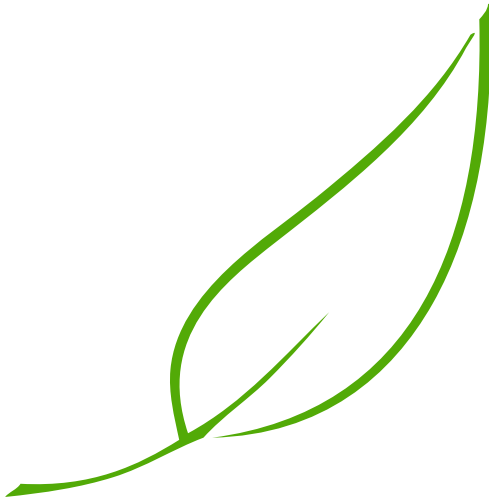


SINGING AT SEVEN

by Ken Bradbury



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CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Paul

Linda

Lucille, a resident of Mount Gilead

McHenry, a nurse at Mount Gilead

Ruth, Linda's daughter

The Voice on the Intercom

ACT I

Scene One: Room B-13 of the Mount Gilead Retirement Facility, the "couples wing."

Voice on the Intercom: May I have your attention? The winner of the matching Hardees

coffee mugs is Florine Brooks. Florine answered eight of 25 questions in our "Leaves

of Autumn" quiz this afternoon. Supper will be served in the main dining room in ten

minutes. Tomorrow's forecast is for showers. Residents are reminded to leave their

wet towels on the racks provided. The answer to today's trivia question is "Yul

Brenner, 1956" Have a nice evening.

The Voice of Paul in the darkness:

"On this wondrous sea,

Sailing silently,

Ho! Pilot, ho!

Knowest thou the shore

Where no breakers roar,

Where the storm is o'er?

In the silent west

Many sails at rest,
Their anchors fast:
Thither I pilot thee ...
Land, ho! Eternity!
Ashore at last!"

LINDA: Paul!

PAUL: *(the lights reveal a heroic Paul standing C ... without pants. He is dressed in a worn tie, shirt and sweater. Aside from his lack of trousers, he seems a vision of elderly normalcy.)* Under the B! Thirteen!

LINDA: *(Linda enters in her wheelchair. Linda is confined to a wheelchair that is decorated with every sort of knickknack imaginable: plastic flowers ,bread ties, and bracelets, mail pouches, cup holders ... The room has two beds, a dresser and a small television. Over Linda's bed are bumper stickers and placards from every liberal Presidential candidate in recent memory, McGovern, Muskie, Carter, Clinton, Humphrey, etc. along with several Pro-Choice, and other liberal posters.)* Paul, are you coming to supper?

PAUL: I'm one number away from a win.

LINDA: You're not playing bingo, Paul. There's no game here. And you were doing Emily Dickinson just now. What in the hell does she have to do with bingo?

PAUL: Just a moment love. They're playing Four Corners on this set. Damn. Lucy Sheahan. I-29. She always wins on I-29.

LINDA: Lucy Sheahan is dead, Paul.

PAUL: Even dead she beats me. Is that luck or what?

LINDA: Come to supper. The creamed peas are calling your name.

PAUL: "The morns are meeker than they were,
The nuts are getting brown;
The berry's cheek is plumper,
The rose is out of town.
The maple wears a gayer scarf,

*This perusal script is for reading purposes only.
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The field a scarlet gown,
Lest I should be old-fashioned,
I'll put a trinket on."

LINDA: I'd settle for your pants. Are you coming?

PAUL: Creamed peas and what?

LINDA: Swiss steak. It's Friday.

PAUL: Friday is Swiss steak?

LINDA: The cook is Lutheran. She just does it to piss off the Catholics. It's a holy war.

PAUL: I'm not hungry.

LINDA: I'm not either. I only eat for a break between enemas. Humor me.

PAUL: You go ahead, m'love. I have work to do.

LINDA: Work? We've been at Mount Gilead for twelve years. What've you got left to do? Creamed peas are not the end of the world, Paul. Let's get out of this room for a while.

PAUL: They say Jacob died.

LINDA: I know. Who told you?

PAUL: They took his McDonald's cup off the coffee rack. The official death notice of Mount Gilead. Why didn't you tell me?

LINDA: I was going to. Later.

PAUL: Then it's official. *(He walks to a homemade chart on the wall near his bed and puts a large "X" through one of the names)*

LINDA: Paul, don't do that.

PAUL: Good-bye, Jacob.

LINDA: Paul that is just morbid.

PAUL: Fare thee well, old chum!

"My life closed twice before its close;
It yet remains to see
If Immortality unveil
A third event to me.
So huge, so hopeless to conceive,
As these that twice befell.
Parting is all we know of heaven,
And all we need of hell."

LINDA: Very nice.

PAUL: Thank you.

LINDA: Now put on your pants and eat your peas.

PAUL: My pants? (*noticing for the first time*) Damn.

LINDA: That's what I say. Damned silly to be standing around reciting Dickinson without your pants.

