

LOST AT SEA

TIME

The Present

PLACE

Cruise Ship Promenade Deck

Purser's Office

Cabin

CHARACTERS

SAUL SEPLOW: An aging playwright, who is preoccupied with his laptop and much more interested in what's happening inside his mind than what's happening around him. Poor most of his life but happy.

YALE: Saul's son, in his late 30s, who works in investments. He has become bitter from a lifetime of trying to get his father's approval without success.

NORMA: Yale's older sister, 30s, a newspaper reporter, very serious. Wanted to be a novelist, but afraid of living the life of a starving artist.

ARIEL: Yale's younger sister, early 30s, the mother of twins,

far less serious than Norma. Wanted to be a painter, but afraid of living the life of a starving artist.

STACEY: Saul's secretary/nurse, early 40s, very smart and very sexy.

PURSER: A trim, fit and very formal ship's purser, in his 40s or 50s.

LOST AT SEA

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SCENE 1

The promenade deck of a luxury cruise liner. Three deck chairs are arranged on the deck, behind a railing overlooking the sea. There's a closed gate in the railing to reach lifeboats. NORMA, in her 30s, is looking out at the water. She is standing next to a walker. YALE, a little older, enters, sees Norma and sneaks up behind her with his camera at the ready.

YALE

Boo.

Norma turns startled. The camera's flash goes off. She's delighted to see her brother.

NORMA

Yale. My God, you scared the hell out of me.

They hug.

YALE

(Checking the screen on his camera)

Look at this expression on your face.

Offers her the camera

NORMA

I don't want to see it.

YALE

You're still a beautiful woman, even when you're terrified.

NORMA

Let me see.

He hands her the camera and she looks at her picture.

NORMA (cont'd)

I look awful.

(Raising the camera as if to throw it overboard)

Goodbye camera.

YALE

No. That's an expensive camera.

NORMA

Top of the line?

YALE

I only do top of the line.

NORMA

Goodbye top-of-the-line camera.

YALE

No.

They wrestle for the camera, convulsing in laughter.
Finally Yale gets the camera.

NORMA

I tried to call you. But your phone has been disconnected.

YALE

I've moved.

NORMA

You sold your fancy Manhattan apartment?

YALE

I missed Staten Island.

NORMA

You're kidding me.

YALE

Things are not going well at work.

NORMA

Oh, I'm sorry. Look, Yale, over there.

YALE

Where?

NORMA

Right there. You can almost touch it.

YALE

I'll be damned.

Yale aims his camera and takes a picture.

NORMA

(From memory)

"Give me your tired, your poor,
Your huddled masses yearning to breathe free,
The wretched refuse of your teeming shore.
Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me.
I lift my lamp beside the golden door."

YALE

Tell that to the Mexicans.

ARIEL, a little younger and far less serious than
Norma, enters.

ARIEL

I've been looking all over the ship for you two.

NORMA

Did you see the Statue of Liberty?

ARIEL

That was the real Statue of Liberty?

NORMA

What did you think it was?

ARIEL

A replica?

YALE

Motherhood addles the brain.

ARIEL

Screw you.

They hug.

ARIEL (cont'd)

This ship is huge. Did you see the fancy suites on the top deck? Each one has a veranda, three rooms and television screens everywhere. I peeked into one of them when the steward wasn't looking. That's how I want to travel.

NORMA

You're not happy with the cabin you've got?

ARIEL

I'm on the bottom deck.

YALE

How are the kids? Paul?

ARIEL

The twins are doing great. Their team might win the league trophy this year. And Paul is deliriously happy building the biggest deck in our condo. Where's dad?

NORMA

Stacey said the trip from the airport really knocked him out. He's in his cabin, taking a nap. She said he's tired all the time now.

YALE

He's still on dialysis?

NORMA

He'll be on dialysis for the rest of his life.

ARIEL

Daddy's been so lonely since mother died.

YALE

He's got Stacey.

NORMA

A nurse/secretary isn't the same thing.

YALE

Stacey is a lot more than a nurse/secretary.

NORMA

I just hope she doesn't end up hurting him. She's beautiful. And so much younger than dad. Let's face it. Dad is an old man.

YALE

He sure as hell doesn't act like one. Keeps calling himself a sexy senior citizen. Does anyone know why he invited us on this cruise? I tried to dig it out of him but all he'd say was we'd find out when we got here. And laughed. The more I pressed him the more he laughed.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Welcome aboard the Ocean Spirit. Tomorrow, Monday, at 315, a life boat drill, compulsory for all guests, will take place to show the safety procedures in case of emergency. When you hear the emergency signal, seven short blasts of the ship's siren, followed by a long one, put on your life jacket and go to your muster station.

SAUL, 76, enters, carrying a cane and a laptop computer.

SAUL

Yo ho ho and a bottle of rum. Fifteen men on a dead man's chest. Well, one man and two women on an aging man's chest.

NORMA

Dad.

ARIEL

Daddy.

YALE

Dad.

They all hug him.

SAUL

Let me get a look at all of you. My. My. My. It's amazing what three fertilized eggs can develop into. Been quite a while since we've all been together like this.

NORMA

Not since Dangerous Desires' opening night.

ARIEL

Five years ago.

SAUL

Five and a half. Ah, here comes Stacey.

STACEY, a beautiful and very sexy woman in her early 40s, enters. They greet her by name.

STACEY

Hello, everyone.

With difficulty using his cane and unsteady feet, Saul heads toward the railing but trips and falls against the gate.

ARIEL

(Yelling a warning)

Daddy.

(Rushing to him and pulling him back)

The gate could have swung open.

SAUL

It's perfectly safe.

(Leaning over the railing)

It is a long way down.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

A free seminar on cellulite reduction will be given today at 4 P.M., after the lifeboat drill, in the Monte Carlo Room on Deck 11.

SAUL

(Surveying the space)

Yes, this is the perfect setting for our little drama.

NORMA

Our little drama?

SAUL

We have important things to do.

NORMA

All of this is making me very nervous.

ARIEL

Is it something bad, daddy?

SAUL

Not bad, Ariel. But significant. At least, significant to me. I've decided to stop....
(Can't find the word)

STACEY

Dialysis.

NORMA

You're stopping dialysis?

SAUL

Yes.

ARIEL

That's great. You're getting a kidney transplant.

SAUL

Too many young people need those kidneys to waste them on an old fart like me.
It's time to let go, dear.

ARIEL

No, daddy.

SAUL

I'm exhausted all the time. I wake up exhausted. I go through the day exhausted. I go to sleep exhausted. I have barely enough energy to do my work.

NORMA

When will you do this?

SAUL

As soon as I finish the play I'm working on.

ARIEL

Then it will be soon?

SAUL

I hope so.

Ariel hugs her dad.

SAUL (cont'd)

Now to the business at hand. I have to write a ...

(Can't find the word)

End-of-life document

STACEY

A will.

SAUL

A will.

(Responding to their surprised look)

Dangerous Desires did very well.

NORMA

You should get a lawyer to help you.

SAUL

Only two types of people in the world. Artists and people who take advantage of artists. No one is better at taking advantage than lawyers. No. This is something we can settle among ourselves.

YALE

How much money are we talking about?

SAUL

A million dollars. Give or take a few thousand.

ARIEL

What!

YALE

A million dollars?

NORMA

You made that much from one play?

SAUL

And the movie and TV rights. I want the three of you to write my will.

NORMA

That's not how it's done.

SAUL

The way it's done is wrong. After your gone, you don't give a damn what happens to your money. But the ones left behind sure as hell care. So they should decide . Then they have no one to get pissed off at but themselves. I want you to write the will on this cruise. If you don't reach a unanimous decision by the time we reach Italy, I will decide.

An alarm on Stacey's wristwatch goes off.

STACEY

It's time for your treatment.

SAUL

We'll celebrate your decision or mine once we reach Rome.

(To Stacey)

OK, my dear. Let the blood letting begin.

Saul and Stacey stand to leave.

SAUL (cont'd)

Thank God I won't be doing this much longer.

They exit.

ARIEL

We can't let him commit suicide.

YALE

Writing has been his whole life. And he can't do it anymore. Maybe it's better this way.

NORMA

He finishes his play in a couple of weeks and then just dies?

ARIEL

Before he knows if the play will be produced?

YALE

He must be in terrible pain to give up opening night.

ARIEL

Maybe we could talk him into holding on until opening night.

YALE

That could be years.

ARIEL

Exactly.

YALE

He's never needed us more than he needs us right now. One of us must be with him at all times, making sure that he's having a good time on this cruise. I'll take the afternoon. Norma can take the evening. And Ariel the morning. We don't want to give him time to brood over what he's about to do.

ARIEL

We'll make this a week he'll never forget.

YALE

God is one hell of a playwright. The day dad's play opens on Broadway is the day doctors tell him he has terminal kidney disease. And now this.

ARIEL

He didn't say a word about it on opening night. He didn't want to spoil the cast party.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

A free seminar on how to flatten that stomach without dieting is now taking place in the health club on Deck 11.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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SCENE 2

The next morning. Saul and Stacey are in Saul's stateroom.

STACEY

The kids were really happy to see you.

SAUL

Were they?

STACEY

You didn't think so?

SAUL

My children are polite if nothing else.

He brings out a make-up kit and starts making himself up as a Hasidic Jew, with a long white beard, curls, hat and long black coat.

STACEY

How can you possibly... What are you doing?

SAUL

Assuming the likeness of a Hasidic Jew.

STACEY

Is this one of your ill-advised practical jokes?

SAUL

My practical jokes are not ill-advised. They're family-bonding experiences. Some of our fondest moments have been laughing together about our practical...

(Can't find the word)

STACEY

Jokes.

SAUL

Once Yale called me up with a disguised voice and said he was a New York producer and wanted to produce one of my plays. He asked me to join him for lunch at Sardi's. I took the Amtrak up to Sardi's, so excited that I had finally made it, but when I got there I was greeted by Yale and his sisters with a big birthday cake. It was his best joke.

STACEY

That was a cruel thing for him to do.

SAUL

It hurt, but I got back at him, a year later, with an even better joke. I photo-shopped one of his lottery tickets with the winning number. For three hours he thought he was a multi-millionaire and almost got arrested when he went to claim his prize with the phony ticket. We really laughed over that one.

STACEY

That's terrible.

SAUL

We have fun with these things but I don't really know my kids. I thought I did until I started writing my will. I was going to leave most of the money to the one who needed it the most. But I didn't know who that was. I'm their father. I should know something like that. Norma has a bad disease, but I have no idea how she's bearing up. Ariel isn't that happy, but is it something money can fix? And Yale? I don't know a damn thing about him.

ARIEL

Kids grow up and change. You knew them when they were young.

SAUL

I didn't. I never went to their soccer games. Hated board games. Jane was the one who read to them at night. It was a royal event whenever I made an appearance. Jane warned me. Said one day I would regret not being part of their lives.

