Patience: a play in two acts.

Mary Rotella 1958-

University of Louisville

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PATIENCE: A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By

Mary Rotella
B.A. Harvard, 1980

A Thesis
Submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of the University of Louisville
in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of

Master of Arts

Department of English
University of Louisville
Louisville, Kentucky

December 2003
PATIENCE: A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

By

Mary Rotella
B.A., Harvard, 1980

A Thesis Approved on

November 10, 2003

by the following Thesis Committee:

Thesis Director
DEDICATION

This thesis is dedicated to
the living memory of those who have died,
especially my Uncle Shorty, Romolo Picciandra,
and
to the living will of those who carry on,
especially my mother, Doreen Tighe.
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

The author's name on the title page represents a convenient fiction, which, while rightfully fixing sole responsibility for any offenses of sound, sense, or form contained herein, unjustly obscures the immeasurable contributions of innumerable others. In partial rectification, I gratefully acknowledge the following assistance.

First and foremost, I thank my husband, Joe Rotella, not only for his sustained moral support, but especially for his intellectual partnership. Many of the ideas for this play germinated in our morning conversations over coffee and have been continuously watered by his enthusiasm. He has also challenged me to consider complexities of character where I may have oversimplified and contributed details of medical verisimilitude where they mattered most.

I also thank friends who have acted as sounding boards, particularly participants in Claire Robson's September 2003 writers' retreat, Claire, Joyce Kravatz, Liz Jones, and Chad Couto, for their dramatic reading and helpful critique of the first act; Linda Baldwin, Rita Carroll and Harry Anderson for their interest in the work in progress; Nancy Dyer and Scott Meyer for dessert at The William Tell and the conversation that underpins part of the final scene of this play; and Jo Ann Griffin for her patient listening to my complaints.

I thank my therapist, Carol Massey, for guiding me past a wicked writer's block and especially for helping me to value the project highly enough to persist through difficult times.

I thank Dr. George Webb, Medical Director for Hospice of Louisville's Education Institute, whose unpublished essay entitled "Patient Autonomy: A Difficult Road" (2002), partly informed my understanding of some of the issues explored in the play.

I thank all of my past and present teachers, especially Dr. James Richardson for telling me I can write and warning me of the dangers, Harry Anderson for his lessons in idealism, Robert Hunter for his lessons in pragmatism, and Dr. Carol Mattingly for her rare and precious gift of being at once a teacher and
a friend. Dr. Beth Boehm, Dr. Thomas Van, Dr. Estella Majozo, and Professor Paul Griner provided comments on my prospectus. Members of my advisory committee, Dr. Dale Billingsley and Dr. Osborne Wiggins, challenged me by the examples of their own scholarship to aspire toward the most rigorous intellectual tasks I could set for myself. Their thoughtful commentary has opened avenues of significant further development. And lastly, I must thank my principal advisor, Professor Jeffrey Skinner, whose insight into the creative process and knowledge of dramatic form have been indispensable to this project. Surely, in whatever measure I have failed to implement his advice and guidance, the work remains less than it might have been otherwise.
ABSTRACT

PATIENCE: A PLAY IN TWO ACTS

Mary Rotella

November 10, 2003

When Howard Manning wakes from a fainting spell to find himself hospitalized with a serious but
correctable weakness in his heart, his refusal of treatment intimates a death wish that provokes
consternation among the skilled medical professionals who are poised to save his life. The first act explores
the character and implications of his resistance in relation to the expectations of his surgeon Dr. Vincent
Abel, nurse Zo Clement, psychiatry resident Trudy Zeffirelli, and neighboring patient Clarence Weatherby.
It culminates with Manning's precipitous and injurious departure against medical advice. The second act
reveals Manning returned to his hospital bed, withdrawn and uncommunicative, visited by the spirit of the
now comatose Weatherby. His conversation with the dying man, along with the ministrations of his
caregivers, confronts Manning with problems in his philosophy of resignation. Meanwhile, his rejection of
medical technology, along with his insistence on autonomy, confronts Dr. Abel with limitations in his
principle of life-extension. The resultant play, with humorous tone but serious intent, constitutes a
dramatization of the standoff between “the right to life” and “the right to choose.”
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CHARACTERS

HOWARD MANNING 69-year-old, retired newspaper editor, now cardiac patient
ZO CLEMENT, R.N., B.S.N. 40-year-old, petite, perky, experienced nurse of ambiguous ethnicity
CLARENCE WEATHERBY 65-year-old, working class patient next door
VINCENT ABEL, M.D. 50-year-old ace cardiac surgeon at mid career
TRUDY ZEFFIRELLI, M.D. 25-year-old-psychiatry resident
SETTING

A modern hospital cardiac telemetry unit consisting of a Nurses' Station/Telemetry "Cockpit" and two patient's cubicles. Technological verisimilitude is less important than the impressions of Manning's isolation/exposure, attachment/containment, and dependence/alienation imposed by hospital things.

TIME

Just around the corner from now, two days before Manning's 70th birthday, shortly before dawn.
### SCENE BREAKDOWN

#### ACT I

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ACT I

SCENE 1

The set is completely dark, representing Howard Manning's unconscious state. At one side, a telemetry
monitoring station is represented by a counter and a bank of computer screens. Behind this station is the
exit from the unit. Other exits lead to other areas of the circular unit. (See Appendix). Manning, dressed in
hospital gown, lies asleep in the bed. A tangle of twelve leads with IV and other catheters connect him to
the bedside equipment. A small, broken and crudely mended crucifix hangs above the bed. A small table on
rollers, a bedside chair, and a small cupboard and washbasin furnish the patient's cubicle. In a separate
similarly furnished cubicle screened from Manning, a second patient, Clarence Weatherby, sleeps
undisturbed by the commotion of Manning's awakening. The first sound is the low-pitched hum of Tibetan
Buddhist chant, gradually overlapped then replaced by the high-pitched beep of the cardiac monitor.
Offstage in the distance, one hears the sound of laughter and the singing of Happy Birthday, which fade out
to leave only the beeps. After a while, the monitor alarm sounds a loud tone. Simultaneously, a spotlight
illuminates Manning as he bolts upright in bed and cries out as if waking from a nightmare.

MANNING

Aaghh! No...Oh, wait! Jeanne!

He begins to flail and fumble with the tubes and wires that connect him to the monitor and IV. As
he becomes oriented to his surroundings, first the monitor lights come up in the cockpit then
gradually other lights come up to reveal the set, leaving Weatherby in darkness, however.

What the...Oh, for Chrissake, no...What is wrong with these people?

Nurse Zo appears from behind the counter where she is checking monitor signals. Calmly she
grabs a clipboard and stethoscope and approaches Manning. Meanwhile, he finds his clothes in a
bag on the chair, stands at the bedside and ineffectually tries to pull on his pants amidst the tangle
of medical paraphernalia, all the while talking to himself.
MANNING (cont’d)

This is ridiculous. I don't need...I thought I said...There must be some mistake. (Pause) Somebody? (pause)

Hello? (Pause) Jesus Christ, can't they leave a man in peace? Nurse?

He sees Zo.

Oh, good, would you please get these off of me? I've got to--

She walks past Manning to check the technology.

ZO

There, there now, Mr. Manning. No need to get alarmed. Here we are.

MANNING

Technically, I am here, you are there, and obviously I have been alarmed whether there is any need or not.

There must be a mistake. I told them I was fine.

She resets the machine, silencing the alarm, then cheerfully but firmly shepherds Manning back toward his bed till he has no choice but to sit with his pants down around his knees.

ZO

Your cord was tangled is all...this lead here. It's okay. You just lay back now and rest.

MANNING

I dreamed--

ZO

Easy now. Live in worry, die in a hurry. You won't be needing these for awhile anyway. There you go.

That's a boy.

She removes his pants, plumps his pillow, gently pushes him into the recumbent position and adjusts his wires and tubes.

MANNING

I'm telling you there's been a mistake.

He sits back up.

I never asked for anyone to...I thought...I'm going home, right? What's the meaning of all this?
ZO

*She raises her voice.*

You're in the hospital, Mr. Manning. Don't you remember? St. Luke's. The ambulance brought you in to the E.R. after you passed out...where was it?

MANNING

You don't have to yell. My hearing is fine. I was at the theater. And I know it's a hospital, for godsake. The costume alone tells me that much. What I want to know is why. What's the meaning of all this (Pause) paraphernalia, this fuss and bother? I told those idiots when they brought me in I'm fine, a fainting spell was all...The theater was too warm. I just need to go home. How long was I...What time is it?

ZO

Your doctor will be in first thing this morning. We hear you put on quite a scene last night.

MANNING

Well, you hear wrong. All I did was...never mind.

ZO

And all this fuss and bother, as you call it, this is our new telemetry unit.

*She adopts an infomercial tone, suggesting she has practiced this explanation many times.*

The CTU! With our brand new TCB! The Total Care Bed monitors your heart rate and other vital signs. Data from this state-of-the-art electronic equipment is continuously transmitted from the bed to a computer monitoring station where--

MANNING

Are.

ZO

Excuse me?

MANNING

The subject happens to be plural. Many bits of information constitute data, which *are* transmitted.

ZO

Yes, well, twenty-four hours a day, our highly trained medical personnel is—
MANNING

Are. Personnel are...like data.

ZO

That's what I said. A whole team of highly trained technicians, nurses and doctors are watching over you to make sure you are well on your road to recovery. Our unit's unique racetrack design and glassed-in exercise area assures that—

_Manning is becoming exasperated, but she is determined to get through her spiel._

MANNING

_Esure_ and plural again.

ZO

--our staff _Self conscious pause_ can maintain maximum supervision of ambulatory patients. Are you always this—

MANNING

Correct?

ZO

Particular?

MANNING

One assures people, _ensures_ circumstances, and _insures_ against loss. Is that so difficult?

ZO

What difference does it make? You know what I mean.

MANNING

I know what you say. The question is do you say what you mean? It's best to be precise. That's why language has rules. The difference between singular and plural is the difference between He and They, between I and We-

ZO

Between You and You?

_She prepares a syringe of medicine to inject in his IV line._
MANNING

It matters. Believe me. Forty-five years as a newspaper editor have taught me one thing: most people are illiterate, pathetic boobs who cannot say what they mean—

ZO

Easy does it, now.

MANNING

--and the rest rarely mean what they say. Let's just hope that fancy computer of yours includes a grammar check. What's that?

ZO

This? Don't worry. Just a little solution to keep your line clear. Salt water. Perfectly natural, like tears.

Okay, well, all set.

_She heads out, places Manning's clothes in the cupboard, and stops to disinfect her hands._

MANNING

Wait! This telemetry business is all very impressive, but, I _assure_ you, unnecessary. The only thing I require is for you to _ensure_ my immediate release. Great American Life may insure me against the financial costs already wasted, but they will not reimburse my time nor compensate for the insult to my autonomy.

ZO

Autonomy?

_Abel, dressed in sport coat and tie, enters behind the cockpit and checks computer screens._

MANNING

Autonomy, from the Greek, _auto-self and nomos_-law, the power of an individual human being to govern himself. Independence, self-sufficiency, self-rule. I do not need the Total Care Bed, or any other bed. I just need to go home--

ZO

Don't worry. You will.

MANNING

--where I'm perfectly capable of taking care of myself.

ZO
Yes, I'm sure you are.

*Abel approaches Manning and Zo, and walks past both of them to the machines.*

**ABEL**

Long time, no see, Mr. Manning. What seems to be the trouble?

**MANNING**

Ah, Dr. Abel, you of all people understand that I do not belong here. Kindly tell this woman to set me free.

**ABEL**

*He punches at his PDA.*

No can do, Howard. Got yourself a sick ticker there, but don’t you worry about a thing. We just need a few more tests, get a little look-see, then a nip-and-tuck, and I’ll have you good as new in no time.

