

The Last Work of Saint Peter the Great

by

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1995. Boston. September. Late Morning. Traffic. PETER, about forty, shirtless, painfully thin and showing a few lesions, is sitting on the sill up center, looking out at the traffic. Dashing all over the apartment, unpacking an overnight bag and straightening things, ROCH, [pronounced Roshe; he uses a bit of French accent for it, but no one else does] about forty; serious, robust.

ROCH

-- I'll stay upstairs - you won't even know I'm here.

PETER

No. I said 'no'. I know how things are.

ROCH

Things are this way: we're friends. I made my peace with that a long time ago.

PETER

No, you didn't.

ROCH

John Donne: "Come be my love, and we will some new pleasures prove/Of golden sands, and crystal brooks --"

PETER

Flesh disgusts me.

ROCH

You make it hard for a fella to date you. (re: the painting) Are you working on this today?

PETER

I don't know. You want to take me from Jon.

ROCH

Peter --

PETER

Is it cold in here?

ROCH

Now you're cold - well, get away from the window --

PETER

No, I'll just put my shirt back on --

MITZI & BITZI (burst in singing)

Welcome home, welcome home, welcome home, welcome home.

BITZI

Boy, are you off key.

MITZI

Me? You sing like Elmer Fudd.

BITZI

Me? Oh, God. (a la Fudd) Dhere's dhe pot cawwing dhe kettwle tone-deaf. (to Peter) How are you, darling love? You look so good sitting there in your own little window --

MITZI

Shirt off, please.

PETER

I just put it on.

MITZI

So this would be the reverse of that. You need a massage. (re: Bitzi) He thinks I'm trying to kill the cat.

BITZI

I only asked if you'd left the gas on.

MITZI

Why would I do that? Fluids today?

PETER

Not yet.

BITZI

Not yet! It's ten o'clock in the morning. I'll get you some -- geez there is nothing to eat in here! Where the heck is Walter?

WALTER (bursts in)

Como estan mi amigo!! Amigos!

PETER

Amigo!

WALTER

Amigo! Oh, my God, I am butchered. Wow, leave that shirt off, you're making me crazy. Where's the vitamin C? God. I'm desperate. Peter, this is that pesto stuff you like - eat it!

Walter takes the grocery list out of the cabinet, hands it to Peter.

WALTER (con't)

Is the list ready? Here we go. Finish it up. You guys! I went bicycling the other day and I met the cutest cutest cutest ever guy. You know that blond with black eyebrows look - oh, I couldn't get the blood stain out of the bottom sheet, but it's useable - anyway - this guy, the eyebrows were definitely naturally black, not a dye job. His name was Brad. Anyway, I'm changing my bicycle tire and this radical beauty is standing right behind me if you'll pardon the expression --

ROCH

Walter, you were supposed to bring juice --

WALTER

-- and he starts talking about the weather and I'm thinking, Oh, my God, he wants me --

MITZI

We need groceries here --

WALTER

Wait - let me finish.

PETER

Wait - let him finish.

WALTER

Where's that pile of socks and things - oh, here they are - So I have all day to play and I'm like, "I have plenty of time today - what's your schedule like-" and he's like, "I'm a bartender!" so I'm like, 'Do you want to go for a ride?' and he's like 'Yeah, absolutely', so off we go and we spent hours tooling around the Esplanade. Put bleach on the list; you're low. So anyway, I'm like, 'oh, thank you, God, what have I done to deserve this?' and all afternoon his thigh muscles were glistening, I mean glistening and I'm like, thank God I have my water bottle because I am de-hydrat-ing!

Saltines? You don't --

BITZI

We used them for poker chips that night --

WALTER

We're so pathetic. So I'm like, in love. We have seen each other every day and twice on Sunday since we met. And, I don't know, it's just like so wonderful, I feel I can tell him anything, you know how I can be so shy sometimes and I just feel like it's it - it's just beautiful.

PETER

Are you boys being careful?

WALTER

Yes, mother. Oh, Lord, I'm not used to not sleeping. Though, let me tell you, I don't mind. Can I just lie for a bit? I can't move; I absolutely cannot move.

BITZI

Oh, I have some stuff from Dale.

WALTER

I better go clean the bathroom.

BITZI (to Walter)

Don't you touch that bathroom, you slob. All right:

To Peter, reading a note and pulling stuff from his bag:

"Praise God, Peter, that you're home. I prayed for you every day. Please accept in love and friendship the enclosed: a necklace that I strung for you specially that will cleanse your colon -- "

PETER

Dear God.

BITZI

Shh.

"Peter - note that your immune system is supposed to take care of you and it can't. It's given up the fight. Peter - You have to forgive yourself for all the things you've done and all the things you haven't done --"

PETER

I'm not listening to this --

WALTER (calling from the bathroom)

You're going to get an ear infection --

BITZI

Walter.

"Dear. Dear, Peter. Love yourself. It's --"

PETER

Will someone please tell Dale he's sicker than I am?

BITZI

Peter!

PETER

Well, he is. He'll probably die first, the dirty rat.

BITZI

Stop! He says for you to sit on this for two hours a day - he says your root chakra is blocked and the orange pillow will clear it out --

PETER

Tell Dale --

BITZI

Sit on the pillow --

PETER

You keep it. I don't want it. And, Mitz, you take the colon-cleanser - it's you.

MITZI

I can't keep that - he strung it for you. He says it's specially --

PETER

And Walter -- Walter come in here --

WALTER (at the bathroom door)

Sir?

PETER

Walter, you can have my baseball cap collection --

WALTER

I can have it??

ROCH (to Peter)

What are you doing?

WALTER

Wait, what do you mean, I can have it? - I'm cleaning the bathroom! Leave me alone!

PETER (to Roch)

And what can I give you, old friend?

Nothing! There is absolutely --

ROCH

Listen --

PETER

No, you listen. I don't have a pen - we can't do this now.

BITZI

You didn't finish your painting --

MITZI

No, no. You guys, you guys. Enough. Enough. It's not --

PETER

The BUZZER sounds. They all stop in their tracks.

Com-pany.

LAST BREATH

I bet it's one of the art dealers.

BITZI

They're not art dealers - they're criminals.

PETER

I got six calls while you were in the hospital.

BITZI

(to Bitzi) Tell them --

PETER

BITZI
I told them!

MITZI
Arm, dear. Tell me if this
is too tight.

It's too tight.

PETER

After I put it on.

MITZI

WALTER
Gentlemen! The buzzer. I'll get it. (into the buzzer) Hello?

JOAN'S VOICE
Peter?

WALTER (into the intercom)
No.

JOAN'S VOICE
Is Peter there?

WALTER (into the intercom)
I'll check. (to Peter) Are you in?

PETER
Who is it?

WALTER (into the intercom)
Who is it please?

JOAN'S VOICE
Joan.

PETER
Joan?

WALTER (into the intercom)
Joan?

JOAN'S VOICE
His sister.

WALTER (to Peter)
Your sist --. Your sister? (into the intercom) Well, come up, come up!

BITZI
She sounds just like you, except for a trace of a California accent, San Francisco, isn't it? Joan of Arc! My favorite saint. The very first cross-dresser in the history of sainthood.

PETER
Joan? Joan. She's here??

ROCH
Did you call her?

PETER
Why would I call her?

Walter opens the door and JOAN, about thirty-five, leaning towards chunky, is standing there with a suitcase. She is fairly disheveled, looks very tired. She looks around the room at the guys. Peter stands.

JOAN
Peter?

PETER
Joan?

JOAN
Are you all right?

PETER
Do I look all right?

WALTER
Joan! How excellent! You can stay with Peter! Donald's sister came out to stay with us when he was sick. God, she was wonderful. She even took one of those "How to Care for The AIDS Patient" courses - she's so cute! I'm Walter. (pause) Uh. Did you know Peter. . was. . ? Uh. Oops.

ROCH
Roch.

JOAN
Sorry?

ROCH
"Roch," as in the Saint. Thirteenth century, French. Invoked against Infectious Diseases and Plague. I'll keep the name till the plague is over. Till there's a cure and a vaccine. Don't hold your breath. I see you have a suitcase - can I call you a cab?

PETER (a near swoon)
Whoa.

Easy, easy. Peter. Sit, sit. ROCH

What year is it? Who am I? BITZI

Stop it. PETER

How many fingers? MITZI

Seventeen. PETER

WALTER MITZI
Close enough. Breathe. Deep breath.

What if that happens and I'm not here? ROCH

I'd move in, Peter, but I'm too neurotic - you'd hate it -- WALTER

We've already talked about that -- ROCH

No, we haven't -- PETER

Peter, be reasonable -- you need someone to stay with you -- MITZI

The floor isn't that far down. PETER

I would have come sooner if you wanted -- JOAN

I didn't want you to. PETER

WALTER

Peter! Joan, sit. He didn't used to be this rude.

JOAN

I don't mind.

MITZI

(to Peter) Your pulse is racing.

PETER

No it's not.

MITZI

Oh, sorry, I must have forgotten how to count.

BITZI

If you wouldn't stay up half the night reading Ulysses you wouldn't have these problems. The light keeps me up.

MITZI

You were snoring.

BITZI

I could be having sinus problems. And the light bothers Kumquat. (to Joan) Kumquat's our cat. Isn't it wonderful? It's the perfect combination of a dirty word and a vegetable.

MITZI

(to Bitzi) It's a fruit. (to Peter) This is that new stuff, honey - Phase III Clinical Trials - you are on board. I'll need you to be somewhat still for an hour or so in case you get dizzy or something. Do you need to void?

BITZI

Why would he when he won't eat or drink anything?

MITZI

Don't yell at him because you're mad at me.

BITZI

I'm not mad at you --

JOAN

I heard about a woman who got it being on the same bus as a guy who had it. The woman was sitting next to him and a kid threw a rock into the window and the window was open of course and now the glass in busses is that special glass that doesn't shatter when it gets hit, but you can't really see out of it, but the rock hit the sick guy in the head and the blood kind of splattered like a waterfall or a fountain pen and the lady who was sitting next to him, she wasn't wearing glasses or, of course, not goggles like the doctors wear and the blood got in her eye and so she got it.

Pause

BITZI

I'm a little mad. If you don't rinse the dishes before you wash what you get is a bucket of slime. I'm telling you, these dishes are up to the ceiling and they're filthy and he puts them right in the water and I'm supposed to eat off these plates? Please. I don't even want them in the cabinet. From now on, I'll do the dishes, you make the bed. God, I can't look at this bathroom. Walter, you're a nightmare.

MITZI

You don't like the way I make the bed.

BITZI

Oh, isn't that scrumptious. Forget it - I'll do the bed, I'll do the dishes - isn't it nice for you to have a maid.

MITZI

You're not the maid. *Tu et l'amour de ma vie.*

BITZI

Tish, that's French.
(they kiss; Joan gasps)
What?

JOAN (leaving)

What? - you know what - I - I'm supposed to meet someone at the Y - at the YMCA - I mean the W - the W - I'll stay there - I don't want to be in the way and everything and - it's no trouble, OK, I'll call you - Bye.

She's gone.

PETER

Good riddance.

BITZI

Peter, dear, your skills as a host are on the decline.

PETER

Why do you care if she stays here --

BITZI

Are you blind?

PETER

Not yet. Why?

MITZI

Did you look at her? Did you look?

BITZI

She's in trouble.

PETER

What kind of -- she's pregnant? She's thirty five years old - she's married -- how could-

MITZI

No, no, no, not that kind of "trouble."

PETER

What are you --

WALTER

I agree - there is definitely --

MITZI

I wonder if she's battered --

PETER

Joan is? Derek? You think Derek beats her?

BITZI

If that's her husband, then I'd say, yes, probably it is Derek of the Fist.

PETER

What are you - how could you possibly know --

MITZI

I didn't say I knew for sure, I'm only --

BITZI (with Mitzi)

He didn't say he knew for sure --

WALTER

Peter, I'm not the most sensitive guy in the world, and even I - although I'm not self-centered, I wouldn't say that I'm, uh, anyway. She's in trouble, Peter.

ROCH

Do you guys think he needs trouble in this house?

BITZI

Life is trouble, son. Peter, she's your sister.

PETER

My sister: I'm nineteen years old; my mother is dying of cancer; Joan has to go. She runs off, at fifteen, to marry this Fist Guy. Heads West. She's not my --

Joan is back, standing at the door.

You shouldn't have left.

JOAN

You shouldn't have let me.

ROCH

Peter, I can find her a place to stay --

LAST BREATH

Oh, yeah. Joanie Joan. Little Ghostie Joanie. Come for a visit.

PETER

No. It's OK. She can stay for a bit.

BITZI

You're a saint.

JOAN (slightly mumbled)

Saint Peter the Great.

MITZI

What, hon?

JOAN

"Saint Peter the Great, let me in/You're always right, you always win." He used to make me say that to come in to his boy's club.

BITZI

Saint. . that's two different people, isn't it?

JOAN

I guess so.

BITZI

OK. So. Good. You can stay upstairs - there's a nice bed and he never goes up there anymore.

