SCENE TWO

(Later that night. The set is dark. The rain is a little louder. A flash of lightning, then the crash of thunder over the center stage set. The lights come up to dim. Mary is restless; she moans. Another flash, more thunder, then there's a loud buzzing-humming, like electrical current. Mary sits up and grabs and rubs her head. The buzzing ends. A strong spot comes up on her. Michael is asleep in the chair.)

MARY

(animated)

What's happened?

(She looks around.)

What's going on?

Is this a dream?

Am I dead?

(The buzzing returns. Mary grabs her head again. In back of her, a strong spot comes up on Mavis as she stirs and sits up. The buzzing ends. Mavis sits up and stretches and makes awakening sounds. Mary hears her, turns around and looks at her, shocked.)

Oh my god!

MAVIS

(stretches her arms outward and makes a happy growling sound)

Arrrrrrrrrrrrhhhhhh.

MARY

Mavis! You're awake!

MAVIS

(bright, chipper)

Good mornin', Mary.

MARY

Mavis, it's the dead of night!

MAVIS

Well, it's mornin' to me.

(The lights come up on center set. Mavis turns sideways on the bed, tests her legs.)

MARY

But you're . . . you're supposed to be semi-comatose! You haven't said a word since I got here.

MAVIS

And you're supposed to be outta your gourd. What's your point?

(She gets up, takes a few steps, still stretching, getting her bones and muscles working)

Oh my God, that feels so good.

MARY

This is all just so . . .

(Mavis comes forward. She occupies the space, her arms outstretched, relishing her freedom to move around the room. She begins to glide/twirl a little.)

MAVIS

This is all just so wonderful. (Mavis twirls/glides/dances and sings a non-verbal little ditty.) Tra, la, la. Oooo, ooo. La, la, la. (Etc.)

MARY

(She calls out to the hallway and even above.)

Hello?

Is somebody there?

Can anybody tell me . . .
(frustrated)

Mavis, would you please tell me what's going on?

MAVIS

La, la, la. (glide, twirl) Why are you asking me, Mary, this is your hallucination.

MARY

Would you please stop that? You're getting on my nerves. What do you mean this is my hallucination?

MAVIS

A mirror. I need a mirror. Is there one anywhere?

(Mary nods and points at an imaginary wall in the front. Mavis goes forward and looks at herself.)

Well, the hair needs some work--could definitely use a trip to the beauty parlor. And these . . .

(She cups her breasts and pulls them up.)

. . . have gone south--four kids before the age of 20 (she shakes her head)--but overall, it's not too bad. I don't look a day over 70.

(primping)

Ya know, you couldda made me 50.

MARY

For god's sake!

MAVIS

Would that've been so hard?

MARY
(sharp, demanding)
Mavis!!

MAVIS
(turns, just a little annoyed at being
interrupted)
What?

MARY
We have a dilemma here?

MAVIS
A dilemma? Oh please!
(walks over and looks at the sleeping
Michael)
Who's this?

MARY
My grandson, Michael.

MAVIS
My, he's a sweet young thing. He gotta wife and kids?

MARY
No.

MAVIS
Girlfriend?

MARY
No.

MAVIS
Why not?

MARY
It's a long story.

MAVIS
Well, I'm available.

MARY
Mavis, that's enough. Let's get back to business.

MAVIS
Business! My business days are over—and good riddance.

MARY
We need to . . .

MAVIS

We??

MARY

Well, you're here, I'm here . . . we!!

MAVIS

There's this joke, Mary. My old friend, Leon Redhorn--who worked for me at the restaurant for 27 years--he liked to tell it all the time.

(animated and dramatic, into telling the
joke)

The Lone Ranger and Tonto are surrounded by Indians . . .

MARY

Mavis, really. This is no time . . .

MAVIS

. . . and the Lone Ranger looks at Tonto and says, "Well I guess we've had it now, Tonto . . .

MARY

Mavis!

MAVIS

. . . and Tonto looks at the Lone Ranger and says, "What do ya mean WE white man?"

(Mary crosses her arms and stares daggers
at Mavis.)

All I'm sayin' is, how's this my problem . . . old woman?

MARY

Old woman indeed!

(shifting gears, thinking it out calmly)

Well then . . . let's look at it this way. If this is my hallucination, then it just goes to figure that I can un-hallucinate you! Thus, my problem is your problem.

Do you get my drift . . . Tonto?

MAVIS

Alright. (She goes over and sits beside Mary) So now what?

MARY

Well, help me figure out what's going on.

You said this is my hallucination. How do you know that? Maybe we're dead.

MAVIS

I don't feel dead, but then I've never been dead before.

MARY

Me neither.

MAVIS

And if I were dead, why would I end up with you?

MARY

True enough.

MAVIS

If I'm gonna end up with anyone in the afterlife, I'm goin' for that young Richard Chamberlain. My god, he's handsome.

MARY

I guess we agree on something.

MAVIS

Yes, indeedy.

MARY

He is a looker.

(trying to get back to the issue)

Anyway . .

MAVIS

Dr. Kildare . . . I'd come out of a coma for him!

MARY

Let's move on . . .

MAVIS

What a body!

MARY

Mavis!

We're moving on now.

MAVIS

Ok, ok.

Maybe we're in hell.

MARY

Well, you're annoying, but not annoying enough to be an agent of Satan.

Am I your image of hell?

MAVIS

(slightly annoyed)

Not yet, Mary. Not yet.

MARY

So what does that leave us with?

MAVIS

Ya know, when these things happen on TV, it usually means ya need to learn some lesson--find somethin' you screwed up and fix it. So, what have ya screwed up, Mary?

MARY

How the hell would I know?

MAVIS

Well, it's your hallucination. Sift through the flour and find the lumps, woman.

MARY

80 years! How do I sift through 80 years and find something to fix?

MAVIS

From what I've heard about you, Mary Schultz, there's plenty of lumps.