STACEY

You spend every Christmas with Ariel. And Norma tries to be with you as much as she can.

SAUL

She calls every month, or two. And Ariel sends me cards on the appropriate days. Birthday. Father's Day. Thanksgiving. They both call me up on New Year's. Not on the stroke of midnight. Ariel always calls a few minutes before midnight and Norma a few minutes after. They've choreographed that very nicely. Is this love or duty? I don't want to die, not knowing.

STACEY

You shouldn't be questioning this. Not now.

SAUL

I was always working on my plays. All of my energy was put there. An artist has to do that. It's so easy to make excuses why the work can wait. It's so easy to lose it. To lose everything.

STACEY

Your kids love you.

SAUL

To know that for sure, I'd have to be a fly on the wall.

Stacey looks at him with shock, realizing what he's about to do.

STACEY

That's the reason for this get-up. You're going to spy on your children.

SAUL

Moliere and Shakespeare used disguised characters to great advantage.

STACEY

In their plays. Not real life. This isn't one of your plays.

SAUL

If it'll work on the stage, it'll work in real life.

STACEY

You need to see a therapist, Saul.

SAUL

Another doctor you want me to go to? Every day I'm sitting in a different waiting room, reading out-of-date magazines.

STACEY

Doubting the love of your children is not normal.

SAUL

More parents should have these doubts.

STACEY

They do. When their kids are teenagers. But deep down inside they know their children love them. Talk to a therapist, Saul.

SAUL

Yale and I live in the same city and I never see him. The only thing we share is our practical jokes.

STACEY

You're always fighting with him.

SAUL

I know. I know. That's another thing I did wrong. But he turned against everything I believed in.

STACEY

All he did was go into business. You're not going to lecture him about this again. Not on this trip. You promised not to talk about it.

SAUL

I've forgotten all the things I'm not supposed to talk about.

STACEY

I have it written down here.

(Bringing out a piece of paper)

I made a copy and gave it to you. You didn't bring it with you?

SAUL

I must have misplaced it.

STACEY

(Consulting paper)

You promised not to talk about Republicans, capitalism, greed, business people, unequal wealth distribution, self-serving politicians, lobbyists, the minimum wage, immigration, the Supreme Court and the American dream. And the most important promise of all. You would not talk about or argue with Yale about his career.

SAUL

Doesn't leave much to talk about on this...

(He can't find the word)

STACEY

Cruise. You really should tell the kids what the doctor said.

SAUL

Which doctor?

STACEY

You know which doctor. The neurologist.

SAUL

No.

STACEY

It's getting worse, Saul. You're wandering a lot more these days. And forgetting words.

SAUL

Don't you think I know that. All my life words have been my friend, my tools. Now they're my enemy.

STACEY

You can keep this a secret for only so long, before it becomes obvious.

SAUL

I'll be long gone before that happens. Whether or not I finish this play. Why are we talking about this? We decided this is the best way. And you agreed.

STACEY

I'm having more doubts.

SAUL

It's too late for you to have more doubts.

STACEY

Saul, please....

SAUL

You promised.

STACEY

This could...

SAUL

You promised.

STACEY

All right. We'll do it your way.

SAUL

That's better. How do I look?

STACEY

Very kosher.

SAUL

Good. Then they'll never recognize me.

STACEY

Moliere could have done a lot with this.

SAUL

(Grabbing a Bible and other tattered holy books)

Show time. Let's see what the kids have to say about their old man.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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SCENE 3

The promenade deck, a few minutes later. Yale and Ariel are playing deck shuffleboard. Norma is watching. Saul, disguised as a Hasidic Jew, is sitting nearby, rocking in prayer.

YALE

It's your turn, Ariel.

ARIEL

What?

YALE

Shuffleboard. We're playing shuffleboard.

ARIEL

I'm sorry. I can't concentrate. It doesn't seem right to be up here having fun while daddy is downstairs in his cabin planning suicide.

YALE

He's not planning his suicide. He's probably napping.

Yale and Ariel put down their sticks and they all go to their deck chairs. Stacey enters.

STACEY

Morning everyone.

They greet her in response.

NORMA

How's dad doing this morning?

STACEY

He's fine.

(Looking at the rocking Saul)

Rocking himself to sleep

NORMA

It was quite a bomb dad dropped on us yesterday.

STACEY
Stopping dialysis?

NORMA
Yes.

STACEY
This must be very difficult for all of you.

ARIEL
He shouldn't give up.

STACEY
The day he made his decision to do this, we went out, drank far more than anyone with kidney disease should and celebrated. The indecision was depressing him more than even the fatigue or the thought of death.

NORMA
This must be awful for him.

STACEY
He's at peace now.

ARIEL
I don't want to lose him.

Saul is touched. Even though he is supposed to be reciting from the Bible, he reacts to what he is hearing, especially anything relating to him.

STACEY
Don't try to talk him out of it. Don't force him to face the indecision again.

They each nod in agreement in their own way.
Stacey sits down in a deck chair and puts on headphones.

YALE
So we go ahead with our plan. I'll stay with dad this afternoon, take him to the casino. He hates gambling but loves watching the drama at the slots and around the tables.

ARIEL
I'll take him to the art auction. There's a lot of drama there. I'll keep the conversation light.

YALE

Dad doesn't do light conversation. Talk about whatever he wants to talk about.

ARIEL

His impending death?

YALE

That topic is probably at the top of his list.

ARIEL

(Laughing)

We can talk about the million dollars.

NORMA

I had no idea he'd made that kind of money from Dangerous Desires.

YALE

How could we have guessed? His life didn't change at all. He bought nothing. Went nowhere. Didn't even move out of that tiny, rent-controlled apartment.

ARIEL

He loves that apartment. And Greenwich Village.

YALE

You'd think he would have splurged just a little bit.

ARIEL

He's splurging on this cruise.

YALE

Doesn't that make you a little suspicious?

ARIEL

Why should it make me suspicious?

YALE

This cruise is out of character for him. We're surrounded by the make-believe opulence that he despises.

ARIEL

The cruise is a birthday celebration. It's no coincidence that your two birthdays come on the last day we're at sea.

YALE

He never liked doing that. He only did it because of mother.

NORMA

He's isn't going to be with us for much longer. This is his way of saying goodbye.

YALE

Your both wrong. This is one of his practical jokes.

NORMA

What's the joke?

YALE

Didn't you hear what he said? "This is the perfect setting for our little drama." He's planning something.

ARIEL

He's not going to spend all this money on a cruise just for a practical joke.

YALE

He'll go to any lengths. Remember the time he rented a boat -- this God awful big thing -- took us out to the middle of the bay and told us the motor died. For six hours we're rowing in the hot sun.

NORMA

While he's drinking gin and tonics.

YALE

And when we get back to the marina, he starts up the motor and tells us that's why we shouldn't believe everything we're told.

NORMA

He brought us on this ship to write his will. We couldn't have worked out the details with us scattered all over the country.

YALE

What details? We'll just share the money equally. We could have done that with a conference call.

NORMA

There are a lot of other things to consider.

YALE

Like what?

NORMA

Like what about Stacey?

YALE

Stacey's not family.

NORMA

She's been with dad for four years, almost around the clock.

YALE

I never thought of including her. What do you think, Ariel?

ARIEL

You're right. She's not family.

NORMA

I think dad loves her, in his own way.

YALE

OK. We pay severance. A month's pay?

NORMA

Not a penny less than ten thousand.

ARIEL

Ten thousand!

NORMA

So we each get three thousand less.

ARIEL

That's a lot of severance.

NORMA

Dad would be very unhappy if we froze her out.

YALE

She's got a point, Ariel.

ARIEL

Ten thousand is fine. I suppose.

YALE

There, the will thing is settled. See, that wasn't so hard.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Silent auction begins in ten minutes in the art gallery, Deck 5, Genoa. This is a collector's unique opportunity. Many original oil paintings are available. Shipping, certificates of authenticity, insurance and new frames all free. Don't miss this chance of a lifetime.

NORMA

Why would anyone want to buy a painting on a cruise ship?

ARIEL

They're beautiful paintings. And they're real. Not prints. You can even see the brush strokes on the canvas. If you get up real close and the light is just right.

NORMA

They're sentimental crap.

ARIEL

And they're signed.

NORMA

Those artists will sign anything. They're even signing their sketches. That's like dad signing the first drafts of his plays and selling them on the ship. I'd be suspicious, Ariel.

ARIEL

The certificates of authenticity are pasted right on the back of the artwork.

NORMA

Your innocence is beguiling.

ARIEL

Well, I'd really like to have an original anything hanging up in our house. Everyone else we know has prints.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Bingo will start in five minutes in the grand lounge. Today's prize is five thousand dollars. That's five thousand dollars waiting for you in the grand lounge.

ARIEL

Five thousand dollars. We can't miss a chance like that.

YALE

I think I'll pass.

She rushes off. Yale goes over to the railing and looks out at the ocean.

YALE (cont'd)

This is the first time I've ever been out of sight of land.

NORMA

It's so immense, the ocean.

YALE

I look out at the horizon and think of the courage it took for the explorers to sail towards it, not knowing for sure that the world was round and they wouldn't fall off the edge.

NORMA

Could you have done it?

YALE

I don't have that kind of courage. Sometimes I wonder if I have any courage at all.

NORMA

What's wrong, Yale?

YALE

I hate my job. But I'm afraid to quit.

She puts her arm around his shoulder. They stare out at ocean silently, both lost in their thoughts.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

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SCENE 4

Later that evening, the promenade deck. Saul and Norma are sitting in deck chairs on the promenade deck.

SAUL

The drama in the casino is unending. Money-lusting at its best.

NORMA

It's nicer up here.

SAUL

Much nicer. I like to look out at the ocean and think about life. Or what's left of it.

NORMA

Are you scared? About what you're going to do?

SAUL

They say it won't be bad. A little nausea. And then you just drift off to...
(Can't find the word)

NORMA

Sleep?

SAUL

Yes.

NORMA

It seems wrong to give up any part of life, no matter how bad things are.

SAUL

We give up a little bit of life every day, after we pass the halfway point. First your eyes go. In your 40s. Right on schedule. Then comes the arthritis. Start losing teeth. You're tired all the time. Make excuses for not walking up stairs. Let young people do things for you. You get glasses for the eyes, drugs for the arthritis. Dialysis for the kidneys. Then something really bad happens, like heart disease or cancer.

NORMA

You do what you can.

SAUL

Why do we keep on trucking? Is it because we're in the habit of living? Or terrified of not living?

NORMA

Maybe it's because life is so rich that you can lose all sorts of things and still have enough left over to excite you.

SAUL

But there does come a time when too much has been taken away and you don't want to think about the future.

She touches him tenderly.

SAUL (cont'd)

I've come to accept death. It's the anticipation that's so hard. Sometimes I think I should jump in front of a truck and get it over with. Drifting off to sleep and never waking up isn't very dramatic. If this were a play, I'd want a more spectacular ending. Like that Jack London story where this guy commits suicide by jumping off a cruise ship in the middle of the night.