PAUL: Emily would have praised my nakedness.

LINDA: No one would praise your nakedness. And she's dead too.

PAUL: Really? (*then he moves to his chart*)

LINDA: She's not on your chart, Paul.

PAUL: Strange. She's such a dear friend. I taught her for 35 years and now that I've become decrepit, she teaches me.

McHENRY: (*a female attendant, appearing at the door*) Mrs. Leam?

LINDA: Do you ever knock?

McHENRY: The door was open.

LINDA: It's always open, McBeth.

McHENRY: McHenry.

LINDA: You feed us with children's spoons, you change our diapers, and wipe our butts. What's the use in closing the door? Watch this. (*she wheels herself to the open door and knocks on it*) Is that clever or what?

INTERCOM: Excuse me, the answer should have been, "Yul Brenner, 1958."

LINDA: What the hell use is it to give the answers in a place where nobody remembers the questions?

McHENRY: Mrs. Leam, it's time for supper. Would you and Mr. Leam like to ...

LINDA: Stop talking to me like Paul can't hear. If you have a question for *us*, then ask *us*.

McHENRY: I'm sorry, but I didn't know if ...

PAUL: (*stepping in plain view for McHenry*) Tavern wench! Peas for my friends!

LINDA: (*moans*) Oh, dear God.

McHENRY: (*bowing*) Supper is served, my Lord.

PAUL: Then mount the battlements! Send out the dwarves!
Avast ye scullery maid! What ho! Come, let me wrestle
loose the flower of thy youth in yon meadow!

LINDA: Dear God.

McHENRY: Has he had his medication, Mrs. Leam?

LINDA: I gave it to him myself.

PAUL: Poison! The hag doth try her poison but this noble heart
has resisted! (*moving toward McHenry*) For inward burns a
passion wench, a wasp! The stinger of the gods intent on
dallying in thy precious nectar!

McHENRY: (*backing out*) I'll be down the hall if you need me.
(*she turns and exits*)

LINDA: Our door is always open.

PAUL: (*shouting after her*) And even in retreat, my little bee!
Thy tender hammocks do inspire dreams of pollination!

LINDA: Tender hammocks? Dear God. You come on too
heavy, you know.

PAUL: Never.

LINDA: They're going to find you out.

PAUL: I've got them fooled.

LINDA: For now. But it's too much. They'll find you out.

PAUL: You really think so?

LINDA: I do.

PAUL: Then I'll ease up. I bow to the great god of finance.

LINDA: It's important, Paul. Don't fool around with this. It's
nearly five hundred more a month if you're bonko. But the
State Department of Mental Illness could sue you if they
found out.

PAUL: Linda, the door's open.

LINDA: In this place who can hear?

PAUL: The orderlies.

LINDA: Minimum wage dolts. I told her we had our medicine.
Better get it out.

PAUL: Capital idea, old girl. (*he pulls a bottle of Jack Daniels
from under his mattress*)

LINDA: How can you sleep with that thing?

PAUL: That's what first wife asked when I met you. (*Linda swings at him with her cane and he moves just in time for her to nail the bed instead*) Missed.

LINDA: This time. And they're going to find out we're not married.

PAUL: Always the pessimist. Look, my love, they just assume I'm nutso and they just assume we're married.

LINDA: If they assume we're married then they'll assume that I'm the one who's crazy. And they assume it because you lied.

PAUL: How can an insane old man lie? He doesn't know his catheter from a soda straw.

LINDA: Don't tempt me. You're a sound sleeper.

PAUL: And you are a cruel old woman.

LINDA: Pour the cocktail, Miss Kitty. Easy ... easy. I'm a sipper, remember?

PAUL: Only when the lights are on, my dear.

LINDA: Stop that. I just came from chapel.

PAUL: You're agnostic.

LINDA: My sugar was high this morning. When I my sugar is high I'm Baptist.

PAUL: (*a toast with glass in hand*) "Surgeons must be very careful!

When they take the knife!

Underneath their fine incisions

Stirs the culprit, --- Life!"

LINDA: Cheers. (*and they both drink*) It goes on our record, you know.

PAUL: (*holding the bottle*) They don't even know I've got it.

LINDA: Supper. You don't eat, it goes on your record. Everything's written down. You pee and it goes on the record.

PAUL: Oh that it would. (*they both laugh*) Let's get married.

LINDA: Don't be foolish.

PAUL: I could get your father's permission.

LINDA: Oh, God, let's don't dig him up again. And besides, we'd pay the back rent for living single all these years.

Couples do it cheaper, Paul. Remember that. They know if we're both here then they're sure to get the whole estate.

Let's just continue to fool around.

PAUL: (*holding the bottle*) Another?

LINDA: Put on your pants and we'll go get supper.

PAUL: (*sighs*) Ah, the joys of senility ... when fooling around comes to gumming Swiss steak in unison. Dickinson never wrote a poem about Swiss steak. She missed a good one there.

LINDA: Do what you will, I'm leaving.

