

THE OBITUARY I'M DYING TO WRITE ©

A Comedic Stage Play In Two Acts

By

Lawrence B. Fox
1834 Pennsylvania Avenue
Hanover Township
Allentown, PA 18109

Telephone 610-861-9297
Facsimile 610-861-5958
LBFox@LBFoxLaw.com
www.lawrencebfox.com

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CAST LIST

THE OBITUARY I'M DYING TO WRITE JANUARY 2013 MANUSCRIPT

SCENE ONE: *The Luncheon Gathering* Eleven Actors

LILLIAN: 85-year-old nursing home resident who walks with a cane. She will transition later in the play into a 35 year old lawyer who cares about the welfare of her clients.

JANICE: 80-year-old nursing home resident who walks unassisted. She is a soft-spoken retired nurse with a loving and gentle personality.

SARGE: 85-year-old nursing home resident who is confined to a wheelchair. A former Marine and bartender, what he lacks in education he overcompensates with sarcasm. He will transition later in the play into a 20-year-old military inductee.

KEVIN: 25-year-old nursing home aid. He is upbeat and energetic, despite the depressing surroundings in which he works.

MILTON: 80-year-old nursing home resident who walks with an aluminum four-legged "walker" device. He is slightly depressed and has no sense of humor. He will transition later in the play into a 50-year-old concrete contractor.

GERTIE: 85-year-old upbeat and gregarious nursing home resident confined to a wheelchair. A former school teacher, she finds humor in everything. She will transition later in the play into a 35-year-old visitor to New York City.

ARTIE: 85-year-old nursing home resident who walks unassisted. A Coast Guard veteran and former security guard, he is pleasant and enjoys a good conversation. He will transition later in the play into a 20-year-old Coast Guard sailor.

BENNY: 85-year-old nursing home resident who walks with two canes. A former furniture salesman, he can become philosophical at times. He will transition later in the play into a 40-year-old card playing husband.

GLENN: 85-year-old nursing home resident who walks unassisted. A former blouse mill worker, he has grown accustomed to and thankful for his present existence at the nursing home. He will transition later in the play into a 20-year-old car enthusiast.

SYLVIA: 35-year-old housewife and mother who is volunteering for the first time at the nursing home. Initially nervous regarding these new surroundings, she grows to enjoy her new-found elderly friends.

BERNIE: 25-year-old IRS agent conducting an audit of MILTON'S construction business. BERNIE is humorless, dedicated, and persistent.

SCENE TWO: *A Trip To New York City*
Two New Roles

GERTIE, BENNY, JANICE, ARTIE, MILTON, and SARGE, appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

GERTIE also transitions into a 35-year-old housewife who visits the United Nations.

ETHIOPIAN DELEGATE: (Can be either male or female.) Speaks in a foreign language with a strange accent.

TOGOLAND DELEGATE: (Can be either male or female.) Speaks in a foreign language with a strange accent.

SCENE THREE: *Saint Joseph*
Three New Roles

LILLIAN, BENNY, SARGE, JANICE, MILTON, and ARTIE, appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

BENNY also transitions into a 40-year-old card-playing husband, married to FRED A.

PATRICK: 40-year-old card-playing friend, married to MARY.

MARY: 40-year-old card-playing friend, married to PATRICK.

FRED A: 40-year-old card-playing friend, married to BENNY.

SCENE FOUR: *The Written Examination*
One New Role

SARGE, GLENN, MILTON, GERTIE, and ARTIE, appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

SARGE also transitions into a 20-year-old military inductee.

SERGEANT HILDENBLOOM: A no-nonsense 25-year-old female Marine sergeant.

ECHO VOICE: an off-stage voice describing SARGE'S thoughts.

(Three test takers are also present on stage. They have no speaking parts.)

SCENE FIVE: The Duty Assignment
Four New Roles

ARTIE, LILLIAN, GLENN, JANICE, MILTON, and GERTIE appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

ARTIE also transitions into a 20-year-old Coast Guard sailor.

CAPTAIN: A 23-year-old Coast Guard officer.

FEMALE SAILOR: A 20-year-old Coast Guard sailor.

COOKIE: A 20-year-old Coast Guard cook.

CLEARWATER: A 45-year-old Coast Guard Vice-Admiral.

SCENE SIX: The Adoption
Seven New Roles

LILLIAN, JANICE, BENNY, SYLVIA, GERTIE, MILTON and SARGE appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

LILLIAN also transitions into a 35-year-old attorney.

HEFFELFINGER: 50-year-old agitated farmer who is LILLIAN'S client.

CLAIRE: LILLIAN'S female legal secretary (no specific age required.) She is competent and sarcastic.

MRS. PERRYMAN: 35-year-old housewife. She is highly emotional and persistent.

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY: (Can be any age and either sex.) This attorney is perceptive and tries to explain to Lillian the dangers she faces.

DR. PHILIPS: A young gynecologist at the hospital. (This actor can be female if necessary.)

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR (Can be any age and either sex.) This doctor is perceptive and tries to explain to DR. PHILIPS the dangers he faces.

NURSE: (Female and can be any age.) No-nonsense nurse at hospital, who is always in a hurry.

SCENE SEVEN: *True Love*

JANICE, LILLIAN, ARTIE, SYLVIA, GERTIE, and SARGE appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

SCENE EIGHT: *The Speeding Ticket*
Four New Roles

GLENN, SYLVIA, GERTIE, LILLIAN, BENNY, JANICE, and MILTON appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

GLENN also transitions into a 20-year-old car enthusiast.

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE: (Can be male or female. Non-speaking part.)

FIRST DEFENDANT: A young defendant in the courtroom. (Can be male or female.)

SECOND DEFENDANT: A young defendant in the courtroom. (Can be male or female.)

SECRETARY: 20-year-old female secretary to the Justice of the Peace.

SCENE NINE: *The Perfect Crime*
Two New Roles

SYLVIA, SARGE, MILTON, GLENN, ARTIE, GERTIE, and LILLIAN appear in their nursing home setting. (The other residents are also present, but have no speaking parts.)

CHEF BARRY: A male cook. (Could be female, if necessary, and can be any age.)

CHEF HAROLD: A male cook (Could be female, if necessary, and can be any age.)

SCENE TEN: *The Obituaries*

MILTON, GERTIE, GLENN, SARGE, LILLIAN, ARTIE, JANICE, and BENNY, appear in their nursing home setting.

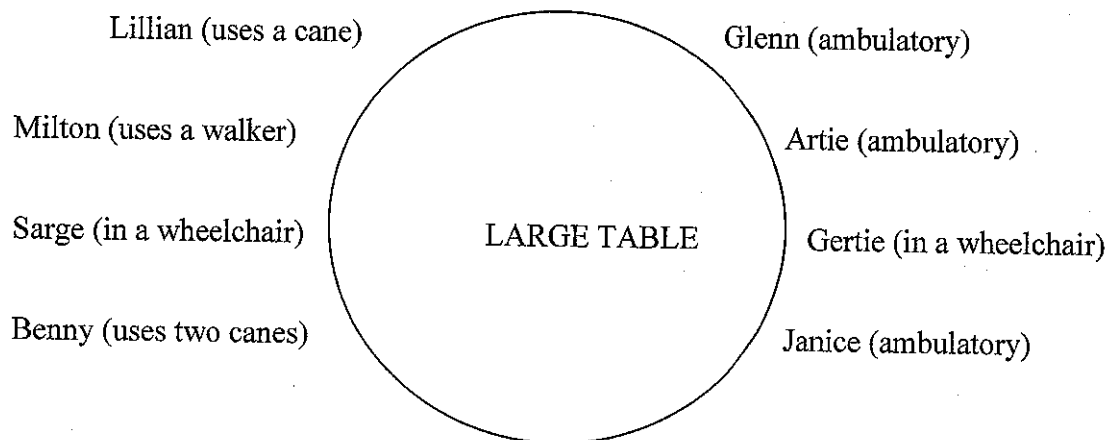
THE OBITUARY I'M DYING TO WRITE

SYNOPSIS

Eight elderly residents of the county nursing home for the indigent discuss the drafting of their obituaries. Should the notices of their approaching deaths contain the same useless platitudes as are so often found in the newspapers? Perhaps these senior citizens might distinguish themselves by drafting their own individual obituaries with a focus upon a particular achievement or life-altering Epiphany never before divulged. The audience becomes privy to some of these unique moments, after which the elderly residents share a reading of their final words on earth.

SCENE ONE – THE LUNCHEON GATHERING

(The audience views the lunch room at Cedardale, the county nursing home for those indigent elderly residents who can't afford to reside in a private upscale facility. Eight residents begin one by one to gather around a table as they await their lunch. These senior citizens worked hard all their lives just to get by, and now society has forgotten them. Their close friends died years ago. They will eat at an empty table that is decorated by just one cheap plastic flower holder in which is displayed an artificial flower that appears to have been placed there as an afterthought.)



The actors individually begin to appear on stage in the following order:

Lillian – (She is about 85 years old, uses a cane to walk, is dressed in simple street clothes, and wears slippers. In her earlier life, she was a small town attorney who took on cases even if the client could not pay. She accepts her lot in life because she is too pragmatic to do otherwise. But that doesn't mean she is prepared to wear pajamas in the middle of the day. Rather, she strives to maintain an air of dignity and respectability. She carries a newspaper in her hand. She shuffles over to the table, and struggles to sit down on one of the cheap chairs. She looks about the room as she mumbles to herself.)

LILLIAN:

“Guess I’m the first one here.” (Not one to waste precious time, she unfolds the newspaper and begins to glance at the pages.)

Janice, who is about 80, appears on stage and in good physical condition. She walks unassisted and without hesitation. She is a gentle person, who has rarely ever found the need to assert herself. She is a widow who could not afford to live in her small home once her husband died. She approaches Lillian, but remains standing next to her.

JANICE:

“Is this seat taken?” (Lillian and Janice both laugh as she points to the seat. Lillian motions for Janice to sit down. Janice looks about the room, since she feels no need to begin a conversation that might interrupt Lillian’s study of her newspaper. Lillian looks up to address Janice.)

LILLIAN:

“Do anything interesting this morning, Janice?”

JANICE:

“Beanbag therapy. Some of us girls tossed beanbags at the big box with a hole in the top. I hit the target three times, but Gertie stole the show. She threw six winners in a row, even though she’s stuck in her wheelchair! (Lillian nods her head in approval as the two friends sit quietly.) **What have you done with your day?”**

LILLIAN:

(Lays down her newspaper.)

“I wrote a letter to my granddaughter. She’s in college now. Says I’m one of the last letter writers on the face of the earth. Everyone else e-mails or texts. I guess I’ve become a dinosaur in this technological age.”

JANICE:

"I don't think the kids in school are taught penmanship anymore. I wonder if any of them even owns a pen."

LILLIAN:

"As a young student, I used to carry a slide rule, and it never needed recharging. Know what my granddaughter told her parents she wants for Christmas?"

JANICE:

"I can't imagine."

LILLIAN:

"Batteries, and lots of them. For her computers, and the phone that can call itself and record its own message in 40 different languages, and the digital games, and the skateboard with the portable TV. The list is apparently endless."

JANICE:

"I never felt a need for any of that stuff. How ever did we exist?"

LILLIAN:

"We were obviously deprived. We misspent our youth playing outdoors in the pollution, when we should have been nestled safe inside with the air conditioners running full blast."

Sarge rolls on stage seated in a wheelchair pushed by Kevin, a twenty-something orderly dressed in hospital whites. Sarge is about 85, and is dressed in pajamas. A pole protrudes upward from his wheelchair that supports the U.S. Marine Corps flag inscribed with the words *Semper Fi*. He is jovial but does not maintain the same social graces to which Lillian and Janice adhere. His grammar is not always correct and sometimes his attempts at humor border on sarcasm.

Kevin appears to be oblivious to the depressing surroundings in which he works. He is upbeat and energetic, despite the fact this facility is understaffed, requiring that he perform the duties of two orderlies.

SARGE:

(He appears to be awakening from a mid-morning nap. He has trouble speaking, since he is missing his dentures.)

“Is dis breakfast or dinner?”

KEVIN:

“It’s lunch, Sarge. Don’t you remember, you had breakfast just before you took your nap.”

SARGE:

“I took a nap? Hey Kev, where are my teeef? I don’t think you put ‘em in my mouth yet. If you did, I musta sneezed and they flew out again.”

KEVIN:

“They’re probably sitting in the glass on your dresser. I’ll get your choppers just as soon as everyone else arrives.”

LILLIAN:

“That could take some time. Herding cats is probably easier.” (Kevin disappears off-stage to locate another resident.)

SARGE:

(Addresses questions to anyone who might listen.)

“Are you sure dis is lunch? Where’s my watch? What time is it?”

Milton appears on stage. He assists himself with a four-legged aluminum “walker” device. He is dressed in street clothes, and is about 80 years old. He is polite, but is not very friendly, and is

probably suffering from depression. In his prior life he was a concrete contractor. He finds an empty seat and gingerly lowers his body into it as he continues to grasp the walker device.

LILLIAN:

“Hi, Milt.”

MILTON:
(Lacking emotion.)

“Hello everyone.”

SARGE:

“Milt – would you believe dis is lunch already?”

MILTON:

“Sarge, we have this same conversation just about every day.”

SARGE:

“We do? What did we decide?” (Milton shakes his head side-to-side incredulously.)

Gertie appears on stage sitting in a wheelchair pushed from behind by Kevin who rolls Gertie to the table. She is about 85 and wears a hospital gown. Despite her declining state of health, she is upbeat, and finds a way whenever possible to interject humor into any discussion. She taught school many years ago.

GERTIE:

“Hey Sarge, is this brunch or lunch?”

MILTON:
(Exasperated.)

“Why do you have to push his buttons? Please don’t wind him up again.”

SARGE:
(Vindicated.)

“See – I’m not the only one who wants to know.”

KEVIN:
(Addresses everyone at the table.)

“When I knocked on Gertie’s door (he points at Gertie) to see if she was ready, know what she said?”

JANICE:

“I can’t imagine.”

KEVIN:

“Who’s there – friend or enema?” (He rushes off stage to find another resident.)

GERTIE:

“I was simply checking. At my age, any surprise could be fatal.”

SARGE:

“But Gertie, you’re wearing a colostomy bag.”

GERTIE:

“Yup! Best thing that ever happened to me. First time in my life I’ve got a bag that actually matches my shoes! And now, unlike you mere mortals, I can take a shit anytime, anywhere and no one knows it. Not even me! Ah ... wait ... It’s possible something may be sliding by right about now.”

MILTON:

“That’s disgusting! It’s almost lunch time!”

SARGE:

“Are you sure?” (Everyone ignores him.)

GERTIE:

“Beats the crap out of wearing a diaper ... Milty.” (She points at him.)

Artie walks on stage wearing street clothes. He is about 85 and physically fit. In his prior life he served in the Coast Guard and later as a bank security guard. He takes one of the remaining seats.

