

# GORKED!

by

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## CHARACTERS

Winnie, a retired newspaper editor, in his 60s or 70s. He's very self-assured, loves his family deeply and rejoices in life. But underneath, there is the dark awareness of his own mortality, a low-level dread he has endured all his life.

Katie, Winnie's dead wife, in her 60s or 70s. She's a sprightly, no-nonsense lady who loves Winnie, embracing him with a caustic but tender wit, which Winnie responds to in kind. Their lives together have been a joyful, well-matched tennis match.

Jessica Hellman, in her 30s, the daughter of Winnie and Katie. An energetic, upbeat woman, she works hard to keep her spirits up while meeting the increasingly burdensome needs of her father while taking care of her daughter and pursuing her career as an artist.

Max Hellman, in his 30s, a bright reporter and caring husband, who prides himself on his objectivity and being governed more by facts than myth or hope.

Krissy, a very young 11-year-old, who knows more how to relate to her ailing grandfather than anyone else in the family.

### TIME

The Present

### SET

Areas suggesting a Philadelphia townhouse sunroom and an Irish country road

ACT I

SCENE 1

Setting: Philadelphia townhouse sunroom, which has been turned into a multi-purpose sick room. There's a couch, an artist's easel, a desktop computer and a large table with an almost finished puzzle. The room is filled with wild flowers.

At Rise: Winnie, dressed in a long bathrobe that completely covers him, is sitting in a chaise lounge. He is obsessively rearranging books in a stack. He doesn't look at the books, but seems to be rearranging them in some mysterious order. He does this for a long time and then stops. He sits silently, doing nothing, for a few seconds and then starts swearing for apparently no reason.

WINNIE

(finally)

Son of a bitch. Go to hell. Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch. Shit.

Jessica enters.

JESSICA

(brightly)

Hi, dad, it's me, Jessica. I was making some tea. Would you like some?

WINNIE

Fuck.

JESSICA

Great. One tea coming up.

Jessica exits. He starts rearranging his books again and then stops. He looks around the room, searching for something.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED :

WINNIE

(appealing to another dimension)

Katie, I want you to come back. It's been five years since you died. Enough is enough.

He searches the room, looking for Katie to materialize.  
She doesn't.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I've never asked you for a favor before, at least not since you died. But I'm asking you for one now. Materialize.

He looks around again, but still no Katie.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

I'm so lonely. I'm losing touch with everyone. I need you.

He gives up and returns to his books. Katie materializes.  
She is dressed in a long, flowing gown.

WINNIE (CONT'D)

Katie.

KATIE

Winnie.

WINNIE

What took you so long?

KATIE

Computer glitch.

WINNIE

So, you're finally here.

KATIE

Big as life. Well, maybe not life, but you get my meaning.

Winnie reaches out tentatively and touches her face.

WINNIE

You look great for a ...

(He doesn't want to say it.)

( CONTINUED )

CONTINUED: (2)

KATIE

Corpse. Go ahead and say it. Corpses don't have feelings you can hurt.

WINNIE

I loved you so much.

(correcting himself, awkwardly)

I love you so much.

KATIE

The past tense is fine. Until death do us part, that's all you signed up for.

WINNIE

Are you really here, Katie, or are you just something in my mind?

KATIE

When you get right down to it, isn't everything we see and know and think we know is just something in our minds?

WINNIE

You're evading my question.

KATIE

Yes.

He pleads for an answer with his eyes.

KATIE

I'm whatever you want me to be. What are you doing with these books, Winnie? Are you ever going to start reading them?

WINNIE

Got to keep them in alphabetical order.

KATIE

(indicating specific books)

Since when did A come after P and Z before B? It's wrong.

WINNIE

Only if you use the A-to-Z alphabet. I use a different one.

KATIE

Still the same old Winnie.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (3)

She kisses him.

KATIE

It looks like you're not doing so good these days.

WINNIE

A year or so after you died, the doctors said I had Alzheimer's. Then I had a stroke. And after that, two heart attacks.

KATIE

Blue Cross must love you. I'm glad you summoned me. But I was planning to come anyway.

WINNIE

You were? Why?

KATIE

There is something important we've got to talk about.

WINNIE

Oh, shit. Those nine words again. There is something important we've got to talk about. You first said them in the spring of 1965. Six months later, we were married. You said the words again in September of 1970.

KATIE

(fondly remembering)

Oh, yes.

WINNIE

Seven months later Jess was born.

KATIE

You remember my utterances like lines from Shakespeare.

WINNIE

It's not your utterances. It's what happens to me after you utter that I remember. I'm glad we got married and had Jess, but I wasn't planning on doing that just then. You uttered the nine words again in 1980. That was the end of my career as a foreign correspondent.

KATIE

You were tired of stories about death and destruction. You wanted to be a medical reporter and write about happy things, like cancer and heart disease. But this is no time for small talk. There is something important you've got to do.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (4)

WINNIE

What have I got to do?

KATIE

(tenderly)

Die. Most people don't need help. But you do, my dear, and I will do everything I can to help you.

WINNIE

They let you come back from the dead to tell me something like this?

KATIE

It's called the Brigadoon Factor. If you love someone very much and they love you very much but they're having trouble dying, they'll let you come back and help.

WINNIE

Hey, look, I called you back for companionship, not hospice counseling.

KATIE

That's not why you called me back.

WINNIE

I have no interest in death.

KATIE

You've been obsessed with it all your life.

WINNIE

I have not.

KATIE

That's why you became a medical writer, so you could immerse yourself in it.

WINNIE

I was trying to understand it so I could master it.

KATIE

Death really isn't that bad once you get over the prejudice against it. There's nothing to be afraid of.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (5)

WINNIE

You think I'm scared of death? Don't be ridiculous. I'm an atheist. We don't have to fear hell or a vengeful god.

(trying to be positive but with hint of dread)

Death is non-existence, for eternity. Why?

KATIE

Why what?

WINNIE

Why should I die?

KATIE

Everyone has to die.

WINNIE

But why now?

Jessica enters with tea. Katie is overwhelmed by the sight of her daughter.

KATIE

Oh, Winnie. Jessie looks so tired.

WINNIE

Why?

JESSICA

Why? What are you talking about?

WINNIE

Eternity.

JESSICA

What about eternity?

WINNIE

Long time.

JESSICA

You're not making sense.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (6)

She hands him the cup and he drinks awkwardly. She sits down, almost ontop of Katie, who scoots out of the way. Katie is pleased that her daughter is so close.

JESSICA

You must be having another one of those awful dreams. Krissy and I were out picking flowers. She's made up a bunch to give you.

She waits for a response but there is none. Giving up, she goes to the stack of books and picks one out. Going through it, she finds the page she is looking for.

JESSICA

(continuing; reading from the book)

When you are old and grey and full of sleep.

(speaking)

Can't you remember that, Dad? You must have read it to me a thousand times.

He doesn't respond.

JESSICA

The words bring back no memories at all?

WINNIE

(mumbling as he looks warmly at Katie, who nods, trying to help him remember with her body language. )

Nodding by the fire.

JESSICA

Yes. That right.

(reciting )

Take down this book, And slowly read...

WINNIE

(looking at Katie)

...and dream.

JESSICA

Yes.

( CONTINUED )

CONTINUED: (7)

Soft look...eyes...shadows deep.

WINNIE

Dad, you remember it all.

JESSICA

Liked reading with you.

WINNIE

We had so much fun doing it.

JESSICA

(excited by his responsiveness)

Winter...cold snow...warm fireplace. Reading to each other.

WINNIE

Yes.

JESSICA

Jess upstairs, asleep.

WINNIE

What?

JESSICA

Be careful...not to wake Jess up.

WINNIE

(he winks at her)

Dad, it's me, Jess.

JESSICA

What?

WINNIE

(trying to focus on her)

Mom's gone.

JESSICA

He looks confused and then sad as he realizes his mistake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (8)

WINNIE

(speaking with difficulty)

Your mother.

He points to where Katie is sitting. Jessica sees nothing.

WINNIE

She's there.

JESSICA

Mother is dead.

WINNIE

Couch. Your mother, she's OK.

JESSICA

Sure she's OK, wherever she is.

WINNIE

She's here. There. Now.

JESSICA

You know what my fantasy is, Dad? She's up there in heaven, selling real estate, but even better than she did down here on earth. She's doing great business, auctioning off the best clouds to the highest bidders and driving clients around in her fancy cloudmobile.

WINNIE

(indicating the couch)

Look.

JESSICA

No one can refuse her once she sets out to sell someone something.

He resumes the stacking, something he will be doing throughout Act I when he is not talking to someone.

JESSICA

Maybe we can read poetry again tomorrow night after I come home from school.

WINNIE

(stops rearranging and smiles)

Poetry?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (9)

JESSICA

We could spend the whole evening together, reading poetry and talking about Yeats. Would you like to do that, Dad?

WINNIE

Yes.

JESSICA

Tomorrow.

WINNIE

(with hint of enthusiasm)

Tomorrow. Poetry.

JESSICA

(excited that she seems to have made contact)

You really want to read poetry? Is that what you're saying?

She nods as she says this and he imitates.

JESSICA

Poetry?

WINNIE

Yes. Poetry.

JESSICA

I'm so happy you want to do that, Dad. We'll have a lot of fun, won't we, Dad? It'll be just like the old times. I'm looking forward to it. Do you want some more tea?

He doesn't respond. Jessica exits. Winnie's smile disappears and he starts rearranging his books again.

WINNIE

Shit. Son of a bitch. Son of a bitch.

He closes his eyes, drops his head and appears to be in a deep sleep. Katie walks downstage.

END OF SCENE 1

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (10)

SCENE 2

The lights on the the space where Katie is now standing change to signify the past. An explosion is heard and Katie starts brushing off dust on her gown.

KATIE

Damn that was close. Winnie, Winnie. My God, where are you? Are you all right?

Winnie jerks awake, sees Katie and goes to her.

WINNIE

Katie, are you OK?

KATIE

Yeah, I'm fine. I thought there was a cease fire. Thank God you weren't here.

WINNIE

I was filing my story. You're sure you're OK?

KATIE

Yes.

WINNIE

The office has been trying to get hold of me all week.

KATIE

Something wrong?

WINNIE

They want me to take over the Rome bureau.

KATIE

We're going to Rome?

WINNIE

Unless you'd rather stay here.

KATIE

(facetiously)

Leave here? Leave the rubble and the carnage for good food, wonderful music, unbelievable art? You think I have no principles? When do we leave?

WINNIE

Next month. We'll be able to live in a house with windows and a roof, like an old married couple.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (11)

KATIE

(wistfully)

An old married couple. Winnie, there's something important we've got to talk about. I want to get married.

WINNIE

To who?

KATIE

To you, of course.

WINNIE

But we're in love.

KATIE

Yes.

WINNIE

Why screw it up?

KATIE

We've been together five years.

WINNIE

See, we're doing fine.

KATIE

Winnie, I'm proposing to you. I'm proposing marriage.

Katie waits and then gets down on one knee.

KATIE

Will you marry me?

WINNIE

But...

KATIE

Will you marry me?

WINNIE

It's that important to you?

She nods solemnly.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (12)

KATIE

Do you accept?

WINNIE

(singing)

Love me tender, love me true, never let me go. You have made my dreams come true and I love you so.

He takes her in his arms and they dance, at first tentatively but then with love. Katie starts singing with him.

WINNIE and KATIE

(singing)

Love me tender, love me true, all my dreams fulfill, for my darling I love you and I always will.

