



Stoops

**SPOT INSTRUMENTIST
SL FLOOR**

Act I

Scene one: morning.

Two porches angle to slightly face each other with a small patch of lawn between them. Murial's porch is stage right, storybook in its neatness...Norman Rockwell meets Martha Stewart. Sophie's front porch is at stage left, a joyous explosion of color with little regard for symmetry, order, or ...some might say...taste. Disney World on speed. **MUSIC STOPS, SPOT OFF.**

The lights come up to reveal Murial sitting on her porch, reading the newspaper. (LIGHTS UP, MORNING LIGHT, HIGHLIGHT EACH ROCKER AREAS,)

(A crash is heard inside Sophie's house...then)

SOPHIE: *(from inside)* Damn! *(A long beat, then Sophie enters, heavily splattered in flour.)*

MURIAL: *(a long beat, sees her but is not surprised to find Sophie in any condition)*
You're late.

SOPHIE: I'm not late.

MURIAL: You're late.

SOPHIE: What time is it?

MURIAL: It doesn't matter. I've been out here for half an hour.

SOPHIE: You're not even wearing a watch.

MURIAL: And you're a mess.

SOPHIE: How can I be late when you don't even know what time it is?

MURIAL: Was it your cat?

SOPHIE: The sun's barely up.

MURIAL: It was your cat, wasn't it?

SOPHIE: It was not my damned cat!

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MURIAL: Then what was it?

SOPHIE: It was my damned cat. ..but it wasn't his fault.

MURIAL: Never is. You're a mess.

SOPHIE: What?

MURIAL: You're covered with ...I don't know...what is it?

SOPHIE: (*notices her dusting for the first time, then*) Gunpowder. I'm building a bomb in my kitchen.

MURIAL: You're crazy.

SOPHIE: What time is it?

MURIAL: How should I know? I don't wear a watch. (*indicating the paper*) Did you read what your president did?

SOPHIE: It's flour. I had it in a bowl on the kitchen table and the cat couldn't help it.

MURIAL: Taxes. Your president loves taxes.

SOPHIE: It's a nice state.

MURIAL: Taxes! He's proposing more taxes! And your hearing's getting worse!

SOPHIE: What? Kidding! I heard you! I heard you! I don't have time to read the paper. I'm busy building bombs.

MURIAL: Liberals! Liberals drive me crazy. When was the last time you got beyond the horoscope section of any newspaper?

SOPHIE: I don't need to read it. You tell me everything that happens. What time is it?

MURIAL: 7:15.

SOPHIE: You told me you don't have a watch.

MURIAL: I don't need a watch. I have the time in my head.

SOPHIE: That's ridiculous. (*whips open her porch door and looks at a clock, then*) 7:15...exactly. How do you do that?

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MURIAL: What day is it?

SOPHIE: Wednesday.

MURIAL: Thursday. You don't even know the day.

SOPHIE: I had the right week.

MURIAL: I give up.

SOPHIE: Oh!Oh!

MURIAL: What's the matter?

SOPHIE: This is Thursday? I had an appointment on Wednesday!

MURIAL: You missed it. What was it?

SOPHIE: I don't remember...but it was Wednesday. I had an appointment on Wednesday and it was very important.

MURIAL: I give up.

SOPHIE: Something medical.

MURIAL: Oh great.

SOPHIE: Quick. Look at me. Is anything missing?

MURIAL: Your mind.

SOPHIE: Oh...what was it? Darn. I need write these things down.

MURIAL: You missed a doctor's appointment?

SOPHIE: I don't know. Do I look bad?

MURIAL: Yes.

SOPHIE: I knew it. It was something medical.

MURIAL: But you look perfectly normal.

SOPHIE: Oh good. (*a beat then*) Maybe they'll call to remind me.

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MURIAL: Who?

SOPHIE: How should I know?

MURIAL: Just sit down, Sophie. Sit down and enjoy the morning.

SOPHIE: I don't even have my makeup on yet.

MURIAL: You don't need makeup, Sophie. You have flour. You're gorgeous.

SOPHIE: You're just saying that.

MURIAL: Yes I am. (*looking at the paper*) Oh, dear Lord. Liberals! Liberals drive me crazy!

SOPHIE: What time is it?

MURIAL: 7:15 am. This is not all about politics anymore!

SOPHIE: If you're going to talk politics then I'm going back inside to work on my bomb.

MURIAL: This isn't politics. It's insanity.

SOPHIE: (*looking around*) I didn't get my newspaper yet.

MURIAL: Sophie, you don't get the newspaper. You read mine.

SOPHIE: Oh. Maybe it was the dentist.

MURIAL: He has his own paper.

SOPHIE: I mean, the appointment I missed.

MURIAL: Sophie, you have dentures.

SOPHIE: You're right. Not the dentist.

MURIAL: I just get so mad reading the paper. How can they...

SOPHIE: What does it say about Sagittarius?

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: My horoscope.

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MURIAL: “Today you will forget an appointment for something you can’t remember anyway and you’ll probably die before dinner.”

SOPHIE: Those things are amazing.

MURIAL: Sophie, I made that up.

SOPHIE: Oh.

MURIAL: How can you do it, Sophie? How can you live your entire life and not care what’s going on around you...the things that affect our world?

SOPHIE: I don’t know. What difference does it make if I’m going to die before dinner?

MURIAL: *(groans and goes back to reading the paper)*

SOPHIE: *(a long beat, then)* I’m not stupid, you know.

MURIAL: *(still reading)* I didn’t say you were stupid.

SOPHIE: I care about things.

MURIAL: I know you do.

SOPHIE: Sometimes, Murial...sometimes I wake up real early in the morning and I look out my window and everything is just so...I don’t know...It’s just so beautiful... So breath-taking. This morning. Did you hear the chickadee this morning?

MURIAL: I was listening to the news.

SOPHIE: What a shame. The chickadee was so much more beautiful. ...a little gray belly with the black cap and bib and a gorgeous rust color on his flanks...he sits in that tree right between our houses...

MURIAL: I was watching CNN.

SOPHIE: *(noticing Murial’s absorption in her paper)* He was holding a hammer in his little paw.

MURIAL: *(not really hearing)* Uh-huh.

SOPHIE: And he was dancing the tango with an armadillo.

MURIAL: *(still reading)* That’s nice.

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SOPHIE: ..and he was a liberal!

MURIAL: What!?

SOPHIE: Good. I thought you were in a coma.

MURIAL: Who's a liberal?

SOPHIE: I've got to finish that cake.

MURIAL: You're baking this morning?

SOPHIE: I don't remember for sure. *(sticks her finger into some of flour she's wearing)* Yep. That's cake.

MURIAL: What kind?

SOPHIE: *(tastes again, spits)* Lint. A lint cake. *(begins to exit into her house)* See you in a bit.

MURIAL: What's the occasion?

SOPHIE: Occasion?

MURIAL: A cake. What's the occasion for a cake?

SOPHIE: I forgot. Oh, darn. How am I going to decorate it if I don't know what it's for?

MURIAL: Sophie!

SOPHIE: Wait! Wait! Now I remember.....Life! Yes! It's a celebration of life cake! You could use a piece, you old grouch. Put on a happy face!

MURIAL: *(Mocking her)* This is my happy face. You don't want to see my other one. Go bake your cake.

SOPHIE: *(exiting)* Celebrate life!

MURIAL: *(back to her paper)* Oh dear Lord, Sophie.

SOPHIE: *(bursting through the doorway)* General Hospital!

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: I remember the appointment! I wanted to watch General Hospital!

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MURIAL: Oh dear Lord.

SOPHIE: Murial! Look! The chickadee! (CHICKADEE SOUND)

LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK

Scene Two: later

— (LIGHTS UP SR PLATFORM)

The open area stage right platform becomes the living room of Lucas and Rosemary Morris. A single chair indicates the space.

ROSE: *(sitting, cell phone in her hand)* Oh come on....answer! Answer!

LUCAS: *(from offstage SR)* Don't worry about it.

ROSE: Come on! Seven rings! She can get to the phone in seven rings.

LUCAS: *(entering SR)..he holds a stove burner ring)* If she's home.

ROSE: Where would she go?

LUCAS: I don't know. Where does anybody go? She's alive...she walks and talks and drives a car. ...and sometimes she just doesn't answer the phone.

ROSE: *(disconnecting)* I'm worried.

LUCAS: I know...Look, she'll be okay.

ROSE: She's your mother.

LUCAS: *(begins to respond.....decides against it)*

ROSE: I didn't mean to say it that way.

LUCAS: No.

ROSE: I'm sorry. It's just that....

LUCAS: Look, I stopped by on the way to work and saw her just this morning. She was fine.

ROSE: *(noticing the burner ring)* What's that?

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LUCAS: From her stove. I told her I'd pick up new one...it's got this..I don't know..guck all over it.

ROSE: Guck?

LUCAS: Something's melted onto it. (*she stares at him*) What's the matter? (*Rose turns away*) Rose...Rose, she just set something down on the burner...plastic or something. Hey, people do that all the time.

ROSE: The light bill?

LUCAS: Anybody can forget to pay a light bill. My boss forgot to pay his light bill.

ROSE: (*beginning to exit*) I'm going over there.

LUCAS: (*stopping her*) Please..just...Okay, I'll do it!

ROSE: I can do it.

LUCAS: She can't be losing her mind because she always asks me if I'm stopping by to see if she's losing her mind.