ARTIE:

“Sorry I’m late. Did I miss anything?”

GERTIE:

“Nothing that won’t happen again about this time tomorrow.”

Benny walks on stage using two canes. He is about 85. He is wearing street clothes. He moves slowly with determination as a result of previous knee replacement surgery. He once sold furniture, and later sold real estate. He is content with his present situation, and is able to hold an intelligent conversation. He slowly inches into one of the last remaining chairs.

BENNY:

“Hello everyone.” (The other residents mumble a response as Kevin appears pushing a food cart laden with trays. He is accompanied by Sylvia.)

Sylvia is about 30 years old, a young mother who is volunteering for the first time as part of her church’s outreach program. She is slightly nervous in these unknown surroundings, but she wants to help wherever possible, and she projects a friendly demeanor. She is wearing high-end clothing reflective of her above-average social status.

KEVIN:

“Luncheon is served. (He points at Sylvia.) This is Sylvia, today’s volunteer. (Kevin addresses Sylvia.) Sylvia, this is the group from East Wing Nine. (Kevin looks around.) Wait a minute. Someone’s missing. Where’s Glenn?”

Glenn walks on stage. He is about 85 and physically fit. He wears street clothes. He has a kind disposition, a gentle smile, and is grateful for his meager life style. He was a laborer in a blouse mill until it went out of business. His wife died several years ago. He takes the last seat.

GLENN:

“I’ve just got to stop watching those TV soaps. They’re addictive. I almost missed lunch again. But important things were happening between the commercials. You see, Matilda, the bleached blonde, is about to give birth, and it’s still unclear if the real father knows he’s going to have twins.”

GERTIE:

“That’s a rerun. Tomorrow she’s gonna have triplets, and it’s probably two different fathers, including the guy who didn’t make bail.”

GLENN:

“I can’t believe you disclosed the ending!”

GERTIE:

“No worry, ‘cause it never ends. It’s a soap.”

MILTON:

(Despondent.)

“I guess it’s sorta like living here.”

SYLVIA:
(Shy and nervous.)

"It's so nice to make everyone's acquaintance." (Kevin and Sylvia begin to set trays laden with food in front of the residents, who study the trays with some hesitation.)

KEVIN:

"Now I gotta find Sarge's dentures, so Sylvia, why don't you stay here and get acquainted with everyone. They won't bite."

SARGE:

"Can't. Got no teeef." (He points at his mouth.)

SYLVIA:

"But what am I supposed to do while you're gone?"

KEVIN:

"Don't you worry. They aren't bashful. They'll tell you if they need anything." (Kevin disappears off stage, abandoning nervous Sylvia. Milton begins to study his food.)

MILTON:

"Any ideas?"

SARGE:

"It's green. It's Tuesday. Must be Jell-O, or ... wait a minute – maybe strained peas."

MILTON:

"In your dreams! It's salad from yesterday."

BENNY:

"Who says it's green?"

GLENN:

"Look, you bunch of whiners, where do you think you are? The Ritz? At least we've got something to eat."

ARTIE:

"I suppose we're the lucky ones. No feeding tubes. And then there's the damn Alzheimer's wing. Poor bastards."

SARGE:

"Yeah. Dey can't remember nothin'. Wouldn't know if it was breakfast or lunch."

MILTON:

"Actually, the Alzheimers folks are kinda lucky. They don't know from shit what they ate yesterday."

BENNY:

"You're right, Artie. You've got to look on the bright side. Sitting here these last five years, well ... I've only now begun to realize why we were put on the earth."

GERTIE:

"You've figured out the meaning of life?"

BENNY:

"Care to be let in on the secret?"

GERTIE:

"I'm all ears, except for the colostomy bag."

BENNY:

"What does a man between the ages of 20 and 40 want?"

GERTIE:

"I dunno. What?"

BENNY:

"Sex. As much as he can get."

GERTIE:

"I wouldn't mind meeting that man."

BENNY:

"What does a man between the ages of 40 and 60 want?"

GERTIE:

"I dunno. What?"

BENNY:

"Money. As much as he can make."

GERTIE:

"I suppose so."

BENNY:

"What does a man between the ages of 60 and 80 want?"

GERTIE:

"I dunno. Tell me."

BENNY:

"One good crap! There comes a time in life when nothing is more important or satisfying."

GERTIE:

"You ain't shittin'."

MILTON:
(Agitated.)

"I don't understand why you two must always be so irreverent. There's a reason one becomes elderly. Each day you get a little closer to God and his greatest gift – death. Imagine if you lived forever, becoming more infirm with each passing day. But by heavenly design, God in His infinite wisdom finally permits us to take our well-deserved rest. Those of us with Faith will sit at His right hand."

SARGE:
(With conviction.)

"Aww ... Bullshit!"

JANICE:

"Sarge! You should be ashamed of yourself! It's good to believe in something – anything."

SARGE:

"Yeah? Well there was a time when I actually believed there was a tooth fairy and Tinkerbell, too. Look where it got me. That reminds me, where are my teeef?"

JANICE:

"The beauty of growing old is that only with time do you finally have something worthwhile to say. It would be presumptuous and premature for a 30-year-old to write an autobiography. The young haven't yet lived."

LILLIAN:
(Picks up his newspaper and points at it.)

"Ya know what's so strange about life? What they fail to report at your death. These obituaries? Full of useless dribble."

MILTON:

"Huh?" (Said like an old man hard of hearing.)

LILLIAN:
(Takes on the challenge.)

"There was a time when the art of writing an obituary was pursued with grace and style. Some actual thought went into the process. On occasion personal poems or stories written by the decedent accompanied the announcement of one's death." (Lillian picks up her newspaper and reads aloud with disdain.) Listen to this:

Herminia 'Hermie' Clodstoffer died suddenly in her private residence on Monday, at the age of 92."

MILTON:

"So?"

LILLIAN:

"Obviously she died *suddenly*. One second your heart's beating, the next it isn't. Same with the phrase *died unexpectedly*. Rubbish! No one lives forever! Of course, the most hackneyed phrase always starts with the words *He died peacefully*. Just once, wouldn't it be refreshing to read about some poor bastard biting the dust while screaming his lungs out for a bedpan? (She points with disdain at the newspaper.) And listen to this:

She returned to the Lord after a long illness. What a waste of ink. God alone makes that call without any help from the editor of this newspaper. And here's more useless clatter:

She was employed by the former Morgans Department Store in the foundations department, retiring after 17 years of loyal service. She was a member of St. John's Lutheran Church, where she served in the hand bell choir. She enjoyed gardening and grew tomatoes that received a blue ribbon at the annual county fair."

SARGE:

"She sounded like a nice lady. How many people can say they grew championship tomatoes?"

LILLIAN:

"Ninety-two years on the face of the earth, and all somebody chooses to chronicle are her damned tomatoes? And selling padded bras at a forgotten department store? Do you think that's how 'ol Hermie would have wanted to take her last bow?"

JANICE:

"Probably no one asked her what she wanted in her obituary."

LILLIAN:

"My point exactly. We're all just days away from discovering each other's death notices in print. So is this it? A paragraph or two of platitudes drafted by someone who might not even have known you? Shouldn't your final bow include original memories from you, the most authoritative source, chronicling a significant event, your defining moment, or perhaps the turning point in your life? The Epiphany that gave your unique existence its essential meaning. The secret insight that only you can unlock and share. That extraordinary and remarkable something known but to you."

SARGE:

"But what if you never accomplished anything *extraordinary*? What if all you did was grow some tomatoes, and ring a few hand bells?"

LILLIAN:

"Rubbish! Everybody's got one."

GERTIE:

"One what?"

LILLIAN:

"A shining moment. The sum and substance of your life, waiting to be revealed at the end of your journey. Something obituary worthy."

JANICE:

"Are you suggesting that we alone should write our epitaphs?"

LILLIAN:

(She smiles and nods.)

"It's so much easier if you draft one before you die."

KEVIN:

(Returns carrying Sarge's dentures.)

"Got 'em." (He proudly displays the dentures.)

SARGE:

"What a releef! Thought I mighta swallowed 'em. I can't wait to dig into this sumptuous meal."

KEVIN:

"OK, Sylvia. I've gotta bounce along. There's two more wards to feed." (Kevin gives Sylvia an encouraging pat on her shoulder.) **You'll do just fine. They like you already."**

SYLVIA:

"But what am I supposed to ..."

KEVIN:

(Interrupts.)

"Don't worry. They'll do most of the talking." (Kevin exits the stage.)

BENNY:

(Points at his tray.)

"Hey Sylvia, can you tell if this stuff is Jell-O, strained asparagus, lettuce, peas, or lime custard? Go on. Taste it." (Benny offers Sylvia a spoon as she tentatively samples his lunch.)

SYLVIA:

"Meat loaf, perhaps."

ARTIE:

"But it's green."

GERTIE:

(Gertie picks up her plate and places the food one inch from her face.)

"Well, just on the one side."

GLENN:

"Where did you say you were from, Sylvia?"

SYLVIA:

"The Ladies Aid Society at St. Simon. I'm your girl for the entire afternoon."

ARTIE:

"Well, ain't that nice of you."

MILTON:

"I used to attend church 'regular' before I became imprisoned here."

SYLVIA:

"What did you do for a living?"

MILTON:

"Cement. Mixed it, poured it, formed it – in my own construction business – from pool decks to sidewalks. (He sighs.) Seems like a million years ago. (He points at his food.) Know what – I don't think this here is meatloaf. It's pork with spinach. (Leans over and loud-whispers to his neighbor.) When I was a kid, I used to feed this shit to the dog under the table."

(There is a sad empty silence as Sylvia struggles to keep the conversation going.)

SYLVIA:

"Uhhhh ... what did you other folks do for a living?" (She looks at Sarge.)

SARGE:

(Pushes his teeth into place with his thumbs.)

"Bartender most of my life. Before that, I was in the corps – the Marines – (He shouts:)

Semper Fi!" (He points with pride at the flag displayed above his wheelchair as Sylvia continues her inquiry of each resident. She turns to Janice, who needs no encouragement.)

JANICE:

"St. Luke's. Pediatric nurse for 35 years."

LILLIAN:

"My turn? I was a lawyer in a small office here in town. All those endless night meetings.

Fat lot of good they did me." (She picks up her newspaper and studies it again.)

SYLVIA:

"Glenn – what about you?"

GLENN:

"Machine operator in the local blouse mill, back when this country still made its own clothing. I cut shirt patterns for 40 years, and fed three kids on a salary most people today would find laughable. The kids moved away, the wife died, and I broke a hip. So here I am."

ARTIE:

"Enlisted in the Coast Guard. Put in my twenty. After I retired, I worked as a security guard at the bank."

GERTIE:

"I taught elementary school while raising a family. I've been here about two years now, ever since my husband died. This isn't such a bad place ... (she trails off looking into the distance) ... once you get used to the community bathrooms."

SYLVIA:

"How 'bout you, Benny?"

BENNY:

"Salesman. Over at the furniture store on Broad and Main. Beds, dressers, recliners, you name it. Sold some real estate, too."

JANICE:

"What's your story, Sylvia?"

SYLVIA:

"Three kids in grade school. That's a lot of soccer games. My husband's an accountant."

JANICE:

"You must be busy ... I miss being needed."

LILLIAN:

(Looks up from her newspaper.)

"Here they go again."

GERTIE:

"What?"

LILLIAN:

"Listen to this: *Leonard 'Scooter' McClain went home to meet the Lord on Monday.*"

MILTON:

(Solemnly.)

"Amen."

LILLIAN:

“Whatever. Think they’ll carve that nickname into old Scooter’s tombstone? (She starts to read aloud again.) *He was surrounded by his loving family and loyal dog, Scout.*”

MILTON:

“Sounds quite fitting. A proper end.”

LILLIAN:

“Useless dribble. A Norman Rockwell illusion that never occurs. Now it would have been newsworthy had he invited his enemies to gather ‘round for one last argument.”

MILTON:

“You are without a doubt one of the most cynical persons I’ve ever met.”

LILLIAN:

“Actually, I consider myself to be the exact opposite. It’s my belief that everyone’s remarkable, and that precious newsprint should be judiciously utilized to properly honor the dearly departed.”

BENNY:

“You think each of us vegetables rotting here has had an extraordinary moment?”

LILLIAN:

“Possibly several. A unique vision or experience that defines your legacy. It separates us from the fish in the ocean and the fowl in the sky.”

JANICE

(Muses to herself.)

“The thing that sets me apart ...”

LILLIAN:

(Acknowledges with a shake of her head.)

“Yes – the thing that sets you apart. It belongs in the obituary you alone should write to confirm that you were here, and that you deserve to be remembered for your accomplishments, your unique insights, your life dreams, the near misses, and those aspirations that might actually have come to fruition.”

MILTON:

“Truth be told, there is something that once happened to me that I’ve never disclosed to anyone – not a soul. Looking back, maybe it’s time there was a sentence or two written about it before I take my last breath.”

JANICE

“You’ve been holding on to a secret?”

MILTON:

“Maybe 30 years. I think about it every so often. Sometimes the dream of it haunts me as well.”

BENNY:

(Sits up straight with intense interest.)

“You think about what?”

GERTIE:

(Excited.)

“So tell us already. You could drop dead or something before dinner.”

GLENN:

“This is fun – better than the soaps on TV.”

MILTON:

(The encouragement motivates him.)

“Well, you see, it was like this: I was about 40 at the time, and workin’ at my own construction business. I wasn’t makin’ a lot of money, but I wasn’t broke, either. Just payin’ the bills day after day like every other schmuck. So one afternoon I open the mail, and there’s this letter from the IRS.”

SARGE:

“Refund?”

MILTON:

(Agitated.)

“Refund my ass. Them bastards called for an audit. Like I had nothing better to do those days. So, two weeks go by, and this suit shows up at my door, flashes a badge, and says he wants to see my books. Name was Bernard. Told me to call him *Bernie*, like we was gonna be lifelong friends, or somethin’.”

(Milton stands and transitions into a younger man as he discards his street clothes, exposing construction work clothes. He removes his silver wig, exposing dark hair. He walks over to his work office and takes a seat at a desk next to Bernie, the IRS agent. Bernie is in his late twenties, wears a cheap coat and tie and uses a hand-crank manual addition machine, since calculators had not yet been invented. Every time Bernie focuses upon a number, he punches the number on the buttons on the machine, and pulls the little hand-crank, causing a white roll of paper to continuously emerge and descend toward the floor with each newly printed number.)

BERNIE:

"Fifteen shovels at twelve dollars a piece. (He types the numbers and activates the hand-crank as if he were seated at a gambling slot machine.) You took all of them as tax deductions?"

MILTON:

(Out of patience.)

"Of course! My men use them tools when we pour cement. You think I buy extra shovels for the fun of it?"

BERNIE:

(Studies more documents.)