NORMA

Do you really think this is the time -- or place -- to be talking about something like that?

SAUL

But he bobs up to the surface and floats in the water, watching the lights of the ship disappear in the distance. It's dark. It's silent. He's alone. Floating in the water. Irrevocably committed to death. Now that's what I call a final...a final...

(Can't find the word)

Good way to end a play.

NORMA

You think about your death a lot?

SAUL

More and more these days. What about you?

NORMA

Not a lot. Maybe once or twice a day.

SAUL

Only three ways to deal with death. Religion, of course, with the fantasy of eternal happiness after you die. Aerobic exercise, with the hope you never will. Or you can live in the present.

Norma holds up her hands, as though in surrender.
Enough talk about death.

SAUL (cont'd)

Maybe we should tell jokes.

NORMA

I loved Dangerous Desires. It's your best play.

SAUL

It certainly was a success financially.

NORMA

Artistically, too.

Using her walker, Norma moves to the railing.

NORMA (cont'd)

The stars are so brilliant out here.

SAUL

Ariel tells me that you might be leaving the newspaper.

NORMA

I've been thinking of it.

SAUL

I thought you loved that job.

NORMA

I've gotten an offer that's difficult to refuse, dad. I would be making twice as much as I'm making now.

SAUL

Doing what?

NORMA

Public relations.

SAUL

You hate public relations.

NORMA

Paul and I could do an awful lot with the extra money. See the world. Maybe take some cruises like this. We've just started daydreaming about what we'd do with the money.

SAUL

Who'd you be working for?

NORMA

Blue Cross.

SAUL

You won journalism prizes for exposing the bad things those companies do.

NORMA

They don't hold grudges.

SAUL

But you should, with companies like that. You gave up writing your novel for journalism. Just so you'd have a paycheck. Now you want to give up something else you've come to love for a bigger paycheck.

NORMA

Eventually I'll need money for health workers. When the M.S. gets worse. We have a little bit saved. And Paul's working. But high school teachers don't make that much.

SAUL

Are you worried about that?

NORMA

I try not to look that far ahead.

SAUL

You don't have to worry.

NORMA

It's hard not to worry.

SAUL

You'll be taken care of. If I have anything to say about it.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

The midnight, chocolate buffet will begin on the lido deck in ten minutes. Be sure to bring your camera to take pictures of the ice and chocolate sculpture.

Ariel comes rushing in.

ARIEL

Chocolate buffet! Did you hear that? And chocolate sculpture.

SAUL

After that huge dinner, you could think of chocolate?

ARIEL

I saw the sculpture. There's a huge chocolate orangutang. Let's go get our picture taken with him.

SAUL

Thank you, dear. I think I'll just sit here and continue digesting.

ARIEL

Come with me, Norma. We can take pictures of all the chocolate.

NORMA

Oh, all right. I've always wanted to be photographed with a chocolate orangutang.

ARIEL

And to think, I was only expecting a little chocolate bar on my pillow.

Norma and Ariel exit. Saul takes out a chocolate bar and starts eating it as he opens his laptop. Stacey enters.

SAUL

I'm surprised you're not in the discotheque, dancing.

STACEY

I'd rather be here with you. You couldn't sleep?

SAUL

Too much on my mind.

STACEY

You need a massage.

She starts massaging him.

SAUL

That feels good. Cruising isn't as bad as I thought it would be. It's nice, if you stay up here, away from all the nonsense. Pretending you're on a ship.

STACEY

Are the kids staying with you, the way they planned?

SAUL

The moment one leaves, another one arrives. I'm surprised you were able to slip in here between shift changes. Norma just finished her assignment.

STACEY

Don't make fun.

SAUL

Actually we had a very nice talk. That's fine. Thank you.

She stops massaging.

SAUL (cont'd)

How many good years do you think Norma has left? Four? Five? Six? She wants to spend them making a lot of money at a job she'll hate. With the inheritance, she could quit and write the novel she's been dying to write. When she can still do it.

STACEY

It's a very unpredictable disease. She may have many more years.

SAUL

You young people should do what you can do now before you can't do it anymore Like right now, you should be dancing.

STACEY

You'd rather be alone with the ocean than me?

SAUL

I'd rather see you happy than wishing you could be dancing.

STACEY

It's a great dance band. Why don't you come with me?

SAUL

I wasn't planning to stay up much longer.

STACEY

They're playing fox trots. You could doze.

SAUL

You dance. I'll sleep, in my cabin. Tomorrow morning we'll dance around the promenade desk.

STACEY

I will count the hours until then.

She kisses him on his forehead and heads off . Saul closes his eyes, as the sound of the ocean comes up.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

5

5

SCENE 5

The next morning. Yale, Ariel and Norma are sitting in a hot tub. Ariel is preoccupied and not participating in the fun.

NORMA

Whose toes am I feeling?

YALE

Not my toes.

NORMA

Ariel?

ARIEL

What?

NORMA

The toes I'm feeling. Are they yours?

ARIEL

No.

NORMA

They feel like male toes.

YALE

There's a difference between male and female toes?

NORMA

You've never checked out your girlfriends' toes when you're in bed with them?

YALE

When I'm in bed with my girlfriends, I'm not looking at their toes. You're kidding about the toes. Aren't you?

NORMA

Yes, I'm kidding about the toes. This is great. We should have had hot tubs when we were kids.

YALE

We were lucky to have a fire hydrant.

NORMA

Our friends never knew the joy of an open fire hydrant. They had to settle for summer camps, trips abroad and beachfront homes in Southampton.

YALE

Labor Day was a big day for us. Our friends were coming back to the city. Hey, the bubbles have stopped. Would you push the button, Ariel?

She doesn't respond.

YALE (cont'd)

Ariel.

ARIEL

What?

YALE

The bubbles have stopped.

ARIEL

What do you want me to do about it?

YALE

Push the bubble button. Over there. Next to your arm.

Ariel pushes the bubble-activating button and the bubbles resume. Saul, wearing his disguise, enters and sits in a deck chair near the hot tub. His expressions and body language will show how disturbed he is by what he is hearing.

YALE (cont'd)

You haven't said a word. You're a million miles away.

ARIEL

I'm sorry.

NORMA

Is something wrong?

ARIEL

I keep thinking about daddy's will.

YALE

We settled all that yesterday.

ARIEL

I don't think the money should be shared equally.

YALE

That's not what you said yesterday.

ARIEL

I have to send the boys to college.

YALE

Won't Paul take care of that?

ARIEL

Paul and I are having problems. He drinks.

NORMA

He gets drunk?

ARIEL

Liquor makes men very aggressive and some times mean. Physical violence is a big problem.

YALE

Does he hit you?

ARIEL

I'd rather not get into that.

NORMA

In front of the boys?

ARIEL

They hate it when we fight. If only I had a safety net, a cushion of money I could fall back on if he should lose it completely and endanger the boys.

NORMA

I'm so sorry, Ariel.

YALE

I always wondered about that guy. He's ceaselessly pleasant and cheerful, acting like he loves everybody and there's nothing wrong in his life. Lot of rage buried under the surface in people like that.

NORMA

It's not good for the boys to see you fighting like that.

ARIEL

I do everything I can to protect them. But you can do only so much. Soon they'll be old enough to go to college, but the most we can afford is community college and they'll have to live at home.

YALE

Dad's money should be enough to send them away to college.

ARIEL

A woman trapped in a bad relationship should have the wherewithal to escape if she has to. The interest on two hundred and fifty thousand isn't enough to live on.

YALE

You've figured that out?

ARIEL

It's only ten thousand dollars. You can't do much with that.

NORMA

You haven't heard a word Ariel said. It's terrible to feel like your trapped in a marriage where you're in physical danger. We have to rethink what we're going to do with the money.

ARIEL

It should be divvied up on the basis of need. That's why daddy wants us to write the will. We know who needs the money the most.

YALE

And you think that's you.

ARIEL

I need it more than you.

NORMA

Sharing the money equally is OK by me. But if we're going to distribute on the basis of need, then I should get the money. The M.S. is going to get worse and health care aides cost a fortune.

ARIEL

You should get all the money?

NORMA

I don't want to be greedy. I should get five hundred thousand. You should get four hundred thousand. And Yale should split the rest with Stacey.

YALE

That's not fair.

ARIEL

You don't need the money.

YALE

I have a lot of debts. Is sending the boys away to college more important than Norma's health care workers and is my paying off my debts half as important as that?

ARIEL

You don't have to be sarcastic, Yale.

YALE

We'll end up in terrible fights trying to decide who needs the money the most. The safest and fairest thing to do is to divide the money equally. We can always help each other out, if one of us is really hurting.

ARIEL

It's not only me that we have to consider. The boys' welfare is at stake. I should get 550,000. Norma should get 350,000

YALE

You must have been up all night with a calculator. No matter how you guys figure it out, I always end up with a measly hundred grand.

ARIEL

That's what we should vote for. Five-fifty, three-fifty and a hundred.

YALE

We divide the money equally. That's my vote. And I'm staying with it.

ARIEL

And I'm voting against that. What's your vote, Norma?

NORMA

We're not going to resolve this. Daddy will have to decide.

ARIEL

Daddy doesn't know the trouble Paul and I are having.

YALE

I don't want you to take this personally, Ariel. But you are a conniving little bitch.

NORMA

(Disapproving)

Yale.

YALE

You don't give a damn about Norma or me.

NORMA

Stop it, Yale.

ARIEL

You can go to hell.

Ariel gets out of the hot tub and exits angrily.

NORMA

How could you call your sister a thing like that?

YALE

She's trying to get it all for herself. And you're not any better.

NORMA

That poor woman is hurting terribly. And I've got a terrible, progressive disease.

YALE

That's true. But her story is bullshit. Everything seemed just fine with Paul before we started talking about money. She said Paul was deliriously happy building the biggest deck in her goddamn condo. Those were the very words she used. Deliriously happy. Doesn't sound like someone who is getting drunk and beating his wife in front of the boys. Give me a break.

NORMA

Our sister needs our help.

She exits angrily, leaving Yale alone in the hot tub.
Saul stands and exits sadly.

6

6

SCENE 6

The promenade deck, that evening. Saul is eagerly working at his computer. Ariel enters with two glasses.

ARIEL

(Giving one of the glasses to her father)

I got you a club soda on ice. I'm sorry you can't have anything stronger than that, daddy.

SAUL

That's very thoughtful of you.

Ariel goes to the railing and looks up at the sky. Making sure that Ariel isn't looking, Saul brings a silver, liquor flask from his pocket, pours a generous amount of booze into the glass and puts the flask back in his pocket.

ARIEL

The stars are incredible.

SAUL

Nature redeems itself on nights like this.

He takes a very big and very satisfying drink from the glass.

ARIEL

Redeems itself?

SAUL

Hurricanes? Tsunamis? Earthquakes?

ARIEL

But don't you think...