ROSE: Tell her, yes.

LUCAS: You're kidding.

ROSE: You don't have to say it that way....but be honest about it, Luke. Tell her you're concerned. Be subtle.

LUCAS: Subtle? Are we talking about the same mother?

ROSE: Then just come out and ask her.

LUCAS: (Laughs) "Mom, don't take this personally, but I think you're losing your mind. Do you mind if I ask?"

ROSE: Luke...

LUCAS: "Stick out your tongue so I can see if you've swallowed anything large today."

ROSE: Luke, I just meant...

LUCAS: "Me? Not trust you? Oh mother! Don't be silly! Now put down that bow and arrow before someone gets hurt."

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ROSE: A cake.

LUCAS: Huh?

ROSE: She loves cake. Stop at Wal-Mart and get her a cake.

LUCAS: I have never brought my mother a cake in her life.

ROSE: Then you're a lousy son. Tell her it's because you love her! A housewarming gift!

LUCAS: She's lived there for 30 years.

ROSE: She knows you're always late... You don't have to have a reason to do something nice for your own mother.

LUCAS: She'll smell a rat. She's sharp.

ROSE: She can't even answer her phone.

LUCAS: Rose...

ROSE: *(moving him out the door)* Go..go... be a good son. Check on Pocahontas...*(Points at him)* And call me when you find her.

LUCAS: You're getting excited about nothing...

ROSE: And you're a lousy son...Go...go! *(he exits as the LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK)*

Scene Three: later, Daytime on the porches **(LIGHTS UP ON PORCHES, ROCKERS HIGHLIGHTED)**

(Sophie enters to her porch. Murial's porch is empty.) (Cell phone rings inside Sophie's house)

SOPHIE: Murial! *(nothing)* Murial, your phone was ringing! Murial!

MURIAL: *(entering)* It was yours.

SOPHIE: How do you know?

MURIAL: Because it sounds just like mine.

SOPHIE: I hate that...especially in the spring when we've got our windows open. Somebody calls you and I answer my phone.

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MURIAL: Ditto. I thought I was getting prank calls 'til I realized it was your exterminator. (*indicating a distinctive plant on Sophie's porch*) What on earth is that?

SOPHIE: The plant? I don't know. I haven't named it yet.

MURIAL: I mean what type?

SOPHIE: It's a Frankolia.

MURIAL: Frankolia? I've never heard of Frankolia.

SOPHIE: I just made it up. I took it out of Frank Miller's back yard so I named it after him.

MURIAL: Sophie!

SOPHIE: (*grabbing a watering can*) Oh, he has plenty. I water it with my new Aqua-Murial.

MURIAL: That looks just like mi-ne (*Sophie smiles at her.*) Sophie!

SOPHIE: But I named it after you! Oh, I was just borrowing it. (*Looks out*). What a nice afternoon for a ride. (*looks out*)

MURIAL: I remember when we used to do that. We'd just take off riding for no reason at all.

SOPHIE: You too? My grandpa had a Flivver.

MURIAL: Did he die of it?

SOPHIE: It's a car. A Model T. "I will build a car for the great multitude! ...so that all men can enjoy the blessing of hours of pleasure in God's great open spaces!" Henry Ford.

MURIAL: You knew him personally?

SOPHIE: I stole his flowers. (*noticing something*) Oh, look Murial. (*Chickadee Sound*) There's our chickadee.

MURIAL: Where'd you steal him?

SOPHIE: Look at him, Murial. Isn't he beautiful? (*Cuddly*) Yes, you are, aren't you, Mr. Chickadee?

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MURIAL: Sophie, I don't get it, you don't read the paper, you don't listen to the news, but you talk to birds.

SOPHIE: I know. Isn't it wonderful?

MURIAL: *(gives up, then)* Let's go for a ride.

SOPHIE: I've lost my keys.

MURIAL: I haven't.

SOPHIE: You have my keys?

MURIAL: I have my keys, you old idiot. Let's go for a spin.

SOPHIE: I can't. What if my gardener shows up?

MURIAL: You've never had a gardener.

SOPHIE: See....All these years without a gardener then the one day he shows up and I'm off Flivvering with you.

MURIAL: Oh, forget it.

SOPHIE: Okay, let's go.

MURIAL: Where to?

SOPHIE: How about God's great open spaces?

MURIAL: Is that near Wal-Mart? I need toilet paper.

SOPHIE: Wherever the road may lead us!

MURIAL: Get your hat and I'll back the car out.

SOPHIE: Tally-Ho! *(begins to exit, then stops)* Leave a note for the gardener. *(stops again)* **CHICKADEE SOUND, CONTINUES.** Look at him, Muriel. He's singing right to us.

MURIAL: How can you see birds so quickly? I think you're making things up.

SOPHIE: Oh, you look with your ears, not your eyes, you old poop. You hear a bird, then you see him.

MURIAL: *(pulls hearing aid from her ear)* Well then, just let me turn this thing up.

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SOPHIE: *(grabbing the hearing aid from Murial's hand and shouting directly into it)* He's right up there in that tree, Murial.

MURIAL: *(grabbing it back)* It doesn't work that way, you old fool.

SOPHIE: Are you going to stand around all day listening to birds? I thought you wanted to take a road trip.

MURIAL: You were the one...

SOPHIE: Oh listen...**CHICKADEE SOUND.** There he goes again.

MURIAL: I'm getting the car. Get your hat.

SOPHIE: *(as she moves toward the porch)* I'll get my hat. You go get the car.

MURIAL: Why do I bother? *(Sophie has gone...Murial begins to exit, then stops...looks around to make sure she's not being observed, then moves DS a bit, squinting to see the bird...listening for the bird...unable to locate the darned bird.. After a bit, Sophie enters onto her porch wearing her hat...She sees Murial, stops, and whistles like a chickadee or use plastic whistle. Murial gasps...she begins squinting even harder to see the bird. Sophie moves to one side of the porch and whistles again. Murial hears it and moves to that side. ...she can see no bird. Sophie takes an imaginary gun from her bodice and takes aim at the imaginary bird.)*

SOPHIE: Bang! *(Murial jumps...then)*

MURIAL: Sophie!

SOPHIE: I didn't know it was loaded! **(DIM TO BLACKOUT)**

Scene Four: later, the Morris living room

ROSE: **(LIGHTS UP SLOWLY. SR PLATFORM-** *Lucas SR enters into the area)* What do you mean she wasn't home?

LUCAS: That's it. She wasn't home. We don't have her locked up.

ROSE: The neighbor lady?

LUCAS: I knocked. No one at either house.

ROSE: The people across the street?

LUCAS: They don't speak English. *(Sits on chair)* They thought I was selling cakes.

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ROSE: And you called?

LUCAS: I told you I called.

ROSE: You should make her use a cell phone.

LUCAS: *(Laughs)* I bought her a cell phone. She puts it in the refrigerator to save the battery. I bought her a Medical Alert System and she hung it on her Christmas tree. I got her a Kindle and she uses it for a bookmark. You can't make a person do things, Rose.

ROSE: We're talking about her well being, Lucas...not some strange little quirks. These things could mean her life. Don't deny it...she's forgetting more and more.

LUCAS: She says that at her age she just has alot more to remember.

ROSE: This isn't funny.

LUCAS: She got picked up for speeding last week.

ROSE: No.

LUCAS: The cop asked her why she was going over the speed limit. She said, "Because I didn't see you there." *(Pause)*

ROSE: She got a ticket?

LUCAS: She said, "Look at the age on my license. What are the chances I'll still be alive on the court date?" *(Pause)* He let her off. *(Laughs)*

ROSE: That's not funny, Luke.

LUCAS: No... yes. Yes, it is. *(Stands up)* It shows me she's still got wit. She's funny, Rose. My mother's hilarious! She still cracks me up...That's a good sign, isn't' it? Okay, she forgets things...she tells the same stories over and over...she gets confused, shebut..... Rose, I'm not ready to be my mother's parent.

ROSE:*(urgently)* Well somebody's got to! *(She's gone too far...she looks at Lucas a long moment, then)* I've said too much. *(Sits on chair)* I'm sorry.

LUCAS: No..

ROSE: No, I've gone too far. If it was my mother I'd ...I don't know. I'd be just like you.

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LUCAS: And I'd be saying everything you're saying. *(a long beat, then)* So what do I do, Rose?

ROSE: Well...first. First we find out where in blazes she is. *(with emphasis)*

LUCAS: No clue.

ROSE: *(Stands up)* She wasn't hiding in the basement?

LUCAS: She never goes to her basement.

ROSE: Really?

LUCAS: She said she's hiding illegal immigrants in her basement. They run a casino and hold cock fights and she's afraid of chickens.

ROSE: *(laughing)* Oh dear God.

LUCAS: Before Dad died....I was taking her to see him one day and we were walking down to his room...the hallways were filled with wheelchairs...eyes staring at the floor...droolingthe smell...well, Mom stopped me in the middle of the hallway and said, , "Lucas! If I ever lose my mind I want you to just shoot me."

ROSE: *(a beat then)* What did you say?

LUCAS: I said, "Mom, why don't we just do it now and save all the suffering?"

ROSE: Luke!

LUCAS: She laughed. We both laughed. We always laugh together. That's what I fear the most...that some day we won't laugh at the same things. Is that strange? I don't have to talk to my mother all the time...I don't have to cry with her when bad things happen....but if I can't laugh with her anymore....If I can't kid her about forgetting to wear her shoes to mass. ...Rose, that won't be my mom.

