

THE DEARLY UNDEPARTED

A COMEDY IN TWO ACTS

By Michael Soetaert

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CHARACTERS

(15-17 Players; 5 Females, 2 Males, 7-9 Either)

PEARL HEDGEPTH -- She is an old (mid 80s) sweet lady. She was a housewife all her life. She is definitely loopy as they come. She has lived in her house for 57 years and doesn't want to leave. Her late husband, Eugene (whom she will always refer to as "Mr. Hedgepath") was an amateur carpenter; he remodeled the house to suit his tastes. Pearl promised Mr. Hedgepath that she would never move without his permission, but it's come to the point in her life where she really can't stay alone anymore, and she knows it.

LYLE WANAMAKER -- Her grandson. 20 something. He's truly a nice guy. He has his grandmother's best interest at heart. His parents were eaten by a lion at the zoo (which no one believes) while he was visiting Gramma, so he just stayed. He wants to help his grandmother go to assisted living, but since she won't leave the house without knowing her husband would approve, he arranges a "séance." He is also working with a realtor he will fall in love with. The money for the house will go to support Gramma.

UNCLE VERN POOTSKY -- Pearl's only son. 60s. He is nasty and greedy and truly only wants Pearl's supposed money, which, as far as he's concerned, is the house. Unfortunately, the house really isn't really worth anything (which is why Allison is showing it.)

CHIP FURBITZ -- Uncle Vern's lawyer. He doesn't have a clue about law (he's still in law school, where's he's been since 1987. He thinks passing the board is something that involves the freeway and a lumber truck.

ALLISON BEEDLE -- Young (20s), pretty. She's a realtor. A bad realtor. A desperate realtor. But honest . . . well, she tries. She desperately needs a sell and will do anything for it. She's also madly in love with Lyle, and has been since the 2nd grade. Lyle, however, is clueless, mostly because she's never mentioned it to him. Why bother when it's so much easier to stalk him?

ACE BANDAGE -- One of the séance guys. He's actually a moonlighting English teacher. (They're basically the same job.)

FLOYD -- The other séance guy. They have all sorts of gadgets and weird backgrounds. Still, what it comes down to is that they're Union workers and this is just another gig.

OOGA (just Ooga): She is the fortune teller that is doing the séance; moonlighting from the circus (hey, it's off season.) She has a Romania accent (if you can't do Romanian, Hungarian would be fine) that can come and go. She tries to be deep and mysterious, but can't hide the fact that she's shallow and transparent.

LOUIE CHEDARWAX -- The dead guy. A bit younger than Pearl, but not by much (say, late 70's.) In good health, aside from the fact that he's dead. Doesn't want to go back. Likes to watch TV, eat junk food, and play cards.

ILENE CHEDARWAX – Louie's wife. She's still wearing black. Don't fool yourself, she's glad that Louie's gone. I hear her, and all her kids, speaking with a Brooklyn accent.

RAYMOND CHEDARWAX – Louie's oldest son. Respectful, generally polite, but willing to defend the family honor at a moment's notice, if that. Wears a cheap suit, no tie.

ANDY CHEDARWAX – Louie's younger son. He's only interested in playing soccer. In fact, he's dressed in a soccer shirt and shorts – shin guards if you have 'em, and he has a soccer ball.

ANSON HORSELWITZ – He's a stereotypical undertaker, presumably the one who buried Louie. Black suit, reserved.

SANDY DIZINSKI – She is a reporter for the American Inquirer, which is a sleazy tabloid. All she cares about is getting a story that will sell. After all, truth is relative.

COP #1 (PETE) – He (or she) is just a cop. A regular flat foot. Both he and Bernie happened to know Louie in his previous life... or they're in on the hoax, too . . .

COP #2 (BERNIE) – Just like Cop #1. Could be a female, too.

Note: Both Raymond and Andy could be doubled for Floyd and Ace, and one or both could be played by girls with minor changes. Both cops, the Undertaker, and Chip could also be played by girls.

SETTING

One interior scene. The front room of a home. Not on your block, mind you, but the next one over.

TIME

I got about 6:30 right now, but I imagine it'll have changed by the time you read this.

ACT I: Late afternoon.

ACT II: Later that night.

ACT III: The next evening.

SET

One Set: Somewhat complicated, but it'll be fun

The stage will become the front room and dining room of Pearl Hedgepath. It is strange, to say the least. There is no front door...really, instead, there is a window UR that almost everyone will enter through. There is a coat closet DR that also opens to the outside, but it truly needs to look like a coat closet. There is another door UL that, when opened from the inside, needs to look like there's a brick wall behind it. This "wall" needs to be able to hinge open to backstage so people can secretly enter or exit through it. There is one more door LC that exits to the kitchen and the rest of the house.

The right part of the stage is the living room. There is an old TV, complete with rabbit ears, against the wall UR. A toilet is sitting in front of the TV, along with a sofa. There is a blanket draping the sofa that hides the hole that goes all the way through it. In front of the sofa there is a small, ragged area rug. There should be the ubiquitous end tables, lamps, and all the knickknacks that any old lady would have in her home. On one of the end tables there needs to be an old style rotary phone.

The left part of the stage is the dining area. It consists of a large table – big enough to seat six – and a hutch against the wall DL (to the Left of the kitchen door). The hutch should have drawers or cabinets underneath that can be opened. On the hutch, aside from all the Frou Frou, is a toaster and a coffee pot, both of which need to be at least marginally practical. A refrigerator that can be opened would be nice, too. See what you can find.

Now, go figure out how you can get all this to fit on your stage.

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ACT I

At curtain we see the front room and dining room of PEARL HEDGEPTH.

PEARL enters DR with a feather duster. SHE is wearing a brightly colored day dress, happily humming as SHE randomly dusts here and there. SHE goes to the toilet, which is in front of the TV, and dusts the cat that is sitting there. SHE then picks up the cat, which is obviously stuffed, and holds it up to her ear, as if SHE's listening to it. Then SHE says . . .

PEARL: Okay, Kitty. You can go out. But don't go running off again.

(PEARL then goes to the window UC, opens it, and throws the cat out. SHE continues to dust, humming "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," which becomes quite robust, replete with "Bum Bums" and a military stride to her step. SHE breaks into a "Ta Ta Ta Ta" just before there's a loud knock at the closet door, stopping her abruptly.)

PEARL: *(to no one in particular)* That must be the cat wanting back in.

(PEARL goes to the door and opens it. LYLE, her grandson, enters, pushing his way through the various coats that are hanging in the "closet;" HE is carrying the cat.)

PEARL: Oh, my, Kitty! You've never dragged in anything this big before.

LYLE: *(kissing her on the cheek)* Good morning, Grandmother. How's my favorite octogenarian?

PEARL: *(taking the cat)* Oh, Kitty? He's fine. *(SHE pitches the cat behind the sofa.)*

(Enter UNCLE VERN through the "closet," pushing past LYLE.)

UNCLE VERN: Ah ha! I knew I'd find you here, Lyle!

LYLE: Where else would I be? I live here. Which reminds me, Gramma, when are you going to give me my own key?

PEARL: I'm waiting for you to get married, dear. Then you can come back and visit me without having to knock.

UNCLE VERN: Don't try changing the subject!

LYLE: What subject, Uncle Vern?

UNCLE VERN: See! There you go! Trying to do it again! Just because we're related doesn't mean we're family. Yeah, I know what you're up to, trying to scam my mother out of her money.

PEARL: *(continuing to dust; to UNCLE VERN)* Oh, now, Vern. Don't be all upset. You know you're still my favorite son.

UNCLE VERN: I'm your only son! But I was never your favorite child. You always liked Dahlia better than me.