SAUL

Traffic-snarling snow storms? Tornados?

ARIEL

But most of the time...

SAUL

Flash floods? Heat waves? Hail?

ARIEL

The stars have a lot of work to do.

SAUL

They'll never catch up.

ARIEL

The twins were very jealous of me coming on this trip and not bringing them. They wanted to spend time with their granddaddy.

SAUL

I always thought they were bored with me.

ARIEL

They both want to be playwrights. Just like their grandfather. They're very proud of you, daddy.

SAUL

(Suspicious)

I thought they wanted to be hedge-fund managers.

ARIEL

They changed their minds.

SAUL

Last year it was derivatives and the year before that pharmaceuticals.

ARIEL

Oh, you know kids and their flights of fancy.

SAUL

Their flights never took them in the direction of anything that didn't make a lot of money.

ARIEL

It's been a while since you saw them. The twins are so big now. In a few years, we'll have to start thinking about college. We were thinking of Yale.

SAUL

Your brother?

ARIEL

No, silly. The college. Yale has the best drama department.

SAUL

Teaching playwriting is a lot of crap.

ARIEL

It's very expensive.

SAUL

(Realizing she is processing him)

Aha.

ARIEL

Parents have to be millionaires to afford Yale.

SAUL

You and Paul don't want to waste your money on something like that.

ARIEL

It'd be worth the money for the boys to learn how to write like you.

Saul breaks up laughing.

SAUL

Yale will teach them to be successful playwrights. By networking. Not writing good plays.

ARIEL

Isn't that the same thing?

Yale beaks up laughing again.

ARIEL (cont'd)

I thought this would make you happy.

SAUL

You know what makes me happy? Smelling this air. And looking out across the ocean on a moonlit night like tonight. You can see the white caps almost as far as the eye can see. Little puffs of white in a black expanse.

ARIEL

Yale was just a passing thought.

Ariel gives up. They both silently look out at the ocean.

ARIEL (cont'd)

This is a lovely cruise, daddy. The motion of the ship and the sound of going through the water is so restful. And to think, we'll all be together to celebrate your birthday and Yale's birthday.

SAUL

When?

ARIEL

Our last day at sea. Aug. 29. The date you and Yale were born?

SAUL

Oh, that Aug. 29.

ARIEL

You used to celebrate them together, before mom died.

SAUL

We stopped doing a lot of things after she died.

ARIEL

I want to move back to the city, daddy.

SAUL

You are a bundle of surprises tonight.

ARIEL

You were right about the suburbs. They're awful.

SAUL

It's taken you all this time to find that out?

ARIEL

We thought it was better for the boys, but now even they want to leave.

SAUL

That should make it easier to move. Everyone wanting to do it.

(Responding to her look)

I guess everyone, except...except...

(Can't remember Paul's name)

Your husband.

ARIEL

Paul has no ambition.

SAUL

It took a lot of ambition to endure four years of dental school.

ARIEL

He's perfectly content at being an assistant professor and playing in his garden.

SAUL

Finding pleasure in life's simple things is a gift.

ARIEL

Paul could make four times what he's making now if he quit his job and opened a private practice.

SAUL

It's the rare individual who's happy with what he has.

ARIEL

These high rises in the city are incredible, daddy. The excitement of the city is only an elevator ride away. But these condos are expensive.

She pauses for a positive reaction, but doesn't get one. It's all about the money and Saul is not happy.

ARIEL (cont'd)

They have almost as many square feet as our tiny house, if you don't count the basement, garage, deck, closet space and attic.

She pauses again, sees her father's angry expression and decides to back off.

ARIEL (cont'd)

I guess buying one is a dream that will never come true for me.

SAUL

Those condos are overpriced.

ARIEL

Yeah. Sure.

Ariel goes to the railing and looks out. Saul looks at her sadly. Norma appears unnoticed and is about to enter when she sees Ariel and decides not to intrude. Ariel returns to her seat.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Can I read your play?

SAUL

Which play?

ARIEL

The one you're working on.

SAUL

I never show anyone a play until it's finished. You know that.

ARIEL

I thought you just might break your rule since you're not going...
(Doesn't want to say it)

SAUL

To be around long enough to finish it?

ARIEL

I want to be able to tell you how wonderful your last...how wonderful your play is.

SAUL

And if it's terrible?

ARIEL

I'll still tell you how wonderful it is.

They laugh.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Paul and I aren't getting along.

SAUL

Another surprise.

ARIEL

We want different things. It's like Paul and I are living in different worlds.

SAUL

Your mother and I lived in separate worlds and thought about splitting, but couldn't afford it. So we stayed together. Kept on fighting. After a while we started listening to each other and found new things in each other to love.

ARIEL

Children shouldn't live in a house with tension.

SAUL

Do you fight in front of the boys?

ARIEL

Yes.

SAUL

That's not good. My parents were always fighting. I'd go to bed, praying that one of them would leave so the fighting would stop.

ARIEL

If things got so bad that it was hurting the boys, I'd leave Paul. I mean I would. If I had the money.

SAUL

All roads lead to the money.

ARIEL

What?

SAUL

Do you think the fighting will get that bad?

ARIEL

I'm so scared daddy.

SAUL

You'll be taken care of.

ARIEL

I will?

SAUL

If I have anything to say about it.

ARIEL

That means a lot to me, daddy.

She gives him a kiss.

ARIEL (cont'd)

There's this one condo I saw I think you'll love.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

The rock-climbing wall is now open on the stern sports deck. Skilled climbers are waiting to show you how to complete the most daring ascents. Don't be left alone on the deck. And don't forget to bring your camera.

ARIEL

Did you hear that, daddy? Rock climbing. Do you want to?

SAUL

I'd love to, dear, but I've already signed up for bungee jumping off the bow.

ARIEL

They have bungee jumping?

SAUL

Oh, to be so innocent.

Yale enters. Ariel bristles.

YALE

Good evening.

ARIEL

It was until you got here.

YALE

I wasn't talking to you.

ARIEL

(Starting to leave)

Well, daddy, I'm not going to miss an opportunity like this. Imagine. Rock climbing in the middle of the ocean.

YALE

(Taunting)

I hope you don't fall.

She pointedly ignores him, gives her father a kiss and exits.

SAUL

What was that all about?

YALE

Just a little brother/sister spat.
(Going to the railing)
The stars are incredible.

SAUL

That does seem to be the consensus. I'm glad we have a little time by ourselves to talk.

YALE

About what?

SAUL

I don't know. Existentialism. Kierkegaard said we should live our lives with passion and sincerity despite all the crap life throws at us. That's how I've lived my life.

YALE

I don't like the direction this conversation is going in.

SAUL

It's how I've wanted you to live your life. But it's your life to live and you should live it the way you want. Does it really matter how we while away the time while we're waiting for the bus. It's not important, in the cosmic sense.

YALE

When you get right down to it, does anything matter in the cosmic sense?

SAUL

That's a very good point, son. A little humbling, but right on target.

YALE

Are you happy that you became a playwright?

SAUL

I was very lucky in the life I chose.

YALE

You've been broke most of your life.

SAUL

(Cheerfully)
Almost all of my life.

YALE

The constant rejection never stopped you.

SAUL

Some of my plays made it to the stage.

YALE

The few productions you did get were in small theaters.

SAUL

One theater had only 35 seats. It was such a trip seeing my imagination brought to life in front of all those people.

YALE

All 35 of them.

SAUL

Not even that. I never had a full house. After the reviews, my audiences got smaller and smaller. Only three people in the audience the night the play closed. And I was one of them. I'll never forget that run.

YALE

Why did you keep writing plays? You didn't even make enough to live on.

SAUL

Fortunately your mother had a steady job she loved.

YALE

What did you get out of it?

SAUL

What I got was taking my excitement into a lonely room and turning it into words. The payback for me was in that room, not in the theaters.

Yale nods silently, wishing that he felt that way about his work. Saul sees this.

SAUL (cont'd)

What about you? Where do you find your excitement? In the next big deal?

YALE

Not hardly.

SAUL

Then what do you look forward to when you get up in the morning?

YALE

The weekend.

SAUL

That's an awful lot of your life to lose.

YALE

I'll retire early with a lot of money and then do what I want to do. Paint and not have to worry about paying the rent.

SAUL

Why couldn't I convince you to stay with your painting? Art dealers were wanting to show your work and you were just a kid.

YALE

We've talked about this a thousand times.

SAUL

And it still doesn't make any sense.

YALE

It makes sense to me. This is a very stable ship. I was afraid of getting seasick.

SAUL

Why didn't you listen to me?

YALE

I didn't want to be poor again.

SAUL

We weren't poor.

YALE

Mom spent a lot of time worrying about the bills.

SAUL

We were doing all right.

YALE

We didn't have a lot of the things other people had.

SAUL

We didn't have to look for happiness in the mall. Your mother loved teaching. And I loved writing. That was enough for us.

But all you could see were the things we didn't have. Loving your work is the most important thing. More important than big paychecks. Or power. Or Prestige.

YALE

Dad, I don't want to go over this all over again.

SAUL

You wake up every morning longing for the weekend. I wake up thinking of the play I'm working on and what I should write next. I can't wait to get to the computer.

YALE

It was like that when I was painting.

SAUL

You're only 30 years old. It's not too late to make changes in your life.

YALE

(Angrily)

I'll paint again after I retire.

SAUL

You're wasting your life. Investment bankers are parasites.

YALE

I'm an investment advisor.

SAUL

They're all whores. They're worse than whores. At least whores provide something of value. You're contributing nothing to society.

YALE

You're contributing something to society, writing plays that never get produced?

SAUL

What? Are you saying my plays are worthless?

YALE

I shouldn't have said that.

SAUL

I work my ass off to write good plays.

YALE

You're right, dad. You're absolutely right.

SAUL

I'm trying to make a statement with my plays.

YALE

You never took the easy way out.

SAUL

They want musicals. Comedies. Fluff.

YALE

None of your plays are fluff.

SAUL

And none of my plays are worthless.

YALE

I didn't say they were.

SAUL

That's what it sounded like to me.

YALE

They should have produced more of your work.

SAUL

Now there's something we can agree on.

YALE

You worked so hard on your writing.

SAUL

I did the best I could.

YALE

I know you did, dad. I need a drink.

(Standing)

Can I get you something?

SAUL

Don't go.

YALE

I can see you're busy with your play.

SAUL

We should talk more..

YALE

It's a beautiful night.

Yale exits.

SAUL

(Calling after him)

I'm finished writing for the night. Yale.

He starts to go after him, but he can't move fast enough and gives up. He goes sadly back to his deck chair, opens his computer and stares at it for a while. Finally, he angrily slams down the lid of his computer and starts to cry.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

7

7

SCENE 7

The promenade deck, the next morning. In the dark, a voice on the public address system is heard sounding cadence.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

One, two, three, four
One, two, three, four

Lights come up to reveal Yale and Ariel marching energetically in time with the voice. Norma is sitting in a deck chair, watching with amusement.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

One, two, three, four
One, two, three, four
Relax

They stop, out of breath.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

All right all you happy campers on the promenade deck. Our last exercise and then you all can go back to sleep in your deck chairs. Leg lifts.