ROSE: But if something happened.....

LUCAS: Rose...

ROSE: You don't know how it feels to...

LUCAS: Rose, your mother fell. That's all. She fell and nobody was with her, but it wasn't your fault! I can't be a nursemaid to my mother just because something might happen. I can't live my life like that and neither can she. *(He sees that Rose is hurt, hugs her)* I've got a really.....a really big mouth.

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ROSE: No.

LUCAS: I'm sorry, Rose. (*gives a hug and a peck on her cheek or forehead*)

ROSE: I'm...I'm not angry, Luke. But I don't think you understand..

LUCAS: Let's don't bring this all up and...

ROSE: ...I really don't think you've ever understood ...the....the helplessness ...of knowing my mother was just lying there. I don't care how much sense you seem to be making right now about your own mother....to meafter what I....well, it makes no sense at all.

LUKE: (*a long beat, separates, then*) We were going out tonight.

ROSE: I guess not. (*a beat*) Let's give her an hour to get back from...the moon wherever . . . then we'll call again. You hungry?

LUCAS: (*a beat, then*) How do you feel about cake? (**LIGHTS GO TO BLACK**).

Scene Five: the porches, that evening

LIGHTS UP TO DIM/BLUE, SOFT HIGHLIGHTS ON ROCKERS

(Murial and Sophie sit on their respective porches...silent. Silently fuming. Neither speaks for a long time, then.) (Murial fans herself with newspaper. Sophie nervously messes with plants/flowers.

SOPHIE: I told you. (*Toward Murial*)

MURIAL: You did not. (*another long beat*)

SOPHIE: I said turn right.

MURIAL: You most certainly did not. (*another long beat*)

SOPHIE: So how long are we going to be mad about this?

MURIAL: I plan to live another thirty years. (*another beat, then*) Besides, it's stupid to have a sign that says "One Way Street" and not say which way.

SOPHIE: There was an arrow.

MURIAL: The arrow was pointing up. (*Pointing up*) My Buick doesn't go up.

SOPHIE: Well, you'd have made it if.... you know , if you hadn't ...

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MURIAL: If I hadn't backed up?

SOPHIE: If you hadn't backed up! I told you to look first.

MURIAL: I did look first. I should have looked second and third.

SOPHIE: Well.....the other guy wasn't hurt.

MURIAL: Sophie, policemen wear seatbelts. (*gestures seat belts*) That was the most expensive joyride I've ever taken.

SOPHIE: He seemed very nice.

MURIAL: You were flirting with him.

SOPHIE: I told him I liked his uniform. That is not flirting.

MURIAL: But you couldn't stop there.

SOPHIE: He was very nice looking.

MURIAL: Sophie, when a policeman asks if you have anything to say, "Nice Butt" is not the proper reply.

SOPHIE: Oh.

MURIAL: He thought you were crazy.

SOPHIE: That is not my fault!

MURIAL: I had to tell him something!

SOPHIE: "I have to get my friend back to the home. She's late for her medication."

MURIAL: Well? It was true.

SOPHIE: It's my home and my medication was my Jack Daniels!

MURIAL: So I skipped a few details.

SOPHIE: Look, let's talk about something else. You hungry? Mrs. Gonzales across the street said some idiot was selling cakes. I could go look for him.

MURIAL: I don't want cake. I want to go to bed and pretend as if today didn't happen. What do you think?

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SOPHIE: He did have a nice butt.

MURIAL: *(a groan)* Oh, dear Lord!

SOPHIE: You think we're getting old?

MURIAL: Not that old. Do you?

SOPHIE: I don't know. I keep changing the definition.

MURIAL: You know when I first felt old? When someone gave me my first pair of slippers for Christmas. Slippers. Oh, dear Lord! Old lady slippers!

SOPHIE: I used to keep a diary to hold my cherished memories. Now I use it to see what I did yesterday.

MURIAL: My hearing...my eyesight.

SOPHIE: That's why I hate wearing these glasses. *(Has glasses)* I can see what's happening to the rest of me.

MURIAL: We should eat. That's what happens to old people. They forget to eat and then they die.

SOPHIE: They die hungry?

MURIAL: I forget.

SOPHIE: *(a beat, then)* Nice night.. *..(Murial continues to fume)*...only the night birds singing tonight. Nightingale...Bobwhite...

MURIAL: Loons. *(Sophie looks at her.)* I'm sorry. It's been a bad day. Did your son call?

SOPHIE: Loons made you think of my son?

MURIAL: No...he usually calls.

SOPHIE: I don't know. I turned off my phone machine.

MURIAL: Why?

SOPHIE: I don't want to talk to the people who call when I'm at home. Why should I want to talk to them when I'm gone? He's always calling. He calls me every day. That's how I know I'm still alive. Some day he doesn't call I'll know I'm dead.

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MURIAL: Sophie, we're friends, right?

SOPHIE: *(Quickly)* Don't push it.

MURIAL: Sophie.

SOPHIE: Yes...yes, we're friends.

MURIAL: Can I be honest with you?

SOPHIE: Sure. Try something new.

MURIAL: I mean, do you mind if I tell you something personal?

SOPHIE: Go ahead. You nearly killed me on a one-way street. What's a little insult? Finish me off.

MURIAL: Alright, I will. *(a beat, then)* You're starting to forget things. *(nothing)* Your memory. *(Sophie remains silent)* Sophie, did you hear me?

SOPHIE: I heard you. I thought that maybe if I waited long enough I'd forget you said it. I have a bad memory, you know. Can I ask you something?

MURIAL: Shoot.

SOPHIE: Does it really matter to lose something if you don't remember if you ever had it?

MURIAL: *(a beat, then)* I suppose you're right.

SOPHIE: *(a beat as they both look at the night sky, then)* What was your name again?

MURIAL: I'm ready for bed.

SOPHIE: Me too. I wonder where I put it.

MURIAL: Sophie...

SOPHIE: If I crawl into Frank Miller's bed by mistake tonight, tell him I was just after his flowers.

MURIAL: I'm sorry I brought it up.

SOPHIE: Brought what up?

Stoops

MURIAL: (*getting up*) Goodnight, Sophie.

SOPHIE: Night? Already! Where'd the day go?

MURIAL: Oh dear Lord. (**CHICKADEE SOUND. CHICKADEE SOUND CONTINUES**).

SOPHIE: Listen!

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: I've never heard anything like that in my life.

MURIAL: What are you talking about?

SOPHIE: A chickadee at night. Isn't that strange...(*looks up*) Ah...I see...yeah..that's it! That's it, Murial!

MURIAL: What's it? What are you looking at?

SOPHIE: It's a full moon. The chickadee thinks the sun's coming up!

MURIAL: Stupid bird.

SOPHIE: Is he? Two women growing old and grouchy on their front stoops ...and Mr. Chickadee is singing because he doesn't know any better. Who's the stupid bird?

MURIAL: But look at that...a cloud's about to cover the moon...Mr. Chickadee is in for a surprise.

SOPHIE: It won't.

MURIAL: How do you know?

SOPHIE: Because I'll blow it away...(*she begins blowing and blowing and blowing the cloud away*) Blow with me Murial! I need help!

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: Blow!

MURIAL: I refuse to blow at the moon! You're crazy!

SOPHIE: You just tried to run over a cop with a nice butt on a one-way street! I'm sane! Now blow! (*Blows*)

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MURIAL: I'm not going to blow!

SOPHIE: Keep singing, Mr. Chickadee! Keep singing! *(to Murial)* Blow, Murial! Blow!

MURIAL: I'm blowing! *(Blows)*.
*(And they both blow at the clouds as the **LIGHTS DIM OUT TO BLACK**)*

Scene Six...an elementary school classroom

(LIGHTS UP ON PAULA, SR PLATFORM)

PAULA: *(a little girl, standing front and center, reading)* "My Grandma. My Grandma is the coolest person ever because she does funny things. We went over to her house once and she was hiding in the bushes and dressed up like a rabbit. She really, really scared us when she jumped out and started barking like a dog. Grandma says that rabbits don't make sounds so people would think she was crazy if she barked like a rabbit.

Another time my Grandma got really, really sick and the ambulance had to take her to the hospital. Mommy said she might have died but she had a hair appointment the next day and that's what kept her alive. She says it's impossible to die as long as you still have one more hair appointment.

My grandma is really, really funny.

Grandma has a cat that she calls Nixon and it is always breaking stuff around her house. Grandma says that the cat is possessed but I don't know what that means. The reason I chose my grandma is because I told her I was supposed to write about the most awesome person I know and she said that was her.

She said, "Write about me because I am one cool old..." *(she stops reading)* I can't say that word in class. Is that okay?

(LIGHTS DIM OUT QUICKLY TO BLACK)

Scene Seven...A Retirement Home

*(Entering on FLOOR SL, need **OVERHEAD AUDITORIUM FRONT 2 ROWS-MAYBE FLOOD OUT SPOT LIGHT**)*

MORGAN: *(entering with Rose and Lucas following)* Forty-seven units, each with its own kitchen facilities, bath...just like home. *(They move to center floor DS area)*

ROSE: And they eat...

MORGAN: All meals are taken in the dining room...just like home. A different menu each week. It's really quite good. I eat here myself.

ROSE: It's a far cry from the nursing homes I...