PEARL: Well, dear, she did get eaten by a lion. Poor dear. Along with poor Lyles' father, too. Left the poor boy an orphan. *(SHE pats LYLE's cheek.)* That sort of thing doesn't happen every day, you know. *(SHE continues dusting.)*

UNCLE VERN: What's so special about getting eaten by a lion?

PEARL: *(thinks for a beat)* Well, I'm not really sure. But who else do you know who's been eaten by a lion?

UNCLE VERN: *(to LYLE)* Oh! Don't think that I'm not on to you! I know your plan! You're wanting to ship my mother off to the old folks' home just so you can sell her house and keep all the money for yourself. Well, buster, the gigs up!

LYLE: Don't you mean "jig?"

UNCLE VERN: Not at all. I mean "gig." *(HE holds up a frog gig.)* I'm off to get some frogs. And when I get back, I expect to find you gone!

LYLE: But I live here!

UNCLE VERN: That doesn't mean you can't be gone! Good day! *(a thoughtful pause)* No, goodbye! *(to PEARL, very sweetly)* Bye, mom. Can I get you anything while I'm out?

PEARL: Just some cat food.

UNCLE VERN: But mom . . . none of your cats are . . . alive.

PEARL: I know, dear.

UNCLE VERN: Oh.

(UNCLE VERN turns to leave, but sticks his head back inside to snarl at LYLE, then HE'S gone. PEARL continues to dust the house. From behind the sofa SHE picks up the cat and sits it on the sofa.)

LYLE: Gramma, can you sit down for a moment?

PEARL: Sure, dear.

(PEARL immediately sits down behind the sofa, out of sight.)

LYLE: No, Gramma. I was wanting you to sit on the sofa.

PEARL: *(standing)* Okay!

(PEARL crosses to the front of the sofa where SHE sits -- on the cat. SHE makes an "Oh!" sound, stands, picks up the cat, and tosses it once again behind the sofa, then sits back down. LYLE sits in the chair across from PEARL and takes her hand.)

LYLE: Gramma, you know that I love you, right?

PEARL: Oh, yes, dear. And I love you, too.

LYLE: And you know that I'd never do anything to . . . to take advantage of you.

PEARL: And I wouldn't take advantage of you, too.

LYLE: Thank you, Gramma. But it's just that . . . well . . . it's just that . . . well, it's not good for you to be living on your own so much anymore.

PEARL: But I'm not living on my own. I have you to take care of me. *(as an after thought)* And I have my cats.

LYLE: But you know that I really can't take care of you anymore, either, what with my job at the radio station.

PEARL: Yes. You're the morning man. *(Instantly, totally changing character to that of an over-the-top radio personality)* It's time to smile with Lyle for the morning mile here at KBOR, the station that is less talk and more rock. That's right, less talk . . . *(pretending to echo)* . . . talk . . . talk . . . talk . . . And more rock! And now it's time to rock! But first, a word from our sponsor!

LYLE: That's very good, Gramma.

PEARL: (*back to normal, at least for her*) Oh, I'm a fan. (*a pensive beat*) You know, I've often wondered how you can sound so cool on the air and look like such a dweeb in real life.

LYLE: (*ignoring her comment*) Well, Gramma, you know we've talked about this . . .

PEARL: What? We've talked about you looking like a dweeb? I don't believe we have. But then again, there's a lot of things I don't believe that very well may be true.

LYLE: No, Gramma . . . remember?

PEARL: (*SHE takes a moment to concentrate, but then gives up*) Obviously not.

LYLE: We decided that maybe it would be best if you were to move some place . . . well . . . more stable. Some place where there would be people to look after you. Some place where there would be people more your age. People who might have the same interests.

PEARL: What? There would be people who like to knit?

LYLE: I'm certain of it.

PEARL: That would be wonderful. We could knit body amour together.

LYLE: (*trying to placate her*) Yes. Yes, you could. But you do understand that we need to sell your house.

PEARL: (*suddenly concerned*) But I don't see why you couldn't just stay here.

LYLE: We've gone over this before, Grams. First of all, you'll need the money to live on. And . . . second of all . . . well, I just thought I'd like to live in a more . . . conventional house.

PEARL: Oh? What's wrong with this house?

LYLE: There's a toilet in the front room.

PEARL: You know how Mr. Hedgepath, your dear grandfather, never wanted to miss any of his shows . . .

LYLE: (*getting up and crossing to the door US, which HE opens; there is a brick wall behind the door*) He made a door going nowhere.

PEARL: That's because he really didn't have anywhere to go . . .

LYLE: (*crossing to the front door*) And the front door is disguised on the outside to look like a sump pump outlet.

PEARL: That was to keep people away . . .

LYLE: Well, I guess that's not so bad after all. But to get out you have to go through the coat closet.

PEARL: You don't have to go out of your way to get your coat.

LYLE: That's all very good. But most people don't build houses like this.

PEARL: Your grandfather was ahead of his time.

LYLE: But Gramma, don't you see?

PEARL: (*taking off her glasses and rubbing them*) That's why I wear glasses, dear. (*SHE puts them back on again.*)

LYLE: Do you remember Mary Ann Joblonski, Gramma?

PEARL: That nice girl that you used to date in high school? The one with the hairy mole on the back of her hand? Oh, yes, I remember her. Whatever happened to her?

LYLE: I brought her home, Gramma. I managed to date her longer than any of the girls I went out with. But sooner or later, they would all insist on meeting my parents.

PEARL: Didn't they know they'd been eaten by lions?

LYLE: Of course they did. That's why they wanted to meet you and Grampa. But one look at our house, and they were gone.

PEARL: I'm not sure, but I think I'm confused.

LYLE: They were certain that insanity ran in the family.

PEARL: Oh, but it does.

LYLE: I know that. But I couldn't hide it anymore once they came here.

PEARL: And they can tell all that by just looking at our house?

LYLE: If that were all, I might've worked around it. Do you remember Darla Anderson? When Grampa demonstrated his Civil War re-enactment?

PEARL: What's so strange about that? Lots of people pretend to keep fighting wars.

LYLE: He fired a cannon at her! *(LYLE removes a quilt from the back of the couch, revealing a hole clean through it.)*

PEARL: I don't know what all the fuss is about. He missed.

LYLE: *(terse, trying to hold temper)* Young ladies are not accustomed to being fired upon with artillery in the sitting room. It tends to drive them away.

PEARL: Well thankfully your grandfather doesn't do that anymore.

LYLE: It's only because he's dead!

PEARL: Now, dear, don't be judgmental. Besides, now that your grandfather's gone, I don't see why you can't bring young ladies home. What about that Mary Ann girl? Maybe she'd come back over.

LYLE: Don't you remember, Gramma? We're not dating anymore.

PEARL: Oh? When did you two break up?

LYLE: Nine years ago.

PEARL: Maybe the two of you can get back together.

LYLE: Gramma . . . she's married.

PEARL: That's no reason not to get back with her.

LYLE: She has children.

PEARL: Children are nice.

LYLE: She lives in Abu Dhabi.

PEARL: You always liked sand.

LYLE: No, Gramma. We're done. We've been done for a long time.

PEARL: Well . . . then maybe you can meet somebody else.

LYLE: I wish I could. But I would still want to bring them home . . . hopefully . . . eventually.

PEARL: I just don't see why you couldn't bring them home to this house.

LYLE: For starters, you have nine cats . . .

PEARL: Ten.

LYLE: What difference does it make? They're all dead! *(HE picks up one for emphasis.)*

PEARL: I find they're easier to take care of that way.

LYLE: And you knit body armor . . .

PEARL: The poor dears do so need it.

LYLE: You can't knit body armor!

PEARL: I thought so, too, but I keep sending it to the government, and they keep sending me checks.