"What about the two hundred eighty three dollars for overalls and fifty six dollars for industrial strength gloves?"

MILTON:

(Exasperated, Milton says nothing as Milton gives Bernie a *c'mon* raised-eyebrow look.)

"Let me ask you something. We've been at this since eight-thirty this morning. It's now one in the afternoon, and we haven't even taken a break for lunch. Have you found anything at all today that would lead you to believe I've ripped off Uncle Sam?"

BERNIE:

"No, actually I haven't."

MILTON:

"That's because I don't cheat. (He points at a check stub) Take these country club dues. This is my one luxury in life. Playing golf at the club once a week. Now some other guy might try to deduct those dues as a business expense. Not me."

BERNIE:

"Quite admirable of you, sir. But you see, some people don't play by the rules, hence the audits."

MILTON:

"Where's your office located?"

BERNIE:

"Philadelphia."

MILTON:
(Incredulous.)

"You drove all the way here just to look at shovel receipts?"

BERNIE:

"Sometimes I travel over a hundred one way."

MILTON:
(Pauses as he thinks.)

"You play golf?"

BERNIE:
(Smiling.)

"I hack."

MILTON:

"Work long hours?"

BERNIE:

"Well, some weeks yes. Some no. If I find a problem, I have to resolve it. The next week, things might be light. It all averages out."

MILTON:

"Then what are we doing here?"

BERNIE:

"Excuse me?"

MILTON:

"Listen, pal, it's a beautiful spring day. The birdies are singin', and the bees are hummin'. We could get nine holes in on the short course over at the club in less than two hours."

BERNIE:
(Stammering.)

"I could *never* do that. I mean ... uh ... well that's to say ... I would need permission."

MILTON:

"Says who? Hey, if it makes you feel any better, we could come back here afterward, and crunch numbers to your heart's delight. No harm – no foul. I've got an extra set of clubs at the caddy shack. They can fit you with shoes. We could be there in 20 minutes."

BERNIE:
(Hesitatingly.)

"That might be misconstrued as contrary to procedure. You see ..."

MILTON:
(Interrupts.)

"Look — we'll call it an extended lunch break. I'll buy. (Laughs.) That way, I can write it off as a tax deduction!"

BERNIE:

"I don't know ..."

MILTON:

"It's just lunch and a quick nine. You're not exactly stealing the crown jewels."

BERNIE:
(Struggling with the decision.)

"Damn it!"

MILTON:

"You did your job, Bern. I'm clean. Let's hit the links."

(Spotlight extinguished on Milton's office as he changes off-stage into golf clothes.)

(Spotlight on Milton and Bernie, with golf clubs in hand, as they walk to the tee off area of the third hole. Milton cups his hands over his eyes as he stares at the third green. He places a golf ball on the ground.) **"I think I still have honors."**

BERNIE:

"Correct. I'm trailing by two strokes."

MILTON:
(He points.)

"Now this is the sweetest hole on the entire course. It's a par three. Just 140 yards to the flag. You can make it to the green with a seven iron."

BERNIE:

"Okay, *Arnold*. Show me how it's done."

(Milton takes a few practice swings, and then hits his golf ball. They watch as the ball approaches the flag.)

BERNIE:

"That's a great shot, Milton. I think you'll make the green. (They watch in silence.)

It's headed toward the flag ... Still rolling ... (They watch in silence.) I THINK IT WENT IN THE DAMNED HOLE!"

MILTON:
(Ecstatic.)

“OH MY GOD! OH MY GOD! OH MY GOD! (Milton starts to jump up and down.) I’VE WAITED FOR THIS DAY FOR 25 YEARS.”

BERNIE:
(He begins to jump up and down as well.)

“A hole in one! (Bernie pats Milton on the back.) I’ve never seen one before!”

MILTON:
(Still jumping up and down for joy.)

“I’ve never had one before! I woke up this morning facing an IRS audit, and now I’ve completed my life’s goal – all in the same day. Isn’t life incredible? A split second, and the entire world can change. Now I can die in peace. I’ve done the impossible. My name will be engraved on the clubhouse plaque with the other golf immortals.”

BERNIE:
(Sincere.)

“I am so happy for you.”

MILTON:

“And I owe it all to you. You agreed to play today. You brought me luck, my young auditor friend.”

BERNIE:

“Oh think nothing of it.”

MILTON:

“Wait ‘til the boys hear about this! All you’ve got to do, Bern, is sign the witness affidavit with the golf pro. (Bernie’s exuberance quickly vanishes, but Milton does not yet notice.) I’m gonna have that ball bronzed and mounted on the mantle.”

BERNIE:

"Milton ..."

MILTON:
(Ignores him.)

"When I die, I'll bequeath it to my son in my last will and testament."

BERNIE:

"Milton ... "

MILTON:

"That ball will become a family heirloom."

BERNIE:

"Milton ... "

MILTON:

"That golf ball only cost a dollar, but I wouldn't part with it for a million bucks."

BERNIE:

"MILTON!"

MILTON:

"What?"

BERNIE:

"About that affidavit ... "

MILTON:

"Yeah?"

BERNIE:
(Just stares until Milton begins to understand.)

MILTON:

“Aww c’mom! No way! I mean ... You saw the damn ball go into the – ”

BERNIE:

(Interrupts.)

“Milton, I certainly saw the ball go in the hole, but I can’t lose my job over it. What if my supervisor found out?”

MILTON:

“It’s just a bloody affidavit – a piece of paper. Couldn’t you use an alias, or take early retirement or something?”

BERNIE:

“Alias? I thought you were an honest guy, Milton.”

(Stage lights extinguished on the golf course as Milton walks back to the lunchroom and the residents at Cedardale. He transforms into an old man again as he puts on his street clothes, grey wig, and sits back down in his chair.)

MILTON:

(Dejected.)

“The only thing Bernie signed was some federal form confirming my audit was complete and that I didn’t owe any taxes. Then he and his adding machine left. Never saw him again. Couldn’t tell anyone about it either. Who would have believed me? No bronzed ball. No club plaque. Never had another hole in one. Not even close. But looking back, it was the most exciting moment of my life – affidavit or not. So, damn it ... print that in my obit.”

ARTIE:

(He raises a plastic drinking cup.)

"I'd like to offer a toast: (Everyone struggles to locate a similar cup or milk carton, all of which are raised in unison.) **To Milton, the greatest golfer any of us have ever known."**

EVERYONE REPEATS IN UNISON:

"To Milton."

ARTIE:

"May your balls be bronzed and set on a mantle."

(End of Scene One)

SCENE TWO – A Trip to New York City

(The elderly residents move food around on their plates as Gertie looks from side to side.)

GERTIE:

(Pipes up loudly.)

“1952 – October 14, ‘52, to be exact. That date’s burned into my memory. It changed my life forever.”

BENNY:

“Have you got a story, too? One that belongs in your obituary?”

GERTIE:

“Funny. Until this very moment, I never felt I could disclose what actually happened. I’ve never told a soul.”

JANICE:

“Never told anyone what?”

GERTIE:

“About my life-altering experience. After all, who would have believed me?”

JANICE:

“Believed what?”

GERTIE:

“OK ... OK. It was a Tuesday – a Tuesday that held the seemingly unattainable dream of countless generations – permanent world peace. Just a mere 80 miles away, in Manhattan, it was opening day for the newly constructed General Assembly chambers of the United Nations.”

ARTIE:

"I remember that day, too!"

GERTIE:

"Ceremonies were to begin at ten a.m. sharp. Representatives from a multitude of nations had agreed to assemble to resolve their differences. I, who lived through the ravages of World War II, had prayed daily for the success of this new venture, and now I felt an obligation – a veritable duty – to be present at this momentous occasion. Radio or TV would not have sufficed."

MILTON:

"So what did you do?"

GERTIE:

"I figured since my husband left for work at seven, and the kids were on the school bus by seven fifteen, I could catch the seven thirty train into New York and be at the U.N. by nine thirty. No worries. I'd be back in plenty of time to start dinner before the kids stepped off the bus. Two hours later I stood in front of the gleaming United Nations building."

ARTIE:

"Was there much of a crowd?"

GERTIE:

"A line of visitors snaked around the block and out of sight. With an eye on my watch I thought about another entrance — maybe around back. By golly if there wasn't. That line was much shorter and moving along at a nice clip. I figured it was worth it for nose-bleed seats. I was the last person in line. It was nine fifty-six a.m.

And then things got interesting. I was gnawing on a bagel I had brought from home, and completely missed the *DELEGATES ONLY* sign."

SARGE:

"Wait a minute – wait a minute! You walked right the hell in?"

GERTIE:

"Ya gotta understand, Sarge – I'm talkin' pre-nine eleven security here, and I was holding a bagel, not a hand grenade."

SARGE:

"Makes sense, I guess."

GERTIE:

"Anyway, when the guard asked to see some ID, I showed him my library card. The next thing I know, I'm standing in the general assembly amphitheatre!"

ARTIE:

"You're shittin' me."

GERTIE:

"I was apparently one of the last *dignitaries* to arrive, so I scouted around and noticed that nobody had taken the Madagascar seats. After all, if you study a globe, Madagascar is pretty far away. Who knows? The delegates' flight might have been delayed. Anything. So I sat down. Ethiopia on my left. Togoland on my right."

(Gertie rises from her wheelchair, and transforms into a young mother as she takes off her pajamas, exposing clothing she wore to the U.N. She discards her grey wig, exposing dark hair, as she walks to a table where Gertie and the delegates from Ethiopia and Togoland will sit side-by-side.)

MILTON:
(Incredulous.)

“So you passed yourself off as a delegate!”

GERTIE:

(She calls back loudly to Milton as she takes her place at a table with the other delegates, who don't yet realize she has joined them, and can not hear what she is saying to Milton.)

“What's your point? Nobody got hurt and I voted on issues the way I felt my constituents back in Madagascar would have wanted.”

MILTON:
(Incredulous.)

“You cast a vote at the U.N. on opening day?”

GERTIE:

“I had to. What was I going to do? Travel half way around the world from Madagascar just to abstain?”

(The spotlight illuminates a table where Gertie and the delegates from Ethiopia and Togoland sit side-by-side. Gertie tries to speak in a jovial manner with the delegates on each side of her, as she sticks out her hand in friendship.)

GERTIE:

“Hi. I'm Gertie.”

ETHIOPIAN DELEGATE:
(Tentatively shakes her hand.)

“Mombie Gulab?”

GERTIE:

"No, actually I'm from Pennsylvania. I'm just filling in, you might say. You speak English?"

ETHIOPIAN DELEGATE:
(He shakes his head negatively.)

"Bana."

GERTIE:

"Ohhh. That's OK. None of the cab drivers do either. Well, it's nice to meet you all the same! (She turns to the delegate from Togoland on her other side.) "Hi. I'm Gertie. Do you speak English, or (she looks at the delegate's identification name plate) perhaps Togolandian?"

TOGOLAND DELEGATE:
(The Togoland delegate tentatively shakes her hand as he also shakes his head while responding in the negative.)

"Dada."

GERTIE:

"Oh, that's alright. By the way, have you two folks met?" (She points at the Ethiopian delegate.)

ETHIOPIAN DELEGATE:

"Bana." (The Ethiopian and Togoland delegates shake hands across her table.)

TOGOLAND DELEGATE:

"Dada."

ETHIOPIAN DELEGATE:
(The Ethiopian points at Gertie as he addresses her.)

"Nogu rima?"

GERTIE:
(Rambling.)

“This old thing? Awww. Thank you! I got it on sale at the bargain store. It was a mark-down. (She takes a big breath.) Isn’t this amazing! Communicating across cultures as we work toward world peace!”

(Behind Gertie’s back the Ethiopian circles the side of his head with his hand, the international sign to suggest that Gertie is *nuts*. The Togoland delegate shakes his head up and down affirmatively.)

(Gertie returns to the Cedardale residents, and transitions back into an old lady as she places her pajamas back over her street clothes, puts on her grey wig, and sits back in her wheelchair. She addresses her fellow residents.)

GERTIE:

“So much excitement! The first vote was to retain Trygve Lie as secretary-general. The second dealt with seniority in the U.N. parking deck. Then I posed for an opening day picture with all of the delegates.”

MILTON:
(Surprised.)

“You mean you’re in the shot?”

GERTIE:

“Uh huh. I think it’s still printed each year in the *Encyclopedia Britannica*. Unfortunately, time flew by that morning, and I had to skip the meet-and-greet lunch. There was dinner to make and laundry to fold at home. But now that I look back on that important day, I realize that a mom *can* do it all, if the stars align just so. International delegate on Tuesday

– ACME shopper on Wednesday. At any rate, who knows? Maybe I helped to move our planet a little closer toward mutual understanding and world peace. I'd like that thought printed in my obituary."

ARTIE:

(Raises a milk carton as a toast.)

"To Gertie, the only U.N. delegate from Madagascar to have ever retired here at Cedardale."

EVERYONE IN UNISON:

(Raises cups and cartons.)

"To Gertie, the Ambassador!"

(End of Scene Two)

SCENE THREE – SAINT JOSEPH

(The residents begin to pick at their food again. Benny slowly, sheepishly raises his right hand, as if he were a student in a classroom. Lillian decides to acknowledge him.)

LILLIAN:

“Benny – have you got something to say?”

BENNY:

“Has anyone here ever spoken to God and received a direct response?”

SARGE:

“By burning bush, or perhaps He calls you back on the phone long distance collect with some worthwhile advice?”

JANICE:

(Scolding.)

“Sarge, I believe Benny has something serious on his mind, and your poor attempt at sarcasm isn’t appropriate. (She turns to Benny in an understanding frame of mind.) Yes, Benny, I’ve spoken to God, and God has returned the favor. It’s a matter of attitude, receptiveness, and faith.”

BENNY:

“This may sound presumptuous, but God has spoken to me on more than one occasion, and the last time He chose to do so, He also presented me with a gift – an actual physical memento of our conversation. I still have it. After all, it *was* from God.” (Benny points heavenward.)

SARGE:

(In disbelief.)

“You received a present from God on high? What type of present?”

BENNY:

"I'm getting to that. Give me a minute, will ya? Naturally, it changed my life, since I doubt He goes to that much trouble with everyone. And so I've often wondered – why did He pick me? I mean, I'm not exactly someone special."

JANICE:

"Neither was Moses when he received the Ten Commandments. Just an elderly traveler in an expansive desert, similar in many ways to us."

SARGE:

"The Ten Commandments. Can you imagine what those hand-carved tablets would go for today on the Internet?"

JANICE:

"And I'll ignore that comment. Benny, do you have a story for us that belongs in your obituary?"

BENNY:

"I've never before breathed a word of this. After all, who woulda believed me?"

JANICE:

"Perhaps now is the time."

MILTON:

"You know something, folks, when I was just a kid growing up, I always knew in my heart of hearts that there was a Superman and kryptonite. Anything is possible. If Benny says he's in possession of the physical evidence of God's existence, I for one believe him."