PETER

Not upstairs --

BITZI

You want to share the couch? (to Joan) Now, make sure he drinks three of these a day --

JOAN

"Ensure"?

MITZI

He doesn't like it, so make him. Make sure Walter takes the dish towels. They're cotton germ-breeders and Walter forgets to take them -

WALTER

I do not! He hides them!

PETER

I do not!

Bitzi kicks over her suitcase: mostly junk food

BITZI

Oh, sorry!

PETER

What's up with your suitcase?

WALTER

What have you been wearing?

JOAN

Um. These. And I have - this T-shirt --

BITZI

Ach! Easy enough. I have some ladies clothes that would fit you just nicely. I used to go for that silliness but not since I met the man of my dreams and settled down.

MITZI

I found a bra in the hamper last week.

BITZI

Oh, that old thing. I'll bring some stuff by.

JOAN

Oh, no, I --

BITZI

Some of it's very staid - given to me by an auntie who was not clear on the concept.

MITZI

(to Joan) All right, very basic lessons. You won't have to do much - I'll stop by a couple of times every day and check his vitals and tubes and make sure he's not developing anything. Gloves are right there --

JOAN

Gloves?

MITZI

Don't handle any body fluids - I mean ANY - without them. Don't worry about laundry because Walter does that and don't worry about the basic cleaning --

BITZI

Mine --

MITZI

-- because Bitz does that. If he seems funny at all, check his fever. If it's over one hundred, call nine-one-one and get him to the hospital. If it's over ninety-nine, call me and we'll come over. We have a beeper - give her a card, honey.

She hesitates.

BITZI
It's washed.

JOAN
"AIDS AID." (to Bitzi) You're a lawyer?

BITZI
It doesn't mean I'm not a nice person.

MITZI
You can tell he's unconscious as opposed to sleeping if you pinch him and he doesn't stir. A bed sore can form in as little as one hour - do at least that for me, OK? Make sure he's moving all the time.

JOAN
But, I --

MITZI
I can't be ten places at once!

BITZI
Well don't bite her head off.

MITZI
I'm sorry. It's been a long decade. OK, baby, time to feed the worm. (to Joan) I hope you're not squeamish.

Mitzi pulls gauze off of Peter's arm to reveal a "long-line" firmly imbedded in his flesh. He begins to rig a bag of medication.

BITZI
That looks good, babe. Sore at all?

MITZI
Geez, you should have seen the tube we saw last night.

BITZI
Oh, geez!

MITZI

Joan, come and watch this so you can learn how. I mean to tell you that tube was squirming with life. There'd been some bleeding and no one had bothered to clean it out so it just was rank and you know what happens when blood dries in a tube - it just backs right up and the pus collects and by the time we got there it was encrusted like an eighth layer of skin or something. I had to soak the incision --

Joan runs to the window, stands gulping air.

JOAN

Oh - I - uh, this is a good view. . .

ROCH

(to Peter) Are you sure about this?

PETER

No.

Time passes; Late Night. Peter is painting, trying to paint downstairs, JOAN is upstairs, not touching any of the paintings or furniture with her hands if she can help it, cleaning up and eating Junior Mints. Silence.

JOAN

Thank you for letting me stay here.

PETER

It'll be a nice change - we don't get many homophobes around here.

JOAN

I'm not.

PETER

Prove it.

JOAN

I can't prove that.

PETER

Do you know any homosexuals?

JOAN

Ah. Harvey Fierstein.

PETER
No, Joan, to talk to.

JOAN
Oh, well, no.

PETER
You live in San Francisco!

JOAN
Outskirts.

PETER
How can you not know any --

JOAN
I don't know anybody. I'm really sorry about your - um - illness.

PETER
Thanks, I - um - feel much better.

JOAN
I heard about this other guy, he got it from a cab driver. He was paying the guy and the guy grabbed the money --

PETER
The only way he could have gotten it from a cab driver was if he paid the fare in trade. In trade. If he --

JOAN
Well. He said he got it that way --

PETER
That's how I got it. I had a cab driver who had it and I was wearing a pink tutu on a Tuesday of a month with a "Q" in it and the moon was in Aquarius and so I got it.

JOAN
I didn't want to assume --

PETER

Assume away. I don't know exactly how I got it, Joan, but I don't think it was on a bus. I like to think of it as a gift from Jon, a hand to pull me where he's gone. When we found out he had it we went to Italy for four weeks, to eat, drink and lie in the sun. To tan. Jon wanted to tan while he was still beautiful enough to be stared at for that reason. He wasn't vain. He was just handsome. Jonathan died last summer. July twenty fifth. Three thirty seven o'clock in the morning, though, really, it was night.
Don't touch my stuff.

JOAN

I have to move it.

PETER

Go ahead and move it. But don't scrape - don't scrape the paintings together --

JOAN

I'm not --

PETER

Don't humor me --

JOAN

I'm not. I'm just not scraping them together. These are nice.

PETER

Don't scrape them!!

JOAN

I'm not! I think you're very brave. I couldn't handle all this.

PETER

Peter the Brave: that's me.

JOAN

I was trying to --

PETER

To what? To what? Why did you come here? I don't understand.

JOAN

I've been taking busses, you know, just seeing the country a little and I thought, 'I haven't seen Peter in a while; maybe I should --'

Why did you come here?
PETER

I'm out of money.
JOAN

Then go home.
PETER

I can't.
JOAN

How's Derek?
PETER

Fine.
JOAN

He's a gym teacher, right? He was pretty big, right? Big, physical guy, right?
PETER

Are these brushes supposed to be in this water? Do you want me to --
JOAN

No, just leave them there --
PETER

But won't they get ruined -- oh, no! --
JOAN

What? What? What did -- ? Did you spill it?
PETER

Well, why'd you leave them up here -- I have Kleenex -- don't worry, I'll get it --
JOAN

Did it spill on the bureau?? That's an antique --
PETER

It's OK - It's OK - I got it - I have - I have Kleenex --
JOAN

PETER
What are you doing??

JOAN
I'm wiping --

PETER
Here! I mean here! What are you doing here??

JOAN
I'm visiting!!

PETER
Get all that stuff up, Joan. That surface will rot under the water - it'll ruin it --

JOAN (on "Joan")
I'm getting it, I'm getting it --

PETER
You ran away from home? Why?

JOAN
I had to.

PETER
Why?

JOAN
Because --

PETER
Because why?

JOAN
Because I had to --

PETER
Why did you have to --

JOAN
Because he should have been more careful and he wasn't and he's a -- he's not careful. And one of his students is pregnant. And. I. I'm. I know, I know, he's supposed to be the teacher, the . . . just the gym teacher, but, still, a teacher and he. He'd get phone calls at night. Girls. I could hear him in the kitchen. Bits of it. The

JOAN (con't)

tone of it. Well, I let it go. I found a bra in the back seat of the car once. Well, not a whole bra. The rosette. That little pink rosette that comes on bras that girls wear. On early bras. I threw it out. Forgot about it. You know. You do things. You let it go, and you let it go and you. . But this girl. This last girl. Well. It got a little messy. Oh, Jesus, I haven't slept in a month -- you can't sleep on a bus.

PETER

No, it's hard to -- well, I think it's nice we got to see each other one more time. Yeah. Do you need anything?

JOAN

No. This is clean. All clean.

PETER

OK. Thanks --

JOAN

Sorry --

PETER

No. It's OK. Forget it. Goodnight.

JOAN

I'll stay upstairs. You won't even know I'm here.

She is trying, to no avail, to get on Peter's bed. Finally, she lays her jacket on the floor and sleeps on that.

PETER

Damn. Dammit. Name of the father, son, and holy spirit, amen. Well, isn't it nice Joan and I get to say - say. Whatever. God, please, God, OK, quick visit, nice idea. . got to see her again. But. . find her a place to stay -

LAST BREATH pops a condom balloon. Peter finds himself in a bar setting, is surrounded by men from THE CAST, who have become bar patrons. LAST BREATH dons a leather jacket and maybe a harness.

PETER

Do I know you? I think I do. Let me see your face.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

Aren't you going to ask me if I come here often?

Do you come here often? PETER

Do you? LAST BREATH AS STUD

Um. Yeah. I guess I do. Yeah. Why shouldn't I? It's 1980. It's Gay Camelot. Look, I'm surrounded by people who remind me of me. I'm invincible and herpes is treatable. Syphilis is curable. Penicillin is cheap. I'm not a leper for the first time in my life. I'm happy and you have beautiful eyes and would you like to come back to my place? PETER

Sure. Let's go. LAST BREATH AS STUD

I'll get my coat. PETER

Wait. There's something I have to tell you. LAST BREATH AS STUD

Tell me later. PETER

I infected you. LAST BREATH AS STUD

Come again? PETER

In 1980. September something or other. We met here and went out a few times. I'm the one who made you sick. LAST BREATH AS STUD

I'll kill you! I mean it - I'll kill you. I'm dying! PETER

Don't - you'll only hurt yourself. LAST BREATH AS STUD

PETER

God damn you! I wondered. I said it didn't matter but I wondered. My lover died last year.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

Mine, too.

PETER

I killed him.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

You killed each other. You wanna know something funny?

PETER

Yeah, sure, tell me a joke.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

I got it from a transfusion.

PETER

You're cute, but you're not funny.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

Well. It was swell. It's good that your sister is home.

PETER

She's not home; she's here.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

It's nice.

PETER

You're a diplomat.

LAST BREATH AS STUD

I think of myself as a gentleman.

Last Breath as The Stud starts to go, stops, takes Peter's hand, kisses it. Peter swoons; the club disappears.

Time passes; Day. JOAN, alone, at the window, eating. WALTER bursts in, slumps in the chair beside the couch.

JOAN

Oh, hi -- is it Walter - yeah, hi.

WALTER

Did you know that peppers are in season? Those purple ones. The dark purple ones, like eggplant. Aubergine.

JOAN

Oh, I didn't know that.

WALTER

Yeah, I was getting the groceries and I saw them. I was going to get one because you can get them so rarely - and I flashed back to when Donald and I once had a fight in the grocery store, the very same store, because I wanted to buy one of those purple peppers even though I'd never tasted one. I figured if it was rare and expensive, it was probably good, no? And he said he wouldn't pay seven dollars for a vegetable and I said he had no sporting sense at all and he pouted - he was a terrible pout - and we fought right there. It was just after he was diagnosed. We were fighting about stupid things.

JOAN

Peter's at the Clinic with Roch --

WALTER

He died four years ago. Four years it's been. I keep thinking I'm fine. Then I see a purple pepper in the grocery store and I fall apart.

JOAN

Do you want a cookie?

WALTER

I stay so, so busy, but it doesn't always help. How long can you miss someone this much? It's unbearable.

JOAN

I never missed someone too much.

WALTER

You're lucky.

JOAN

Yeah --

WALTER

Oh, Jesus, I didn't bring any groceries. I'm off. Let me try this again. I'll get my bowl when I come back - oh, I better soak it.

JOAN

You cook for him, too?

WALTER

I'm amazing. Let me tell you something about food - it has to be cooked by someone who loves you to do you any good. Ronald MacDonald doesn't love you. I'm going to keep him alive. He's been like a big brother to me.

JOAN

He doesn't seem to eat that much of it --

WALTER

But if he takes one bite, it might it keep him alive one more minute, and I might get to see him one more time. Oh! It's clean. Wow, Joan. You're good for his appetite. This is the first time I've seen an empty bowl around here in a long time - oh, hand me that knife will you.

She does, but cuts herself.

JOAN

Oh!! Ow --

WALTER

Oh, dear. Want a paper towel?

JOAN

No, that's OK --

WALTER

Dish towel?

JOAN

No. Thanks.

WALTER

Band-Aid?

JOAN

Oh, no --

Pause.

WALTER

Want me to tear off a piece of my underwear? It's cotton.

JOAN

No.

WALTER

Well, then, just suck on it, Joan.

Time passes; Night. PETER and JOAN; Peter is meticulously cleaning his teeth. Joan is donning many layers of protective clothing.

JOAN

These gloves are very hard to get on. Um. When was the last time you turned over?

PETER

I turn over all the time. I'm sore. It's a terrible thing not to have an immune system. That's what happened to the American Aboriginal Nations - smallpox, TB, the flu - they just didn't have any immunity to it. It traveled in the mattresses of the pioneers; in the blankets; on the skin, they breathed it, exhaled deadly fumes, stinking of tobacco and smallpox and the Indians had no way to fend it off. That's what it's like. The cavalry is here, with their diseases, their fevers and clogged, sloppy lungs and I've no way to fight it off.

JOAN

Mitzi said you get crabby late at night.

PETER

He did?

JOAN

Um, no. Are you through with your toothbrush?

PETER

Yup.

JOAN

All right, then. I'll just take it from you.

PETER

You have to get near me to do that.

JOAN

Yup.

PETER

You don't need chemical warfare gear to handle a toothbrush.

JOAN

I don't mind.

PETER

Joan - you're overdressed. I'm in much more danger from you than you are from me. God knows what you've brought with you from the West Coast. And you've been on public transportation. Ick.