Winnie stops dancing and looks at Katie with a warm smile.

WINNIE

Yes, Katie, I accept.

They start dancing again as Winnie hums the song. Katie moves away to hover.

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

Lights change to signify the present. Winnie continues dancing, by himself as though he is still holding her. Jessica enters with a cup of tea and sees him stumbling around the room.

JESSICA

Dad, what are you doing?

He stops abruptly, and looks at her confused. She helps him back to his chair.

JESSICA

Did you get a little confused, Dad? Were you looking for the bathroom?

He shakes his head sadly, and closes his eyes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (13)

JESSICA

Are you all right now?

He doesn't reply. He appears to be asleep.

JESSICA

I'm not going to leave you, Dad. I'll be at my easel painting.

She goes to her easel and starts painting, frequently looking back at her father, who seems to be asleep.

A bedraggled Max enters and collapses in a chair with a sigh. Winnie is oblivious to what is happening around him, but Katie watches and listens intently, as she will in all scenes.

MAX

They didn't get one call. Twenty-four hours in the biggest fire house in the city and they don't get one call.

He waits for a response but she is preoccupied with the painting.

MAX

The firemen want to adopt me as a good-luck mascot. They think I'm a lot better than their dog. Can't write a story about a fire house that never gets any calls. Though it would make a good expose, a little misleading but investigative journalism at its best. How's he doing?

JESSICA

He seems happier today. He even smiled.

MAX

At what?

JESSICA

The couch.

MAX

That empty couch?

JESSICA

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (14)

MAX

Oh.

JESSICA

I think he might be doing a little better. He wants to read poetry with me. Isn't that great?

MAX

Yeah, sure.

She resumes her work, at times walking back to see her painting from a distance, wrinkling up her nose like a rabbit when she sees something she doesn't like. Max goes to Winnie.

MAX

Hello, Winnie, how's it going, old boy?

Winnie doesn't respond.

MAX

Wherever you've gone to, I hope it's a real nice place. You sure deserve it.

He touches Winnie tenderly and studies him sadly. He looks at Jessica painting.

MAX

You are a very beautiful woman.

She looks at him with a frown. He smiles.

JESSICA

What do you mean by that?

MAX

What I mean by that is, you're a very beautiful woman.

JESSICA

Well, thank you.

She resumes her painting, stops and looks at Max.

JESSICA

That's a funny thing to say.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (15)

MAX

I love the way you walk back from your painting, peer at it for a long time and then scrunch up your nose like a bunny rabbit when you find something you don't like.

JESSICA

Bunny rabbit?

MAX

It's very cute.

She smiles suspiciously, resumes her painting and then stops. She turns to Max.

JESSICA

Why are you saying these things?

MAX

Because I haven't for a long time.

JESSICA

I don't feel beautiful.

MAX

Then I will have to show you.

JESSICA

That's not going to be easy. I haven't been paying attention to how I look. Just last week...

MAX

Shhh. I bought you a present. Actually I bought both of us a present. They weren't easy to get.

He hands her an envelope.

JESSICA

What's this?

MAX

Open it and see.

She takes two tickets out of the envelope.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (16)

MAX

Elixir of Love. Let's make a night of it. Drinks before the opera and a late-night dinner afterwards in our restaurant, if it's still there. I could even see us doing some dancing and after that...

JESSICA

It's been months since we've had an evening out like that.

MAX

Fourteen months.

JESSICA

No, has it been that long?

MAX

And three weeks.

JESSICA

Oh, the thought of just you and me, sitting there listening to that wonderful music. We used to have so much fun going to the opera, and then a late meal afterwards.

MAX

Before going home and making love.

JESSICA

And waking up in the morning, still in each other's arms, feeling so good about everything.

MAX

Why don't we have Destiny stay overnight tomorrow so we don't have to rush home?

JESSICA

The tickets are for tomorrow night? I'm going to read poetry with dad tomorrow night.

MAX

You can't put that off? One lousy evening out.

JESSICA

I promised him and I know he's counting on it.

MAX

How could you possibly know that?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (17)

JESSICA

He was smiling so much when we were talking about it. He hasn't responded like this for months. Dad has so little in his life. Couldn't we do this another night?

MAX

Yeah, sure, why don't we do it another night, next year. I need some coffee.

He exits disgruntled.

JESSICA

(chasing after him)

That was so nice of you, getting the tickets.

She waits to hear a response, but there is none. She checks Winnie and resumes her painting.

KATIE

You've become a terrible burden on them.

WINNIE

They make my meals and do my laundry. What's the big deal?

KATIE

The big deal is you're a lump and lumps need constant care. They're young. They should be out chasing their dreams, not paying homage to the dying. It's been a year since you made any sense. It's gotten so maybe one day a month they can guess what you're talking about.

WINNIE

Stop the sales pitch. I'm not ready to...

(looking for a non-threatening word)

...leave. I still have a lot of things to do, a lot of things to figure out.

KATIE

Like what?

WINNIE

Like how I could have lived my life better, where I went wrong.

KATIE

Winnie, you're practically dead. No one is wondering why the parachute didn't open as they're smashing into the ground.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (18)

Max enters with a cup of coffee and sits down at the puzzle.

MAX

(reconciliation)

They're doing the opera again Saturday. I'll try to change the tickets.

JESSICA

I know how difficult this has been for you.

She squeezes his hand and joins him at the puzzle.

WINNIE

What's the meaning of it all?

KATIE

You'll be ready to move on, once you figure that out? Is that what you're telling me?

WINNIE

Yes.

KATIE

All right then, I'll explain to you the meaning of life.

WINNIE

How the hell would you know?

KATIE

They tell you after you die. But before I share this with you, you've got to promise to die or I'm violating the order of the universe.

WINNIE

It's a deal.

They shake on it.

KATIE

There is no meaning.

WINNIE

What!

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (19)

KATIE

We have to fake it. That's why we put holes in golf courses, to give meaning to walking.

WINNIE

That's it?

KATIE

That's it. OK, now let's talk about where and when you're going to die.

WINNIE

An explanation like that is hardly worth dying for.

KATIE

Winnie, you're not far from being gorked!

WINNIE

Gorked.

KATIE

Not gorked with a period. Gorked! With an exclamation point. That's the way they said it, the ICU doctors watching me die. I'd become a lifeless body with no redeeming qualities, a decaying slab of tissue, useless even for educational purposes.

WINNIE

Gorked?

KATIE

Gorked!

WINNIE

Gorked!

Krissy enters, holding a bunch of flowers behind her back. Katie looks at her with surprise and then with warmth.

KATIE

(to Winnie)

She's gotten so big.

KRISSY

Hello, Gramps. I've got a surprise for you. Can you guess what it is? I'll give you a hint. They smell nice. Surprise.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (20)

KRISSY (CONT'D)  
(She thrusts the flowers at Winnie.)

They were growing on a hill.

WINNIE

Hell.

KRISSY

Not hell, Gramps. Hill. Growing on a hill.

(She puts the flowers in a vase and sits on a footstool next to Winnie. She whispers to keep her mother from hearing)

I've got something important to tell you. You're the first person I told, except for all my very closest friends, of course. Billy wants to take me to the movies Saturday afternoon.

WINNIE

Huh.

KRISSY

Billy Benson. Just the cutest boy on the soccer team. All the girls think he's awesome. Mom thinks I'm too young to go to a movie with a boy. You think it's OK if I go to the movies with Billy, don't you?

WINNIE

What?

KRISSY

(enunciating, word by word)

You think it's OK to go to the movies with Billy.

She nods, encouraging him to follow her example. He does nothing. She nods harder. He still does nothing. She nods even harder. He nods.

KRISSY

Awesome. Do you like the flowers? They're totally cool.

WINNIE

Flowers?

KRISSY

Billy gave me some flowers. But he made me promise not to tell anyone.

WINNIE

Pretty flowers.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (21)

KRISSY

(whispering)

I'm going to tell mom what you said about Billy.

She goes to Jessica, who's intently working the puzzle with Max.

KRISSY

Mom.

JESSICA

Just a minute, dear.

KRISSY

It's important.

Jessica puts a piece into the puzzle with great satisfaction.

MAX

I'll be damned. That's the piece I've been looking for.

KRISSY

Mom.

JESSICA

Yes, dear.

KRISSY

I was just talking to gramps.

JESSICA

That's nice.

KRISSY

He said it's OK to go to the movies with Billy.

JESSICA

What?

KRISSY

He just said it. Didn't you hear him?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (22)

Jessica looks at Winnie, who's totally out of it. She smiles sadly at Krissy.

JESSICA

I think what your Gramps meant was that it would be OK if all of us went to the movies -  
- you, Billy, your father and me.

KRISSY

That's not what he said.

Krissy stomps out and Jessica returns to the puzzle, smiling at Max who is also amused by their daughter's attempt to get approval.

KATIE

I cleared up this meaning-of-life business for you. Now it's time for you to pay up.

WINNIE

I'm going to get better. These two young people need me.

KATIE

Like picnics need ants. You're practically a vegetable. You're a salad, without the dressing.  
You're the gleam in a vegan's eye.

JESSICA

Feel like a salad, Dad? It's time for lunch.

She waits for a response, but gets none.

JESSICA

Well maybe later. I'm not much hungry myself right now.

MAX

You look exhausted.

JESSICA

I'm so tired I feel numb. I know I've been cranky and moody lately, with you and Krissy.  
I'm sorry.

MAX

You're wearing yourself out, staying with him all the time. He doesn't recognize us any  
more.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (23)

JESSICA

Sure he recognizes us. Today he was even talking about poetry.

MAX

(skeptical)

Talking about poetry?

JESSICA

Kind of.

MAX

You were up with him most of the night, weren't you?

JESSICA

He was very agitated.

MAX

You don't have to do this. Most of the time he doesn't even know you're there.

JESSICA

He can sense we're there.

MAX

I know you want to do everything you can for him, but talking to him and reading poetry isn't going to stop this disease.

JESSICA

(irked)

I know that. But it might slow it down a little. They say people who stay mentally active do better than people who just sit there vegetating.

MAX

Who's they?

JESSICA

I don't know. The experts. I read it somewhere.

MAX

You can't keep this up, Jess.

JESSICA

I've been thinking of dropping out of school for a while.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (24)

He shakes his head.

JESSICA

We need the money.

Max starts to protest.

JESSICA

We'll talk about it later. I've got to get his lunch.

She heads for the door followed by Max.

MAX

I told you I'm trying to get freelance work.

JESSICA

I'm not criticizing.

MAX

I'm doing what I can.

JESSICA

We can cut back Destiny's hours if I'm home more.

MAX

No, damn it.

Max and Jessica exit

KATIE

Most people are afraid of death because they don't know what to expect. You don't have to worry about that. I'll tell you everything you want to know.

WINNIE

I know what it's going to be like.

KATIE

How would you know?

WINNIE

I've done a lot of reading.

(becoming more honest)

I've thought about it all my life.

(MORE)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (25)

WINNIE (CONT'D)

When I was a kid, I'd stare up into the black, emptiness of space and think this is what'll it be like when I'm dead. Nothingness. Even less than nothingness.

KATIE

If you don't exist, there's nothing to be afraid of.

WINNIE

I told you, I'm not afraid. Sadness, that's what I'm feeling when I think about it. I'll miss the people I love and the things I like doing. Having no more thoughts, that's the terrible thing. But I'll be ready, when the time comes.

KATIE

Most people resist death at first, but in the end everyone decides to let it happen.