BENNY:

"It all began during the Saturday night bridge games with my dear friends, Patrick and Mary McFadden. Before that, God and I sort of ignored each other. My deceased wife,

Mrs. Steinberg and I, we used to play cards with the McFaddens from seven to ten p.m.”

MILTON:

“Every Saturday?”

(Benny stands and discards his silver wig as he transitions into a young man. He walks over to a card table where Patrick and Mary McFadden sit playing cards with Benny’s wife, Freda. There is a crucifix hanging on the wall. Benny still talks to the Cedardale residents. The other card players do not yet hear him as he speaks.)

BENNY:

“For thirty-five years without fail. See, Saturday evenings were the most convenient time, since Mrs. Steinberg and I attended Friday night services at our synagogue, *The Sons of Israel*, and the McFaddens had a full day planned on Sundays at their house of worship, *The Church of the Holy Rosary*. The four of us had been friends since high school, starting with double dating. We would talk about almost anything, and these conversations spanned almost four decades.” (Benny takes a seat as the card game begins.)

PATRICK:

“One club.”

FREDA:

“Two hearts.”

MARY:

“Three spades.”

BENNY:

"Four diamonds ... Did we tell you folks we're still having trouble selling our house? (He puts down his cards.) The realtor hasn't had a single bite. Our life is on hold. We can't down-size into the condo until our split level is under contract. It's just so frustrating."

MARY:

(Looks knowingly at Patrick.)

"Perhaps your realtor isn't using the most proven techniques."

BENNY:

"The house is multi-listed, and advertised in the paper. We've had three 'open houses'."

PATRICK:

"We've been aware of your problem, but have been a little hesitant to make a suggestion ...
Actually, there is something else you might do."

BENNY:

"What's that?"

MARY:

"Saint Joseph, the patron saint of real estate sales."

FREDA:

"I beg your pardon?"

PATRICK:

"You simply plant him head first in the ground facing the front door of the home you wish to sell. He does the rest. After you bury Saint Joseph, you won't need a realtor."

BENNY:

(Shocked.)

"You do what?"

MARY:

“You dig a hole in the front yard, drop the statue of the saint in, upside down, and cover him up. Then wait for a buyer to appear. You won’t wait very long.”

PATRICK:

“We first experienced the saint’s powers about five years ago when we purchased this house. We were out for a Sunday afternoon drive, with no thought of buying a new home. But as we drove past, it was as if the *for sale* sign was beckoning us. We took a look inside and made an offer on the spot.”

MARY:

“The owners, the O’Shaunesseys, had been trying to sell the place for months. In desperation, they invoked St. Joseph’s powers. We drove by the next morning, and bought it. They knew we would need help selling our old home, so they dug ol’ Joseph up and gave him to us. We planted the saint the next day in our front yard. Within 24 hours, we had three competing offers. Would you care to borrow him? Even though you drop him down a hole, things will begin to look up.”

(Spotlight on the Cedardale residents who Benny addresses out of earshot of Mary and Patrick.)

BENNY:

“This offer created something of a predicament. If I buried St. Joseph in my front yard, such an act implied that I didn’t believe the basic tenets of my religion – the two thousand year ban on graven images – that sort of thing. There aren’t many statues hanging around the synagogue. You see, Judaism is different from Catholicism.”

MILTON:

“You may not be the first person to have reached that conclusion.”

BENNY:

“What I mean is – in Judaism, we believe there is only one way to avoid a two-car head-on collision. Carry enough insurance. You enter into a covenant with your insurance company, and this continues as long as you pay the premium on time. If you want to avoid guilt, there is an additional form of absolution. You may also purchase under-insured coverage. It’s different with Catholicism. All you need is faith and a magnetic replica of the patron saint of safe travel on the dashboard, and you’re ready to motor down the highway. If you truly believe, you don’t need no stinkin’ covenant.

Well, back to my story: two days after the Saturday card game, a nice Vietnamese couple showed up at our door. They were Buddhists. They explained that they were out for a Sunday drive. They had no intention of buying a house, but for some inexplicable reason, our *for sale* sign called out to them. Then they took a look inside the house, and made a full-price offer. They didn’t need any mortgage financing, and because it was a cash deal, we were able to close in a week.”

ARTIE:

“How very lucky for you!”

BENNY:

“I’m not so sure it was mere luck. You see, my wife, similar to our Catholic friends, decided a little confession was good for the soul – especially after I noticed a newly excavated small mound of dirt in our front yard.”

(Benny walks over to his kitchen table and sits next to Freda, who appears to be embarrassed.

Benny addresses Freda in an astonished manner:) “*You did what?*”

FREDA:

"I was desperate, so I decided to take Mary up on her gracious offer. I borrowed her statue of blessed Saint Joseph. Eight hours after I planted him in the front yard, the Vietnamese couple rang our doorbell. Later, just as I was about to dig the statue up again, some girl scouts appeared out of nowhere and sold me five boxes of thin mints. I swear I had no idea I was going to buy any cookies. I'm still on a diet!"

BENNY:

(Benny stands and addresses the Cedardale residents.)

"That was many years ago. But I never forgot the lesson. God and His intermediaries are willing to assist anyone – Catholic, Jew, or Buddhist – just to name a few, if one is willing to listen. I'd like my obituary to include the fact that I had a conversation or two with a Higher Authority, and I've got the statue to prove it, just in case anyone around here needs to sell a house."

ARTIE:

(Raises a cup as a toast.)

"To Benny. Moses only received a couple of tablets. You were given an entire statue!"

EVERYONE IN UNISON:

(Raise their cups and cartons.)

"To Benny, a true believer!"

(End of Scene Three.)

SCENE FOUR – THE WRITTEN EXAMINATION

SARGE:

“I hope you guys understand I meant no disrespect to God. After all, I was a Marine, and nothing is more important to a Marine than God and Country.”

GLENN:

“When did you serve?”

SARGE:

“During the Big One – WW2. I enlisted, and worked my way up to Sergeant.”

MILTON:

“What type of unit were you in?”

SARGE:

“Artillery. We shot just about anything you can name, from handguns to tanks. I had to pass a special test to earn that assignment. They didn’t dish out flame throwers to just any Tom, Dick, or Harry. I had to prove I possessed the native intelligence necessary to destroy things.”

GERTIE:

“Just how much intelligence did that actually require?”

SARGE:

“I’ll give you an example of a display of my smartness while under fire. The very first time I was on the pistol range engaged in target practice, I shot a cluster of bullets in a group about two inches above the bull’s-eye. Did I panic? No sir-ee. I knew instinctively that my combat boots had two inch heels.”

GERTIE:

“What’s that got to do with anything?”

SARGE:

“Shows what you know! So I took them boots off, and naturally that lowered my next round of rapid fire by just the right amount.”

ARTIE:

“Wait a minute! Wait just a freakin’ minute! Why didn’t you simply adjust the rear sight of your 45 automatic?”

SARGE:

“The 45 has a rear sight? Are you sure? Somebody shoulda told me. Well anyway, as I was sayin’, I had to take a special test to get into the Marines, and I’d like it noted in my obituary that I passed that test and ultimately became what I am today – a United States Marine. Let me tell you somethin’ – that test wasn’t so easy. Not everyone made it. As usual, I had to stay cool under fire.”

(Sarge transitions into a young man as he stands up out of his wheelchair, discards his grey wig and pajamas, uncovering street clothes. He walks across stage to a military induction testing room where other potential inductees are seated in preparation for the taking of a written test. A strict no-nonsense female proctor, Sergeant Hildenbloom, dressed in full military uniform, stands at a lectern facing several inductees. Sarge finds a seat as Hildenbloom begins her instructions which she has obviously memorized. She is a large woman with a deep booming voice, linebacker chest, heavy red lipstick, and short hair.)

HILDENBLOOM:

"Class will come to order. (The test takers become silent.) I am Sergeant Hildenbloom. I will be administering today's test. In the first space, print your last name first, your first name last, and your middle name in the middle. If you do not have a middle name, proceed through the door to my left, and you will be issued one. (One of the test-takers slowly rises, looks around, and disappears through the door to the left.) In the second space, print your blood type, followed by your mother's maiden name. If you don't have a blood type, a mother, or your mother didn't have a maiden name, proceed through the door to my right, and you will be issued one. (Another test-taker slowly rises, and disappears through that door.) In the third space, print your eye color. If you are unsure of your eye color, proceed through the door on my left. (Another test-taker rises and proceeds through that door.) Going on to the fourth line, fill in the number of grades you attended at school, the number of original teeth left in your head, aliases used during the last six months, and where you were born. Those who have no teeth, can't remember if they were in school, have no current aliases, or don't have a place of birth, should proceed double-time through the door to my left. (Another test-taker jumps up and runs through that door.) Very well, class. It is now time to take the test. There are 50 questions in your test booklet. You will be given 30 minutes to complete the test. But first, let's look together at a sample question, so that you will understand how to fill in your answer box using the military issue number two graphite pencil. I will read the first sample question aloud from the *Electronics* section of the test."

(Spotlight momentarily extinguished on Hildenbloom as a spotlight focuses upon Sarge who offers some thoughts out of earshot of Hildenbloom directed to the residents at Cedardale.)

SARGE:

“Electronics! I was sunk! I had never so much as replaced a battery in a flashlight.”

GERTIE:

“Hell, in my day I could switch batteries on anything one-handed in the dark even if it was vibrating.”

(Spotlight returns to Hildenbloom and the testing room.)

SARGE:

(Still addresses the Cedardale residents.)

“The first sample question was rather confusing.”

(An off-stage “echo voice” reads the question to the audience as Sarge, obviously confused, studies the test booklet.)

ECHO VOICE:

“Birds that sit on high tension wires don’t get electrocuted because:

- (a) Their toes are insulated;**
- (b) They know instinctively the difference between *live* and *dead* wires;**
- (c) They don’t complete an electrical circuit;**
- (d) All of the above;**
- (e) None of the above.”**

(Sarge scratches his head as he again reads this question. The off-stage echo voice explains to the audience what Sarge is thinking.)

ECHO VOICE:

"Answer "A" was probably wrong, because if memory serves, most birds, other than the blue-footed boobie, don't have toes. (A picture of the blue-footed boobie is projected on a screen above Sarge.) And while birds instinctively know the difference between the north and south poles, few are able to differentiate electron polarity. Actually, the entire question was suspect, since birds don't *sit* on high tension wires, given the fact very few of them, other than ostriches, have buttocks." (A picture of an ostrich is projected on the screen with an arrow pointing toward its buttocks. Spotlight returns to the testing room.)

HILDENBLOOM:

"Time's up! On to the next sample question in the *Electronic General Knowledge* section. Which topic is most closely associated with electricity?"

ECHO VOICE:

- (a) Lawn mower;**
- (b) Bathtub;**
- (c) Benjamin Franklin;**
- (d) All of the above;**
- (e) None of the above."**

(Spotlight on Sarge who appears to be confused. He looks around the room at the other test takers who are busy circling the correct answer.)

SARGE:

(Addresses the Cedardale residents:)

"Why the hell was everyone else finished? I was beginning to sense that I might only qualify for KP duty. Still, I didn't panic. Did *lawn mower* refer to a person or a machine,

and if the reference were to a machine, was the machine equipped with a battery, or was it an old rotary push-mower that had no electrical source? *Bath tub* was obviously a trick answer. Lots of people have been electrocuted while soaking in one of those. (Sarge stands and returns to the Cedardale residents as he puts on his pajamas, and sits back in his wheelchair.) The other sections of the test proved to be just as daunting. Who knows how many quarts of oil go into a car radiator, or which box wrench is used to fix a box. Does the eagle on a naval officer's hat face to the left or the right? I don't know! Doesn't it depend upon whether one is wearing the hat, rather than looking at it? A week passed, and then I received official notice from my draft board that I had achieved a 72 percent passing grade. As a result, I would be attending Marine artillery school so I could learn how to blow things up efficiently. Well, that's the story that belongs in my obituary. I ultimately became a true-blue Marine. (He raises his cup.) **Semper Fi!"**

ARTIE:
(He raises his cup.)

"To Sarge – a Marine."

EVERYONE IN UNISON:
(They raise their cups.)

"Semper Fi!"

(End of Scene Four)

SCENE FIVE – THE DUTY ASSIGNMENT

ARTIE:

“Is it my turn to tell a little story?”

LILLIAN:

“You bet.”

ARTIE:

“Sarge’s account has brought to mind a memory of my own about the military.”

GLENN:

“Did you also serve our country during the big war?”

ARTIE:

“United States Coast Guard. I may not have shot any cannons like Sarge, but in my own small way, I, too, helped win the war. I’ve never told anyone what I’m about to relate, since no one would have believed me anyway. But now that the years have passed, what have I got to lose?”

JANICE:

“This sounds like material for an obituary.”

ARTIE:

(Thoughtfully.)

“Perhaps. Well, here’s my tale, and I’m stickin’ to it. (Artie begins to take off his street clothes, as he transitions into a young man, exposing a Coast Guard Yeoman’s uniform underneath. He walks over to a Coast Guard office as he continues to address the Cedardale residents.) There were 25 of us kids marooned up in frigid Alaska. No one, not even our Lieutenant, had yet seen his twenty-third birthday. I worked in the office, filing endless

papers. One day an order arrived in the weekly mail from headquarters. The Lieutenant decided I was just the guy to carry it out, so he called me into his private quarters. Even though he was a Junior Officer, we all addressed him as *Captain*, and we referred to him in his absence as *The Old Man* because he was 22 and the oldest guy on board."

(Spotlight on Lieutenant Meshaw's office. Meshaw sits behind a Spartan desk upon which are located two side-by-side telephones. One is colored fire engine red, has no dial, and the hand piece is rendered unusable because it is encumbered with a large padlock. There is a large red light attached to the top of this phone. The other telephone is a simple black rotary phone. Artie knocks on the office door.)

CAPTAIN:

"Enter." (Artie enters as commanded and stands at attention.)

ARTIE:

"You sent for me, Captain?"

CAPTAIN:

"At ease, sailor." (Artie takes a relaxed stance.) "I've got a duty assignment that's tailor-made for a yeoman."

ARTIE:

"Aye-aye, sir."

CAPTAIN:

(The Captain pushes a box across a table toward Artie.)

"Headquarters – Washington sent this box on the last supply plane. It's marked *Top Priority*."

ARTIE:
(Impressed.)

"Sounds mighty important."

CAPTAIN:

"It is. This is the annual urine testing kit. All 25 souls on board must take a squirt to establish they are medically fit for duty. Inside this box are 25 official Coast Guard bottles. Your job is to locate each sailor, and get them to piss in a bottle. Then, secure the bottles, and ship them back to Headquarters – all in the next 24 hours. You are to become conversant with the enclosed instructions. They outline every possible issue pertaining to urine collection and its inter-continental transmittal. Do you have any questions?"