*He continues muttering to Zo with unintelligible medicalese while Manning talks over them.*

What’s the carbylation fraction?

**MANNING**

All of you desist from these pointless ministrations. The show is over. I’m going home, and you can all go back to doing whatever it is you do when you are not afflicting the perfectly well with all your technological wonders.

**ZO**

Two thirty-seven but there’s a slight depression in the drivet.

**ABEL**

What’s he getting for xylaphene?

**ZO**

180 q6 LMNOP

*She turns toward Manning.*

**ZO**

Mr. Manning’s feeling a little grumpy this morning. Had quite a night.
ABEL

He continues to Zo, ignoring Manning.

Watch the cardiocalimeter levels and call me if they drop below, say, seven point six.

ZO

Right.

ABEL

Come on, Howard. Nothing to be afraid of. Didn’t I take care of you with that bypass? It was a beauty, if I don’t say so myself.

He whispers to Zo. She shakes her head then nods reluctantly and walks to the monitoring station.

MANNING

That was nearly ten years ago. I was young and foolish then. Besides, I am not afraid. If anyone’s afraid around here, it’s you. You can’t deal with...my philosophy.

ABEL

Look, my job is keeping people alive. It’s what I’ve trained to do. Philosophy, as you call it, has nothing to do with it. Just because you’ve got yourself into some fancy ideas about...There is no reason, today, with all our current armamentarium...anyone could live to be a hundred or more, not even considering future technological advances.

MANNING

And more is always better with you, isn’t it?

ABEL

Of course.

MANNING

Jesus, what’s the point? Sometimes enough is enough. Anyway, it’s not natural.

ABEL

Don’t talk like that. Of course it’s natural. The framistration just helps your heart keep doing its job. Like a tune-up for your engine. What could be more natural?
Zo returns with a tray of medication.

MANNING

Besides, I have plans, which this happy farce has already disrupted quite enough, thank you. What time is it?

ZO

A stitch in time saves nine.

MANNING

What's that supposed to mean?

*Abel's beeper sounds and he checks it, winking to Zo.*

ABEL

I've got to get this. Look, Howard, trust me here. A little frustration to improve your output and we'll have you on your way in no time. No reason to worry about that...philosophy or whatever. Not now, anyway. This is not like...We'll talk about it later.

*Abel exits.*

MANNING

Wait! If you would just listen to me, I could tell you...

*He turns to Zo.*

Nobody needs to bother about me. Just disconnect these...er...tubes and hand me back those pants. Isn't there a clock anywhere? A person can't tell if it's night or day in here.

ZO

If you were fine, you wouldn't be here. Your EKG-

MANNING

Irrelevant! I think I should be the arbiter of my own condition. One doesn't need a thermometer to tell the weather when one is standing out of doors.

ZO

The instruments are more accurate. They can pick up cardiac events you can't even notice, and these tubes here are giving you fluids and medicines and here's where we can monitor your outputs. It's all very precise and tracked by the computer.
She takes his pulse and listens to his heart with the stethoscope. An amplified Lub Dub, Lub Dub, Lub Da Da Dub Dub ("Shave and a haircut") sounds.

MANNING

Is that good?

ZO

A bit irregular, but that's what the framistration is for.

MANNING

Forget it. I'm not the one who staged the scene, by the way. That would be our illustrious Doctor Abel. And I thought you said the computer tracks everything. What's this?

ZO

Oh, the stethoscope? Part of the costume, I guess, a habit. Plus, I still like the old ways. Ears are for hearing. Dr. Abel says—

MANNING

Man's got a problem if you ask me. Can't take no for an answer. That cut-em-up cowboy can't deal with a man of reason.

ZO

Now, now, you be nice. He's good at what he does and he says--

MANNING

All I did was thank him for his unwanted attentions and request that he send me home. I have that right, you know. I don't mean to trouble anyone, really. It's just a little misunderstanding. So if you'll help me with these...I'm fine (Pause) really.

ZO

That's not what I hear. People who are fine don't suddenly pass out at the theater. Remember? Or come into the hospital on a stretcher.

MANNING

Of course I remember! I remember everything. Quit trying to make me out as some god-damned fool. I thought I'd celebrate my birthday with one last...with a good play.

ZO checks her PDA chart and returns to the monitoring station.
Oh, right. You have a birthday coming up, looks like day after tomorrow. Well, happy birthday! Hey, Maybe later, before you go, I can get you a piece of Jamie's cake.

MANNING

Ah, yes, the consolation of excess. Great.

*Introspective pause*

They were murdering Lear.

ZO

*Distracted by her task*

Really, I don't remember that part.

*Abel appears in the cockpit and whispers to Zo. She looks at Manning and nods. Abel exits the unit.*

MANNING

The play! The fools were killing the play, what with all their high-tech puppetry, video effects, and electronic noise, nothing but computer-generated smoke and mirrors, if you ask me. Not a recognizable human emotion anywhere in the chaos. I don't understand why it is that some people feel compelled to impose their blind, stupid, unnecessary inventions on a nearly perfect creation. Progress they call it, or creativity I suppose. Good thing I passed out. I'd have had to walk out otherwise. It's just this kind of thing that makes me...

ZO

*She returns to the machines at Manning's bedside.*

Come on, Mr. Manning, sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

MANNING

Oh, never mind. You wouldn't understand. Anyway, it was nothing, just a little spell, probably allergic to pretension and bad art, so if you don't mind, I'll just get dressed and be on my way.

ZO

Patience, patience. Dr. Abel still wants to see you. Waiting for a few test results, I guess. And believe it or not, I understand more than you think. Apart from the fact that normal people don't pass out for no
ZO (cont’d)

Particular reason and they don’t call the best cardiologist in the city an idiot when he practically saved their life, more than once, right?

MANNING

That’s beside the point.

ZO

And they definitely don’t...well, let’s just say you’ve caused quite a stir. I’m not here to take sides, but you’re here for a reason. Something’s not right and until someone figures out what it is and what to do about it, my job is to take care of you, give you what you need, and that means monitor your vitals, pass your meds, keep the flow sheets, and chart your I’s and O’s. So if you don’t mind, I’ve got work to do.

MANNING

I’s and O’s?

ZO

Intakes and outputs. See, the fluids, you know, like sugar water and electrolytes and stuff, they go in this tube, and your medicines. And then the waste fluid, that comes out here, and we measure everything. That’s I’s and O’s. They can analyze that stuff to find out what’s going on in between... you know, heart, liver, kidney, lungs and stuff. Balance is the key.

MANNING (disgusted)

Huh. That simple.

ZO

If what comes out matches what goes in, then everything is working. If not, then adjustments have to be made. That’s what medicine is all about. Balance. My job is just to keep track and implement care plans. For you and two other very sick patients, so if there’s nothing else you need right now, I suggest you just make yourself comfortable and be patient. Dr. Abel will be in to see you soon. This is your call button if you need anything. Ask for me, I’m your nurse, Zo.

She indicates a gadget which she then places on the little table and rolls the table just out of Manning’s reach. She exits into the unit.
He calls after her.
Some tea would be nice! My morning paper!

He continues to himself.

Zo? What the hell kind of a name is that?

He pauses then continues in a mocking tone.

Our state-of-the-art facility provides everything (Pause) but the comforts of home, and freedom to choose. Patience, she says. I's and O's. What goes in and what comes out and in between ... they have no idea. In between, heart, lungs, liver, and kidney, is that the sum of it? What about me? There's more to this man than the net effect of so many tissues and organs. Not as if we're talking about machinery. (Pause) She makes it sound so simple. A matter of intakes and outputs, as if a person were the sum of what goes in and what comes out. Sounds like a computer.

He calls out to no one in particular.

You can't ignore what can't be measured!

He continues to himself.

Actually, you can. We do it all the time. But that's the problem. Ignoring something doesn't mean it isn't there. People are not computers, no matter how many functions they manage to foist off on their machines. If they were, you could just program everybody to be healthy, smart and kind. Eat the right foods, read the right books, listen to the right music and watch the right videos and we'll all live happily ever after. It's not that simple. They have no idea about people, really, what goes on in between. The damn in-between remains a complete mystery, (Pause) and that's where all the suffering occurs. (Pause) The Total Care Bed, of all things.

He fusses with the controls.

Designed for the physician's total illusion of control and the patient's total illusion of security. What do you think, Jeanne? Don't you wish you could have enjoyed the benefits of the Total Care Bed? Who knows how much longer they might have been able to stretch you out on the rack of this miraculous care. A few more months? Another year? Patience. We know all about that, I suppose. They really put you through it. For what? That's what I still want to know. What was the point? Why did you... For me? (Pause) You? Were
MANNING (cont'd)

you afraid? Not me, love. They can save their heroism for someone else. I'm going home. Soon as I can get disconnected from this... this... oh, well, may as well try to get some rest.

Manning resigns himself to Zo's advice, wrestles with the blanket and pillow trying to get comfortable. The light bothers him and he finally settles with both blanket and pillow covering his head.
ACT I

SCENE 2

_A light comes on behind the screen separating Manning from Weatherby._

CLARENCE

_He calls from behind the screen._

Your lights went out!

_He rises to an elbow._

His shadow rises from bed, stretches and sits at a small table behind the screen. He begins to shuffle cards rhythmically: Thrrt, Thrrt, Shhhp, Tap, Tap, Tap. The sound of the cards shuffled and laid out for solitaire continues throughout the scene.

MANNING

_He rises to an elbow._

What's that?

CLARENCE

Your lights! I heard them talking when you come in last night. Your whaddyacallum, electric lights are down. Happened to me three, four times now. Lucky to be alive. Every time I nearly died, if it hadn't been for the whoozit, you know, ambulanceguys. They're very important, you know, your lights. I didn't know a thing about it till the first time. Your lights go down and, who-whoo! Boom! Like that, you're out.

MANNING

Electric lights?

_He searches about for the call button while Clarence speaks, practically falls out of bed reaching for it, and finally retrieves it and presses it impatiently but detects no effect._

CLARENCE

You didn't know about that, did you? Everybody's got 'em. They's these little things in your blood kinda like vitamins. After my lights went out the once, that was maybe ten, eleven years ago, let's see, the Stingers were in the playoffs so it would have to be '90, no wait, maybe that was my gall bladder... I forget
CLARENCE (cont’d)

what year but they told me you gotta eat lotsa bananas and orange juice and stuff like that to keep ‘em up.
Your lights is what keeps your balance. Not that I'm any genius like these here doctors and nurses or
nothing, but I been around a few times. Believe you me, one thing you can say about old Clarence
Weatherby, I learn as I go. Long as you keep your lights up is all. You're lucky to be alive.

MANNING

Yes, well. Thank you. Now if you'll excuse me, I've had a rather busy night, so as long as they're keeping
me a prisoner in this bed, I might as well try to get some sleep. Do you have any idea what time it is?

CLARENCE

I don't stay in no bed in the daytime. That's my one rule in this place. They tell me, Clarence, you gotta stay
in the bed, but if I'm awake, I'm up. The bed is for sleeping. That's my rule. And if you snooze, you lose.
(Pause) No way I'm gonna be one of those sick people that live in their bed. I seen what happens to them.
They's lots of 'em in a place like this. You'll see. Once you lie down, either you go to sleep or you might as
well be dead. Long as I got my cards here and I can sit in the chair, I'm good. (Pause) When they move me
to the other side, then I can have my programs. That's the one thing, no TV in the monitoring place here. I
guess they worry about the static or something, but once you get over there it's okay and I got my whatsit,
the...

He clicks with his tongue and gestures the use of a remote control.

TVCD’s or whatever they call’em now. Gotta have my programs. My nephew brung me in all these good
ones, you know, from the old days, Abbott and Costello, Jerry Lewis, Kung Fu movies, that's what I like.
He's a good kid, my nephew, and smart. They's no harm in it. Everybody's gotta have some entertainment,
something to make you laugh, and something to make you feel good, take away the stress of things.