LYLE: That's your social security check.

PEARL: Oh, no. *(holding up two checks for emphasis)* I get a check from the Department of the Defense every month and my Social Security check. Isn't it wonderful to live in America?

LYLE: Look, Gramma. I love you. But I'm 26 years old. It's time I had a place of my own.

PEARL: Well, if that's all it is, then why don't you go find yourself a nice apartment to live in? What about that place over by Dirk's Dry Cleaners? You know? They rent by the hour and the day. That way, if you changed your mind, you wouldn't have any trouble leaving.

LYLE: I know that I could move out on my own, Gramma, but that still doesn't solve the problem with you. You need someone to look after you. You need to be living somewhere where . . . where you won't get in trouble.

PEARL: But we got rid of Mr. Hedgepath's cannon.

LYLE: That's not what I'm talking about.

PEARL: But I don't want to go. I love my house. I want to live here until I die. Longer, if possible. I always dreamed I'd still be living here when you got married . . . finally. And we could have the reception right here in this room.

LYLE: (*critically looking around*) She'd have to be some woman.

PEARL: That was always a hope of mine, too.

LYLE: (*confused*) What?

PEARL: That she'd be a woman. And I always dreamed that some day I'd see your children playing right here on this rug.

LYLE: (*noticing that it's a rather small rug*) On this rug?

PEARL: We could always get a bigger rug when they get bigger. But don't you see? That's why I can't go.

LYLE: Just so children I may never have might play on this rug?

PEARL: Well, yes.

LYLE: What if I never have children?

PEARL: I'm willing to wait.

LYLE: Oh, Gramma. You know I love you. And I would love for you to be able to live in your home forever. But you just can't. Not by yourself. And I can't live with you here any longer.

PEARL: It's just that I don't want to be sent to that place.

LYLE: What place was that, Gramma?

PEARL: I'm not picky.

LYLE: But Gramma, don't you remember? You said you liked Sunset Towers.

PEARL: Sunset Towers? Wasn't that the place that didn't have any windows?

LYLE: Only on the north side. Don't you remember? The other sides faced the landfill and the cemetery.

PEARL: I always get confused which is which.

LYLE: Oh, Gramma, I think you'd like Sunset Towers.

PEARL: That's the same thing they told me about my colostomy.

LYLE: There's a wonderful beauty parlor right next door where you could get your hair done. Every day if you wanted. They've got karaoke and sing-alongs just about every night. And every Tuesday and Thursday there's Bingo.

PEARL: Bingo?

LYLE: (*seeing hope*) Yes.

PEARL: Wasn't he a dog? Because I don't think my cats would like a dog.

LYLE: Gramma, your cats are all dead.

PEARL: That doesn't mean they still wouldn't like him.

LYLE: No, Gramma. No. Bingo is a game. You know . . . Bingo?

PEARL: (*a glimmer of recognition*) Oh, yes! They give you little cards and you cover it with little numbers, and when you get all of them in a row, you get to shout (*jumping up, very loudly*) Bingo! And the numbers go everywhere. And then you get a prize.

LYLE: Yes!

PEARL: (*sitting confidentially*) It's really a stupid game. Except for the yelling part. That's a lot of fun. Can I do it again?

LYLE: Why don't you wait?

PEARL: (*jumping and shouting*) Bingo!

LYLE: I thought you were going to wait.

PEARL: (*sitting*) No. You thought I was going to wait. At my age, it seems a bit silly to wait for anything, don't you think?

LYLE: You wouldn't have to wait if you moved to Sunset Towers.

PEARL: I'd have to wait for Tuesdays and Thursdays.

LYLE: But they have other things to do while you're waiting. Fridays are Taco days. *(enticingly)* Tacos every Friday, Gramma. You love Tacos . . . And there's a big screen TV in the TV room.

PEARL: Why would I want a big screen TV? *(confidentially)* You know, it doesn't get any better no matter how big it is.

LYLE: But Gramma . . . You'll like it there. It's a nice place.

PEARL: Crap doodle.

LYLE: Excuse me?

PEARL: You heard me. I didn't stutter . . . Did I? I said, "Crap doodle."

LYLE: I understood what you said. I just have no idea what you mean.

PEARL: What? Crap doodle? It's crap doodle. Blarney. Balderdash. Mashooka. Malarkey. You know, bulls . . .

LYLE: *(cutting in – quickly)* I get it. I get it.

PEARL: Take it from me. Never trust someone who wants you to go somewhere they have never been themselves.

LYLE: Oh, but I've been there. It's a really nice place.

PEARL: I know you've been there, dear. But you're not the one staying. *(taking his hand)* Oh, I'm sorry, Lyle. I don't want to seem ungrateful. I know you're trying your best. But sitting in a room full of old people with gas while watching Wheel of Fortune is not how I was really wanting to spend the final years of my life. And besides, if I were to move, who would take care of my cats?

LYLE: Gramma . . . your cats are all dead.

PEARL: That doesn't mean they don't need to be taken care of.

(There is a sudden tapping on the window UR.)

That must be the cat, now. *(SHE crosses and opens the curtains.)* Why, it's a young lady. *(SHE opens the window.)* She didn't put you up to this, did she?

ALLISON: *(from outside)* I'm sorry, who?

PEARL: The cat. She didn't put you up to knocking on the window did she? She's getting so lazy in her old age.

LYLE: *(crossing over to the window)* That must be the realtor. *(leaning out the window, extending his hand)* Hi. I'm Lyle Wanamaker.

ALLISON: *(warmly takes his hand; read on. It'll make sense.)* I'm sorry, but I couldn't find a door.

LYLE: That's because it's hidden.

ALLISON: Oh. Could you help me find it?

LYLE: It would probably be easier to just come through the window.

(LYLE boosts her through, ALLISON dusts herself off and once again offers him her hand, which HE won't take, but only because he'll recognize her, but we have to get through her next line, first.)

ALLISON: Hi. I'm . . .

LYLE: *(surprised)* You're Allison Beedle. I remember you. Second grade. You got in a fist fight with the Meastros Brothers on the playground. And then you told Miss Beeblebaum to blow it out her . . .

ALLISON: That's been a long time ago . . .

LYLE: You made playground history that day. I remember it like it was the second grade!

(LYLE offers his hand, which SHE will take and hold a bit too long, but it'll make sense somewhere in Act 2. But we're not there, yet.)

Wow! Well how the heck are you?

ALLISON: I'm fine.

(THEY will hold each other's hands for way too long, just staring lovingly at each other, oblivious to anything else in the world.)

PEARL: *(after patiently, and enjoyably, watching)* Oh, how exciting. Love at first sight.

LYLE: *(suddenly self-conscious, letting go of ALLISON's hands)* Oh, Gramma. Don't embarrass the young lady.

ALLISON: *(taking back his hands)* Who's embarrassed?

LYLE: *(manages to free one hand so he can point to ALLISON, to PEARL, who has been happily watching the previous exchange)* Gramma, this is Allison.

PEARL: I know. I heard. I was right here.

LYLE: Allison is the girl . . . woman . . . who's . . . *(HE once more gets caught up in her eyes.)*

ALLISON: *(after a beat: letting go of LYLE's hands and taking PEARL's in hers; while SHE shakes PEARL's hand)* I'm going to help you sell your house.

PEARL: *(to LYLE)* Oh. I thought you were going to sell it yourself so you . . . *(changing her voice to try and sound like LYLE, complete with hand gestures)* . . . wouldn't have to give those money sucking shysters one darn penny!"

LYLE: *(embarrassed)* It wasn't quite that bad, Gramma.

PEARL: Oh, no, I remember. *(to ALLISON)* I really have a good memory, you know. I remember everything that I don't forget.