They groan.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

Standing on your right leg, lift your left leg up to as close to your chest as you can get it, holding your knee with your hands.

They struggle to do this with varying amounts of success. After a few seconds the voice continues.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

Relax.

(Pause)

Now do the same with your right leg.

They struggle and after a few seconds the voice continues

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

Relax.

(Pause)

Left leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds.)

Right leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds)

The pauses between sets become progressively shorter, forcing them to lift their legs quicker and quicker.

Left leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds.)

Right leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds)

Left leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds.)

Right leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds)

Left leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds.)

Right leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds)

Left leg up.

(Pause of a few seconds.)

They collapse, out of breath, in utter disarray. Saul enters in his disguise, and sits down on a deck chair.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE (cont'd)

Relax. Congratulations on once again completing another session of exercising on the promenade deck. Post-breakfast pastries and other forbidden goodies are available on the lido deck. Don't forget to stretch.

Ariel and Yale go their deck chairs, sitting on either side of Norma. They stare angrily ahead, saying nothing to each other.

NORMA

(Finally, to Yale)

I'm still mad at you.

ARIEL

(To Yale)

I'm mad at you.

YALE

I'm mad at both of you.

ARIEL

You're so greedy.

YALE

I thought we were all agreed.

NORMA

Ariel made a good point about our needs not being equal.

YALE

You want to give her all the money?

ARIEL

That's not what I was proposing, Yale. Besides, I've changed my mind about what we should do. We should let daddy decide.

YALE

I don't like that idea either.

ARIEL

You don't think our daddy will do the right thing?

YALE

You want me to be perfectly frank?

ARIEL

That would be nice, for a change.

Saul's changing expressions show he's being increasingly troubled by what he's hearing.

YALE

Dad and I are not getting along. You know that.

ARIEL

You don't need that money.

YALE

I'm in trouble.

ARIEL

Yeah, sure.

YALE

I borrowed some money at work.

ARIEL

What's wrong with that?

YALE

Investment counselors are not supposed to borrow money from the accounts they're managing.

NORMA

You took the money illegally?

YALE

That's usually one of the charges when an investment advisor borrows money for himself from an account.

NORMA

How much did you take?

YALE

A lot.

NORMA

You'll go to jail.

YALE

I was going to pay it back. But I'm broke.

NORMA

This changes everything, Ariel.

ARIEL

This has nothing to do with us.

NORMA

Our brother could go to jail.

ARIEL

He shouldn't have stolen the money.

YALE

I didn't steal it. I borrowed it.

ARIEL

You can't expect us to pay for your mistakes.

NORMA
Ariel. He's our brother.

YALE
You are a piece of work.

Yale exits.

ARIEL
You believe that story?

NORMA
I've never seen you act like this. Yale's right. You don't give a damn about anyone but yourself.

Saul is deeply upset and doesn't want them to see this. He goes to the railing and looks out.

ARIEL
That's not fair.

NORMA
I saw you huddling with dad last night.

ARIEL
I wasn't huddling with him.

NORMA
Does that have anything to do with your sudden turnabout?

ARIEL
I don't know what you mean.

NORMA
What did you talk about?

ARIEL
A lot of different things.

NORMA
The will?

ARIEL
No.

NORMA

Did the subject of money happen to come up?

ARIEL

All I can say is after our little talk, I was feeling a lot better about the future.

NORMA

He said you'll get the money.

ARIEL

Not in so many words.

NORMA

Just exactly what did he say?

ARIEL

Is that important?

NORMA

Humor me.

ARIEL

He said I didn't have anything to worry about. Not if it was up to him.

NORMA

He said that?

ARIEL

Almost those exact words.

Norma laughs.

ARIEL (cont'd)

What's so funny?

NORMA

That's what he said to me. The exact same words. I'm going to get some of that pastry.

Norma exits. Ariel picks up her magazine and tries to read, but she is too rattled to concentrate. She exits. Stacey enters and goes to Saul at the railing.

STACEY

It's mesmerizing. Isn't it?

Saul doesn't respond.

STACEY (cont'd)

The ocean.

SAUL

All they're doing now is fighting with each other.

STACEY

About what?

SAUL

The money.

STACEY

Why am I not surprised?

SAUL

It's terrible what they're saying to each other. They've never fought like this with each other.

STACEY

They've never had a million dollars to fight about. I was afraid this would happen when you decided to let them write your will.

SAUL

You never said a thing.

STACEY

Would it have made any difference?

SAUL

No. I can't believe it's come to this. Money isn't that important. It's your work that matters. Squabbling over money destroys families. Don't squander your life chasing after it. That's what I taught them.

STACEY

What did you think would happen when you dangled all this money in front of them?

SAUL

They were the three musketeers. Ever since they were kids. One for all and all for one. That was their motto. People couldn't believe brothers and sisters could be so close. Writing the will wasn't going to be a problem. They'd sort out who needed what and be done with it.

STACEY

A million dollars is a lot of money.

SAUL

Money is not the meaning of life.

STACEY

To love and be loved. That's the meaning of life.

SAUL

They don't know what it's like to lose that.

STACEY

Give them time. They'll sort everything out. It's getting chilly. We should go inside.

SAUL

You go.

STACEY

I don't want to leave you like this.

SAUL

I need to be by myself.

STACEY

I'll be in the cabin.

Stacey exits. Saul continues looking out to sea, very troubled. He doesn't know what to do.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

SCENE 8

That evening, the promenade deck. Yale is sitting in a deck chair. Norma enters, wearing a toga.

YALE

What the hell is that?

NORMA

Everyone is suppose to dress up in a toga. It's Roman night tonight.

YALE

Where do you get a toga in the middle of the ocean?

NORMA

The steward should have left one in your cabin.

YALE

Is that what that sheet was for?

NORMA

Yes, Yale, that's what that sheet was for.

YALE

It doesn't look right.

NORMA

I followed the directions exactly.

YALE

It could be a lot more sexy. Here, let me show you?

Yale gets up and tries to adjust the toga, which falls off of Norma. She is wearing a bathing suit.

YALE (cont'd)

Romans didn't wear bathing suits under their togas.

NORMA

You did that on purpose.

She gathers up the toga and arranges it on her body.
Ariel enters, wearing a toga.

YALE

What kind of a brother do you think I am? A dirty old man?

NORMA

A dirty young man, I'm beginning to think.

ARIEL

Took me a half hour to figure out how to wear this damn thing.

YALE

(Ignoring Ariel, to Norma)

You look very fetching as a Roman senator. Even if your toga is off center.

NORMA

It's not off-center, Yale. Where's your toga?

YALE

I'm not into that sort of thing.

ARIEL

Some of us are secure enough to wear costumes.

YALE

Dad probably got an outfit from a costume shop in New York. He'll be the toast of the Roman gala.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Would Mr. Saul Seplow of Cabin Fifteen-Thirty-Two please call the purser's office.

ARIEL

Did she say Seplow?

NORMA

It was a little garbled, but it did sound like Seplow.

ARIEL

Why would they be paging daddy?

NORMA

I don't know.

ARIEL

Maybe it's a phone call from New York. Another Broadway producer.

NORMA

They wouldn't page him. They'd just put the call through to the cabin.

Stacey comes rushing in.

STACEY

Have you seen your dad?

NORMA

We think they were just paging him.

STACEY

I asked them to do that. I can't find him anywhere.

NORMA

Isn't he getting ready for dinner?

STACEY

I've been looking all over the ship for him.

ARIEL

He's probably in his cabin napping.

YALE

Or trying to figure out how to put on his toga.

STACEY

His cabin is empty.

NORMA

Did you check the library?

STACEY

Yes.

ARIEL

The gym?

STACEY

He never goes to the gym.

Stacey goes to a phone and dials.

STACEY (cont'd)

(On phone)

Hello. Has Mr. Seplow answered the page? ... Please make the announcement again.
Thank you.

Stacey hangs up.

STACEY (cont'd)

I'm worried.

Norma leans on the gate and it swings open. She grabs the handrail to keep from falling. They look at the open gate with shock, simultaneously realizing what might have happened.

ARIEL

Oh my God.

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Would Mr. Saul Seplow of Cabin Fifteen-Thirty-Two please call the purser's office.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

CURTAIN ACT I

SCENE 9

A short while later, the purser's office. The purser is seated at a desk and Ariel, Norma and Yale are seated across from him.

PURSER

We're midway. Only four more days until we dock in Italy. Are you enjoying the cruise?

YALE

We wouldn't be here if we were enjoying the cruise.

PURSER

Yes, of course. You spoke of an urgent matter.

NORMA

Our dad is missing.

PURSER

Missing?

ARIEL

We can't find him.

PURSER

There are many places he could be. The Ocean Spirit is a fifth of a mile long, thirty-five hundred passengers, 17 decks, 12 bars, 9 restaurants, 22 elevators, a two-block-long mall and....

YALE

We've read the ship's brochure.

NORMA

He was looking forward to the Captain's Dinner. He would have come back from wherever he'd gone to get ready for the dinner.

PURSER

Missing passengers always turn up. We haven't lost one yet.

He chuckles to ease the tension. It doesn't.

NORMA

This happens a lot, losing passengers?

PURSER

The Ocean Spirit doesn't lose passengers. And your dad hasn't been lost. On almost every trip some passenger will come to me, saying they've lost a father or mother or a child. Usually it's an older person, who no longer can think clearly. How old is your dad?

NORMA

Seventy-six.

PURSER

That is getting on a bit. As we age, often we become confused.

YALE

Dad's mind is clear as a bell.

PURSER

The elderly father of one of our passengers disappeared for three days.

NORMA

Three days!

PURSER

He was a lovely gentleman, but age had clouded his mind and he kept getting lost on the ship. Then one day his daughter came to me and said she had been looking for him all day and couldn't find him. We searched the ship for three days and eventually found him.

NORMA

I am very worried about the gate.

PURSER

The gate?

NORMA

In the railing. On the promenade deck. Where we hang out.

PURSER

What about this gate?

NORMA

It was open.

PURSER

That's not possible. Those gates are always secured.

NORMA

I leaned on it. And the gate swung open. I could have fallen overboard. The gate is right in front of the deck chairs we always used.

PURSER

When we're at sea, there is no reason for any of those gates to be open.

YALE

We're telling you what we saw. The gate was open.

ARIEL

A horrible thing could have happened.

PURSER

Are you suggesting that, God forbid, your father fell overboard?

YALE

He often stood at that railing.

PURSER

It's far more likely that he is wandering about this ship, not quite sure where he is. He is 76 years old.

YALE

He is not senile, God damnit.

ARIEL

We're worried. We're scared.

NORMA

Mr. Smiley, isn't there anything you can do to help us?