WINNIE

Decide to let it happen? What about people killed in plane crashes or murder victims or people struck by lightning? They don't have a chance to think about death and decide to let it happen.

KATIE

Nanoseconds before death, they discover it's not going to be that bad. So happily they let it happen. That's why people who've come close to death lose their fear of dying.

WINNIE

(turning on Katie)

What about people in comas in coronary care units, people who can't wake up to choose death, people who force loved ones to make decisions they don't want to make and shouldn't have to make.

KATIE

You're talking about me, aren't you?

WINNIE

I wanted you to live.

KATIE

I couldn't help myself. Once the process starts, you don't want to stop it.

WINNIE

You make death sound like an orgasm.

She is at first startled, having never thought of it that way.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (26)

KATIE

It is something like that.

WINNIE

(sudden about face)

It's like an orgasm?

KATIE

(envisioning an orgasm)

As death approaches, the tension gets tighter and tighter until you're gripped by a wonderful sense of inevitability. You desperately want it to happen.

WINNIE

And you come.

KATIE

No, you go.

WINNIE

Where?

KATIE

It depends on what you choose. In that nanosecond before death, you're given two choices -- non-existence for eternity or rebirth, so you can live your life over and over and over again.

WINNIE

I don't know if I'd want to relive my life.

KATIE

That's what a lot of dying people say. That's why the non-existence option was added.

WINNIE

Whatever happen to heaven and hell?

KATIE

That option isn't available to atheists.

WINNIE

If I choose rebirth, could I skip the bad things?

KATIE

Sorry, no delete or fast forward.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (27)

WINNIE

It would be awful knowing ahead of time all the bad things you're going to do and not being able to stop yourself.

KATIE

Each time you repeat the mistakes you become a little wiser because of what happened before. You don't know you're reliving your life. You think it's de ja vu or intuition but actually it's a momentary glimpse of a past life. You keep reliving your life until you get it perfect. Then you enter the second and final stage of death. But I'm not going to talk about that because you're an atheist and won't believe me.

WINNIE

Maybe what's happening right now isn't happening for the first time and I don't have to die.

KATIE

To relive your life is to relive your death.

WINNIE

They think of everything, don't they? It would be nice reliving the good times. What's your favorite scene, the day Jessie was born?

KATIE

Seventeen hours of hard labor? I don't think so.

WINNIE

Our time in Italy?

KATIE

(teasing)

What makes you think my favorite scene includes you?

WINNIE

What could you have possibly done by yourself that was better than what we did together?

KATIE

Alzheimer's hasn't dulled your incredible ego. I led a very exciting and full life before I met you. And hard as it might be for you to conceive, even after we got married I did a lot of great things that didn't involve you. Like the time I went to that little ski lodge in Vermont. Or when I took tango lessons with that...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (28)

WINNIE

I'm not asking for details.

KATIE

Or during my European vacation after graduation when I was alone on the Orient Express late at night and this mysterious man...

WINNIE

Enough.

(with hurt, embarrassed )

I just assumed your favorite scene would involve me. I guess I shouldn't have assumed.

KATIE

(trying to undo the hurt)

Oh, Winnie. Of course my favorite scene involves you. Practically all of the good ones do.

WINNIE

We did do a lot of wonderful things together, didn't we?

KATIE

You never told me that when I was alive.

WINNIE

I always told you when something was wrong. When I didn't say anything, it meant that everything was fine, maybe even wonderful. Tell me your favorite scene.

KATIE

You won't remember it.

Katie starts to describe the scene as Winnie appears to doze off.

KATIE

We're standing under a huge tree that arches over a country road. We have our bikes. You're wearing a bright red helmet. And mine is blue. I knew you wouldn't remember this. Winnie!

(stomps her foot)

Have you fallen asleep again?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (29)

WINNIE

I wore the blue helmet.

KATIE

You're pretending you remember.

WINNIE

It was in Ireland.

KATIE

Yes.

WINNIE

There was this big, old castle on a hill. I wanted to race up to it and you wanted to walk our bikes up. Yes, that's a good memory.

Winnie dozes off with a smile.

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4

After a few beats, the lights change to indicate the past, lighting a spot on the stage where Jessica is hugging herself in delight. Winnie wakes up and sees Jessica. He goes over to her and waits for her to acknowledge him, but she is lost in her thoughts, sighing with delight.

WINNIE

(finally)

That must have been one hell of a movie.

JESSICA

He's the most exciting man I have ever met.

WINNIE

I thought you were going out with Max.

JESSICA

I did. He's wonderful.

WINNIE

I don't know about wonderful, but he is one of my best reporters.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (30)

JESSICA

I feel so happy that it scares me. Dad, is it foolish to feel this way about someone I've just met? What if it doesn't work out? What if he never calls me again?

WINNIE

Then I'll fire him.

She gives him a hurt look, not wanting to joke about this.

WINNIE

It sounds like you like this guy a lot more than all the other characters you've been going out with.

She nods.

WINNIE

Then go for it. Holding back isn't going to protect you from anything.

JESSICA

Do you believe in love at first sight?

WINNIE

That's how I felt about your mother after our first date.

JESSICA

Did mom feel that way about you?

WINNIE

Yes, but it took her a few months to realize it.

JESSICA

This has been such a wonderful day for me. Something else very special happened. I got a letter -- from THE New Yorker Magazine. Remember my short story about the high school prom I wrote for the contest they were running?

WINNIE

I sure do.

JESSICA

It won.

WINNIE

No.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (31)

JESSICA

Yes.

WINNIE

Your short story is going to be published in THE New Yorker?

JESSICA

THE New Yorker.

WINNIE

You have arrived. This proves what I've always said. You have incredible talent.

JESSICA

It's in the genes.

WINNIE

If it is, the talent skips generations.

(looking over her head)

Look a shooting star. That's a good omen. When I was your age, I couldn't sell my fiction to anyone, let alone THE New Yorker. I soon realized that for me it was either journalism or a career in fast food.

JESSICA

Dad, you're a great newspaperman. It's something you've always loved.

WINNIE

Now that I'm getting near the end of my career, I keep wondering what would have happened if a few of my short stories had been accepted. I know, I still would have ended up in fast food.

JESSICA

Oh, Dad, you're being silly.

WINNIE

The stars are beautiful tonight.

JESSICA

You're a wonderful writer.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (32)

WINNIE

You know what I think about when I look at the stars? Eternity.

(said with awe and a little fear)

The thought of something extending into infinity and lasting forever. It's a little scary, like non-existence.

Lights fade on this part of the stage and Jessica exits.

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

Lights come up elsewhere on the stage, as Krissy enters, counting to 10. It's five years in the past. Winnie sees Krissy and watches her with delight.

KRISSY

(calling out)

Three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten. I see you. You're hiding behind the curtain. You're it.

Winnie rushes to hide behind a chair. Krissy parts the imaginary curtains, but doesn't find him. She runs to the other side of the imaginary room.

KRISSY

You're behind the couch.

Winnie sneaks up behind Krissy.

WINNIE

Booo.

KRISSY

Where were you?

WINNIE

I'm not telling. Aren't you getting bored with this? Do you want to do something else?

KRISSY

Tell me one of your stories. Your stories are better than the ones in the books.

WINNIE

You really think so?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (33)

KRISSY

Your stories are funny.

WINNIE

All right, I've got a good one for you. Come, sit besides me.

She does.

WINNIE

OK, let's see. Once upon a time, not very long ago, in a kingdom, not very far from here, lived people who were not all equal.

KRISSY

Not like here in America.

WINNIE

That's another story I'll tell you when you're a little older. They called this kingdom The Land of the Haves and Have-Nots. The Haves were very happy because they had everything. The Have-Nots were very unhappy because they had nothing.

KRISSY

Not even a house?

WINNIE

They lived in horrible, tall buildings with dirt in the hallways, rats and bad people who sold drugs. The Have-Nots wanted to feel sorry for themselves but they were told that they could have everything they wanted if they were willing to work hard. So instead of complaining, they gave thanks to God for living in a country where they didn't have to be poor.

Jessica enters unseen and observes.

WINNIE

One day there came to this land a very brave man who thought everything should be shared equally.

KRISSY

Why?

WINNIE

Because it was the right thing to do. This man...

KRISSY

What was he called?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (34)

WINNIE  
A Democrat.

JESSICA  
(with disapproval)  
Daddy.

KRISSY  
Gramps is telling me the story about the Haves and Have-Nots.

JESSICA  
(more with amusement than anger)  
Can't you tell her stories about princes and princesses and beautiful castles like normal grandfathers do?

WINNIE  
Do you want me to be like a normal grandfather?

JESSICA  
Come on, Krissy, it's time for your swimming lessons.

WINNIE  
You didn't answer my question.

JESSICA  
(laughing)  
No, I don't want you to be like a normal grandfather.

Winnie falls asleep. Krissy exits and Jessica goes to the puzzle. Lights change to indicate the present.

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6  
Max enters with a pitcher of lemonade.

MAX  
I made some lemonade. Want some?

Jessica shakes her head. Max starts working the puzzle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (35)

MAX

I tell you, it doesn't look like there's enough pieces here.

JESSICA

Peggy said it was practically brand new.

MAX

She's got three kids. Practically doesn't count. I bet the piece in the middle to complete this guy's face is missing. It's always the most important piece that gets lost.

WINNIE

(to Katie)

All the time we were together, I kept meaning to tell you how much you meant to me. I almost did, in the ICU, but you were dying and then you were dead and I'd lost my last chance.

Jessica sees her father stirring.

JESSICA

Are you OK, Dad?

WINNIE

Damn it, why does she have to keep interrupting us like that?

JESSICA

Do you want some lemonade, Dad?

WINNIE

I look forward to her coming in here and reading to me. And it's wonderful the way she holds my hand. But all these interruptions when I want to talk to you about...

JESSICA

Are you trying to say something, Dad?

WINNIE

I... I...

JESSICA

(going to him)

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (36)

Ireland.  
WINNIE

Ireland? Did you say Ireland?  
JESSICA

Helmet.  
WINNIE  
(slowly, with difficulty)

What?  
JESSICA

Castle.  
WINNIE

You're not making any sense, Dad. What castle?  
JESSICA

Winnie gives up in exasperation. He resumes stacking. Jessica watches as his look of frustration is slowly replaced with a smile as he remembers the Irish scene.

Look, he's kind of smiling again. The corners of his mouth, they're pointed up ever so slightly.  
JESSICA

Max goes to him and looks closely, like inspecting an anatomical specimen.

I think it's a twitch.  
MAX

That's not a twitch.  
JESSICA

How do you know?  
MAX

Because it's not twitching. It's just lying there, like a smile. Oh, oh, it's beginning to fade. Dad, what were you smiling at?  
JESSICA

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (37)

He doesn't respond.

JESSICA

You were talking about a castle. What castle?

Winnie smiles.

JESSICA

Look, the smile's coming back. Dad?

Winnie is lost in the happy memory and doesn't respond.

JESSICA

Dad? Can you hear me?

He doesn't respond.

JESSICA

He's gone.

MAX

I think he was talking about the paper. He always used to think of that place as his castle.

Winnie turns his face to Max and tries to understand.

MAX

Is that it? The newsroom? The castle?

Winnie smiles.

MAX

Those were good days, when you were running that place. They still talk about you a lot in the city room.

With great effort, Winnie tries to get up, but they hold him down.

MAX

Where are you going?