ARTIE:

"I'm the official piss collector?"

CAPTAIN:

"The official piss collector designee. Well, if there are no further questions, carry on sailor, and Godspeed!"

ARTIE:
(He turns but stops momentarily.)

"Captain – just one other question."

CAPTAIN:

"Fire away."

ARTIE:

"Now that I've been here for three whole days, I was wondering ..."

CAPTAIN:

"What?"

ARTIE:
(Quickly.)

“Why there’s a red phone and a black phone on your desk. Why two?”

CAPTAIN:

“Simple, sailor. The black phone is used for all day-to-day calls, incoming and outgoing. The red phone – now that’s entirely different. That’s the Doomsday connection.”

ARTIE:
(Concerned.)

“The what?”

CAPTAIN:

“It’s a one-way line that originates at headquarters. We can’t call out, but Washington can call in. If that phone ever rings, I’ve got 60 seconds to unlock the padlock (the Captain points) by using the key that hangs on the chain that never leaves my neck.” (He points at his neck.)

ARTIE:

“Then what happens?”

CAPTAIN:

“Headquarters tells us how long we have to live – probably less than an hour. Thankfully, no red phone has ever rung in the entire history of the Coast Guard.”

ARTIE:
(Relieved.)

“Thank God!”

CAPTAIN:

“Any other questions?”

ARTIE:

"No, Sir."

CAPTAIN:

"Carry on your duty as assigned, sailor. Dis...missed!"

ARTIE:

(Artie grabs the box, salutes, turns on his heel, and leaves the office. He studies one of the urine collection bottles as he also addresses the residents at Cedardale.)

"I had an official mission to complete, and the minutes were ticking away. I returned to my cubicle and began to study the detailed instructions. (Artie reads aloud:)

- 1) Locate bottle and sailor.**
- 2) Hand sailor bottle.**
- 3) Collect urine in bottle.**
- 4) Secure bottle.**
- 5) Affix identification name tag to bottle.**
- 6) Send carton with completed urine collection to headquarters.**

Unfortunately some minor problems did arise. There were two female sailors on board."

(Artie approaches a female sailor and hands her a small bottle.)

FEMALE SAILOR:

"Are you kidding me, Ace? Look at the size of that microscopic bottle! How do you expect me to squat over that?" (She hands Artie the bottle and leaves in a huff.)

ARTIE:

(Addresses the Cedardale residents.)

"She was right, and the directions were unclear how to proceed. There was only one thing to do. I made my way down to the galley where our cook was preparing dinner."

ARTIE:

(Approaches the keep cook known as "Cookie".)

"Hey Cookie, do you have a funnel?"

COOKIE:

"What size?"

ARTIE:

"Uh ... medium."

COOKIE:

"What you gonna use it for?"

ARTIE:

"Do you remember this morning when I asked you to piss in a bottle?"

COOKIE:

"Uh huh."

ARTIE:

"Well, there's two women on board."

COOKIE:

"Oh ... (He searches for a funnel.) Here, try this one, but make sure you bring it back clean.

I'll probably use it tonight to make dessert." (Artie takes the funnel and begins to leave the galley.) "Hey ... wait a minute. I've gotta question. Which end of the funnel do the women ..."

ARTIE:

(Interrupts.)

"Cookie, how the hell would I know? (Artie addresses the Cedardale residents.) I was making significant progress, when I suddenly discovered that the official overnight urine collection package only contained bottles, no caps. I figured I better inform the Captain."

(Spotlight on the Captain's office as Artie knocks on the Captain's door.)

CAPTAIN:

"Enter." (Artie enters and stands at attention.) **"At ease, sailor. Have you completed your duty as assigned?"**

ARTIE:

"Well, you see, sir, I collected all the urine samples ..."

CAPTAIN:

"Good work, yeoman. I'm putting you in for a commendation."

ARTIE:

(Apologetically.)

"But you see, sir, the bottles didn't come with any caps, and this could have a direct impact on the return shipment of --"

CAPTAIN:

(Interrupts.)

"Sailor -- stand fast a moment." (Artie comes to rigid attention.)

ARTIE:

"Aye-aye, Captain."

CAPTAIN:

"You're experiencing a problem with your assignment?"

ARTIE:

"Yes, Captain, I am. See, there don't appear to be any --"

CAPTAIN:

(Interrupts.)

"Stand fast. Let me ask you a question. Did you achieve a passing grade on the standard written military intelligence test?"

ARTIE:

"Eighty-two percent, sir, including the section dealing with birds that possess toes and buttocks."

CAPTAIN:

"Very good. And did you also successfully complete your training at Coast Guard Boot Camp?"

ARTIE:

"Yes, sir."

CAPTAIN:

"And while at Boot Camp, were you taught that you must overcome all obstacles that stand between you and your assigned duties?"

ARTIE:

"Yes, sir, but you see, sir, when I looked for the bottle caps – "

CAPTAIN:

"Then simply apply what you learned in Boot Camp, sailor. *Are we clear?*"

ARTIE:
(Confused.)

"Yes, sir!"

CAPTAIN:

"Dis...missed!"

(Artie salutes, turns on his heel and exits the Captain's office as the spotlight returns to the residents at Cedardale. Artie engages in another explanation to the residents.)

MILTON:

"What did you do?"

ARTIE:

"Milton, it was the 40s. No plastic wrap. No disposable containers. Just ..."

MILTON:

"What?"

ARTIE:

"Just waxed butcher block paper."

MILTON:

"No." (Said as if he were thinking "Oh no. You didn't.")

ARTIE:

"Yup. (Artie returns to his wrapping of the bottles as he explains to the Cedardale residents what he is doing.) So I cut a portion of that stiff paper off a big roll I found on the mess deck, and hand-sculpted little caps to fit my 25 bottles. It took several hours, but I persevered. Then I secured those caps with a 'belt and suspenders' double foolproof combination of thick rubber bands held in place with masking tape. The waterproof caps were as tight as a guitar string. (Artie shakes the bottles.) Not a single drop leaked. (Artie beams with pride.) Then I carefully wrapped each individual bottle in multiple layers of tissue paper, and placed my delicate collection in a special Coast Guard air delivery bullet-proof box. In twelve hours, my urine collection would be in someone else's hands half way around the world before daybreak.

The next morning, the Captain again sought out my help, but on a different project. We needed to review all of the medical records to confirm that each soul on board had

received the requisite malaria and beriberi inoculations, in case we were ever shot down over equatorial Africa.”

(Spotlight on Captain’s office. Artie holds a stack of files in one arm as he knocks on the door.)

CAPTAIN:

“Enter.” (Artie enters and stands at attention.) “At ease, sailor.”

ARTIE:

“Thank you, sir.” (Artie assumes a relaxed stance.)

CAPTAIN:

“Did you bring all of the medical files?”

ARTIE:

“Yes, sir.”

CAPTAIN:

“Very well. I just received a teletype from headquarters. Now here’s what I want you to do. Check those files to confirm that each sailor has been inoculated against – ”

(The large red light on the red doomsday telephone begins to blink on and off, as a siren begins to blare off-stage. Artie yells over the sound of the alarm.)

ARTIE:
(Interrupts.)

“Pardon me, sir, but I think the Doomsday Phone is ringing. Shouldn’t we answer it?”

CAPTAIN:
(Startled and in uncharacteristic panic.)

“OH MY GOD. First the Japs bomb Pearl Harbor. Now this! Where the hell is my Doomsday key?”

ARTIE:
(Calmly.)

“Around your neck, sir?” (He points.)

CAPTAIN:

“Right you are – right you are – No need to panic!”

(The Captain fumbles for his key, unlocks the red phone with shaking hands, and struggles to pick up the receiver which he places to his ear. The off-stage siren stops its blaring.)

CAPTAIN:

“Hello? ... Lieutenant Meshaw, Station Anchorage ... Yes, sir ... (He stares at Artie.) **He’s standing right here, sir ...** (He stares at the phone with a puzzled look) **It’s for you.”**

(The Captain hands the phone to Artie, as a second spotlight illuminates Vice-Admiral Clearwater’s ornate and plush Coast Guard office back at Headquarters – Washington. Clearwater wears a uniform adorned with gold stripes and he boasts a chest full of military ribbons. He is speaking into a similar red phone.)

ARTIE:

“Hello?”

CLEARWATER:
(Speaks abruptly.)

“Vice-Admiral Clearwater here!”

ARTIE:

(Puts his hand over the phone and silently points to the phone and mouths to Captain “It’s the Vice-Admiral!”)

“Uhh. May I help you?”

CLEARWATER:

"Yes, sailor. You may indeed *help me*. I personally oversee collection of all urine west of the Mississippi. Are you the idiot yeoman who sent me capless bottles?"

ARTIE:

"Is something wrong, sir?"

CLEARWATER:

"Are you aware that urine contains an acid that eats through the wax of butcher block paper?"

ARTIE:

"It does? Well, you see, sir, Admiral, I mean Vice-Admiral, Headquarters sent me a box of bottles without caps, so I had to improvise, just like we learned to do at boot camp, and so ..."

CLEARWATER:
(Interrupts.)

"Hey swab, do you think I like being awash in urine?"

ARTIE:

"Um ... no?"

CLEARWATER:

"You bet your sweet ass *NO*. Until all sailors at Station Anchorage are found to be urine-compliant, their certification as militarily-ready for action is compromised. Because they are not deemed *ready*, all the other Coast Guard units in the Alaskan Territory that would have been called to action simultaneously must stand down, while Headquarters awaits receipt of your 25 bottles of urine, the originals of which leaked in transit.

(While Clearwater is speaking, Artie mimics to Lieutenant Meashaw how there were no caps for the bottles.) **And if Alaska is not ready for mobilization, that means all of the Coast Guard Stations west of the Mississippi must stand down, since they form one integrated combat group.**

That's not the only beehive you've stirred up, yeoman. I'm up for promotion – Admiral in charge of all urine collection both east and west of the Mississippi. Your drenched box of samples is the only thing standing between *me* and an extra gold star above the brim of my hat. Do I have to fly to Anchorage personally to review this little matter with you face “to” face?”

ARTIE:

“That won't be necessary, Vice-Admiral.”

CLEARWATER:

“Brilliant, sailor. If you fail, I will personally see to it that you are permanently assigned to Basic Training Piss Collection School.” (Clearwater hangs up the red phone on his desk as the spotlight on his office is extinguished. Artie slowly hangs up his red phone as well.)

CAPTAIN:
(Hesitant.)

“Is there something wrong?”

(Spotlight on the residents at Cedardale, as Artie walks over to give them another explanation.)

ARTIE:

“Twenty-four hours later an armed guard dressed in a parka and riding a dog sled appeared at our gate. He was carrying a bulletproof box. I signed for delivery and went back to my cubicle. I opened the box. Know what I found inside?”

GLENN:

“What?”

ARTIE:

“Twenty-four caps. *No bottles!* I didn’t need another lecture about Coast Guard Boot Camp. After all, there wasn’t a second to lose.”

MILTON:
(Concerned.)

“Whadja do?”

ARTIE:

“I walked into town, went to the only drug store standing in Alaska, and bought 24 little bottles and a gallon jug of iced tea. Then I returned to the base. I drank the gallon of tea, waited a while, and then pissed in each bottle. I screwed on the caps, affixed ID labels corresponding to each sailor on board, put the bottles in a bulletproof Coast Guard transmittal box, and sent a Morse code encrypted message to the airfield. An hour later I handed the package to some armed guard on a dog sled who appeared at our gate.”

GLENN:

“Pissing in all them bottles – couldn’t you have landed in the brig?”

ARTIE:
(Returns to the residents as he transitions back into an old man.)

“That’s why I’ve never told anyone this story before. But as a result of my urination, preservation of our nation, rather than its ruination, was assured.”

JANICE:
(She sighs in awe.)

“A real war hero.”

GERTIE:

"I just love a man in uniform. Piss in a cup and win the war."

ARTIE:

"You're right, Gertie. Come to think of it, that phrase – just the way you said it – has a nice ring to it. I'd like it printed in my obituary."

GERTIE:

(Raises a cup.)

"To Artie – a real pisser!"

EVERYONE IN UNISON:

(With cups in hand.)

"A real pisser!"

(End of Scene Five.)

SIXTH SCENE – THE ADOPTION

(The residents begin to pick at their food again. Lillian looks up as she begins to ponder out loud.)

LILLIAN:

“Know what I’ve learned after 85 years as a visitor on this revolving speck of dirt we call earth?”

JANICE:

“What’s that, Lillian?”

LILLIAN:

“The most important life decisions are often made in the space of a heartbeat or two – decisions that may ultimately affect two or perhaps three generations of a family.”

BENNY:

“I feel a story coming on. Am I right, Lillian? One that belongs in your obituary?”

LILLIAN:

“For close to half a century, I dealt on a daily basis with my clients’ intimate personal problems. Some issues could be resolved, some couldn’t. But no matter the outcome, it was an honor, a true privilege that my friends and neighbors trusted me in one way or another with the stewardship of their fate. And as Benny has already confirmed, the chances were good that God, despite His busy schedule, took the time to monitor the progression of each of my files.”

JANICE:

“You believe God was watching you?”

LILLIAN:

"I've got a story you folks might find interesting. Seems like a billion years ago."

SYLVIA:

"Does this narrative belong in your obituary?"

LILLIAN:

"I'll let you folks be the judge. After all, I was just the lawyer. Suffice it to say that similar to Milton's adventure on the golf course, the memory of this particular case is as vivid as yesterday, and I'm not sure I'd have it any other way."

ARTIE:

"The floor is yours, counselor."

(All stage lights dim on the Cedardale residents as Lillian stands and addresses the theatre audience out of earshot of the residents.)

LILLIAN:

"There's something I want to share just with you. Know what I found so unusual about the practice of law? One moment I might deal with something so inconsequential it did not merit any expenditure of my time. Fifteen minutes later, I might be involved in a matter of life and death. Take Jacob Heffelfinger sitting over there in my conference room. (Lillian points as a spotlight illuminates Heffelfinger, a farmer dressed in denim overalls and a flannel shirt. He is sitting at a law office conference room table, unaware that Lillian is talking about him.) He was my client for over thirty years. For reasons that will become clearer in just a few minutes, I'd prefer that my fellow nursing home residents not hear what I'm about to relate. Jake has his health, a good family, and a large working farm that has provided him with an adequate living. Yet he can't seem to recognize his many blessings. My secretary

told me why he was dropping by. Frankly, today's so-called problem is of minor consequence, and there is precious little I can do, yet there he sits, agitated and expecting me to concoct some legal remedy where none exists. The conversation to which you're about to become privy may at first blush appear irrelevant regarding the drafting of obituaries. But stick with me. In a few minutes, you'll see why this discussion ultimately proved to be important in the life of one of my nursing home buddies. I promise!"