PURSER

Of course there is. First I will check with the engineering department to make sure that no work involving the gate was done today. So we can at least rule out that frightening thought. And we'll distribute your father's photograph to our entire staff.

NORMA

I don't think we have any photographs of him.

PURSER

You forgot that all the passengers were photographed when they got their boarding passes. I know how difficult this is for all of you. But we will find your father. And when we do, we'll all have a good laugh.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

10

10

SCENE 10

The next day, the promenade deck. Ariel and Norma are standing at the railing. Yale is leaning over, looking down at the water.

YALE

It's a clear drop from here to the ocean. No obstructions. The flow of water around the hull probably swept him back into the propellers.

NORMA

Jesus Christ, Yale.

YALE

I hope he was knocked out by the fall. It's a 10-story drop.

NORMA

We killed him.

YALE

What?

NORMA

By not being there for him. That's why he took his life.

YALE

That's crazy, Norma. It was the disease. The dialysis. He couldn't work any more. He was exhausted all the time. He had no energy.

NORMA

He didn't look that tired on this ship.

YALE

You don't need a lot of energy to lie in a deck chair all the time.

NORMA

After mom died, he was so lonely.

ARIEL

Every year I invited him to Christmas.

NORMA

I only saw him once or twice a year. If that.

YALE

Then why didn't you see him more, if it bothers you that much?

NORMA

I live in California, Yale. You never saw him. And you lived in the same city.

YALE

He was always locked up in that tiny apartment of his, working on his computer.

NORMA

You could have dropped by.

YALE

We don't need any guilt trips, Norma. His jumping off the ship had nothing to do with us.

ARIEL

He didn't jump off the ship. He had it all planned. He was going to finish his play, stop dialysis and die peacefully. Just drift off to sleep.

YALE

It was a snap decision. He was sitting here, dreading the next couple of months. He looks at the gate. Walks over to it. The latches are easy to disengage. Why wait? he says to himself. When all I have to do is open this gate and jump.

ARIEL

No, Yale. No. The thought of him dying like that.

Ariel bursts into tears.

YALE

It's hard enough not to feel guilty about something. I had a stupid fight with him, just before he disappeared.

NORMA

You had a fight with him? Why?

He thought I said his plays are worthless.

NORMA (cont'd)

You said that?

YALE

He misunderstood me.

NORMA

Are you out of your mind?

ARIEL

How could you?

YALE

He was on my ass again and I lost it.

ARIEL

That's no excuse.

YALE

Now that he's gone, all that fighting seems so stupid.

NORMA

What's going to happen with the will now?

ARIEL

I don't care.

YALE

The courts probably have some sort of formula if no will has been written.

ARIEL

This time yesterday, all we could talk about was that goddamn money.

She leans over the railing, looks to the stern where the propellers are and shudders.

ARIEL (cont'd)

Maybe they'll find him.

NORMA

He's been gone an awfully long time, Ariel.

ARIEL

That one man was missing for three days. And they found him.

YALE

(Seeing how distressed Ariel is)

You're right, Ariel. All we really know is that dad has been missing for a long while and that gate wasn't shut. Connecting those two facts is a huge leap.

NORMA

We're jumping to conclusions.

Stacey enters. She is close to tears.

YALE

They find anything?

STACEY

Nothing. It doesn't look good.

YALE

Was he depressed the last time you saw him?

STACEY

Why do you ask me that?

YALE

He might have done something impulsively.

STACEY

No. His writing was going well. He thought he might finish his play before we reached Italy.

ARIEL

I don't like hanging around here. Not if daddy, you know.

YALE

Let's get out of here.

Stacey sits down in a deck chair and starts crying.
Saul, still disguised, appears. He looks like he has spent the night sleeping in his clothes and seems to be completely at ease and mindless of what his disappearance had wrought.

SAUL

Beautiful night.

Stacey looks at him, so shocked she is wordless.

SAUL (cont'd)

Every night has been beautiful.

STACEY

Saul.

SAUL

(Sitting down next to Stacey)

So how are you tonight, my dear?

STACEY

Where the hell have you been?

SAUL

Working on my play. Cruise ships are wonderful places for creative thought.

STACEY

Damnit, Saul. We've looked all over the ship for you.

SAUL

Lifeboats are wonderful places to work.

STACEY

You've been hiding in a lifeboat?

SAUL

Not hiding. Writing. The emergency rations could be better and the water is a bit stale, but you can't beat the silence.

STACEY

We've been worried sick.

SAUL

Because I was gone for a couple of hours?

STACEY

You've been missing for two days.

SAUL

Oh, come on now.

STACEY

Two days, Saul. You've been wandering a lot these days, but never for this long.

SAUL

Boy does time pass fast when the writing is going well.

STACEY

Fifteen hundred sailors are looking for you. The kids think you're dead. I'm a wreck. What'll we tell the kids?

SAUL

I was working on my play and lost track of time. Tell them the truth.

STACEY

They're not going to believe the truth. And to tell you the truth, I'm having trouble believing it myself.

SAUL

The truth is the truth and there's nothing you can do about it.

STACEY

There's a lot you can do about it.

SAUL

What?

STACEY

Lie.

SAUL

Why lie?

STACEY

Because they'll think this was one of your practical jokes. And you'll die with them hating you for doing this. Only a sociopath would go missing like you did, scaring the hell out of everyone. Do you want them to think you're a sociopath? It's your choice.

SAUL

I can't lie to my own children.

STACEY

OK, be honest with them. Tell them you're senile.

SAUL

I'm not senile.

STACEY

There's nothing wrong with being senile.

SAUL

You'd have to be senile to believe that.

STACEY

If you have a better truth, what is it?

Saul thinks about it for a while.

SAUL

Well, we could tell them that... No we couldn't tell them that. What if we said...

(Laughing at the thought)

They'd think that was a joke. I could hint that...OK. We tell them I'm a little bit senile.

STACEY

Well, at least they can pretend to believe that.

SAUL

But my mind is fine.

STACEY

You look like hell.

SAUL

I feel like shit.

STACEY

Damn right you feel like shit. You haven't been dialyzed for two days. Come on, before you drop dead on me.

SAUL

I've almost finished the last scene.

STACEY

You really were working on your play in a lifeboat all this time?

SAUL

Would I lie about a thing like that?

They exit.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

11

11

SCENE 11

Promenade deck, one day later. Ariel, Norma and Yale are talking with Stacey.

ARIEL
Daddy's come back?

NORMA
Is he OK?

STACEY
He's fine.

ARIEL
Where did you find him?

STACEY
I didn't find him. He just appeared. He'd been working hard on his play.

ARIEL
For two days? Without telling anyone?

STACEY
That's what he said.

ARIEL
Where?

STACEY
In a lifeboat.

ARIEL
In a lifeboat?

NORMA
That's hard to believe, Stacey.

YALE
What really happened? You don't just climb into a lifeboat and hang out there for two days.

Stacey is reluctant to reply.

YALE (cont'd)

We have a right to know.

STACEY

Your father... I'm afraid he's become just a little bit senile.

NORMA

He seemed perfectly normal before he disappeared.

STACEY

It came on all of a sudden.

Saul enters without the disguise. He wanders past them.

ARIEL

Daddy!

NORMA

Dad, it's you.

Saul stops. Looks at them. And continues wandering off.

NORMA (cont'd)

Dad.

She goes to him.

SAUL

Norma.

(Sees the others)

Ariel. Yale.

NORMA

He recognizes us.

STACEY

I think your father is about to become coherent again.

YALE

The senility comes and goes just like that?

STACEY
Surprising, isn't it?

SAUL
I feel better now.

ARIEL
You're not senile anymore?

SAUL
Not now.

ARIEL
But you were before?

SAUL
How else can I explain my mysterious...(he can't think of the word)

STACEY
Disappearance.

NORMA
We thought you'd fallen over board.

SAUL
Why?

NORMA
You wanted us to think that.

SAUL
Only a sociopath would do something like that.

NORMA
Then why did you unlatch this gate?

SAUL
I didn't unlatch the gate.

NORMA
Someone unlatched it.

YALE
Oh shit.

SAUL

I forgot that it was even there.

YALE

It might have been me.

They all turn to him with stern or surprised expressions.

YALE (cont'd)

(Sheepishly)

I thought the latches had been painted shut. That didn't seem like a good idea for something needed for emergencies. So I checked it out and pulled on the latches. They worked fine. I thought I had reengaged them.

The purser enters. He's surprised to see Saul.

PURSER

What have we here? Mr. Seplow?

STACEY

Hello, Mr. Smiley.

PURSER

This is Mr. Seplow, isn't it?

SAUL

Call me Saul.

STACEY

We were just about to go down to your office to tell you that he's come back.

(To Saul)

This is the nice purser who has the crew looking for you.

SAUL

Nice to meet you. Thank you for all you've done.

PURSER

So, you've come back.

STACEY

He didn't know where he was. The Alzheimer's.

YALE

(Whispering to his sisters)

Now he has Alzheimer's?

PURSER

He doesn't look that out of it to me.

SAUL

Oops.

STACEY

He has intermittent Alzheimer's.

PURSER

I've never heard of such a thing.

STACEY

It affects only very creative people, like playwrights. Their creative brains overwhelm the Alzheimer's. But when they run out of ideas, the disease comes back. Until they start thinking creatively again. Then they're back with us for a while. That's why great art takes so long.

Impressed with the creativity, Saul gives Stacey a thumbs up.

PURSER

(To Saul)

We looked for you all over the ship. Where were you?

SAUL

Very nice.

PURSER

What?

SAUL

I like your airplane.

STACEY

Oh, dear, it's come back again.

PURSER

This is a cruise ship.

SAUL

Lots of leg room.

PURSER

He's obviously not competent.

STACEY

His remissions usually last a lot longer.

SAUL

When can we unfasten our seat belts?

PURSER

The disease is not as intermittent as you think it is.

SAUL

Is it all right to turn on our electronic gadgets?

PURSER

This isn't an airplane.

SAUL

Are you serving pretzels on this flight?

PURSER

He cannot be left alone.

STACEY

We can't watch him all the time.

PURSER

We'll assign someone from our children's program to watch over him.

STACEY

My husband doesn't need a baby sitter. This time tomorrow he'll be totally coherent.

PURSER

He will not be left alone, not on my ship.

The purser exits.

STACEY

Why the hell did you do that?

SAUL

I couldn't help myself. He's a control freak. Obviously a Republican.

STACEY

He's an Italian citizen.

SAUL

I don't mean Republican in the political sense. So I like taunting authority figures. Is that a crime?

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

The art auction will begin in ten minutes in the art gallery, Deck 5, Genoa. Many original oil paintings are available. Shipping, certificates of authenticity, insurance and new frames are all free. Don't miss the free champagne.

SAUL

Let's get some of that free champagne.

STACEY

You're not supposed to drink.

SAUL

What'll it do? Kill me before I can commit suicide? I'm sick and tired of club soda.

Saul and Stacey exit.

