

Love, Bob

a one-man one-act play by
Robert Locke

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED. This manuscript or any part thereof is not to be copied in any form without written permission of the author or his agent.

© Robert Locke June 4, 2007

<http://webpages.csus.edu/~boblocke/index.htm>
boblocke@csus.edu

Love, Bob

A Play in One Act

By Robert Locke

Centerstage is the living room with simple furniture: sofa, coffee table, and desk. On one side of the stage is a small kitchen. In the back wall are the closed and bolted Outside Door and the open door to the bathroom. In the wall opposite the kitchen, and near the bathroom door is the open door to the single bedroom. Between the two open doors is a clothes hamper.

The play begins with Bob's voice in blackness.

BOB

(speaking into an Ipod)

And so if this really is the last day of her life, and she IS in there dead this morning— well, I mean, uh... passed... gone... this morning, then...

Lights come up to reveal Bob sitting on one end of the sofa. A sheet and blanket neatly pulled back but not yet folded, along with a pillow, are at the other end. There is a coffee mug on the coffee table. Otherwise the apartment is immaculate.

BOB

...then yes, she did have a good last day. Okay, that's all for now. *(laughs)* I'll let you know. *(sighs)* Oh! Bye.

Bob goes to the desk, takes out a small folding speaker, connects it to the Ipod and starts the recording from the beginning. As it plays, Bob lies down on sofa to listen to his own voice.

BOB ON IPOD

(half asleep)

Hi. It's December 31, the last day of the year; and I guess this is for posterity, I don't know who else will listen to it. Anyway, it seems to me fitting or ironic ...

BOB

(getting up and heading for desk)

No, no, make that, uh... change that, uh...

As recording continues, Bob takes a notebook from the desk, makes a short note, heads back to sofa to lie down, but instead whisks mug off coffee table, takes it into kitchen, refills it from a pot under a cozy, returns, gets exercise mat from behind sofa and starts exercises.

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

... or something that I'm recording this today on my brand new Ipod, my birthday gift from my mom because she said she wanted me to have something quote unquote fun. This is the first time since I was a teenager that she has given me a birthday present that wasn't just a check, and I guess the reason she stipulates it should be fun is because she must know she's dying, and this is something she wants me to remember her by ... that's fun. And that ... leads me to ... the fact that at this moment, 8:30 on the last morning of the year, that I ... suspect that my mom is lying in her bed in the next room, dead. *(laughs)* Of course I have to confess that I've had this same suspicion every morning for a while now, and in fact, so sure have I been, each morning I sit here waiting for her to ring her bell—it's a doorbell I installed because I sleep so deep and sometimes don't wake up when she calls me, and she's got one button beside her easy chair and another button on her bed rail—each morning I think about all the things that happened the day before and how that would ... be ... if it did turn out to ... be ... have been the last day of her life. And so this ...

BELL RINGS. loud and startling, a demanding ding dong. Bob gasps, a little hiccup sob, grins, not without wryness, goes quickly into bedroom, starting to speak at doorway, flipping on bedroom light.

BOB

(very loudly for the hard-of-hearing)

Howya doin', Mama? You slept lonnnnnnnng! You about to pop?

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

... morning because really this is the latest she's gone and it was way back 2:30 when I last helped her to the potty chair, and she's never gone six hours without a pee—oh she'd die if she heard this, well she won't because she can't hear anything any more, and besides *(laughs)* she may be dead already, oh, poor old dear in there. Anyway I've, I've told myself each morning that I'm not going to go in and check on her until after 10:00 because I want to make sure that she really is ... uh, I'm not going to finish that thought, that seems kind of rude ...

BOB

(coming out of bedroom with satin sheet in hand)

(loudly) No problem, Mom, I'll just put it in the wash. You just went too long What?

(stops, turns back)

Probably 70. I'll nudge it up.

He drops the satin sheet into the hamper, goes to thermostat in back wall, nudges the lever up, goes into bathroom and gets a clean satin gown from the hook on the other side of the bathroom door and, on his way back to the bedroom, collects sweater off the back of sofa and slippers from the floor beside the sofa.

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

... but I'm thinking of a conversation she had with the Emergency Room doctor the other day when the doctor, a very sweet and pretty Chinese woman who looked thirteen years old, was asking Mom about whether she had a Do-Not-Resuscitate order on the refrigerator door so that if the paramedics charged in if Mom had a heart attack, they wouldn't pound on her chest and break her ribs, God!

BOB

(heading into the bedroom)

Oh, God!

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

But Mom didn't hear that last part because she was already responding something that really took me by surprise because it was the first time I've heard her say anything like this, "I'm 93 years old, hon," she said to this little-girl-looking stranger doctor, "if I had a heart attack, it would be a blessing." So that's always

there in the front of my brain, her in there in that bed with that oxygen tube which she's always waking up and finding that she's lost it during the night, and ...