PAUL: I can walk stark naked into the dining room and nothing is said, but fail just once to miss a dose of soybean meat bobbing about in tomato sauce and it becomes a part of your everlasting obituary.

LINDA: Hurry up. The Methodists are having a hymn sing at seven.

PAUL: A hymn sing at seven. Almost poetic. My first wife was a Methodist.

LINDA: You told me she was Jewish.

PAUL: She was. Methodists take anybody. And Jews don't have potlucks. Oh, for a good potluck in this sterile beanery! She tried to make me Jewish before she died.

LINDA: Barmitzva or circumcision in your sleep?

PAUL: Neither. Sophie preferred a life of constant suffering. She assumed that if I suffered enough I'd eventually become Jewish. "Do not go Gentile into that good night!"

LINDA: I think I'll go. Methodists at seven sound amusing. Presbyterians can't sing worth a toot and the Congregationalists keep sending you those cards. "So nice to see you at our services this week. Please feel free to call our salvation hotline if you're in need." I hate little cards.

PAUL: Don't sign your name.

LINDA: I don't. I've been signing my card "Eleanor Roosevelt" since March and they still send me the damned cards.

(*the phone rings and Paul picks up the receiver*)

PAUL: International House of Pancakes. (*to Linda*) It's your daughter, Rosanne.

LINDA: I don't have a daughter Roseanne.

PAUL: Does she know that?

LINDA: Her name is Ruth. Tell her I died.

PAUL: I told her that twice last week. You don't suppose that excuse is wearing a bit thin?

LINDA: Tell her I've gone to supper. Anything. I don't feel like talking tonight.

PAUL: (*into the receiver*) Your mother is dead, Roseanne. She choked on her creamed peas. Could you call back later when she can talk?

LINDA: Don't tell her that!

PAUL: Yes. Well, God bless you, too. Have a nice day.

LINDA: I shouldn't have done that.

PAUL: I know.

LINDA: She'll come visit now.

PAUL: She's a wonderful girl.

LINDA: She's a nag.

PAUL: I wish you'd get over that. We're going to find you head down in the tulips some morning and I'll be damned if I want to make all the funeral arrangements myself.

LINDA: Ruth was a wonderful girl once ... liberal ... free-thinking ... compassionate. Then she got religious.

PAUL: It's her right, Linda. She's a grown woman.

LINDA: And it's my right to ignore her. God! She voted for Reagan! Can you believe that? A daughter of mine!

PAUL: It's a free country.

LINDA: Not if she keeps that up.

PAUL: Calm yourself, old girl. The Pentecostals were here last night. Why didn't you go?

LINDA: Music's too loud. Half the people in nursing homes are Pentecostal just because they can hear the music. But they scare me ... all that jumping around. (*as she attaches imaginary paddles*) "One! Two! Three! Clear!" (*she jumps*) (*an elderly lady with a walker comes to the door and stands.*)

LINDA: Oh dear God. The return of Lucille. Go away Lucille. (*Lucille stands there, staring blankly.*) They're serving supper, Lucille. Go away now, sweetheart.

PAUL: What's she staring at this time?

LINDA: What does she ever stare at? Nothing.

PAUL: (*standing*) My lady, please! I'm not yet dressed! (*Lucille yawns and stares some more.*) Critics. Everywhere the critics.

LINDA: Well, there goes the Swiss steak. Lucille's blocked our escape.

PAUL: Tell me, would this be a scream or what? They hook one of their meters to her and find that she's been dead all this time.

LINDA: Are you dead, Lucille? (*nothing*) Maybe she's just a Baptist and we can't tell.

PAUL: She's a spy. They've implanted a camera in her dead old brain and she's surreptitiously checking to see if we've eaten our creamed peas. Aha! Will Mati Hare succumb to bribery? (*offering her the bottle*) How about a drink old girl? (*Lucille stares a moment then shuffles her walker on down the hall*) Dear God, you're right Linda. She turned down 12-year-old Jack Daniels. She is a Baptist.

LINDA: What've we come to, Paul? Just look at that poor old sod. This is not the way I choose to end it. When I stand and stare in a walker will you knock me on the head with a bedpan?

PAUL: My pleasure. I'll do it right now if you like.

LINDA: Margaret Gregory died last week. (*Paul makes a move to his chart*) You've already marked her off, Paul. She died in a room full of strangers. (*a silence, shared with Paul*) God, what a morbid way to knock off. It was horrible. Tubes and buzzers and doctors and tight butt nurses ... And the family was there, Paul! In the ICU waiting room! The family was there! Ten steps away! Why in the hell weren't they with her? Why couldn't they be there? Seventy-eight years holding her close and when she gets ready to die, we throw her into a room full of strangers! (*slamming her hand*

against her armrest) Damn, couldn't they have called them in? She was dying and they knew it! Screw the bells and monitors! Why weren't they there? What the hell have we come to when we put up a stainless steel wall between the living and the dying? I will not die in a room full of strangers! Do you hear me, you old fool? I will not die among those I've never met! Haul me out to the bingo hall! Drape me over a bench at the mall! Do something! Grab my dying leg and toss me into a booth at McDonalds! Prop me up with a strawberry shake between my trembling lips and let me look at someone I know! What have we come to? *(slamming her hand down with each word)* What ... the ... hell ... have ... we ... come ... to!?