YALE

Intermittent Alzheimer's? Don't make me laugh.

ARIEL

Disappearing like he does qualify as Alzheimer's.

YALE

Alzheimer's doesn't come and go like that. He wanders in, acts like we're not there and then suddenly is totally coherent again?

NORMA

He does get lost in his work.

YALE

Do you really think he was writing his play in a lifeboat, munching on survival rations? For two whole days?

ARIEL

It does seem far-fetched, Norma.

NORMA

He wouldn't frighten us like that on purpose.

YALE

This was his grandest and most impressive practical joke yet. The son of a gun wants to go out with a bang.

NORMA

Stacey says he's very sick.

ARIEL

It was a remarkably fast recovery.

YALE

That's why he invited us on this cruise. He wanted to have the last laugh.

ARIEL

I don't think it was very funny.

YALE

Metaphorically speaking.

ARIEL

Daddy wouldn't do something like that.

Norma and Yale look at her shocked that she'd think that.

ARIEL (cont'd)

OK, maybe he would.

YALE

Do you two want to let him have the last laugh?

NORMA

Let him have the last laugh. If that's what he's doing.

YALE

That would be disrespectful.

NORMA

Damnit, Yale, he's dying.

YALE

So you want us to role over and play dead?

NORMA

It's a terrible burden you carry, Yale.

YALE
What?

NORMA
Testosterone.

YALE
I'm not planning to do anything bad.

NORMA
What are you planning?

YALE
I thought it would be only fair to show dad what it feels like when you think someone you love has died a horrible death.

NORMA
Oh God.

He starts to leave.

ARIEL
Where are you going?

YALE
Off to make preparations.

ARIEL
For what?

YALE
The ultimate practical joke.

He exits.

NORMA
Did you see the expression on his face? The last time he looked like that was when we were in Sardi's, waiting for daddy to show up.

ARIEL
What a wonderful joke that was.

NORMA
I thought it was awful.

ARIEL

Daddy was laughing right along with us. After he got over the disappointment that his play wasn't going to be really produced.

NORMA

Dad is senile. That's why he went missing. Stacey said as much.

ARIEL

Maybe daddy is fooling her, too.

NORMA

He wouldn't do that to Stacey.

ARIEL

You have to admit, if his disappearance was a practical joke, he's finally topped the Sardi's gag.

NORMA

Then we should let him have the last laugh. He won't be with us for much longer.

ARIEL

What if daddy wants Yale to pull his gag so he can beat him again with a joke he's holding in reserve?

NORMA

That's a bit of a stretch, Ariel.

ARIEL

Why'd he reappear now, two days before the end of the cruise? He wouldn't give Yale all that time to get back at him. Unless he was setting Yale up.

NORMA

That's true.

ARIEL

I'm betting Yale's joke won't be the last one before we dock.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

12

12

SCENE 12

The promenade deck, the next night. Saul and Stacey are talking.

STACEY

I haven't seen Yale all day.

SAUL

I was surprised that he missed dinner.

STACEY

He's sulking.

SAUL

I go missing. And now he's disappeared? He's up to something.

(Looking over at the sailor)

Why's that sailor standing there?

STACEY

As the rabbi said, why shouldn't the sailor be standing there?

SAUL

The sailors on this ship are always working. He's not doing a thing. But looking at us.

STACEY

Maybe he's resting from all that work.

SAUL

He's keeping an eye on me. They damn well better not charge us for this baby sitting.

STACEY

Enough cloak and dagger, Saul. Can't we just enjoy the cruise?

PUBLIC ADDRESS VOICE

Would Mr. Yale Seplow kindly call the reception desk?

He stops. Listens.

SAUL

Did he say Yale Seplow?

STACEY

I think he did.

SAUL

Why would the reception desk want to talk to him?

Norma rushes onto the deck.

NORMA

We've been looking all over the ship for Yale.

SAUL

They were just paging him.

NORMA

Ariel's paging him.

SAUL

Is something wrong?

NORMA

We had a lot of things scheduled to do together. But we haven't seen him all day.

SAUL

Maybe he's a little seasick.

NORMA

The ocean couldn't be calmer.

SAUL

Did you check his cabin?

NORMA

Of course.

SAUL

The library? The casino?

NORMA

We've checked everywhere.

Ariel enters.

ARIEL

Our brother is dead.

SAUL

What?

ARIEL

He fell overboard.

(Going to the gate)

Look.

She swings it open.

SAUL

(Feigned alarm)

Oh, my God. Could it be that he's gone to a watery death?

ARIEL

We can't find him. Anywhere.

SAUL

Have you checked the lifeboats?

ARIEL

This isn't a joke, daddy. Our brother is missing.

NORMA

Maybe we should check the lifeboats, just to be sure.

SAUL

There in might lie a shred of hope.

NORMA

As slim as that might be.

SAUL

Go, seek him out.

They rush off. Saul breaks up laughing.

STACEY

I don't like that gleam in your eye. What are you about to do, Saul?

SAUL

You heard them. Their brother is missing. We need help. From the purser.

STACEY

But you don't think he's really missing.

SAUL

When 1,500 sailors start looking for Yale, they'll think their little joke has gone too far.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

13

13

SCENE 13

The purser's office, a little while later. Stacey and Saul are talking to the purser.

SAUL

My only son is missing and you're making jokes?

PURSER

Is this something that runs in the family?

SAUL

Remarkable coincidences happen.

PURSER

What's remarkable is your rapid recovery. The ship's doctor has never heard of intermittent Alzheimer's.

SAUL

If your doctor was competent, he wouldn't be working on this ... (he can't find the word) ocean-going vessel.

PURSER

Are you two having fun with this?

SAUL

There's no fun in losing your only son on an obscenely large cruise ship. We've been looking for him all day.

PURSER

I'm sure he'll turn up.

SAUL

Why are you so sure?

PURSER

You turned up.

SAUL

We didn't come here to squabble with you. We came here because we need help. He might have fallen overboard.

PURSER

No doubt through the gate you were supposed to have fallen through.

SAUL

That damn gate is never latched shut.

PURSER

If he fell overboard, he's gone. If he didn't fall overboard, he will show up. In either case, there's nothing to do.

SAUL

You refuse to take this seriously.

PURSER

I'm finding that very difficult to do.

SAUL

We can talk about that in court, if you want.

PURSER

I am not going to be taken for a fool.

SAUL

I'm calling my ... (looking for the word)

STACEY

Lawyer.

SAUL

Yes, my lawyer.

PURSER

I will alert the crew.

SAUL

And tell us what you find?

PURSER

If we find him, we'll contact you.

SAUL

You won't contact us if you don't find him?

PURSER

I don't think that will be necessary. You must excuse me. I am needed elsewhere.

The purser stands to leave. Saul is trying hard to keep from laughing. They exit.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

14

14

SCENE 14

The promenade deck, the next morning. Saul is seated in his deck chair, eagerly working on his computer. Stacey enters with a present.

STACEY

Happy birthday.

SAUL

What's this?

STACEY

Your birthday, of course.

SAUL

Today is my birthday?

STACEY

You didn't know?

SAUL

Celebrating the aging process never made any sense to me.

STACEY

Today you are 77.

SAUL

I prefer to think of it as the 37th anniversary of my 40th birthday.

Ariel enters, jogs past them and exits.

NORMA (O.S.)

Hey, Norma, not so fast. I can't keep up.

Ariel jogs back into the scene and jogs in place, as Norma enters from the other side with her walker.

NORMA (cont'd)

I'm doing the best I can with this goddamn thing.

The bearded sailor enters and goes to the rail.

ARIEL

You're not bad for a gimp.

NORMA

You're not bad for a little sister.

Laughing, they exit.

SAUL

They should be sad or worried, not laughing and running around the ship like nothing's happened. They're not playing their roles very well. What they need is a good director. There's that sailor again.

STACEY

He's beginning to freak me out.

Saul leans over to whisper to Stacey. The sailor moves closer to overhear.

SAUL

(Stopping mid-sentence, Saul angrily addresses the sailor)

Would you please give us a little privacy?

The sailor moves back to the railing.

SAUL (cont'd)

(Whispering to Stacey)

If I was their director, I'd tell them to be close to tears. I'd even have the playwright give them some lines to make it appear more likely that their brother died.

STACEY

All the world's a stage and all the men and women merely playwrights.

SAUL

For Yale's practical joke to work, they have to make me grieve over the loss of my son.

STACEY

You are one cocky father.

Ariel and Norma enter. Ariel is jogging in place.

ARIEL

How are you doing, daddy?

SAUL

I'm doing fine, but I'm not the one who's jogging.

ARIEL

I'm very worried.

SAUL

You don't look worried.

ARIEL

I'm trying not to think about it.

SAUL

The purser thinks it's a hoax.

Ariel stops jogging in place.

ARIEL

You went to the purser?

SAUL

Of course I did.

ARIEL

You shouldn't have done that.

Saul looks knowingly, with a smile, at Stacey.

SAUL

Why?

ARIEL

Because...because...

NORMA

Yale hasn't been gone that long.

(To Ariel)

This is getting out of hand.

SAUL

Why did you say that?

ARIEL

She means Yale's disappearance is scaring a lot of people.

SAUL

You didn't find him in any of the lifeboats?

ARIEL

We would have told you.

SAUL

Of course you would. It is looking worse and worse. But how could he fall overboard on a ship like this. Even with that damn gate.

ARIEL

Yale was doing a lot of stupid things. I saw him walking on this railing.

SAUL

Ah, the missing lines.

ARIEL

What?

SAUL

Nothing dear.

ARIEL

You saw him doing that. Didn't you, Norma?

NORMA

That's a dangerous thing to do.

Saul can see that Norma is reluctant to join Ariel in this lie.

SAUL

Did you see it, Norma?

NORMA

Not exactly.

ARIEL

But you did see him swinging out on this gate, Norma.

NORMA

That's even more dangerous.

SAUL

I guess you missed that, too.

ARIEL

And climbing around the partition between terraces.

NORMA

Yale has no sense of danger.

ARIEL

You have to prepare yourself, daddy.

SAUL

It's so ironic.

ARIEL

Why is it ironic?

SAUL

I was going to leave all the money to him.

ARIEL

You were?

SAUL

He had serious money problems.

ARIEL

You weren't going to leave us anything?

SAUL

I knew you girls could take care of yourselves. But not poor Yale. He needs help.

ARIEL

He's a rich investment banker. What will you do, daddy, if he comes back. I mean, he could still turn up. Like you did.

NORMA

Then the three of you will decide what to do with the money.. Unless you can't reach a unanimous agreement.

ARIEL

We'll reach a unanimous decision.

SAUL

But first he must come back.

ARIEL

He'll come back.

SAUL

How can you be so sure?

ARIEL

I mean, I hope he'll come back.

SAUL

It's good to see that you two can still enjoy yourself in the face of a possible tragedy.
Don't let me stop you.

ARIEL

We're grieving inside.