(Lillian walks over to the conference room and shakes hands with Heffelfinger. The Cedardale residents continue to sit in the dark, and can not hear this conversation.)

HEFFELFINGER:

"I'm so angry I could spit nails!"

LILLIAN:

"What's the problem, Jake?"

HEFFELFINGER:

"More of them trespassers on my land. As if I didn't have enough problems trying to run a hundred acre farm. Each year I plant enough corn so my cows have something to eat over the winter. Then the invaders show up right on cue. It always starts with them rotten kids riding their dirt bikes everywhere as they break the stalks. Then there's the deer and raccoons and the other freeloaders the law won't allow me to shoot out of hunting season. I'm lucky anything is left after the tassel worms start to infiltrate, and the law don't let me use an insecticide strong enough to stop them, the deer, or the kids. It's a miracle I'm still in business."

LILLIAN:

"As we discussed before, I'm not sure I can help you other than to suggest you put up *no trespassing* signs."

HEFFELFINGER:

"Just listen once. I ain't done. So, as you know, I'm pretty sensitive as to who approaches my land. It's the rare visitor that has ever done me any good. But after I thought I had seen everything, two weeks ago there came another surprise intruder – and this time it was part animal and part human!"

LILLIAN:

"I don't quite understand."

HEFFELFINGER:

"You will. You will. See, I keep a telescope at my back window so I can view the lower fifty acres where the corn's growing. All them vandals probably think I'm not watching. Two weeks ago was the clincher. This beat up yellow Volkswagen beetle car slows down near where the creek runs and just sits there idling. Up to no good, I'm thinkin', so I take down the license number, just in case. And then it happened."

LILLIAN:

"What?"

HEFFELFINGER:

"Cool as a cucumber. Don't the driver open his door, and step out carrying a wire cage. What do you think was in it?"

LILLIAN:

"I haven't a clue."

HEFFELFINGER:

A pussy cat. All black except for two white ears and the white tip of its tail. He dumps the cat in my field! Imagine the nerve. But that ain't all. He reaches in the car and pulls out a second victim."

LILLIAN:

"Another cat?"

HEFFELFINGER:

"This one is all orange, except for a black nose. And the son of a bitch still ain't done. He produces a third reluctant passenger. This free loader is all white except for three black paws. This is the trio of cats that uninvited catnapper deposits in my field. And then he looks around, and makes his getaway, his problems solved."

LILLIAN:

"But what can I possibly do to help?"

HEFFELFINGER:

"Just listen once. I ain't done. That was two weeks ago. It took me a week of filling out forms, but I tracked the license plate and found out who owned the yellow Volkswagen and where he lived."

LILLIAN:

"Wait a minute! Are you telling me - "

HEFFELFINGER:

(Interrupts.)

"So I rounded up them three mangy cats, and dropped them off at *his* house about two in the morning. They were probably happy to be back home. Now tell me, counselor, can I

sue that clown for my time and trouble? It cost me ten bucks just to get his license information."

(Spotlight extinguished on Heffelfinger as he silently leaves the stage. Single spotlight on Lillian as she addresses the audience out of earshot of the Cedardale residents who are still sitting in the dark.)

LILLIAN:

"We'll get back to that little discussion in a few minutes. (Lillian pauses as she takes another step toward the audience.) Some client inquiries were so emotionally charged that I hesitated becoming involved. A few required that I make decisions that should only have been made by God. I remember one day in particular when the level of mayhem in my office had reached a new plateau. And then came that fateful telephone call."

(Spotlight illuminates the Cedardale residents. Second spotlight on Lillian's law office where Lillian sits at her desk as she studies a file. Her secretary, Claire, enters. She conducts herself in a professional manner, but her unmistakable subdued sarcasm discloses a subtle sense of humor. Lillian is now able to maintain a conversation with her fellow Cedardale residents whenever she wishes.)

CLAIRE:

"The Terminex guy says it isn't mice in the basement – its moles eating the files, and the office credit card was rejected. *Again.* Your mother's on line two, and she says yours was a hideously painful birth and she kindly asks that you pick up the goddamn phone. The plumber is just about finished, and he has concluded that this time (she pauses with a sigh)

the toilet can't be fixed. He suggests we have a talk with everyone in the office about what can and what can't go down, and I quote, (with air quotes) *da freakin' pipes.*"

LILLIAN:

(Starts pulling at her hair.)

"Who's on three?"

CLAIRE:

"A Mrs. Perryman."

LILLIAN:

"Who?"

CLAIRE:

"A new client. She says it concerns a *family matter.*"

LILLIAN:

"O.K. O.K. Put my mother on with the plumber. Sounds like they speak the same language, and write the Terminex guy a check from next week's payroll. I'll grab the Perryman call."

CLAIRE:

"Aye Aye, el cap-i-tano." (She engages in a sarcastic salute, executes a smart military turn on her heel and leaves. Lillian picks up the phone and punches a button.)

LILLIAN:

"This is Attorney Palmer. How might I help you?"

(Third spotlight on June Perryman who is calling from her private residence. As she begins to speak, a well dressed attorney wearing a three piece suit and carrying a briefcase makes his way from the back of the theatre toward the front. He listens intently to this telephone conversation.)

MRS. PERRYMAN:
(Excited.)

"Attorney Palmer, this is Mrs. Perryman ... June Perryman."

LILLIAN:

"How may I help you?"

MRS. PERRYMAN:

"Please forgive the emotion in my voice, but truthfully, this may be the most important call I've ever made."

LILLIAN:

"O.K. (Rubs her eyes with her free hand.) Take your time."

MRS. PERRYMAN:
(Takes in a deep relaxing breath.)

"The Frankenfields said that you were instrumental in coordinating the adoption of their lovely daughter Isabelle. They said you were so attentive and thorough. In a word, I need your help."

(The well-dressed attorney stops in his tracks and speaks from his off-stage location as he addresses Lillian.)

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:
(In a sing-song voice.)

"Don't do it, Lillian. Think!"

LILLIAN:

"Who said that?" (She looks around and focuses upon the well-dressed attorney.)

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"As if you didn't have enough problems. An adoption? Ugh ... The judicial abyss. Representing a murderer is easier – and you know it – 'cause if things don't go right, they just execute the son-of-a-bitch. But when there's a baby involved – "

LILLIAN:
(Interrupts.)

"Who are you?"

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"And don't kid yourself. No one likes us *lawyers*. We're only in it for the money, remember? Do you think anyone actually cares if you make payroll? Will they help with a plugged up toilet? And just this week, Claire asked for a raise, your malpractice went up, and the copy machine broke. Again. The Police Athletic League is still gunning you for another donation ..."

LILLIAN:
(Despondent.)

"I know ... I know. But isn't it all about giving back?"

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"First you've got to help yourself. Your family's complaining you haven't been to a single soccer game this month, and you still haven't found the time to draft your own will. Your doctor says you may have an ulcer, you're driving a 12-year-old car, and you haven't even begun saving for your kid's college education. Did I leave anything out?"

LILLIAN:

"But Mrs. Perryman. She sounds desperate."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"Every client thinks his is the only important case. And pal, you know that taking on an adoption is like walking blind into quicksand."

(Spotlight on Sylvia who is filling a water glass for one of the elderly residents. She addresses a question to the Well-Dressed Attorney.)

SYLVIA:

(Nervously stuttering.)

"You are so cynical. An adoption is a joyous occasion. An innocent infant – a baby – is beginning a journey into a new life with wonderful new parents."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"Honey, what planet did you come from? Just what do you think happens when the kid is born brown and Mr. Baby Daddy is supposedly white? And then there are the expectant mothers who change their minds at the last possible minute. Or the attending nurse who tries to change it for them."

MRS. PERRYMAN:

(Worried.)

"Attorney Palmer, are you still there?"

LILLIAN:

"Yes ... Yes, I am. Unfortunately, Mrs. Perryman, I've got a Superior Court brief due tomorrow, and I don't think –"

MRS. PERRYMAN:

(Interrupts determinedly.)

"Attorney Palmer, this is the most important thing that my husband and I will ever do.

The Frankenfields said you were the best."

LILLIAN:

"Mrs. Perryman, it's been some time since – "

MRS. PERRYMAN:

(Interrupts.)

"With your help, two lives will become three, and our new family will be forever grateful. Every birthday, every holiday with our new child, I will think of you and thank God for your help."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

(Laughs.)

"Ohhh maaan. She's good. Don't fall for that dribble. She's just reeling you in for the kill."

LILLIAN:

(Places her hand over the phone as she addresses the well-dressed attorney.)

"She's making me feel so guilty. Just like my mother."

SYLVIA:

"Your mother manipulated you through guilt?"

LILLIAN:

"Are you kidding? My mother was the poster girl for guilt. How about this? I was five ... maybe six at the time. Our home only had one toilet, and I was sitting on it. My mother starts banging on the bathroom door, demanding that I make a fast exit. Know what she said?"

SYLVIA:

"I can't imagine."

LILLIAN:
(Mimicking his mother's voice.)

"When I was pregnant with you, you single-handedly wrecked my bladder. So get the blazes out of that bathroom! Now!"

MRS. PERRYMAN:
(Begins to cry uncontrollably.)

"Attorney Palmer, I need your help."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"See what I mean, Bub? That's the problem with these adoptions – too much drama. One minute the client is ecstatic – the next – devastated. And mark my words. Just like the natural mother, the adopting mother will begin to experience her own form of labor pains – and complain about them to you. It's a phenomenon similar to what occurs with college sorority sisters whose monthly periods begin to synchronize. And then there is the four A.M. call from the hospital to advise that the baby has arrived. (To the audience.) Every baby ever adopted shows up at four A. M. sharp. It's some unwritten baby law."

MRS. PERRYMAN:

"If you help us, we'll forever be in your debt."

LILLIAN:
(Hesitant.)

"Mrs. Perryman ... I've got to be honest ..."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"Right on! That's the spirit. Hang up that phone."

MRS. PERRYMAN:
(Cries uncontrollably.)

"... Yes ... ?"

LILLIAN:
(Capitulates as she shakes her head.)

"I would be pleased to assist you and your husband."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:
(Sings this.)

"Sucker! Big mistake."

MRS. PERRYMAN:
(Exhausted and relieved.)

"Oh thank you. See, we've been trying to conceive for almost ten years. Then, last week, Dr. Bevilaqua told me about one of his patients, Lucinda. She's a culinary arts major at the community college, unmarried, and pregnant. She wants her baby to have a good home. The doctor suggested we contact a lawyer right away."

LILLIAN:

"We'll need to locate the father, get his permission, and file the necessary papers at the courthouse."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"You're an idiot. Hey, don't plan on anyone giving you a medal."

GERTIE:
(Leading.)

"What about Lucinda's pre-birth expenses?"

LILLIAN:

"Good question. The selling of a baby is a criminal offense. On the other hand, paying the expectant mother's expenses is quite legal. Lucinda needed maternity clothes and other essentials. The Perrymans paid for everything, despite the fact they were of modest means. Mr. Perryman was a forklift driver."

MILTON:
(Leading.)

"What about the medical bills?"

LILLIAN:

"Lucinda had insurance coverage through her parents' medical plan, since she was still a student living at home. So, the costs of almost all pre-natal care and hospitalization were covered. The pregnancy appeared to be normal, and free of complications."

SARGE:

"Did the stork bring the baby on time?"

LILLIAN:

"Got the call at four a.m. sharp."

(Lillian walks over to a hospital desk with two seats. Overworked and tired Dr. Philips is seated at the desk, paging through several documents. His hair is disheveled and a surgical mask dangles from one ear. Another well-dressed doctor, meticulously attired in crisp, pressed hospital whites with a stethoscope hanging around his neck proceeds from the back of the theatre toward, but stops short of, the stage.)

LILLIAN:
(Addresses the Cedardale residents.)

"Had to go to the hospital. I was the court-appointed intermediary until the Perrymans took physical possession ..."

SARGE:
(Interrupts.)

"What'd ya mean *physical possession*? Sounds like they was buyin' a car."

LILLIAN:

"The baby would remain my responsibility until it was literally cradled in the arms of the new parents. In the meantime my clients waited anxiously in the lobby."

DR. PHILIPS:

(Looks up as he addresses Lillian in a tired manner.)

"Are you Attorney Palmer? I've been expecting you."

WELL-DRESSED ATTORNEY:

"I'm out of here. This is gonna be like watching a train wreck." (He picks up his briefcase and leaves the stage but remains in the theatre.)

LILLIAN:

"Yes."

DR. PHILIPS:

"Dick Philips. (They shake hands.) Pull up a chair, counselor. (Lillian complies and sits down at the doctor's desk.) Baby Boy X was born at 4:05 this morning. Seven pounds, two ounces. Ten fingers and ten toes."

LILLIAN:

"Well, that's good."

(Spotlight momentarily extinguished on Lillian. Spotlight on the Well-Dressed Doctor who appears at the edge of the stage and addresses Dr. Philips out of earshot from Lillian.)

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR:

"Why sugar coat it, doc? You know exactly where this is going. The kid's ticker is busted. Probably a heart valve. It's either Children's Hospital in Philly, or the morgue."

DR. PHILIPS:
(Snaps back.)

“Don’t you think I know that. I’m tired, and I’m trying to be gentle here. Been up 36 hours straight.”

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR:

“You’ve got your own problems. On call weekends and nights, taking a shower with a cell phone, crushing unpaid student loans, ridiculous governmental insurance regulations, interns who don’t speak English, hands in rubber gloves twelve hours a day. When the hell was the last time you and your wife went out for dinner?”

DR. PHILIPS:
(Turns to address Lillian as the spotlight returns to Lillian.)

“I’ve just completed some preliminary tests. There’s nothing conclusive yet, but it’s possible this infant has, in layman’s terms, a defective heart valve. He may need immediate surgery.”

LILLIAN:
(Startled.)

“Open heart surgery!”

DR. PHILIPS:

“In-coming helicopter’s ten minutes out, ready to transport to Children’s. How do you wish to proceed?”

NURSE:
(Approaches.)

“Doctor, Mrs. Adams in 402 is dilated nine centimeters. We’re just about ready.”

DR. PHILIPS:

“I’ll be there in a minute.”

NURSE:

"We may not have a minute, doctor."

DR. PHILIPS:

"I get it! I'll be there in a sec." (Nurse leaves.)

LILLIAN:
(Shocked.)

"How do *I* wish ... "

DR. PHILIPS:
(Interrupts.)

"You *are* the court-appointed intermediary, aren't you?"

LILLIAN:

"Yes, but ..."

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR:
(Interrupts.)

"Yeah. She's the idiot who picked up the phone when Perryman called – not you."

DR. PHILIPS:
(Ignores Well-Dressed Doctor as he addresses Lillian.)

"So, he's your kid. Do you want him air-lifted or not? Philadelphia is standing by with a prepped O.R."

LILLIAN:

"Wait a minute ... Wait a minute, Doctor. Why am I making medical decisions about the care of this baby? You're the doctor."