VOICE ON THE INTECOM: May I have your attention?

Supper will be served in five minutes.

LINDA: Go to hell!

PAUL: *(after a long beat)* Bravo, old girl.

LINDA: Don't patronize me.

PAUL: I mean it. Bravo. Improve life as we might, we continue to screw up death.

LINDA: At death, we suck.

PAUL: Amen.

LINDA: What's that noise?

PAUL: The Methodists are tuning up, I think.

LINDA: God help us.

PAUL: Singing at Seven.

LINDA: Are you ready for this?

PAUL: Do I need my pants?

LINDA: No. But they will. Let's get a Swiss steak to go and catch the show. *(and the lights dim out as Paul reaches for his pants and Linda slowly moves her wheelchair toward the door).* I'm signing it Jackie Kennedy this time.

Scene Two: *Later that evening. The sounds of a piano playing a hymn is heard as Paul, now with pants, wheels Linda into their room. Linda holds several brochures in her lap.*

VOICE ON THE INTERCOM: May I have your attention?

Ice cream will be served in the Sunset Room in ten minutes.

Tomorrow's forecast is for showers. Would whoever borrowed the "Better Living With Martha Stewart" please return it to the television parlor? Have a pleasant evening.

LINDA: (*singing against the tide of the piano*) "Bringing in the sheaves! Bringing in the sheaves!" What in the hell does that mean, anyway?

PAUL: It's a Methodist secret.

LINDA: Well, another evening in the chapel shot to hell.

PAUL: That's blasphemy, Linda. Please.

LINDA: It's not blasphemy. God was bored too. I heard him snore. (*holding the brochures*) Look at these! It's a bloody carnival! "Saturday Senior Seamstresses sewing potholders for starving children in the Sudan." "Sunday Senior Citizen Van Service." Whoever wrote these is under sixty. Too many s's for false teeth. And look ... "Have you made your will? And have you considered the church in your estate planning?" What a benevolent bunch of leaches!

PAUL: They're only trying to keep us busy.

LINDA: It's no use. I know I'm dying. They can't distract me. I shall die under a pile of benevolent brochures. Crushed in an avalanche of depressing pamphlets. "Dear, How long has it been since we visited Aunt Eleanor?"

PAUL: "Oh must we, George? The smell of alcohol and pee is so very distressing."

LINDA: "I quite agree. Let's send her a brochure, shall we?"

PAUL: "Smashing idea!"

LINDA: (*throws the brochures onto the floor*) Fie on thee! (*running her wheelchair over each brochure as she pronounces her death sentences, making motor noises as she wheels her chariot around the room*) A pox on Bingo! (*roar*) A plague on escorted bus tours! (*sees an especially hated nemesis and roars toward it*) Death to matinee dinner theatre!

PAUL: (*standing on his bed*) Bravo! Bravissimo! Ole!

LINDA: La Muerte! Finis!

PAUL: Orlando! Cappuccino! Ricardo Montalban!

(Lucille appears at the doorway, walker and blank stare in place)

LINDA: *(caught in mid-revere, groans, then)* Good to see you, Lucille. I'm glad you got our invitation. *(nothing)* So, did you enjoy the hymn sing, sweetheart? I saw you down there on the front row clicking your teeth to the beat! Paul and I were just discussing, I've never heard I'll Fly Away on dentures. So, did you have a good time? You didn't? Thought the Methodists were a bit off tonight? Did you hear that, Paul? Lucille didn't much care for the Wesleyans singing this evening. And how about the creamed peas? They reminded you of the Methodists? Listen to her, Paul. Is she a stitch or what?

PAUL: I have this theory, Linda. Lucille thinks she's our daughter.

LINDA: Dear God, no.

PAUL: Just a theory, mind you. She appears at breakfast, lunch, supper, and bedtime, just like a faithful daughter.

LINDA: I disinherit you, Lucille. Go away. Shoo. You've lost the ranch, Annie. Ride off into the sunset.

PAUL: Linda, you're cruel.

LINDA: Like she knows. Lucille, your pants are on fire. See? Nothing.

PAUL: I somehow doubt that Lucille's pants have ever been on fire.

LINDA: It's the silent types who fool you.

PAUL: Are you tired? You always get catty when you're tired.

LINDA: I am not catty. I am never catty, you old sexist. I'm surprised at you Paul.

PAUL: Sorry. Bitchy?

LINDA: Bitchy? Yes, I'm bitchy. That's better. Leave me alone. Move to Missouri. Sell Amway. Do something but get out of here. I'm sorry, it's my time of the month.

PAUL: Your time?

LINDA: Sunday. Methodists irritate the hell out of me.

PAUL: Are we having guests tomorrow?

LINDA: *(a beat, then)* Have you seen my sweater?

PAUL: Is she coming?

LINDA: You didn't leave it in church, did you? I'll have to buy it back at the fall bazaar.