Stoops

MORGAN: It's not a nursing home. We have a nurse on staff, but this is independent living.

ROSE: Luke?

LUCAS: Huh? Oh...I don't have any...uh...was there something else we needed to know?

ROSE: You haven't said a thing.

LUCAS: I guess not. *(to Morgan)* We're just looking...we're not ready yet.

ROSE: He's talking about his mother.

LUCAS: Yeah.

MORGAN: You have my card. Please call if you have any... *(Starts to exit SL)*.

LUCAS: Does anyone laugh?

MORGAN: *(a beat, then, turns back)* Pardon me?

LUCAS: Do the...you know...residents. Do they laugh?

MORGAN: Well...I mean, of course. They're just normal people.

LUCAS: Normal people laugh. I don't hear anyone laughing.

ROSE: Luke.

LUCAS: We've been through the entire facility...all I hear are televisions and walkers.

MORGAN: It's two in the afternoon. I suppose many of the folks are resting.

LUCAS: From what?

ROSE: Luke....

MORGAN: I'm not sure I...

LUCAS: They're tired from what? What do they do that makes them tired?

MORGAN: Some of our residents are in their eighties and nineties. It's just a natural thing...

Stoops

LUCAS: Not to laugh? Not to weed their garden and jump out of the bushes to scare the mailman? Is anybody happy? *(An awkward beat...Rose is embarrassed, Morgan confused, Luke simply frustrated)*

MORGAN: As we age...as we grow older...our needs change, and...

LUCAS: That's ridiculous.

ROSE: Luke!

LUCAS: He's wrong.

ROSE: *(to Morgan)* I'm sorry.

LUKE: Our needs do not change. Do you have a machine or something?

MORGAN: Machine?

LUCAS: Something over the door.....When people walk in with normal lives and feelings...some sort of machine that snatches away their needs and joys?

ROSE: *(a very long, awkward beat...Morgan doesn't know how to respond...finally)*
Thank you very much for your time, Mr. Morgan. We've really enjoyed the tour. Luke, let's go.

LUCAS: *(numb)* Thank you.

MORGAN: *(exiting)* Let me know if there's anything I can do.

LUCAS: Uh....

MORGAN: *(stopping)* Yes?

LUCAS: I'm sorry. It's...it's not your fault.

MORGAN: I know. *(he begins to exit, then stops)* You need to understand...It's not about this place. It's about.....well, the alternative. *(a long beat as he and Lucas look at each other, then Morgan exits SL)*

ROSE: Luke?

LUCAS: Wrong...wrong. This is all wrong. I don't know what I thought I was going to find here...I mean, it's a great place.....and it's all wrong.

ROSE: We've got to consider this, Luke.

Stoops

LUCAS: What did I think I'd ...? Listen to this place, Rose! Silence! What was I thinking? Nobody's laughing, Rose! Did I tell you about Grandpa's funeral?

ROSE: What?

LUCAS: We were all staying in this motel during his funeral...maybe twenty of us...rented every room on the first floor of the Holiday Inn...

ROSE: Luke, let's get in the car...you can tell me on the way home.

LUCAS: It was her own father, Rose. He died suddenly and everybody was in shock and when we got back to the hotel we couldn't get in our doors. Mom had put Vaseline on all the doorknobs! We laughed all night long! We woke up in the middle of the night laughing.

ROSE: Good grief.

LUCAS: That is not the sign of a crazy woman, Rose. That was sanity. That was beautiful...healing...sanity. THAT...That was the "alternative." You don't put people in homes who are saner than you are.

ROSE: Nobody's saying she's not sane. It's matter of her safety. What if she's in trouble? What if she sets something flammable on the stove next time? Are you willing to live with that?

LUCAS: Yes!

ROSE: Oh, Luke....

LUCAS: Another time, that Christmas when the neighbors' house burnt down.... Mom had them all over for supper and she took this walkie-talkie and hung it inside the toilet bowl. Whenever somebody would go in and sit down she'd grab the microphone and say, "Hey! Who turned out the lights?!" It was a scream, Rose!

ROSE: Are you letting her stay in her own house just because of what you want?

LUCAS: I don't know. Maybe. What's wrong with that?

ROSE: People are staring at you, Luke.

LUCAS: I know. And not a soul is laughing. Not a damned soul is even smiling.

(BLACKOUT)

Stoops

Scene Eight...The Stoops **EVENING LIGHTS (DIM), HIGHLIGHT ROCKERS**

(Sophie sits rocking)

MURIAL: *(from inside her house)* Sophie!

SOPHIE: I'm out here on the stoop.

MURIAL: *(entering)* Why do you always call it that? It's a porch.

SOPHIE: It's a stoop.

MURIAL: What's the difference?

SOPHIE: Exactly.

MURIAL: *(a beat, then)* I give up.

SOPHIE: Can't sleep?

MURIAL: No. You?

SOPHIE: Nixon's in my bed. *(Murial laughs)* That's not funny. He won't move.

MURIAL: Do you have any idea how funny that sounds?

SOPHIE: You've obviously never had Nixon in your bed. So what's the deal? You're hardly ever out here this time of night. One dose of CNN, a shot of Seagrams, and you leave me out here stranded ...on the stoop..

MURIAL: Porch.

SOPHIE: Whatever.

MURIAL: I got a call from the DMV.

SOPHIE: Is that a disease?

MURIAL: Department of Motor Vehicles. I have to be tested before I can drive again.

SOPHIE: You are joking.

MURIAL: I'm not joking. After a certain age and you have a moving violation, you have to take a test every year.

SOPHIE: Until you die?

Stoops

MURIAL: Until you die.

SOPHIE: Moving violation. That almost sounds exciting.

MURIAL: Yeah, exciting.

SOPHIE: That sucks.

MURIAL: *(a beat, then)* What if I don't pass it, Sophie?

SOPHIE: You're a wonderful driver! Okay, just one little mistake . . . going down a one-way street, trying to back out of it, then nearly killing a highway patrolman who had a really nice.....I mean..... You hardly did anything!

MURIAL: I'm worried.

SOPHIE: I can drive you anywhere you want to go, Murial. One-way, two-way...I can do it all.

MURIAL: Oh, oh,oh. *(thinks)* It's not so much the test....it's just another step. ...one more step toward losing all this...my independence...my very soul....

SOPHIE: You make it sound poetic.

MURIAL: *(pause)* Shut up!

SOPHIE: You're right.

MURIAL: What will they try to take next?

SOPHIE: *(a long beat, then)* I've got an idea.

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: Let's lay siege on the DDT.

MURIAL: DMV.

SOPHIE: Yeah.

MURIAL: You mean war? You're crazy. *(a beat, then)* I like it. I can see it. Mortar attacks...riots in the street...CNN. Wolf Blitzer will pee his pants.

SOPHIE: Cake bombs.

Stoops

MURIAL: Cake bombs. Great idea! Hey, would you consider running naked around the state capitol carrying a sign?

SOPHIE: *(thinks a moment, looks down at her body, then)* No.

MURIAL: *(a long silence, then a sigh and)* The chickadee is mighty quiet tonight.

SOPHIE: Clouds. Clouds are covering the moon.I'm scared, Murial. *(Moves to Murial, hugs her)*

MURIAL: Me too.....me too. **LIGHTS DIM TO BLACK.**

Scene Nine...on the street in front of porches

EVENING LIGHTS ON PORCHES

ROSE: *(entering, alone SL...she stops, center stage, looks around...pulls out her cell phone and enters a number)* Hello? Luke. It's me. I know...I know...you thought I'd gone to bed. I didn't. Look, please forgive me honey, but I'm standing in front of your mother's house.Oh Luke....please don't be angry. I haven't done anything yet..... Luke, we both know we've got to talk to your mother and we both know you can't do it.No, her lights are on. Luke, I'll be gentle...I promise....I won't push anything on her. I just want her to start thinking in that direction. Yes, I know it's cold. I'm standing out in it.Luke, if you want I'll wait for you get here but....look, it was the only way this was going to happen.You know this is hard for you. Just stay there. I'll have a talk with your mother...I'll show her the brochures about the retirement center...we'll talk. That's all, Luke. We'll just talk. Why'd I call? I'm not sure. I just ...I hoped that maybe you'd.....I want to do it either way, Luke, but I'd rather have your blessing.please. And.....okay, I'll be honest.....If you absolutely forbid me to talk to her I mean, if you absolutely won't allow it then.... Then I'll come home.....*(a long beat)* ... Luke?Luke, say something.Luke, I just wanted to spare you from.....What?..... Thanks. Thank, Luke. I love you. *(she slowly closes the phone...straightens herself a bit, as she turns toward SL, Sophie's door opens.)*

SOPHIE: Who in the heck is? Rose! Rose, it that you?

ROSE: Hi Sophie.

SOPHIE: What in God's name are you....? Murial! Murial, we've got a prowler. Don't shoot. She's only got a cell phone and it's not loaded. Murial, put on some pants and come to the door! *(Murial opens her door.)*

SOPHIE: It's your daughter-in-law.

----BLACKOUT AND END OF ACT I---

SPOT INSTRUMENTALIST SL FLOOR

Act II

SPOT INSTRUMENTALIST SL FLOOR

Scene One: A Branch Facility of the DMV
(LIGHTS UP SR PLATFORM)

MUSIC STOPS

(The lights come to reveal two chairs, side by side, representing the front seat of a car.)
(Entering SR)

DYER: Right this way, Mrs. Wheatley. *(Dyer carries a clipboard with forms clipped)*

MURIAL: *(entering)* My name's Murial. Feel free to use it.