LYLE: *(trying to move on; almost forgetting what HE was going to say... hey, it's love at first sight, after all)* Allison called me, only I didn't know it was Allison. I mean, I knew it was Allison, but not the Allison I knew. Well . . . Oh, never mind. Anyway, Allison called me and said she saw my "For Sale" sign in the front yard, and she convinced me that she could sell our house easier, faster, and cheaper than I could myself.

PEARL: Don't you remember that I told you the very same thing?

LYLE: *(puzzled)* No . . .

PEARL: Well, I wished I had.

(PEARL wanders off, taking up dusting, and eventually will drift off stage.)

LYLE: *(to ALLISON)* Where should we get started?

ALLISON: *(once more taking LYLE's hand)* How do you start something you never want to end?

LYLE: *(untangling himself from ALLISON: after all, SHE is moving a bit too fast. You know what your mother warned you about fast women.)* I was thinking about the house.

ALLISON: Oh! The house. What we need to do first is to get ready for the séance.

LYLE: Excuse me?

ALLISON: I'm sorry, was it your turn to talk?

LYLE: No. The "Excuse me" was more of a polite way to say "What?"

ALLISON: What what?

LYLE: What séance?

ALLISON: Oh! That's the one we're having here this evening so Mr. Hedgepath can give Pearl permission to sell the house.

LYLE: What?

ALLISON: (*patiently*) We're having a séance here this evening so your grandfather can give your grandmother permission to sell the house.

LYLE: How do you know about all of that?

ALLISON: I thought everybody knew about séances.

LYLE: No! I mean, how do you know about my grandfather not wanting my grandmother to sell the house?

ALLISON: Research. It's what you pay a realtor to do.

LYLE: But I just agreed to hire you today!

ALLISON: You don't pay realtors to sit around, either.

LYLE: I'm not sure a séance is a good idea . . .

ALLISON: Trust me. These guys are good. No one's ever died . . . yet. (*noticing that PEARL has wandered off; aside*) And no one's ever come back for that matter. Confidentially, the whole thing's a scam. They come in, smoke and mirrors, pretend to be your grandfather, say some things to make Gramma happy, tell her what we want her to hear, and then they go away. Cheaply.

LYLE: I don't know. I'd really like to think about this first.

ALLISON: This is real estate. Who has time to think? Besides, tonight's the only night for the next three weeks that we could get Ooga.

LYLE: Ooga?

ALLISON: She's in town with the circus. She's an authentic . . . Ooga. Crystal ball. Slavic accent. She won't eat too much and she promises not to stay.

LYLE: I just wish I had more time to think about it.

(*There's a knocking at the window.*)

ALLISON: That must be them. (*crosses to the window and opens it*)

ACE: (*leaning in*) Are we early?

ALLISON: Yes.

ACE: Good. (*yelling off set*) OK, Floyd. This is the place. Just back the truck up right here. Hey! Watch out for the . . . Never mind.

(ACE pulls himself through the window offering his hand to LYLE.)

ACE: How ya do? I'm Ace.

LYLE: Ace?

ACE: Yeah. Ace. My parents wanted to give me a name with distinction. A name people would remember. Carl would've been just fine with me, but who's to doubt the wisdom of their parents?

LYLE: So they named you Ace? Like the rock star?

ACE: No. Like the bandage. That's my name. Ace Bandage.

LYLE: You're kidding.

ACE: Should I be?

LYLE: With a name like Ace Bandage, I'd hope so.

ACE: Well . . . it's not my real name. It's my stage name.

LYLE: Oh. You're on the stage?

ACE: No.

LYLE: Oh. Um . . . Oh . . . So . . . what was your real name?

ACE: I don't remember.

LYLE: How can you not remember your name?

ACE: If you had my name, you wouldn't want to remember it, either.

LYLE: Oh, c'mon. It can't be that bad. I mean, it can't be worse than Ace Bandage . . . can it?

ACE: Who said Ace Bandage is a bad name?

LYLE: Well . . . um . . . So tell me, what was your real name?

ACE: Promise not to laugh?

LYLE: Ever?

ACE: What?

LYLE: I mean, I don't think I want to promise not to laugh forever, you know. That's a long time.

ACE: No. Just now.

LYLE: Oh. Okay.

ACE: My real name was Wassoon.

LYLE: Wassoon. That's it?

ACE: No. It was Wassoon Yousef Nevil Vroont.

LYLE: I have to admit, that's a doosey.

ACE: My mother liked it.

LYLE: Oh . . .

ACE: But mom wasn't what most people would call . . . um . . . sane.

LYLE: There seems to be a lot of that going around. What about your father? Didn't he have a say in your name?

ACE: My dad wanted me to be a priest. He thought the name was perfect.

LYLE: How does . . . that name make you a priest?

ACE: Well, Dad figured once you get beyond that celibacy thing, the rest is easy.

LYLE: So, I'm guessing it's a family name.

ACE: Of course it's a family name. Who the heck you think named me? The neighbors?

LYLE: My neighbor named me.

ACE: Why were you named by the neighbor?

LYLE: I don't know. And whenever I asked my mother, she always just said, "Never mind."

FLOYD: *(sticking his head in the window)* Hey! You gonna sit in there and gab all day or are ya gonna help me with this junk?

(FLOYD starts handing stuff through the window, which ACE will take and start setting up, starting with a card table, and progressing through such things as a disco ball, loud speakers, and a fog machine. While THEY're doing this, LYLE looks on helplessly.)

ACE: *(to FLOYD as HE hands in a box with several wires hanging out of it)* Hey! Careful! We don't want nothin' blowin' up before we're ready . . . again.

LYLE: What!

ACE: Nothin' to worry about. It's a flash pot. It's perfectly safe until it blows up. And it's mostly safe even then.

LYLE: *(to ACE)* Not! No explosions!

ACE: Oh, why not? I love to blow things up. Confidentially, it's why I took an evening job.

LYLE: Oh?

ACE: Yeah, this gig is just part time. I teach high school English during the day.

LYLE: Wow. I bet this is quite a change.

ACE: Naw, not really. The pay stinks. No one truly believes I do anything important. And I never really bring anybody back from the dead.

LYLE: So why do you do it?

ACE: Why, the prestige, of course. That, and it's about all you can do with a degree in English Literature.

LYLE: Oh.

ACE: The trouble with being a teacher, though, is you rarely get to blow anything up, and when you do, you usually get in trouble for it. So what say ya? Let's blow somethin' up.

LYLE: No! We're not blowing up anything.

ACE: Ah, man. Why not? Don't you know? That's what people pay to see.

LYLE: I don't care. The answer is no.

ACE: It's safe. Usually. It's just the very smallest of explosions . . . a little smoke . . . barely any flames to speak of.

LYLE: No. You'll just have to do without. I want to sell the house. Not burn it down.

ACE: Aww . . . you're no fun.

(ACE sets the flash pot on the floor just as FLOYD hands in the "crystal ball.")

LYLE: What the heck is that?

ACE: Ain't ya ever seen a crystal ball?

LYLE: I've never seen a crystal ball that needed to be plugged in.

ACE: You've never been to a séance with Ooga. This crystal ball is cable ready. It gets better reception than satellite, and more spirits than I used to with rabbit ears. *(pulls out an old TV antennae)* And nobody complains about cruelty to rabbits. *(pulls out a rabbit)*

LYLE: *(on closer inspection)* That's not a crystal ball! It's a disco ball! You can't use a disco ball to summon spirits!

ACE: An' what makes you the expert?

ALLISON: *(who has been helping arrange things)* You've got to trust them, dear. They know what they're doing.

LYLE: Dear?

(ALLISON will pretend not to hear him.)