MARY

What do you mean by that?

MAVIS

Altamont's a small town. Ya can't stash a whole lotta secrets in the ole cookie jar--especially with so many grubby hands clawin' at it . . . wantin' all those goodies.

MARY

I mean, I've done somethings . . . I guess . . . but I just don't know where to start

MAVIS

Think, Mary. When somethin's screwed up, most of the time, what's it come back to?

MAVIS/MARY

(They answer together.)

Family.

MARY

Damn!

If fixing things up with the kids is what we're here for, then we're in trouble.

My youngest is dead—but we got along pretty well.

My oldest is far off—in California—too busy with his life to think much about me—and I have to honestly say, I don't fret much about him either.

As for my daughter, well, you must've caught some of her act—even in your state of unconsciousness. I think it's fair to say, that ship has sailed.

So if getting us out of this purgatory means me patching it up with the children, I say . . .

MARY/MAVIS

(together)

. . . we're screwed.

MAVIS

Then again . . . maybe not.

Maybe this isn't about the kids. It don't sound like there's any lack of resolution there, Mary. It may not be the kind of resolution you'd like, but your issues with your kids seem settled, so we shouldn't be stuck here tryin' to resolve somethin's already been resolved.

MARY

That makes sense, but then what's left?

MAVIS

If it ain't kids, then it's . . .

MARY/MAVIS

(look at each other, pause, and say together)

Men!

MARY

Double damn!

How can you ever resolve anything with men?

MAVIS

Especially if they're your husband.

MARY

What can I say? Josiah was a good man . . . a good husband and father. He never hit me. He was a good provider.

MAVIS

(doubtful)

Uh huh.

MARY

(indignant)

He was.

He was a good, decent, honest man.

MAVIS

But?

MARY

But what?

MAVIS

Clingin' to denial ain't gonna get us anywhere, Mary. It's time to have a come-to-Jesus moment.

MARY

There's nothing more to confess.

MAVIS

There's always somethin' more to confess. And you know that old sayin' about confession and the soul.

MARY

Confession is good for . . . getting you thrown into jail.

MAVIS

Mary!

MARY

The eyes are the windows to the . . . soles of your feet.
(Mary cracks herself up.)

MAVIS

You're the one with the dilemma You're the one who wants to get down to business . . . Kemo Sabe.

MARY

Oh, give me a break.

MAVIS

(moderately annoyed)

Alright, alright.
We'll do it this way.
I'll start.

What'd you think about my husband, Sam?

MARY

(tentatively)

Well . . . they say he enjoyed a game of cards.
That he had a drink now and then.
Wasn't much of a businessman.
And was liked by a lot of people.

MAVIS

He was a gamblin' drunk, who lost our farm and was a soft
touch that any dunce could con ten bucks out of.

MARY

Wow.
Why'd you marry him then? Did you love him?

MAVIS

Lookin' back, I think I loved the idea of 'im. As a girl, I'd
read a lot of those pocket romances that were goin' around,
and he fit the bill. He was handsome, older by 10 years—he
seemed more worldly, excitin'. Papa caught us in a delicate
position, forced 'im to marry me, gave us 80 acres to start
out on.

Sam wasn't much of a farmer. We borrowed against our place
until the bank finally took it. I moved us to town, started
that little restaurant, scraped by.

MARY

It was a good place, Mavis. You can be proud of what you
built.

MAVIS

Up at 4:30 every mornin'. Not home most nights until after 9.
The kids grew up in the restaurant.
Not a great way to raise 4 children.

MARY

You did what you had to, Mavis.

MAVIS

I loved my kids, but God, I can't help thinkin' that they
sometimes knew I felt they were a burden.

MARY

I know that's not true.

MAVIS

I wouldn't be so sure. Kids pick up on a lot—even when they're
young.

MARY

Life can be pretty hard—kids don't always understand that.

MAVIS

Neither do no-good husbands. Sam, he'd stay out carousin' most evenin's, come home drunk—often after midnight—an' wake me up wantin' to get romantic. I told 'im, I'm tired; I gotta get up early, so I'm goin' back to sleep; do what ya want, but just cover me up when you're finished.

Sex? It was just somethin' on a long day's check list.

MARY

I know.

Josiah was a good husband, but sweet Jesus, he was a boring lover. Every Sunday afternoon—like clockwork—never changing a thing—him on top, mechanically chugging along—I could lie there and almost count the strokes until he spewed his juice. Then he'd lie there on top of me, mumbling how much he loved me, and all I could think was, there must be more to it than this.

MAVIS

I never did have a good lay. It was just never in the cards. It's not that I believed all that shit about bein' faithful—to a good man, yes, but to a dickweed like Sam, nope. It's just that I never found the right man at the right time.

MARY

I know what you mean.

MAVIS

Do you, Mary?

MARY

What are you implying?

MAVIS

You do remember that part about the cookie jar and it bein' a small town?

MARY

If you mean Harve, well, that's not really an issue here. Besides, you were pretty much in a coma before I took up with Harve—and that was after Josiah had . . .

MAVIS

. . . had what? . . . died??

MARY

We don't need to go into that.

MAVIS

We'll see about that.

(The set lights go down. A strong spot comes up on the two women. A flash of lightning and the following thunder.)

MARY

(annoyed)

Now what!

MAVIS

The storm's risin' again. Not a good sign for prevaricators, Mary.

(Flashes of lightning, thunder. The noise of rain comes up again--the thunder and lightning desist as the buzzing returns. Mary clasps her head. Mavis is unaffected. The buzzing stops. In the farthest, darkest corner of upstage right, Josiah begins to enter. He is walking slowly, haltingly, clutching a mobile IV pole in his right hand to help him walk. His left side is crumpled--arm, leg, and face. We hear him before we see him: the rollers creaking, a slide of his good leg, the clump of his bad one.)

MARY

What's that?

MAVIS

What's what?

MARY

That sound.