DYER: Please don't be nervous.

MURIAL: You're kidding.

DYER: What?

MURIAL: Have you ever given a driver's test to anyone who wasn't nervous?

DYER: Well...I suppose not. I mean...try to relax. You seem more upset than most.

MURIAL: I'm an over-achiever. . .

DYER: I see.

MURIAL: They won't let me audition for Miss America unless I have a driver's license. My life depends on it.

DYER: Your life?

MURIAL: Look at my age. *(he consults his clipboard)* I'll bet you thought I'd just turned sweet sixteen.

DYER: I'm uh....I'm glad that you're still able to drive at...

MURIAL: No numbers! I don't do numbers. Okay, how do I look?

DYER: Look?

MURIAL: Am I dressed alright for the test?

DYER: It really doesn't matter.....

Stoops

MURIAL: (pause) Are there any women here who could give this test? Someone with sensitivity perhaps!

DYER: You look just fine Mrs. Wheatley.....a Murial.

MURIAL: I was up all night trying to decide what to wear and now you tell me it doesn't matter, of course it matters. This is my life at stake here!

DYER: (resigned) You look just fine.

MURIAL: You think I'd even believe you now. Oh, all right, where do we start?

DYER: Well, you just hop right in the driver's seat. (*Gestures to car*)

MURIAL: Oh, young man. I can't even remember the last time I hopped.

DYER: and I'll get in the other side. (*they move to the car*) ...I guess we'll begin. I suppose you're familiar with your own car.

MURIAL: Of course.

DYER: Good.

MURIAL: ...and this isn't it. It's my neighbor's. She's the one back in your office trying to steal the road maps when nobody's looking. You don't have any plants, do you?

DYER: You don't have a car?

MURIAL: Of course I have a car.

DYER: But your neighbor's car?

MURIAL: My car is ill. (*Open's door*)

DYER: Ill?

MURIAL: No flu shot. Don't worry...I can drive anything.

DYER: Whatever you say.

MURIAL: (*getting in her side of the car as Dyer sits in the passenger seat*) Oh, my! She has this seat up so close! Here, hold this a moment....(*hands him her purse*) (*pause*) Could we just sit here a minute? I need to get ahold of myself.

DYER: We don't have to take the test today.

Stoops

MURIAL: Oh yes we do. I'm not going a day without my license. *(pause)* I studied up. The AARP sends you cheat sheets.

DYER: This will only take about thirty minutes.

MURIAL: People have died in thirty minutes.

DYER: Mrs. Wheatley, it's not that difficult.

MURIAL: I know.. Quick...easy...no pain. Like childbirth.

DYER: Many people your age pass the test.

MURIAL: "Many." How many? Talk percentages.

DYER: I'm not sure. But it often happens.

MURIAL: "Moral support" obviously isn't a part of your job requirement. You'll never make Wal-Mart greeter. So what do I do? Fasten your belt. *(They do.)* Good thing you're not taking the test.

DYER: Just start the car and pull out of the parking lot.

MURIAL: Do you have to be in the car when I take the test?

DYER: It's uh...pretty much mandatory. You did fine on the written exam, Mrs. Wheatley. Ready?

MURIAL: Oh dear God. I've done this a million times. Why does everything seem so difficult when you think about it? Ready? No, I'm not ready. Let's just go before I get ready, because that could take forever. I know...don't think about it. Is it completely necessary that you're in the car with me? You make me rather nervous, you know.

DYER: Yes, it doesn't count unless I'm with you. Ready?

MURIAL: No. So how do I start?

DYER: Excuse me?

MURIAL: I start the car, that's how I start! Alright! Would you pray?

DYER: What?

MURIAL: Pray. It's a religious thing people do.

Stoops

DYER: That's really not a part of my job.

MURIAL: Young man, you are in a very bad position to be making God angry. Now pray!

DYER: There's certainly nothing wrong if you'd like to take a moment yourself and...

MURIAL: I haven't been to mass in a month. I don't want to stretch my luck. Pray.

DYER: Uh...well....(*looks around*) This is unofficial, okay?

MURIAL: Don't ask me...(*points heavenward*)

DYER:let's uh....you know...pray. (*They both close their eyes.*) Dear Lord...

MURIAL: And make it a good one.

DYER: I will. I promise. Dear Lord...

MURIAL: Signal lights. I don't always remember to signal. Pray for that.

DYER: Signal lights.

MURIAL: (*a beat, then*) Go ahead.

DYER: (*a breath, another glance around to see if he's being observed*) Okay...

MURIAL: Wait! You're not agnostic, are you? Moonie? Scientologist? Anything iffy like that? I want this to count.

DYER: I'm uh...I think I can do this.

MURIAL: Good. Go ahead. And don't forget the signal lights.

DYER: I won't forget the signal lights.

MURIAL: Well, what are you waiting for?

DYER: Dear Lord.....I thank you for this beautiful day and...

MURIAL: Skip the "Hello's." Get right to the driving.

DYER: I pray that you'll calm Mrs. Wheatley's nerves...

MURIAL: And yours...you seem a bit skittish...

Stoops

DYER: ...and mine...and that we'll both have a successful ...uh...trip.

MURIAL: *(makes clicking sounds and moves her hand up and down as if operating a turn signal)*

DYER: And that she'll remember to use her turn signals. *(a beat, then)* Anything else?

MURIAL: You talking to me or God?

DYER: You.

MURIAL: Amen.

DYER: Amen.

MURIAL: *(as she grips the wheel)* Amen! *(Pulls down the shift lever)*

(BLACKOUT SR PLATFORM)

Scene Two.....the Stoops.
DAYTIME LIGHTS-SOPHIE'S HOUSE ONLY, HIGHLIGHT ROCKER
MURIAL'S HOUSE DIM LIGHTS

Sophie sits in her porch rocker listening to Paula read. Paula sits on step.

PAULA: “....The reason I chose my grandma is because I told her I was supposed to write about the most awesome person I know and she said that was her. She said, ‘Write about me because I am one cool old...’”

SOPHIE: Whoa! You didn't use that word!

PAULA: No. I stopped before I got to it.

SOPHIE: Thank goodness.

PAULA: So all the kids were dying to know what it was.

SOPHIE: You didn't tell them did you?

PAULA:Yes.

SOPHIE: Good! Good! Oh... Paula, you are my favorite, favorite grandchild.

Stoops

PAULA: Do you tell the others that, too?

SOPHIE: Of course.

PAULA: You're funny, Grandma.

SOPHIE: Yes, I am....and you...you Paula...you are dessert! *(moves to sit on step with Paula)*

PAULA: Huh?

SOPHIE: Grandchildren are the dessert God gives us after a lifetime of broccoli and cauliflower.

PAULA: Ooo....

SOPHIE: Except for your father...he was Spam.

PAULA: Spam?

SOPHIE: Oh, he's prime rib now, but when he was a teenager...Spam, Spam, Spam, Spam.

PAULA: What was daddy like when he was little?

SOPHIE: Awful. I threatened to kill him every weekend.

PAULA: What?

SOPHIE: You could threaten to kill your kids back then.... I miss that. *(Paula tries to speak, but can't.)* Mostly shooting. Sometimes drowning or once I threatened to chop him up into little pieces and sell him to McDonalds... a quarter pound at a time.

PAULA: *(Looks at wrist watch)* Oh my gosh...I'm gonna be late for dance lessons.

SOPHIE: I'm so glad you dance...Your grandpa was the world's best.

PAULA: Grandpa danced?

SOPHIE: How do you think he got me? That guy could cut quite a swath. I wish you'd known him, Paula. Peas in a pod.

PAULA: What was he like?

Stoops

SOPHIE: Oh....hard to describe...one word...let's see... A giver! Yeah..that'd do it. You needed it, he had it, he'd give it to you. The kindest man.... We went nearly thirty years without a vacation because just when we'd be ready to take off, a neighbor would need a washing machine or there'd be a hurricane in Guatemala. He always said it was a sin to waste what we're given. If I hadn't hid the newspapers from him we'd never have left the house.

PAULA: How'd he die?

SOPHIE: He ran out of toilet paper. *(She turns, sits on steps)*

PAULA: *(a long beat, then puzzled)* What did you just say?

SOPHIE: He died because he ran out of toilet paper.

PAULA: That's what I thought you said.

SOPHIE: You see, Gerald always had this theory....He figured that God never wasted anything, and as long as he still had two rolls of paper in the bathroom closet God wouldn't take him.

PAULA: *(trying to stifle her laughter)* I'm sorry...that's funny.

SOPHIE: I thought so too. He'd been sick for maybe...I don't know...three months... couldn't hardly leave the house and I had to do all the shopping. One night he died in his sleep. I came home after the funeral, and went into the bathroom and saw we were down to just one roll...I thought...Oh hell. I just killed Gerald.

PAULA: Is that all true?

SOPHIE: Doesn't matter. It's a good story. *(Stands up)* But oh, how I wish he could have seen his granddaughter dance.

PAULA: That's why you liked him? His dancing?