Manning tries to work the call button again, but succeeds only in activating various features of
the Total Care Bed.

MANNING

Nurse! Zo? Somebody? Please, Mr. ah...

CLARENCE

Clarence, well, not Mr. Clarence, see that's my first name, know what I mean, Clarence Weatherby, but you
CLARENCE (cont’d)
don't have to call me no mister. Everybody just calls me Clarence, well, actually, nobody really calls me
that, except in here and if they don't know me, you know. Mostly they use my whatchamacallit nickname,
Ceebee, you know cee for Clarence and bee for Weatherby, beginning and end, kinda like skipping what's
in between. They started calling me Ceebee when I was a little kid, not like I was a Seabee in the military
or nothing. I woulda been butcept they wouldn't take me on account of me missing a couple toes on this
here foot. I guess the army don't want to have to worry about no special shoes. See, I gotta order mine
special on account of them two toes is missing.

MANNING
Please, Mr. Weatherby, if you don't mind.

_Zo enters, and walks past Manning to Clarence's screened area._

Nurse! (Pause) Ah, Zo, could you please—

ZO
Clarence! You know the rules!

MANNING
Hello? Is there any way--

CLARENCE
It's okay, doll. I was just telling my friend here about the lights.

ZO
What about them?

CLARENCE
You know, how my lights went out them times? And how I almost died?

ZO
_She inspects his lines and administers his meds._

Lights? Oh, you mean electrolytes. Well, you shouldn't bother the other patients with your stories. What
goes on in here is supposed to be private. As far as you're concerned, there are no other patients. And you're
not supposed to be out of bed.
CLARENCE

Come on, kiddo. You know me. What could it hurt? I'm just sitting here playing my cards, waiting for my breakfast, having a conversation with my friend here. If I'm awake I'm up. That's my rule. The bed is for sick people.

ZO

I hate to be the one to tell you, hon, but you are sick people. And we have rules, too, you know. For your own safety. An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure. You're not supposed to get up unless one of us is here to help.

*Clarence purrs audibly, a mock sexual come-on to demonstrate his vigor. Manning, meanwhile,*

*gets out his bed and tests the range of his tethers heading for the cabinet that contains his clothes. He cannot reach and sets off his alarm again. The sound sends him scurrying back to the bed.*

ZO

*Hassled, she hurries to finish with Clarence.*

Not again! Come on honey, how do you expect to get better and go home if you can't follow the rules?

CLARENCE

Don't worry. If anyone asks, I'll just say you helped me. I'm up now. And everything's copasetic. No harm no foul so what's the problem?

ZO

That's not the point. Nobody knows what could happen next. That's why we have procedures. Next time you call me, hear?

*She moves around the screen from Clarence to Manning.*

What seems to be the problem, Mr. Manning?

MANNING

I was just looking for the bathroom. A man can hardly move around here without one of these machines screaming at him.

ZO

Not to worry. It's just your IV's come loose.

*She adjusts the tube and resets the machine.*
ZO (cont’d)

No bathroom necessary with the Total Care Bed.

*She pushes a button and the bed hums.*

MANNING

Oh, no, no way I'm...never mind, I can wait.

ZO

Look, I know this is hard for you, but believe me, you're in good hands. Dr. Abel's the best. Just lay back and rest a bit and he'll be in to see you soon.

MANNING

What about my tea?

ZO

Sorry, hon, they've got you NPO for your cardio-mimetic framination.

MANNING

NPO?

ZO and CLARENCE

Nothing By Mouth

MANNING

You mean NBM.

ZO

What's that?

MANNING

Nothing by Mouth would be NBM, not NPO. NPO is probably the Latin *nil per os*.

CLARENCE

Ha, ha, this is a wise guy. Real college of medical knowledge!

ZO

Whatever. NPO, NBM...I guess that's the idea. Anyway, it's just what we say and it means I can't give you any tea. Not until the orders are changed.

*She hands him a newspaper.*
MANNING

But I'm not having the framastration or any other procedure. I told you, I'm going home.

ZO

I know that, dear, but right now the orders still say NPO and well, we have to follow orders. It'll just be a little while. As soon as Dr. Abel comes back, he'll change them and you can have your tea. Anything else?

CLARENCE

Kay Kayser. Remember? College of Musical Knowledge?

MANNING

As soon as Abel comes in, I'm leaving and I can get my own damn tea, or anything else I like, thank you. Hey, this is yesterday's paper!

ZO

Really? I'm sorry. Oh...well, they're pretty much the same one day to the next anyway, aren't they?

MANNING

I suppose a news person ought to take offense at that remark.

ZO

Oh, jeez, I didn't mean... that's right, you're...I'm sure to a professional it's all different...it's just, well...I mean the world. The world doesn't change much, I mean, not that much, not in a single day...so yesterday's paper can still be news if you haven't seen it, right? Or like if you miss a day you don't miss that much. I don't know. Mostly, the same things keep happening over and over. Weather, sports, politics, even the wars, right? Nothing new under the sun. I mean, I guess if you were in the middle of (Pause) whatever it is it would matter a whole lot, but the news makes it seem like all just one person doing the same things over and over. Don't you think?

MANNING

Oh, never mind. I'm too tired to read, anyway. It's impossible to sleep around here. Phones and beepers and alarms going off constantly. And laughing. What's so funny at this ungodly hour? I dreamt...I heard people...I don't know, maybe it was just part of my dream.
I'm sorry. The night shift people were just having a little party for one of the nurses. It's Jamie's birthday, and well, we always try to celebrate everyone's occasions here.

CLARENCE

Yeah, they eat cake and then tell us it's no good for our hearts. But I don't mind cause I never had one of them whatchacall sweet tooths.

ZO

Don't mind Clarence there. He's a real kidder, aren't you, Clarence?

CLARENCE

I calls 'em like I sees 'em.

MANNING

Couldn't you at least move me, someplace quieter, away from...away from the noise?

ZO

I know what you mean, but, gee, I'm afraid there is no place quieter. We're all full. Sorry. I know it's a little crazy, but this is a hospital not a rest home. It's a busy place. That's just the way things are around here.

MANNING

The way things are around here is precisely why I intend to depart A.S.A.P. At least at home I might be able finally to rest. That's all I really need, you know, sleep, what Shakespeare called "Nature's soft nurse."

ZO

We have medicine for that, you know.

MANNING

God! Yes, I know, you have a medicine for everything. No thank you.

ZO

Whatever. Okay, well...Dr. Abel will be in soon. Just try not to mess up these lines. Remember, you can call if you need anything.

She exits.

CLARENCE

Ain't she something? You don't gotta worry 'bout nothing there buddy. We got us a real angel here.
CLARENCE (cont’d)

Zo, she's the best. And Abel.

*He calls after Zo.*

And maybe get that man some cards for relaxing, like me.

It's like I says, you learn as you go. Did you know they had a whole article about him in the paper and everything? He's like the Roger Clemens of heart surgeons. Every operation a win. He's famous.

ZO

*Offstage*

Clarence!

CLARENCE

Everything's copasetic, doll. Just me and my cards.

*Manning rolls over and puts his head under the pillow again. Clarence continues playing cards.*

*Lights dim on the patients.*
ACT I

SCENE 3

The “cockpit” of the monitoring station. Abel enters. He wears surgical scrubs and talks on a cell phone.

ABEL

Don't give me that no such thing as a psych emergency bullshit. This is the chief of cardiac surgery you're talking to and I'm telling you you've got to send someone to see this guy now. He's crazy. That's all there is to it. (Pause) No, not delirium. (Pause) I know all that. There is no medical reason. He just needs the damn framistration or he could die is all. (Pause) It's not a reasonable objection. It's not even rational. (Pause) It is that simple. (Pause) Of course that means he's suicidal! (Pause) Sure he has the right to refuse treatment, as long as he's' competent to make decisions, which he's obviously not (Pause) Because anyone competent would listen to me when I tell him it's the wrong decision! I've tried to explain it to him but he won't even listen. We're talking life and death here and do you know what he said? He told the admitting doctor I might as well stick a wire up my own—(Pause) Look, I'm not the shrink, you are, but even I can tell the guy's depressed and suicidal. (Pause) It is too an emergency. I'm telling you it is; that's why. Last time I took care of him, he told me right out what he planned to do and I believe him. It's all in the chart for godsake, why do I—(Pause) Look, I don't have time to hold his hand or be his babysitter. That's your job. I just need to schedule this routine procedure, do what I've been trained to do, which I'm damn good at, by the way, and save this ungrateful bastard's miserable life, for whatever it's worth. (Pause) I am not being melodramatic, don't you start your psychobabble on me. I'm not the patient here. (Pause) Before his 70th birthday...day after tomorrow! You listen to me. I don't care about your established protocol. We can't let him sign himself out Against Medical Advice just so he can turn around and kill himself. That's why we have the damn psych service, isn't it? Just order the hold. I need the damn psych consult STAT!

He pockets the phone and continues talking to himself.

And I wouldn't have to be telling you how to do your job if you'd just do it without all these stupid questions. Nurse, what have you got for me
Zo appears in the cockpit and indicates her nametag.

ZO

I've got a name for one thing, Dr. Abel.

ABEL

Come on, Nurse ZO Clement, RN, BSN, Cardiac Telemetry Unit, St. Luke Hospital. You know me. Don't have to get testy. It's nothing personal, you know. Just don't have time for all this Mars 'n' Venus stuff right now. I'm booked solid in the OR and this loony toon's driving me crazy. How's he doing?

ZO

She types at a keyboard.

I've stalled like you said, but I thought if a patient wants to sign himself out...Protocol 137 in the Nursing Manual--

ABEL

What is it with all you people and protocols? Doesn't anybody pay attention to a thing I've said? You know, protocols are written by people who know how to make decisions, for people who haven't got a clue. I happen to have learned a few things in twenty-five years of practice. I know what I'm doing here. Psych will be in this morning to process the hold. We can't let this one go.

ZO

I didn't mean...I was just...

She indicates a monitor screen.

Anyway, here's his rhythm strip and his I's and O's. He says he wants his breakfast.

ABEL

Keep the NPO order till I see if we can change his mind about the procedure, and do me a favor. I really can't afford to waste any more time in lengthy discussions with this guy. Let psychiatry deal with his mental problem. That's what they're here for. Just let me know how things turn out.

Zo disappears behind the counter and Abel exits to the unit. Lights up on Manning and Weatherby. Clarence is still at his table playing solitaire. Manning is resting in a semi-reclining position.
CLARENCE

Bingo! Made it out! That puts me up 450!

MANNING

How can you waste your time like that?

CLARENCE

Like what? This here ain’t no waste. What do you mean?

MANNING

Cards. Solitaire. There’s no point you know. No skill. Once you’ve shuffled the deck, the outcome is decided. There’s no strategy involved. Either it works out or it doesn’t.

CLARENCE

That don’t mean it’s a waste of time. A person’s gotta do something, you know. Gotta keep your mind occupied. No good dwelling on your problems. These cards, this here game relaxes me.

MANNING

Hypnotizes, you might say. Anesthetizes. Entertainment is the opiate of the masses.

CLARENCE

I don’t know about that, whatchamacallit, you know, big words; they can just be a way of confusing simple things. Like these cards here. It’s not complicated, but they’s more to it than meets the mind. Hands, eyes, ears, the whole deal. Listen.

*He shuffles the deck and lays out the cards.*

Nothing like the sound of a crisp new deck.

MANNING

Isn’t that why they invented computers?

CLARENCE

Naw, it ain’t the same at all. My nephew tried to give me one of them there whatchamacallit machines, you know, in the hand. Just push the buttons and beep, beep, beep. Not for me.