WINNIE

(to Katie)

Race you to castle.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (38)

Winnie winks at Katie. Max and Jessica look at each other in surprise, wondering why Winnie is winking at an empty couch. Winnie dozes off.

JESSICA

Dad?

He doesn't respond.

MAX

He was a great editor.

They exit.

KATIE

Oh, how I loved dancing with you. I remember how when I proposed to you, you took me in your arms and started dancing and singing to me. I didn't know what you were doing and then you said yes, Katie, I accept. It was so long ago. We were so young. Our flaming youth is no more. I'm dead and you should be.

WINNIE

(returning to his seat)

Stop the sales pitch, Katie. You're beginning to sound like one of those non-stop, all-day NPR fund-raisers that drag on and on when all you want to do is hear Car Talk.

KATIE

That's a terrible thing to say. I do not sound like an NPR fund-raiser.

WINNIE

You could be worse things.

KATIE

There are no worse things than an NPR fund-raiser.

WINNIE

Yes there is. Getting old. One by one the things you can do and look forward to are taken away. And when there's nothing left to live for, still you keep holding on. Life is like a parking space in Manhattan. You don't want to give it up even though it's time to go.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (39)

KATIE

The time has come to give up your parking space. What do you have left? Those books. "How are you doing, Dad?" seven times a day. Everyone cheering you on when you mumble something they think they understand.

WINNIE

Is everything so much better where you are, in that great cineplex in the sky -- all these dead people eating popcorn and watching home movies? Does the place have a good view, nice climate? Does it accept Master Card, endorsed by AARP?

KATIE

Your wit is very off putting, you know? All your life you've used wit to protect yourself from thoughts you don't want to have.

WINNIE

To believe I must have faith. And if I had faith, I could believe in God and heaven. Maybe the best I can hope for is reliving the good scenes. Remember the lavish meals I cooked for you?

KATIE

Could you refresh my memory?

WINNIE

You don't remember my veal piccata? Or my spaghetti marinara? Or the stir fry? Or the mushrooms, cooked so they are tender and tasty, not water logged? Lavish meals.

KATIE

They were nice, simple meals, hardly lavish.

WINNIE

(with growing heated anger)

Your definition of lavish is small minded and cruel. I spent hours putting together those meals. Just because I didn't use a lot of unhealthy sauces that take weeks to prepare or set everything out in a fancy display or ...

He grabs his chest.

WINNIE

Oh God. Not another heart attack.

She takes his hand in hers.

KATIE

What's happening to you now is good. Don't fight it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (40)

WINNIE

It's getting better.

She drops his hand.

WINNIE

We better talk about something else.

KATIE

No, let's stay with this and see where it goes.

WINNIE

I know where it's going and I don't want to go.

KATIE

All right, we can wait.

WINNIE

Oh, that's better.

(contemplative, preoccupied)

I wouldn't want to be a young man again. I wasn't a very nice person. I guess nobody is when they're young. I was too competitive. I hurt a lot of people on the way up. Messed up a bunch of careers with my stories. I wouldn't want to relive the stroke. Or the heart attacks. Or the colonoscopies or root canals. And there were a lot of times when I was afraid or angry or mean. Better not to revisit that stuff. And that selfish thing I did to Jessie. Of all the bad things, that would be the worst to relive. Maybe non-existence would be a better way to spend eternity.

KATIE

She loves you dearly. I'm my father's daughter. Remember how she used to say that with such pride?

WINNIE

Yes, she did, didn't she?

Lights change to indicate the past.

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7

Jessica enters, sits down in a chair distant from Winnie, and starts looking through a book of poetry, in search of a specific poem.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: ( 41 )

JESSICA

Where's that poem you were reading to me?

(she finds it )

Ah, here it is.

(reciting from the book)

Death be not proud, though some have called thee mighty and dreadful, for, thou art not so.

Winnie is startled to hear the words and then see Jessica sitting there. He goes to her.

WINNIE

My God, could that man write. So many poets make death out to be a grand event. What bull shit.

(reciting from memory )

Like pilgrims to the appointed place we tend; the world's an inn, and death the journey's end.

(speaking normally)

Dryden was no slouch either. Nor was Shelley.

(reciting from memory )

Death will come when thou art dead, soon, too soon.

(speaking normally)

I do love reading poetry with you, dear.

JESSICA

All the poems are about death. Is it because mom died?

WINNIE

It's what poets like to write about it. Five columns of citations are devoted to death in The Oxford Dictionary of Quotations. No other subject comes close.

JESSICA

"Love" gets nine columns.

WINNIE

How do you know that?

( CONTINUED )

CONTINUED: (42)

JESSICA

(with pride)

I'm my father's daughter.

(coming clean)

I saw you counting the columns the other day and thought I should be prepared.

WINNIE

You are your father's daughter. Is this troubling to you? Would you rather...

JESSICA

No, Dad, I like reading poetry about death. I mean, it doesn't matter if a poem is about death. But there are other things. You miss her a lot, don't you?

He doesn't respond.

JESSICA

You don't like talking about her.

WINNIE

(finally)

I killed your mother.

JESSICA

What?

WINNIE

I signed the papers.

JESSICA

It's not like that. I was there with you at the meeting. Not one chance in a thousand she'd wake up, the doctors said.

WINNIE

And I denied her that chance. At the time it seemed like the only sane thing to do. She was lying there, totally out of it. What purpose did it serve to keep that damn machine going? So I signed the papers. They stopped the machine. And she died. Did I do the right thing? A million times I asked myself that question, sitting all alone in that big house.

She goes to him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (43)

WINNIE

You take such a huge risk when you sign those papers, when you don't do everything possible to give the people you love just a little bit more time. You never anticipate how much guilt you will feel years later, how many what-ifs you'll ask yourself.

Lights fade to black.

END OF SCENE 7

SCENE 8

Lights come up in the present. Winnie is sitting in his usual chair, stripped to the waste, and Jessica is washing his chest and arms with alcohol.

JESSICA

Doesn't that feel good, Dad? It's real refreshing, isn't it?

She helps dress him in his nightshirt and starts brushing his hair.

JESSICA

Even with the air conditioning it feels sticky today.

Winnie moves restlessly.

JESSICA

Do you want something, Dad?

He grunts.

JESSICA

Do you have to go to the bathroom?

He grunts. She puts her arms around him to help him stand.

JESSICA

I'm holding you, Dad.

With Winnie leaning on her, she helps him offstage. Max enters. He has news, which he is excited about, and surprised to see the room empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (44)

MAX

(calling out)

Jessie.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Just a second.

Max takes off his jacket and practices what he is going to say to Jessica. Jessica enters and is surprised to see the expectant look on Max's face.

JESSICA

Is something wrong?

MAX

Everything is wonderful.

JESSICA

I don't know about that.

MAX

They posted a new job today. The Rome bureau. I was thinking of applying for it.

JESSICA

The Rome bureau?

He nods cautiously, trying to judge her response.

MAX

Your parents were always talking about it. Most romantic time in their lives, your father said. You'd love Italy. Krissy would learn a second language.

JESSICA

There are a lot of things to consider.

MAX

Your father. That's what you're worried about, isn't it?

JESSICA

Of course I'm worried about my father. I'm surprised you're not.

MAX

This could be a great opportunity for me, for both of us. You could do some wonderful painting in Italy.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (45)

JESSICA

We can't make those kind of plans, not when he's like this.

MAX

He could go on like this for years. It's already been more than five years. I'm not talking about abandoning him. We'll find a place big enough for all of us. But we've got to live our own lives, as best we can.

WINNIE (O.S.)

(yelling)

Katie. Where are you?

JESSICA

All day long he's been confusing me with mom.

(calling out)

Coming, Dad.

She exits. Exasperated, Max goes to his shoulder bag and pulls out some Italian travel books. Jessica enters with Winnie leaning on her shoulder. She helps him to his seat.

MAX

I bought some books on Italy. It's such a beautiful country.

He shows her a picture book. She sadly looks at some of the pictures as Max hovers excitedly nearby. She hands the book back to Max and starts brushing her father's hair.

JESSICA

When would you do this?

MAX

We wouldn't be moving until next year. All of Europe would be my beat. Imagine the stories I'd be getting.

JESSICA

What if dad can't make a trip like that?

MAX

We'll do the right thing.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (46)

JESSICA

What'll we do?

MAX

We'll do the right thing. I need a drink.

JESSICA

It's the middle of the day.

MAX

For me it's the end of a long night. I need a brandy to calm my nerves, damn it.

JESSICA

I'm worried about you, Max. You've been drinking a lot lately.

MAX

A few drinks now and then is not drinking a lot.

He exits.

JESSICA

You never did it before. If you want to talk or if there is anything...

She follows him.

WINNIE

So many times I've remembered this, you sitting quietly, smiling like that. I was never aware of you doing that when you were alive. So many things I was never aware of until you were gone. Like how you'd make a cup of tea for yourself and sit with it in the backyard in the shade, reading a book. Or how you'd put flowers everywhere, even where they didn't belong, like on the kitchen counter in front of the door of the microwave.

He hears Jessica returning.

WINNIE

Damnit, she's coming back. I'm being suffocated by all this attention. And all these flowers they keep bringing in here.

KATIE

You should be proud of our daughter. She is so loving, so attentive.

Jessica enters. She picks up the brush and starts brushing his hair.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (47)

WINNIE

(with explosive agitation)

Suffocating.

JESSICA

Oh, my God, he can't breathe.

WINNIE

Can't breathe.

JESSICA

(calling out)

Max, gets the oxygen.

Katie is amused by the drama resulting from Jessica's misunderstanding. Max rushes in, holding a brandy glass.

MAX

(hopefully)

Another heart attack?

WINNIE

No.

Max gets the oxygen.

MAX

It's for your own good, Winnie.

Max wrestles with Winnie, forcing him to briefly accept the mask then Winnie breaks free.

WINNIE

Damnit, I can breathe.

JESSICA

You just said you couldn't breathe.

MAX

He's not making sense.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (48)

Max tries to force the mask over his mouth again.

WINNIE

No.

MAX

Help me. Hold him down.

WINNIE

Away. Go.

JESSICA

Don't worry, Dad, we're not going away, we won't abandon you. We're staying right here by your side.

She pins him in the chair as Max tries to put the oxygen mask over his squirming face.

MAX

Hold his head still.

JESSICA

I'm trying.

MAX

(fitting the mask over his mouth)

I'm pushing it down as hard as I can.

Indicating to Katie that he is pretending, Winnie becomes quiet.

MAX

He's gotten quiet.

JESSICA

Is he all right?

MAX

Is he dead?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (49)

Max takes away the mask. Max and Jessica bend close, to see if he is breathing. They put their ears even closer to Winnie's mouth. Winnie bolts upright.

WINNIE

Help. Help. Heeeeeeeelp.

They jump back startled. The scream continues for many seconds, frightening Jessica and Max.

JESSICA

He seems to be breathing OK now. Where's his medicine? We want to help you, Dad.

WINNIE

No medicine. Help. Get away.

Max finds the bottle of medicine and pours out a pill. Krissy enters with flowers. She's about to offer Winnie the flowers when she stops, frightened by what's happening to her grandfather.

MAX

This'll help calm him.

Winnie turns away, trying to to avoid the medicine.

JESSICA

Dad, please.

Jessica holds his nose. Max forces him to take the medicine. Winnie feigns sleep so they'll leave him alone.

MAX

Damn, does that stuff work fast.

Jessica holds her father's hands with concern for several seconds. Krissy enters with an armload of flowers.

KRISSY

Gramps, look what I have...