PEARL: *(entering)* Yes? Did you call? *(noticing all the commotion)* Oh, my. Do the cats know we have company?

ALLISON: *(to PEARL)* Mrs. Hedgepath, these men are going to help you sell your house.

PEARL: Well how nice. But they're going to a lot of trouble for nothing.

ALLISON: Why is that?

PEARL: My late husband, Mr. Hedgepath, built this house, one piece at a time. He was so proud of it. And he made me promise that I would never leave it.

ALLISON: I know. But maybe if we asked him he would say that it's okay for you to move.

PEARL: That's a wonderful idea. But isn't he dead?

LYLE: Yes, Gramma. He died.

PEARL: *(puzzled -- more than usual)* Oh. Well . . . do you think he'll mind if we call?

ALLISON: Actually, Mrs. Hedgepath, we can't call your husband. Not on a telephone. That wouldn't work. But there is a way that we can call him. We're going to have a séance.

PEARL: And you think that will work?

ALLISON: *(aside)* Oh . . . I can pretty much guarantee it.

(ALLISON crosses to the front door and swings it open. Enter OOGA with a flourish. SHE is the total stereotype: Flowing dress, turban, earrings . . . you get the idea. SHE will walk around stopping here and there during the followings lines, always with over-the-top theatrics.)

OOGA: *(shushing no one in particular)* Shhhh! I feel a presence! *(SHE walks over to LYLE and circles him a few times.)* You. You are the grandson.

PEARL: Oh. She's good!

OOGA: *(aside; to LYLE)* I accept Visa, MasterCard, and cash. No checks.

PEARL: Oh! She's really good!

OOGA: *(moving over to PEARL; after theatrics of your choice)* And you! You are the one they call . . . Pearl. It is you who wish to speak to . . . the other side!

PEARL: I'd rather speak with my husband.

OOGA: Silence! We don't want to disturb the spirits.

ACE: *(aside; while taking a drink)* Maybe you don't, but I'm all in favor of it.

OOGA: *(to no one in particular)* I am seer of unknown. Knower of unseen. I am Ooga!

PEARL: *(giggling)* Oh! How exciting!

LYLE: Ooga?

OOGA: Yah, Ooga. *(spelling)* O-O-G-A. In my country, it cost more to have more name. My family very poor; could only afford 3 letters.

LYLE: But doesn't Ooga have four letters?

OOGA: Yes, but the O's were 2 for 1. It was a Tuesday, you know.

(Enter UNCLE VERN, pushing his way through EVERYONE.)

UNCLE VERN: And just what, may I ask, is going on here?

OOGA: *(in terror)* Ah! We have accidentally summoned a minion from hell!

PEARL: No. That's not a minion. That's Vern.

UNCLE VERN: I demand these people get out of my house.

LYLE: It's not your house.

UNCLE VERN: It will be!

LYLE: Well, it's not! And you can't barge in and order people out of it. Besides, you don't even know why they're here.

UNCLE VERN: It doesn't matter! I want them gone!

OOGA: See! I was right first time.

UNCLE VERN: And who the heck are you?

OOGA: *(aloof)* I? I am Ooga, seer of the unknown, knower of the unseen.

UNCLE VERN: *(figuring out what's going on)* It's a séance! You're having a séance!

OOGA: Ya! That is so! *(aside)* But I got here first.

UNCLE VERN: You've got to be kidding me!

OOGA: No. They only pay for standard séance. Kidding extra.

PEARL: We're going to talk to Mr. Hedgepath, your father, dear.

UNCLE VERN: What on earth for? *(putting it together)* Wait a minute! Wait a minute!

(turning on LYLE) You're trying to trick Mother into selling my house, aren't you! This is all your idea!

ALLISON: *(stepping forward)* Well, actually it's mine.

UNCLE VERN: And who the heck are you?

LYLE: Hey! Watch yourself! You're talking to a lady!

UNCLE VERN: You've got to be kidding me?

LYLE: No, I'm not. *(to ALLISON; aside)* I'm not, am I.

ALLISON: Let's have coffee first. I'll let you decide.

UNCLE VERN: Well I'm not going to stand around and allow this to happen!

PEARL: Maybe one of the nice boys could get you a chair from the bedroom. Then you wouldn't have to stand.

ACE: *(to PEARL, politely)* Thank you, ma'am. *(to UNCLE VERN, nasty)* We ain't goin' nowhere until after our break.

UNCLE VERN: *(for the first time noticing ACE and FLOYD, who have taken a spot off to the side and are sharing a thermos)* And who the heck are they?

ACE: I'm Ace, an' that's Floyd.

(FLOYD nods.)

He don't say much.

(FLOYD just shrugs.)

UNCLE VERN: Well, I want both of you out of here! Now!

ACE: *(not upset in the least; checking his watch)* Sorry. No can do.

UNCLE VERN: The heck you say!

(FLOYD nods in agreement.)

Well, I'm telling you to get out!

ACE: Sorry. Union break.

UNCLE VERN: *(still mad, but a bit cautious)* What?

ACE: Union break. Local 172.

UNCLE VERN: What kind of Union would a séance . . . person . . . be in?

ACE: Her? *(motions toward OOGA)* Beats me.

OOGA: Local 91. Sisterhood of Seers, Sayers, and See 'N' Say makers.

ACE: Floyd an' me, though, we're Teamsters. Like I said, Local 172.

UNCLE VERN: *(definitely cautious)* Teamsters, huh?

ACE: Nothin' moves in this town what without a Teamster movin' it, an' that goes for crystal balls, too.

UNCLE VERN: I'm sorry. Um . . . I didn't realize. I don't want any Union trouble . . .

ACE: Hey. It's alright. Now here's the deal. We've got this gig until 7:30. So ya might as well be comfortable. I mean, you can stay or you can go, makes no difference to me, but we ain't goin' nowhere until 7:30. Capesch?

PEARL: *(to VERN)* Now dear, please. All these people have put together a fun evening for us, so we might as well enjoy it. Besides, it's better than what's on TV.

UNCLE VERN: Oh, Good Grief!

(UNCLE VERN folds his arms in disgust and stands out of the way down from ACE and FLOYD. The lights overhead dim and the ball lights up – and we do mean lights up. Hey, it is a disco ball.)

OOGA: *(With her arms outspread: SHE is definitely in the acting mode.)* Spirits Awaken!

(The lights flicker on and off.)

UNCLE VERN: *(to ACE)* Hey! I saw you do that!

ACE: Do what? You got nothin' on me.

OOGA: I feel a presence! They are about!

UNCLE VERN: Oh, good grief!

OOGA: Silence! I must have total concentration to contact the other side!

UNCLE VERN: Please!

OOGA: Spirits from the Nether World, I summon you. Olly! Olly! All's in free! Come out, come out, wherever you are!

(There is a sudden flash and explosion, followed by a few screams, and then total darkness.)

PEARL: *(while it's still dark)* Yup. That would be Mr. Hedgepath.

(While the lights are off, LOUIE will enter through the door to nowhere. It would be easy to do; just create a "door" that hinges off stage. When the lights come back up – now would be good – LOUIE will be standing next to the door unnoticed, just taking in the surroundings. After a few lines, HE will make his way to the kitchen and start rummaging through the cabinets, and eventually the refrigerator.)

PEARL: Weeee! That was fun! Can we do it again?

OOGA: *(inspecting her "crystal ball;" aside to ACE)* Are you sure we plugged this thing in to a 110 outlet?

(ACE, who is just as surprised as EVERYONE else, shrugs in wonder.)

LYLE: *(furious; trying to maintain a whisper; to ACE)* I thought you said you weren't going to blow anything up?

ACE: I did.

LYLE: I know you did!

ACE: No. I didn't.

LYLE: But you just said that you did!