MANNING

The mute button would be handy.
CLARENCE

With the real thing you hafta watch, pay attention to the little things, lay out the cards all nice and neat, keep track of the score. Use your mind. That feels good, see. And you hafta make decisions. Like this here, see, I could put the ten over here or move the other one down. Them little things makes a difference and it kinda sorta depends on your whatchamacallit, which way you go.

MANNING

Yes, I’m sure it does.

CLARENCE

Personality. You know how after you been working all day long there’s stuff in your mind about this and that, like how you might have messed up or what will happen tomorrow, but you can’t do nothing about them things so’s you need to like settle your mind down. Some people have that there whatchamacallit, yoghurt, or they read books or something. Long as I have my cards, I’m copasetic.

MANNING

Books improve the mind.

CLARENCE

Let me tell you something, this here mind don’t need no improving. Believe you me. I may not a gone to school, but, like I said, I learn as I go. Don’t anyone ever say I’m stupid. I’m a whatchamacallit, philosopher, is what I am. Some people don’t even know what they don’t know. One thing about old Clarence Weatherby is I learn as I go.

MANNING

But the game is fixed. Your decisions don’t really amount to anything.

CLARENCE

Look, I know it’s all in the cards, but that don’t mean I don’t have nothing to do about it. Some people, I seen ‘em, they just cheat, you know whatchamacallit, move the cards around. I could do that anytime I wanted, pull this here card off the bottom, slide this one out here. Sure, if the point was just making it work out, what’s the big deal? Nobody cares. Nobody around but me, right? And maybe the big guy upstairs, but that’s the point. I would know. It’s like a test every time. Will I play honest or cheat? Will I pay attention or miss my chance? It’s like life. No avoiding.
MANNING

It still sounds to me like a fine rationalization for a waste of time.

CLARENCE

Everybody does what they gotta do. As long as you can do it. To my way of thinking that's no waste.

MANNING

Perhaps you could do it more quietly, so I could get some sleep.

Zo enters and approaches Clarence with a wheelchair.

ZO

Come on, Clarence, time for your micro-tension analysis.

MANNING

Hurrah!

CLARENCE

But what about breakfast?

ZO

Don’t worry. It’ll be here when you get back.

She helps Clarence into the wheelchair and they exit. Manning settles back under his covers.

MANNING

Ah, yes, and now if only I could sleep to pass the time. They have a medicine for that, you know.

Trudy Zeffirelli, the psychiatry resident, enters behind the cockpit, looking hastily put together.

She wears jeans, heels, and a boldly colored jacket with Captain Kangaroo pockets housing various paraphernalia including tape, scissors, notebook, pens, antacid tablets, glasses, chewing gum, keys, pen light, reference tools, PDA and pager. She is talking on her cell phone and drinking coffee.

ZEFFIRELLI

So what's the big emergency? Just because he's some hospital big wig doesn’t mean we should have to bend over. Anyway, I'm a psych resident not a social worker. From what you say, doesn't sound like he's depressed or demented or even really very anxious. (Pause) Right, well, I'm here now. I'll check it out, but I still don't see the point, why this has anything to do with psychiatry. (Pause) Whatever.
ZEFFIRELLI (cont’d)

*She pockets the phone and continues talking to herself.*

Sometimes psychiatrists really drive me crazy. They can be so smug with their Zen-master, vague-as-hell, know-it-all bullshit. "Remember, the patient is the one with the problem." Great. Thanks for your help, O wise one. Gee, that narrows it down to just about every man, woman, and child in the god-damned place.

*She looks around and calls out.*

Hello? Anybody home? I thought this was supposed to be some big life and death emergency. As usual, it’s hurry up and wait.

*She takes PDA from her pocket and begins playing a musical game. Zo reappears.*

Hi, Trudy Zeffirelli. Psychiatry. I'm here to see a Howard Manning? Something about a consent problem, I guess. Is he—?

ZO

Oh good. Finally. Maybe you can figure this thing out. He's in one. Dr. Abel has him scheduled for a cardio-mimetic framptonstration this afternoon but Mr. Manning says he's going home and doesn't want any treatment, but the doctors say he could die and he says he doesn't care and some people think that's suicidal, but I don't know, he doesn't seem like the type, and I thought if you're depressed you would be sad or tired or something, but this guy is just pissed off and he picks on everything I say and keeps trying to leave, but Dr. Abel says the protocols don't matter, which I know they do, but I don't want to be in the middle of all this, which I am whether I want to be or not, and I just wish somebody would tell me what I'm supposed to do so I could do it and get on with things.

ZEFFIRELLI

Whoa, okay, slow down! I get the picture. Is it okay if I take a look at his chart first?

ZO

*She indicates a computer monitor.*

It's right here.

*Manning tries the call button again, but when it produces no result, he purposely detaches one of his leads to set the alarm off.*
ZO (cont’d)

See what I mean?

MANNING

Nurse! Nurse! Zo!

_Zo walks briskly toward Manning._

ZO

Come loose again? Honestly, Mr. Manning, I swear you must be the world’s most fidgety patient.

MANNING

I didn’t—

ZO

These things usually hold up better than this. I’ll have to get some tape and see if we can’t keep you together for just a little while longer.

MANNING

Actually, I just wanted to get your attention. I have to go to the bathroom.

ZO

But the TCB--

MANNING

I don’t want the TCB. I want the You Know What. I’m not an invalid, you know. I just want to go to the bathroom like a normal human being.

ZO

I guess normal depends on where you are. Here, the Total Care Bed—

MANNING

It’s not natural.

ZO

Natural just means whatever’s easiest, doesn’t it? My dog thinks it’s natural to relieve himself on the carpet, under the dining room table, and nothing I can do convinces him to use the toilet.

MANNING

You know what I mean.
I'll see what I can do, but orders say—

MANNING

Oh, never mind.

_Zo begins to exit._

Wait! Could you... What kind of name is that—Zo?

ZO

Short and sweet, just like me.

MANNING

No, I mean what's it short for?

ZO

Just because, I guess. Goes with Clement, don't you think?

MANNING

No, I mean, where did it come from?

ZO

From my mother and father. Where does anyone's name come from?

MANNING

But what does it _mean_? Zo sounds Japanese, but you don't look--

ZO

What difference does it make? I don't know. It's just my name. Does it have to have a meaning?

MANNING

Or I guess it could be African, short for Zolanda or something. Or Greek. Is it short for Zophia, like Sophia, which of course you know means wisdom, or Zo as in Zoology? Or Arabic? Isn't there some word that means light or dawn? I think that must be it, Arabic, right?

ZO

You know your problem? You think too much. Why does everything have to have some kind of meaning with you? It's a name. It just means me. This person, right here right now. Zo, me, you know? The woman who keeps track of all the little details of your medicines and fluids and is your heart okay and do your
wounds heal up and do the machines work and are the records straight. The illiterate, pathetic boob—

MANNING

I didn’t mean—

ZO

Who gets up at 5 am every single day and sets the kids clothes out and makes their breakfast and packs their lunches and leaves the house before they even get up just so I can come in here and do my job, taking care of people like you, so I can pay my bills and maybe feel like I’m doing something useful with my life. That’s what Zo means. It’s me. What I do, every little action and every little relationship, every day all added up over 40 years so far. There is no meaning besides that.

MANNING

Something between a question and a statement

You have children.

ZO

Yes, I have children. Three. What, did you think you are the only one I have to worry about?

MANNING

It’s not as if I asked you to.

ZO

I know. Nobody asks to get sick.

MANNING

I’m not sick. And even if I were, I’m perfectly capable of taking care of myself. How much longer does that Dr. Abel intend to keep me waiting?

ZO

I'm sorry, Mr. Manning. He's sending another doctor to come in and talk with you. Dr. Zeffirelli, she's a resident with...Dr. Abel asked for a consult...you know. Two heads are better than one. You'll like her.

MANNING

Great, that guy really doesn’t get it, does he? Why don’t we get the whole damn medical staff in here so I can tell them all once and for all? Thanks, but no thanks.
ZO

*She washes her hands on the way out*

Now you be nice. Dr. Zeffirelli is just here to help.

*Zo exits to the interior. Lights out.*
ACT I

SCENE 4

A breakfast tray waits on Clarence's table. Manning sits up in the bed. Zeffirelli sits at the bedside, notebook and pen in hand.

ZEFFIRELLI

Look, Mr. Manning, you're the one who's supposed to be in a hurry to get out of here. I've got to be here all day whether you talk to me or not. What do you say let's try this again.

MANNING

I can't believe he sent a shrink! The coward! Abel thinks I'm crazy? Ridiculous. He's the one who needs a shrink, not me.

ZEFFIRELLI

These are just routine questions, Mr. Manning. Okay, yes, I'm with psychiatry—

MANNING

I'm as sane as you are.

ZEFFIRELLI

--but it isn't what you think. You can consider us the hospital communication specialists. We're just here to help make sure the medical people understand you and you understand them. That's all.

MANNING

We're here? How many are you?

ZEFFIRELLI

She laughs.

"We are legion." Me and all my multiple personalities. Why do you think I'm in psychiatry?

MANNING

These questions are ridiculous. I don't see what good--
ZEFFIRELLI

Humor me. They're just routine, to make sure your mind is clear and everything is working properly. Heart problems might affect your brain, or... sometimes, just being in the hospital can be pretty confusing.

MANNING

My name is Howard K. Manning. It's Friday, April 18, god only knows what time, in the year \([n+2, \text{ where } n=\text{current year}]\) 2005, C.E. That's the Common Era, which used to be A.D. \textit{anno domini}, year of our lord, before someone got the bright idea of asking whose lord. I'm in the cardiac penal unit of the St. Luke Hospital, Glosterhaven, RI, United States of America, on the North American continent of the planet earth circling one puny, peripheral star among some 200 billion stars of the Milky Way Galaxy, and lost in a universe of maybe a hundred billion other galaxies. Satisfied?

ZEFFIRELLI

\textit{She is taking notes.}

Do you feel like you're in prison?

\textit{He stands up and paces within the limits of his technological restraints.}

MANNING

Of course, I'm in prison. Behold the man, sentenced to life!

ZEFFIRELLI

Ah... Are you supposed to be... would you prefer the chair?

\textit{She stands up.}

MANNING

Never mind.

\textit{He sits back on down on the bed. She, however, fidgets uncomfortably before returning to the chair. While continuing the conversation, she notices the crucifix above the bed.}

ZEFFIRELLI

And how come lost?

MANNING

Who said anything about lost?
You did. You were talking about being lost in the universe.

Jesus, are you psychiatrists always this—

She sits back down and leans toward Manning

Attentive?

Actually, I was going to say obtuse. You must practice this deliberate misunderstanding. I'm not lost. I know precisely where I am. What I said is it's the world that's lost.

And what about the President?

Talk about the blind leading the blind. They're all lost.

No, who is the President of the United States?

I told you, that depends. And world backwards is spelled w-o-r-l-d. The attribution of backwardness represents a redundancy, but if you must have it, then b-a-c-k-w-a-r-d-s. There. Or is that not what you meant?

Zeffirelli pulls the table between them, places the notebook on it and hands Manning the pen.

How about this? Could you draw me a clock showing the time 4:45?

He takes the pen and draws a rectangle with the numeric figures 4:45 inside.

AM or PM?

 Doesn't matter.
MANNING

I have to know whether or not to put the little dot for PM.

*He holds up his drawing.*

ZEFFIRELLI

No, I meant a clock with hands. Never mind.

MANNING

Do I pass?

ZEFFIRELLI

Well, some of your answers are a little irregular, kind of hard to interpret.