PAUL: We've got to discuss it.

LINDA: Why? Why do we have to discuss everything? It's your busy nature, old man. If a tree falls in the forest, does it make a sound unless Paul and Linda discuss it?

PAUL: Is she coming or not?

LINDA: I don't know.

PAUL: Your daughter always calls before she comes.

LINDA: Who?

PAUL: Don't be bitchy.

LINDA: I'm going to bed. Tuck me in, Lucille? I'll let you have a nip of my Ex-lax.

PAUL: Is your daughter coming tomorrow? It's the first of the month.

LINDA: Lucille is my only child. And you're obedient, aren't you, Lucille? You don't nag me, do you? You don't visit me once a month and hold my hand and tell me how much you miss me. You're a wonderful child, Lucille. Mommy loves you very much. I change my mind, the ranch is yours.

PAUL: I wish ... Linda, I wish you could talk to me about your daughter.

LINDA: (*ala Dietrick*) And I want to be levft alone!

PAUL: Linda ...

LINDA: Lucille, I have to pee before I got to bed. Are you going to watch that too or do you want to help?

PAUL: Linda ...

LINDA: Just hold the pan steady, darling. You won't get splashed. It's still the one thing I can do with some accuracy.

PAUL: (*beginning to turn down his own bed*) You are intolerable at times, you know that?

McHENRY: (*appearing at the doorway*) Ready for bed, Lucille?

PAUL: Moonlight falls, the village sleeps, and the wench returns to her love!

LINDA: Dear God.

McHENRY: Were you chatting with Lucille?

LINDA: Yes. I tried talking to my bedpan but that would be silly, wouldn't it?

PAUL: "Forbidden fruit of flavor has
That lawful orchards mocks;
How luscious lies the pea within
The pod that Duty locks!"

LINDA: I'm going to bed.

McHENRY: Say goodnight, Lucille.

LINDA: Dear God.

PAUL: "To make a prairie it takes a clover and one bee, ---
One clover, and a bee, And reverie ..."

McHENRY: Good night, Paul.

PAUL: "The reverie alone will do if bees are few."

(McHenry takes Lucille by the arm and begins to lead her to her room.)

LINDA: 'Night, Lucille! So nice chatting.

McHENRY: Oh by the way, Paul ...

PAUL: Speak, fair Juliet!

McHENRY: Are you busy first thing in the morning?

PAUL: Let me check. *(goes to his chart on the wall)* Let's see.
Early breakfast with the Pope, sing Figaro at the Met, buy
the Yankees franchise, and then stop off for a chat with
Oprah about my new sex manual. I'll be free anytime after
eight.

McHENRY: The director would like to talk to you.

PAUL: I'm busy.

McHENRY: He's says it's important.

PAUL: Oprah will not be happy.

McHENRY: Eight o'clock. His office. Pleasant dreams. *(and she takes Lucille away)*

LINDA: *(watching her exit, then)* They've found you out.

PAUL: Impossible.

LINDA: They know your plan, old man. You'll loose the extra
five hundred and they'll boot us out of here on our butts.

PAUL: You really think so?

LINDA: If you loose your insanity bonus then they'll investigate us both.

PAUL: They wouldn't.

LINDA: (*pulling a paper out from one of the little baskets on her wheelchair*) "If any resident of Mount Gilead knowing provides false information on the residency applications, said resident may be dismissed from the facility, forfeiting all deposits and other payments." I have to divorce you.

PAUL: We aren't married.

LINDA: That'll make it even tougher. (*a beat, as she stares at the floor ... this is serious*) Damn.

PAUL: (*slowly turns away from her and stares at the wall*) Double damn.

LINDA: (*finally*) I need my medication. (*Paul continues to stare at the wall*) Paul, I need a drink.

PAUL: Am I that unconvincing?

LINDA: You have one too, Paul.

PAUL: Was I really that obvious?

LINDA: Brilliant. Just a bit overplayed.

PAUL: I thought we had them.

LINDA: Farce is not everyone's cup of tea, Paul.

PAUL: (*beginning to pour the drinks*) So ... What will you miss most, old girl? The Methodists or the creamed peas?

LINDA: Make it a double.

PAUL: (*he pours some more*) Amen.

LINDA: The gossip. I'll miss the gossip. How the hell do you hear the juicy stuff when you live alone?

PAUL: You go to church. Wait for the "sharing" time.

LINDA: Give me my drink.

PAUL: Cheers. (*he does, then goes to his chart on the wall*)

LINDA: What are you doing?

PAUL: I'm marking myself off.

LINDA: Paul, sit down and drink your medicine.

PAUL: I'm quite serious, Linda. I'm marking myself off. Grab my McDonalds's cup in the morning, and call my family.

LINDA: And we'll sing at seven.

PAUL: We'll sing at seven.

LINDA: Once you know how God-awful terrible it is to get old, you're too damned old to do anything about it. I'm going to bed. Give me a ride, sailor? *(and through the following, Paul wheels Linda to her bed, removes her shoes, turns back the covers, and lifts her, a limb at a time into bed ... a maneuver long-practiced and indicative of the tenderness they feel for one another)* You been drinking?