BOB

(coming out of bedroom, stops, turns back)

(loudly) Just getting some water for your machine. *(louder)* Water! Oxygen!

Bob carries a wet satin gown of a different pastel which he drops into the hamper as he goes into kitchen, retrieves a gallon of distilled water from under the sink and returns to bedroom with it, collecting a fresh satin sheet from the linen closet behind the bathroom door as he goes.

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

... anyway I've been thinking about yesterday, and *(laughs)* it WAS a good day, really, to be her last. First of all she said one of the funniest things I've ever heard. *(laughs throughout)* We were seeing her gynecologist, and she just loves that guy, he's kind of grown up with her, took her on right out of med school, and he's always so kind and understanding, and the past couple of times she's gone to see him, she's wanted me to go in with her because, you know, she really can't understand medical things so well any more, and I sit in the corner and turn my back, you know, and just listen.

Bob has come out of the bedroom and gone into the bathroom where we can see him at the basin just through the doorway as he runs the tap in the basin, tests the temperature, takes a washcloth out of the linen cabinet, wets it, wrings it out, puts some liquid soap in one corner. On the way back to the bedroom, he pauses to enjoy this part of the story.

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

And so he's down there doing his work, well, to be more exact than she would care for me to be, he was preparing to take out her pessary and clean it, and he says—I guess he had just looked at her medical chart—he says, "So are you really 93 years old?" And she says, "What are you doing, counting the rings?"

(laughs so hard he chokes)

Bob laughs along with himself, choking, too. Then he composes himself, puts on his game face, and returns into the bedroom.

BOB ON IPOD (CONT.)

(getting his breath back)

I think the doctor didn't know what hit him. I didn't hear him laughing, I know that. But that's not the only funny thing that old lady said yesterday. It was my birthday and so I went in several times just to sit and be with her since on that day so many years ago she did have quite a tussle with me, so it seemed the least I could do now. It was just about sunset, and the sun sets so early these days ...

BOB

(singing softly heads to Outside Door)

Mon coeur s'ouvre à ta voix comme s'ouvrent les fleurs
Aux baisers de l'aurore ...

BOB ON IPOD

... and she noticed it out the curtains, which she doesn't always, and she said, "It was just about this time of day that you were born." I didn't know that actually, and she said it so sweetly *(laughs)* almost like forgiveness. Then she said, "Oh, I made such a fool of myself in front of that doctor," and I thought she meant her gynecologist, the bit about counting the rings, but no, she was still talking about when I had just been born and the doctor and nurse were taking up the stitches from the episiotomy, a second nurse came in and said that Mr. So and So had just called and was bringing in his wife because she had cut her hand very badly on a vaseline jar. Mom was just coming out of the drugs and she said, "What in the world were they doing with vaseline at THIS time of day!" *(laughs)* That got us talking about Dad. That was nice.

During above Bob has thrown open the bolt on the Outside Door, opened the door to look out at the daylight, picked up the newspaper and begun scanning the headlines as he closes the door.

BOB

(returning to bedroom)

Yeah, that was nice.

BOB ON IPOD

I just imagine she didn't even have time for the vaseline with old dad just jumping her bones all the time. Well, poor old dear, what a ... what a ... She always used

to tell him, when he was sleeping so much just before he died, "Clayton, get up out of bed now, you're going to be a long time dead." Now she tells herself the same thing. Her life is bed, potty chair, easy chair, potty chair, bed. No appetite, but she gets really sick if she doesn't eat on time. *(laughs)* Says she's "feelin' lank". Her brain is ... well, remarkable, but not much help on the crosswords any more. I've got to yell the clues to her, and she misunderstands most of them, and I'll wait and wait and wait for her to get even the simple ones. Sometimes it's so obvious that I worry she'll catch on to what I'm doing. Her hands shake so bad she can't read Dear Abby. I offer to read it for her but she says no. I think she just doesn't care any more; she doesn't even read the salespapers now.

Most of this last, preferably after "lank", plays under Bob's next lines.

He has left the newspaper with his mom and returns to the kitchen, humming the same love duet from "Samson et Dalilah". He picks up the kettle to fill it. The phone on the desk rings and Bob answers, while the Ipod continues (above).

BOB

(picks up telephone handset, speaking over Ipod)

Hello? Benny! Howya doin', Cuz? *(beat)* Oh, she's in there fightin'. You want to talk to her?

(has reached bedroom doorway, holds handset out)

It's Benny, Mom, you want to talk to him? *(louder)* Benny, your nephew Benny. *(playfully)* Now, Bessie Jewel, ah cain't do eve'thin' all at once, I'm a gettin' it, girl.

(heads toward kitchen, handset back to ear)

Sorry, Benny, she's not feeling so good this morning. Oh, oh, sorry, what's up? But wait, Benny, listen, can I call you back, she really wants her breakfast? No, I mean she needs it I've got to— Okay, here, I'm gonna put you on speakerphone so I can have my hands free.