MANNING

That's just because some of your questions are hard to interpret. Who's the president of the United States? Does that mean elected, appointed, or acting? They're all different, you know. And proverbs, nobody knows what *they* mean, it all depends on who's saying it and why. A rolling stone gathers no moss--What the hell, is moss a good thing or a bad thing for a rock? And is the thing rolling downhill of its own accord, or is does someone have to push it uphill. Or are you talking about rock musicians now, or what? Anyway, who the hell cares?

ZEFFIRELLI

I get the idea. Nothing's simple with you, is it?

MANNING

What's simple enough is my preference to avoid all of this nonsense, to go home and enjoy my retirement.

ZEFFIRELLI

Okay, how about this? How about you tell me what you understand about your condition?

MANNING

My condition? Not bad for an old fella. Present inconveniences excluded, I get around pretty well.

ZEFFIRELLI

About your medical condition. Your heart.

MANNING

Don't you have something more important... When is Abel—
He stands again and looks toward the cockpit.

ZEFFIRELLI

She jumps up again and almost knocks over the table.

Should you be doing that? Can I get something for you?

MANNING

My watch. What did they do with my watch?

ZEFFIRELLI

Don’t worry. I’m sure they put your valuables in a safe place till you’re ready to go home.

MANNING

My clothes. I need my clothes.

ZEFFIRELLI

I’m sorry, did I...does my question upset you?

MANNING

I’m fine. Look, I’m no fool. I know what’s what, but I’ve got to tell you this framination business is crazy.

ZEFFIRELLI

What’s crazy about it?

MANNING

Have you seen some of these guys shuffling around nursing homes, lost to themselves, no sense of who they are? I plan to live until I die, and not one minute longer.

ZEFFIRELLI

So you’re afraid of getting old?

MANNING

I’m not afraid of anything. It’s just not natural. I mean, this heart surgery and all, pretending we should live forever.

ZEFFIRELLI

What’s unnatural about it? Are you saying people shouldn’t use any medicine or tools? You know some people say that tool use is what separates us from the animals.
MANNING

No, don’t be absurd, but—

ZEFFIRELLI

You take your car in for a tune-up, don’t you, if the timing is off? Or like if you sprained your ankle or something, you’d use crutches, wouldn’t you. What’s so different about the heart framination?

MANNING

Did you know that false analogy is the most pervasive and the most insidious of logical fallacies?

ZEFFIRELLI

Okay, so help me out here. What’s the difference?

MANNING

The difference is that people are not automobiles, and a heart is no more like an engine than it is like an ankle. These miraculous treatments that everyone around here seems to love are not simple nips and tucks, no matter what Abel pretends. Things go wrong. There are unpredictable costs. Side effects. Collateral damage. All of that fine print on the consent forms no one ever reads. Nobody else should be able to tell me whether or not it’s worth the risk. I hear them talking. They think they’re being so cagey, but then they blather in their cockpit over there as if the patients weren’t right here listening to every word, as if we only exist when they’ve got some billable procedure to inflict. Abel says it’s a weakness that causes me to pass out. He neglects to mention that this weakness or whatever is a leftover from the last time he mucked around in there, and it isn’t just the heart but the medication I’m taking that sets things out of balance. Their cures cause as many problems as the disease. So as far as I’m concerned—

ZEFFIRELLI

But if it could save your life—

MANNING

Look, I’m almost 70 years old—

ZEFFIRELLI

That’s not that old these days.

*Zo enters pushing Clarence in the wheelchair, helps Clarence into his bedside chair, then exits.*
MANNING

I’ve had a good life. I’m satisfied I’ve done everything I wanted to do, so I say, screw the medicine and the procedure and just let me be. Whatever happens happens. (Pause) You want to know what really drives up the cost of medical care? Fear.

ZEFFIRELLI

Fear?

MANNING

People will do anything, swallow anything, spend any amount of money just to forestall death by even a few minutes. They’re afraid. So they buy time. And time is money, as they say. Well, not me. I –

CLARENCE

Fear is fear itself. That’s what I always say.

ZEFFIRELLI

What’s that?

MANNING

Half quoted for the half-witted.

CLARENCE

Fear is fear itself. Like I says. Whatchamacallit. Pain is all in the mind. That’s why I don’t have no problem with it. Nothing to be afraid of.

He resumes his card shuffling.

ZEFFIRELLI

Are you worried about the cost, because your insurance—

Abel enters and walks past Manning’s cubicle to the cockpit. He paces and talks into a voice recorder.

MANNING

No, no, no. It has nothing to do with the cost. Ah, Dr. Abel! Go on. Tell him I’ve passed your little test and I’m ready to go home.

ZEFFIRELLI

Just a few more things we have to determine. Okay?
MANNING

A rhetorical question, I suppose.

ZEFFIRELLI

Mr. Manning—

MANNING

Here we go.

ZEFFIRELLI

Well, you mention going home. Who lives at home?

MANNING

No one. I mean, I’m alone.

ZEFFIRELLI

Any family?

MANNING

You’ve looked at my chart.

ZEFFIRELLI

Do you ever think about, you know... I mean when you talk about your medical care and the end of life, have you ever thought about—

MANNING

For godsakes, get to the point. You’re supposed to be the communication specialist, though I have to admit, you hardly look old enough. Abel told you I was suicidal, didn’t he? That’s what this is all about. He’s not capable of engaging in a mature, rational conversation on the subject without sounding the alarms and calling the thought police.

ZEFFIRELLI

Do you ever consider—?

MANNING

Making my quietus with a bare bodkin? Of course. Anyone who says he hasn’t at least thought about it is a damned fool or a liar. For human beings, who have the dubious advantage of forethought, suicide is always an option. “What if” is the question that defines the species.
ZEFFIRELLI

But do you ever think specifically, I mean, um, make a plan?

MANNING

And what if I were to say I have considered the advantages of a clean, well-timed exit?

ZEFFIRELLI

Well, then, I would have to say I would be concerned about your safety.

MANNING

My safety? What business is it of yours or Abel’s or anyone else’s to be concerned about my safety? All you’re concerned about are your jobs. Well don’t you worry. Even if you do screw up, there won’t be any grieving survivors showing up to sue.

ZEFFIRELLI

No, really—

_Zo enters the cockpit and addresses Abel._

ZO

Mr. Weatherby’s discharge plan is all set for you to sign and Mr. Manning still expects you to talk to him before he leaves AMA.

ABEL

I don’t have all day to wait around for them to finish their little kaffeeklatch. I have to get to the OR.

ZO

But—

ABEL

Psych will give us 72 hours. I can talk to him later.

_He exits. Zo busies herself at the computer._

MANNING

What do you know about cancer?

ZEFFIRELLI

Is that it? Are you afraid you have cancer? Because you know you don’t—
MANNING

No, no, I'm talking philosophically.

ZEFFIRELLI

Well, I know pretty much the basics from medical school.

MANNING

I picked up a little more than the basics from my wife Jeanne. She “died after a long illness,” as they say, six years ago this month.

ZEFFIRELLI

I'm sorry.

MANNING

Don't be. The point is, I learned something, amidst all that medical mumbo jumbo, with all the surgeries and the chemotherapy and radiation, it occurred to me that cancer is what happens when cells that are supposed to die, for whatever reason don't die but just keep on growing and multiplying.

ZEFFIRELLI

Apoptosis.

MANNING

Whatever you want to call it. You see what I mean?

ZEFFIRELLI

I'm not sure. So what does this have to do with your cardio-mimetic fraxstration?

MANNING

People! Don't you see? People are like cells. Individual cells in the body live and die, naturally, right? but the body goes on living, even though it's constantly sloughing off these dead cells. Same with people. Individuals are born, and they die, and in between do whatever it is they do, and afterward...well...life goes on the same as ever. Get it?

ZEFFIRELLI

*She nods assent then shakes her head.*

No. I'm sorry. Are you saying your life hasn't changed since your wife died?
MANNING

No, that’s not it. What if human beings are just...if they don’t...look, every living thing dies, right? So it can’t be a bad thing, dying. It’s natural. See what I mean?

ZEFFIRELLI

I’m sorry. Oh wait, is this one of those, you know, logical fallacies you were talking about?

MANNING

Never mind.

ZEFFIRELLI

No wait, I think I get it. So, is what you’re saying like you want to die?

She writes in the notebook

MANNING

I’m saying it’s okay to die. Why worry about it? More suffering is caused by man’s fear of dying and attempts to avoid it than by any illness or accident along the way.

ZEFFIRELLI

Do you really believe that?

MANNING

Do you really think I’m going to kill myself?

ZEFFIRELLI

Me? I don’t know.

MANNING

Howard Manning, released from St. Luke Hospital on Friday, was discovered in his home on Sunday, the apparent victim of carbon monoxide poisoning.

ZEFFIRELLI

Is that your plan?

MANNING

I never said I had a plan.
ZEFFIRELLI

You understand I have to ask these questions? You can say whatever you want. Honestly? I think you like jerking me around, being in control, so no, maybe...but I don’t know.

*She takes up the crucifix again.*

Are you religious, Mr. Manning?

MANNING

What kind of question is that?

ZEFFIRELLI

I was just noticing this. It’s kind of falling apart. Is it yours?

*She takes a roll of tape from her pocket and tapes the figure of Christ onto the cross.*

MANNING

God, no, not mine. Someone else’s cheap piece of junk. I never have understood that gruesome fetish. How anyone could take comfort from the idea of some guy nailed up and hanging by his wounds. As far as I’m concerned, religion is just a bunch of bedtime stories people made up to reassure themselves and make each other behave, all full of boogie men and empty promises.

ZEFFIRELLI

What about your wife?

MANNING

Dead, I told you.

ZEFFIRELLI

No, I mean, was she religious?

MANNING

Jeanne? Oh, I suppose. She went to church regularly. You know what I would call them, on their knees every Sunday with their beads and prayers and ritual of Communion? Cathoholics. She hated that. She’d be on her way to church and I’d say “Give my regards to all the folks at your Cathoholics Anonymous Meeting.”

*She laughs.*

Your not so bad for a shrink. At least you laugh at my jokes.
ZEFFIRELLI

How about children?

MANNING

No, thank you, I’m too old. Although I did know a guy who remarried at 70 and was changing diapers nine months later.

ZEFFIRELLI

No, I mean... you said something about no survivors, so does that mean--

MANNING

Yes. That is no.

A loud crack sounds. The lights flicker, then go out, then come back on with the rhythmic hum of a generator. The monitor alarms all sound at once. Weatherby jumps up from his chair, knocking over table and cards, then falls unconscious. Zeffirelli runs to his side.

ZEFFIRELLI

You okay? Nurse! Help! Somebody call a code! Call a code!

Zo runs to assist. Manning takes advantage of the chaos to yank his lines. He tries the closet, but finds it locked, grabs a sheet to wrap around himself and exits the unit. The sound of chant returns as the set goes to darkness and then silence.

End of Act I
ACT II

SCENE I

The next day. Manning lies in his bed restrained by tethers on his arms and legs, sporting the monitor leads as before. His head and one arm are bandaged. The other arm contains an IV and is taped to a board. A figure representing Weatherby’s body lies comatose and intubated in the adjacent cubicle. Weatherby’s spirit, however, sits on the cabinet in Manning’s cubicle, visible only to Manning and the audience. Abel, dressed in scrubs, sprawls in a chair in front of the cockpit and Zo leans over the counter. Directions for this and subsequent scenes are complicated by the situation that, unless otherwise indicated, Manning speaks only to Clarence’s spirit and cannot be heard by the others on stage. Clarence, meanwhile can only be seen and heard by Manning. The set is dark. The first sound is the same low chant that opened and closed the first act. Again it is gradually replaced by the rhythmic sounds of the monitors supplemented now by the ventilator. Manning calls out in the darkness.

MANNING
I’m blind! Oh, blind! Help!

CLARENCE
Try opening your eyes.

Lights reveal the set.

MANNING
Oh, good. Phew. For a minute there I thought I was dead.