JOAN

I didn't bring anything from the West Coast.

PETER

Doritos --

JOAN

I wish you had a television. Why don't you have one?

PETER

I had to turn it into cash.

JOAN

How can there be no money? This place is so nice.

PETER

Jon bought it. Flat out. I haven't paid the taxes on it this year; I could lose it. I paid them last year by selling my life insurance policy. I didn't have any health insurance, free-lance artist that I was in my former life and I sold all the paintings till they ran out too so I could officially be a Medicaid whore which doesn't cover a nurse full time which is why I'm blessed with your presence.

JOAN

Oh, I need to get your temperature and stuff.

PETER

My temperature and stuff don't matter.

JOAN

They do to that nurse.

PETER

That nurse's name is Mitzi - Michael Stebin. But at some point in their marriage, Bitzi decided they should rhyme.

JOAN

Oh, well, that's nice.

PETER

You approve, then, of homosexual marriages?

JOAN

I don't know.

PETER

You don't know what they are, or if you approve. That's a rectal thermometer.

JOAN

Oh, God.

PETER

How do you do that? How do you live in the world and have no opinion?

JOAN

You should have one of these "Ensure"s --

PETER

Abortion?

JOAN

Oh, no, I don't think that's good --

PETER

Do you think a fifteen year old should have a baby?

JOAN

Oh, God, Peter, can you just, please, don't you need to rest or something --

PETER

Did she? Did she get an abortion? That girl.

JOAN

I don't know.

PETER
You left. You always leave.

JOAN
I'm here, aren't I?

PETER
You have no place else to go.

JOAN
I could go someplace. . .

Roch bursts in with a plunger in his hand.

ROCH
OK! I'm on the job! What happened?

PETER
To what?

ROCH
Isn't the bathroom busted?

PETER
No --

ROCH
Oh. I saw Joan using the bathroom down at the gas station today - I walked by right as you were - I assumed the bathroom here was broken?

PETER
It's fine.

JOAN
I was nearby - I was walking nearby it and I had to --

ROCH
Oh, is that all - I was worried.

PETER
Oh, no. Nothing to worry about.

ROCH
Good news about the plumbing. You don't need anything else to go wrong, poor lamb.

JOAN

Lamb. He didn't get it from a transfusion.

ROCH

It is just that kind of homophobic intolerant right-wing Christian fundamentalist thinking that keeps the body count as high as it is. Never in a life, never in a thousand life times, not if a person had killed a family of five with a dull knife or started a nuclear war would a person deserve anything like this.

JOAN

What about a serial killer?

ROCH

What - what -- ?

JOAN

Well, what about someone, one of those serial killers, those people who eat the victims and then cut them up and turn them into dish towels and --

ROCH (finding a business card)

I can't have this conversa -- What - what is this??

JOAN

There was a guy here -- I forgot --

PETER

What guy?

JOAN

He left a card -

ROCH

"Paul Carpenter Prentiss Enterprises".

PETER

Christ --

JOAN

He asked if you had painted something for me, or maybe if you finish this one --

ROCH

"When" he fin --

JOAN

He said he was an "associate" of Peter's -

PETER

He's toenail crud - he's trying to buy paintings of mine while I'm still alive enough to need the cash enough to sell anything remaining for pennies --

ROCH

Joan, you're supposed to be taking care of him --

PETER

All right, all right, never mind. He's gone.

ROCH

He's a parasite! And she's inviting him to tea --

PETER

Don't be melodramatic --

ROCH

What is wrong with you?

PETER

You're giving me a headache.

ROCH

I'm giving you a headache? What about her --

PETER

Can we carry this on another time?

ROCH (leaving)

Yup. Right. On my way.

JOAN

Well, I'm glad he's gone.

PETER

He's a saint.

JOAN

Yes, he seems nice.

Time passes; Late Night. All the CAST members run in and out of the apartment, using cabinets and the fridge and the front door, etc., as entrances and exits. They run and drop like flies and PETER can't pick them up fast enough. This goes on for a moment. When LAST BREATH speaks, all the men run upstairs and cover JOAN like snakes.

	LAST BREATH
Had enough?	
	PETER
What is happening here?	
	LAST BREATH
Well, think about it. You can't see anyone who isn't dead or about to be dead, right?	
	PETER
Are you dead?	
	LAST BREATH
WHAT DID I JUST SAY???	
	PETER
Dementia?	
	LAST BREATH
You wish. Boy, you're so close to the edge you can see the other side. Jon says hi.	
	PETER
Jon?	
	LAST BREATH
That's all I can tell you. New one.	
	PETER
What?	
	LAST BREATH
Lesion.	
	PETER
I don't see anything.	

LAST BREATH

Inside, baby, where it's bad. Bad news for the kid. Right on your liver. Why do they call it a "liver" when it's going to kill you? Haha.

PETER

Get out.

LAST BREATH

Can't do it.

PETER

Inthenameofthefatherthesonandtheholyyghost --

LAST BREATH (over)

Oh, for Christ's sake --

PETER

Please help me - I don't know what to do. What is he --

LAST BREATH (over)

Do you think I'm afraid of a little praying --

PETER (over)

Our Father Who Art in Heaven --

LAST BREATH

Hey, man, hey. Who'd you think I am, the boogie man? HaHa. Yuh. Listen, Peter, I'm not the enemy.

PETER

Who is?

LAST BREATH

She's upstairs.

PETER

Joan? Why Joan --

LAST BREATH

Because she's fat; she's lazy. Because she deserted you before and she'll do it again. Because you need someone to blame.

PETER

No, I don't.

LAST BREATH

Don't lie to me, son. I know you. And I'm gonna get you. Thass right. Eatin' off my spoon; lick it up, spit it out. I'm the snake in the garden, man. I got my eye on you, lamb. That's right, man. Poison. Thass me. But you're blaming the sky for being blue.

PETER

The sky isn't blue. It only looks that way because of refracted light.

LAST BREATH

Don't even get deep with me: I'm a manifestation of concept. You're not interested now. I can understand that.

PETER

Then leave.

LAST BREATH

Can't do it.

PETER

Some people live for years.

LAST BREATH

Have you looked in the mirror lately, boy? That breath on your neck? That's me. I'll be here all along.

JOAN (screams; the men scatter)

Aggh! God!

PETER

What? Jon? Joan. Oh, geez.

Time passes; Night. JOAN is sitting on the top stair, chewing on her nails; PETER is painting; trying to paint.

PETER

What do you do with those?

JOAN

With what?

Your nails.

PETER

I bite them.

JOAN

I mean after that? Do you swallow them or spit them out? Either way, it's disgusting, but since you're staying in my house I have to know.

PETER

I spit them.

JOAN

Aghhh!! Oh my God. So there are little bits of nails on the floor? Are they in the bedroom? In the kitchen?

PETER

Well, they're such little tiny bits, you can't feel them.

JOAN

I could if I stepped on them. Ick.

PETER

I can't help it.

JOAN

Well, stop it.

PETER

I just said I can't.

JOAN

Put them in your pocket.

PETER

They're too small.

JOAN

Then swallow them. I don't want little bits of nails all over the place.

PETER

(re: the painting) That's very interesting.

JOAN

PETER
What does that mean?

WALTER(bursting in)
Wha'doweneed? Wha'doweneed? You need it, I'm your man! Hey, did I tell you about my new man - I guess I did - hey where's the list?

PETER
In the cabinet.

JOAN
Oh, no, I got it.

PETER
Got what?

JOAN
The groceries. I saw the list there and the money that guy left and so I went and got them.

WALTER
I get the groceries.

PETER
Geez, Joan.

WALTER
Oh, OK. No big deal. I'll, um, I'll just stop by tomorrow. Yeah. OK. Easy enough. OK. Bye, darlin'--

PETER
I'd like some Oreo's. You didn't get Oreo's, did you, Joan?

JOAN
No.

PETER
I'd really like some.

WALTER
You're not just saying that?

Heck, no. PETER

I'm on the job. Be back in a jiff. WALTER (on his way out)

Joan, Walter gets the groceries. PETER

Oh. JOAN

Time passes; Day; JOAN is upstairs, keeping an eye on the bathroom door. She rips open a few lawn & leaf bags, quietly lays them on the bed. She heads downstairs and leaves. The place is empty, then MITZI comes out of the bathroom.

MITZI (coming out of the bathroom)
OK, Joan, he's decent - Joan? She's gone.

PETER (coming out of the bathroom)
Good. Pack my things. I'll move.

BITZI (coming out of the bathroom)
Stop it - she's adorable --

PETER
Joan? Joan is --

MITZI
Peter, You let her stay, didn't you?

PETER
You made me.

BITZI
Listen, mister, angels don't come crashing through the ceiling, turning somersaults in the air.

PETER
Sometimes they do.

BITZI

Here, sit. Comfy? And sometimes they show up with a suitcase full of junk food and they need a place to stay.

PETER

Joan? Joan is an angel? No, no -- I thought, when she came, I'd be dead by morning. I was ready. But I keep waking up and she keeps being here.

MITZI

It's better for you to have someone here, and I can't --

PETER

Fine, we'll call one of the agencies --

BITZI

You can't get full-time help for nothing and, as your lawyer, it is my duty to inform you that you have no money.

PETER

What if I finish that painting --

BITZI

You can't get a fair price for it right now and you know it --

PETER

I'll sell something else --

BITZI

What's left to sell?

PETER

I don't need that couch --

BITZI

Oh, you're being ridiculous. Mitz - tell him he's being ridiculous --

MITZI

Do I have to? He's in a really bad mood.

BITZI

Oh, for heaven's sake --

PETER

How much would it cost?

BITZI

I hate to tell you this, too, Pietro Santo Love, but you have medical bills to pay long before you can get some good-looking fairy in here to vacuum your rugs so get used to her.

PETER

I can't get used to her.

MITZI

I go to three funerals a month, minimum; I'm used to it. I haven't spoken to my father in twenty years; I'm used to it. Bitzi eats garlic pickles in bed; I'm used to it.

PETER

You're a better person than I am.

MITZI

Strive.

PETER

I have to pee.

BITZI

Don't change the subject.

PETER

Bitzi, help me up, please. My back hurts.

BITZI

Oh, Lord, what I suffer, nobody knows.

PETER

Ow. Oh, God. The human body is a terrible thing. Adam and Eve were right to cover up.

BITZI

We have an Adam and Bruce costume kit at home; two fig leaves and a BIG snake.

PETER

Don't make me laugh when I'm trying to be a pain in the ass.

Time passes; Night. JOAN is eating, sitting at the big window; PETER is painting; trying to paint.

Do you want some tea?	JOAN
No.	PETER
Orange juice?	JOAN
No.	PETER
Do you want an "Ensure"?	JOAN
	PETER
IDONOTWANTANENSURESTOPASKINGME!!!	If you've come for revenge, this is not the time.
Revenge for what? You're the hero.	JOAN
Look at me. Look hard. Ma looked like this before she died.	PETER
Did she ask for me?	JOAN
I don't remember. Do you have to do that?	PETER
What?	JOAN
Chewing. Swallowing.	PETER
You said you weren't hungry --	JOAN

PETER

I'm not. It's just gross. I can hear your breathing over it. I keep thinking I'm going to have to do the Heimlich Maneuver and I really don't have the strength. Then you open your mouth a little bit to toss the cookies around like you're some kind of blender. Like I can see the blades going in your face, the teeth, and they all have cavities or they will someday. Then you swallow and this big glob of food goes down your throat, it falls back, like, like, I don't know what it's like - toothpaste going into a tube backwards - it's sickening.

JOAN

Well, I'm full.

PETER

No, no, you don't have to stop eating on my account. Everything tastes like shit anyway. More for you.

JOAN

Fatso Blatso Joanie Baloney.

PETER

What?

JOAN

That's what you were thinking.

PETER

Why was I thinking that?

JOAN

It's what you used to call me. You said I was full of pig toenails and smelled like fake meat.

PETER

I did? Did I? I guess it sounds vaguely familiar.

JOAN

To the tune of Peter Cottontail:

There goes Joanie Butterball
Waddling down the candy trail
Wobblin', gobblin', slobberin'
Oh! Joan outweighs them all.

PETER

Boy, I was a charmer. Forgive me --

JOAN

For what? Calling me "fatso" all my life? "Tubbo?" "Jello-Leg Joanie?" "And in this corner, Joan, Joan, the Ice Cream Cone - the Heavyweight Champion of the World!!"

PETER

Oh, for Christ's sa --

JOAN

"Joan, Joan - the floorboards groan; the cow's in the meadow but there's one at home."

PETER

Were you writing these down? Why do you --

JOAN

I remembered them all on the way out here.

PETER

No wonder you didn't sleep --

JOAN

Ma shouldn't have laughed.

PETER

Joan, she wasn't laughing at you - she was laughing at me - at how clever I was --

JOAN

I don't think you're so --

PETER

I can see where you might not think I was clever, but Ma --

JOAN

She shouldn't have laughed.

PETER

No. She shouldn't have.