ACE: I know I did. But I meant that I didn't.

LYLE: What?

ACE: You wanna start over?

LYLE: Good idea. You said you weren't going to blow anything up.

ACE: And I didn't blow anything up.

LYLE: Then what was that?

FLOYD: Hey, it wasn't me. *(holds up flash pot by the cord to prove innocence)* I don't know what the heck that was.

UNCLE VERN: *(noticing LOUIE, who has just opened the refrigerator)* Who the heck are you?

LOUIE: *(tipping a cap HE's not wearing)* I'm Louie. *(returning to the refrigerator)*

ACE: He ain't one of ours.

LOUIE: *(still rummaging through the refrigerator)* Prune juice? *(shrugging his shoulders)* It'll have to do. *(HE takes the can and closes the refrigerator door.)*

UNCLE VERN: Who are you?

LOUIE: Like I said, I'm Louie.

UNCLE VERN: What are you doing in my house?

LYLE: It's not your house!

UNCLE VERN: *(to LYLE)* It will be! *(to LOUIE)* Why are you here?

LOUIE: This is where the door led.

UNCLE VERN: What?

LOUIE: Ya see, there I was, sitting in Heaven . . .

UNCLE VERN: What? You were in Heaven?

LOUIE: I suppose. We all called it that. There was no flames or pitchforks. Then again, there was no milk and honey, and no harps and halos, either. But generally, it was OK.

'Specially since I never cared much for harp music, if you know what I mean. So there I was, waitin' for Ernie to finish dealing, and this door appears right there. I mean, right

there. So I says, "Fellas, deal me out." I mean, it's not every day you see a door just appear, even in Heaven. So I go through it, and here I am. That's the long and the short of it.

(LOUIE will move over toward the TV during the following lines.)

LYLE: You were . . . where? Where were you?

LOUIE: *(HE notices the toilet, opens the lid and checks inside before closing it.)* Heaven. The afterlife. You tell me.

OOGA: *(more amazed than anyone else)* He is from the other side!

LOUIE: *(with a shrug HE sits on the toilet and starts looking through the TV Guide)* Yup. Ya pretty much hit it on the head.

UNCLE VERN: *(stepping forward)* You've got to be kidding me!

LOUIE: *(after perusing the TV Guide for a few minutes)* What? No baseball? What the good's a TV without baseball?

UNCLE VERN: You can't be here!

LOUIE: *(getting up)* Why not?

UNCLE VERN: Because you're an intruder! That's why not! And I'm calling the police!
(takes out his cell phone and starts to dial the police)

LOUIE: *(with a good natured shrug)* Suit yourself.

UNCLE VERN: *(in phone, with appropriate pauses)* Hello, police? Yes. We have an intruder. Where? In my house, of course! Oh . . . 714 S. Elm . . . Is he dangerous? Of course he's dangerous! He's crazy! He thinks he's from the other world! No! I don't know what other world! How many other worlds are there? Just send some cops. *(HE hangs up; to LOUIE)* Ha! You're in for it now, buster. The cops are on their way!

LOUIE: *(HE gets up, shrugs, and moves over to the table where EVERYBODY is still sitting.)* So, what gives?

OOGA: We were having séance.

LOUIE: So, is it over?

OOGA: I am not certain.

LOUIE: *(taking a seat and pulling out a deck of cards)* Well, let me know if you want to get started up again, but until then, since you're all here anyway, anybody wanna play some cards?

PEARL: Do you know Crazy Cats?

LOUIE: I'm not familiar with that one, no.

PEARL: It's just like Crazy Eights, only you play with cats, and you don't use cards.

LOUIE: I think I'll stick to rummy.

PEARL: No, thank you. I don't drink.

LYLE: *(HE has been staring at LOUIE in amazement)* You're . . . you're really not from the . . . the other side . . . are you?

LOUIE: *(shuffling)* What difference does it make? I'm here now, so let's play some cards.

LYLE: *(to ALLISON; in a terse whisper)* Is this all part of your plan?

ALLISON: *(returning the terse whisper)* No! I swear! I've never seen this man before.

LYLE: He can't be for real!

ALLISON: Then what's he doing here?

LOUIE: *(starting to deal cards that no one else will pick up)* Playin' cards? Who's in?

(There's a knocking at the window.)

UNCLE VERN: Ha! The gig's up! The police are here! *(to LOUIE)* I'd run if I were you, buster!

LOUIE: (*admiring his hand*) A run or three of a kind, both will play.

(*UNCLE VERN crosses to the window and opens it. The POLICE climb in as if it is a perfectly ordinary thing to do.*)

COP #1: You the guy that called about an intruder?

UNCLE VERN: (*proud of himself*) Yes I am. (*pointing to LOUIE*) And there he is!

COP #2: He don't look very dangerous to me.

(*COP #1 takes a closer look at LOUIE.*)

COP #1: Say, that ain't no intruder. That's Louie Chedarwax!

LOUIE: Hey! How ya doin'? (*standing up and warmly shaking their hands*) Pete, Bernie. It's sure is good to see you two guys.

UNCLE VERN: You've got to be kidding me! You know him?

COP #1 (AKA PETE): Yeah, that's Louie!

COP #2 (AKA BERNIE): Louie Chedarwax? Well I'll be darned. When was the last time we saw Louie, Pete?

COP #1: (*suddenly realizing*) It was at his funeral! (*scared*) Oh, you can't be here, Louie! You's dead!

COP #2: (*crossing himself*) He's come back to haunt us!

COP #1: (*rational; to COP #2*) Wait a minute! Louie? Haunt us? Naw. Louie would never haunt nobody. (*nervous once again*) Would ya, Louie? Tell me, Louie, why are you here?

LOUIE: Beats me. Like I was tellin' these folks, I was mindin' my own business on the other side when I see this door . . .

LYLE: We were havin' a séance . . .

PEARL: We were trying to speak with my late husband, Mr. Hedgepath . . .

OOGA: (*nervously moving toward the door*) I was just leaving . . .

UNCLE VERN: Just you hold on there, sister! Nobody goes until I say so!

COP #2: Hey! That's my line.

UNCLE VERN: Sorry.

LOUIE: You all through? So I see this door, an' I'm thinkin' to myself, "Self, why the heck not?" An' I go through it. Next thing I know, here I am.

COP #1: And this gentleman called the police on you?

UNCLE VERN: You bet I did!

COP #1: (*to UNCLE VERN*) I can't believe you called the police on Louie. Why . . . I ought to run you in instead.

UNCLE VERN: What?!

LOUIE: Ah, don't get sore at him fellas. If he hadn't a called ya, we never would a got to see each other. An' that's a nice thing, don' cha think?

COP #2: That's the Louie I always knew.

COP #1: (*after a pause*) Say, Louie, I wanna thank ya for thinkin' of your pals an' invitin' us to your funeral. I just wanted you to know that we all had a wonderful time. The food was top rate, and you remembered I liked pastrami. Now that's class. I just hope we can all go out as well as you did, Louie. Here's to you.

(*Both COPS tip their caps.*)

LOUIE: Hey, you boys wanna stay and shoot some cards?

COP #1: Ah, I'd love to . . . but we got two more hours of our shift left. And then I got to get home to the wife.

LOUIE: (*good natured*) She still got you on a tight leash?

COP #1: Better than no leash at all.

LOUIE: Here's to good women . . . both of them! (*HE takes a drink of his prune juice.*)

(*The COPS exit through the window.*)

UNCLE VERN: (*crossing to LYLE*) This is all some plan of yours, ain't it?

LYLE: What?

UNCLE VERN: I don't know how you did it, but the fun's over. You just need to make it go away.

LYLE: What? You think I did all this?