(Mary gets up on the bed, looking around.)

MAVIS

I don't . . . oh yah . . .

(Mavis scoots upon the bed with Mary. A dim spot comes up on Josiah as he slowly moves towards Mary's bed center stage. They don't see him yet.)

MARY

What could that be?

MAVIS

What do you think it is?

MARY

Why do you keep asking me such stupid questions when I'm looking for answers?

MAVIS

Well, it seems rather obvious, doesn't it?

MARY

I hate you.

MAVIS

Come on Mary, bite the bullet.

JOSIAH

(softly, eerily calls out)

Marrry.

MARY

(gasps)

Oh!

(She clings to Mavis, who puts her arms around her.)

JOSIAH

(a little louder)

Marrrrrrrrry.

MARY

Oh my god!

MAVIS

God's not gonna sort this out for you, Mary.

JOSIAH

(louder)

Marrry Schultz!

MARY

Who is that?

MAVIS

You know.

(Josiah makes it to the end of the bed.)

MARY

Josiah?

JOSIAH

Mary.

MARY

Josiah!

(looks around)

What is this? A fucking Christmas Carol?

(Mavis slips off the bed, stands off to the side. Mary turns to address Josiah.)

Josiah, you're all crumpled up!

JOSIAH

It's your hallucination, Mary. You can make me any way you want.

MARY

Then I make you better.

(She snaps her fingers in his direction. A short buzz sounds. Josiah straightens up.)

JOSIAH

That's better . . . much better . . .

(He disconnects the IV and pushes the mobile pole to the side. He stretches.)

. . . but ya know, you coulda made me 40 again!

MARY

My god, what's with all you pushy apparitions?

JOSIAH

It's been a long time.

MARY

It really IS you.

JOSIAH

It is.

MARY

(She stretches out her arms towards him.)

I've missed you so.

JOSIAH

(Moves towards her, his arms outstretched as well.)

Oh, Mary . . .

(Grabs her by the neck and begins to strangle her.)

. . . you lyin', cheatin' whore!

MARY

Josiah, what are you . . . ???

(The attack is serious. He pins her to the bed.)

Josiah, stop!

(Mary struggles, fights back, but can't break Josiah's hold.)

Jo-siah!!

(Their struggle is broad, physical. Mary grabs his hands, pulls them off her neck, and still struggling, calls out:)

Mavis!

(Mavis watches, but doesn't answer, doesn't intervene--focused, interested on what's happening.)

Mavis, help me.

MAVIS

I can't, Mary.

MARY

(surprised)

What???

MAVIS

You won't let me.

MARY

(gathers her strength, pushes Josiah back and off.)

Goddamnit! Knock it off!

(Recovering, to Mavis)

What the hell do you mean?

MAVIS

The wages of sin, Mary.

(Josiah goes to the end of the bed.)

MARY

Fuck sin.

MAVIS

Well, I guess we'll see about that too.

MARY

(To Josiah, harshly) And what the hell do you think you're doing?

JOSIAH

What do you expect, Mary?

MARY

I don't expect you to attack me.

(softening)

It's been 5 years.

I've missed you.

JOSIAH

Have you?

MARY

Of course, I have.

I love you.

JOSIAH

Do you?

MARY

How can you even question that?

JOSIAH

Two words, Mary: Harve Jennings.

MARY

Harve didn't have anything to do with us. He came afterwards.

JOSIAH

You lyin' bitch.

(He goes after Mary again, but Mavis
grabs, stops him.)

MAVIS

(pulls him back)

Now, now. We've already been through that.

JOSIAH

You can lie to other people, you can even lie to yourself, but
you can't lie to me, Mary Schultz.

MAVIS

Or me.

MARY

Shut up, Mavis.

MAVIS

Fess up, Mary.

JOSIAH

Don't you think I know? That I didn't know at the time?

(Mary sits, sullen, silent.)

MARY

Know what?

JOSIAH

Lyin's never been your strong suit, Mary.

MARY

You couldn't know!

JOSIAH

Do you think I didn't hear you?

MARY

You couldn't have.

JOSIAH

I did.

MARY

You were paralyzed . . . and heavily medicated

JOSIAH

. . . and downstairs, parked in a hospital bed in the dining room—with the TV turned on loud?

(Mary slides out of bed and moves downstage, facing and talking towards the audience. She hardly looks at Josiah. A second later, Josiah moves down stage, parallel to her, but 4 feet away. He mainly looks at and talks to her.)

I heard the rhythmic creaking of our old bed.

(Mary gasps a little. Mavis moves downstage to listen, but stays behind the couple, to Josiah's right.)

I heard your laughter as Harve humped away.

MARY

No!

JOSIAH

Right above me.

MARY

You slept 20 hours a day.

JOSIAH

Right over my paralyzed body.

MARY

Oh!

JOSIAH

The creaking bed. The giggling. The shouts of climax.

MARY

Oh, Josiah.

JOSIAH

And me . . . trapped below . . . not even able to escape you getting' on with your life.

MARY

Josiah, you have to believe that . . .

JOSIAH

(indignant)

I have to believe!? I have to believe?

MARY

. . . that I . . .

JOSIAH

You paralyzed my heart.

MARY

I didn't . . .

JOSIAH

That's when I decided to die.

MARY

I . . . I . . .

JOSIAH

I lay down there imprisoned, dying with every burst of laughter from my own bed.

MARY

Oh my god!

(Bolts in horror from front stage and over to Mavis, who holds her in her arms, but doesn't offer much comfort.)

JOSIAH

You killed me, Mary.

MARY

Don't say that.

JOSIAH

You might as well have taken a pillow and put it over my face.

MARY

(turns back to Josiah)

I loved you.

JOSIAH

How can you even say that to me? The one thing left for me after my stroke was the sanctity of our marriage—and you killed that off.

MARY

But I loved you. I love you still.

JOSIAH

Those are just words Mary. Say 'em as often as you like; they won't change what you told me with your actions.