JOAN
I never called you a sissy --

PETER
I would have beaten you to dea --

JOAN
-- because I don't think you should call someone something if it's true.

PETER
Probably not. Well, goodnight --

JOAN
John Bailey.

PETER
Who?

JOAN
John Bailey from Front Street. You sang that Butterball song in front of him and he laughed and then he sang it and the two of you went off to play basketball.

PETER
Oh, yeah. Him. I had a crush on him.

JOAN
So did I.

PETER
Oh, for Christ's sake, Joan. Give me a break - I'm sorry, I'm sorry. I'm dying!!

JOAN
Well. You weren't then.

Time passes; Day. ROCH and PETER alone in the apartment. Roch is massaging Peter.

PETER
A few weeks before Joan arrived, I dreamed of her. Kind of. It was the baby Jesus, the surprise child. I heard this knocking at the door in the middle of the night. I didn't feel well and I couldn't get up to answer the door, but I knew it was Him. Just to be sure, I called out, "Who is it?" and a voice called back: "It's Joan." I hadn't thought of her in a really long time. But then, she shows up.

ROCH

If Joan is a sign from God, I'm your Aunt Mary. How's that?

PETER

It's nice. Really nice. You're the one who's always telling me everything is significant.

ROCH

Well, not Joan. I think Joan is driving you crazy and you should ask her to leave.

PETER

Don't think I don't appreciate everything you do for me. But suddenly, we're not alone anymore, you and I.

ROCH

Peter, we're almost never alone. We're just - you're here; I'm here. I'm so here. Let me touch you.

PETER

Jon was the last one to touch me. And he will again. Any day now. Jon is waiting. I can feel it. I can feel his wiry arms around me even now. Right now. I can hear his voice, humming, the way he did in the shower.

ROCH

They say that people who sing in the shower are naturally artistic. Did you know that? I had an uncle who did that and he was just, he was a lovely man. The bravest thing I ever did was to marry you two. I said till death do you part. It almost killed me. I'm the one who wants you, love. And I'm here. You look beautiful. Peter? Sweetie?

Roch cuddles up with Peter, who has dozed off.

ROCH (con't)

"If it were now to die,/T'were now to be most happy; for I fear/My soul hath her content so absolute/That not another comfort like to this --"

Joan walks in.

JOAN

Should you be doing that? I mean -- it seems a little --

ROCH

Christ walked among the lepers. Of course, leprosy isn't really all that contagious and maybe Christ, being Christ, knew that. Then again. Maybe he didn't and he walked among them anyway. How long will you stay? Peter is a little concerned about your being uncomfortable.

JOAN

I'm used to being uncomfortable.

ROCH

Are you used to this? You're lucky he can't be bothered climbing the stairs anymore. You're lucky he's broke. You're lucky you get to take care of him.

JOAN

I didn't come here to take care of him.

ROCH

It's an honor! It would be an honor, for me, for me there would be. . there is no higher calling than to minister to the suffering --

JOAN

Are you a nurse, too? Peter has a lot of --

ROCH

I'm a *minister*. Sole Proprietor of The Church of the Holy Everything. I founded it myself: "For everything that lives is holy, life delights in life." William Blake. God. Look at him asleep. Wow. Do you have friends you could stay with?

JOAN

No. How can you stand to be a minister if some idiot God lets all kinds of things happen all the time?

ROCH (still holding Peter)

Do you know why God sent His only Son down? What I believe, anyway. I don't go for this stuff about Him dying for our sins because, let's face it, we're still sinning. Some people even think this plague is the result of sin, as if God sent a flood in the form of vomit and diarrhea, like this is some sort of deistic revenge on the planet and its queer inhabitants but you know I don't buy that at all because love is love however you slice it, it's the same kind of torment. It's the torment. He couldn't understand it. Only flesh understands. So He sent his only child, his love, his baby. And now He knows.

Time passes; Day. PETER, MITZI, BITZI, WALTER. Bitzi is cleaning; Mitzi is doing Range-Of-Motion exercises with Peter.

WALTER

Plus, his eyes are the absolute bluest you ever saw. GOOSEBUMPS!! Is this today's paper?

PETER

Let me know if you find my obituary.

BITZI

Stop that!!

Bitzi pulls a note and silk flowers from his bag.

Voila! For you!

PETER

Good God. Dale?

BITZI

His cousin works at Walmart's - he gets a discount. Shall I put them in water?

PETER

Yeah, flush them.

MITZI

And up, and over the head, that's right.

PETER

Ow, come on.

BITZI(to Peter)
Here, they come with
instructions. Read the note.

MITZI
And to the right,
right. Stretch.

WALTER

Did you take the funnies already? Oh, Peter, this painting is so - it's very - you've never - it's very interesting, Peter.

PETER

Thank you.

MITZI

Up, up. You had more range in that leg last week.

PETER

I slept on it funny.

MITZI

Who slept on it funny?

PETER

Goof.

MITZI

I'm too funny.

BITZI

You are not funny!

MITZI

He's mad because I gave him a hickey.

BITZI

I have a court date!

WALTER

Brad got a jury summons. I told him to wear pink; they'll send him right home.

BITZI

Oh, god, Peter - did this bill show up again. What do I have to do -- These people, honest to God. Peter, read the note.

LAST BREATH

Note from a dead man, for a dead man. Heh-heh.

PETER

Only so you'll leave me alone.

"Red is for heart.

Yellow - that's for light; the radiant sunshine, light, orange for your root chakra (I hope you're sitting on that pillow!)"

BITZI (phone, softly)

Yes, hello, I'd like to speak to the billing supervisor.

Yes, it's a problem. Yes, reference account number three three four six one five five nine nine N as in "nancy" -I-I-three four.

MITZI
Is Dale's handwriting looking shaky to you?

WALTER
Peter, where's Joan?

PETER
I don't know. She goes for walks all the time.

WALTER
I like Joan, Peter.

PETER
Why?

WALTER
I have no idea.

ROCH (coming in with real flowers)
Oh, baby, alone at last. I brought these for you --

PETER
Thank you --

ROCH
Columbines. Like them?

PETER
Why, yes, they're blue.
"Blue, communication -
talk, be silent,
it's all the same if
you're listening." What
is his problem???

MITZI
He likes poetic stuff.

PETER
Please. "White and
Black - the balance --

BITZI(under)
Yes, you can give me a break
for one second. He's not
paying for that infusion -
that was purely experimental.
He turned all red, we thought
he was baked in an oven. You
can check the statistics:
Boston, male, thirty-nine,
blotches slash rash. I'm his
attorney and if I don't have
confirmation, in writing,
within fifteen days, I'm
calling the media. Good day.

PETER (con't)

-- of two equals; your health, your illness; your love, your hate; your mother, your father --" They're both dead --

MITZI

I think he's speaking metaphorically.

WALTER

I met Brad's mother. She adores me.

BITZI

Oh, geez, we were supposed to call your mother last night!

MITZI

We called her on Sunday.

BITZI

She had a tooth pulled yesterday!

MITZI

She did? We'll stop over.

BITZI (dialing)

We don't have time!

PETER

Ow. Ow.

BITZI

Honest to God, your poor Mother.

MITZI

Are you sure that was yesterday?

Bitzi holds the phone up to his ear so he can talk and work with Peter at the same time.

Ma? Hi darlin'. How's your face? We were gonna call last night but thought you might be asleep. Yeah. . yeah. . ouch, huh? Yeah, of course he's right here - he called you.

BITZI

Hi, Mom! I was worried! Was it? Oh, God. Warm salt water. Ten times a day - minimum. We're at Peter's. He's good. Yeah. Say hi.

PETER

Aaaggghhh.

BITZI

Mitzi's working him; he's suffering.
 (to Mitzi) She says to leave him alone.
 (to Peter) She says she loves you.

PETER

Love you back.

BITZI

He loves you back. Have to run, darling, how late can we call you tonight? Great.
 Bye, love.
 (to Mitzi) Say good-bye.

MITZI

Bye, Ma. She sounds OK.

BITZI

What - what is this? Ach! This is your Medicaid form!

BITZI

What is it doing here?
 Peter - this was --

PETER

She sounds good?

PETER

I didn't finish filling it out.

BITZI

Why not, for heaven's sake? It takes --

PETER

I didn't think I'd live this long.

BITZI

Sign it - I'll do it myself.

PETER

I'm hungry.

BITZI

Hungry - are you really?

MITZI

Did he say he was hungry?

BITZI

He's just trying to
 change the subject.

PETER

No, I'm not --

ROCH

Well, praise the lord and pass the ammunition. Someone call the pope - he's hungry. How about if I run over to the deli and grab something?

PETER

OK. Not too spicy. And warm. Yeah.

ROCH

On my way --

WALTER

Don't bother, Roch. I brought a ton of lasagna - I'll heat it up.

ROCH

I was going to run out --

WALTER

No need. VERY mild sauce - cream tomato. OK. Who wants some?

MITZI: Yeah, I'll have some --

BITZI: Oh, yeah, count me in --

ROCH: Yeah, I could have a little something --

PETER

Is it me, or is it crowded in here?

Time passes; Night. LAST BREATH as MA in a really tacky slip, something from Walmart's; waltz plays.

PETER

Ma. I'm not your dance partner.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Sure you are; you're my little sugar doodle.

PETER

I'm not a -- I don't like to dance.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Sure, you do.

PETER

I don't like to dance with you.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Yes, you do.

PETER

I read recently that walking around in your slip in front of a child who's over the age of six is considered a form of sexual abuse.

LAST BREATH AS MA

It's not like you were looking.

PETER

I wasn't supposed to be looking at you in your --

LAST BREATH AS MA

Don't you scold me, young man. It's not my fault I didn't feel like getting dressed every day. Waltz.

PETER

Jon thought it was so romantic that I knew how to waltz.

LAST BREATH AS MA

I taught you. Peter.

PETER

Spin.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Peter. Someone wanted me to ask you if you "like" anyone, because I know someone who "likes" you but she doesn't want you to know who it is until she knows if you "like" anyone else, or else maybe her.

PETER

What?

LAST BREATH AS MA

OK, OK. Susan Bleaker. She likes you. And she's got the cutest little figure, oh, when I was a girl --

PETER

I don't have time for that stuff. I'm the man of the house.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Peter - it's admirable that you take your responsibilities seriously, but you still have a right to be a boy - to play at sports and do your design and art classes and go to dances and make friends - girlfriends.

PETER

Spin.

LAST BREATH AS MA

Girls are good. Darling, you're going to ruin your life. I'll send the priest to talk to you again - how's that? It's just a phase, it's nothing.

PETER

Ma? Let me ask you something. Were we mean to Joan?

LAST BREATH AS MA

Who? Just kidding, just kidding. Peter, Joan brings it out in people, honey-bun. It's not your fault. It's not your fault.

It looks like she might kiss his mouth; Peter starts awake, Joan is in the kitchen, shoving Oreo's into her mouth.

There is a magnificent storm in progress.

PETER

Ma!

Joan is startled, chokes.

What? Shit. Chew! What are you doing down here? What time is it?

JOAN

I was having some milk before bed. It helps me sleep better.

PETER

Does it work? Let's buy a cow.

JOAN

God, Peter. You're soaking wet. You should change. Put on your PJ's, why don't you.

PETER

I'm tired.

JOAN

Well, here, come on. Get up, sit up. Didn't Walter drop off some -- yeah, here, come on. Nice clean PJ's. Peter. You can't fall asleep that fast.

PETER

I'm just resting my eyes.

JOAN

Come on. I don't want you to catch a cold. Here. Put these on. Why don't you take a shower?

PETER

What? What time is it?

JOAN

Ten thirty.

PETER

Ten thirty? At night? Why do you want me take a shower at ten thirty at night?

JOAN

Should you?

PETER

I take a shower in the morning.

JOAN

What does that mean? Should you or shouldn't you? Are you going to catch a cold? Roch will kill me. Peter? Don't fall asleep. Tell me what to make you do. Peter? Shoot.

She dons gloves, pinches him.

PETER

Acch! What are you doing?

JOAN

I was seeing if you were conscious.

PETER

Too much so. Do I smell Oreo's?

JOAN

Let me change the sheets at least. Can you make it to the chair? Did you have a dream?

PETER

When?

JOAN

You called for Ma.

PETER

When? What are you --

JOAN

Just now.

JOAN

What did you guys talk about so much? You and Ma had so many talks, so many secrets.

PETER

What secrets?

JOAN

Secrets. Whatever you used to talk about late at night, when you thought I was asleep, when you were in the kitchen.

PETER

You were awake?

JOAN

I was usually at the top of the stairs. But I couldn't hear anything. I didn't want to spy, you know.

PETER

You have a right to spy on your own mother.

JOAN

She was your mother.

PETER

What does that mean? Forget it, forget the linens, Joan. What does that mean, 'she was my mother'?

JOAN

Nothing. You want some crackers or something?

PETER
No.

JOAN
I think this book is wrong. Look at this picture. I can't make a hospital corner on a couch. I used to practice dancing in my room, the way you guys did it, in case she ever asked me, or in case you did.