(shuts off Ipod and switches to speakerphone and hangs up the handset)

Okay, shoot.

Benny's voice comes over the speakerphone.

BENNY

But no don't do that, 'cause yeah, this IS an emergency, but you know, I don't want Aunt Bess hearing any of this stuff, you know?

During the following dialogue, Bob goes about making breakfast with efficiency, precision and care. (For timing and details, see addendum.)

BOB

Don't worry, she can't hear anything. Man, Benny, she doesn't even turn up the volume on her TV anymore because it's just all garble to her. You know how loud she used to have it—

BENNY

Yeah, yeah, yeah, but, okay, but, listen 'cause I need your advice ...

BOB

You need MY advice? Jesus!

BENNY

... cause' you know how I'm always going after these big women, big big women, stuff of champions, you know, but—

BOB

(unison) "Big big women, stuff of champions," yeah, Benny, what's up with that picture you have hanging over your toilet?

BENNY

Yeah, man, ain't that cool! But—

BOB

Hey, man, I was taking a leak at your place, I saw that, I almost vomited.

BENNY

Yeah, man! But—

BOB

That's supposed to be you?

BENNY

Yeah, O'Connell drew it. Ain't it cool? But—

BOB

He's drawn you like—with your arms and legs waving and your little butt all pinched up—like you're getting sucked right up into her.

BENNY

Yeah, it's my dream, man. O'Connell says he's got the same dream about big women, and so he drew me like that. My butt's so cute, ain't it? I didn't know O'Connell could draw like that, you?

BOB

You've got to take that down, Benny. If someone decent walked in there—

BENNY

Ain't gonna happen, man. I don't know anyone decent, and I don't like anyone decent.

BOB

If Oedipus walked in there, he'd faint.

BENNY

Eddy who? I know this Eddy?

BOB

(laughs) No, I guess not. Greek guy, lives around the corner from you. I thought you might know him.

BENNY

Not if he's decent, I don't. But listen, you're gettin' me off track, man. Remember that Marilyn I brought over your mom's place a few weeks ago.

BOB

Yeah, BIG woman! She the one in the picture with you?

BENNY

No, that's just O'Connell's imagination, forget about the picture. So you remember Marilyn, well turns out she's nuts.

BOB

I thought you liked her.

BENNY

Oh, man, in the sack she's the greatest. Like a dancer, man, like a dancer! She can get her ankles behind her ears, man! One night we broke the headboard. But I'm telling you she's nuts, she's bananas, she's the whole fruitcake, man. You know that yappy little weiner dog next door?

BOB

That little red dachshund, what's his name, Zeke or Zack or—

BENNY

Forget his name, it don't matter, you know I hate dogs, but here's the deal, that yappy little weiner dog got into my back yard, dug a hole under the fence, and he shows up at the glass door, yapping, and Marilyn goes out, "Oh, how cute," you know, and she tries shushing him, and then she picks him up and he's wiggling all around you know with those little legs going ninety, and she's still "Oh, how cute," with her face, you know, all right there, and he fuckin' bit her right on the nose, and she threw him, I mean she FLANG him, man, she flang him half way across the yard, flang him up against that fuckin' big tree out there, that's how far she flang him. You there?

BOB

Yes! Was he hurt?

BELL RINGS! Bob has the breakfast in his hands but has been rapt on Benny's story. Now he goes to the bedroom door, holds up one finger to his mom, backs up to listen.

BENNY

Well, duh! You should have heard him! And you know how those weiner dogs got those long bodies, those long backs, and I guess he broke it, his back, because he was just kind of floppin' on the ground and yelpin' and whimperin' and squealin'. Cuz, you never heard anything so awful!

BELL RINGS!

BOB

Wait, wait, I've gotta give this to my mom, but wait, I'm coming back.

BENNY

No, no, no, I've gotta—

BOB

No, I've gotta—

BENNY

No, but I've gotta—

BOB

No, I've gotta get her this food, Cuz! I'm coming right back, just hold on.

(going into bedroom)

(loudly) Here you go, Mama, you feeling lank?

BENNY

(after a brief pause, under his breath)

Come on, come on. Geez, okay, she did it for you, and you gotta do it for her, yada yada, but, Geez, and okay, you're an angel, but, come on, man!

BOB

(coming out of the bedroom)

(loudly) You're welcome, Mom. *(normal voice)* Okay, Benny, you still there?

BENNY

Yeah, of course, where am I gonna be, but—

BELL RINGS!

BOB

Wait a sec, Cuz, she's ringing again.

BENNY

Aw, Christ!

BOB

She wouldn't be ringing it if she didn't need me. I'll just be a sec.

(goes back into bedroom)

BENNY

Geez, every mother should have a gay son. Geez, I should get ME a gay son.

BOB

(starts back out, turns back)

(loudly) Yeah, Mom, what can I do you for, sweetheart? Probably 72 or 73, I nudged it up when you got up. Wait a sec, Ben.