SOPHIE: It's a little more complicated than that. He was just home from the war and we had a dance down at the VFW. Believe me, we had our pick of the boys in those days...all the handsome young boys coming home from the war.. ..We were all lined up against the north wall and they were lined up against the south wall...everybody afraid to make the first move...Then your grandpa...Your grandpa steps out from the other boys and everybody looks at him...What's he gonna do? He runs his eyes down the row of girls and I remember I was biting my lip...I mean actually biting my lip, thinking "Pick me! Pick me!" and his eyes stopped on me... sounds like a movie, doesn't it?...His eyes stopped on me ..and then he took a step to me and put out his hand like this....and I nearly fell into his arms!.. We started dancing...and dancing and then he said the most romantic thing...

Stoops

PAULA: What!?

SOPHIE: He said, "Did you know your lip's bleeding?" Well, it was just heaven from there on. *(as she continues to reenact the scene)* And we whirled and whirled...they the band broke into a Fox Trot and baby, we trotted! And then the waltz...Oh, how he loved the Tennessee Waltz...*(singing as she dances)* "I was waltzing with my darling, to the Tennessee Waltz..." and we got real close to each other and...*(stops)* What time's your dance lesson?

PAULA: Five minutes ago.

SOPHIE: *(rushing to her)* Then go! Go! *(grabs her arm)* Ouch!

PAULA: What?

SOPHIE: I think I pulled something. Go...you go on now...Make Grandpa proud!

PAULA: You gonna be alright?

SOPHIE: Bursitis...arthritis, laryngitis...something with an "itus." I'll be fine.. Now go! Go!

PAULA: *(begins to leave, then)* Grandma, I pray for you....

SOPHIE: Really?

PAULA: Every night.

SOPHIE: Then don't stop....now go! Go! *(again, Paula turns to leave, then)* No! Wait, wait, wait, wait! When you pray for me....?

PAULA: Yes.

SOPHIE: Don't talk...okay?

PAULA: Huh?

SOPHIE: Dance...just dance. Maybe God's had a rough day...needs a little joy.

PAULA: *(hugging Sophie)* I love you Grandma!

SOPHIE: I love you more! Go! Go!

PAULA: *(kisses Sophie on the forehead)* Bye! *(and she exits SL)*
(Sophie watches her go...she grabs her left arm.....moves & sits slowly on step)

Stoops

MURIAL: *(bursting through her own door, waving an official-looking piece of paper)* Geronimo! . . . I did it! *(Sophie remains motionless, staring forward)* Sophie, I'm the king of the world! I passed the test! You should have been there! Once...just once I made a mistake. I parked on a hill and didn't turn my wheels toward the curb. The guy said, "I'm sorry, that's a point off." I said, "Do you turn your wheels into the curb when you park?" He said, "Well, that's not the issue!" and so I said, "Then let's make it the issue!" He said, "No, I guess I don't.!" Then I said, "erase that black mark off my score!" And he did! He erased it! I'm good for another year of backing down one-way streets... And for insurance I had him pray for me. How could he flunk me then? God would have struck him dead! Come on girl, let's celebrate! Red Lobster or Denny's? Your call, Sophie! *(She looks at her directly for the first time.)* Sophie? Did you hear me! I passed! I'm headed for Daytona! Sophie?
(Sophie stares....frightened...)

SOPHIE: II....

MURIAL: What? What's the matter?

SOPHIE: I can't....I can't move. *(Murial looks at her....)*

MURIAL: Are you joking? *(finally)* Oh God. Oh dear God..*(makes a dash for her front door)* Oh my!.... *(runs back to her)* Are you?....No..no.....*(runs for her door again)..* Oh, Lord!... *(a long beat as we see Sophie remaining motionless, then. .move back to Sophie)* **SOPHIE!**

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Three.....Luke and Rose's home

LIGHTS UP DAYTIME-SR PLATFORM

(Single Chair on SR Platform)

ROSE: *(on the phone)* Slow down! Slow down, Murial! Yes, he's just pulling in. Yes, I will...Let me have him call you back...Are you okay? You sure? I know, I know...I'll tell him. Is anybody with you? I know you're okay, but you're upset. *(holding the shouting voice away from her ear)*... Yes! Yes, you have reason to be upset. Look, let me tell Luke and then he'll call you right back. Love you...*(she clicks the phone off)*

LUCAS: *(entering)* Who was that?

ROSE: Your mom. They took Sophie to the hospital.

LUCAS: Why?

ROSE: Iit was hard to tell...Your mother's really shook.

Stoops

LUCAS: I'll bet.

ROSE: She said Sophie was paralyzed.

LUCAS: Oh my God.

ROSE: She's alive. ...she was yelling at the paramedics all the way out the door.

LUCAS: Is Mom okay?

ROSE: I...I don't know. How can you tell?

LUCAS: Was she joking?

ROSE: Joking? No.

LUCAS: Then she's not okay. *(beginning to exit)* I'll go over.

ROSE: *(stopping him)* I told her you'd call.

LUCAS: It's just ten minutes. *(begins again to leave)*

ROSE: *(again stopping him)* Wait a minute...uh....Oh geesh....this is a bad time, but...

LUCAS: What?

ROSE: Last night.

LUCAS: Yeah.

ROSE: When I went over to talk to your mother....

LUCAS: We've been through this, honey. I need to go.

ROSE: *(just as Lucas is about to exit)* I lied to you.

LUCAS: What?

ROSE: I lied.

LUCAS: You lied? You didn't talk to Mom about the retirement home? *(Rose says nothing.)* You did go over? *(Rose nods)* Then why didn't you...Why did you tell me you told her?

ROSE: *(a breath, then)* II didn't have the nerve. ...and I didn't have the nerve to tell you last night...I was going to tell you when you got home.

Stoops

LUCAS: But...why...?

ROSE: You know your mother. As soon as I got there she started telling me what all she'd done for herself this week...it was like she knew why I came.... She'd fixed a faucet, she'd replace two steps on the front porch, and she installed a new ceiling fan in her kitchen. It's upside-down and it runs backwards, but she did it herself. So...after a half hour's guided tour of Home Improvement with Murial, how was I going to say, "I'm sorry, but you aren't competent to live by yourself!"? What was I supposed to do?

LUCAS: I know. I know. But we're trying to think ahead here.

ROSE: She went to the bedroom to get cruise brochure...she wants to see Alaska before it melts...and I saw this paper under the sugar bowl....She wrecked her car, Luke.

LUCAS: What?

ROSE: I only had a few seconds to read it before she came back....one-way street, she hit another car.

LUCAS: Oh good grief. I'm going over there....

ROSE: Don't tell her I told you that.

LUCAS: I just want to see if she's okay...

ROSE: Did she tell you she's taken up yoga?

LUCAS: Yoga?

ROSE: At the health club. It's like she's trying to prove something to us.

LUCAS: She is. Of course she is...Yoga? Don't you have to sit on the floor for that?

ROSE: She'll figure out a way. *(her cell phone rings)* Hello? Yes Murial, he just got home...*(Lucas begins to back out of the room, signaling frantically that he can't talk...he's leaving)* Uh..look, I told him you were upset and he's on his...*(holding the phone away)* Okay! Okay! So you're not upset! Don't get upset! *(Luke gives a final wave and he's gone.)* He just wants to talk to you, Murial...about a lot of things. Did I tell him about the car? How did you know....? Murial, Yoga does not give you ESP. Anything new on Sophie? How should you know? Use your ESP, Murial.

(BLACKOUT SR)

Stoops

Scene Four...The Stoops, shortly after

LIGHTS UP TO DAYTIME-MURIAL'S HOUSE ONLY—DIM LIGHTS ON SOPHIE'S
Murial sits alone on her porch step in a lotus position.

MURIAL: HmMMM.....HmMMM....HmMMM.

LUCAS: (*Quickly in from SL*) Mom!

MURIAL: Quiet. HMMMM. I'm meditating.

LUCAS: How's Sophie?

MURIAL: I'm trying to communicate with her right now.

LUCAS: (*a long beat, then*) Are you serious?

MURIAL: Did you know you have a headlight out?

LUCAS: No.

MURIAL: See? I can see these things.

LUCAS: So....how are you?

MURIAL: Transformed.

LUCAS: (*a beat, then*) What?

MURIAL: Actually, I'm starting to cramp up. Help me up. I've only taken one lesson and we didn't get to "How to get up."

LUCAS: (*as he lifts her to her feet*) Don't break anything.

MURIAL: It's all paid for. You didn't have to come over. There's nothing you can do.

LUCAS: I just wanted to make sure you're okay. That was quite a scare.

MURIAL: Well, it still is. She might be dead.

LUCAS: Don't say that.

MURIAL: Sorry..."transported." You don't get that headlight fixed you'll get a ticket. Anybody can get a ticket. You don't necessarily have to do something stupid to get a ticket. Lots of people get tickets.

Stoops

LUCAS: Why are you telling me this?

MURIAL: Because you're about to ask me about my ticket. Rose was snooping.

LUCAS: How did you know?

MURIAL: Because I sprinkled sugar on the traffic ticket before she got here. The sugar had been disturbed.

LUCAS: Then why did you leave it...?

MURIAL: Because I wanted her to snoop. I can always depend on Rose. You married a smart girl, Luke. It would save me telling you and I didn't want you to read it in the papers and then give you one more reason to ship me off to the Wacky Acres Home for Road Hazards.

LUCAS: How did you know all this?

MURIAL: The day you get ahead of me, sonny, you can have the farm.

LUCAS: You don't have a farm.