MARY

I don't know what to say if you don't believe me. But this I know, I'll love you—always and forever.

JOSIAH

Yes, you love clichés, Mary. We all know that. You banter 'em about. You look for the truths in them. Well, here's one for you: talk is cheap.

MARY

It wasn't just talk. I cared for you. Isn't that love?

JOSIAH

You took care of Harve; you took care of you.

MARY

(She walks up to Josiah and confronts him, shouting, emphatic)

I—took--care—of YOU.

I brought you home—when I could've put you in the nursing home. I fed and bathed you. Got you up several times a day to make sure you didn't get bed sores. Read to you. Slept on the couch so you wouldn't be alone . . . so I'd be there if you needed me in the night. I wiped your ass and sopped up your piss. I put on a cheerful face every day even though my heart was breaking.

After your stroke, I was devastated.

How dare you say such things to me?

(She thumps his chest.)

How dare you.

JOSIAH

Gonna turn the tables on me, eh? It always was your strongest tactic: attack the attacker.

MARY

You weren't the only one locked inside your crippled body. I was paralyzed too—spiritually and emotionally.

Day after day, looking for improvement . . . hoping for . . . praying for . . . the slightest sign you were getting better—and never finding it—helplessly watching you waste away, bit by bit.

I lost even the chance to hope. Our world was over. I began to feel dead inside.

And then Harve came along. And he helped me so much—with the lawn and garden at first—especially after the family and neighbors had returned to their own lives—and later even with you—lifting you—even feeding you—at times when I didn't think I could lift another spoon.

He was so gentle with you—but never pitying or disgusted—even when he'd help me roll you over to change your diaper or give you a bath.

Don't you see? I started to love him because he was so loving with you.

JOSIAH

So you took him into our bed.

What a pair of saints.

Why not invent a new bible verse to cover your asses too? Greater love hath no woman than to take her husband's neighbor to bed . . .

MARY

(soft, almost pleading)

Josiah, please.

JOSIAH

. . . especially when he's too crippled to service her anymore.

What do you expect, Mary? What do you expect? Forgive and forget? Shall we hide behind another comforting cliché . . . another lie we don't wanna face?

MARY

How about just understanding?

JOSIAH

You know what I understand: that I never once cheated on you. I was faithful to my vow. I treasured you above all others.

MARY

(shifts)

You can be so self-righteous.

JOSIAH

You must be kidding me. Pot . . . kettle, Mary.

MARY

Oh, it's so easy for you to be judgmental--all wrapped up in your victimhood, but how about my side?

Maybe some people'd say it was wrong of me to take up with Harve while you were still alive, but I wasn't ready to throw my life onto the funeral pyre with yours.

JOSIAH

And your vow to me?

MARY

What are vows in the face of such circumstances? Did I abandon you? No!

Did I forsake you? No!

It was you who abandoned me.

I felt chained to death, and I wanted to live. I wanted to feel alive again.

JOSIAH

Back to it bein' my fault . . .

MARY

Is it really anybody's fault?

MAVIS

(walks over to the couple)

Well, don't you think someone has to take the fall, Mary?

MARY

Why do we need blame--recrimination?

This is a no-win situation for survivors of . . . of the harshness of life. If you commit yourself to the dying or the dead, then you're not living anymore. If you go on living, you betray those you loved.

Isn't this just a condition of being alive?

And I believe this with all my heart: we have to take as much life as we can—before it all runs out.

MAVIS

So it's a choice? You made a choice?

MARY

Yes.

JOSIAH

And vows mean nothing if they're not convenient any more?

MAVIS

Till death us do part? Just a pretty phrase?

MARY

I didn't say that!

(to Mavis)

And why are you giving me shit? I thought you were on my side in this—with your not worrying about being faithful to a dickweed.

MAVIS

I thought we were pretty clear about that too: Josiah wasn't a dickweed.

JOSIAH

Yah, I'm not a dickweed.

(to Mavis)

What's a dickweed?

MARY

No, you weren't. Never.

But does commitment mean the living have to give up their lives to the dying and the dead?

MAVIS

So, Mary, you're sayin' that special circumstances allow for special actions?

MARY

Yes.

Why do you ask?

MAVIS

I just wanna get the ground rules straight—because you know, Mary, there are all sorts of special circumstances . . .

. . . Josiah's a very attractive man . . .

(Mavis goes behind Josiah, starts rubbing his arms and shoulders.)

. . . and it's been a long time—a really long time—since I had my hands on a man . . .

(She starts rubbing his chest.)

. . . much less one as appealing as Josiah . . .

(He giggles, enjoying it.)

MARY

(annoyed, not angry or shocked)

What the hell are you doing?

MAVIS

. . . and just because you don't seem to want him anymore . . .

.

(She starts giving him short kisses—really revving him up. He responds enthusiastically.)

MARY

Mavis, knock it off . . .

MAVIS

. . . that doesn't mean other women don't . . .

(Mavis and Josiah really go at it: heavy petting, kissing, he buries his face in her bosom, she grabs his butt. The actors can roll around on the floor of flop on the bed

. . . want your castoff.

MARY

This is absurd!

MAVIS

(comes up for air)

. . . well, these are pretty special circumstances, Mary, and I'm goin' for it while I can.

JOSIAH

Lay it on me, hot mama!!

MAVIS

Rev me up, baby!!

MARY

(increasingly annoyed)

Stop!

JOSIAH

Turn-about's not fair play anymore?

MARY

Just stop it!

MAVIS

We're just takin' as much life as we can, while we can.

MARY

First, neither of you is real, and second, you're not doing a porno in my hallucination.

JOSIAH

(the pair let up)

Are you ready to admit you made a mistake?

MARY

No.

Absolutely not.

I didn't bed Harve out of anger or frustration or even boredom--and definitely not out of the desire to hurt anyone--especially you.

It was a loving exchange. He gave me what I needed to go on living.