(checks thermostat, returns to bedroom door)

(loudly) 72, Mom. Okay, I'll nudge it down. You're welcome. Okay, Benny, go ahead, the dog's in pain! Okay, and—

(BELL RINGS! Bob returns to bedroom doorway)

Uh, she needs something else, Benny. *(loudly)* Your command, Mither? What thing? I'm not arguing with you, Mom, I just need to know what "thing" you want? Oh! Oh, sorry, yeah, just hold on!

BENNY

Hey, I need you man!

BOB

(moving quickly to the speakerphone, normal voice)

Sorry, Cuz, I really want to hear this, but listen, Benny, and don't you ever tell her I told you this because she'd die of mortification, but she's got a problem in there and I've gotta help her with the enema, so I'm gonna—

BENNY

Oh, Geez, man, don't tell me that!

BOB

Benny, you don't know how much pain this makes for an old lady, and no, I just hang it on a hook above the potty chair, and she does all the rest of it, but she's practically helpless in there so I've gotta fill the bag and get the temperature just right and lube it up with soap, so I'm gonna be out of the room, but I'll be able to hear you, so go ahead now, the dog's in pain! Geez!

Meanwhile Bob has gone into the bathroom and begun setting up for the enema (for timing and details see Addendum).

BENNY

Pain! If that was all! Man, this dog is out there screamin', and me too, and floppin' all around, but Marilyn, I don't think she's hurt much, I think the dog just nipped her nose a little, like he was just like warning her, you know, "Don't get in my face, bitch!" because I don't see any blood on her, but she's like, cool, like she's assessin' the situation, like Field Marshall Von, you know, Hammerdingleschmidt puttin' the troops to bed! She gets this hatchet, she heads out to the shed, and I can hear her back there, you know, throwin' things all around and she comes back with this hatchet—you there?

Bob has finished preparing the enema, is standing stock still since the word "hatchet", the full enema bag in one hand, the syringe in the other, and the tube dangling between.

BOB

Yes!

BENNY

Well ... she's out there makin' this racket and the dog's floppin' and squealin', and I'm thinkin' the neighbors are all gonna come out and—

BOB

(proceeding into bedroom with enema)

So what are you doing during all this, Benny? (loudly) Coming, Mom!

BENNY

Well, you know, I wanna... I wanna... DO somethin', you know, 'cause the poor puppy's in pain, and I run back in my bedroom and I get my pillow, you know, 'cause the ground's all hard and all, 'cause you know there's no grass there growin' under that tree and they got those, whatchacallem, leaves and twigs and stuff stickin' into him, and I don't want his eyes poked out, you know, he's floppin' there, and so I try to get the pillow under him, but he's squealin' every time I touch him, and you know I don't like dogs, and they got those teeth and on his feet those, whatchacallem, those claws, and I'm just screamin', you know, I can't—

Meanwhile Bob's cell phone has begun a tune and Bob has come out of bedroom, tying handles of a supermarket plastic bag filled with tissues. Bob checks the display.

BOB

Benny, listen, listen, that's my cell phone and I've got to get it, it's my manager.

BENNY

No, but man—

BOB

It's my manager, Benny, I've got to take it, it's business. Darling! (kissing sounds) Mwah, mwah, Buona serra, ciao, come va, va bene, ravioli, what's up?

BENNY

Hey, man!

(Bob returns to bedroom doorway to check on his mom, nods at her, smiles.)

BOB

Shhh, shhh, Benny. Well, what kind of line changes are they talking about? They're trying to get you to change the contract? No-oh, no-oh! Tell them this is the theater, Barbara, this isn't a screenplay, they can't just willy nilly make line

changes, and the play is the play and the contract is the contract. Listen, Barbara, I've got something I desperately have to do RIGHT now, can you get back in touch with them—you've got them on the line right there? Okay, find out exactly what kind of line changes they're talking about, take notes, and get right back to me, okay? No, I still don't have that kind of telephone capacity, I don't want it, and anyway I've got my cousin on that line and he's got something I've got to hear, so mwah, mwah, call me back, bye.

(puts down cell phone, heads for bedroom)

Go ahead, Benny, I can hear you, you've got your pillow, the dog's flopping. (loudly) Okay, Mom, just about done? Not yet?

BENNY

Yeah, and I look up and Marilyn's comin' back from the shed and in one hand she's got a shovel, and in the other hand she's got a hatchet. You there?

BOB

Yes!

BENNY

'Cause I don't know where you are, man!

BOB

I'm here!

BENNY

Cuz, I didn't even know there was a hatchet IN that shed! And she comes back and she stands for just like one second over that poor little dog, and then she chops off its head. She chops off its little head. You there?

BOB

Yes!

BENNY

You're not sayin' nothin'.

BOB

Cuz, that poor little dog! That's a crime!

BENNY

Well, don't say that!

BOB

Well, it is! Benny! You can't kill a dog, someone's pet!

BENNY

It was in pain!