Jessica rushes to head her off.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (50)

JESSICA

No, Krissy. He's become allergic. We'll keep them in a vase in the other room and tell him how pretty they are.

KRISSY

But he can't see them there.

JESSICA

(becoming exasperated)

It's better.

KRISSY

Why?

JESSICA

Because I said so, that's why.

KRISSY

(shocked)

Mom.

JESSICA

I'm sorry, dear. I didn't mean to yell at you. We'll get some water for the flowers.

(to Max)

We better get all these flowers out of here.

Krissy and Jessica exit. Max collects all the flowers in the room and goes to Winnie.

MAX

You'll be able to breathe a lot better now without all these flowers sucking up the oxygen. Of course, it's the other way around, isn't it?

Max exits. Lights change to signify the past.

END OF SCENE 8

SCENE 9

Jessica appears downstage. Winnie goes to her. She is close to tears.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (51)

JESSICA

Maybe we should get a second opinion. Isn't that what you're supposed to do, make sure that there's no mistake.

WINNIE

(going to her)

I'm going to fight this thing, Jess.

JESSICA

Yeah, Dad, you're a fighter.

WINNIE

I'm too young to be that sick. I just got on Medicare. They haven't paid for a thing yet.

JESSICA

This is so unfair.

WINNIE

Damn doctors. You don't just sit someone down and tell them nothing can be done, that you've just got to accept it.

JESSICA

We'll fight this thing together.

WINNIE

Medical research isn't worth a damn. Drug companies spend all their time making new versions of Viagra.

JESSICA

The doctor said it might progress very slowly.

WINNIE

What the hell do those doctors know?

JESSICA

Sure.

WINNIE

My mind is fine. I've just become a little forgetful and unsteady on my feet.

JESSICA

Sure, Dad.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (52)

WINNIE

I wasn't in the best of shape when I took those damn tests. Drinking a lot of wine the night before. Maybe I was a little hung over.

JESSICA

Now that mom's gone, you're rattling around in that big house. Why don't you move in with us? We've got plenty of room. I know Max would like that.

WINNIE

I should be working out more. I haven't been to the gym for months.

JESSICA

You haven't been to the gym for years.

WINNIE

It's been a while. My stumbling and falling down like that might have been a good thing -- a wake-up call.

Jessica tries to smile encouragement, but she's deeply saddened by the hopeless battle Winnie is trying to mount.

WINNIE

Going to start working out regularly, three times a week, like religion. Do exercises to improve my balance.

JESSICA

Maybe you should take it a little easier now. You've been working awfully hard on your book.

WINNIE

You can't give up, no matter how bad things look. What do these doctors know? All they can do is give up on patients, pull the plug. In some people, there's a spark, a will to fight and win. Damn doctors can't measure that with their MRIs and CAT scans so they don't think it exists. It does exist, Jess. And it exists in me.

(appealing for her allegiance)

Damnit, when the time comes, I'm not going out quietly. I'll be fighting this thing with my last breath.

JESSICA

And I'll be there fighting with you.

WINNIE

You will?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (53)

JESSICA

All the way.

Overcome with gratitude, he hugs her. Lights change to signify the present.

END OF SCENE 9

SCENE 10

Winnie returns to his seat.

WINNIE

(looking around the room surprised)

Where'd all the pretty flowers go?

KATIE

It's a long story.

WINNIE

There were so many things I wanted to tell you before you died. This is so hard.

KATIE

Just tell me.

WINNIE

I'm trying. It was easier when you were dead. But when you're right there, looking at me like that.

KATIE

I'll stand behind you.

She moves behind Winnie and puts her arms around him. He tries to say the words, but can't.

WINNIE

Men don't say romantic things, not after they're married.

KATIE

Tell me all the romantic things you wanted to say.

WINNIE

(working hard to find the courage)

I think I can do it now.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (54)

Krissy enters, holding a single flower.

KRISSY

I have something for you, Gramps.

She presents the flower, prompting a huge scream.

WINNIE

(screaming)

Noooooo.

KRISSY

It's only one flower.

WINNIE

No.

KRISSY

I'll get a vase and put it on the other side of the room.

She turns away from Winnie, looking for a vase in the room, which has been cleared of all vases. Winnie talks hurriedly to Katie, unbeknownst to Krissy.

WINNIE

Tell her to go.

KATIE

She can't hear me.

WINNIE

This is just not the right time for her to be doing this.

KATIE

She'll only be a minute.

WINNIE

I don't want to lose what I was going to say to you.

KATIE

Hold on to it.

WINNIE

I'm losing it.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (55)

Krissy finds an empty coffee cup on the table where Max and Jessica play chess and do puzzles.

KRISSY

Ah, this'll work.

She puts the flower in the cup, turns and walks toward him.

KRISSY

Look, isn't this...

WINNIE

Outttttt.

Winnie stands and advances on Krissy menacingly. Krissy backs away, trips and falls. Jessica and Max rush in.

JESSICA

What's happening here?

Winnie raises his hands in frustration, but it looks like he is about to strike Krissy. Max rushes between Winnie and Krissy.

MAX

No.

Winnie turns on him.

WINNIE

Be gone.

KRISSY

What did I do wrong?

Winnie growls and makes a terrifying face that frightens Krissy even more. She screams. Jessica sweeps a sobbing Krissy into her arms

MAX

Everything's going to be all right.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (56)

JESSICA

It's all right, Krissy. It's all right.

KRISSY

I didn't do anything wrong.

JESSICA

Gramps is having a bad day.

She starts to take Krissy from the room.

MAX

We're here with you, Winnie.

Winnie sits down, growling absent-mindedly.

MAX

Shhh.

Winnie dozes off. Jessica and Krissy back out towards the door.

MAX

Everything's going to be all right, Winnie. Krissy, are you all right? Your Gramps didn't mean it.

Jessica, Krissy and Max exit.

KATIE

You should be ashamed of yourself, what you did to Krissy.

WINNIE

I asked her politely to leave.

KATIE

You went wild. You tried to hit her.

WINNIE

I did what?

KATIE

You raised your hand at her like this.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (57)

WINNIE

Oh God. I would never hurt that little girl.

KATIE

This isn't the memory you want to leave them with -- a collection of ugly scenes of you lashing out at them.

WINNIE

I love Krissy. I love them all. I want to do right by them.

KATIE

In a few months you'll be wearing diapers and they'll be changing them for you.

WINNIE

Don't be ridiculous.

KATIE

Changing your diapers and watching you sitting here, stacking those books. Those are the images they will be left with. And you will be left with reliving humiliation for eternity.

WINNIE

Jess changing my diapers?

KATIE

Only a matter of time.

WINNIE

Things aren't going to get better, are they?

KATIE

No.

WINNIE

You know this for a fact, being dead and all?

She nods.

WINNIE

I have been sleeping more than usual.

KATIE

You've been blanking out a lot.

WINNIE

I know.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (58)

KATIE

Wouldn't you rather be reliving the good times than vegetating like this? You've lived a life that's worth repeating. Most people are doomed to the hell of reliving wasted lives.

WINNIE

Rebirth. I'm not sure about that. And I'm not sure this is the right time to end this life.

KATIE

It is the right time. It's not for you to question Him.

WINNIE

Him?

KATIE

Death.

WINNIE

Death is a man?

KATIE

A woman wouldn't do something like that.

Winnie thinks about this for a long time, while Katie waits. It's agony for him, making this decision.

WINNIE

I don't want a funeral with any religious stuff. I don't want any requiem music. Though Beethoven's Fifth would be nice.

(humming the opening notes)

Da da da dum! Ominous yet a touch of the heroic. Certainly appropriate for dying, the final and most heroic act of life. Da da da dum!

KATIE

First you deny death and now you're micro managing your departure.

WINNIE

All my life I've been dreading this moment. You'll stand by me?

KATIE

That's why you asked me to come back. Of course I will.

WINNIE

All right, I'll do it. I'll let death happen.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (59)

KATIE

That's not going to be enough. With your kind of smoldering disease, you've got to help it along.

WINNIE

You mean suicide?

KATIE

I'm afraid so.

WINNIE

Oh.

For several seconds he wrestles with this new demand.

WINNIE

I don't know about that. It's one thing to let yourself die suddenly or even slowly. But suicide? To do such violence to my body, a body that has served me so well all these years. To know exactly when it's going to happen, because I decided to make it happen, that I decided that this is the time and place to stop living. That is scary.

KATIE

I know, Winnie. But I also know you will do it because you know this is what is best for Jessie and Krissy and Max. This is the kind of man you are. You have always found the courage to do the right thing.

WINNIE

I have become a burden on them, haven't I?

KATIE

Yes, Winnie, you have.

WINNIE

Lashing out at Krissy like that. That was a terrible thing to do to that little girl.

Katie hugs him for a long time and then pulls back, looking at him with tenderness and understanding, wanting him to complete the thought.

WINNIE

All right, I will do it.

KATIE

You will?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (60)

Winnie  
Yes.

Katie  
How?

Winnie  
How what?

Katie  
How will you do it?

Winnie  
I don't want the kids to know it's suicide. It would only make them feel guilty.

Katie  
You don't have many choices. You can hardly walk.

Winnie  
I can still wander. I'll wander in front of a fast-moving truck.

Katie considers this idea, trying to envision the results of such a tactic. Concluding that it'll work, she smiles.

Katie  
(finally)  
That should do it.

Lights fade to black

END OF ACT I

ACT II

SCENE 1

Lights come up on the living room, a few weeks later. Jessica is sitting next to an elegantly set table, angrily waiting for Max, who is late. Krissy is laid out on the couch, reading a book. She is not happy. Winnie's chair is empty.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (61)

The opera Elixir of Love is playing quietly in the background. Checking her watch, Jessica stands and snaps off the opera.

KRISSY

It's not fair. You said we could all go to the movies with Billy.

JESSICA

And we will, dear. But Destiny has been busy the last couple of weekend's and couldn't be here.

KRISSY

Why does she have to be here?

JESSICA

You know we can't leave Gramps alone.

KRISSY

Even for a few hours?

JESSICA

Not even for a few hours. It's very late, Krissy. You should be in bed by now.

KRISSY

It's still not fair.

She gets up in a huff and heads for the door.

KRISSY

Why are you all dressed up?

JESSICA

I just put on a little make-up.

KRISSY

Why?

JESSICA

Go to bed. You've got to get up early in the morning for school.

KRISSY

Is daddy working late again?

JESSICA

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (62)

KRISSY

Is that why the table is all set up? You're going to have dinner late tonight?

JESSICA

It's gotten too late for dinner. Enough of these questions. Go.

Krissy is almost out the door, when she turns for one more question.

KRISSY

When can we go to the movies with Billy?

JESSICA

I don't know. Soon.

KRISSY

OK.

JESSICA

Love you, dear.

KRISSY

Love you, mom.

Krissy exits. Jessica shuts off most of the lights and slumps down in a chair, discouraged and tired.

Max enters. He's a little drunk.

MAX

Why are you sitting in the dark? The fuse blow?

He snaps on the lights.

MAX

The lights work fine.

JESSICA

What were you celebrating this time?

MAX

I just had a couple of drinks with the guys.

JESSICA

I made a special dinner for us tonight.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (63)

MAX

That's great.

JESSICA

It's too late now.

MAX

We can still have dinner. I thought you'd be with your father tonight.

He takes her in his arms.

JESSICA

No.

MAX

I'm awfully hungry.

JESSICA

You stink of cigarettes.

MAX

You smell wonderful.