CLARENCE
You said blind.

MANNING
I meant dead. I thought I was blind because I was dead.

CLARENCE
Who says dead people are blind?
MANNING

Well, what is there to see when you're dead?

CLARENCE

How do you know you're not?

MANNING

Not what?

CLARENCE

Not dead. How do you know you're not dead?

MANNING

Then I am dead?

CLARENCE

If you can't tell, then maybe it doesn't matter.

MANNING

Who's talking there, anyway? Where are you?

CLARENCE

What are you, blind? I'm right here.

MANNING

He tries to sit up but finds himself restrained by his tethers. Clarence jumps down and sits beside

the bed.

Who are you? What is this?

CLARENCE

Name's Homer. And This is Your Life. (Pause) No, just kidding. This is still the hospital.

MANNING

So I'm not—

CLARENCE

Nah, I'm just having a little fun. 'Member that show? Where they brung the guy on stage and all these

people he knows come on and talk about him only he doesn't see them at first and has to guess who they

are? That was a good one.
Zo and Abel converse apart from Clarence and Manning. Clarence wanders toward them meanwhile, but they cannot perceive his presence. Manning squirms uncomfortably but has limited mobility in the restraints.

ZO

You look beat. Did you even go home last night?

ABEL

This place practically is my home.

ZO

You should at least get some rest.

ABEL

Nah, I’m fine. When I rest I rust. But, god, I can’t take too many days like yesterday. What a zoo!

ZO

Yeah, it took me all afternoon to replace the data we lost when the transformer blew.

ABEL

He stands and paces.

Jesus, what happened? He was fine. Practically ready to go home. All his tests, x-rays, everything great. This wasn’t supposed to happen.

ZO

I don’t know, maybe the lights had something to do with it.

ABEL

You’re sounding like Weatherby, now. His electrolytes were fine.

ZO

No the lights, before the generator came on. Maybe when the power was off for that sec, maybe something...maybe he just got scared or something. These things happen.

ABEL

Not on my watch, they don’t. I had him on the table, he should have responded. He –

ZO

You did your best.
ABEL

He pulls out his PDA and pokes at it as if looking for information.

I don’t know, maybe I should’ve... I could still operate again.

ZO

What would be the point? By now, he wouldn’t have much brain left.

ABEL

I suppose.

He sits back down.

CLARENCE

Ha, Ha! Never did have much, not compared to these medical guys, but believe you me, what I have I use, that’s one thing you can say, I use what I got.

ZO

We’re still trying to get a hold of his nephew.

CLARENCE

He’s a good kid that one. He’ll be okay.

Clarence wanders back to Manning’s bedside. Zo and Abel carry on a sub-audible conversation.

MANNING

What’d you say your name is?

CLARENCE

Homer.

MANNING

Homer? You remind me of... somebody else. Are you a doctor?

CLARENCE

Ha! Ha! That’s a good one.

MANNING

Nurse?

CLARENCE

Nah, it ain’t nothing like that. I’m just watching, is all.
MANNING

Oh, a guard! Well, I don’t need...what kind of trouble can I get in now, with these?

*He indicates his restraints.*

Anyway, my head is killing me. I won’t be trying that again, not for awhile.

CLARENCE

Who whoo! I saw you! What was you thinking, anyway? Say I’m a taxi driver. No way I’m picking up a guy without his pants. I’m thinking where was he gonna be hiding his whatchamacallit, wallet, you know what I mean?

MANNING

So you *are* a guard?

CLARENCE

Nah, this ain’t no prison. I’m just watching.

MANNING

Watching what?

CLARENCE

You, me, these here nurses and doctors. Buddy, that psychiatrist girl you got, she sure is a looker. And Zo, she’s pretty cute when she runs. Did you see her taking off when they called that there whatchamacallit code?

*He purrs audibly.*

MANNING

I didn’t notice.

CLARENCE

You know, for a smart guy, there’s a lot you don’t notice.

ABEL

What about Howard Manning?

ZO

Stable. Maintaining normal rhythm for now. The cut on his head is superficial. He tore up his arm some when he yanked the IV but the site is clean. The wounds are dressed, we gave him the sedative, and he’s
resting comfortably, but we’ve still got him restrained.

ABEL

What was he thinking? I told him this could happen. If he would have listened—

MANNING

He addresses himself only to Clarence’s spirit and cannot be heard by Zo and Abel.

If I would have listened? Did you hear that? Physician heal thyself!

ZO

He’s still not speaking, but neurology checked him out and they say he’s fine, so it must be a psych problem. The resident, Dr. Zeffirelli, should be back in this morning.

ABEL

Jeez, I told you the guy was out of his mind didn’t I? Can I call ‘em or what?

ZO

I don’t know. Maybe he felt like he had no choice. Maybe now he’s not talking just because…maybe he’s angry. Or scared.

MANNING (mocking)

Maybe he felt like he had no choice. Maybe he’s angry. Maybe there’s just no goddamned point talking to you people.

ABEL

He stands, stretches, and pulls himself together.

Oh, come on, Zo. You’re not going to start on me now, are you? No choice? Who said anyone’s supposed to have a choice? We didn’t choose when to be born, did we? And we don’t get to choose when to die. That’s life. Look at Weatherby, for god’s sake. That guy should be dead by rights and he’s not. No heart left to speak of, and yet it keeps pumping away.

ZO

Maybe he’s waiting for his nephew.
ABEL

Who knows what's going on in there? All I know is I was right about Manning's heart, and I'm right about his nutty philosophy. You know I am.

ZO

I'm just saying I'm not so sure about him being crazy is all. He's different all right, but it takes all kinds. Every pea helps fill the pod.

ABEL

Well, there's one pod's got a few peas loose. I've gotta get going. This was supposed to be my day off. He exits and Zo turns to the computer monitor and talks to herself.

ZO

Well, some of us still have work to do here.

MANNING

Weatherby, is he...did he—

CLARENCE

Don't worry, pal. It's not so bad. Actually, I feel pretty good right now.

MANNING

It is you! I thought I recognized that voice. Why'd you say your name is Homer?

CLARENCE

That is my name. My inside name. The one I call myself.

MANNING

Whatever floats your boat, I guess.

CLARENCE

Clarence or Ceebee, that's for them others. I never did like it much, but you know how it is, in life you're kinda stuck with the names people give you. But I like Homer; it kinda has a nice ring, comfortable like, and kinda fits me better. You know, the whatchamacallit, inside-me.

MANNING

The inside you?
CLARENCE

Yeah, see, that's still me over there.

*He indicates the cubicle with the ventilator. Zo enters Clarence's room and works with the equipment.*

And this is the inside me over here with you.

MANNING

That's ridiculous. I don't believe in ghosts. It must be an effect of the medication they gave me. An hallucination.

CLARENCE

I ain't no ghost or else no whatchamacallit neither.

*As if to demonstrate the point, Zo suctions the breathing tube and Clarence clears his throat.*

Ahem, hack, hack, hack. I'm just the me that sees things. Like in a place them others can't see.

MANNING

I can see you.

CLARENCE

You're different.

MANNING

Does that mean I'm dead, too?

ZO

*She comforts the figure in the bed.*

There you go, Clarence, honey, is that better?

CLARENCE

*He addresses first Zo then Manning.*

Thanks, doll. You're a angel. No, I'm not dead, yet. And you neither.

MANNING

Then why me? What's different?
CLARENCE

I don’t know. Maybe it’s because your lights went out them times. Or because you don’t got nothing else to do right now.

MANNING

Sounds like a load of New Age horseshit to me.

ZO

She enters Manning’s cubicle.

Good morning, Mr. Manning! Rise and shine! Today is the tomorrow you worried about yesterday!

MANNING

He speaks to Clarence who is invisible

Speaking of which, here we go again.

ZO

Still not talking, huh? Well, don’t you worry, hon. It’s okay. I’d say you had kind of a rough day yesterday, but you came through with flying colors.

She checks his bandages and IV line.

You’re lucky to be alive. If you hadn’t a been right in front of the hospital when you collapsed... it was ventricular fibrillation. That’s what we were afraid of. That means your heart was all wriggling like a bag of worms instead of beating like it’s supposed to. A couple more minutes and you might not have made it.

How are you feeling now?

She waits, inviting his response. Manning turns his head away.

CLARENCE

Go ahead. Talk to her.

MANNING

What’s the point?

ZO

Can I get you some tea or something? How about breakfast?

CLARENCE

She’s worried about you. You could at least make things a little easier for her.
MANNING

You talk to her then.

CLARENCE

I can’t. I’m past that now, but you, you’re still in the middle of your life.

MANNING

That’s not my choice.

CLARENCE

But that’s the way it is. Come on. Talk to her.

MANNING

Maybe later.

ZO

Oh, well, you’re here for a while, so you might as well make yourself comfortable.

*She plumps up the pillow behind his head and adjusts his restraints.*

I’m sorry about …it’s just…once burned twice cautious, you know. For your safety. We wouldn’t want you to fall again and get hurt.

*She places the call button right in his hand.*

CLARENCE

Go on. What’s your problem?

ZO

Call me if you need anything. Really.

*She exits.*

CLARENCE

You know what your problem is, you know what you are?

MANNING

What?

CLARENCE

You’re a “y. a.”
MANNING

A “y.a.”? What’s that?

CLARENCE

Y.A.! Y.A.! You don’t know what that is?

MANNING

Youth advocate? Yesterday’s antique? Yellow agitator?

CLARENCE

No, Y.A.

MANNING

Yet again?

CLARENCE

He doesn’t know what a Y.A. is!

MANNING

What on earth are you talking about, Weatherby, er, Homer? Whoever you are. I give up. Tell me, what is a Y. A.?

CLARENCE

Y. A. Wise Ass, that’s what you are.

MANNING

Wise ass is W. A.

CLARENCE

Yeah, what did I say?

MANNING

You said y, but wise begins with w.

CLARENCE

No kidding? Well, that is what you are, you know. Smart, but stupid at the same time. A wise ass. He begins to exit.

MANNING

Hey, where are you going?
CLARENCE

Some of us still have work to do. I ain't stayin' in no bed. Not in the daytime.

MANNING

You're on a ventilator, for Chrissake. What kind of work could you possibly have to do?

CLARENCE

I, for one, don’t mean to let my dying interfere with my living. We all gotta live until we die.

He exits.

MANNING

Wait! (Pause) Jesus, look at me. Now they've got me talking to a son of a bitch figment of my imagination.

Jeanne, can you believe it?
ACT II

Scene 2

Zeffirelli enters dressed as before only with a different jacket, again with the coffee cup. Her conversation with Zo is overheard by Manning, who remains strapped in the bed.

ZO

Hi!

ZEFFIRELLI

How’s it going?

ZO

Another day, another dollar.

ZEFFIRELLI

Nobody does this for the money.

ZO

Don’t I know it. That’s just an expression.

ZEFFIRELLI

Yeah, well, how about “another day, another headache,” or “another day, another chance to screw up big time?”

ZO

You didn’t screw up.

ZEFFIRELLI

Everything seemed to be going okay. We were talking. He’s actually pretty interesting when he gets going, once you get past that obnoxious know-it-all stuff. He seemed a little impatient, but I had no idea he’d take off like that.

ZO

Don’t worry about it. These things happen.
ZEFFIRELLI
I didn’t know what to do when that guy in the next room... I’m supposed to know these things.

ZO
It’s not your fault. If anything, I’m the one... they’re both my patients. Weatherby, there was no way to predict, all his tests were good. But Manning—

ZEFFIRELLI
He just wanted to go home. They said he was trying to catch a cab. I don’t know, maybe if I—

ZO
What do you do for a guy like that that doesn’t want any help? I mean, what are you supposed to do when your job is to help the patient?

ZEFFIRELLI
Sometimes I wonder why I got myself into this.