(BELL RINGS!)

It's, whachallit, mercy killing. Mercy! But, geez, she didn't get it right on the first chop, she had to chop a couple or three, a bunch of times. Mercy! Mercy!

BOB

(shaking his hands helplessly in the air)

And what the hell are you doing all that time?

(quiets himself, goes into the bedroom)

Gotta go, keep talking.

BENNY

Me, I ain't doin' nothin', I'm just standin' there watchin', at this I can't even scream any more, I mean what's to do, she's a crazy woman and she's got a hatchet in her hand! And when she's finished all that choppin' she's just standin' there with that hatchet drippin' blood all over the ground, you know there's no grass under that tree, the blood's just drippin' off that hatchet, running out of that dog's neck, makin' mud, his head's over there, his body's over here. She doesn't even look at me. She goes out to the shed again, and she comes back with a pick and shovel. I'm like, oh God, you know, and she starts lookin' around the yard and she says, lookin' at me now for the first time, "You know this dog, where he came from?" I say, "Yeah, he's from next door." "Which next door?" she says, and I say, "That one," you know the one on the right when you're lookin' out at the yard, and so she goes over to the left hand fence, and she starts pickin' a hole in the ground, and she says, "Go see if he dug a hole under the fence, and when you find it, fill it. Make it look natural. Wait a minute," she says, "You dig this hole, I'll take care of the hole under the fence."

BOB

(coming out of bedroom, tying the handles of a supermarket plastic bag filled with tissues)

She didn't trust you could fill in a—

BENNY

Fuck her, man. She chops the fuckin' head off a fuckin' dog, and SHE doesn't trust ME?

BOB

So what happened?

Bob goes into the bathroom, puts the plastic bag of tissues into the waste basket, gets a new box of tissues from the cabinet under the basin and starts toward the bedroom.

BENNY

So that night there's a knock on the door, and it's the neighbor, the woman that owns the dog, and she wants to know if we've seen it.

BOB

Marilyn's still there?

BENNY

Yeah, man, she ain't goin' nowhere.

BOB

When did this happen?

BENNY

Coupla weeks ago.

BOB

And you've been sleeping with her all this—?!?

BENNY

She's right in the bed with me, hornier than ever, like a dancer, man! Jesus Christ! I'm supposed to perform and all I can see is that hatchet! In my head!

BOB

What happened with the neighbor?

BENNY

We told her we hadn't seen the dog, and she went and knocked on the next door. She's put up posters all around, with pictures, you know, and a reward, and that little face staring at me from every telephone pole. I'm goin' fuckin' nuts.

BOB

(going into the bedroom with the new box of tissues)

Where's Marilyn now?

BENNY

Well, that's what I've been wantin' to tell you, man, but I had to tell you about the little weiner dog first so it makes sense to you, 'cause you gotta know that, about

the hatchet and all, 'cause last night Marilyn's way weird, I mean I know she's already weird enough but last night she's WAY weird, quiet, she's not talking at all, kind of trembling, like she's got this volcano inside, you know, that whole fuckin' holiday shit, and she says all of a sudden, "I'm going out!" I'm like, "Okay." I mean, I don't ask nothin' ...

Bob goes from bedroom into bathroom, takes from the linen closet a handtowel and two more wash cloths that he wets, putting liquid soap on one, and returns to bedroom.

BENNY (CONT.)

. I don't want to know where she's goin', when she's comin' back, I mean she's none too fond of me because I've been like a... zombie, you know, all stiff, and I don't mean in a good way. I want her gone, and I'm just sorry that I don't see her packin' up any of her stuff. I mean, it's not like she moved in with me and all, but she kinda did, I mean toothbrush in the bathroom and panties in the drawer, Goddam! Some clothes in the closet ...

BOB

(coming out of bedroom with empty enema)

(loudly) You're welcome, Mama, good job.

Bob goes into bathroom, rinses enema, puts it back in cabinet, soaps, rinses, dries hands.

BENNY

... She doesn't pack any of that stuff. She just goes out. She STALKS out, you know, STALKS that's how she goes, she STALKS out. And all night I'm like, "Yeah?" And this morning she calls, wakes me up, and she says, "I've done it." I don't have the slightest! "Done what?" "I killed her." I'm like, let it be the dog, please God, and you know I mean it, Lord, let it be the dog she's talkin' about. But then I remember that little weiner dog was a boy dog. I could see his little tupper and nuts between his back legs. He was a boy dog!

There has been a callwaiting signal, and now comes the second.

BOB

She said, "I killed HER"?!? But wait, wait, Benny, I've gotta get this, but I'm comin' right back!

(picks up handset and cuts off speakerphone)

BOB (CONT.)

No, it's the oxygen guy. Mom's oxygen machine is acting up, and he's coming to replace it, Benny, it's life or death I've gotta get it! Be right back.