PAUL: Heavily.

LINDA: Good. I'm not in the mood for lucid conversation tonight. Margaret Gregory's services are tomorrow. I want to go.

PAUL: Then go you shall.

LINDA: Don't let me nap through it.

PAUL: We shall both go.

LINDA: What the hell did that woman leave the world, anyway?

PAUL: Two shoes and a diary. Comfy?

LINDA: Two shoes and a diary. Exactly. Not even a coffee cup. I don't want that, Paul.

PAUL: You shall have three shoes. You already have a cup.

LINDA: I don't want that. I don't want a service by a minister who's never met me and a choir who's paid to sing. Do you hear me?

PAUL: I hear you, Linda.

LINDA: And when you hear me choking in my sleep, don't call a damned nurse. Go get my friends.

PAUL: They're both just down the hall, love.

LINDA: Why aren't you stopping me?

PAUL: Stopping what?

LINDA: Stopping me from talking like this. You're supposed to mutter, "Oh Linda, don't talk like that. Your heart's good, you'll live forever. Stop upsetting yourself." Why aren't you stopping me from upsetting myself? You'd make a lousy priest.

PAUL: I see no need. You are going to die. Perhaps soon, who knows? There's nothing I can do about that and you'd might as well talk frankly.

LINDA: You'd never make it in hospice work.

PAUL: Comfy?

LINDA: I can't believe you. Here. They should come in here now... you really are crazy.

PAUL: I'm truly sorry. Perhaps it's the whiskey.

LINDA: You want the Linda Leam definition of sanity? Here. Look. (*holds one finger from each hand in the air, some distance apart*) This is you ... the real you (*indicating one finger*) ... And this ... *indicating the other*) ... this is who you pretend to be ... the face you give to the world. The further the two are apart, the more unstable you are. (*moves fingers close*) Sane. (*moves them far apart*) Loony.

PAUL: What was all that about?

LINDA: I'm dying. I have to get all my good ideas out while I have the breath.

PAUL: You think I'm insane?

LINDA: If compassion is a sign of sanity, then you're loony as hell.

PAUL: Let's not get nasty before bedtime.

LINDA: Time was, I was nasty after I went to bed. Now I've come to this ... bickering before bedtime. Like singing at seven. Blah ... blah ... blah ... useless.

PAUL: Goodnight, M'love. (*and he begins to prepare himself for bed*)

LINDA: Why don't you buy a potted plant?

PAUL: They put off too much oxygen.

LINDA: You could ignore it ... wouldn't even have to speak.

PAUL: I'm not ignoring you, Linda. I just don't know what to say when you get like this. I'm speechless, honestly.

LINDA: They ignored Margaret Gregory, too.

PAUL: Please, Linda. It's late and I have an appointment with the executioner tomorrow. I need my wits if I'm going to pretend to lose them.

LINDA: Didn't know diddly-squat at the end. Finally took her phone away. Kept calling Vancouver ... always Vancouver and nobody knew why. Ever go into her room, Paul? God, it was gorgeous ... color ... color, color, color everywhere color. And she'd done it all. God it was gorgeous. Just

Margaret and her Crayola 64-pack. She'd do it all in one night, they said. Crazy as a June bug and still she'd manage to smuggle crayons. They must have re-painted that room four times but Margaret was a Houdini, I swear. They'd strap her in, repaint the walls and tomorrow morning she'd have done it again. *(a beat)* Strap her in to keep her from coloring her walls. That's profound, Paul. Your friend Emily would have loved it. God it was gorgeous. Just gorgeous. I think it was her grandkids. Who'd think to frisk a five-year-old? The sneaky little bastards kept bringing granny her coloring crayons and she'd color every spoon and mirror and bed sheet. What a wonderful conspiracy. *(Paul turns out the overhead lights and both are lit only with a small light above their beds as they sit propped up against their pillows.)* She controlled her world. Crazy as a bed bug yet she was in control of her world. Oh, that's the great thing about senility, isn't it Paul? You can be selfish and nobody minds. Color and color and color. The crazy lady drove 'em nuts with her colors. *(she turns out her light, a long silence, then she speaks in the darkness)* One time it was all yellows. Yellow stripes on the drapes, and carpet, and towels. God, it must have taken hours! She'd been saving them, I heard. Every time the kids brought crayons, Margaret would save back the yellows. They even searched her room, looking for the crayons. Delbert told me she'd stick 'em in her tube of Preparation H. Can you imagine such a thing, Paul? Paul, are you listening?

PAUL: I'm spellbound.

LINDA: Preparation H. You think a crazy woman would think of that?

PAUL: *(a long beat, then)* You think I should try it?

LINDA: You'd stick Emily Dickinson in your hemorrhoid medicine?

PAUL: It would have tickled her sense of privacy.

LINDA: Yellow. A whole room full of by-God yellow crayons.

PAUL: I'll do it then.

LINDA: Copycat insanity isn't admissible.