You two are just pigs rolling around in the mud.

MAVIS

And oink, oink to you too, Mary.

JOSIAH

How's it feel, Mary?

MARY

I can take it.

JOSIAH

Give Harve up Mary.

MARY

You just don't get it.

He makes me feel alive. I won't give him up while I have an ounce of life left in me.

JOSIAH

Then don't expect me to accept what you've already decided to do.

MARY

You can have me when I'm dead.
(Josiah and Mavis break apart.)

JOSIAH

(annoyed)

Hhmmh.

MAVIS

Can you live with this, Mary?

MARY

I can. Maybe this weighed on me before—and maybe it's not all clean and pretty—but I can live with this now.

MAVIS

Then, we're almost done here. You can send him back.

MARY

But, but, it's Josiah . . . how can . . .

MAVIS

That's not really Josiah; you know that don't you?

You're finished here; you can send him away now.

MARY

Just like that?

MAVIS

Yes.

Go ahead.

(Mary snaps her fingers, Josiah grabs his IV pole and exits upstage right, into the dark)

MARY

What is this? The end of *The Wizard of Oz*?

MAVIS

Maybe—in a way.

MARY

Do I have to click my heels now and say there's no place like home?

MAVIS

Nothin' so theatrical.

MARY

How much life do I have left?

MAVIS

Probably not much—but that doesn't come from me, of course-- it's what you know.

MARY

Then I'd better make the most of it while I still can.

MAVIS

Probably not a bad cliché to live by—at the beginning or the end of life.

MARY

(goes over to her, hugs her)

Thanks, Mavis.

MAVIS

Thank yourself. I'm your hallucination after all.

(Mavis heads back to her bed, starts to get in.)

MARY

Mavis. One thing.

MAVIS

Yes, Mary.

MARY

Do you dream?

MAVIS

Yes, Mary.

MARY

What do you dream about?

MAVIS

About sleepin'—sleepin' in a big padded recliner, the TV on low, tuned to my stories; the sun is shinin' softly through a window, a big glass of ice tea close at hand.

MARY

Not a bad dream.

MAVIS

Not a bad dream at all.

Good bye, Mary. I'm here if you need me.
(finishes getting into bed)

MARY

Good night, Mavis. Sweet dreams.
(the lights go down low, Beth enters stage right, she looks over the two women sleeping, and walks over to Michael)

BETH

(She shakes him gently awake.)
Michael. Michael, what are you still doin' here? It's late.

MICHAEL

I guess I fell asleep.
(He gets up, walks over to Mary between the two beds.)
I didn't want to leave while she was so agitated.

BETH

She seems pretty settled now.

MICHAEL

I want her to know she's not alone.

BETH

She knows, Michael. She knows we'll be here for her.

MICHAEL

I hope so.

BETH

You go on home now. Even caregivers need to take care of themselves.

MICHAEL

I suppose so.

(bends over and kisses Mary)
 Good night, grandma. I love you. I'll be here for you.
 (He turns to leave, but pauses at Mavis's
 bed. He turns and caresses her head,
 pats her shoulder.)
 And sweet dreams for you too, Mavis.
 (Begins to exit stage left, turns to
 Beth.)
 Good night, Beth. Thanks for everything.

BETH
 No problem. See ya in a couple.
 (Michael exits left; Beth exits right.)

ACT FOUR

SCENE ONE

(The scene is the nursing home. The
 setting is pretty much the same as Acts
 Two/Three except that the flowers have
 been changed and are now a little
 wilted. A few items have been moved.
 Mary and Mavis are in their beds. Mary's
 bed is cranked up again. Mary is awake,
 sitting up. Harve enters from stage left
 and stands between the two beds. He
 brings new flowers.)

HARVE
 (He approaches tentatively.)
 Hello, Mary. How are you today?

MARY
 Harve! It's so good to see you.

HARVE
 You recognize me?
 (He lays the flowers down on the bed
 stand and offers his hand.)

MARY
 Why wouldn't I?
 (She takes his hand.)

HARVE
 Well . . .

MARY

Well what?

HARVE

It's just that . . .

MARY

Ahhh. I guess I've been pretty mixed up lately.

HARVE

(As he talks to her he takes the old
flowers out of the vase and puts them in
a waste can and replaces them with the
new flowers.)

Last Tuesday you thought I was the Reverend Fletcher . . .

MARY

The Reverend Fletcher! He's been dead for twenty years.

HARVE

More like thirty.

MARY

And I didn't even like him.

HARVE

And you let me—or rather, the reverend—know it. You chewed him
out pretty good.

Time before that, you called me Josiah.

MARY

My husband? I haven't seen him for . . . I don't know how
long.

HARVE

Well, you got to see 'im two weeks ago.

MARY

Oh Harve . . .

HARVE

(He takes her hand again.)

Don't fret about it one bit. I'm just glad to see you—no
matter who I am.

MARY

And I'm glad too. But I feel so good today—more like my old
self.

HARVE

And you look really good too.

MARY

Come here. Give me a real kiss.

(They kiss passionately.)

You still spark me like no one else.

HARVE

(He tears up a little.)

I miss you so much . . . every single day.

(They continue holding hands. He tries to hold back heavier tears.)

MARY

Harve . . . Harve, my dear, sweet man, no . . . not today.

(taking his chin in her hand, dabbing his tears)

I understand how hard this has been on you . . .

(tender, then just a little upbeat)

. . . but let's make the most of this time.

Come over here and sit beside me.

(He sits on the bed opposite her.)

No, beside me here.

(She scoots over and pats the bed. Side by side, he puts his arm around her. He takes a deep breath.)

Tell me what you've been up to.

HARVE

(He collects himself.)

Oh, putterin' around. People still bring their cars by for me to work on. Seems like the garage downtown screws up more clutches than they fix.

MARY

You always were the best mechanic in town.

HARVE

And I've started paintin' the old garage—light blue with dark blue trim.