PETER
You're breaking my heart.

JOAN
What? What'd I say?

PETER
It wasn't easy being her partner, that's all. Sometimes it's best to lay low. Ah, God.

JOAN
Are you in pain?

PETER
Yes.

JOAN
Do you want some aspirin?

PETER
Aha!! You didn't read that stuff Mitzi brought by, did you?

JOAN
Oh, no, not all of it yet. There's a ton of it--

PETER
I'm not supposed to take aspirin - it thins the blood. I don't even keep it in the house. And you would have given it to me.

JOAN
Not if you don't have it in the house.

PETER
That's not the point.

JOAN
Do you want some Tylenol or what?

PETER

No, no, I don't mind pain too much. It's waiting I mind. I'm still waiting to get well. For pain to start. To stop. For groceries and clean sheets and visitors. What. What time did you say it was?

The phone rings.

Mitz?? Hello? It's for you.

JOAN

I'm not here. Who is it?

PETER

I don't know.

JOAN

Ask.

PETER (holding the phone far away)

Who is it?

JOAN

Put your mouth near it.

PETER

Put your mouth near it. Oh. They hung up.

JOAN

There was no one --

PETER

There was a minute ago. I thought it was Mitz since he calls thirty seven times a day and he hasn't called to tell me he'll be an hour and a half late. You said ten thirty, right? It's Thursday, right?
Wow. Nothing like a good storm. The wrath of God.

JOAN

Yeah.

PETER

Is it?

JOAN

What?

PETER

Is AIDS the wrath of God? Could my perversion cause God to hate me this much?

JOAN

I don't think God is paying all that much attention, with things that go on and everything. Maybe they got stuck in traffic, with the rain and all.

PETER

They walk.

JOAN

Oh. Well, I'm sure something happened.

PETER

It's no excuse. They said they'd be here at 9 and it's 10:30. I'd like to think I'm not so far gone that people think it doesn't matter what they say to me and what they do --

JOAN

Peter -- I'm sure they just --

PETER

Just what?

JOAN

I don't know.

PETER

A little quickie in the hall on the way upstairs?

JOAN

Peter.

PETER

Oh, sorry - fag lingo - quickie means a fast bit of sex in an inappropriate place - though I thought heterosexuals --

JOAN

I'm going upstairs.

PETER

Don't.

JOAN
You're giving me a headache.

PETER
Oh, a headache, great. My whole body is dropping in pieces on the rug and you have a headache. Let me get you an aspirin.

JOAN
I'll just lie down for a minute.

PETER
No, no. Wait. (pause) Wanna play cards?

JOAN
No.

PETER
Wanna read to me?

JOAN
Why do you need to be read to?

PETER
Wanna. . . Ma asked for you. A couple of times.

JOAN
She did? What did she say??

PETER
Joan. Like that. Um. She said you should remember to wear sun tan lotion out there in California.

JOAN
Really?

PETER
I want some. Crackers.

JOAN
You do? Really? You're not just saying that so I'll stay?

PETER
Nope. Nauseated. Crackers.

Wheat, OK?

JOAN

Yup. So. What kind of house do you live in in "Frisco"?

PETER

An apartment, actually. Top floor. It's nice.

JOAN

I thought Derek made good money, private school and all.

PETER

He does; he spends it - clothes, jewelry, stuff like that.

JOAN

And what's your wardrobe like?

PETER

You're looking at it.

JOAN

That's Bitzi's, isn't it?

PETER

He said I could keep it. Eat.

JOAN

What's the time?

PETER

Ten forty.

JOAN

I knew Derek was dangerous, that one time we met him. I should have --

PETER

Well, you know, marriage is a funny thing --

JOAN

I know; I've been married.

PETER

Oh. Yeah.

JOAN

PETER

You don't think so.

JOAN

Well, it's not like it's legal or anything, you know --

PETER

It's moral. Morally married, spiritually married. When Jon died, I died. All this is just --

MITZI (bursting in)

How's my favorite patient?

BITZI

No - he's my favorite patient --

PETER

You're late!

MITZI

Us? We're not late - are we late??

BITZI

Late, in what sense --

PETER

You said you'd be here at nine and it's --

MITZI

Sweetie - sweetheart. Sorry. Sorry. OK --

PETER

I waited! I had nothing better to do since about four thirty than to worry about what I'd say to you when you got here - should I tell you my feet are swollen, that my fever feels high, but registers normal and I don't know what that means - should I say anything or just let it go because aren't they totally sick of listening to me --

BITZI

Sweetheart, love --

PETER

What --

MITZI
Dale died.

PETER
What? When?

MITZI
This after[noon]. Five Thirty. He left you --

BITZI
He wanted you to have this.

PETER
His wig? He left me his wig? But. But. I hate his wig.

BITZI
He thought, if you need it. Eventually. He was worried.

PETER
What happened?

MITZI
The chemo ruined his lungs. He couldn't --

PETER
He choked to death. His lungs squeezed him out.

MITZI
Pretty much, yeah.

PETER
God. I'm such an asshole.

BITZI
You didn't know. That's a good color for you.

PETER
Is it?

MITZI
It's hideous. Still. It's a nice gesture.

I said he'd die first.

PETER

That's not what killed him.

MITZI

He was sicker than I was and he still sent all those idiot presents. That was the end of his time on earth. Why didn't I know that?

PETER

You're not psychic, honey.

BITZI

I'm a pig.

PETER

No. You're just tired. Like everyone else in the world.

MITZI

You're a good man, Peter. Saint Peter the Great.

BITZI

Why didn't you call? Why did you come over, an hour and a half, more than that, late, with the tidings - couldn't you just have called and then I wouldn't have waited and gotten aggravated and then you show up finally and hit me with that one - don't you have to tell everyone else on the block? I can't be the absolutely last person to know. Oh, geez, what does that matter. I'm not making any sense. I just - I want quiet. Please go home.

PETER

Hey, baby, what's --

ROCH(bursting in)

You, too.

PETER

Me too, what?

ROCH

Go home, please.

PETER

ROCH
I just got here --

JOAN (heading upstairs)
All right, then, I guess I'll go upstairs.

MITZI
We told him about Dale.

ROCH
Oh. Baby --

PETER
You knew? And you didn't call me?

ROCH
I'm here - right?

PETER
I want to be -- just if you guys could go.

MITZI
Sugar --

PETER
Please, please, please leave. Please.

BITZI
You want us to? I guess you want us to. OK. Well, Rochie's here. OK, all set. OK? We'll be by tomorrow.

PETER
Any particular time, or should I hold my breath all day? Sorry.

ROCH
I got it, you guys. Go ahead.

They leave.

PETER
You don't have to stay.

I'm staying.

ROCH

For what?

PETER

To be with you. To be, you know, whatever. I'm sorry that you're upset. I'm sorry that you're sick. I'm sorry that Dale died.

ROCH

Touch me.

PETER

I can do that.

ROCH

Touch me. Not easy. Touch me all over me. Feel me. Feel everything. Everything. Roch, sweet, sweet --

PETER

No, no. Peter. Don't. I can't. Stop. Sex is not for emergency purposes. It's not -- it's a sacred trust. A --

ROCH

Shut up. Touch my eyes; my ears. Touch my skin. Touch me.

PETER

No, no. Please. Don't make me turn you down. After all this. I can't. It's not me - you're not seeing me. It's a gift from God --

ROCH

I'm a corpse. I'm lethal. I stink. Do you think I can't smell the decay from here? I'm right under my nose. My welted, bruised, flaking skin. Touch me. My friend. My old friend. Can you stand it? Can you? Comfort me. God, Comfort me.

PETER

"The lord is my shepherd, I shall not want/He makes me lie down in green pastures;/he leads me beside still waters;/he restores my soul --"

ROCH

Get out.

PETER

ROCH

I love you.

PETER

You think you can love me so much you can save me. Hah! How can you think I want your love when I have mourned more deeply than you could ever - you want to be one of the soldiers. One of the wounded. You want the purple heart - huh? Well it's not as glamorous as it appears to be, not as dramatic. It only stinks. It doesn't make you strong, it only makes you crazy.

ROCH

It makes you scream at your friends --

PETER

It makes you despise them because they don't suffer as much as they should.

ROCH

Everyone suffers, Peter, all the time. I see it all the time.

PETER

From the sidelines. You think you want to be hit so hard you'd never be the same, but you wouldn't survive the blow.

ROCH

Why would I want that, honey?

PETER

Because you want to be able to tell about it! You see it happen to those around you. You wonder what it feels like. And don't call me 'honey' when I'm yelling at you. It's obnoxious.

ROCH

I'm sorry. I can imagine.

PETER

You imagine nothing. You do the show, all bullshit and show. You collect eulogy phrases. It's a farce. The humble minister. 'The lord is my shepherd.' The lord is nothing to me. Nobody means anything at all. I'm gonna throw up. No. I can get there on my own.

ROCH (softly calling upstairs)

Joan. Keep an eye on him. I gotta go.

Roch leaves. Joan tip-toes down the stairs. Pause. Peter comes out of the bathroom looking positively insane.

JOAN

Where'd everyone go?

PETER

What are these? What is this?

JOAN

Nothing.

PETER

What are these? What are these?

JOAN

Do you need to lie down?

PETER

Toilet seat covers! You brought toilet seat covers into my house! We told you what the precautions are - this is not one of them! If you're in so much danger you can just get lost! Take your toilet seat covers and take your toothbrush wrapped in seventeen layers of Saran Wrap --

JOAN

It keeps it clean --

PETER

Well I've been spitting on it! Where are you going?

JOAN

Upstairs. Out. Upstairs. I don't know. Where do you want me to go? They're just - I had some left over from the road trip - I bought them for, you know, bus stations and stuff, and so, I had to put them someplace - I haven't been using them or anything --

Here, sit, Peter, rest --

She reaches for him, he reels back.

PETER

AGGGHHH!!! Don't touch me!! How dare you! How dare you come into my house a pauper and not deign to use the same toilet I use?? I'll tell you how - because you're a coward. A thief - a loser. You're an idiot loser stupid fat lazy idiot Joan!

PETER (con't)

You judge me! You! Ha! That's a beautiful thing - you can't even stay married - I could! If he were alive we would be married and I'd have him here and not you idiot protective covering on the toilet seat you!! Get out!

JOAN

I'm sorry -- I -

PETER

You're pathetic! Get out! I'm gonna spit on you - I mean it - get out!! Get out! Get out! Get out!!!

He chases her out, trashes the apartment, knocks over the painting.

Christ Almighty. God, Oh, my God, what are you thinking?? What could you possibly be thinking? I was a good guy. A pretty good guy. Stop this. Stop it. Kill me! Kill me now! I don't care! Just don't leave me in this condition. Do something. Flood the Earth. Send fire. Change time. End it all. Do something. Oh, God. Ow. God. Help. Help me.

He collapses, moaning, writhing on the floor.

Lights dim, the RAIN and TRAFFIC abruptly stop.

LAST BREATH moves in. Slow Blackout.

END OF ACT I

ACT II

Early morning. Sound of traffic. No signs of life in the loft. Pause. PETER emerges, dazed, from the floor behind the couch.

PETER

Oh, shit. Oh, boy. Anybody home? Joan?

Peter limps over to the phone, dials. Pause.

It's me. OK.

LAST BREATH turns up with a BANG.

LAST BREATH

Morning. Pardon the pyrotechnics. Did you think you'd see another morning?

PETER

I'm not sure why I did.

LAST BREATH

I don't like my meat raw.

PETER

Look, you. Look. What is owed to me?

LAST BREATH

By?

PETER

I don't know --

LAST BREATH

For?

PETER

For this! What is owed to me. For going through this. Can I expect something in return?

LAST BREATH

Oh, like WISDOM, INSIGHT, COMPASSION. That kind of thing --

PETER (overlapping)

Well -- Yes.

LAST BREATH

No. Ooooooh. . isn't that fair???

PETER

Get back. Not now.

LAST BREATH

Soon enough. You can only keep me at bay for a certain, sort of allotted time, then -
-

PETER

How do you know? How do you know that??

LAST BREATH

Symptoms, boy. Symptoms. Ah, let me think . . do you have time to finish your very last painting? Ahhhhh, no: Boo-hoo. I'll be nearby.

PETER

Wait - Wait! Stop. Let me see your eyes.

LAST BREATH

Why?

PETER

I need to see them.

LAST BREATH

They're just eyes, man.

PETER

You can't see anything, can you?

LAST BREATH

I don't need to see anything.

PETER

Who are you?

LAST BREATH

I'm the time you don't have, son. Get outta my face.

ROCH (bursting in)

I am not the maid, my love, contrary to popular opinion. Do you realize I left a mission full of people to come down here because your majesty called. Where's that pillow - the one for your feet - they're swollen. Here. Up. What am I supposed to do, hang around with my tongue hanging out, hoping against hope that you'll let me wipe your butt if you're in a generous mood? What is this? Did you finish this? If you're gonna eat, eat good food. Listen, buster, lord master primeval god of the underworld, I don't need this; I'm exhausted. This place is a shambles! I'm not stupid. I know you don't want me around. Sometimes you're in a patient mood, then glory be to God you don't mind having me here. Well, isn't it my lucky day. Even Christ yelled at the merchants. You're not the only person in the world with a headache, you know. It gets a little sickening. Tylenol. You feel hot and I have a headache. If you want Joan here - fine. See if I care. Or better yet, wipe your own darn butt.