MURIAL: Oh, I know. It's a safe bet. But why would you send Rose over with the news?

LUCAS: I didn't send her over. She knew I'd have trouble talking about itit was supposed to make it easier for all of us.

MURIAL: What a screw-up.

LUCAS: Mom, Rose was only...

MURIAL: Not her...I mean you. Do you remember when you were in Boy Scouts? You had to come up with a project and so built a fishing dock for the town park. You got all your friends to help, you spent weeks hammering boards together, then your father and I went out to help you launch it. You gave a little speech, we pushed it onto the water and it sunk like a rock.

LUCAS: (*a beat, then*) Mom, I was never in Boy Scouts.

MURIAL: (*a beat*) You weren't? It looked like you. You the one with the mole on your left shoulder?

LUCAS: You're doing it again, aren't you?

MURIAL: Yep. And you always fall for it. What a screw-up.

Stoops

LUCAS: *(laughing)* I love you, Mom.

MURIAL: I don't blame you. I'm one lovable old broad. So let's get down to the nut of the thing, shall we? I don't have all day. I passed my driver's test thank-you-very much and I'm going to drive my crippled Buick to the hospital to check on Sophie. So...let's get to it.

LUCAS: Get to it?

MURIAL: The speech..the lecture...the plea...whatever you want to call it.

LUCAS: Well...

MURIAL: No! No...wait. I'll do it. You 'll say, "Mom, you're forgetting things more and more," and I'll say, "That's ridiculous! Who are you again?" and you'll say, "Mom, get serious. We just want to plan ahead before you actually need to move to the Cemetery Holding Pen," and I'll say...and here's the clincher, Luke...here's the part where you won't be able to answer me. I'll stand up to you...I'll look you directly in the eye... you'll think of the mother who raised you and changed your diapers and wrote your high school term paper for you when you stayed out all night at prom...and as all these waves of guilt are breaking over your shame-ridden face, I'll say, "Lucas, I would rather live just one more week in my own home than spend ten years in a retirement home." And then...you'll say...

LUCAS: I....I don't know what to say.

MURIAL: That's right. You won't know what to say. You're a screw-up.

LUCAS: *(He looks at her...he smiles...he begins to laugh, sits on step, and the laughter dissolves into tears, the accumulated weight of many arguments with himself have now come crushing in, in a truly wonderful way.) (finally)* Mom...I love you. I love you so much.

MURIAL: You have great taste.

LUCAS: *(Laughs)* I know.

MURIAL: I'm sorry about the Buick.

LUCAS: You know what?

MURIAL: What?

LUCAS: We're laughing together again. It's been a long time.

Stoops

MURIAL: I know. What's been keeping you? I've been having a hell of a good time. Where have you been?

LUCAS: Life. Life got in the way...I forgot how to laugh.

MURIAL: You know, Lucas, I've been thinking of putting you in a home.

LUCAS: Some days I'm ready.

MURIAL: It's Rose, isn't it?

LUCAS: Mom, this is not Rose's fault.

MURIAL: Of course it's not. I'm not blaming anybody. You married the best woman God ever made...after he finished me, of course. Her mother was my dear friend, Luke. Don't think I'm not afraid of that happening to me...lying there all night in the cold and... well, it was terrible. It was just terrible. Every step I take I think about it.

LUCAS: Mom, that's why I....

MURIAL: That's why you call me every day....to see if I've fallen or carried away by a pack of wolves.

LUCAS: And I'm not gonna stop.

MURIAL: Don't. It's humiliating and infuriating and I do love it. But you see....you see, Luke. I can put my Tupperware down on the hot burner and I can wire my ceiling fan to suck instead of blow and the world does not come to an end. It might set off the smoke detector, but the sun will rise again tomorrow. If I were in your shoes I'd be saying exactly the same things and I'd be just as wrong as you are.

LUCAS: Then you're a screw up.

MURIAL: It's in our genes. I'm sorry. As long as I can take care of myself then we'll both have to live with a little anxiety. Deal?

LUCAS: *(he smiles, nods, then)* Deal. So....what about Sophie?

MURIAL: Oh, that...that's got me worried. She still couldn't feel anything when they carried her out.

LUCAS: She was coherent?

MURIAL: Heavens no. She was Sophie. They pulled the ambulance right up to where she was sitting in the front yard and she started shouting, "Not on the grass, you idiots! Not on the grass!"

Stoops

LUCAS: Did you talk to her?

MURIAL: I tried. She kept screaming, "Oh, the indignity! Oh, the inhumanity!" I suppose I'll have to sleep with Nixon now.

LUCAS: What?

MURIAL: *(pauses)* I hate it when he scratches himself.

LUCAS: Nixon?

MURIAL: Her damned cat.

LUCAS: You hate cats.

MURIAL: So does she. That's why she called him Nixon. *(a long beat, then)* This one's got me scared, Luke.and it's purely selfish. I keep thinking...What am I going to do without Sophie? When the world's gone nuts you've got to have one anchor...she's my anchor...as long as we could laugh and complain about things then everything seemed okay. That's the hardest part of living alone....there's no one to bounce the world off of. No one to say, "Look at that. That's just stupid."

LUCAS: You gonna be okay?

MURIAL: Oh... I'll think I'll live to see another sunrise. What're you going to tell Rose?

LUCAS: She'll understand.

MURIAL: No, she won't.

LUCAS: Mom....

MURIAL: She won't understand because she's smart. She won't understand because she's right and you're wrong. I'm asking you to do something that makes no sense at all.

LUCAS: You want to go to a retirement home?

MURIAL: Oh, hell no! Absolutely not!

LUCAS: Then...

MURIAL: But I'm probably wrong. Rose is being logical, and this isn't a logical decision, son. It's based on pure emotion and stubbornness and pride. *(he's*

Stoops

confused) Like love. Logic has nothing to do with it. Don't be mad at your wife for being smarter than you. I could enter Arthritis Acres tomorrow and I'd eat better and you'd always know where I was and I wouldn't burn the place down or make the ceiling fans run backwards. Everything about it makes perfect sense and you and I both know it's wrong for me. *(She holds back tears)*

LUCAS: *(a beat, then)* And the funny part...the funny part is that I agree with you completely.

MURIAL: That's because you're a screw up. That's because I raised a human being and not a machine. Every decision in my life, Luke...every important decision...made absolutely no sense at all. Good sense is over-rated. And for every illogical, raving lunatic like you and me there should be one reasonable, dispassionate voice like Rose to keep us from blowing up the microwave. You made a good choice of bride.

LUCAS: For a screw-up.

MURIAL: For a screw-up. *(sighs)* Oh God.

LUCAS: What's the matter?

MURIAL: Wisdom. It just wears me out.

LUCAS: *(a beat, then)* 'Night, Mom. *(Moves to her, holds her, hugs)*

MURIAL: Goodnight, Lucas.

LUCAS: *(kisses her forehead)* I love you. *(a beat)* *(Turns to leave, stops looks back at her)* You're supposed to say "I love you, too."

MURIAL: Yeah...but it's the makin' you wait for it that really sells it. I love you, Luke.

*(Luke leaves SL...Murial moves to sit in her rocker, collecting her thoughts,.....a beat, then the sound of a **cat's complaining meow**)* Oh, Nixon, shut up!

(BLACKOUT)

Scene Five....Paula's bedroom
LIGHTS DIM UP EVENING-SL PLATFORM

Paula, knelling as if next to a bed, is dressed for bed.

PAULA: God? It's been a hard day. I'm so very scared for Grandma. They wouldn't let me in to see her at the hospital and... *(she begins to cry)*... I'm scared...I'm really, really scared, God...and I don't even know what to say....'Cause when I'm this scared... I mean all the other times when I'm this scared....I talk to Grandma. *(Softly at first, we hear the simple melody of "TENNESSEE WALTZ" Paula looks up...startled but momentarily, then somehow lifted....to her feet...and she dances the waltz.....and dances.) (as the dance ends...)* Amen. **LIGHTS DIM DOWN TO BLACK**

Scene Six....The Stoops
DAYTIME LIGHTS-ON BOTH HOUSES-HIGHLIGHT ROCKERS

Murial on her porch. ...she's nervous. ...up, she checks a potted plant, she looks at her watch, and she keeps a close eye on the street. When her anxiety has reached a climax, her cell phone rings. She answers sits in rocker.

MURIAL: Oh God! *(she answers)* Hello! What? Oh...Rose. No...no, I haven't heard a thing...but it's worse than that. I called the hospital this morning to find her room number...I was going to drive over...she's not there.I have no idea! They won't tell me! Privacy Act! They just said, "She's no longer a patient here." Idiots! Rose, she's escaped. I know Sophie, and she's commandeered a wheelchair, bribed an orderly to wheel her out the back door and now she's in the parking lot of some Burger King feeding the birds! No, I haven't called her son. She'd never give me his number....She said she didn't trust a sexy old broad like me around her innocent little boy. Rose...I'm worried. No, no...don't come over. You just make me more nervous... no, I love you dearly, but you're always trying to fix things Look, make some phone calls, would you? Fix this! Bye! *(she disconnects)* Sophie! Damn you, Sophie!

CUNNINGHAM: *(the mail delivery person, entering SL, letters in hand)* Morning, Murial.
(going to Sophie's box) Nice morning!

MURIAL: She's not home. I'll take her mail.

CUNNINGHAM: Where's Sophie?