(switches calls)

Hello? Oh, Jan, I can't talk. What's wrong, what're you crying about? You disowned him? You disowned one son last week and you're disowning your other son this week? Jan, I'm sorry, I can hear how upset you are, but I'm telling you straight out, Jan, your anger is your worst enemy and you hug it to your breast like it's your best friend, and I can't talk now, I've got an important call on the other line, Janet, you don't even have any money to disown him FROM! No, that's not your inheritance yet, that's Mom's money! And I've told you don't start counting on that because if she has to go into a home, she's going to need that money. No, Jan, those bonds are her bonds, she made that clear. Yes, your name is on them too but don't start thinking that money is yours yet. And don't start disowning your children based on it, Jesus!

(BELL RINGS! Going to bedroom door, Bob puts on game face, holding up one finger to his mom.)

Jan, I've got to go, Mom's ringing, and I'm on the other line, and I've got to get back to it, you just come over here, you can have lunch with her, maybe it'll help her to eat. *(loudly)* Jan's coming over for lunch! Bread pudding!

(into phone again)

Now, no earlier than twelve, Jan, no it's going to be bread pudding because she can EAT bread pudding, and it's full of eggs and milk. No, Jan, no raisins because she can't stand raisins, but you can put them in your— No, the raisins DON'T need to cook with the— Okay then I'll make two pots! Just come over, but not before twelve, I'll talk to you then, bye.

(switches calls)

You there, Benny? Just my whacko sister, so the oxygen guy's still going to be calling in, but now Marilyn said, "I killed—" oh there he is, hold on, no just hold on!

(switches calls)

Hello? No, Jan! Not before twelve because I'm tied up with Mom and I'm on a very important call on the other— Jan, you're not ... taking ... those ... cuticle scissors ... to your nose again, are you? And not the X-acto knife either? Okay, good. See you at 11:30, let's split the difference, okay? I'm on the other line, now, so don't call back, okay? Bye.

(switches calls)

Benny? No, it was Jan, but she won't call again so go back, go back, Marilyn, Marilyn said, "I killed ... HER"?!?

(BELL RINGS!)

Oh, crap, I forgot Mom, she's been ringing for me, I'm putting you on speakerphone, Benny. She said, "I killed HER"?!?

BENNY

Jesus, yeah! Then she goes on and she tells me that where she went last night was to visit her ex.

BOB

(reaching bedroom doorway, stops)

Wait! Wait!

(game face, holds up one finger to his mom, backs up)

Her ex? You think she— Her ex is a woman? Marilyn is a lesbian?

BENNY

Well, that's part of the thing, Cuz. I don't think so. I mean, she got into my porn, you know what I mean?

BOB

That so-called lesbian stuff of yours?

BENNY

Well, you know it's always been my dream, not just one big woman, you know, but stuff of champions.

BOB

God, you straight men are so— Go on, keep going. Marilyn's on the phone with you, and she says—

(shaking his head in disbelief, goes into bedroom)

BENNY

Yeah, but that's the thing, can I trust her, what she's tellin' me, 'cause she's tryin' to get me all interested in her again, and maybe it's just all a trick, with whips and chains and ... you know ... hatchets and all. So she's tellin' me that she went over to her ex's house, and she took the hatchet, and yeah I checked after the call, the hatchet's not out in the shed. *(slowing)* I think she, maybe she did it, Cuz. I do. I mean if you didn't know about the little weiner dog, you wouldn't ever believe it, you'd think she's just cracked, but I saw her, Cuz, with that hatchet and that little weiner dog and the way she went at it. And if she does have this lesbian lover—

Meanwhile, Bob has come out of the bedroom with his mother's finished breakfast plate and a glass almost empty of water, which he has taken into the kitchen and put in the sink. He gets a fresh glass and fills it half way with water, picks up a day's segment of a weekly organizer of pills and

starts for the bedroom again, all with an air of stupefaction.

BOB

You've got to, you've got to—

BENNY

She's on her way here.

BOB

You mean this whole time we've been talking, you—

BENNY

She says she's gonna stop and get Chinese food for us; where do you get Chinese food at this time of the morning?

BOB

She's on her way right now?!?

BENNY

What do I do when she gets here, Cuz?

BOB

You ... don't ...BE there! You call the cops and you get out of there right now!

BENNY

But what if she didn't, you know, do her ex, and then the cops are on her, and when they let her go because maybe she didn't do it after all and it IS all this sicko stuff to lure me back into her pants, man, she knows where I live! And she's got my hatchet. And maybe the cops come after me, too, because of false ... something or other, you know? I can't take any trouble with the cops, man.

Call waiting signal.

BOB

(picking up the handset and cutting off speakerphone)

Benny, I've gotta take that, it's the oxygen guy, but you get out of there right now!

(switches calls)

Hello? Oh, Charlene, sorry I can't talk right now, babe, let me call you back.

Twenty thousand dollars! My God, what— Today! Charlene— Charlene, stop crying, I can't understand what you're saying.

