

# **MA, MOONFLOWERS & ME:**

*A Comedy For People Old Enough To Know Better*

by

Jo Morello

## **SYNOPSIS**

A full-length contemporary comedy in two acts.

It's summer and things are heating up in the small college town of Fairview. Al, in his early 60s, has finally decided to marry one-year-older Barbara after a 10-year courtship but there are complications: his long-missing first wife and especially Ruth, his feisty, 80-year-old mother, who blocks his every effort. Ruth has moved back in with her son after the death of her third husband. As long as she stays there, Al can't marry and move Barbara—Ruth's sworn enemy—into his home. Bill Hilton, 75, a family friend and Al's best friend, helps Al in his struggle to ease out the unwilling Ruth. If only she would move into that lovely retirement home.... Things start to change when Tina, a spiky-haired, tattooed teen-ager, delivers two tiny moonflower plants.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS\*

4M, 4F; two acts

RUTH FONTAINE ROGERS MASON..... Al's mother (80)  
GAIL..... Retirement home resident, 70s  
AL FONTAINE..... Pharmacist (early 60s)  
TINA ROSS..... Summer intern, college student (17)  
BILL HILTON..... Al's best friend (75)  
BARBARA LOGAN..... Al's girlfriend (one year older than Al)  
REV. JIM HESS..... Smarmy, opportunistic minister (50s)  
LESTER..... Retirement home resident (very elderly)

DOUBLED ROLES

May be doubled with GAIL:

MARTHA BURTON..... Caregiver, freelance writer (40)  
MRS. LOPEZ..... Rental agent, Hispanic accent at times (any age)

Doubled with REV. JIM HESS:

JAKE..... Retirement home resident (very elderly)  
REV. TIM HESS..... Identical twin brother of Rev. Jim Hess

Doubled with LESTER:

DR. KRISHNA..... Doctor, Indian accent (any age)  
FRED..... Al's friend; Good Ole Boy (60s-70s)

Doubled with TINA:

ALANA BURTON ..... Martha's daughter, late teens

VOICES (doubled with other cast members, at director's discretion)

Female:

EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR..... Heavy German accent (any age)

Male:

MOTORCYCLE MAN..... Rough and tough (50s on up)

Male or Female:

BELLY-DANCING INSTRUCTOR..... Middle-Eastern accent (any age)

CHAIR-DANCING INSTRUCTOR..... Latino/Latina accent (any age)

RESERVATION AGENT..... Southern accent (any age)

9-1-1 DISPATCHER..... Any accent (any age)

TV ANCHOR..... General Standard American (any age)

\*Director may add non-speaking roles (e.g., residents of Ancient Oaks Retirement Home) as desired.

## SETTING AND SET

TIME: The present. Late June through late August

PLACE: Any small American college town with a summer growing season

THE SET: The action of the play takes place primarily on Al's porch, the heart of his home in the summer. It is comfortably but not elaborately furnished. No railings obstruct the audience's view of the porch's interior. The front, open to the audience, has an entry or steps leading to a walk that goes to an (unseen) street. The back wall has a functioning door and window, both connecting to the (unseen) inside of Al's house. Characters will view an (unseen) TV. Strings will be hung to guide moonflower plants to the porch roof as they grow. Smaller plants may surround the porch if desired.

Action flows to and from a few other locations, which are defined by pools of light and sometimes a door or prop. The location of Ancient Oaks Retirement Home (Act I) may be indicated by an identifying banner or sign on an easel ("ANCIENT OAKS RETIREMENT HOME. Make the rest of your life the best of your life"). At the director's discretion, these scenes may be played downstage right or left.

A monitor or projections may be used to show videos of moonflowers opening as well as photos and possibly (although not necessarily) exercise videos.

**MA, MOONFLOWERS & ME**

ACT I

SCENE 1

(Al's porch, late June, afternoon. In dark, LIVELY MUSIC with a strong beat plays.)

EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR (O.S.)

Achtung, Frauleins! Grap tose balls. *(to the beat)* Und shtrut und zwei und drei—

(LIGHTS UP on RUTH and GAIL, moving to an (unseen) exercise video and trying to follow. EACH wears hot pink: Spandex leotards, tights, sneakers, hair ribbons, with a pink basketball between her knees.)

(THEY strut and move their arms with thumbs-up gestures as instructed, but only succeed for a minute or so. Their panting dialogue overlaps the exercise audio.)