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR:
(Begins to laugh.)

"That's a good one."

DR. PHILIPS:

(Addresses the Well-Dressed Doctor in a scolding manner.)

"Would you please let me handle this in my own way? (Dr. Philips turns to Lillian in a calm demeanor.) Yes, I am. But I'm not the insurance company."

LILLIAN:

"What do you mean? The natural mother has insurance coverage through her parents."

DR. PHILIPS:

"For Lucinda. But she previously signed the formal releases giving up the infant. Baby X doesn't belong to her. And he doesn't belong to the Perrymans either. He belongs to you as the court-approved intermediary."

LILLIAN:

"So what happens if I don't give the O.K.?"

DR. PHILIPS:

"The County Office of Children and Youth will be contacted for *its* approval. And if that office gives consent, the county will pay the medical expenses."

LILLIAN:

"Doctor, what are the chances of successful heart surgery?"

DR. PHILIPS:

"Won't know 'til they're in there. It's tricky. The baby's heart is about the size of a walnut."

LILLIAN:

"The cost?"

DR. PHILIPS:

"The helicopter ride alone will set you back about the price of a new car. If you've gotta ask, you can't afford it."

LILLIAN:

"Doc ..."

DR. PHILIPS:

"Yes ..."

LILLIAN:

"How much time do I have to make a decision?"

DR. PHILIPS:

"The baby's critical. Every minute increases the risk."

LILLIAN:

"Let me talk with my clients."

DR. PHILIPS:

"I understand."

LILLIAN:

(Motioning for the doctor to join him.)

"Will you - ?"

DR. PHILIPS:

"Certainly. Let me look in on another patient, and then I'll join you down stairs as soon as I can."

NURSE:

(Insistent as she rushes on stage.)

"Doctor! Now!"

WELL-DRESSED DOCTOR:

"You shoulda been a dermatologist." (The doctors leave the stage. Lillian walks over to the elderly residents and transitions back into an old woman with grey wig and pajamas. She sits down.)

GERTIE:
(Animated.)

"This story gives me the chills. What ever did you do?"

LILLIAN:

"I met with the Perrymans to review their options."

GERTIE:
(Impatient.)

"Yes, yes, of course. But what did *they* decide to do?"

LILLIAN:

"What would *you* have done?"

GERTIE:

"What type of answer is that? I'm not the Perrymans."

LILLIAN:

"But you're human. How would you have counseled them?"

GERTIE:

"That's a lawyer-trick: answering a question with a question where only you know the answer."

MILTON:
(Contemplative.)

"I beg to differ. Lillian's right. It isn't important for us to know whether the Perrymans took that child into their home. What's important is whether you believe in the inherent goodness of the human soul in times of need."

GERTIE:
(Demanding.)

"Bullshit! I wanna know. Did the Perrymans take the kid?"

LILLIAN:
(Philosophically.)

"You will have my answer shortly. Please be patient."

JANICE:
(Raises a cup.)

"I'd like to offer a toast: to all the unheralded dedicated lawyers who daily struggle to simply do the right thing."

EVERYONE IN UNISON:
(With cups in hand.)

"To Lillian, a lawyer."

(End of Scene Six.)

SCENE SEVEN – TRUE LOVE

JANICE:

“Lillian, the unconditional love required to sustain that little infant’s life has brought to mind another type of love I’d like to share with all of you. It’s a story I’ve kept to myself these many years, because no one would have ever believed me. But now, with the end of my life fast approaching, I’d like someone to know that there once was a very special moment when I was the recipient of unconditional devotion, the memory of which has never faded. It is perhaps my most endearing possession.”

LILLIAN:

“I have a feeling we’re about to be honored with a unique and beautiful recollection.”

ARTIE:

“You know something. Any similarity between the slop they feed us here and actual food is purely coincidental, yet this has been one of the most memorable lunches I’ve ever attended. Tell us your story, Janice.”

JANICE:

“I was still relatively young, about 40, and married to my late husband, Andy. Our son had already moved out and joined the Navy.”

SYLVIA:

“So it was Andy who gave you this very special love? That’s so sweet.”

JANICE:
(Incredulous.)

“My Andy? (Janice laughs) You’ve got to be kidding. He was just my husband. No, what I’m talking about transcended mere marital obligations. Well, I guess I better begin at the

beginning. See, we lived out by Kreidersville, in one of those row homes on Second Street. We had a small back yard and a single car garage. Anyway, one day I'm out back hanging up the laundry, when this cat appears out of nowhere, and begins to meow for something to eat. I went inside, got a saucer of milk, and gave it to her. What else could I do? The poor thing was obviously homeless. My new friend decided to take up residence under the garage steps and so I began to feed her every day. Word must have spread among some of her friends, because a week later a second cat showed up for a handout, and decided to stay as well. To make a long story short, by the end of the month there were three cats. The truth is I had always wanted a family pet or two, but my husband claimed he was allergic to fur. I figured if they stayed outside, there wouldn't be a problem.

I loved those cats and they loved me. I often sat out back on the garage step and petted my little critters for hours. I was never closer to any other living creatures. I could confide in them, and they would listen patiently to my every word. But Andy said the smell of them on my clothes made him cough, and with winter on the way, they needed to find a new home. I was heartbroken, but he was adamant. He said he knew of a farmer about ten miles down the road near Butlerstown who might take them. They would become working cats catching mice. So Andy gathered my dear sweet darlings up, and simply drove them away. I cried for a week."

GERTIE:

"That is so sad. You lost the loves of your life."

JANICE:

"Wait! There's more to the story. Two of the hardest weeks I've ever endured crawled by, and then a miracle. I was hanging up the laundry, and just who do you think made an appearance on my garage step?"

MILTON:

"You're not going to ask us to believe --"

JANICE:
(Interrupts.)

"All three cats, as pretty as you please. I broke down and cried for joy."

ARTIE:

"Janice, you're not suggesting the cats walked back to your residence, a distance of ten miles? Cats don't have homing powers like pigeons. They don't return to the same beach similar to migratory turtles."

SARGE:

"It couldn't have been the same cats. It was probably just three new similar looking freeloaders."

JANICE:
(Indignant.)

"I knew my precious cats, you doubting Thomas. *Blackie* was all black, except for her two white ears and the white tip of her tail. *Rosie* was orange, except for a black nose. And *Whitey* was all white, except for his right front and two rear black paws. These were my cats!"

SARGE:

"I'm sure there's a very simple explanation. Probably your husband had second thoughts, and decided to retrieve your pets."

JANICE:

"If only that were true. Actually the opposite occurred. He demanded that I never befriend another cat. He had no thought of bringing them back. Rather, after he kidnapped my pets,

he suffered one of his so-called gallbladder attacks, and ended up in the hospital during that two week period.”

SARGE:

“This is one of the most ridiculous stories I’ve ever heard. The ten mile stretch of road between Butlerstown and Kreiderville includes a portion of a super highway, a tunnel, several railroad trestles, and a river span with no pedestrian walkway. And you think those three stupid hair-ball regurgitating felines made their way back without being eaten by hawks, killed by dogs, or hit in traffic?”

JANICE:

(Becomes upset.)

“Now you understand why I’ve never told anyone this story. But whether you believe it or not, those three cats loved me so much that they braved rivers, tunnels, traffic, and birds of prey to return to me, the one who adored them. (Janice turns to Lillian.) Lillian, you believe me, don’t you?”

LILLIAN:

(Ponders for a moment.)

“Did you say that your husband, Andy, drove a Volkswagen Beetle?”

JANICE:

“Yes. Why?”

LILLIAN:

“It wasn’t yellow, was it?”

JANICE:

“How did you know?”

LILLIAN:

“Just a lucky guess.”

JANICE:

“Lillian – you believe those three cats loved me so much they faced possible death to return to my waiting arms, don’t you?”

LILLIAN:

(Ponders for a moment.)

“Janice, there is no doubt in my mind that those were your three loving cats, and that God above orchestrated their return to you.”

JANICE:

“Your words mean a great deal to me, Lillian. I miss those cats more than anyone can possibly imagine. I may be old, but I will always remember what it feels like to have been loved. And that’s what I want noted in my obituary.”

LILLIAN:

(Raises a cup.)

“I’d like to offer a toast: to Janice, who has experienced the greatest gift of all – true reciprocal unconditional love.”

EVERYONE IN UNISON:

(With cups in hand.)

“True love.”

(Spotlights extinguished. End of Scene Seven.)

SCENE EIGHT – THE SPEEDING TICKET

GLENN:

“As long as we’re on the subject of miracles and heavenly intervention, I’ve got something I’d like to relate.”

SYLVIA:

“I’ve never been witness to such unusual stories!”

GERTIE:

“Stick around, kid. We may be fossils, but sometimes the tastiest wine issues forth from the aged barrels. Sometimes the sweetest music springs from the oldest violins.”

GLENN:

“Have any of you ever sort of accidentally ... unintentionally of course ... come real close to killing someone?”

LILLIAN:

“Whatever are you talking about?”

GLENN:

“Surprisingly, this story has a happy ending. Perhaps I should not it in my obituary. See, it deals with the day I discovered there actually is *Justice* out there, if you look hard enough.”

LILLIAN:

“You obtained justice by nearly killing someone?”

GLENN:

"Not just anyone. Actually, I almost snuffed out a sitting judge as I appeared before him in his courtroom. That's the reason up until now I've chosen to keep this little misadventure under wraps."

BENNY:

"You did what?"

GLENN:

"It wasn't very funny at the time, but now as I look back half a century later, the tale is probably worth telling. After all, I was never arrested for attempted murder, so things turned out OK."

JANICE:

"You've got our undivided attention. Please enlighten us."

GLENN:

Well, let's see, I was about 25. Full of piss and vinegar. I was driving the most beautiful car in the whole wide world – my powder blue V-8 Desoto, the special model with the glow-in-the-dark amber Indian hood ornament – when this cop steams up behind me and says I was speeding. Doin' 70 in a 40 zone. God how I miss that car ..."

MILTON:

"What memories. That'll be the day any of us ever drive again."

GLENN:

(He ignores the comment.)

“So the cop gives me a ticket. With the fine and costs, it totaled \$35. I didn’t have that type of money, not even in the bank. I was only making 28 bucks a week clear. So I decided to fight the charge.”

LILLIAN:

“All by yourself?”

GLENN:

“Yup. Couldn’t afford a lawyer. And this wasn’t before some judge in a courthouse. Nope, a Justice of the Peace heard the case in his dusty little office. Anyway, the cocky state trooper shows up and testifies that I had been speeding and that I should be found guilty as charged. But just as he’s finishing his side of the case, he gets an emergency call and rushes out of the building. That leaves only me, the Justice of the Peace, and a couple of other desperados waiting for their hearings.”

(Glenn transitions into a young man as he sheds his grey wig, exposing his red hair. He walks to a small judicial office where Glenn stands before an old Justice of the Peace seated at his desk. Four or five accused defendants and their attorneys sit in two rows of chairs awaiting their hearings. There is a six-foot green oxygen cylinder positioned next to this desk, and a clear plastic oxygen hose that winds its way from the cylinder, coiled on the floor, and over the desk where it ends its journey strapped to the justice’s face as the tube enters his nose. Even with this assistance, the Justice still has trouble breathing. Next to the oxygen cylinder and leaning against the wall stands an old army stretcher, the type used to carry the wounded to an ambulance.)

(A second spotlight returns to Cedardale as Glenn, now standing in the courtroom, calls back to the Cedardale residents who shake their heads in acknowledgment.)

GLENN:

“It was time for me to tell my side of the story, so I approached his honor to present my defense. (Glenn holds his arms apart in dramatic fashion as he addresses the Justice of the Peace.) Your Honor, it’s simply not possible that I was driving as fast as the state trooper said. See, that old country road is full of bumps, and I love my car. I maintained the speed limit to make sure the wheels didn’t slam into any potholes.”

(Glenn takes a step closer to the Justice of the Peace’s desk, and as he does so, without realizing what he has done, he unintentionally steps on the oxygen hose coiled on the floor. He turns 180 degrees to face the members of the audience and briefly addresses them. As he does so, he fails to see that the Justice of the Peace is now struggling to breathe as he desperately points in vain at the air hose upon which Glenn stands.) **“As my fellow accused defendants sitting here undoubtedly understand, this is a special production Desoto with the illuminated Indian head on the front hood. No one with a love for classic cars would ever place such a unique vehicle at risk.”**

FIRST DEFENDANT IN THE COURTROOM:

“He’s making sense! That’s proof of his innocence beyond a reasonable doubt. I’d vote to acquit.”

A SECOND DEFENDANT:

“Me, too!”

JUSTICE OF THE PEACE:
(Points at his hose as he gasps.)

“... da ... hose ... ”

(The Justice of the Peace struggles to take one last gasp, as his head slams onto his desk as he loses consciousness. Glenn is still unaware of the catastrophe he has caused as he continues to stand on the hose while addressing the defendants in the courtroom.)

GLENN:

“It would mean a great deal to me if all of you unanimously agreed that I am innocent. A split decision would leave some lingering doubt.”

(The Justice of the Peace’s secretary rushes onto the stage and hovers over the fallen Justice, attempting to revive him.)

SECRETARY:
(Distraught.)

“Jesus Christ. Must this happen *every* week! (Looking at Glenn.) God knows, you probably killed him. (She points at the stretcher.) Go on! Grab it and help me drag his body to my car. I’ll rush him straight to the hospital. Like I have time for this.”

FIRST DEFENDANT:
(Craning his neck to offer helpful advice.)

“Don’t speed!”

(Spotlight fades on the courtroom, as Glenn returns to Cedardale, and transforms back into an old man with a silver haired wig. He sits back down at the cafeteria table.)

MILTON:

“Well, don’t keep us in suspense! What happened?”

GLENN:
(Nonchalantly.)

“I heard he lived.”

MILTON:

"You idiot! I wasn't talking about the asthmatic judge. Were you found guilty?"

GLENN:

"Ohhhhh! Not exactly. See, the judge took a month's leave. Something about a concussion. Anyway, since he failed to render a verdict that day, the charges were automatically dropped. Couldn't try me again. Double jeopardy. Looking back, I was pretty lucky."

MILTON:

"I'll say."

GLENN:

"All told, I could've been charged with both speeding *and* attempted manslaughter. So that's it. I beat the damn charge single-handed and took my new girl and my precious Desoto to the drive-in movies that very night. (Chuckles and speaks loudly.) And oh what a night it was!"

LILLIAN:

(Nodding her head approvingly.)

"A story worthy of an obituary, and one that warrants a toast: to Glenn – may you continue to experience your fair share of luck, interspersed with a little justice on occasion."

EVERYONE IN UNISON:

(With cups in hand.)

"Luck and Justice."

(End of Scene Eight.)

NINTH SCENE – THE PERFECT CRIME

(Sylvia begins to gather her coat and purse as she addresses the Cedardale residents.)