(BELL RINGS! putting on game face, and with phone to ear, Bob takes pills and glass of water into bedroom, returns quickly.)

Charlene, you're a fucking real estate agent, you KNOW about foreclosure, how did you— Babe, that's what you DO in real estate, in the good times you put money away just for this reason, so you can get through the bad times and don't have to go beating down your uncle for it! What about your dad, he's got lots more than I've got? Well, yes, I've got it, I mean I can get it, not all of it today, but ten thousand probably, they'll take that? That'll stop the foreclosure? I mean, that's what we've got to do, you can't lose your equity! Yeah, I know you're good for it, but Charlene, you know I'm retired, I'm on a fixed income, I can't— Never mind how much! but I'll tell you this, my monthly income is not half, probably not even a third of what you lay out every month without blinking an eye, and I've got to stretch that for the whole rest of my life. You know, babe, I never had kids for this exact— Gay people DO have kids, Charlene! If they want 'em they adopt or they do the invitro thing or surrogate whatever, but I never wanted kids because I never wanted them calling me up out of the blue and asking for twenty thousand dollars before the bank closes. *(sigh)* Yes, I know, I don't want to say anything bad about your dad, he's my only living brother, but he does have ... certain incompatibilities ... with love. Okay, okay, come over this afternoon, your Aunt Janet's going to be here, and she can take care of Grandma while you and I go to the bank, but Charlene, I've gotta take this call, it's Grandma's oxygen guy, I love you, too, babe, goodbye.

(switches calls)

Hello? Aw, man!

(presses OFF, then ON, dials quickly)

BELL RINGS!

BOB

(shouting to the bedroom)

Just a second, Mom! *(lower)* Come on, Benny, pick up, pick up, pick up.

(BELL RINGS! Putting on game face, Bob goes to bedroom doorway holds up one finger, grins at his mom, backs up)

Benny, if you're there, pick up. Benny—oh shit, they're ringing this fucking phone to Kingdom Come.

(switches calls)

Yeah? Hello?

Bob's answering machine comes on.

BOB'S VOICE ON ANSWERING MACHINE

This is Bob and Bess, leave a message.

BENNY

(Bob's answering machine)

Hey, man, pick up, pick up!

*We hear both Benny's and Bob's voices
coming through the answering machine.*

BOB

Benny, I just called your place, where are you?

BENNY

No, man, I'm on my cell, I'm on my way over.

BOB

Your, your, your way over where?

BENNY

Your place, man, your mom's place, where you are, 'cause you know Marilyn's gonna show up at my place any time now.

BOB

Benny, she's showing up with Chinese food, expecting you to be there! And if you're not, you KNOW she's going to come here! Where else are you going to go?

BENNY

No, man, I could be goin' to visit somebody.

BOB

You've only got me! She's gonna follow you over here, man!

BENNY

Well, you told me to get out of there.

BOB

But not come here! My mom's in her bed—she's got a hatchet—she's—no, you gotta be right, it's gotta be a trick, a horrible porno trick.

(rushing to Outside Door and throws the bolt into lock position)

Oh, come! Come! Come! I've gotta get that.

(switches calls, goes off speakerphone)

Hello? Yes! I've been expecting your call, thanks! Half an hour? That ... should ... be ... great. Yeah, best way to get in is second driveway, we're the last apartment. Okay, bye.

(BELL RINGS! Bob goes to bedroom door, handset in hand.)
(loudly) Yeah, Mom? Probably about 70. *(louder)* 70. Okay, I'll nudge it up.
(goes to thermostat, nudges lever. BELL RINGS! Bob goes back to bedroom doorway.)

Yeah, Mom? Yeah, he just called, half an hour, how's that? You feeling better? You look strong today, really pretty. Pretty! Pretty! *(laughs)* Yeah, you! No, it's nice and sunny out there, no rain today. Well, the television's wrong. No, that's just a movie. *(laughs)* I'm just trying to pull my own brains together, Mom.
(Telephone rings. He waves handset at his mom.)

Telephone.

(moves to sofa and sits dejectedly, phone ringing)

Oh, God.

(finally presses ON)

Hello? Ohhhhhhhhhh, howya doin', love? *(gentle laugh)* No, I can't, sorry. No, I can't, really, I've got ... people coming over. *(laughs)* You wouldn't want to. No, I'll tell you ... if I survive... but believe me, not today. You'll forgive me, keep me on? *(gentle laugh)* Babe, if all the world's troubles were about to knock on your door, what would you do? Now how did I know you'd say that? Listen, I'll call you soon. Yeah, me too, with sugar on t—with Splenda on top. Bye.

(presses OFF, considers a moment, stands, puts the exercise mat back behind the sofa, folds the blanket, folds the sheets, stacks them with the pillow on the back of the sofa, sighs, goes up to the Outside Door)

Oh, well.