JESSICA

I wanted to make this...

MAX

Shhh.

JESSICA

Special.

MAX

What did you make for dinner?

JESSICA

Chicken marengo.

MAX

My favorite.

JESSICA

I know.

He gives her a long kiss, which she at first resists and then gives into.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (64)

MAX

I'm sorry.

JESSICA

I know we should be doing this more often.

MAX

Why not every night?

JESSICA

We never did it every night.

MAX

(with lust)

Yes we did.

JESSICA

Oh that.

MAX

A little dismissive, wouldn't you say?

JESSICA

(revised, lustful tone)

Oh that. I bought a new CD. We can hear it after dinner.

MAX

We'll hear it now. Who knows what we'll want to do after dinner.

JESSICA

Let me check on Dad and get dinner.

(seductively)

Then we'll see what happens.

Jessica exits as he turns on the stereo. Pleased to hear the opening notes of the Elixir of Love, he jauntily takes off his jacket in time with the music and picks up the bottle of wine.

MAX

The Elixir of Love.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (65)

He pours a glass of wine and anticipates a long overdue intimacy. Jessica enters.

JESSICA

(snapping off the music)

Max. He's gone.

MAX

Maybe he's wandered upstairs.

JESSICA

I'll go check.

MAX

I'll look outside.

They rush off.

JESSICA (O.S.)

Daddy, where are you?

MAX (O.S.)

Winnie. Winnie. Where the hell are you?

Jessie rushes in, talking on a cordless phone.

JESSICA

(on phone)

Hey, Deb, it's me, Jessie. Did my father wander over there? ... Oh... I don't know. He's just gone... I can't talk. I want to keep the line open... Yes, of course, I'll call you when we find him.

She hangs up. Max enters.

MAX

I looked up and down the streets. They're empty. Nothing.

Jessica rushes off.

JESSICA (O.S.)

I should have listened to Destiny. She said we should lock the doors.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (66)

MAX

These things happen.

Jessica rushes back in with the phone and a sheet of emergency numbers.

JESSICA

What do you mean these things happen? It's not like we lost the car keys or misplaced our glasses.

MAX

Hey, I'm on your side. What I meant was that no one is to blame. He probably fell asleep some place. He'll wake up with the sunlight and start wandering again and then they'll pick him up.

JESSICA

This wouldn't have happened if we'd been spending more time with him.

MAX

Doing what?

JESSICA

I don't know what. Reading him the telephone book. We should never have left him alone.

MAX

We never leave him alone. You do your painting here. I do my writing here. We read our books here, listen to music, do puzzles, play chess. The sum total of our lives is taking place in this one little room.

JESSICA

You're thinking he should have been in some home.

MAX

I was thinking how nice the evening had started out.

JESSICA

You were?

He nods.

JESSICA

It just wasn't to be, was it?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (67)

The phone rings. Jessica grabs it.

JESSICA

(continuing; on the phone)

Hello... Yes... Oh, thank God... You did?... He did?... Why was he doing that?... We'll be there in a few minutes. Thank you. Thank you so much.

She hangs up.

JESSICA

They found him down the street in the deserted school yard. Standing in front of a parked school bus.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 1

SCENE 2

Lights come up on the sick room the next morning. Winnie and Katie are alone.

KATIE

You were just standing there, waiting to be run over?

WINNIE

I don't want to talk about it.

KATIE

Talk about leisurely suicides. How long were you there?

WINNIE

Damn it, Katie, I tried. Killing yourself is a lot harder than you think.

Jessica enters, carrying a book, and other reading material.

JESSICA

Hi, Dad, it's me, Jessica. I thought you'd want to know what we're having for dinner so I brought something to read to you.

(reading from the book with feeling)

Poblano chilies range from mild to very hot in flavor, so taste a tiny bit before using.

Krissy enters reading from Nancy Drew as Jessica heads for the door, quoting last lines of the cookbook.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (68)

JESSICA

If the chili is very hot, you may want to substitute...

Jessica exits.

KRISSY

(reading from a book)

No, a silver pen isn't exactly what I'm looking for, Nancy Drew explained to the jewelry salesman in the department store. The slim, attractive girl with lovely reddish-blond hair...

Winnie whines. Krissy exits on her last lines as Max enters reading from the newspaper.

MAX

Craig Biggio's two-out RBI single in the 11th inning drove in the go-ahead run as the Houston Astros beat the Phillies, 2-1 last night.

Winnie screams.

MAX

Santiago retired the first two batters in the 11th before pinch-hitter Merced singled to right.

Winnie's screaming intensifies.

MAX

(continuing; calling out)

Jessie, I need you.

(to Winnie)

Maybe you'd rather hear about the basketball game.

Winnie screams louder still. Jessica rushes in.

MAX

I don't think your father likes sports. He hates Nancy Drew.

JESSICA

He was very interested in vegetarian cooking.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (69)

MAX

I don't think spending more time with him like this is working. He only wants to stack.

Winnie sweeps the books onto the floor.

MAX

Not even that. What's got into him?

JESSICA

Dad.

She starts picking up the books.

JESSICA

You're acting like a child.

Winnie slumps in his chair. Jessica finishes collecting the books and turns to see Winnie slumped in his chair.

JESSICA

He's fallen asleep again.

He collapses, falling to the side.

KATIE

(rushing to him)

Way to go, Winnie.

JESSICA

Dad, are you OK?

Winnie falls out of the chair to the ground.

KATIE

Winnie. Don't be frightened. You're on your way.

JESSICA

Oh, my God.

She rushes to him.

Lights fade to black

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (70)

END OF SCENE 2

SCENE 3

Lights come up on the sunroom one month later. Winnie is sitting in his usual chair, but he looks very different. He's suffered a second stroke and the left side of his body is drooping. His left arm hangs lifelessly. The books are still stacked on his table, but he will not be touching them again. He seems to be asleep. Katie sits nearby. Max and Jessica are playing chess. Max moves a piece.

MAX

Check.

JESSICA

I knew you'd do that.

She studies the board. Max gets up, walks over to Winnie and studies him.

MAX

He's like one of those British battleships in the World War II movies. It keeps getting hit with torpedoes, but refuses to sink. Bam.

Jessica winces.

MAX

(continuing; louder)

Bam.

Jessica turns angrily and gives him a menacing look. He backs off.

MAX

(continuing; softly)

Bam. It's terrible how bit by bit by bit this disease has taken everything from him.

JESSICA

Do you think he knows we're here? They say hearing is the last thing to go. Dad, can you hear me?

MAX

He's gone, Jess. That last stroke took away what little he had left.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (71)

JESSICA

Maybe he wants to give me a sign but can't because he's paralyzed.

MAX

He's not here anymore. We've got to accept that.

Jessica goes to her father, lifts the limp arm and puts it on his lap.

JESSICA

No, that's not true. Deep down inside, maybe too far away to reach, is a spark that is still my father. Dad used to talk about how everyone had a spark that made them special. He didn't believe in souls or spirits, but he did believe in that. Maybe what he's trying to do is find a way to show us that the spark is still there.

Jessica returns to the table and sadly resumes the chess game. Winnie wakes up and starts talking to Katie, unbeknownst to Max and Jessica.

WINNIE

It's strange how nobody comes in here anymore.

KATIE

They're here with you right now.

WINNIE

What are you talking about? There's no one here.

KATIE

You've lost contact with the outside world. You're gorked! Totally. Fully. Completely. Through-and-through. You're so far gorked! that an observant person might call you dead.

MAX

Check.

JESSICA

On the phone, you said you had something important to talk about.

MAX

I wanted to wait until we were alone.

(looking at the unresponsive Winnie)

I guess we are alone. I got the Rome assignment.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (72)

JESSICA

Oh.

MAX

Isn't that great?

She moves a piece without looking at him.

MAX

Well, I think it's great. We don't have to live in Rome, but we should live nearby because I need to be near the airport. Wherever we decide to live, it won't be hard finding a good Italian restaurant.

He laughs at his joke. She doesn't.

JESSICA

When do you have to give them your answer?

MAX

I already have.

JESSICA

We were going to talk about it before any decisions were made.

MAX

After that last stroke, I didn't think anything more had to be discussed.

JESSICA

We should have talked.

MAX

My boss offers me the chance of a lifetime and I'm supposed to say thanks a lot I'll get back to you?

JESSICA

Dad's in no condition to travel.

MAX

Of course, he's not.

JESSICA

You weren't thinking of leaving him here.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (73)

He doesn't respond.

JESSICA

Were you? Max, what are you...

MAX

Remember that story I did about the residential program for Alzheimer's patients? The one the university was setting up? It was going to have all sorts of innovative programs.

JESSICA

So.

MAX

Well, they've opened it up and its getting all sorts of national recognition.

He brings out brochures from the center.

JESSICA

I don't see what this has to do with my father.

MAX

This place has private rooms and beautifully decorated common rooms and a staffing ratio that guarantees constant care.

He offers them to her.

JESSICA

I'm not interested in this.

MAX

They even have special rooms with different sounds in them like constantly playing classical music, and the sound of water bubbling in a brook and the sounds of birds singing in a garden. It's just like you said. Hearing might be the last thing to go, the last pleasure the patients can appreciate it. At least that's what these researchers think so they set up these rooms.

JESSICA

That's why I'm always reading to him and doing poetry. Some of it is getting through to him, I'm sure of it.

MAX

I spent the whole afternoon at the center and...

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (74)

JESSICA

You decided to go there after telling the paper you'd take the Rome assignment?

MAX

I wanted to make sure that Winnie would be well taken care while we're gone. He will be, Jess. The staff treats the patients beautifully, as though they were members of their own family.

JESSICA

But they're not members of their own family.

MAX

It's tough to get into this place. It's not exactly ethical but I think I can pull some strings and get Winnie in there. They really liked that story I wrote.

JESSICA

Damn you and your stories. I'm not leaving dad.

MAX

I know you and your dad have been unbelievably close. I wish I had been that close to my dad. I realize this is especially difficult for you. I know how you're feeling, but...

JESSICA

Don't you dare patronize me. You have no idea how I'm feeling, no idea at all. I can't believe you told them you'd go to Rome.

MAX

Your father would want us to go to Rome.

She shakes her head.

MAX

If I turn this down, I'll never get another chance.

JESSICA

I promised I would never put him in one of those places. I promised I'd be with him, fighting to the...

(she doesn't want to finish the thought)

Doctors make mistakes, he said, a lot more than people realize.

MAX

He had two strokes. He has Alzheimer's. Doctors don't make that many mistakes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (75)

JESSICA

I promised him.

MAX

Look at him.

She turns away.

MAX

No, I want you to look at him.

(bending down to Winnie's ear)

Hey, Winnie, do you hear me? It's me, Max, you know, your daughter's husband.

MAX

Winnie. Do you hear me?

He claps his hands next to Winnie's ear.

MAX

Nothing.

He flicks his fingers at Winnie's unseeing eyes.

JESSICA

Max. Please.

He shakes Winnie hard.

JESSICA

No. You bastard.

Jessica pushes Max away from her father. Max is dismayed by what he just did and stands helplessly as Jessica cries.

MAX

Oh, God, Jess, I'm so sorry.

He reaches out to her.

JESSICA

Don't touch me.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (76)

MAX

I didn't mean to do that.

He reaches out again.

JESSICA

No, stay away.

MAX

Oh, Jessie.

Jessica exits. Max slumps down on the couch.

KATIE

This is getting bad.

WINNIE

What the hell are you talking about?