RUTH

You do this three times a week? And you call it a “retirement” home?

GAIL

They call us the Prancin’ Grannies.

EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR (O.S.)

Und shtrut und front und back and back—

(RUTH and GAIL strut front and back.)

RUTH

Then I don’t qualify. No grandchild.

EXERCISE INSTRUCTOR (O.S.)

Und squeeze dose balls und drei und vier—

(AL FONTAINE, a plump 62, comes up the walk unseen. He’s dapper in his white lab coat although it barely fastens over his paunch. One button hangs loose. HE stops at the sight on his porch and stares.)

RUTH

Did Hitler have a daughter?

(THEIR balls fall. RUTH turns off video.)

RUTH (Cont'd)

Stopp! [*pron "shtop"*]

AL

Well, if it isn't the L. A. Lakers cheerleaders. Forget your pom-poms, Girls?

RUTH

It's an exercise tape by some deranged, Germanic drill instructor. From Gail's retirement home. "Ancient Oaks. Make the Rest of Your Life the Best of Your Life." Really lame.

GAIL

Hello, Dr. Fontaine.

RUTH

My son's not a doctor. Just a pharmacist. Ph.D., not M.D. He could've been a doctor if—

AL

That's enough, Ma.

GAIL

You'd love living there, Ruthie. Daily Happy Hour. "Wet Your Whistle 'til You Can't Say Thistle." Dances every week. A show every month.

RUTH

A show? ... Wait right there.

(RUTH goes inside.)

GAIL

Does she know you booked her a room?

AL

God, no. She'd throw a fit. But we have to convince her...I mean, she has to convince herself...soon. They'll only hold it one more week. ... You need a ride?

GAIL

Thanks, but Bill Hilton's picking me up.

AL

You and Bill? My best friend's holding out on me.

GAIL

I wish. But it's just for convenience. He's teaching Latin dance today and I'm in his class. Except Bill's in a class by himself.

(TINA wheels up on a bike with two tiny moonflower plants and two envelopes in the basket. SHE wears tight jeans, a light jacket

with a “Fairview College” logo, spiked lavender hair, a nose ring. SHE stops at the end of the walk, still on the bike, watching.)

AL

He’s just a guy.

GAIL

To you a guy. To the ladies, a god. A fantasy Gene Kelly who makes me long for a horizontal tango. . . . I hope to get promoted from cha-cha-cha to ooh-la-la.

(A blast of MUSIC from inside: “Pistol Packin’ Mama.” RUTH bursts outside in an old cowgirl hat, holster and prop gun.)

(RUTH carries a [washable] large poster or life-sized cutout of herself as a young girl, in a skimpy cowgirl costume, aiming two guns. It reads, “Ruthless Ruthie IS “Pistol Packin’ Mama.” SHE places it on the porch.)

RUTH

(to Al) You were a baby when I was in that revue. Your father loved it. (*sings*)

OOOH, LAY THAT PISTOL DOWN, BABE.  
LAY THAT PISTOL DOWN.  
PISTOL PACKIN' MAMA,  
LAY THAT PISTOL DOWN.

(SHE “shoots” AL. GAIL claps. TINA tries to but loses her balance. She jumps clear as the bike falls with a CRASH, dumping plants and envelopes. AL grabs the gun.)

AL

Don’t you ever point a gun—

RUTH

It’s just a prop. I can’t find the other one. . . . That ragamuffin is staring at me.

AL

Can you blame her?. Good thing we don’t have many neighbors.

RUTH

None, unless you count Barbara Logan. And I don’t. She can stare all she wants. Eat her heart out. I’m better at eighty than she ever was. (*to Gail*) Let’s go change.

(WOMEN go inside. AL walks to TINA.)

AL

You all right, Miss?

TINA

I'm fine. I have a delivery for Mr. Al Fontaine—

(HE helps HER to right the bike. HE picks up the two envelopes and reads them.)

AL

That's me. (*reads*) "Al Fontaine. Mr. Al Fontaine." These for me?

(TINA hastily grabs the envelopes and picks up the two plants, which are broken.)

TINA

This one is just ... a note for me. This one goes with the plants. Moonflowers. But they're broken. I killed them. I'll replace them.

AL

Don't worry about it. ... Your hand is bleeding.

(AL gets his handkerchief. HE reaches out to dab at TINA's hand but pulls back.)

AL (Cont'd)

Let me wipe it ... I mean, is it all right if I...?

(TINA nods. AL wipes her hand.)