(throws the bolt open again, turns, comes down to the desk, opens the Yellow Pages, finds a number, dials)

Hello, this is WEAVE? Women Escaping a, a, a Violent Environment, right? Do you help men? Oh, yeah, yeah, no you gotta do that right now, sure. Five minutes is great. You've got my phone number on your screen? Great, thanks so much. Bye.

(walks to the bedroom with the handset in his hand, collecting his bedding on the way)

Hiya, Mama. Howya doin', love?

He goes into the bedroom.

THE END

ADDENDUM

The visuals of good, efficient, wordless nursing often are too specific to put into the script because they retard the forward movement, yet the timing of the staging is dependent upon them. Here are some of the more complicated details. The point to be conveyed visually is that Bob is a good, efficient, thoughtful—in fact loving—nurse.

Bob preparing his mom's breakfast

Bob offers healthful foods that are soft, easy to eat and quick to prepare: bran muffins that he makes himself and keeps on hand in the freezer; applesauce that is measured carefully and served in an easy-to-handle cup; instant coffee, clearly his mother's choice, not his. He knows the best timing for all three to be ready at the same moment, warm but not too hot.

First, he washes his hands with dish soap in the kitchen sink, and dries them with a paper towel which he discards under the sink.

Then, my suggestion is that Bob have a dozen-cup muffin tin full of freshly baked bran muffins on the countertop. There is a sweet irony here that on this morning, when he sincerely believes his mom might be dead already, he has—even so—baked her a fresh tin of bran muffins. His first job, then, after he gets his mom up, would be to tidily put eleven of the muffins into a bag into the freezer. Having accomplished this storage for the future, he takes the twelfth muffin, puts it on a small plate and cuts it in half, tops each half with a thin slice of butter, puts them into an aluminum pie pan which he pops into the countertop toaster oven.

Then he runs the tap and puts only enough water in the kettle for a single mug, and puts that on a burner on the stove.

He gets a large jar of applesauce out of the refrigerator and, using a teaspoon, fills a custard cup full of applesauce and puts it into the microwave for a minute.

He puts a spoonful of instant coffee into a mug, collects the custard cup of applesauce from the microwave and the two muffin halves from the toaster oven and puts them onto the small plate, pours the water from the kettle into the mug, and he's ready.

Bob preparing his mom's enema:

It's an old fashioned enema. First he takes a fresh wash cloth out of the linen closet, then the enema bag with its tube and syringe out of the cabinet under the wash basin. He runs the water from the basin until the temperature is luke, then fills the bag, adds to the water

a couple of squirts of liquid soap, and squirting more soap into his free hand, lubricates the enema syringe with it. He rinses the soap from his free hand and uses the fresh wash cloth to dry it, taking the wash cloth along with the enema back to the bedroom.

Addendum to the Addendum

Other details that add meaning and subtlety to the play.

I suggest a bag of Peet's coffee beans and a grinder on the counter beside Bob's coffee pot and cozy. Mom's instant coffee is Taster's Choice. If Bob sets his mom's mug on the counter beside his own, the audience can see that he gives much the smaller one to his Mom, and if he scrapes a little of the instant coffee out of the teaspoon and back into the jar, it's clear that he is making the coffee exactly to her specifications. In fact, if timing works out and, of course, if the budget permits it, it would be ideal if there were two Taster Choice jars, the red regular and the green decaf, and Bob spooned up half-and-half, an easy silent visual of exactly how solicitous this son is for his mom.

After he has measured out the teaspoons of applesauce (8, and it would be very nice to see Bob's lips actually counting silently) he puts the teaspoon in the lid of the applesauce to keep the countertop clean until he takes the custard cup out of the microwave, at which time he puts the teaspoon into the custard cup of applesauce, puts the lid back on the jar and the jar back into the refrigerator, everything tidy and routine. Another nice touch is to have a little plastic lid (off a can of nuts, say) beside the microwave, which Bob puts over the custard cup as it heats, making sure there are no splashes. Of course he would rinse the lid immediately afterwards and put it back in its place.

I suggest that the freezer bag for the muffins be a waxpaper bag from a bygone cereal box. Bob routinely keeps those for exactly this purpose, closing the bag around the muffins with a rubber band. Instead of a paper napkin, I suggest Bob use a paper towel, knowing that his mom often uses these paper towels after eating to wet with the glass of water always beside her easy chair and use as a face and hand washer. Also Bob gets to fold the paper towel, nice visual business to show his carefulness with his mom.

In sign language the sign for "pretty" is drawing a circle around the face with the hand. That would be a nice touch on Bob's third "Pretty".

The two satin gowns read well if they are different pastels.

The two satin sheets are matching bottom and top that Bob bought specially after his mom's last crisis (spinal fracture, severely reducing mobility) when his mom suggested it would be much easier for her to slide in her hospital bed with satin on satin. In fact, if Bob could even manage to have the second satin sheet in its original plastic zip-bag (with

the two unused pillow cases), that's a really nice touch. By the way, they do not make single bed satin sheets. (?)

The End
Playwright's Promise