KATIE

They're sending Max to the Rome bureau.

WINNIE

That's wonderful. Remember how we...

KATIE

She's not going with him. She thinks she has to stay here and take care of you.

Winnie smiles with pride.

KATIE

This isn't something to smile about. You've got to do something.

WINNIE

I am doing something. I'm working on a plan.

KATIE

Standing in front of parked buses isn't the answer.

WINNIE

All right, already. So I made a mistake.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (77)

KATIE

I'm not putting that down. It took courage to do what you did. You didn't know the bus was parked.

WINNIE

I knew the bus was parked.

KATIE

You did?

WINNIE

I was afraid to walk in front of a moving truck. I did that so you'd think I just made a mistake and didn't realize the bus was parked.

KATIE

Oh, Winnie.

WINNIE

You weren't scared when you were dying.

KATIE

I was in a coma. What's this plan you're working on?

WINNIE

The elegant simplicity of it will impress you. I will simply stop breathing. I'll kill myself by holding my breath.

KATIE

You'll just pass out and start breathing again.

WINNIE

I've got serious heart disease. Without oxygen, I'll go into cardiac arrest. Ventricular fibrillation. That's what they call it. Did a story on it once. I'll die unless someone gives me CPR or defibrillates me with those paddles the paramedics use.

KATIE

I'm not calling 911. OK, so do it.

WINNIE

Now?

KATIE

Why wait?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (78)

WINNIE

All right, I will.

Slowly building courage, he holds his breath as Katie watches with growing fascination. He waves goodbye. As he's holding his breath, his facial expressions change from self-satisfaction, to concern, to bewilderment, to fear, to the agony of holding on for one more second without air. Finally he gives up.

KATIE

Any chest pain?

He shakes his head.

KATIE

Damn.

Max goes to Winnie.

MAX

(finally)

OK, so I was a little bull-headed just now. Maybe you can still hear. Who the hell knows? I was thinking that if you can, you and I should have a talk. Or at least I could talk and you could listen and maybe understand. You don't have to stay alive just for us. You don't have to feel responsible for us any more. We can take it from here. It's OK to die.

Winnie doesn't respond. Krissy enters and listens to Max unseen. Jessica comes in a few seconds later.

MAX

Go ahead and do it. Die.

KRISSY

No. We want Gramps to get better.

JESSICA

What the hell are you saying to my father?

KRISSY

I don't want Gramps to die.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (79)

MAX

I don't want him to die, either.

KRISSY

You told him to go ahead and die, I heard you.

MAX

That is what I said, but it's not what you think.

Max goes to Krissy, kneels down to her and takes her hands in his.

MAX

Gramps is sick. Very, very sick. He's so sick that he's not really here anymore. His body is here. But his mind is gone.

KRISSY

Where did it go?

MAX

To a place that is very, very peaceful. And I was just telling your Gramps that it was all right to let his body follow his mind.

KRISSY

I don't want him to go.

MAX

Your Gramps can't do anything any more. He just sits there day after day, waiting. You know how hard it is to wait for something. You want it to happen right away, don't you?

KRISSY

Yes.

MAX

That's the way it is with your Gramps. He's waiting patiently to go. But I think he wants to know that it's all right with all the people who love him.

KRISSY

I still don't want him to go.

MAX

I know, honey. It is very hard to give up someone you love but you go ahead and do it anyhow because it is best for them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (80)

Krissy nods sadly. He kisses her. She starts crying. Jessica goes to her, but she pushes her mother away, shaking her head. Krissy runs out crying.

MAX

Jess, you know that I love that guy. He's been like a father to me. If there was any chance that he could...

JESSICA

That day, when he collapsed and I thought he was dead, I didn't feel sad. I felt relieved. Every day I come into this room with a happy face, but when I see him here, stacking those fucking books...

Overwhelmed with shame, she looks at Max for reassurance. He nods that he understands.

JESSICA

I want him to die. I try to tell myself that would be better for him.

They exit with Max's arms around Jessica. Katie watches their exit, close to tears. After a few seconds she composes herself.

KATIE

(finally)

So much for holding your breath. Got any other great ideas?

WINNIE

Yes, it just so happens that I do. I'll starve myself to death. That's what the great protestors did down through the ages.

Lights fade to black

END OF SCENE 3

SCENE 4

Lights come up on the sunroom, two days later. Max is working on his laptop. Winnie is in a yoga position.

KATIE

Ommmmmm.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (81)

WINNIE

Boy, am I hungry.

KATIE

It's been only two days.

WINNIE

What I wouldn't give for a hot-fudge sundae.

KATIE

Hot-fudge sundae is not the image we want. Freedom from the earthly bonds that hold you in their dark grasp. This is the image.

WINNIE

A little red cherry set amidst whipped cream on top of a mountain of chocolate ice cream.

KATIE

Hot-fudge sundaes were not what Mahatma Gandhi was thinking of while fighting for India's independence from Great Britain.

WINNIE

Independence from English cooking was motivation enough.

Jessica appears in the doorway with a hot fudge sundae.

JESSICA

Hi, Dad, it's me, Jessica. I have a surprise for you, Dad.

She shows him the sundae.

JESSICA

I know my father. He wants a sundae with whipped cream and nuts and hot fudge flowing down a mountain of ice cream.

KATIE

(only heard by Winnie)

School's out.

JESSICA

Don't you, Dad? Hot fudge?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (82)

KATIE

(only heard by Winnie)

Steady, old boy.

Everyone watches expectantly as Jessica brings a spoonful of ice cream to Winnie's lips. A tongue shoots out.

JESSICA

You've never said no to a hot-fudge sundae.

KATIE

(only heard by Winnie)

Don't take the bait, sweet love.

JESSICA

Here, Dad.

She brings the spoonful of hot fudge and ice cream close to his lips. A tongue shoots out. She touches his lips with the spoon. His lips quiver.

JESSICA

Just a little bite for Jessie.

She persists. Slowly he opens his mouth.

JESSICA

That's good, Dad.

He gobbles up the ice cream as she spoons it into his mouth. He finishes it.

JESSICA

The poor guy was so hungry. Dad, I'll get you another hot fudge sundae with M&Ms for dinner.

She kisses him and goes to Max.

MAX

(facetiously)

That's great. Now he won't starve to death. Where's Destiny?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (83)

JESSICA

I let her go. I can take care of him, now that I'm not going to school.

MAX

No, you can't stay here alone with him. You won't ever be able to leave the house.

JESSICA

Look, Max, this is my responsibility and I'm taking care of it. I'll do just fine while you're gone.

She starts to leave.

MAX

I'm not going to Rome. I'm quitting the paper.

JESSICA

No, Max.

MAX

It's time I made some real money. Get a job in public relations. Regular hours. Name on the door. Secretary. Good medical coverage.

JESSICA

You'll hate it.

MAX

We'll be able to hire a whole bunch of Destinys and maybe have enough left over for...

JESSICA

A vacation in Rome?

MAX

Something like that.

JESSICA

You can't do that.

MAX

I've made up my mind.

JESSICA

Have you told anyone at the paper?

MAX

Not yet.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (84)

JESSICA

We should talk about it before you do anything.

MAX

There's nothing left to talk about.

JESSICA

There's a lot to talk about.

They exit.

KATIE

Enjoy your sundae? You just blew your last chance for suicide.

WINNIE

I don't know why I opened my mouth.

KATIE

Starvation was your only gambit, and you gutted that with gluttony.

WINNIE

Give me a break, will you? It was easy enough for you, Ms. Fatal-Heart-Attack Victim. No decisions for you to make. No strategies for you to plan. A fatal heart attack blasted you into a coma and I was the one who had to finish you off.

KATIE

Maybe you'll get a bad infection. But the way you're going, they'll cure it with antibiotics. There's always the flu.

WINNIE

I had my flu shot.

KATIE

Flu shots. Exercise. Cholesterol drugs. No smoking. You're never going to die.

WINNIE

I'll come up with something else. I'm as good as dead.

KATIE

That's what I've been telling you since I got here. We've got to talk about how you're going to spend eternity. You've got to be prepared. When the time comes, you'll have only a nanosecond to choose.

WINNIE

Non-existence terrifies me. But reliving the shame of what I did to Jessie is awful.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (85)

KATIE

No one makes it from birth to death without having done some shameful things, except maybe the stillborn.

WINNIE

That stupid, stupid fight. I had the money. I could have paid for the tuition.

KATIE

It was a stupid, stupid fight.

END OF SCENE 4

SCENE 5

Lights signifying the past come up elsewhere on the stage. Jessica is standing in the light.

JESSICA

It's the best art school in the country. Why are you putting it down like this?

Winnie goes to her.

WINNIE

You're not an artist.

JESSICA

I'm a good enough artist to get into that school.

WINNIE

But you'll never be a great artist. You're a great writer.

JESSICA

I don't want to be a writer.

WINNIE

I'm wanting what is best for you.

JESSICA

What you're wanting is to live your life through me.

WINNIE

That's not true.

JESSICA

You want me to succeed where you couldn't.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (86)

WINNIE

(firmly)

I'm wanting what is best for you.

JESSICA

It's my life to live.

WINNIE

I will not stand by and let you waste your talent.

JESSICA

I'm going to live my own life and you can't stop me.

WINNIE

The hell I can't.

JESSICA

The hell you can.

WINNIE

I'm not paying the tuition, not for art school.

JESSICA

You have to pay the tuition.

WINNIE

I'm not going to help you do something that you will regret for the rest of your life.

JESSICA

It's an honor getting into a school like that. This is a great opportunity for me.

WINNIE

It's an honor winning all those writing competitions. It's an honor being published in the New Yorker.

JESSICA

I'll get a job and pay for the tuition myself.

WINNIE

You're a writer.

JESSICA

I'm not a writer. I'm an artist.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (87)

WINNIE

You're not much of an artist.

JESSICA

And you're not much of a father.

She exits.

WINNIE

(calling after her)

Jessie. Jessie.

Winnie crumples in despair, close to tears. He returns to his chair as the lights change to signify the present.

END OF SCENE 5

SCENE 6

WINNIE

The fights between us got worse and worse. We stopped talking to each other. For a whole year.

KATIE

You finally went to her and apologized.

WINNIE

She couldn't make enough to stay in school.

KATIE

And now she's back in school. You made it up to her. You two are closer than you've ever been.

WINNIE

I would have given anything to be published in the New Yorker.

KATIE

She didn't want to compete with you.

WINNIE

Don't be ridiculous. Do you think it would have bothered me if she kept getting published in the New Yorker and wrote best-selling novels and won literary awards and did all the goddamn things I wanted to do but wasn't able to. You think I would have been jealous of my own daughter?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (88)

He looks to Katie for confirmation, but she doesn't give it to him.

WINNIE

(continuing; slowly accepting the shameful possibility)

That is even more shameful.

Krissy enters. She goes to him and studies his impassive face.

KRISSY

Gramps, can you hear me?

He doesn't respond. She sits down next to him.

KRISSY

Daddy says we have to give you permission to die. You never asked for permission to do anything before. But daddy says this is different. I talked to mom about it and she kind of agreed, I think. I don't want you to die. But if that's what you want and you're not dying because you think you need permission, then I give you permission.

Krissy hugs him crying.

Lights slowly fade to black

END OF SCENE 6

SCENE 7

Lights come up on the sunroom, a little while later as the sun is setting. Winnie and Katie are lying together on the chaise lounge, delighted that he has a high fever. Max is at his computer.

WINNIE

I told you I could do it.