MARY

Sounds very pretty.

HARVE

So, how's this time been for you?

MARY

Some days are long; some I don't remember. I think it's harder on my visitors than it is on me.

They tell me Fay comes in about twice a week. Luckily, I'm out of my head most of those days.

HARVE

Mary Schultz. You'd joke on the gallows.

MARY

In case you ain't noticed, I've got a foot on the trap door.

HARVE

(shakes his head and chuckles a little)

Mary, Mary—that's not true.

MARY

(sweetly mocking) Harve, Harve . . . what else is going on with you?

HARVE

My niece and nephew look in on me 'bout every day. They're great kids.

MARY

Kids. When did 50-year-olds become kids?

HARVE

It seems like they were kids just yesterday. They grow up so fast.

MARY

Here today, gone tomorrow.

HARVE

Time stands still for no man.

MARY

Why don't you just say we're older than dirt?

HARVE

You up for a round?

MARY

Sure am.

HARVE

I'm on my toes today.

Are you?

MARY

Challenge accepted. No one out-clichés me!

Where did the time go?

HARVE

(lightly)

One foot on the banana peel, another in the grave.

MARY

No use crying over spilt milk.

HARVE

Grow old gracefully.

MARY

Grow old disgracefully.

HARVE

There's no fool like an old fool.

MARY

You never miss the water till the well runs dry.

(Longingly, she rubs his arm.)

HARVE

There may be snow on the roof, but there's fire in the belly.

(He kisses her hand.)

MARY

The older the fiddle, the sweeter the tune.

(She rubs his chest and belly.)

HARVE

(questioning, hopeful)

Open a can of worms?

MARY

(kisses him lightly)

Two peas in a pod.

HARVE

(reaches across and rubs her belly and side)

Putting the cart before the horse?

MARY

Still waters run deep.

(She fondles his crotch, kisses him passionately.)

HARVE

Little strokes fell great oaks.
(He caresses her breast.)

MARY

There's no time like the present.
(She pulls him on top of her. They make out passionately.)

MARY

(They come up for air.)
Oh Harve, let's make hay while the sun shines. Take me now.

HARVE

Now?? Buttt . . .

MARY

It's too late to tell me you're not up for it. Now!!!
(She pulls at his shirt and undoes his belt. Excited, he takes down his pants and shorts while Mary spreads her legs and pulls up her nightgown. He lies down on her, his ass bare; her bare legs are up in the air, kicking, freely signaling her enthusiasm and joy. They make exuberant love.)

(Beth and Fay enter stage left--outside the room as they start the conversation, moving towards it, but not seeing what is going on.)

BETH

I think you're gonna notice a real change in Mary.

FAY

. . . in *Mrs. Schultz!* (haughtily)

BETH

(meekly) Mrs. Schultz.

The new meds Dr. Naryan prescribed really seem to be working.

FAY

(not interested)
Uh huh.

BETH

And I think her new diet is helping too.

FAY

Well, we'll see how she's doing today.

BETH

If she keeps improving, I think there's a real chance she can go home.

FAY

(annoyed)

Oh you do?

And where did you get your medical degree?

BETH

Well , I just . . .

FAY

(They walk into the room, Fay leads and upon seeing the lovers, screams,)

Oh my God!

(drops her bag)

Mother! What are you doing?

(the lovers continue unabated)

MARY

If you don't know at this point in your life, no mother-daughter talk is gonna help you now, Fay.

Praise the lord and pass the ammunition!

BETH

(tugging at her coat)

Mrs. Miller, I think we oughtta leave.

FAY

Leave? Not on your life.

(stomps her foot)

Mother, stop this right now.

MARY

Not on your life.

Oh Harve, bring it home, baby!

(The lovers let out loud orgasmic yells
at the same time and collapse. Harve
staying on top of Mary.)

FAY

(marches over to the bed and hits Harve)
Get off her! Get off her right now!
(Harve rolls off to the opposite side of
the bed and redresses.)

MARY

(exuberant, laughing)
Who said you can't squeeze blood out of a turnip!

FAY

How could you humiliate me like this?

MARY

(still laughing, playing the cliché game)
No use cryin' over spilt milk.

God, I needed that!

(Harve backs away from Fay and the bed.)
Harve, where are you going?

HARVE

Well . . . I guess I'd better . . .

FAY

(to Harve)
How dare you!

MARY

Fay, leave him alone.

FAY

You've taken advantage of her.

MARY

No he didn't.

FAY

You'll pay for this, Harve Jennings.
(Harve flees stage right.)

MARY

No he won't. We're adults. We both wanted this.

Beth, you're my witness.

BETH

Mrs. Miller, this really isn't such a big deal. Mary . . . uh, Mrs. Schultz is right, they're both in control of their faculties . . .

FAY

You call this "in control?" I think it's anything but "in control." And as for Mrs. Schultz's faculties, only last week she thought I was her long-dead mother.

BETH

But she's been so much better this week. Dr. Naryan . . .

FAY

It's obvious Dr. Naryan and his methods are not giving us what we had hoped for.

MARY

Fay, please . . .

FAY

(indignant/incensed)

Please??

Please????

Now you're going to plead with me . . . now you'll remember your manners?? Isn't it a little late for that, mother?

MARY

Fay, when are you ever gonna loosen your sphincter and pull that stick out of your ass?

FAY

(sharp, harsh to Mary)

How dare you speak to me that way!

BETH

Mrs. Miller, if we could all just calm down and talk . . .

FAY

(angrily)

Calm down?

Calm down??

(then softly; focused, systematic, determined. She calmly walks over and picks up her purse; deep breath and turns to Beth)

I'm perfectly calm.

My family has donated a lot of money to this care facility.

My husband sits on the board.

(pointedly to Beth) Changes will be made.

Order will be restored.

(Beth hurries out; Fay starts to leave
but turns to Mary)

I will deal with Harve Jennings.