PAUL: *(a long silence, then)* I'm worried, Linda.

LINDA: Me too.

PAUL: What if ...

LINDA: I'm going to sleep.

PAUL: (*a beat*) Now? Now that I want to say something?

LINDA: I can't think of a better time.

PAUL: You're a wicked woman, Linda.

LINDA: (*a beat*) But by God I'm cute.

VOICE ON THE INTERCOM: May I have your attention please?

LINDA: Get lost.

VOICE: The time is now ten o'clock.

LINDA: For that you woke me?

VOICE: This is today's thought for the day ...

LINDA: Dear God ...

VOICE: "Behind every cloud there is a silver lining."

LINDA: That was yesterday's.

VOICE: Excuse me that was yesterday's.

LINDA: Idiot.

VOICE: "A happy heart is the world's greatest treasure."

LINDA: Go to hell.

VOICE: The Forecast for tomorrow is showers. Have a nice evening.

LINDA: (*in unison with the voice*) "Have a nice evening."

PAUL: I forgot to close the door.

LINDA: Why bother?

PAUL: I suppose so.

LINDA: One shot of Emily for my sleep?

PAUL: (*a beat, then*) I could not die with you,

For one must wait

To shut the other's gaze down---

They'd judge us---how?

For you served Heaven, you know,

Or sought to;

I could not.

And were you saved,

And I condemned to be

Where you were not,

That self were hell to me.
So we must keep apart,
You there, I here,
With just a door ajar
That oceans are,
And prayer,
And that pale sustenance,
Despair!

LINDA: That's nice.

PAUL: Thank you.

LINDA: *(a beat)* 'Night.

PAUL: 'Night.

(Paul clicks out his light)

ACT II

Scene One: *The lights come up on Linda, alone onstage in her wheelchair, talking on the phone. It is the following morning.*

LINDA: Oh hell! He's what? Oh hell! Where? For how long? Is she dead? Oh hell! Well, what do you expect me to do? In my condition? Talk to him yourself! He's your patient, I just married him.

McHENRY: *(rushing into the room, quite out of breath)* Mrs. Leam, you've got to come!

LINDA: No I don't.

McHENRY: He'll listen to you!

LINDA: Since when?

McHENRY: Well ... you've got to do something! We have a situation here!

LINDA: I feel like I'm on ER. Paul can take care of himself.

McHENRY: Mrs. Leam, your husband is in the fellowship hall holding the Methodist piano player hostage!

LINDA: I know. They just phoned from crisis central.

McHENRY: He's got her pinned down behind the Steinway grand!

LINDA: Paul has class. I've always said that. Say what you will, the man has class.

McHENRY: The poor lady is scared to death! The orderlies barely rescued the choir just now!

LINDA: Children's choir, I hear. Paul hates children's choirs. Something about his childhood as a boy soprano ... Maury Metzker painted his locker pink.

McHENRY: What if she dies? What if he harms her?

LINDA: Paul won't harm her. He's a pacifist neurotic.

McHENRY: Your husband has the Methodist piano player ... trapped behind the piano, threatening to harm her if anyone comes close!

LINDA: I'll bet it was the salmon patties. Did we have salmon patties tonight?

McHENRY: Mrs. Leam, I don't think ...

LINDA: How did they sing? Were they any good today?

McHENRY: I have no idea but ...

LINDA: You wouldn't. You always go smoke when the choirs come. Don't think we haven't noticed. (*the phone rings and Linda answers*) Hostage Central. Yes, she's right here. I hope you need here somewhere, the lady's hysterical.

McHENRY: (*taking the phone*) What? He's what? Oh my God!

LINDA: Then it was the salmon patties.

McHENRY: I'll be right there. And yes, I'll bring her.

LINDA: You will not.

McHENRY: Yes. Yes, okay. (*she hangs up*) He's threatening her.

LINDA: (*in disbelief*) With what?

McHENRY: They say ... I mean the situation has the poor lady scared to death. Mrs. Leam, his attitude alone is enough to ...

LINDA: With what? He's threatening her with what?

McHENRY: The director says it looks like a tube of hemorrhoid treatment.

LINDA: Emily!!! Sweet Jesus, it's Emily!!

McHENRY: Who?

LINDA: Has he actually ... uh ... used it on her?

McHENRY: Mrs. Leam that makes very little difference.

LINDA: (*sighs*) Oh ... you're so young. If only you knew the relief.

McHENRY: You're coming with me.

LINDA: I'm doing no such thing. Get out of here.

McHENRY: Mrs. Leam that's an order!

LINDA: Who are you to be ordering me?

McHENRY: Very well, I'll take you then. (*she grabs Linda's wheelchair as Linda suddenly makes a grab for the foot board of the bed and hangs on with a death grip.*)

LINDA: Help! Murder! Somebody help me!

McHENRY: (*struggling to break the wheelchair free*) Linda, let go!

LINDA: Fascist! Nazi! Republican!

RUTH: (*appearing at the doorway*) Mother!