KATIE

One hundred and two, very impressive. How did you pull that off?

WINNIE

(indicating God)

He heard you.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (89)

KATIE

That was fast. He must have broad band.

They break up laughing.

WINNIE

I hope it doesn't freak Jessie out when she finds out about this fever.

KATIE

It didn't. She's already been here. Doctor says you have pneumonia.

WINNIE

(with pride)

My doctor made a house call.

KATIE

Diagnosed you over the phone.

WINNIE

(with disappointment)

Oh.

KATIE

(with disappointment)

Damn bacterial pneumonia. Jess is out getting the damn antibiotics now.

She touches his forehead.

KATIE

Aspirin's bringing down your fever. I wish you were still smoking. You'd be dead by now. How you feeling?

WINNIE

Like shit.

KATIE

Well, that's something.

WINNIE

This will give me time to tell them how much I love them.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (90)

KATIE

There's nothing you can do about that, Winnie. You can't see them. You can't hear them. You can't talk. You've forgotten how to speak.

WINNIE

I'll practice what I'm going to say and then find a way to force it out.

(getting up and rehearsing a sentence)

Thank you for the flowers.

KATIE

Thank you for the flowers?

WINNIE

Shhh. I'm practicing.

KATIE

This is how you're going to tell them that you love them?

WINNIE

(practicing)

Thank you for the flowers.

Jessica enters. She carries a bag from the drugstore.

JESSICA

He seems to want something.

She caresses his hair. She looks intently at him, looking for some flickering awareness.

WINNIE

Tell me when they get here.

KATIE

They're here now.

WINNIE

They are?

KATIE

Yes.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (91)

WINNIE

Thank you for the flowers.

JESSICA

Is he trying to say something?

MAX

No.

KATIE

Let it go. After you're gone they'll remember how much you used to love them.

WINNIE

Not used to. Now. I love them now.

(louder)

Thank you for the flowers.

JESSICA

I think he's trying to move his lips.

MAX

He hasn't spoken for a month.

WINNIE

(yelling)

I liked the flowers. What's wrong, are they deaf?

(yelling with increasing desperation and in all directions  
because he can't see them)

Thank you for the flowers. Hey, I'm talking to you. I liked the flowers. I liked the flowers. I like the stupid flowers. Damn it, will you help me, Katie.

KATIE

They can't hear me either.

WINNIE

Help me, will you?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (92)

KATIE

(shouting)

He loves you.

WINNIE

I liked the flowers.

KATIE

He loves both of you.

WINNIE

I liked the flowers.

MAX

The poor bastard.

WINNIE

(giving up, speaking with quiet resignation)

I liked the flowers.

JESSICA

I think I understand what he is trying to say.

MAX

He hasn't uttered a word.

JESSICA

He's communicating on another level. He's saying he loves us.

KATIE

(amazed that she understood)

I'll be damned.

Jessica takes the antibiotics from the bag.

MAX

(taking the bottle of pills from Jessica)

Jess, don't.

KATIE

Dear, it'll be better for everyone if you just held your father's hand.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (93)

JESSICA

(unaware of Katie)

I can't just hold his hand and do nothing.

KATIE

"Nothing" is good.

MAX

Pneumonia is God's gift to the slowly dying.

JESSICA

You're asking me to play God.

MAX

(hopefully)

Yes.

JESSICA

I might just as well stop giving him food or water or put a plastic bag over his head and tie it tight.

Jessica reaches for the pills but Max won't give up the bottle.

KATIE

Parents are forever playing God with their children. That's all your father is now, a child. He's not even that. Letting him die is the right thing to do.

JESSICA

This voice inside me says letting him die is the right thing to do.

MAX

Listen to the voice.

JESSICA

But another voice is saying it's wrong to let him die. I keep asking myself what dad would do if he knew he was this sick. I can't make the decision for him.

MAX

Giving him the drug is making a decision for him.

JESSICA

I don't have the courage to kill him.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (94)

MAX

You don't have the courage to help him die peacefully?

JESSICA

He is at peace. Look at him. He's not in pain. He might even be happy.

MAX

You don't know that.

JESSICA

Of course I don't. He's an inconvenience, that's all I know for sure. I swore I would not let this happen to him. I would do what was necessary, like he did for mom. But he warned me about that. He's not in pain. It's not right to kill him because we're in pain.

MAX

You father wouldn't want...

JESSICA

I don't want to look back and think that something I did or didn't do took away even a few hours of the little life he had left. Let God, or whatever it is that does these things, bear that guilt.

Max realizes the quandary she's in. He takes a pill from the bottle and goes to Winnie.

KATIE

No.

Max gives Winnie the pill and massages his neck as a vet would with a sick dog.

MAX

I think you could use a drink.

JESSICA

We could both use a drink.

Max exits and Jessica slumps down on the couch. She is unaware of Katie and Winnie talking to each other.

WINNIE

Ever since she was born, I've tried to do the right thing for her. And now, at the last moment, I'm failing her. I'm just a failure, Katie, a miserable failure.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (95)

KATIE

I remember you saying that to me on our very first date.

WINNIE

I did?

KATIE

You were in the midst of one of those big investigations of yours and having trouble getting one important fact for the story. You said you'd lost the edge and were a failure as a newspaperman. So we worked out the problem.

WINNIE

This is what we did on our first date?

KATIE

One of the things.

WINNIE

(fondly)

Now I remember. When we said goodbye that night...

KATIE

That morning.

WINNIE

I realized I had just spent the evening with a kindred spirit.

KATIE

And I realized I had spent the evening with the man I was going to marry.

WINNIE

I thought it took you months to realize how much you loved me.

KATIE

I didn't want you to get too sure of yourself. You had so much passion for everything, I couldn't help falling in love with you. You loved being a newspaperman. Whenever you had a big story, you'd rush out in the morning to get the paper to see how they played it. You were so proud of your work. You always got mad when they didn't put it on Page One.

WINNIE

They always put in on One.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (96)

KATIE

Most of the time.

WINNIE

Always. And above the fold.

KATIE

Even now, you're still passionate about it. That's why I've loved you so much.

WINNIE

Katie, I need your help again. Please, help me die.

KATIE

I want to. I want to so much. But there's nothing I can do.

WINNIE

I've tried so hard to do it. I really have.

KATIE

Oh, Winnie.

WINNIE

Please.

KATIE

All I can do is talk to you, give you advise, share all that I know.

WINNIE

Damnit, Katie, I don't ask for your help very often. I need you to help me now.

KATIE

I can't.

WINNIE

You're not trying.

KATIE

So now this is my responsibility?xxx

He grabs his chest. He is having angina. Now Katie realizes what she must do. She will provoke a heart attack with increasingly vicious attacks on things Winnie takes pride in.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (97)

KATIE

You should have retired years earlier than you did. You should have quit while you were ahead.

WINNIE

What?

KATIE

You were a disaster as a newspaperman, the last 10 years of your career.

WINNIE

You liked my stories.

KATIE

I was pretending.

WINNIE

Pretending?

KATIE

Stroking your incredible ego. But now I'm dead. I have to tell the truth. It's a rule.

Disappointed that this didn't do it, she she thinks of another way to insult him.

KATIE

(continuing; raising the ante)

Your cooking was terrible.

WINNIE

You didn't like my cooking, either?

KATIE

Your mushrooms were waterlogged.

WINNIE

Waterlogged!

Frustrated again, she realizes that she must use a weapon of mass destruction.

KATIE

You weren't very good in bed, either.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (98)

THE NEXT PAGE IS PAGE 95 AND REPLACES  
PAGES 95 AND 96

Winnie screams with extreme pain. He is having a heart  
attack. He looks at Katie, who is smiling in triumph. At  
first he is shocked, and then he understands.

WINNIE

I'll be damned.

He starts to collapse.

WINNIE

I knew you would come up with something.

KATIE

(shouting at him)

You were a wonderful writer, an exceptional cook and the best lover in the world.

WINNIE

I know. Xxx

He crumples to the ground.

KATIE

Winnie, which is it? Rebirth or non-existence?

(as she slowly vanishes)

Rebirth or non-existence.

Jessica rushes to him.

KATIE

Rebirth or non-existence.

Katie exits.

JESSICA

Dad.

Jessica listens to his chest, feels for a pulse in his neck.  
She starts CPR, counting each time she presses down on  
his heart.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (99)

JESSICA  
Max. Come quick. Max.

Max appears in the doorway, holding two drinks.

MAX  
What's wrong?

JESSICA  
He's had a heart attack.

MAX  
(looking upward)  
Thank you.

JESSICA  
Call 911.

She continues the CPR. He takes a drink.

MAX  
What are you doing?

JESSICA  
One, two, three, four, five. Call 911 for God's sake.

She blows into his mouth.

MAX  
This is a message from God.

JESSICA  
We don't need God. We need paramedics. Call the damn paramedics, will you? One, two, three, four, five.

MAX  
Let the poor bastard go.

She breathes into his mouth.

JESSICA  
One, two, three, four, five. Call.

She blows into his mouth.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (100)

Shit.  
MAX

One, two, three, four, five.  
JESSICA

He dials. She breathes into his mouth.

MAX

(on phone)

Hello, this is the Hellman residence at 911... I mean at Twenty-One Thirteen Spruce Street. My father-in-law is having a heart attack. Would you send someone over, when you get a chance? Thank you.

Get the oxygen. One, two, three, four, five.  
JESSICA

We shouldn't be doing this.  
MAX

Oxygen.  
JESSICA

She blows into his mouth. Max gets the oxygen.

He's trying so hard to die and you keep undermining him.  
MAX

Get the oxygen tank.  
JESSICA

Max brings over the oxygen and starts preparing the mask.

Give me that.  
JESSICA (CONT'D)

She reaches over to get the mask. Winnie rolls out from under the compressions and exits. She stops the CPR.

He's coming back.  
JESSICA (CONT'D)

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (101)

MAX

He can't be coming back.

JESSICA

He moved his head.

MAX

Because you're pumping on his chest.

JESSICA

No. He moved it himself.

MAX

He's gone.

JESSICA

No.

She resumes the CPR more aggressively.

JESSICA

One, two, three, four, five

MAX

Please, Jessie.

JESSICA

One, two, three, four, five.

MAX

For God's sake, Jess, stop.

As Jessica continues the CPR, very bright lights come up, illuminating an elevated, upstage space, at the top of a hidden ramp, where Katie stands waiting. She wears the colorful costume of a bike rider and holds red and blue biking helmets. Winnie enters, climbing the ramp to where Katie is waiting. He wears a bicycle rider's outfit.

WINNIE

Breathe that Irish air.

KATIE

Isn't this a beautiful country?

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (102)

WINNIE

I feel so wonderful. I never knew the golden years would be so good.

KATIE

We've got our health and we've got each other.

WINNIE

What more could you want? I wish this could last forever.

KATIE

It will.

WINNIE

What makes you think so?

KATIE

Intuition.

WINNIE

(looking off to the distance)

Oh, look, Katie, on top of that hill way in the distance, a castle. Race you to the castle.

Upstage lights bump out to complete black. The instant the Irish scene goes black, Jessica yells.

JESSICA

(with alarm)

Daddy.

The shock is replaced with the deeply sad realization that her father is gone.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Daddy.

But there is also relief that his struggle is over and she and her family have been freed from this burden.

JESSICA (CONT'D)

Daddy.

Max bends down and brings her close. They hug as the sirens of an approaching ambulance are heard.

(CONTINUED)

CONTINUED: (103)

Lights fade to black

CURTAIN