MARY

This is between you and me, Fay; don't take this out on Harve.
It's not his fault.

FAY

Fault. An interesting word . . . but irrelevant. How about
outrageous . . . or inappropriate? But you're right, mother,
it's not his fault.

MARY

Why do you have to make such a big deal about everything?

FAY

Disgracing yourself isn't a big deal?

Humiliating me isn't a big deal?

MARY

God, Fay, once a bitch, always a bitch.

FAY

You're so funny mother—your little games, your reckless
pranks, your biting witticisms. All my life I
(stops, pauses, shifts)

Let me leave you one little adage to think about: speak softly
and carry a big stick.

(starts to walk away again)

MARY

What do you care?

FAY

Care? Why do I care? Maybe you don't care about your
reputation, but I have to live in this community! I have to
listen to people talk.

MARY

You just don't get it. I'm not ready to stop living.

FAY

Oh, I do, mother, I do get it. You live to make my life miserable.

(continues to leave)

MARY

Fay. Don't you walk out on me. We're not done here . . .

FAY

Sorry, mother, visiting hours are over.

(Fay exits stage right.)

SCENE TWO

(The scene is the same as Scene One with a few changes such as the flowers and a few moved objects. The sides of Mary's hospital bed are raised, and Mary is tied down with restraints, the head of the bed is raised enough to see her eyes. Sedated, she stares off into the distance blankly. She barely moves and remains unresponsive to all actions in the scene. Michael and Fay enter Mary's room stage left. Fay carries a bag.)

MICHAEL

. . . but she was doing so well with Dr. Naryan.

FAY

Well honey, that's a matter of opinion. Dr. Gordon agrees with me that this is a better course of treatment. Your grandmother's much calmer . . . much more relaxed now.

MICHAEL

Calmer? More relaxed? She's damn near catatonic!

FAY

(firm)

Don't you use such language with me, young man.

MICHAEL

It's not right for you to keep her like this.

FAY

(sharply, rebuking)

It's not right?

(challenging, intimidating)

I don't have the right?

MICHAEL

How can you even pretend this is right for her?

FAY

And what do you really know about any of this? You just come breezing in when it suits you, when you want some warm, fuzzy interaction with your grandmother.

MICHAEL

It's just that . . .

FAY

You can't even begin to know how hard this has all been on me . . . and not just these last months, but for a long time . . .

MICHAEL

Mother, I . . .

FAY

Michael . . . I know how you feel about your grandmother, and that's sweet, but it's best you left this up to me and Dr. Gordon.

Do you really think we'd do anything that wasn't in her best interest?

(Michael stares at her but doesn't say anything. Fay continues, justifying, increasingly irritated.)

She was delusional.

She was having public sex.

Who knows how many other residents she might have molested?

MICHAEL

Harve wasn't a resident, and he wasn't a stranger.

FAY

It was only a matter of time before something worse happened.

MICHAEL

How can you say such a thing? You know her.

FAY

Oh, I know her alright.

MICHAEL

Then you know she's not like that. Show some compassion—some understanding.

FAY

(smirking, ironic)

Compassion.

Understanding.

(mutters)

It's obvious you don't know your grandmother that well.

Let me tell you: I've given far more than I received.

MICHAEL

Why do you have to be . . .

(stops himself)

FAY

. . . such a hard-assed bitch?

MICHAEL

Mother, I didn't . . .

FAY

Just go ahead and say it: your mother's a hard-assed bitch. I can live with that . . . but have you considered that I have a mother too? Where do you think I got it from, Michael?

MICHAEL

I'm just saying . . .

FAY

(She cuts him off.)

It's our family legacy--from one hard-assed bitching generation to the next.

Don't worry, you'll get your turn.

MICHAEL

Is that what you want for this family?

FAY

You think we have a choice?

MICHAEL

Can't we just let go of this vicious cycle? Just let it go.

FAY

Oh that's easy for you to say . . .

MICHAEL

You may not ever have another chance to set things right, to let go of old grievances.

FAY

(shakes her head, laughs a little with pain and regret)

I have bad news for you: those grievances . . . they never leave you.

(increasingly bitter)

Every cutting comment, every silent rebuke, every disappointed look . . . those injuries never go away—even if you want them to . . .

MICHAEL

Someone has to . . .

FAY

(Fay drifts off here, talking more to herself than to Michael.)

. . . not even with a hundred hours of counseling . . . a thousand bottles of Chablis . . . a million hours of charity work . . .

(She snaps back into reality.)

No death-bed reconciliation is ever really going to change anything. And honestly, it's not like your grandmother was anxious for a cease-fire.

MICHAEL

Then what are we left with?

FAY

What do we have left? Our family reputation, that's what—and I'm not going to see this family become the laughing stock of the county:

(She mimics the gossip mongers:)

"Poor Fay Miller—did ya hear? Her wacked-out mother's pulling all sorts of antics over at the nursing home."

Over--my--dead--body!

MICHAEL

Who gives a fuck about reputation?

FAY

Oh please!

(she laughs at him coldly)

You think you don't benefit from our family reputation?

(Michael turns his back on her. She continues,)

Sure, we're a bunch of assholes to you, but our reputation in this community is pretty damn good: we're good people, hard-working, we've got money, we give back to the community. And if we're sometimes seen as hard-assed bastards, well that commands respect as well.

It's kept your brother out of jail a couple of times . . . and it's kept you from getting beat up and run out of town for your shenanigans . . .

(he turns and faces her, to object, but she cuts him off,)

Don't even.

Don't you think I know?

Don't you think the whole county knows . . . what you do on those back roads . . . in those dark parking lots late at night . . . with all those men? And that's just fine and dandy . . . because we have a family reputation that protects you. It's ok for you to be the black sheep. What good family doesn't have one?

It's ok for you to have your little . . . peccadilloes. What member of a good family doesn't?

But if there are too many, then we turn into trash, and we are NOT going back to the trailer court!