UNCLE VERN: I'm thinkin' it's some stupid plan of yours to milk my mother out of what little money of mine she has.

LYLE: My plan?

UNCLE VERN: Well, why not? For starters, I couldn't afford to rig something this elaborate. I'm thinkin' five grand right up front . . . at least. And no tellin' how much by the time it's all through. How much did it cost to pay off the cops? Or are they even cops at all?

LYLE: That's ridiculous!

UNCLE VERN: Well, who was it that rigged the séance to begin with?

LYLE: That was only so Grandma would sell her house.

UNCLE VERN: So you could steal my mother's money.

LYLE: Your mother doesn't have any money.

UNCLE VERN: And how do you know?

LYLE: Because I live with her! We have the same address, don't you remember?

UNCLE VERN: That doesn't mean anything. I have the same address.

LYLE: What? You never changed your address?

UNCLE VERN: Naw . . . why bother?

LYLE: But you haven't lived here for 17 years.

UNCLE VERN: It's my way of screening my mail.

LYLE: And having people take pot shots at our mailbox.

UNCLE VERN: Don't let them guys bother you none. They're just playin' around. They're a lot better shots than that.

LYLE: Well, wait! Answer me this. If I need Gramma's money so bad, where did I get the money to pay for this? You know what I think? I think it was you. That's what I think.

ACE: (*noticing his watch*) Up! 7:30. Time to go.

(*ACE starts gathering up the séance stuff. FLOYD will take the flash pot and climb out the window.*)

UNCLE VERN: (*to ACE, who has the disco ball in his arms*) What are you doing?

ACE: We got a high school dance to do by eight.

(*ACE hands the disco ball to FLOYD, who is waiting outside the window.*)

(*looking at LOUIE; to OOGA*) What about this one?

OOGA: Leave him.

(ACE shrugs and moves on to other things.)

UNCLE VERN: What? Oh no you don't. He can't stay.

LYLE: I have to agree with Uncle Vern.

UNCLE VERN: Don't make it a habit.

OOGA: *(handing LYLE a bill)* Contract only state we leave with what we came in with.
Besides, we no charge extra for dead guy.

UNCLE VERN: He's not dead!

LOUIE: Suit yourself.

UNCLE VERN: I can't believe it! You're all in on it! You're all trying to trick me out of my money! Well, let me tell you, it's not going to work! *(HE crosses to the window.)* Oh, just you wait! You won't get away with it! No siree, Bob! I'll be back in the morning with my lawyer!

LYLE: You have a lawyer?

UNCLE VERN: Well, somebody has to!

(HE climbs through the window and leaves.)

LOUIE: *(after a beat)* Well, is anybody going to play cards or not?

END OF ACT I

ACT II

It is the morning of the next day. LYLE is in the living room talking – but mostly just listening -- on the old rotary-style telephone that is sitting on the table next to the TV. From time to time HE will nod his head. LOUIE, still wearing what HE had on the night before, is sitting at the table shuffling and inspecting the cards while PEARL, dressed in a housecoat, is bustling about making coffee and toasting bread. When the bread pops up the first time, SHE immediately pushes it back down. After a few moments smoke begins coming from the toaster. It would be easy to rig a smoke bomb in a toaster, and fun, too.

LOUIE: *(noticing the smoke)* Far be it from me to say, but ain't ya supposed to take the toast out once it's done?

PEARL: Oh, do you suppose that would help?

LOUIE: *(getting up)* Lookit. I've got an idea. I'll make breakfast and you sit at the table.

PEARL: I was always taught that the lady should wait on the gentleman.

LOUIE: *(guiding her to a chair)* I imagine you were taught that by a gentleman.

(PEARL sits down at the table and immediately starts reading the paper while LOUIE rummages through the cupboard. HE finds cold cereal and then looks around some more; after looking for a few moments . . .)

LOUIE: Hey, you got any milk?

PEARL: Try looking in the second drawer on the right.

(LOUIE opens the door, and finds a carton of milk. HE opens it and takes a whiff and immediately recoils. HE puts the lid back on and puts it back in the drawer.)

LOUIE: Never mind. I think I'll just have coffee. Black coffee. *(begins the process of making coffee)*

LYLE: *(hanging up phone and crossing to LOUIE)* Ah ha! Do you know who I just got off the phone with? I just got through talking with the bureau of census for the entire state, and you, Mr. Chedarwax, you do not exist.

(LOUIE starts to speak.)

No, don't even start. You're not worming your way out of this one. There is no record of your existence. No birth certificate, no wedding certificate. You never paid taxes, never drew Social Security. You've never had a traffic ticket, nor a driver's license for that matter. Never had credit, never bought real estate, or never even had a stinking library

card. What kid didn't have a library card? It's the coolest thing ever invented, and everybody in the world has one but you. It's because library cards are free, Louie, free. But you don't have one. And ya wanna know why you didn't have one? Because you don't exist. You're made up. C'mon, Louie, what's your real name? Carl? Mike? No. . . You look like a Wayne. Which is it? Maybe you're a Gerald. C'mon, Louie, admit it. The jig's up.

LOUIE: You're right.

LYLE: (*astounded*) What?

LOUIE: You heard me. You're right.

LYLE: That was too easy. I know ya got more fight in you than that.

LOUIE: What's the point? You're right.

LYLE: So, it's just that easy?

LOUIE: Yup. It's just that easy. I mean, you're going to believe whatever you want to believe anyway, no matter what I say, right? You're like those guys that are always comin' around knockin' on my door wantin' me to believe what they believe. Oh, they ask you what you do on Sunday mornings, but the only reason they want to know is so they can tell you you're wrong. No. No. You don't got to explain. It's alright. But we both know you already made up your mind. Even if I explain to you that I lived my whole life across the state line, you still ain't gonna believe me. You'll just check Kansas and find out they got no record of me, either, which is exactly what you knew you'd find, so why bother to look? The truth is, you don't want to find out that I just might be for real. An' who could blame you? That kinda thing is down right scary. Then ya gotta believe in heaven or hell – or worse. Ya gotta believe in something other than just you. But you see, the thing is, you've already decided that I ain't true, so that's all you're willing to believe. And since I'm not really sure what I believe, that means your belief is stronger than mine. That seems the most sensible way to settle this, don't cha think? (*fanning his deck*) Unless you want to draw for high card.

LYLE: Darn you! I had you dead to rights! I did. But you wormed out of it.

LOUIE: You know, I think I can honestly say that the afterlife has taught me just one thing. And I'm going to share that with you. What good is knowledge if you don't share?

LYLE: That's it? That's the one thing you learned in the afterlife?

LOUIE: What? No. That's not the one thing I learned. That's why I'm telling you the one thing I learned.

LYLE: You know, I don't even care what you may have learned.

LOUIE: "You could be wrong."

LYLE: No, I'm fairly certain I don't care.

LOUIE: No. That wasn't a comment. You confused me. That was the one thing I've learned. "Always consider the possibility that you could be wrong." (*pause*) Let that soak in for a while, but then start thinkin' about how much better our world would be right now if everybody – even if just once every other week or so – seriously considered the possibility that they could be wrong. About anything. Maybe everything. It may not make a difference with some of them. Heck, it may not make a difference with any of them. But it couldn't hurt, either.

LYLE: Just what does that have to do with me?

LOUIE: Apparently not a thing.

LYLE: Well, you just wait, fella. And I wouldn't get too comfortable, if I were you. I'm going to have you out of this house by the end of the day, or my name isn't Lyle Wanamaker!

LOUIE: Who knows, it may not be.