ZO
These people come in here in some kind of crisis. It’s always a matter of life and death, and maybe I’ve never even seen them before, but I’m supposed to help them? I know the medicine. I know the procedures. I know what I’m supposed to do, but how am I supposed to figure out what they want? To understand their... I don’t know, personalities? There’s no time.

ZEFFIRELLI
Most of the time they don’t even know what they want.

ZO
And what if I know that what they want is the wrong thing? You can’t win for losing.

ZEFFIRELLI
I thought I might be able to do something good. You know, subtract from the suffering of the world. You look around and see all these miserable, unhappy people, and you just want to do something.

ZO
You are doing something. At least you’re trying.

ZEFFIRELLI
I don’t know. Mr. Manning won’t even talk to me now.
ZO
He’s not talking to anyone.

MANNING
Just ghosts and memories. They’re better listeners.

ZEFFIRELLI
I feel like a traitor. What was I supposed to do?

MANNING
You were supposed to leave me alone.

ZO
Dr. Abel really thinks he should have the framination. If he would just consent to let us help—

ZEFFIRELLI
What if I say I think we should just leave him alone? What if I tell Abel he’s okay to go, psych-wise, anyway?

ZO
Why? You saw what happened. And anyway, Dr. Abel will just get somebody else to sign him in.

ZEFFIRELLI
And I’ll just be the dumb ass resident who gets raked. But why does Abel have to make such a big deal about this? So Manning refuses. He has his big heart attack, the one he wants, as expected, and he checks out. Or even, what if he chooses to kill himself? Why is that such a tragedy if that’s what the guy wants? Why does everybody have to get so wrapped up in one individual life, when there are thousands of people dying every day, millions a year? In fact, the mortality rate around the world, last time I checked, still 100%.

ZO
Well, aren’t you a little bluebird of happiness, today.

ZEFFIRELLI
No, seriously, what’s the big deal? What if Manning has a point?

MANNING
Of course, I have a point.
ZO

You know what I think? I think he's just missing his wife, you know, lonely.

MANNING

Oh, here we go. Always the emotions with them.

ZEFFIRELLI

Everybody's missing somebody. But that doesn't mean we all just turn in the keys to our own life.

_Clarence enters the cockpit and sits at one of the computers._

ZO

That's the thing. The exception makes the rule.

ZEFFIRELLI

What's that supposed to mean?

ZO

I don't know. It's like, if you let yourself give up on one, you might as well give up on them all. And then where would we be?

_The phone rings and Zo picks up._

Oh, hi, yeah...okay.

_She mouths to Zeffirelli: "You go ahead" and points her toward Manning. Zeffirelli heads to Manning's cubicle, where she will sit by his bedside._

Yes, this is Zo. I'm Mr. Weatherby's nurse. So I guess you heard about your uncle...I'm sorry...yeah, it's just the ventilator that's keeping him alive now...No, there's no chance he'll come out of the coma. There really isn't any brain function left...We wanted to talk to you about that...about how you think he would want us to go from here. Did he have a living will?...yeah, I know he's strong-headed, but I meant a living will, like some kind of instructions about what he would want us to do if he can't make medical decisions for himself...Yeah. Are you going to be able to come in, you know, and see him?...Yeah, I think he'd like that too...okay, well...yeah, we all really love Clarence. He's quite a character...

CLARENCE

Tell him he's a good kid. He's all right.
ZO
He’s told us how good you’ve been to him. He’s lucky to have a nephew like you.

CLARENCE
Tell him about what I said, pain is all in the mind. You know, everything’s copasetic.

ZO
No, he’s not suffering. He seems very peaceful.

CLARENCE
That’s my girl.

ZO
Okay, then we’ll see you… whenever you get here is fine. Be gentle with yourself. Bye.

CLARENCE
Hee hee, did you see how these here computer cards go when you make it out? They all jump down one at a time, kinda like rainbows. Ain’t that something? I gotta try that again.
ACT II

SCENE 3

Zeffirelli attends Manning's bedside. Manning has turned himself away, and is drawn up in as close to a fetal position as he can manage with his restraints. Abel enters, dressed in polo shirt and casual slacks.

ABEL

Oh, you, ah—

ZEFFIRELLI

*She extends her hand.*

Dr. Zeffirelli, psychiatry service.

ABEL

*He takes the hand perfunctorily, without eye contact.*

Yes, so how's our patient doing? What do you say, Howard? I can get you on the schedule for first thing Monday morning and have you home, good as new, jeez, the same afternoon if that's what you want.

ZEFFIRELLI

He's not saying anything.

ABEL

Oh, for godsake, still mad? And what are they paying you for?

ZEFFIRELLI

Me? I was just--

ABEL

I thought we had this all straightened out.

ZEFFIRELLI

Sometimes these things take time, Dr. Abel.

*Clarence enters Manning's cubicle and sits on the floor on the opposite side of the bed from Zeffirelli.*
ABEL
How long does it take? Either he’s competent or he isn’t.

MANNING

*He speaks to Clarence and cannot be heard by Abel and Zeffirelli.*

He’s right here. I hate it when they talk about me as if I weren’t here.

CLARENCE

Then maybe you should act like you are here.

ABEL

If he’s competent, he can sign the consent. If he isn’t, then, well, we’ll get someone to sign for him.

ZEFFIRELLI

Is that it?

ABEL

Simple.

ZEFFIRELLI

Nothing in between?

ABEL

No point making things more complicated than they have to be.

ZEFFIRELLI

If you want my opinion—

ABEL

Generally, that’s what a consult means.

ZEFFIRELLI

*She addresses Manning as she removes the restraints. When she comes around the bed, Clarence gets up and moves to the chair she vacated. Manning turns away again.*

Maybe if we take these off and you can sit up, we could talk about what you want to do.

MANNING

*He speaks to Clarence and continues to ignore the doctors.*

Where have you been?
Come on, Mr. Manning. We're just here to help you.

Around.

Doing what?

Things. Will you get a load of all these brains taking care of you? You must be important.

Look, Howard, it's the weekend. Nothing's going to happen till Monday, anyway. Let's just keep you on the monitor. You rest and let that little business on your head heal up. First thing Monday, we'll take care of the heart.

*Zeffirelli almost sits on top of Clarence, but Abel gestures for her to follow him and exits to the cockpit.*

Dr. Zarelli--

*She follows correcting him.*

Zeffirelli

Whatever.

*He purrs and performs a little wiggle dance.*


Do you even know who I am? What I do?

Yeah, you're a surgeon, the chief of cardiac surgery.
ABEL

And what’s your job?

ZEFFIRELLI

I’m a psychiatry resident.

ABEL

And so? (Pause) Your job is to help me do my job. That’s what a consult is, isn’t it?

ZEFFIRELLI

I guess.

CLARENCE

Hey, how do you like that? They’s fighting over you. You are a big deal.

He deals out hands of cards to himself and Manning.

MANNING

Not over me, over who gets to control me. And they’re wasting their time.

Manning and Clarence play Go Fish while Abel and Zeffirelli argue. The sounds of the game intersperse the discussion.

ABEL

So tell me, where is all this talking and hand-holding getting us?

ZEFFIRELLI

I was just about to—

ABEL

Are you helping me do my job, or are you making things more difficult by filling Manning’s head with unrealistic expectations? This is not about what he wants. It’s about what he needs.

ZEFFIRELLI

I know—

ABEL

And it certainly doesn’t help for you to mess his chart up with your gobbledygook notes about his mental status. What the hell sense is anyone supposed to make of “seems a little hostile but basically okay?” Do they teach you anything about psychiatry in medical school at all? You’re supposed to convince him to
ABEL (cont’d)

cooperate with his treatment plan. If you can’t do that, then get off the case and I’ll get a real psychiatrist to
do the job.

CLARENCE

Ooh! Zingeroony!

ZEFFIRELLI

Fine.

She starts to gather up her stuff to leave.

Sorry I’m in the way, here. (Pause) I never asked for this assignment, anyway.

Abel starts to leave ahead of her but she bucks up and calls him back.

No, wait. You know what? I don’t need this.

CLARENCE

Round two!

MANNING

Good luck, kid. I’ve been saying the same thing, all along.

ZEFFIRELLI

I don’t know what your problem is, but I’m at least trying to understand Mr. Manning before I go making
decisions about what he needs. Have you ever even talked to him for even five minutes?

MANNING

Have you?

ABEL

Talked to him? Are you kidding? I have held that man’s beating heart right here, in these two hands. What
are you talking about? Do you have any idea what that’s like? There are no words for that experience. You
don’t simply talk about things like that. Anybody can talk.

ZEFFIRELLI

Maybe, but not anybody can listen.
ABEL

Oh, no you don’t. You psychiatrists are all alike, aren’t you? Analyzing everybody. Well not me. I’m not the patient here.

ZEFFIRELLI

Yeah, I know. The patient is the one with the problem.

ABEL

Damn straight. And don’t forget it.

ZEFFIRELLI

Could I ask one thing, though?

ABEL

What’s that?

ZEFFIRELLI

Why? I mean, if I am supposed to convince Mr. Manning to accept the framistration, maybe it would help if I had a better understanding of why it’s so important.

ABEL

Maybe you should just review your cardiology textbook.

ZEFFIRELLI

That’s not what—

He exits, leaving Zeffirelli fighting back tears of shame and frustration.

I meant. Aaghgh! This job totally sucks!

She pulls out her phone and starts to make a call then changes her mind, starts to leave, but returns, taps a bit at the computer but quits, starts to enter Manning’s cubicle, but stops, looks in on Clarence’s comatose body and is standing there when Zo enters to suction Clarence’s ventilator tube again. Meanwhile, Manning and Clarence continue to play cards. Manning is sitting up in bed now and Clarence is in the chair.

MANNING

Got any nines?
CLARENCE (coughing)

Maybe, but you has to ask me nice.

MANNING

Oh, for godsake! This is an idiotic game.

CLARENCE

What do you say?

MANNING

Please, Homer, do you have any nines?

CLARENCE

Go fish.

MANNING

Go Fish? Come on. You’ve got ‘em. You just asked me for them!

CLARENCE

Sorry, I sent off my nines.

MANNING

You sent off your nines? What the hell is that supposed to mean?

Clarence indicates his match pile.

CLARENCE

Done and finished.

He clears his throat.

Now I ask for your threes and then your jacks and I’m all out and away we go.

Manning throws down his cards.

Hey, that’s the way the game goes. Don’t get mad at me. Rules is rules.

MANNING

It’s a stupid game.

CLARENCE

How ‘bout this, then?
He begins building a house of cards. Zo enters Weatherby’s cubicle, where Zeffirelli seems to be lost in thought.

ZO
Hi, you lost?

ZEFFIRELLI
No, just thinking. Is he...?

ZO
Pretty much. His nephew’s here. Soon as he’s had a chance to see him, we’re gonna...you know. Come on, if you’re not busy, you can help me pretty him up.

ZEFFIRELLI
I don’t know. Part of the reason I’m in psych is I didn’t want to have to deal with all this dying stuff.

ZO
It’s part of life. You get used to it around here. Well, not really used, but, you know, you do what you can and that’s about it. Come on. Just help me put on this clean gown.

The two women attend to Weatherby’s body.

MANNING
What are you bothering about me for, anyway?

CLARENCE
I don’t know. I like you is all.

MANNING
I thought I was a Y.A.?

CLARENCE
You still are. Nobody’s perfect. Look, I can’t stick around forever. Do me a favor, will you?

MANNING
What’s that?

CLARENCE
Look out for my gals.
MANNING

Your gals?

CLARENCE

Zo, over there, and that other one. Whatchamacallit. She’s young. You watch out for them. They’s a couple of good eggs and I don’t want nobody hurting them. Can you do that for me?

MANNING

Me?