MICHAEL

But mother . . . mom . . .

FAY

That's enough!

Your grandmother's 81. And let's face it, Michael, getting old isn't pretty. This is how a lot of us end.

And look at it this way, when I get to this age, you can stick me in here and drug me to the gills. In fact, I'd prefer it.

MICHAEL

I'm just saying . . .

FAY

(with finality)

I will not discuss this any more.

(She shifts into her cheery, public facade.)

Today is about your grandmother.

(On Fay's last line, several CNAs and/or nurses come into the room—Beth is not

among them; one is pushing a cart with a birthday cake lit with 81 candles. Fay digs in her bag and pulls out a toy crown and puts it on the unresponsive Mary. Then she hands out hats and noise makers to everyone. Michael moves to the opposite side of Mary's bed and takes her hand. Bert enters with a big bag of Depends and stands at the end of Mary's bed. Fay continues, happily.)

FAY

Ok everyone, it's Mary's special day. Let's all sing!
 (The assembled sing an unenthusiastic Happy Birthday.)

BERT

(Plops the Depends on the end of the bed at the end of the song.)
 Happy birthday, grandma.
 (Lights down. All exit.)

ACT FIVE

(The scene is Mary's funeral, stage left. A coffin sets low in the center of the set so that the audience can see Mary, who is in the coffin. The coffin is not cheap. It is tasteful. There are flower arrangements. Fay stands stage right of the coffin, Michael next to her, Bert next to him, Fay's husband, Herman next to Bert. Dr. Naryan, Beth, and Harve are stage left of the coffin. Other mourners may be added behind these two groups. The funeral director hovers about; a minister is present between the two groups, a little downstage, back to the crowd. Mary is dressed in a horrible dress—gaudy and/or way too frilly. Her cheeks are too heavily rouged, the rest of her make up overdone.)

MINISTER

(drones on in a flat tone)
 . . . and Jesus said to her, "Your brother will rise."
 And Martha said to him, "I know he will rise, in the resurrection on the last day."

Then Jesus told her, "I am the resurrection and the life; whoever believes in me, even if he dies, will live, and everyone who lives and believes in me will never die . . . "

MARY

(A spot comes up on Mary, who sits up. The mourners are frozen in place, the lights dim on them. Mary knocks down the side of the casket--or crawls out. She looks around and moves downstage, taking it all in.)

I told Fay I didn't wanna be buried.

I was supposed to be cremated--and I told her she could put my ashes anywhere she liked--use them as cat litter or put them in the bottom of a potted plant for drainage, for all I cared, but don't fill me up with chemicals and put me in a fucking box.

Damn!

And look at this dress--sweet Jesus!

God, that Fay sure can hold a grudge.

She's probably got me made up like a whore too.

(She lightly touches her face.)

I don't mind that though.

So, here we are.

Not a bad turn out--for someone who outlived most of her friends--

(she glances back at Fay)

--if not all of her enemies.

So what do we do now with our little bit of suspended disbelief?

I suppose you want some reassuring words or some bits of wisdom--something to pull it all together.

A grand gesture of forgiveness or reconciliation?

But I haven't got any for you.

Everything that could be said about life and death has already been said. Why would you need a comforting cliché from me? I can't tell you anything that'd transform your lives--make you

a better person, improve your sex life—(sarcastic here) give you lasting love.

All that comes to mind is an old song title from Doris Day: "Que Sera, Sera." For you youngsters, that's, what will be, will be. That's as much as anyone can expect.

(She turns and starts to walk back to the coffin, then stops, turns around, walks back toward the audience and says,)

Ok, ok.

I'll give you this--and this is only what I've learned—I don't pretend it's some kind of wisdom for the ages.

(She walks back downstage.)

No matter what we do with our children, no matter how careful we think we're being, we're fucking them over. A very wise friend of mine once told me, all parents screw up their kids—it just can't be helped. But there are two types of parents—and this is the important part—the first type admits their mistakes, apologizes, and tries to move on—the other lives in denial and lets the pain and anger fester and destroy.

But then I guess that's true for all our relationships. With our brothers and sisters, our friends—with our husbands—or wives—(she turns and wistfully looks at Harve)—and even our lovers.

I can't tell you how to fix any of it.

All we leave behind are messes—messes that get passed on from generation to generation. More than anything, we pass on our ability to live in denial—clinging to a few sweet illusions that over-ride the reality of our lives.

I have to hand it to Fay; she may be seeing most of her life through a bottle of Chablis these days, but she saw through me. And maybe that was the problem—we saw through each other. Maybe the reality was too much for each of us.

Well, I made my own mistakes—but even admitting it—it won't make any difference now.

I did the best I could.

So, there you have it. Are you happy now?

It's time for me to move off—don't know where to or why; I guess it's just what we do.

(She crawls up into the coffin-and says
before she lies down,)

I suppose they'll stick me by Josiah. That'll be ok by me.
Maybe he won't be so pissed at me by now.

(Adjusts her hair and clothing a little.)

God, I hope they don't sing "Amazing Grace." I always hated
that song.

(She lies down. The undertaker puts the
coffin back together, straightens out
Mary, and stands aside. The lights come
up. We come in on the end of the
minister's sermon)

MINISTER

. . . I am the resurrection, and the life: he that believeth
in me, though he were dead, yet shall he live. Amen.

(He bows his head for a moment, then
says,)

Now, let's turn to page 42 and sing a song that Mary's beloved
daughter Fay tells me was her favorite, "Amazing Grace."

(The assembled members begin to sing
"Amazing Grace.")

(From the coffin, still lying down, Mary
yells out loudly in exasperation,)

"Jesus!"

(As the mourners continue to sing,
Michael crosses from his side of the
funeral mourners to the other and stands
with Beth, Harve, and Dr. Naryan. Lights
fade as the undertaker closes the coffin
and the assembled members continue the
song.)

(Curtain.)