AL (Cont'd)

Wait right there. I'll get a band-aid.

(As HE walks to the porch, TINA rides off. RUTH enters the porch in casual clothes.)

RUTH

Aren't you off today?

AL

Just until noon. I spoke to little third-graders this morning for career day. Boy, the questions. Do pharmacists carry guns? I hated to admit that I do. ... Do we require fingerprints before we dispense drugs? I told them some states want to. Then I said next thing you know, they'll be asking for nose prints.

RUTH

They really do nose prints?

AL

Not for humans. Maybe if you're a dog . Or a cow. Or gorilla. I was kidding but I'm not sure the kiddies knew that. One little girl took my picture for her blob. Or was it blob? Kids today know all about those things. They're smart. And cute as the dickens.

RUTH

Thanks to you and your wayward wife, I'll never have grandchildren. Cute or otherwise.

AL

You want one so bad, adopt.

RUTH

Look at you. (*tugs at his loose button*) Mr. Pillsbury Dough Boy! You should jog. Run.

AL

I only run if I'm being chased.

RUTH

You're not chaste with Barbara Logan.

AL

At my age, chastity is overrated. Once it's gone, you don't miss it. Like an appendix. Or tonsils. Or toenails? And I'll thank you to leave Barbara alone.

RUTH

You leave her alone. You need a *good* woman. To cook healthy meals, mend your clothes.... If you had a wife, your buttons would be tight instead of your uniform.

AL

I have a wife.

RUTH

I haven't seen her in a while. It's been ... what? Forty years?

AL

Ellen left home on her own. She can come home on her own.

(BILL comes up the walk dressed to tango: black trousers, a low-cut shirt, bright scarf. HE carries a CD.)

RUTH

You'd take her back? You don't know where she's been! That woman stole your life. And my locket. ... Here's your sidekick again. Doesn't he have anything better to do?

BILL

*Buenos días, mi amigos.*

AL

Hey, Bill. What's with the costume?

BILL

Señor Guillermo [*ghee-YER-mo*] today. Dance instructor at Ancient Oaks.

RUTH

If I stay at Al's, you're here. If I go to Ancient Oaks, you're there. ... I'll get Gail.

(RUTH goes inside.)

AL

I don't mind when Ma lands here between husbands but she took Harry's death really hard. I hate to leave her alone but I have to work. If she'd just move to Ancient Oaks—

BILL

Have you considered hypnosis? I guess torture's out.

AL

She tortures me. Still nags me about Ellen. If Ma knew she's living with some guy—

BILL

Why not divorce her and be done with it?

AL

Once burned, twice shy. And boy, did I get burned. The marriage is my safety net. That's why it's so good with Barbara. She doesn't want to get married any more than I do.

BILL

(*with a Spanish accent*) I would not be so sure, Señor.

(RUTH enters with an overnight bag.)

RUTH

(*to Bill*) Gail will be right out. Mind if I ride along? (*to Al*) There's a party at Ancient Oaks. I'll stay with Gail tonight. Would you mind too much if I decided to move there?

AL

I'd miss you something awful, but—

RUTH

I don't have to go.

AL

Why would you? They have nothing to offer. A couple of new friends, some men to meet. A few parties. Chauffeur service. But you'd have to give up cooking and cleaning, and I know how particular you are. And your volunteer work--

RUTH

Gail says they'd drive me to Surrogate Grandparents. And Furry Godmothers.

BILL

Fairy Godmothers?

RUTH

Furry! Furry Godmothers! For animals. We take care of strays. I'm a godmother to forlorn felines. Maybe I've earned the right to be pampered.

AL

Do what makes you happy, Ma. I'll be fine.

RUTH

Well... if you're sure—

BILL

If you move to Ancient Oaks, we can dance together. Like the old days.

RUTH

On second thought—

(BILL plays "Hernando's Hideaway." HE extends his palm to RUTH. GAIL enters.)

RUTH

Are you loco?

(BILL leads RUTH in a tango as HE sings.)

BILL

I KNOW A DARK, SECLUDED PLACE.

RUTH

A PLACE WHERE I CAN'T SEE YOUR FACE.

BILL

A GLASS OF WINE, A FAST EMBRACE.

RUTH

SENOR GUILLERMO, GO AWAY. FAR AWAY! OLE!

(BILL takes the CD and RUTH's bag. HE, RUTH and GAIL exit. AL makes a call.)