CLARENCE

I don’t see nobody else here, do you?

MANNING

I don’t know what I’m supposed to do.

CLARENCE

Just be yourself is all.

*He exits Manning’s cubicle and enters his own to take his place in the bed. The women help him to get settled comfortably. Manning starts to get up but lies back down. The women wash their hands as the lights go out.*
ACT II

SCENE 4

The third day. Weatherby’s bed is empty, the ventilator silent. Manning is asleep in the bed. Zo enters carrying a breakfast tray holding a cup of tea and a muffin with a birthday candle. She sings.

ZO

Happy Birthday to you! Happy Birthday to you!

Manning remains mute.

ZO

Breakfast, Mr. Manning. And it’s your birthday, remember?

He looks at the tray but turns away.

Come on. You’re supposed to make a wish.

MANNING

He mutters under his breath.

I wish to be left alone.

ZO

Did you say something?

MANNING

I said, I wish to be left alone.

ZO

There now. Good. That’s better. But you have to blow out the candle, you know.

MANNING

Don’t be ridiculous.

ZO

Those are the rules.

Manning turns over, blows out the candle, and turns back.
MANNING
You’re still here.

ZO

She attends to Manning’s IV etc.

I still have a job to do.

MANNING

Thus the saying: you can wish in one hand and shit in the other.

ZO

Spit.

MANNING

Why?

ZO

No, it’s what my grandmother used to say: “wish in one hand and spit in the other.” I never knew what she meant.

MANNING

It means, wishing is a waste of time.

ZO

Oh, (Pause) but it’s not, really. Everybody wishes for something, don’t’ they? Wishing is kinda like…it’s just what people do, isn’t?

MANNING

Well, I wished to go home and what good has it done me? I’m still here, still pinned and wriggling, and still, it seems, impotent to stop this insistent machine of medicine from prolonging my life whether I want it to or not.

ZO

Just because you wish for something doesn’t mean you really want it.

MANNING

Oh now that's profound. What's the difference?

*Abel enters dressed in a suit. He checks the computer briefly then approaches Manning.*
ZO
I don’t know, it’s like a wish is in your mind, what you think you want, but what you want is like something you really need, and you might want it and not even know it. Does that make sense?

MANNING
I doubt it. Either way, wish or want, right now what I really want is to be left alone.

He sees Abel and turns away.

ZO
Dr. Abel! Mr. Manning was just having a little birthday party. We didn’t expect to see you today.

ABEL
I just stopped by to check on something and... well, I thought I’d just look in to say hello, see how you’re doing, Howard.

ZO
He seems much better today. After breakfast, we may get him out for a walk.

MANNING
He's right here.

ABEL
So I see. Good. Well, how’s that bump on your head, doing? All right? Well, I’ve gotta go. Happy Birthday, Howard.

He begins to exit and Zo follows him to the cockpit.

ZO
Um, Dr. Abel did you see there was something for you in the Nurses’ station? Mr. Weatherby’s nephew left it.

ABEL

She hands Abel a small envelope, which he opens to reveal a greeting card and a deck of Weatherby’s playing cards.
ABEL
Weatherby's cards, and a note. "Thanks for taking good care of my Uncle Ceebee. We'll miss him but he's in a better place now. I know he would want you to have these as a remembrance."

MANNING

_He sits up and starts out of bed._

He's dead.

ABEL

_He moves toward Manning's room._

What's that?

MANNING

He's dead! Weatherby died. He's not in a better place. He did not fail to respond to treatment. He's dead.

ABEL

Well, it's just a manner of speaking, what we say about (pause) when someone passes on.

MANNING

Say it!

ABEL

Say what?

MANNING

You can't even say it, can you?

ABEL

What are you getting at Manning?

_He turns to Zo inquiringly._

ZO

_She steps in to comfort Manning._

It's okay, don't upset yourself, dear. Your situation is not the same at all.

MANNING

Say it! Death! Death! The thing nobody around here ever talks about. I die, you die, he, she, it dies, we die, you die, they die! Everybody dies!
ABEL

Don't be silly, Manning. Listen to yourself, going on. You're not dying. In fact you're in great shape for the shape you're in. If you would just---

MANNING

_He stands and paces wildly._

Come on, you say it! I will die, you will die, he, she, it will die. I am dying, you are dying, we are all dying-

ABEL

Nurse, call psychiatry, and let's give him 5cc's of azpramolam just to be on the safe side.

_She exits to the cockpit._

MANNING

What's the big deal? It's not an "unfortunate outcome," not a regrettable turn of events," and by god it's not a failure. Not as if you lost the big game, Abel. He died. Everybody's doing it, doing it, doing it!

ABEL

You're right, Howard. That's true. Now just settle down. We're going to get you a little something to help you relax.

MANNING

I don't need to relax. For Chrissake, all I've done around here for two days is relax while you and the others parade in and out with your state-of-the-art equipment and designer drugs and "Oh, Mr. Manning, you look so good today," or "Come on, Howard, have a little framistration today," and nobody, not one of you even thinks about WHY.

ABEL

Wait a minute---

MANNING

Say it, Abel! He's dead! It's the one immutable fact of life. The one certainty, whatever you're afraid of...whatever they're doing now, afterlife or reincarnation or nothingness, whatever comes, everybody dies. Birds, bees, dogs, cats, trees, flowers, good people, assholes, idiots, totally indifferent, apathetic people, lost, found, saved, or not, everybody dies. How can that be a bad thing?
ABEL
Okay, okay, I get it. Easy now.

MANNING
So what's the point?

ABEL
Look, I see where you're going with this, but--

MANNING
He sits on the bed.

Death. You still haven't said it.

ABEL
I don't buy it, Howard. You're a smart guy, but whatever it is that comes after, something or nothing, I have to say, I don't trust it. I believe in life. It's what I know.

He sits in the chair and draws it close to the bedside.

MANNING
Can't have one without the other.

Zo returns with a syringe. Abel signals her to wait.

ABEL
No, but that doesn't mean it doesn't matter what we do. Most people, you know, don't think about (pause) the end of life until they have to, or if they're lucky, they just live right up until...they don't even have a chance to think about it. But you...where does it get you? You've got death or whatever all figured out, but you still have to get up every day and live your life. And that's a good thing.

MANNING
What's another day or year or two in the grand scheme of things?

ABEL
What's one person, for that matter, in the grand scheme of things? I don't know. It's not my business to know. What I know is life. This life.
I've got the medicine you ordered, doctor.

Hang on.

*He sits beside the bed, pulling the chair close. She places the syringe on the table, and exits.*

Look, I know that when your time comes, your time comes, but until then, if it’s not your time, we have to keep on fighting.

Fighting what?

For godsakes, Howard. It’s what we do. It’s what our minds are for. Science, medicine, all of this, can’t you see? It’s life!

I’m sick of it.

I can’t imagine that some day will come when I can no longer wake up and feel what it is to be alive, to hear the birds tittering in the trees or a symphony or some kid wailing on an electric guitar or rain pelleting the roof.

What if you’re deaf?

Or to see the sun streaking rays from behind the clouds, or, or...

*He looks around and sees Zeffirelli enter the cockpit.*

a pretty woman walking down the hall, or watch children kicking a ball in the park--

What if you’re blind?

*Zeffirelli enters Manning’s room.*
ABEL

To smell the salt breeze by the ocean or to cool my feet in an icy brook, or take a warm shower...or remembering the softness of my mother's cheek—

MANNING

What if you're demented?

ZEFFIRELLI

Are we having a party?

MANNING

Dr. Abel was just telling me about all the things he's going to miss when he's dead. Or when he can't see, hear, walk, talk, taste, touch, smell, or think, whichever comes first.

ZEFFIRELLI

Sounds like fun. Can I play?

ABEL

I was just explaining to Mr. Manning that his course of treatment carries an excellent prognosis.

MANNING

And I was just explaining to Dr. Abel that his course of treatment is a waste of time. You doctors think you can play god, or something, controlling death by prolonging life.

ABEL

Now, wait a minute there, what about you? You think you're any different? You're the one who's playing god, here. Deciding for yourself when you've had enough of life and want to quit. What makes you think it's up to you?

MANNING

It's my life!

ABEL

Who gave it to you? Where'd you buy it?

MANNING

It's mine because I have it.
ABEL

Oh, is that the rule? This tea is mine because I have it? This cake is mine because I have it?

_He rushes about the room grabbing at things. Zo enters carrying another chair intended for Dr. Zeffirelli._

This chair is mine because I have it?

ZEFFIRELLI

Dr. Abel, should I—

ABEL

This monitor is mine because I have it? This nurse is mine because I have her?

ZO

Doctor, please—

ABEL

That, that right there is my heart in there because—

MANNING

That's not what I meant and you know it.

ABEL

It's _your_ life? What about the rest of us, then? Do we count for anything?

ZO

I think what Mr. Manning means is—

ABEL

I know what he means. Fine.

ZEFFIRELLI

Can I say something, here?

ZO

Life goes on, no matter what we try to do to it.

ABEL

If you want to go home, go ahead, knock yourself out. If you want to take your chances with a sick heart, fine. That's your right. Hell, if you want to kill yourself, or whatever, you want to avoid having to
ABEL (cont’d)
grieve any more losses, fine, I understand. Just don’t pretend like it doesn’t matter to anyone whether
you do or not. You’re wrong.

MANNING
What do you care? What do you know about me, really? I’m just your next little project for your next
little achievement award. F.Y.I. there is no anyone else for whom my life matters. I’m seventy years
old, and I’ve outlived them all. My wife Jeanne, Dead. Ovarian cancer, age 53. Our son Charles, Dead.
Car wreck, age 21.

ZEFFIRELLI
I’m sorry.

MANNING
Our baby Elizabeth, Dead. Pneumonia, age 18 months.

ZO
That was a long time ago. Life goes on.

MANNING
But how long?

ABEL
You think you’re the only one who knows about death? Who’s lost loved ones? Do you? You said it

MANNING
Your mother?

ABEL
She didn’t have to... Just a Stage I tumor. And she was young. Perfectly treatable, but no. She’s all into some bogus “natural healing.” Eating special foods and brewing up teas and lining up all these kooky friends to channel positive energy at her tumor. She refused the surgery, said it was barbaric.

ZEFFIRELLI
That must have been very hard for you.
ABEL

Her own son a doctor! And the chemo, she said was poison. It could have saved her life!

MANNING

Sounds like a brave woman to me.

ABEL

But what about us? What about her family? Did she hate us that much that she would just throw her life away? What's brave about that?

ZEFFIRELLI

We all do what we have to do, I guess.

ZO

Maybe she thought it would be easier that way. For everybody.

ABEL

I don't know. I don't know why I even mention it. Look, Howard—

MANNING

Never mind.

ABEL

Just don't get too caught up in this meaning of life stuff, okay?

MANNING

I won't, if you won't.

ABEL

I've got to get going.

ZEFFIRELLI

Wait, what about the party?

She re-lights the candle on the muffin.

Come on, now.

Zo, Abel, and Zeffirelli sing a lame rendition of the Birthday song. The sound of Tibetan chant returns
Zo

Make a wish!

Abel

He reaches into his pocket to find Weatherby's cards.

Oh, here. It’s a present from your friend next door. Weatherby wanted you to have these.

Manning

Thanks.

He takes the cards and blows out the candle. Lights out.

The End
Figure 1. Schematic illustration of the spatial relationships among set elements envisioned for the play script. Arrows indicate exit and entrance points. Dashes indicate offstage movement. Lines and shaded areas represent visual limitations for the characters on stage.
CURRICULUM VITAE

NAME: Mary Rotella

ADDRESS: 1414 Techny Lane
Louisville, KY 40222

DOB: Norwood, Massachusetts – May 12, 1958

EDUCATION & TRAINING: B.A, English
Harvard University
1976-80