LINDA: The cavalry! Thank God! Sweetheart, your mother is being kidnapped. Want to lend a hand? I haven't signed the will yet.

RUTH: What are you doing?

McHENRY: (*letting go ... flustered*) Mrs ... uh ...

RUTH: (*stepping into the room, Ruth Milby is an attractive lady, poised and confident.*) Milby. What are you doing with my mother?!

PAUL'S VOICE: (*from down the hallway*) The Revenge of Zorro! Aha!!!!!!!

McHENRY: Oh God! (*McHenry rushes out of the room*)

LINDA: Thank you, Paul. (*smiling sweetly at Ruth*) And how was your day?

RUTH: Mother, what in the name of heaven is going on?

LINDA: It's Paul. He's attacked another Methodist. That's seven this month. Would you call this a trend or just a passing fad?

RUTH: Mother ...

LINDA: Perhaps a mood. I hardly think it's a "condition." Conditions are so ... well ... They need proof and everything and it's really too expensive to diagnosis the mental conditions of the elderly. Let's just write it all off to dementia or Alzheimers or something.

RUTH: What's the matter with Paul, mother?

LINDA: It's his new hemorrhoid treatment. You know Paul, always afraid to try anything new. It's my guess he's found an old lady to try it out on.

RUTH: Do you have time to talk?

McHENRY'S VOICE IN THE HALLWAY: Stop him!
Somebody grab him!

PAUL'S VOICE IN THE HALLWAY: Bastante! Et tu, Brunhilda! Andele! Andele!

LINDA: I'd say about ten minutes. He's not carrying his heavy weapons today.

RUTH: I could come back.

LINDA: I'm sure you could. I'm sure you would. Let's get it over with.

RUTH: Mother, do you have any idea how much it hurts me when you say that?

LINDA: Some.

RUTH: You aren't even going to try today are you?

LINDA: I am your mother. I'll be damned if I'll become your mission.

RUTH: That's not why I come here. And you're exceptionally cruel today.

LINDA: My husband is threatening modern Christendom with a rectal preparation. Who can blame me? I'm distracted.

RUTH: *(taking a seat on Paul's bed)* The boys are fine.

LINDA: Good. Do they color?

RUTH: Color?

LINDA: In coloring books. Do they have crayons and all that?

RUTH: They're in college, mother.

LINDA: Junior college?

RUTH: The university.

LINDA: No crayons then?

RUTH: No. No crayons. Are you all right?

LINDA: God no. Are you? Is anybody?

RUTH: *(simply stares at her ... trying)*

LINDA: *(finally)* Want some tea?

RUTH: I'd love some tea.

LINDA: It's down the hall. Oh hell, Paul's commandeering the cafeteria. There goes morning tea-time. How about some salmon patties? I snuck one out in my sock.

RUTH: How are you mother?

LINDA: What? Financial, physical or moral?

RUTH: I'll take anything.

LINDA: Good. Then I'm flush, fit, and full of it.

RUTH: You are. You are indeed, mother. You're all of those things. Do you mind. . . I mean do you really mind if I ask about you? Just inquire?

PAUL'S VOICE: Back! Back I say! This tube has your name on it, McHenry!

INTERCOM: May I have your attention? The cafeteria will be temporarily closed until further notice.

LINDA: (*shouting down the hallway*) Lay on, McDuff! I'm fine, really. I love you. I love your boys. I love the boy you married. I love raindrops on roses and thick apple strudel. And those are just a few of my favorite things. (*Ruth rises and walks to the door, her back to Linda.*) (*after a moment*) Indulge me ... please? (*nothing. Ruth continues to stand looking at the empty doorway*) I'm ... look, I'm sorry, Ruth. I'm very sorry. (*a long beat, nothing*) Sit down, Ruth. We'll talk. (*a moment, then Ruth returns and sits on Paul's bed, staring at the floor*) The boys are fine then? (*Ruth nods*) Charles? (*Ruth nods*) Good. How's his knee?

RUTH: You remembered that? It's been three years since his surgery.

LINDA: Ruth, I am old and cruel and unfeeling. I'm not senile. You told me and I worried. That's my job, I'm your mother.

RUTH: I'm sorry. It's ...

LINDA: Don't assume that because I'm unkind that I've lost my mind. You can be sane and disagreeable. They're not mutually exclusive ... just confusing.

RUTH: I pray for you, Mom.

LINDA: Thank you. How's the job?

RUTH: I said I pray for you.

LINDA: I heard you. I always hear you. And within three minutes of telling me you pray for me, you'll be asking to pray *with* me and if I allow that then before lunch you'll give me scriptures to read, then I'll be signed up for a "share group" by afternoon tea, and I'll be baptized before the tonight's baked lasagna. Believe me, I hear you.

RUTH: Is that so bad? Is it so bad that I pray for you?

LINDA: You know we're heading for another confrontation, don't you? Give me that tablet.

RUTH: (*handing her a small pad from Paul's nightstand*) What are you doing?

LINDA: I want to write this down. "To Whom it may Concern: I did not start this conversation." Can I get this notarized?



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