SYLVIA:

“What an unusual afternoon. I had no idea I was going to be privy to such curious stories.

(She looks at her watch.) My ... my ... where has the time gone? Thank you all for sharing your experiences with me. I hope you will invite me back soon.”

SARGE:

(With the hint of a threat.)

“Where do you think you’re going, sister?”

SYLVIA:

(Caught off guard.)

“It’s almost time for me to make dinner. The kids will be home from school soon.”

MILTON:

(Joins the chorus.)

“Let me see if I’ve got this straight: we just spilled our guts disclosing intimate facts no one could have possibly imagined, and you’re about to slink away without so much as a peep?”

SYLVIA:

“I beg your pardon?”

GLENN:

“He’s right, you know. We showed you ours. You ought to show us yours.”

SYLVIA:

“Show you my what?”

GLENN:
(Scolding.)

"Now Sylvia, you must have a little secret you've kept hidden. Something you've never dared tell a soul. Don't you think you have an obligation to let your hair down a curl or two? Something juicy for *your* obituary?"

SYLVIA:
(Defensively.)

"I don't have any skeletons in my closet. I'm just a simple housewife!"

ARTIE:

"Are you gonna leave knowing that you ate some mush at our table, accepted our hospitality, but refused to confide in us?"

(Sylvia surveys each aged resident as she slowly places her purse and coat back on the table.)

SYLVIA:
(Pauses for a moment.)

"Do you believe there can be such a thing as the *perfect crime*?"

SARGE:
(Lets out a laugh.)

"I had a hunch there was something lurking just below that innocent surface."

GERTIE:

"Your secret's safe with us. Did you try to kill someone, similar to Glenn?"

SYLVIA:

"If you folks breathe a word of what I'm about to relate, I'll come back here and personally feed each one of you more green slop for lunch. Understood?"

LILLIAN:

"That's fair."

SYLVIA:

(She sits down to address the aged residents.)

"About a year ago, I attended a school parent-teacher function. The conference ran late and I was famished. I decided to stop over at Wiggleman's for something to eat."

SARGE:

"Is that the big grocery store everyone talks about? I've never seen it."

SYLVIA:

"That's the one, Sarge. Every category of food awaits the customer, from snacks to delicacies, and they cook and prepare just about anything you can imagine right on the premises. I was trying to choose between some Chinese noodles and the crab cakes as I studied the labels with my right hand. In my left hand were my clipboard and notes from my night meeting. It was 10:30, so I was the only customer in the entire prepared foods department. And then it happened."

GLENN:

"The perfect crime?"

SYLVIA:

"Two chefs dressed top to bottom in white formal cooking gear opened their kitchen door, and began to stare at me. I tried to ignore them, but they approached closer."

(Sylvia walks over to the Wiggleman's grocery store prepared foods department. Two chefs, Barry and Harold, initiate a conversation with Sylvia. Sylvia continues to hold her clipboard in her left hand.)

CHEF BARRY:

"Is there anything we can help you with? Don't hesitate to ask."

SYLVIA:

"That's very kind of you. I'm just looking."

CHEF HAROLD:

(Knowingly to Chef Barry.)

"She's just looking."

CHEF BARRY:

(His head nods up and down.)

"Would you care to sample anything in particular? We're at your service."

SYLVIA:

"Don't trouble yourselves. I'm here to grab a late dinner, that's all."

CHEF HAROLD:

"We just made some pheasant under glass. It hasn't even been placed in the display case yet. Care for a little taste?"

SYLVIA:

"Does every customer receive such wonderful service? I'm overwhelmed."

CHEF BARRY:

"Tell you what. Why don't we prepare you some nice duck with cranberry stuffing, rice soufflé, and marinated green beans smothered in a brandy sauce. It's on the house."

SYLVIA:

"I beg your pardon?"

CHEF HAROLD:

"And for dessert, a chocolate swirl cheese cake, topped with almonds."

SYLVIA:

"Are you joking with me?"

CHEF BARRY:

"Actually, we know who you are."

SYLVIA:

"You do?"

CHEF BARRY:

"Security contacted us the minute you drove into the parking lot."

SYLVIA:

"Security?"

CHEF HAROLD:

"Your New York plates gave you away."

SYLVIA:

"That's not my car. It's a rental while my husband has our SUV's valves adjusted."

CHEF HAROLD:

"Showing up at 10:00 at night on the last day of the month. The clipboard and notes. Studying each label. Wiggleman headquarters are in upstate New York. You're the secret corporate inspector – don't deny it. Cut us a break. Let us treat you to the best meal you've ever had. In return, maybe you'll put in a good word for us. One hand washes the other, so to speak. We're all part of the Wiggleman family, just trying to make a living."

SYLVIA:
(Emphatic.)

"I'm not an inspector, and I don't work for Wiggleman's. I just came from a parent-teacher conference. I was thinking of picking up a pint of Chinese noodles."

CHEF BARRY:
(Unconvinced.)

“Sure – sure. Tell you what – give us five minutes. We’ll wrap up the best dinner you ever had. In return, maybe you might advise headquarters that Chef Harold and Chef Barry made your shopping experience here at Wiggleman’s Store Number 37 a memorable one. Fair enough?”

(Spotlight returns to the residents at Cedardale who discuss with Sylvia what has just occurred.)

MILTON:

“Did you take the bait?”

SYLVIA:
(She walks over to the residents.)

“What do you think? I asked if they could throw in a half pound of crabmeat and some asparagus. I didn’t have to pay for anything. And Chef Barry and Chef Harold were correct. I can’t remember a better feast.”

LILLIAN:

“But you received that bounty under false pretenses!”

SYLVIA:

“Au contraire! I told them I wasn’t an inspector, and I kept my end of the bargain. The minute I got home, I wrote a letter to Wiggleman’s headquarters, advising that Chef Barry and Chef Harold were exemplary employees who had treated me like royalty, and that in my humble opinion they both deserved a raise. Apparently my letter was well received. A month later, while shopping late one night, I chanced to meet the two chefs again.”

(Sylvia returns to the Wiggleman's prepared food section. The two chefs approach Sylvia as she studies the label on a pint of Chinese noodles.)

CHEF BARRY:

"We just wanted to thank you personally for what you did. We both got a raise."

SYLVIA:

"Think nothing of it."

CHEF HAROLD:

"We'd like to show our appreciation. If you have a minute, we'll put together a little something you might enjoy."

SYLVIA:

"But you don't understand. I'm not the Wiggleman's inspector."

CHEF HAROLD:

"Sure – sure. Just give us a few minutes."

(Spotlight returns to the residents at Cedardale as Sylvia joins them.)

SYLVIA:

"My two friends prepared another gourmet feast. Braised rack of lamb with mint jelly, encased in Russian caviar, with a side of crab cakes, all accompanied by a triple layer chocolate cake."

LILLIAN:

"The perfect crime!"

SYLVIA:

"If you ever stop in at Wiggleman's, I recommend the rack of lamb. It's usually on 'special' if you shop after 10 p.m. Carry a clipboard, and ask for Harold and Barry. They're very helpful."

GERTIE:

(Raises a cup.)

“I’d like to propose a toast: to Sylvia – may you always have enough money in your purse to make bail, no matter what crime you commit.”

EVERYONE IN UNISON

(With cups in hand.)

“To Sylvia, a career criminal.”

(End of Scene Nine.)

TENTH SCENE – THE OBITUARIES

(Milton appears alone on stage in the lunch room where the other residents had been eating. The chairs at the lunch room table are empty. Everyone is gone, including Kevin and Sylvia. Milton looks around bewildered.)

MILTON:

“Where is everyone?”

GERTIE:

(Gertie approaches from off stage. She is dressed in her finest clothes and has little angel wings attached to her back. She is now able to walk without assistance as she first addresses Milton, and later will address the audience.)

“Everyone’s waiting for you, Milt. You’re gonna be late! They’re over there.” (She points off stage.)

MILTON:

“Well I certainly don’t want to be known as the *Late Milton*. I’ll just hurry right along.”

(Milton leaves the stage as Gertie addresses the audience.)

GERTIE:

“Some people have never had the guts to look in the mirror and ask themselves *why* they were put on the face of this earth. When pressed, many of them come up with the most time-worn, useless excuse ever: (Mockingly) *I’m here to make the lives of my children better.*

BULLSHIT! By age 14 your children have a life and social circle of their own and only want a full refrigerator, free transportation, and a paid up cell phone.

If you can't come up with a legitimate reason to justify your existence, your obituary will be strewn with useless platitudes, since you will have squandered the precious time you were given.

I died last week. It was expected. I was old. One thing I've learned now that I'm here – all those people who thought they had a 'lock' on what happens when you cross over – are they in for a surprise. My advice: keep an open mind, and don't leave home without a sense of humor.

I wrote my obituary the week before I died. I'm curious to know what you think, okay? I'd like to read you a small portion of it. (Gertie produces a piece of paper as she reads from it.)

Gertrude Armbruster passed away at age 89. At one point during her brief visit on earth, she worked toward world peace by serving at the United Nations as the first representative of Madagascar. She was observant during her life experience, and learned some invaluable things which, with these, her last words, she now hopes to pass on. First: it's a waste of valuable time arguing with anyone. Talking peacefully – yes. Arguing – no. Second: there may be times when it is quite appropriate to say nothing if you have nothing to say. As but one example, there is no need to fumble about telling the person standing next to you in line at my funeral viewing that the dearly departed looks good. I don't, because I'm dead, and the half an inch of mortuary makeup caked on my face won't alter that fact. Third: good friends and good health are what it's all about. Don't ever take either for granted. No one is promised tomorrow. (Gertie places the paper back in her pocket and looks up at the audience.) I'll see you when you get over here. The food isn't bad."

(Gertie turns and walks off stage. Glenn walks on stage dressed in a suit coat and tie. He has angel wings on his back. He pulls a piece of paper out of his pocket and addresses the audience.)

GLENN:

"I'd like to read a portion of my obituary. I wrote it myself: Glenn Rothchild died last week at the age of 93. He was married for 48 years to his only true love, Vivian. He met her when she worked as a secretary for a Justice of the Peace, who ultimately married them after he recuperated from a concussion. They spent their honeymoon at Niagara Falls. Glenn's powder blue Desoto didn't skip a beat getting them there and back. They both developed a life-long interest in emergency medical services, and volunteered at their community fire and rescue squad to transport the injured by stretcher."

(Glenn places the obituary in his pocket and walks off stage. Sarge walks unassisted on stage, dressed in a coat and tie. He has angel wings. He takes a document from his pocket and addresses the audience.)

SARGE:

"I wrote my obituary just before I died. One paragraph in particular is important to me, and I'd like to share it with you:

Herman Bergstresser, also known as *Sarge*, departed this life at the age of 88. He enlisted in the United States Marine Corps during World War Two, and ultimately received a commendation for his outstanding pistol marksmanship. He advanced from the rank of buck private to that of Sergeant, and because of his innate ability to achieve the highest score possible on every standardized military examination, was ultimately assigned to proctor these written intelligence tests to incoming recruits." (Sarge places the obituary in his pocket and walks off stage. Milton walks unassisted on stage, dressed in golf clothes and

angel wings. He is carrying a golf club. He takes a practice swing or two, and then produces a document from his pocket as he addresses the audience.)

MILTON:

"When I felt my time growing short, I wrote my obituary. I'd like to read you a sentence or two: Milton Fenstermacher died at the age of 86. He was in the cement business. He also played golf, and on one special day, he had a hole in one. This miraculous feat can be confirmed by both the IRS and God. However, it is difficult dealing with the IRS, and so it is hoped that God will ultimately vouch for Milton when he gets to heaven, and that a plaque will finally be hung up there in his honor." (Milton places the obituary in his pocket, and walks off stage. Lillian walks on stage wearing an upscale dress and angel wings. She addresses the audience.)

LILLIAN:

"After you die, you develop a different perspective. You'll see what I mean when it's your turn. A rather strange thing happened at my funeral. A young man, perhaps 30 years of age, was in attendance. His loving wife and small child accompanied him. No one could place this stranger, since he wasn't a member of my immediate family, nor did he seem to know anyone in the small crowd of mourners. Had this young man removed his shirt, he would have exposed a sizable scar where some significant surgery within his chest had taken place on the very day of his birth. The young man, now quite healthy, openly cried at the sight of my casket. The others in attendance seemed more interested in obtaining directions on how to find the luncheon reception hall. It was obvious that this young mourner possessed a heart of gold. (Lillian places the obituary in her pocket, and begins to walk off stage, but stops short and turns toward the audience.) Oh, and by the way, it's important to believe in miracles, even little furry ones that arrive unannounced at your

garage doorstep. God works in truly mysterious ways.” (Lillian exits the stage as Artie walks on stage dressed in a Coast Guard uniform with attached angel wings. He reads his obituary.)

ARTIE:

“Artie Dupree departed this life on October 18, having attained the age of 89. He served his country during World War Two as a yeoman in the United States Coast Guard. During his tour of duty, he was periodically called upon to perform tasks that required a working knowledge of complex military sample collection procedures. As a result of his unwavering dedication to duty, the Alaskan Territory was rendered secure from invasion, and the war was won. He ultimately graduated from officer’s candidate school and advanced to the rank of Vice-Admiral in charge of all medical records east of the Mississippi.”

(Artie walks off stage. Janice appears on stage adorned with angel wings. She draws a piece of paper from her pocket and reads from it.)

JANICE:

“Janice Renninger died last week, content in the knowledge that she had, for one special shining moment during her lifetime, been the recipient of the miracle of true love, a love that could not be separated by highways, rivers, or tunnels. This one special gift gave her a perspective that made all the pain and all the nonsensical distractions of life bearable.”

(Janice departs the stage as Benny approaches wearing a coat and tie and angel wings. He carries a two-foot cement statue of Saint Joseph. He produces a piece of paper and reads from it.)

BENNY:

“Benny Steinberg died last week at the age of 86. He was preceded in death by his loving wife, Freda, with whom he played bridge for nearly 50 years. He initially worked as a furniture salesman for various retail outlets. During his later years, he amassed a large

collection of medieval statuary, including images of most of the patron saints. Upon his retirement from furniture sales, he engaged in a second career as a real estate agent, and enjoyed immediate success. He received the coveted annual award for top sales in the eastern portion of the state for three consecutive years. When asked to what he attributed his unusual number of sales, he responded, *Back-breaking work. Sometimes you've just got to loosen your tie, grab a shovel, a 'for sale' sign, and dig.*

(Benny begins to leave the stage, but stops to momentarily address the audience:)

It's amazing what can affect a person's life – statues, audits, speeding tickets, pussycats, a bus trip to the city, even a urine test or two. Be proud of what you have endured and what you have learned from the experience, and don't forget to note your true accomplishments in your obituary. Deep down we're all dying to tell."

(Benny exits the stage.)

END OF PLAY.