MURIAL: She joined the circus. I'll take her mail from now on.

CUNNINGHAM: *(putting the mail in Sophie's box)* I never know when to believe you.

MURIAL: Always. Always believe me. What're you doing?

Stoops

CUNNINGHAM: I'm putting Sophie's mail in her box.

MURIAL: I said give it to me...give me her mail.

CUNNINGHAM: Sorry, Murial. I have to put it in her box... *(Puts mail in mail box)*
what happens to it after that is none of my business.

MURIAL: You're a bureaucrat, you know that? If it weren't for your cute uniforms I'd have no use for you at all.

CUNNINGHAM: Sophie gone?

MURIAL: She was still breathing when they hauled her off.

CUNNINGHAM: *(laughing)* You know, this is my favorite stop on the route.

MURIAL: Then you've got a dull route. Did you hear me? I don't even know if Sophie's alive or dead.

CUNNINGHAM: I thought you said she joined the circus. *(walks out, as if going down a side walk)*

MURIAL: Oh forget it. She was mauled by a rogue elephant.

CUNNINGHAM: Here's your mail, *(Walking toward Murial's box)* Your Majesty.

MURIAL: Take it back. I'm no longer receiving mail.

CUNNINGHAM: I'll put in your box. *(goes to Murial's mail box)*

MURIAL: I put a rattlesnake in my box.

CUNNINGHAM: The rattlesnake is sitting in her rocking chair *(Chuckles at his own joke.)*

MURIAL: Give me that mail and go.....go postal. *(gives Murial her mail)*

CUNNINGHAM: *(exiting SR)* Have a nice day.

MURIAL: "Have a nice day." Oh piffle...Nice butt! *(pushes a button on her phone)*
Lucas? Have you heard anything?....You're at work? Sophie could be dying and you went to work? This won't screw up your retirement if you have to be a pallbearer for Sophie's funeral, will it? No...no....Stay where you are. I'm sorry. I'm truly sorry...I'm just ... I'm whacko is what I am. I can't just sit hereDid Rose tell you she's missing from the hospital? Should I call the funeral homes? Do they announce these things? Do they write your name on a wall then draw a line through it? ...Oh,

Stoops

I'm sorry. Go back to work, sweetheart. Make money. Raise a family. Pay taxes.I don't even know what I'm saying. Goodbye. *(she hangs up)* Now what?

SOPHIE: *(bursting through the door of her house, arms raised)* TA-DAH ! *(Murial reacts)* Scared the hell out of you, didn't I?

MURIAL: Oh dear ! *(shocked)*.....You're alive!

SOPHIE: *(turning around)* Nothing missing. New paint job!

MURIAL: Why aren't you.....

SOPHIE: Dead? They won't call it official 'til your heart stops beating. Bureaucrats, got to have everything just so.

MURIAL: But...I mean...what about...you know...

SOPHIE: Murial, you're making no sense at all this morning. *(Sarcastic)* Think you've had a stroke? That's what I had.

MURIAL: A stroke!

SOPHIE: Itsy-bitsy, teeny-weenie strokie-wokey. A "TIA." *(moving down steps)* "A Transient ..Ish...isch..." Oh hell, I can't pronounce it.. "A temporary stoppage of blood to the brain." You've had that for years...they just didn't name it.

MURIAL: Will you live?

SOPHIE: They gave me 'til noon to get my affairs in order.

MURIAL: Sophie!

SOPHIE: I'll live! I'll live! I'll live on blood thinners the rest of my life. I came home early this morning. You weren't even up yet, you bum.

MURIAL: But...a stroke...that's serious.

SOPHIE: As serious as..... a stroke! *(they look at each other, then both laugh)* *(still laughing)* This is not funny...

MURIAL: *(still laughing)* I know... I can't stop.

SOPHIE: Me either. *(stops suddenly...grabs her chest)* Oh!

Stoops

MURIAL: Sophie! (*Alarmed, moves to her*)

SOPHIE: (*smiling*) And I'm going to use that little trick on you every time you irritate me. Be warned.

MURIAL: So you're really all right?

SOPHIE: Never better. They watched me all night and the doctor said to go home, get some rest, and buy stock in Bayer aspirin. This one was a warning.

MURIAL: Thank God you're ...at least you're almost all right.

SOPHIE: So what's new at the Ponderosa since I moseyed off, Mr. Cartwright?

MURIAL: You're sure you're okay?

SOPHIE: Murial, they told me not to get stressed. If you ask me every five minutes if I'm okay, then I'm gonna get stressed and you'll be to blame for my death. Now what'd I miss?

MURIAL: Well.....My son wanted to put me in a retirement home.

SOPHIE: Oh, he's a screw-up.

MURIAL: Don't talk that way about my son.

SOPHIE: Okay. So what'd you do?

MURIAL: Well, I didn't have the money....and since I thought you'd die last night I sold your house.

SOPHIE: Well done. Anything else?

MURIAL: The postman found a snake in my mailbox.

SOPHIE: The one with the cute butt?

MURIAL: Snakes don't have butts.

SOPHIE: What else?

MURIAL: Your granddaughter came by.

SOPHIE: Paula?

MURIAL: Yes.

Stoops

SOPHIE: Oh...Paula. I'll bet she's scared to death.

MURIAL: Yes she is. You must call her.

SOPHIE: What did she say?

MURIAL: She said she was scared to death. And then the strangest thing.... She said God liked her dance.

SOPHIE: Oh! (*Sophie's hands involuntarily cover her mouth as her eyes light up with delight*) Oh Paula! Yes! (*she begins clapping*) Yes! Yes! Yes! You go, girl!

MURIAL: Are you stressed!

SOPHIE: If I am, then may I die right now! Whatta girl! I'll call her.How's Nixon?

MURIAL: Dead.

SOPHIE: What!!?

MURIAL: Oh, you mean the cat. I fed him last night.

SOPHIE: Fed him what?

MURIAL: A little Kobe beef in truffle sauce..with white wine.....

SOPHIE: Good. That should have killed him. What about Mr. Chickadee?

MURIAL: Interesting you should mention it. I've been reading up.

SOPHIE: You? Murial Wheatley, the hater of all living things? You're studying chickadees?

MURIAL: I was doing research for your obituary.

SOPHIE: Oh.

MURIAL: Chickadees don't migrate.

SOPHIE: I knew that.

MURIAL: "I knew that". They have survival mechanisms that most birds don't have... a little bitty bird that weighs as much as a handful of paperclips, but he can withstand the roughest winter nights. Wanna know how?

Stoops

SOPHIE: Go ahead. I've never heard my own obituary.

MURIAL: He eats like crazy all day long...

SOPHIE: Yeah..

MURIAL: Then he can lower his own body temperature at night.

SOPHIE: Now that's one heart-wrenching eulogy. The Audubon Society will be blubbering in the aisles.

MURIAL: No...here's the good part. Other birds...bluebirds, redbirds, swallows...they huddle up together to stay warm. But our Mr. Chickadee...he nests alone. He takes care of his own self. ...He's a survivor.

SOPHIE: Now that...that is profound, Murial. I don't remember you being this wise before I got sick.

MURIAL: I was always wise Sophie. You never listened.

SOPHIE: Don't stress me.

MURIAL: Why not? I've got the obituary all written.

SOPHIE: *(a long beat as the two of them move up their steps and sit in rockers, simply look out into the sky, the neighborhood...the world, then)* It's a good life, isn't it, Murial. Just out here on the stoop.

MURIAL: The porch.

SOPHIE: Whatever. Knowing that you've got a good friend...that's all you really need...just one if she's a keeper.

MURIAL: A keeper.

SOPHIE: What time is it?

MURIAL: 8:45.

SOPHIE: You didn't even look.

MURIAL: I didn't have to.

SOPHIE: What day is it?

Stoops

MURIAL: *(a beat, then)* Your day, Sophie. It's your day. *(Sophie turns to smile at her friend.)* **{SFX: chickadee} CHICKADEE SOUNDS CONTINUE**

SOPHIE: *(suddenly looking up)* Oh....oh...oh... *(Rises and starts down steps)*

MURIAL: Are you stressing? *(Rises and starts down steps)*

SOPHIE: Listen!

MURIAL: What?

SOPHIE: The chickadee! Murial, it's Mr. Chickadee! He's welcoming me home! *(she stands)* Oh, isn't that glorious? Isn't that wonderful!

MURIAL: I don't see him!

SOPHIE: Wait! Just wait! Just listen!

MURIAL: *(sees something in the sky)* Oh no!

SOPHIE: What?

MURIAL: A cloud! A huge cloud! He'll think it's night and he'll stop singing!

SOPHIE: He can't! *(as they both begin shouting)* You can't stop singing, Mr. Chickadee!

MURIAL: Come on, you old bird!

SOPHIE: Blow, Murial! Blow the clouds away! *(to the bird)* Keep singing! It's just a shadow! It's just a stupid shadow! Blow, Murial!

MURIAL: I'm blowing! *(she is)*

SOPHIE: Harder, Murial! *(she blows as well)*

MURIAL: Keep singing! *(blows)*

SOPHIE: Keep singing! *(blows)*

MURIAL: Keep singing! *(blows)* *(they continue blowing as.....)*

TOGETHER: Keep singing.....**(blowing)**

(...AND LIGHTS DIM OUT TO BLACK...)

HOUSE LIGHTS UP

Stoops

END

Stoops

Stoops