LYLE: Don't you even start! (*exits to his room*)

PEARL: *(after a beat; looking up from reading the newspaper)* Here's a story about a parrot that learned over 247 words and could even speak Spanish, French, and a little Portuguese. *(SHE continues reading for a moment, then . . .)* Oh, my. How sad. It says the bird died. It was 32 years old. Apparently that's old for a parrot. It lived its entire life with a Mr. Dunwiddy in Manchester, England. Mr. Dunwiddy even taught it to sing his soccer club's fight song. They called it Sissy.

LOUIE: What? A fight song called "Sissy?"

PEARL: No. That was the parrot's name.

LOUIE: That's even worse. That can't possibly be right.

PEARL: Oh, no, sir. It's the Gospel Truth. See. *(SHE offers him the paper)* It's here in print and everything. So it must be true. I just think that's fantastic.

LOUIE: What? That somebody would name a bird Sissy?

PEARL: No. That a bird could be that smart. That's what I think is fantastic.

LOUIE: What I find fantastic is that any animal could be that dumb.

PEARL: What do you mean, dumb? Why, it probably knew more words than I do, and I know I can't speak any Portuguese. At least, I don't think I can. But I've never tried. Do you know any Portuguese?

LOUIE: Lookit. It ain't the Portuguese. It's not about how many words you know. The way I see it, it's what you do with all that information that makes you smart. And the way I further see it, that's why that bird was an idiot.

PEARL: Oh, I disagree.

LOUIE: Which certainly you have the right to do. I invite it.

PEARL: What?

LOUIE: Never mind. Go on with the bird.

PEARL: Well, they even had him on the Tonight Show. Now if that's not something, I don't know what is. Sissy was sitting right there on Jay Leno's desk. See, they even have a picture.

(SHE offers, but LOUIE waves her off.)

LOUIE: That must've been some show.

PEARL: Then you agree with me?

LOUIE: *Au contraire*, as the French would say.

PEARL: Oh, was that French?

LOUIE: *(with theatrics)* *Oui, oui, madame.*

PEARL: Oh, then I don't know French, either.

LOUIE: You keep gettin' off the subject . . .

PEARL: No, I don't. I just forget what the subject is.

LOUIE: We was talkin' about the bird. About the idiot bird. Now, I'm gonna say my piece and then I don't intend to say no more.

PEARL: Ever?

LOUIE: Of course not, ever. What fun would that be? No. I mean about the bird. Here goes. One: If the bird was so smart, then why did he stay in a cage all his life? I mean, the smart birds are out there doin' what birds do, not sittin' in a cage. An' even if he was in a cage, look at all the work he goes through and they're gonna feed him anyways if he does it or not. An' he puts up with the name Sissy! A name like that would get your beak broke in my old neighborhood, if you know what I mean. Now . . . where was I? Oh, yeah! Number two: *(after a pause)* OK, I guess there ain't no number two, but number one was good enough.

(LOUIE brings over two cups of coffee and sits down next to PEARL.)

LOUIE: So, tell me, how did your late husband become late?

PEARL: He drove off the side of the road one day while he was working. They said he went over a quarter of a mile before he finally hit a tree.

LOUIE: What? Did he fall asleep while driving?

PEARL: Oh, heavens no. At least, I don't think he did. I wasn't there. The witnesses said he was bird watching. He loved to watch birds.

LOUIE: While he was driving?

PEARL: Where else would you watch them? He always watched birds while he was driving.

LOUIE: I'm not one to say, but isn't that dangerous?

PEARL: Only if you use binoculars.

LOUIE: I can see that.

PEARL: He followed that bird right up the tree. It was a tufted titmouse, you know.

LOUIE: Excuse me?

PEARL: A tufted titmouse. It's a bird. You can look it up. Next to the Platypus, that was his favorite animal.

LOUIE: Why?

PEARL: Because he liked Platypuses better. I'm fairly certain that it wasn't a platypus that he saw. They're not from around here, you know. Besides, they don't climb trees. At least, I don't think they do.

LOUIE: But why did he like tufted tit . . . mouses . . . meeces . . . mices . . . them better.

PEARL: Oh, you'd have to ask him.

LOUIE: So, did your husband drive for a living?

PEARL: Mr. Hedgepath painted the lines on the highway.

LOUIE: The lines?

PEARL: You know, yellow or white? Solid or broken? *(after a pause)* Somebody has to.

LOUIE: Did he do that all his life?

PEARL: Oh, no. You have to be at least 18.

LOUIE: No . . . What I meant was . . . Oh, never mind.

PEARL: Besides, you have to work your way up.

LOUIE: Up? Up from where?

PEARL: Oh, the bottom, of course.

LOUIE: Well, that's a shame.

PEARL: Oh, not really. Everybody has to start at the bottom.

LOUIE: No. I was thinkin' about your husband's passin' and all.

PEARL: Oh, no. He wasn't allowed to pass. At least, not while he was working.

LOUIE: What I meant to say was, that must've been quite a shock, hearin' that your husband died when he ran into a tree while paintin' lines on the highway.

PEARL: Oh, he didn't get killed when he hit the tree. It was everybody that kept running into him from behind. You know, people follow that line no matter where it goes. Just like in the cartoons.

LOUIE: *(after a pause)* Did you ever work?

PEARL: I don't think you can get through life and never work. You know, some days just getting out of bed is work.

LOUIE: What I meant was, did you ever have a job?

PEARL: Oh. Why didn't you say so?

LOUIE: I thought I did.

PEARL: I was a lunch lady.

LOUIE: A lunch lady? Like a high school cafeteria lunch lady?

PEARL: One in the same. Our motto was: "Making silk purses out of cows' ears on a daily basis."

LOUIE: Does that make sense?

PEARL: I didn't know it needed to.

LOUIE: How was it? How was it bein' a lunch lady?

PEARL: (*thinks for a minute*) You know how everybody always thinks that being a school lunch lady would just be awful?

LOUIE: I suppose.

PEARL: They were right.

LOUIE: So why did you do it?

PEARL: Why, they paid me, of course. Why else would you work?

LOUIE: My sentiments exactly! You know, I think I'm gonna like you. We think alike.

PEARL: Oh, are you loopy, too?

LOUIE: No. I'm as sane as I've ever been. Maybe the sanest. And no matter what they say, sister, I think there's more shinin' there than they give you credit for.

PEARL: Oh my! I'm surprised they give me credit for any at all. (*pause*) But you know, I don't mind being loopy. (*confidentially*) I've seen sane people.

LOUIE: So, back to bein' a lunch lady . . . Did you get to retire?

PEARL: Oh, I insisted on it.

LOUIE: You wanna know the bad thing about dying before you retire? Is you never get to retire.

PEARL: What were you planning on doing when you retired?

LOUIE: I thought for the longest time that I'd like to fish. But then one day I had to admit to myself that I really can't stand fishing. It's kinda hard to take pleasure out of something else's suffering, if you even think about it at all.

PEARL: I've always found it easier not to think . . .

LOUIE: Besides, when you fish . . . you have to go to a whole lot of trouble just to do nothin', if you ask me. No, what I really wanted to do was just to sit in the front yard in a lawn chair . . . every morning. Just sit there and wave at everybody going to work.

PEARL: I guess you still could . . .

LOUIE: Naw. It just wouldn't be the same any more, if you know what I mean. And there's probably an ordinance against it. Public indecency.

PEARL: My! I would hope you'd wear pants.

LOUIE: That's not what I had in mind, though it's not a bad idea. I was just thinkin' it just wouldn't be decent to let the public know – every morning – that you didn't have to work. They'd probably make me go away . . . again.

PEARL: You know, they don't want me around here any more, either.

LOUIE: I know what you mean, sister. I know what you mean.

(There is a knock at the window just as LYLE hurriedly re-enters. LYLE waving them to stay seated, which THEY had all the intentions of doing anyway)

LYLE: I'll get it.

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