PETER

Sorry.

ROCH

Oh, God, no, I'm sorry. I was so worried. I missed you. Don't do that - you shouldn't be getting upset like that.

PETER

I'm stressed.

ROCH

Where is Joan?

PETER

I don't know. I really don't. I, uh, suggested that she leave, too.

ROCH

Peter, you're not going to be popular if you keep doing that. She'll be back.

PETER

I don't want her back. She's squeamish. I know I'm repulsive. You think I don't know that? I don't want someone around here who can't hide it.

ROCH

Fine, then, I'll move in.

PETER

I didn't want to touch him. Towards the end. Jon. When he was sick. When he got thin. Really thin. When his beautiful arms turned to nothing, chicken bones. The funny bone stuck out. Like that. It was ridiculous. I didn't want to touch him.

ROCH

But you did.

PETER

But I was repulsed. Just a little.

ROCH

Bless you, Peter, for you have sinned. Who has not?

PETER

Do you believe in God?

ROCH

Fervently. That's a funny question to ask a minister.

PETER

For a while there, I didn't know what to believe. I was a druid, briefly. That was before we met. Then an atheist. But, I don't know, I found that lonely. Then I was a Unitarian for a while, but they didn't seem to worship anything except the fact that they were worshipping. Then I thought I might go Jewish, because of Jon, but it does seem like a blood thing, even though I feel somewhat nomadic in nature - I was going to move before I got sick - but then. I don't seem to have learned much from any of that. When I pray, I'm talking to the man I grew up with. Big guy, right? White? Big tall guy, long white beard, like that.

ROCH

That's not God, that's Santa.

PETER

But I find myself praying to him. And I'm thinking, 'Who is this guy?' And why am I praying to someone or something that could allow this to happen to me? When I'm scared and alone I find myself saying an Our Father and I'm thinking, what am I, five, what am I, seven, what is this, First Communion? I don't know who I'm talking to --

ROCH

I don't know who's listening. I'm listening. That's all I can tell you.

PETER

Why does it always come down to you?

ROCH

Why doesn't it?

PETER

Because at that last moment, you are alone. You're seeing something no one else can see. Jon did that. He was looking at me. Then he looked up, and his eyes popped open, like he was amazed and I said, "What, babe - what do you see?" I figured it was the white light or something. But he didn't answer. He just died then, at that point, and his last words were "See ya", but his last thought he kept to himself.

ROCH

You will not be alone. I promise you.

KNOCK at the door. Pause.

PETER

Shit. Art Dealer? No. (calling) Who is it?

JOAN'S VOICE

It's Joan.

PETER

Don't know any "Joan".

ROCH

Peter--

KNOCK.

JOAN'S VOICE

Peter -- let me in, for just a sec and I'll --

PETER

I don't know you.

KNOCK

JOAN

"Saint Peter the Great, let me in -- "

PETER

Stop it! I don't know any --

BITZI pushes open the door; he's standing there with a shaken, tired looking JOAN, and MITZI.

BITZI

We were trying to be civilized about this but if you're going to be a nightmare:

Look who's back!! Praise the lord and heat the coffee - the cat was up all night - she knew something was wrong even though *we were not called*. Peter, get your sister a cookie -- she's exhausted.

PETER

What are you doing here?

JOAN

I just. Um.

MITZI

The police called us this morning. She'd been roaming, I guess; she was asleep in an alley. Not a safe part of town, is all I'll say. She had our card on her and we dragged her home.

PETER

She's not home.

BITZI

Now, look you! She's tired - she's hungry, she's scared, she's your sister, you throw out the welcome mat right now or I'm going to - I'm going to - I'll - I'll strip, I swear I will.

PETER

(to Joan) What were you doing in an alley? Did that seem like a good idea? Have you had any sleep at all? Why don't you go lie down?

JOAN

I want to stay here. I'll use the toilet. I'll sleep on the bed. I'll share your toothbrush if you want me to. I don't want to go. You need me. If I go upstairs now, I'm staying and you won't throw me out again and I won't leave.

PETER

Why should I believe you?

JOAN
Why should I believe you?

PETER
I didn't ask you to.

JOAN
Oh. Well. I don't know then.

PETER
OK, OK. Joan. Look, go and lie down, OK?

JOAN
For a little while. Then I'll come down and, um, clean something.

PETER
Fine.

She goes upstairs.

(to Mitzi and Bitzi) Are you happy now?

JOAN (calls down)
Peter!

PETER (calls up)
Yeah?

A lawn & leaf bag flutters down.

BITZI
Oh, my God. This is so beautiful --

Time passes; Day. PETER is on the couch, painting; trying to paint. JOAN, gloved, is setting a sandwich on a plate.

JOAN
OK. Here we go - the big experiment.

PETER
Who are you, the FDA? It's a PBJ.

Try it. JOAN

Later. I'm working. PETER

You're just staring at it. Come on, try it. JOAN

I've tried peanut butter and jelly before. I'm not in the -- PETER

Please. JOAN

One bite - then you'll leave me alone?
Jesus, Joan. What is in this? PETER

Powdered milk. How is it? JOAN

It tastes like sand. PETER

But the patient care book said to put powdered milk in everything -- I threw two
"Ensure"s down the sink today; you have to eat something.
Choo, choo, choo, choo. JOAN

Stop it. Oops. PETER

I guess it's my job to clean that up. JOAN

It's not mine. PETER

Well, I don't know, I mean, you knocked it over. JOAN

PETER

It was an accident. I need to nap.

JOAN

Quit it. I know you're awake. Fine. I'll just wait. What's the matter?

PETER

I got an itch --

JOAN

Well, here, let me --

PETER

No! Don't touch me unless you take off the gloves.

JOAN

But what if I have germs on my . .

She takes them off.

Here?

PETER

No. Up. Down. To the left. Ow. Softer. Left. No, down. Back up, right, right. Geez, clumsy --

JOAN

Idiot.

PETER

Fatso.

JOAN

Fairy.

PETER

Joan --

JOAN

Peter --

The phone RINGS.

PETER

Hello? Hi, honey. Yeah. Yeah. I did. Joan, quit it. She's putting eight million pillows behind me.

JOAN

It's better for your back.

PETER

Get these pillows off the couch. Thank you.
Mitz -- I -- Yes ma'am. Wait. (to Joan) Joan. He wants to talk to you.

JOAN

Hello? Hi. Did he eat? Oh, yeah, he ate. He did. Well, I mean, he had an "Ensure". Delicious Artificial Apricot. I know, but this time he wanted apricot. Go figure. Yeah. It was cold. No, no ice. OK, talk to you later. OK.

PETER

Thanks.

JOAN

You're welcome.

PETER

We must have something in common. (pause) We both like men.

JOAN

I don't.

PETER

Oh.

Time passes; Bright Day. WALTER, ROCH and PETER at the downstage left window looking down into the street.

WALTER

Look at that set.

PETER

Yipes.

ROCH

Oh, Lord. Wow. I think I've seen him at the gym. Definitely. He has a pair of purple running shorts that are to die for.

WALTER

He looks like Brad, a little.

ROCH

Do you have to talk about Brad every minute?

WALTER

When do I talk about Brad?

JOAN comes down from upstairs.

PETER

Nah, you're crazy. It's not going to rain.

WALTER

I don't know, those look like storm clouds to me.

PETER

No way. The weather report said --

JOAN

I didn't hear that but you never know. New England weather. In California, that took me a long time to get used to. The weather just never changes. It's weird.

ROCH

We were not talking about the weather. We were looking at the impressive buns and biceps of certain members of the same sex, the homo sex, as they passed under the window, much as we've been doing for the last ten or so years. You can join us if you like.

PETER

Roch.

WALTER

Well, I guess I'll get going.

JOAN

I'll join you.

WALTER

You will?

JOAN

If you don't mind.

WALTER

Here, pull up a ledge. You can sit next to me.

Followed by a long moment of silence.

WALTER

Well.

JOAN

He's, um, handsome.

WALTER

He's an ass-hole. A moron. A toad. We dated for a while. I never told you guys this - I was embarrassed - but when we broke up he stole three tins of caviar, Beluga caviar, right out of the pantry.

ROCH

I had a guy do that once. Stole an expensive bottle of wine.

PETER

Really? What's the point of that?

ROCH

I don't know, like, food as a weapon. Something like that.

WALTER

God, Peter, don't you watch *Oprah*?

JOAN

I once took all of Derek's herbal supplements and dumped them in the trash down the street, a few blocks from our house, so he wouldn't know where to look for them.

PETER

Why?

ROCH

Promise me you won't do that to Peter's herbal supplements.

PETER

Roch --

ROCH

You need those! (to Joan) Promise me. If it's an herb thing, we'll hide them. Some days it's all he eats.

PETER

Roch, it's OK. I don't take them anyway.

ROCH

What? Why not? How could you not take them?

PETER

They taste gross.

ROCH

They taste gross! Who cares how they taste! How can you taste them! They're pills! They're covered with some sort of covering or something --

PETER

I can taste them. They taste like dirt.

ROCH

Do you know what I went through to get them? Dried centipede sperm doesn't come cheap, my friend!

WALTER

Oh, *now* he'll take them.

ROCH

Shut up, Walter! Peter, we are doing everything we can to keep you alive and you're not cooperating! Every moment is precious. If those things buy you five more minutes, you have to take it. You can't squander time, Peter. We just don't have it.

PETER

If I die on a Tuesday instead of a Thursday, so be it.

ROCH

I want the Wednesday.

PETER

It's not yours to want.

ROCH

Peter. Peter. I have to get to the mission.

OK. Coming by later? PETER

I wouldn't be surprised. ROCH (leaving)

Do they taste that bad? WALTER

Yeah. PETER

Is this today's paper? WALTER

My head is throbbing. PETER

Want some aspirin - I mean Tylenol? JOAN

I want a Percocet. PETER

No, not for twenty more minutes. JOAN

Oh, for Christ's sake -- PETER

Hot water bottle? JOAN

No, no. PETER

Cold cloth -- JOAN

PETER
No --

JOAN
Do you guys think I'm gay?

PETER
What?

WALTER
What, honey?

JOAN
Bitzi thinks I'm gay.

WALTER
Oh.

PETER
Bitzi thinks everyone's gay.

JOAN
Yeah, well. He wondered. And then I got to thinking. See, there are certain things that I would never do that would make Derek totally mad and --

PETER
Like?

JOAN
Oh, no --

PETER
Oral sex?

JOAN
I can just barely have normal sex --

PETER
I thought that was normal sex.

JOAN
Peter. So how do you tell - I mean, how do you know if you're - you know.

PETER
I know.

WALTER
You'd know by now.

JOAN
Not necessarily.

PETER
That's true. Well. Ok. Who's the sexiest woman you know?

JOAN
You mean, know, as in, I know her, or know, like from TV or anything --

PETER
Whatever.

JOAN
Uh. Farrah Fawcett.

PETER
Still? Well. She has good teeth.

WALTER
She has very good teeth.

PETER
OK. So you close your eyes. And picture kissing her. Can you do it?

JOAN
Yeah.

PETER
You can?

JOAN
Yeah.

WALTER
On the mouth?

JOAN
Oh, God, no. No, on the cheek. On the side of the face --

PETER
Oh, no, no, no, that doesn't count. You have to picture kissing her on the mouth.

JOAN
Um. Ok.

PETER
Did you do it?

JOAN
Yeah.

PETER
You did? On the mouth? What kind of kiss?

JOAN
What --

WALTER
Open mouth? Tongues?

JOAN
Ach!! No! Of course not. Lck, gross.

PETER
I don't think you're gay, Joan.

JOAN
Oh, thank God.

PETER
Thank you, Joan.

JOAN
Oh, no, I didn't mean -- I didn't mean anything by it --

PETER
If you don't mean anything, you shouldn't say anything.

WALTER
Peter.

PETER
Sorry.

JOAN
I saw you.

PETER
Hmm? What?

JOAN
With Jason Richardson.

Who? PETER

In high school. JOAN

Catch me up, here, Joan, I have no idea -- PETER

I saw you and Jason Richardson kissing under the bleachers when you were a senior and I came looking for you because I wanted to go home and I saw you there. JOAN

Oh. Jason. Hmm. The Bleachers. He's a priest, I heard. PETER

Peter! JOAN

PETER
I'm just saying
what I heard.

WALTER
Father Jason. Have mercy.

We heard you, by the way. There was this huge gasp, a choking noise, and I thought it was Jason but I cracked open my eyes a bit and saw you standing there, panting. Yeah, yeah. I remember. What could I say, though? PETER

I'd never, I mean, I couldn't. . God, you guys made me sick. JOAN

No, you make *me* sick. PETER

WALTER
She said "made."