SAUL

Go. Go. Go. You're cooling down and that's not good.

ARIEL

But...

SAUL

Go.

They exit.

SAUL (cont'd)

Walking on the railing. Swinging on the gate. Come on.

The sailor draws near. Saul looks at him sternly.
The sailor backs off. He keeps staring at the sailor.

STACEY

What's the matter.

SAUL

Did you notice that guy's ears?

STACEY

What about them?

SAUL

They stick out. Just like Yale's.

STACEY

His eyes are very blue. Just like Yale's.

SAUL

He's the same height as Yale.

STACEY

And the same weight.

SAUL

And the same body language.

SAUL AND STACEY

It's Yale.

STACEY

Why's he spying on us? What's he up to?

SAUL

I think it's time for our Kosher friend to reappear.

He stands.

STACEY

What?

SAUL

Come.

They exit, followed at a distance, by the sailor.
Norma enters with her walker, exhausted, followed
by Ariel.

ARIEL

Come on Norma. I'm just getting started.

NORMA

Can't you see I'm a cripple, for Christ sake.

ARIEL

You're not a cripple. You're physically challenged.

They collapse in the deck chairs.

ARIEL (cont'd)

They left.

NORMA

Probably time for dad's dialysis.

ARIEL

I can't believe he was going to leave all the money to Yale.

NORMA

You overdid it with all that stuff about walking on the railing. Swinging on the gate.

ARIEL

So I got carried away a little bit. Yale looks very funny dressed up like a sailor.

NORMA

The beard is hilarious.

ARIEL

Where'd he get the disguise?

NORMA

He paid off a sailor to get the uniform and got the make-up from the show people.

Yale enters and sits down with them.

YALE

They went to their cabin. What were they saying? I couldn't hear.

ARIEL

He said he was going to leave all the money to you.

YALE

You're joking.

ARIEL

We'd be left out in the cold.

YALE

Dad said he was leaving all the money to me?

ARIEL

If we don't reach a unanimous decision.

YALE

You wanted to leave it up to him.

NORMA

He doesn't believe you're really missing.

ARIEL

Why do you think that? He seemed devastated.

NORMA

He's acting. Thank God he's a playwright and not on the stage. Your practical joke isn't working, Yale.

YALE

He'll begin to believe if I don't show up tonight for our last dinner.

NORMA

How long are you going to keep this up?

YALE

I'll reappear after dinner when you're all up here.

ARIEL

You're just going to reappear like that?

YALE

We have to choreograph this. Dad will propose coming up here for a final after-dinner drink. You and Norma will make an excuse that you have to do something and will catch up with him.

ARIEL

Why will we do that?

YALE

So you can get the birthday cake I will have made for him. I'll be up here in my disguise when he and Stacey get up here. He'll be worried because it doesn't make sense that I'd keep a practical joke going for this long. He'll look at the gate and think that maybe I did fall overboard. He might even cry a little bit.

ARIEL

You really think daddy will cry?

NORMA

He's not going to cry. There're a hell of a lot ifs in this scenario of yours.

YALE

There's a lot of emotion welled up in that guy. He just has trouble letting it out. So we help him.

NORMA

You are a son of a bitch, Yale.

YALE

Look what he did to us, hiding out in a lifeboat for two days.

Saul enters in his disguise with a bunch of holy books, sits down in a nearby deck chair and starts rocking and reading.

NORMA

I was talking to Stacey. Dad has Alzheimer's.

YALE

Did she say something?

NORMA

I asked her straight out it and she changed the subject.

ARIEL

Daddy's reaching out to us. In his own crazy way.

NORMA

I've never felt so close to him as I did the other night when we were talking about death of all things. He knew just how I was feeling. I've never been able to talk to anyone about it the way I did with dad.

YALE

I was feeling pretty close to him myself, just before that damn fight. I was going to tell him that he was right. The financial world wasn't for me. I was even thinking of quitting.

NORMA

What would you do?

YALE

Maybe try a little painting.

Saul stops rocking, shocked to hear this. Ariel and Norma look at him. He hurriedly resumes rocking.

ARIEL

That would have been such a gift. If you'd told him that.

Standing at the railing, they look sadly out at the ocean.

YALE

(Finally)
The sea is calm.

NORMA

It's so peaceful.

ARIEL

The sun is setting. Daddy used to love watching sunsets.

NORMA

I loved watching them with him.

Saul is close to tears.

YALE

He never said anything. He'd just look up from his laptop and watch. You had the sense the sun was saying something to him and he was listening. I never realized how much he loved life and what he was doing.

NORMA

I felt very close to him at those times.

ARIEL

The sun's dropping below the horizon.

They stop talking and stare at this awesome display.

YALE

Poof. It's gone. When that happens, you think it should be instantly night. Like flipping off a light switch. But it stays light for a long time.

NORMA

I need a drink.

ARIEL

I'll join you.

YALE

Me, too.

They exit. Saul is crying.

LIGHTS FADE TO BLACK

15

15

SCENE 15

The promenade deck, that night. Stacey enters with a bottle of champagne which she hides under the deck chair. Saul enters, in disguise.

SAUL

Where are the girls?

STACEY

They said they had to finish packing.

SAUL

We can't do this without the girls.

STACEY

It could be a while.

SAUL

We have to wait.

Saul sits down in a deck chair a few yards away from Stacey. He looks at the Bible with a sigh. Yale, disguised as the sailor, walks by, looks at them and exits.

SAUL (cont'd)

Shit.

STACEY

He'll be back.

SAUL

He's suspicious.

STACEY

He's not.

SAUL

We won't see him again until tomorrow when we dock. Don't you think it's strange the girls aren't here, on our last night.

NORMA

They had to pack.

SAUL

Maybe they're part of Yale's gag and that's why they're not here. He wants me to wait. We've got to move.

STACEY

Here he comes.

SAUL

Remember, pop the champagne when I say happy birthday, Yale.

Yale enters and goes to the railing. Saul gets up and hobbles over to the railing with his cane, stopping a few yards from Yale. For several seconds they stand silently, sneaking glances at each other.

SAUL (cont'd)

(Finally)

The stars are incredible.

Yale doesn't respond.

SAUL (cont'd)

So I've been told.

Yale doesn't respond.

SAUL (cont'd)

Every night on this ship has been beautiful.

No response from Yale.

SAUL (cont'd)

You speak English?

No response.

SAUL (cont'd)

Don't you?

No response.

SAUL (cont'd)

Of course you do.

(Ripping off his disguise)

Happy birthday, Yale.

Stacey stands, popping the bottle of champagne.

Yale loses it but quickly recovers.

YALE

(Ripping off his disguise)

Happy birthday, dad.

Norma and Ariel burst onto the stage, yelling happy birthday and blowing noise makers. Ariel carries a birthday cake. Saul drops his cane on the deck, takes the bottle from Stacey and starts pouring champagne.

SAUL

You didn't think I'd forget your birthday, did you?

YALE

You knew it was me?

SAUL

Playwrights always know what the actors are doing.

NORMA

I'll be damned. The Jew is dad.

ARIEL

He overheard everything we said.

They gather around the cake, taking slices and pouring champagne.

NORMA

You've outdid yourself, dad.

ARIEL

You beat Yale.

YALE

I'd call it a tie.

NORMA

Ariel has something she wants to tell everyone.

ARIEL

I'm very ashamed. And I'm asking you to forgive me.

SAUL

Forgive you for what?

ARIEL

I wanted the money so much I misled everyone. About Paul.

YALE

He doesn't get drunk and beat you in front of the boys?

ARIEL

He's been drinking more than he should. But don't we all at this age?

YALE

He doesn't beat you?

ARIEL

No.

YALE

Everything you said was a lie?

ARIEL

I didn't lie. Exactly. I said liquor makes men aggressive and sometime violent. I was speaking generally. I didn't say that the liquor was making Paul violent.

YALE

You said the boys watched him beating you?

ARIEL

I said the boys hate it when we fight. Verbally. You assumed I meant they hate to see Paul hitting me.

YALE

That comes about as close to lying as you can get.

ARIEL

Paul and I are having some problems. But we're working them out with the help of a therapist.

YALE

I also have a confession, dad.

SAUL

Suddenly I'm a priest?

(Assuming the pose of a priest in the confessional)

Tell me, my son.

YALE

I didn't embezzle the money. I borrowed it. From the company's credit union.

NORMA

Legally?

YALE

Completely.

ARIEL

You said you took the money from one of the accounts you manage.

NORMA

That you could go to jail.

YALE

I misled you just like Ariel did. I said investment counselors could go to jail if they borrowed money from the accounts they manage. I wasn't referring to me.

NORMA

Why did you mislead us like that?

YALE

I wanted to trump Ariel. I didn't believe her story for a minute. Now I have a question for dad. Was your disappearance a practical joke?

SAUL

I lost track of time.

YALE

For two days? That doesn't make sense.

STACEY

I think you should leave it there, Yale.

ARIEL

You don't have a million dollars?

SAUL

Actually I have more than that.

NORMA

You're not stopping dialysis?

SAUL

I've finished my play and will stop dialysis as soon as I return to New York. There was no practical joke. Until you pulled your stunt.

YALE

Then why did you invite us on this cruise?

STACEY

Your father wanted to be with his family.

ARIEL

Why'd you dress up in that ridiculous disguise?

NORMA

Yes, dad, tell us why.

SAUL

It's not important. Not now.

NORMA

But...

STACEY

I think we should leave it at that. Better for everyone.

SAUL

I want to make a toast.

ARIEL

Who to, daddy?

SAUL

To all of you.

ARIEL

For what?

SAUL

For being my children.

YALE

And we toast you for being our crazy father.

ARIEL

No, for being our wonderful daddy.

NORMA

Who we love very much.

ARIEL

Now there's something we can unanimously agree on.

SAUL

First I want to toast you, my darling Ariel. For being the colorful spinnaker in my life.

They clink glasses. He goes to Norma, who moves back, holding up her glass.

SAUL (cont'd)

And to lovely Norma, for being the rudder that keeps us on a true and steady course.

They clink glasses.

SAUL (cont'd)

And finally Yale. I've run out of nautical allusions. So I'll just say: To you, Yale, for being Yale.

He goes to Yale, who moves back, holding up his glass. Yale trips on the cane and falls against the gate, which springs open. Yale grabs for the railing to keep from falling in.

ARIEL

Someone grab him.

NORMA

I can't reach him.

ARIEL

Don't let him fall.

NORMA
Hold on, Yale.

ARIEL
Oh my God.

YALE
Help.

ARIEL
A life ring. Get a life ring.

NORMA
Where are they?

ARIEL
We can't save him.

NORMA
He's going to die.

SAUL
(Grabbing for Yale)
I got him.

He pulls Yale back as they both fall onto the deck. Everyone starts laughing with relief, but they stop as they realize what almost happened. Silently Yale helps Saul to his feet. They hug.

NORMA
Someone ought to fix that gate.

CURTAIN

END OF PLAY