JOAN
I said "made."

Time passes; Night. PETER is trying to paint. JOAN comes out of the bathroom.

JOAN

OK. Time for your bath. The water is nice and warm, but not hot. Ivory soap and a tiny bit of baking soda for clean dry skin and a drop of Betadyne and two face cloths and three towels washed in Ivory. All set.

PETER

I don't feel like a bath right now.

JOAN

Why not?

PETER

Because I don't.

JOAN

Oh. Well. I can re-draw the water later. I can. OK. No problem. Hungry?

PETER

No.

JOAN

Thirsty?

PETER

No.

JOAN

Want anything?

PETER

No.

JOAN

What about --

PETER

Stop it! I'll let you know, Joan, really, it's OK. Sit.

JOAN (at the window)

Cute guy. Oh, wow. Another one. This is a good window.

PETER

It may not be as productive as one would think for a girl such as yourself.

JOAN

Still, it's a nice view.

PETER

It used to be.

JOAN

Leave your socks on. You're not supposed to walk around in bare feet.

PETER

I feel like it.

JOAN

You shouldn't. The book says --

PETER

I'm hungry.

JOAN

You are? Really?

PETER

How about some of that kugel Mrs. Mitzi brought over?

JOAN

Oh, the kugel. Um. Well, let me see. Oh, you know what, I remember now - I threw it out.

PETER

Why?

JOAN

It had a bug in it.

PETER

A - what kind of bug?

JOAN

Oh, I don't know, this big brown thing, tons of legs --

PETER

I have never seen a bug in this apartment --

JOAN

Yeah, it must have come from Bitzi's.

PETER

Mitzi and Bitzi's. Well, I could mention it.

JOAN

No, don't! You might hurt their feelings.

PETER

Yeah, maybe. Yeah. Shoot.

JOAN

Do you want something else? You want some toast?

PETER

Nah.

JOAN

"Ensure" - we have Delicious Artificial Strawberry, or --

PETER

Nah.

JOAN

I could buy some kugel. Run down to the deli.

PETER

Nah. Never mind. It's gone. I'm not hungry anymore.

JOAN

Oh, no, come on, you can't do that.

PETER

Do what?

JOAN

Change your mind like that.

PETER

What? I'm not hungry.

JOAN

You were a minute ago! Get it back --

PETER

I'm telling you, it's passed.

JOAN

You're not funny --

PETER

I'm not trying to be funny --

JOAN

You don't know the kind of pressure I'm under!

PETER

What pressure --

JOAN

To get you to eat! Roch says it, Mitzi says it, Bitzi says it - - "Oh, Joanie, get Peter to eat, will you?" "See what you can do, dear. He walked by an apple last Thursday and he thinks that counts!" So then you say you're hungry and I think, Oh, great, finally he'll eat a little something and I can tell them what you ate, had a nice dinner or something and then you change your mind like that, like a little old lady or something and where does that leave me?

PETER

Well, next time don't eat all the kugel.

JOAN

You wanna listen to some music?

PETER

Jon had an amazing CD collection. I kept telling him albums would be back.

JOAN

He liked music, huh? And you liked him?

PETER

I worshipped him. Yes, I liked him.

JOAN

Nothing about him bothered you?

PETER

Nothing that lingered. Jonathan was a nice man. Do you know how rare a find that is? Not that I hate men. Just that, I mean, in this world, it's rare.

JOAN

Yeah, I know.

PETER

He was gentle. That's why he died before me. To outlive me would have been too much for him. I would have hated it. It's better this way.

JOAN

You loved . . . him? This man? How, though?

PETER

How graphic can I get?

JOAN

No, don't. How did you ever learn to love someone well?

PETER

Jonathan taught me.

JOAN

Because you didn't know when I left.

PETER

Yeah, well. Love like that is an amazing thing. Every time I touched him, I loved him more. Many nights, we didn't go to sleep. Just stayed up and made love all night --

JOAN

Well, goodnight --

PETER

Oh, my God, I am heartily sorry if I have offended thee.

JOAN

I said don't get graphic --

PETER

Graphic? I'll give you graphic - He pulled down my shorts with his teeth till he got them to my ankles then he knelt down and started at my belly, licking every inch of it because it was rippled at the time and I'd get hard just having him near me like that -

She dashes upstairs.

Get back here!!! Get back here.

You said you would stay. Do you know why I don't believe you? I saw Dad leave. Did you know that? Can you imagine? I was five years old. I heard something down the hall, a noise. He was standing at the door. He saw me, saw his only son standing there in his cowboy pajamas. And he held his fingers to his lips. Like Santa. And he left. I wet my pants. Because I knew he was gone. And I went into their bedroom, Ma's bedroom. She was swollen with you. And she'd already decided you were a girl, and you'd be "Joan". And I lay beside her, put my arm around her belly, and I said, "Joan?" and you didn't answer. So I figured right then, we were alone. Ma and Me.

JOAN

You weren't though. I was there.

PETER

Come here, then.

JOAN

What?

PETER

Come here. You want to know about Jon? You want to know what it feels like to dance with me? Jon did it all the time --

JOAN

Ma taught you.

PETER

Yes. And Jon would let me lead, because I knew what I was doing. And he'd put his head here. Put your head here. In the curve of my chest. So he could hear my heart beat. And we would. . We would dance, sway, stay still, stand together for hours and listen to each other breathe.

JOAN

I'm so sorry.

PETER
Thanks. (mumbled) You're all right.

JOAN
What?

PETER
I said you're a good kid.

JOAN
Thank you. I can see why Jon liked you so much. Loved you.

PETER
I miss him. Oh, my God - Oh, Jesus God. I miss him. I miss him so much. I just. I can't - I just -- how can I -- Oh, God, I'm sorry --

JOAN
I don't mind --

LAST BREATH appears as JON; Peter sees him.

PETER
Jon.

LAST BREATH AS JON
Peter.

PETER
Uh. Joan. Could you. I'd like some tea. Would you?

JOAN
Sure. Sure. I'll get you some. Sure.

She goes into the kitchenette; lights shift to cover just "Jon" and Peter.

LAST BREATH AS JON
Sweet.

PETER
Sweetie.

LAST BREATH AS JON
So what are you, tougher than I was?

PETER

Oh, sweetie. No, no. I just. You know, a virus is a funny thing - sometimes a body fights it and it has nothing to do with how strong a person is. It's nothing like that, no judgement or anything. No crime has been committed. It's just you live or you die.

LAST BREATH AS JON

You probably die.

PETER

Not always. You smell good.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Not rank?

PETER

At all.

LAST BREATH AS JON

What about our plans?

PETER

They can wait.

LAST BREATH AS JON

I'm not waiting.

PETER

Why not?

LAST BREATH AS JON

Peter - I've been dead for over a year. I can't hang around here forever. I'll wait till you die, but not if it takes forty years. I have to be honest with you, babe: you don't look so good.

PETER

It's the light.

LAST BREATH AS JON

What about the plan? Were you just humoring a dying man or do you really want to come back as my wife this time?

PETER

No, I still do.

LAST BREATH AS JON

It would be so great; lesbians. We'd still be together but we'd have breasts.
How can you walk away from that?

PETER

Well. I have an obligation. To my sister.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Do you love her?

PETER

I should. I'm trying. I guess I do.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Well, you loved me.

PETER

Yes.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Tell me.

PETER

I loved you. Like a ship. Like the Queen Mary. Like the Himalayas. Like the Grand
Canyon. New York City.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Ick.

PETER

Ick.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Love me.

PETER

I can't.

LAST BREATH AS JON

Why not?

PETER

I don't want to be dead.

"JON" disappears and Last Breath remains.

	LAST BREATH
Tough.	
	PETER
Honey - Jon!! What did you do to him? Where is he?	
	LAST BREATH
He's in the great beyond, man. Dead. Unless, of course, you don't want him to be.	
	PETER
I don't want him to be.	
	LAST BREATH
OK.	
	PETER
OK??	
	LAST BREATH
You give it up and I'll let him go.	
	PETER
What?	
	LAST BREATH
You die, he lives.	
	PETER
But he's already --	
	LAST BREATH
Do you think I'm lying?	
	PETER
Let me think about it.	
	LAST BREATH
Nope. No time. Make up your mind.	

PETER

But - what will happen to him?

LAST BREATH

Nothing that didn't already happen. He'll be all right.

PETER

Really?

LAST BREATH

WHAT DID I JUST SAY???

PETER

OK, OK. Wait. Um. Let me think --

LAST BREATH

Shit, too late man. Too late. Can't do it. I gotta go. OK, JON, BABY, HERE I COME -- I'm outta here.

PETER

NO! Wait - Jon - let me explain --

Last Breath runs out the front door; Peter runs out the door after him, slams it, Joan runs to the door, chases him out.

JOAN

Peter? Peter! What are you doing???

PETER!!

Time passes; Early Morning. BITZI and JOAN and WALTER. Joan sits at the down left window; Walter is asleep on the couch; Bitzi is cleaning.

BITZI

Mitzi once found a sweatshirt I'd lost three years previously. It's true - we were on the Cape, you must come down some time - and it had been buried in a sand drift and Mitzi saw the cuff sticking out of the sand and he snatched it. He's amazing.

JOAN

It's been eleven hours.

BITZI

I know how long it's been and it's fine, he'll be fine, Mitzi will find him and it's not your fault.

JOAN

What could have made him leave like that?

BITZI

It's hard to say what's going on in his mind right about now. I heard someone say that dying takes as much energy as being born. Do you want to know how stupid I am? OK. I'll tell you. I thought we could save Peter. I thought, "Just one. Just this one." A breakthrough - something. There are rumblings. But. I don't know. Every time I look at him, he's further away.

JOAN

He's much worse since I got here; how can he stand it?

BITZI

The way you stand anything.

JOAN

Do you, what -- what do you do, pray or something?

BITZI

My Grandfather, Emil Jason Bitzenkowski made it out of Auschwitz. He had a tattoo on his wrist - 56671 - till the day he died at 92. My Grandmother, Sharon, did not make it out of Auschwitz. She was sickly. Woman troubles -- who knows. Emil stood in the yard digging mud away from the tire of a general's car and Sharon was hauled off, along with a few hundred others, to the gas chambers. She knew where she was going, too. She called him, Emil, Emil, My Emil, and if Emil had looked up he would have been taken to the chambers, too. So he looked at the mud at his feet. He told me this story. Most of my friends are dead from a disease that turns them into human skeletons. If there is a god, he does not deserve my adoration.

JOAN

Then who do you blame?

BITZI

Mitzi. He doesn't mind and it makes me feel better.

ROCH(bursting in)

Well? What do you have to say for yourself?

WALTER (waking)

What? What is it --

BITZI

Roch, hey. I'll make tea. I brought those frosted black and white cookies in the hopes that when Peter comes home any minute now he'll be a little hungry.

ROCH

He'll be home soon.

WALTER

Did they find him?

ROCH

I just left him; Mitzi's with him now. (to Joan) What do you have to say --

BITZI

Why didn't Mitzi call -- I'll kill him --

ROCH

Mitzi The Wonder Dog didn't find him. He was found by a local street man, Bolo, he calls himself, and he came and got me and I called an ambulance. I went to the hospital with him; he was bleeding. His head, his feet. You let him run out of here in the middle of the night in bare feet --

WALTER

Roch --

JOAN

No, Walter, it's OK. How is he? Tell me.

ROCH

Little cut on his hand. He has a small contusion on his scalp. And his forearm; it looked like he bit himself, or someone bit him. Either way, it's not good. He had soiled himself; they gave him some surgical greens. He looks so cute in them. He was a little confused, they gave him something to calm him. I washed his feet. The nurse at the hospital did it, but then I did it. I put hydrogen peroxide on the cuts. Then I put a little oil on them because they were so so dry. And I thought, you know, Roch, you better hurry because when he wakes up he's going to wish you weren't doing that. He's going to wish it were someone else --

JOAN

So he's asleep?

ROCH

-- anyone else at all.

But. He was going to let me move in. He would have had to let me, wouldn't he, Bitz? Walter, am I right?

How could he not love me?

JOAN

I don't know.

MITZI comes in supporting PETER; no one notices them.

ROCH

I don't know, either --

JOAN

Do you want something to eat? I could fix you some --

ROCH

He knows you look away.

JOAN

No. I don't.

ROCH

You do.

JOAN

I can tell you where every spot and bump is, every lump, every scar from too many needles - I look! I --

PETER

Joanie. Back off.

BITZI

Ah, the Prodigal Son returns.

MITZI

He felt a little light headed in the stairwell --

BITZI

Joan was worried, I wasn't.

PETER

No need to worry, I just went for a walk.

ROCH

Do you want, tea, something. What do you want?

PETER

I'm all set.

WALTER

I read the paper, but I put it back in order.

JOAN

Do you want a pillow?

PETER

God, no, don't do that pillow thing again. It's OK. I'm just tired.

JOAN

Can I get you anything? Should I have known you were going to do that?

PETER

No. I didn't know myself.

JOAN

Why, though?

PETER

I forget.

Time passes; Day. JOAN alone, eating out of a pan. WALTER bursts in, stands at the door in a panic.

WALTER

Where is he? Peter! Joan - where --

JOAN

He's with Mitzi - they --

WALTER

He's - he left here this morning?

JOAN

Yeah --

WALTER

Oh, my God. Mother and all the Saints. Geez.

JOAN

What is it?

WALTER

I dreamed, I guess it was a dream but it felt more like, I don't know, it was a premonition. He was dead. He looked the way he does now, but thinner. And whiter. Very white. And I was near him and I could feel the cold he was giving off just being near him.

JOAN

He's OK.

WALTER

I really felt frightened, you know, after that scare we had when he took off and -- What's that -- oh, you were eating and I interrupted you! Is that my stroganoff?

JOAN

Oh, yes. But I'm all done.

WALTER

Oh, no, you're being polite. Here. Let me. Here. It's good to be fed. Isn't that nice? Do you like it?

JOAN

I do.

WALTER

Have some more. The way you chew, it's so cute. Brad chews that way, like a little kid, but, no matter. I'm through with him. Yup. I'm a free man again.

JOAN

But, I thought --

WALTER

Ah, no, no big deal. I'm easily fooled by a pair of nice biceps. Done is done. Well, that's a relief. Mind if I pull up a fork? I'm a genius.

JOAN

But Peter said he hadn't seen you this happy in, um, in a long time.

WALTER

Since Donald. You meant to say since Donald.

JOAN

I meant to say since Donald. I thought you liked him. You did say he had nice eyes. Blue, right, really blue?

WALTER

They're all right. They'll do.

JOAN

You said Brad was really nice. And Peter likes him. And Roch likes him. And Mitzi and Bitzi --

WALTER

Bitzi likes everyone.

JOAN

You like him, Walter.

WALTER

Shit, Joan. Joanie. He's got it. Got the bug. He'll get sick. He'll be sick. I'm sick of it. I am. I can't go through that again. I won't.

JOAN

You won't have to. Maybe. You never know.

WALTER

What if I do?

JOAN

Then you will. His eyes are so blue. You said they were blue.

Time passes; Day. PETER and JOAN; Joan is frantically hovering. Peter has a sizable red bump on his forehead.

JOAN

What should I - I'll call the clinic - do you want to go to the clinic?

No, I really don't -- PETER

This is all my fault -- JOAN

Sweets for the -- What happened?? ROCH(bursting in with chocolates)

It's my fault -- JOAN

Call Mitzi. Beep him. ROCH

We did -- JOAN

Why isn't he here?? Did you do it right? ROCH

Don't yell. PETER

I'm sorry. Take small breaths -- ROCH

I'm OK. PETER

Anybody get the license plate off the bus? ROCH

It was Derek. PETER

What are you doing to yourself? Call the police! Did he break in here? ROCH

He just walked in. He must have followed someone in -- PETER

That's beautiful. Did you dial Mitzi? Never mind, I'm calling 9-1-1 -- ROCH

PETER

Don't. He's insane! First thing he asks is, hasn't she gained a few pounds since she left --

JOAN

Well, I might have --

PETER

And Joan told him she was going to gain two hundred pounds and walk around the house with no clothes on all day --

ROCH

Oh, God --

PETER

And, naturally, I was pretty sad about that so I said --

JOAN (under)

I wasn't really going to do that --

PETER

-- I said, 'Now, listen, Joan, let's think about that,' and she just burst out laughing and Derek told me to shut up --

ROCH

So you duked it out with a gym teacher -- Let's get some ice on that.

JOAN

That was funny, wasn't it? You were laughing. I saw you covering your mouth.

PETER

Yes, that was funny.

ROCH

I'm sure it was a scream. Do you think Peter needs this? Huh? Think of him, why don't you - what would be best for Peter?

PETER

Why don't we ask Peter?

ROCH

Fine.

PETER
If she got a divorce, for starters.

ROCH
(not the answer he was hoping for)
Oh, Jesus --

PETER
She told him her lawyer would contact him.

ROCH
Her what?

JOAN
Bitzi.

PETER
That was a good idea, Joan.

JOAN
Yeah, that was a good idea --

ROCH
Why didn't you just let it go? Let them have their little argument --

PETER
He thinks he's a tough guy -- He was twisting her arm - she started to cry --

JOAN
And Peter told him to knock it off - and he said, 'Make me, faggot!' - just like that --

PETER
Well, I don't like to be outdone by an idiot so I called him a 'sissy' --

ROCH
Peter!

PETER
He should be so lucky.

ROCH
I'm sure it was all very exciting. Joan, get me a Band-Aid from the bathroom --

PETER
I'm not bleeding --

JOAN
He's not even bleeding --

ROCH
Get me a Band-Aid, Joan!

JOAN (heading into the bathroom)
Oh, for heaven's sake --

PETER
So what I did was, I got up off the couch and I told him about this guy who got AIDS from a guy on a bus. The guy was sitting next to him and somebody threw a rock and the rock hit him in the head and maybe it was a lady who got it -- It's so hard for me to keep my balance when I'm walking - I might fall on someone -- and next thing I know, I'm lying face down on the floor and he's screaming bloody murder and hurling himself out the door screaming for a doctor!!

JOAN
And he'll go stumbling into some poor clinic or something and they'll say: "But, sir, you're not even bleeding. And there's no blood on you. You're probably more danger to him than he is to you." Idiot.
(re: Peter) He might have hurt his wrist. He hit it when he fell. Should I wrap it?

PETER
Let's wait for Mitzi. I have a headache.

ROCH
Well, of course you do.

JOAN
I'll wrap it. No problem. Would you have done it?

PETER
Done it?

JOAN
Would you have infected Derek?

PETER
God, no. I wouldn't wish this on my worst enemy. And he may be it, but, still.

JOAN
Just relax. You did great.

Uh-huh. PETER

That was great. You were great. Peter. Thank you. JOAN

You're welcome. PETER
You've cut off the circulation in my arm, Joan.

I did not! JOAN

House call! MITZI (bursting in with BITZI)

Don't you know what a beeper is for! It means come right away! What, did you stop for lunch! ROCH

What's up? BITZI

There was a little accident. JOAN

What are we looking at here? MITZI

I, uh, I don't know; I can't really see anymore. PETER

Time passes; Dawn. MITZI is checking and re-checking vitals; BITZI is hovering; WALTER is pretending to read the paper. PETER is on the couch, JOAN is sitting on the arm of the couch behind him.

No change? MITZI

Nah. PETER

MITZI

Off the top of my head, I'd say the slight blow you took from Derek set off something that was already loose.

BITZI

How long have your eyes been bad?

PETER

Long enough.

BITZI

How did you manage to hide that from Dr. Tarash?

MITZI

He didn't. She knows.

BITZI

What?? And you didn't --

MITZI

He told me not to tell anyone --

BITZI

That doesn't include me --

PETER

What does it matter, who knew, who didn't know -- Don't be mad at him -

BITZI

It doesn't matter, it doesn't matter.

MITZI

I'm sorry.

BITZI

I'm not mad.

MITZI

Please come to the clinic.

PETER

I can't go to the clinic.

You're sure? BITZI

I'm sure. PETER

I'll give you a dollar. MITZI

PETER
Under the bed upstairs, under the mattress, there are three paintings. Finished ones. Sell two of them. Get at least twice the standing offers. Hide the cash. Give thirty percent to Aids Action; seventy percent to the clinic. Give the third painting to Joanie, though. Make sure she sells it. It'll be enough to get her started.

Yup. BITZI

Peter -- JOAN

Consider this official? BITZI

Yup. PETER

Mitz - witness? BITZI

Yeah. MITZ

Joan - witness? BITZI

Huh? JOAN

BITZI
I can't take this on by myself! I need witnesses - Joan??

JOAN

Yeah, sure. What do I have to --

BITZI

Just listen. Peter, which hospice if necessary?

PETER

Mission Hill. Isn't that where Fred Rafael was?

BITZI

Uh-huh.

PETER

But only if you can't help it. I'd really rather go here.

BITZI

Yup. And can we put the "A" word in the notice?

PETER

In caps. And I want to be cremated.

JOAN

Oh, gross.

PETER

Throw my ashes out the window on a blustery day.

JOAN

Don't you wanna be buried next to Ma?

PETER

Would you?

ROCH stumbles in, disheveled, a little drunk. He pauses at the door, then goes to Peter, touches him.

PETER

Roch? You stink. Where've you been?

ROCH

Out. Everywhere. Lindo's, mostly.

PETER

That pit? What for?

ROCH

I had lots of awful sex with people I don't know and I didn't use any protection at all.

Peter hits him.

"A hit. A very palpable hit."

PETER

Why, for God's sake? What is wrong with you?

ROCH

Forgive me. I'm frosted over. I started out with good intentions, I swear I did, but - too many funerals, too many poems I've memorized. I've dug myself a fox hole, haven't I? You caught me. Busted. "We are all strong enough to bear the misfortunes of others." Duc de la Rochefoucauld. I have to get to the mission. I have to fall apart, a little bit, I think. I have to. Um. I may have someone at services today. I have to take a shower. I need some vitamin C. Maybe I'll move out of state. Start over. I'll come by later.

PETER

I may not be here. Something's broken loose inside. I think it's my liver. It's floating around in there like a balloon in a dryer -- very fragile.

MITZI

Let me call Dr. Tarash. She'll come by. At least talk to her.

ROCH

Call an ambulance --

WALTER

Peter, don't wait until --

PETER

No, no, enough. I can feel the virus multiplying. This is a relatively new phenomenon. I see it, a free floater, a single virus, popped off recently from a cell behind my spleen, escaped, cut loose, and it latches on to a cell near my eye. My left eye, right eye, whatever. It moves. Slithers. And it latches onto a healthy cell, and I think: Oh, Christ, Enough. Leave me this one cell. But it sticks to the surface and it sucks at the cell wall. Sycophant. Nibbles at the surface till it breaks into the cell itself, it replicates. Splits itself over and over and over till it finally explodes, cracks the wall, breaks it up, breaks it up, breaks it up, and I can feel all this. All this sucking and latching and fecundity; from in here, it's quite a show.

ROCH
Save me a seat. Truly, I love you.

PETER
I believe you.

ROCH
Do you?

PETER
Yes.

ROCH
Say it again.

PETER
I believe. Thanks for doing my feet.

ROCH
You're welcome. Good. OK. I'll be going.

PETER
No, no. Stay.

ROCH
I can't. I just can't.

He leaves.

PETER
I'm really in so much pain. Mitz, hook up that morphine stash, will you?

MITZI
I'm calling the hospital.

PETER
No, don't.

MITZI
All right, you, now you listen to me. Peter. You. I have been here two, three, four times a day including Christmas and my birthday and before that I was here with Jonathan and I was happy to do it, I was honored to do it but I think I've garnered a little slack here and when I tell you to drink some apple juice I expect you to try and

CONTINUED

MITZI (CONTINUED)

when I tell you your IV doesn't look good let's go to the clinic and get a new one. expect you to come and get a new IV and when I tell you for Christ's sake Peter you can't see come to the hospital with me I expect you to come to the hospital now Joanie get his coat.

PETER

Mitzenkowski. My friend.

BITZI (to Mitzi)

Babe? Come on. He wants the morphine.

JOAN

Could you. Um. You should show me how to do that.

MITZI

Gloves. Alcohol swab. Gently.

PETER

Ow.

JOAN

Sorry.

PETER

Angel of Mercy, Joan.

BITZI

Peter.

MITZI

Saline. Gently flush the line. Morphine. Gently puncture the top. Draw out ten Cc's. Force it up. Tap the needle. Get the air out. It fits right into the cap. Easy.

PETER

Ow.

JOAN

Stop that. You're not funny.

PETER

Plenty of good nursing jobs around here, Joan.

JOAN

Peter. I don't know if I'll still be here.

PETER
Where would you be?

JOAN
Someplace else.

PETER
Might as well stay in Boston. You guys will take care of her, right?

WALTER: You bet.
BITZI: Right.
MITZI: Yup.

JOAN
Thanks for the painting.

PETER
Get cash for it.

JOAN
Maybe I'll just keep it. I don't need much money. Maybe I could waitress or something.

PETER
Sure, why not.
Oh, geez, geez, ow, ow, oh shit. Inthenameofthefatherthesonandtheholyyghost.
God.

JOAN (overlapping)
--ofthefatherthesonandtheholyyghost. Want me to pray with you?

PETER
Nah. I don't need anything.
Mitz?

MITZI
Right here.

PETER
Bitzenkowski?

BITZI
Yes, darling love.

Walter? PETER

Amigo. WALTER

Amigo. You'll be OK.
Roch? You here? PETER

Peter? LAST BREATH

Joan? PETER

Yeah? JOAN

Peter. LAST BREATH

Where's my sister? PETER

I'm here. JOAN

*The sound of TRAFFIC stops abruptly.
Last Breath moves in. Blackout.*

END OF PLAY