AL

(on the phone) Barbara? ... Hi, Honey. Ma's on a sleepover. Wanna do the same?

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

(That evening. Romantic MUSIC and soft lights add a magical glow but Ruth's picture "watches." AL and BARBARA have just finished dinner. BARBARA, in a fancy black apron, is attractive in a homey way but could update her look. HE's in his lab coat.)

(SHE dons glasses to cut two pieces of chocolate cake, one huge and one tiny, from her fancy cake dish. AL eats the big piece.)

BARBARA

Tonight would be perfect except for our chaperone. *(turns the poster backwards)*

AL

At least she can't talk. A kiss for the cook. *(kisses her)* Still as exciting as the first time.

BARBARA

You can remember that far back?

AL

Of course. You think I've been drinking milk of amnesia? *(discovers his gun, still in his pocket)* Oops. But I did forget to put this away. Then I have a surprise. Be right back.

*(AL takes the gun and Ruth's poster inside.)*

BARBARA

This better be good.

AL (O.S.)

Sit down and close your eyes.

*(HE returns with a bottle of champagne and two glasses. HE puts a glass in HER hand.)*

AL

Now don't peek. Let me *(wrestles with the cork)* pop the—

BARBARA

Question? The answer is "yes."

*(The cork POPS. SHE sags. HE fills his glass and kneels to fill HERS.)*

AL

You can open your eyes now.

(SHE sees him on his knees, glass raised.)

AL (Cont'd)

To us. ... I've been waiting for this day ever since Harry passed away—

BARBARA

Harry? Your mother's latest late husband?

AL

... and Ma moved in with me. But she's away for the night and I think she'll move out for good. This calls for a celebration. No more chaperone. We'll be together like before.

BARBARA

Like, "shacked up"?

AL

I thought we were happy.

BARBARA

"We" are not happy. You are happy. Al, I don't want to die an old maid.

AL

You couldn't. You've been married. Divorced. Had children. Grandchildren.

BARBARA

You know what I mean.

AL

We've been through this. I'll be excommunicated if I remarry while Ellen's alive.

BARBARA

When's the last time you went to church? And how do you know she's still alive? Tell you what: Let's spend your days off checking tombstones. ... Find out how Ruth married Harry in a Catholic ceremony. Her ex, Vernon, is still very much alive.

AL

She got an annulment. The Church ruled they'd never been married.

BARBARA

Bull! They had a big wedding. Find out how she got her annulment.

AL

I think she used her casino winnings.

BARBARA

Damn it, Al, get a divorce. Ellen abandoned you. That's grounds for ... something. Maybe she has amnesia, Anyway, who comes back after forty years?

AL

Betty White?

BARBARA

*(not laughing)* Ha.Ha. I've waited ten years for you. Time I could have spent with my daughter and grandkids. I might have even found a nice man who'd love me and not a ghost. ... You still love Ellen, don't you? ... Why won't you answer me?

AL

I'm trying to find the right words—

BARBARA

You only need three: "I ... love ... you."

AL

You already know that. The right words to tell you Ellen's gone.

BARBARA

Hot off the press, huh?

AL

I mean, really gone. Died. Passed on. I got a phone call this afternoon.

BARBARA

Those should have been the first words out of your mouth. Were you going to tell me?

AL

I wanted to wait until after we celebrated.

BARBARA

Mr. Sensitivity. You wanted to celebrate because your mother might move out and we could shack up. Not because you're free to get married. You have no intention—

AL

Of course I do. But I wouldn't have felt right celebrating Ellen's death. So I waited. ... I didn't have to tell you, Barb. You'd never know.

BARBARA

You're right. I wasn't thinking. You must feel awful. Well. It's finally over.

AL

Yes.

BARBARA

You're finally free.

AL

Yes.

BARBARA

We can finally get married.

AL

Yes. ... I mean ... Well, I need a little time ... to tell Ma.

BARBARA

That does it. You selfish, deceitful, lying ... narcissist.

AL

You're saying I have character issues?

BARBARA

We're through. I'm going home.

AL

Don't. I love you! I'm in shock, that's all. Stay. Or let me walk you home. Please.

BARBARA

Forget it, Boy Scout. This old lady can walk herself across the street. And don't call.

(BARBARA exits. AL calls after her.)

AL

Barbara? You forgot your cake dish.

(AL settles into a chair. Turns on TV. Channel-surfs. Sips champagne, eats cake, sips champagne. Turns off TV. Lifts phone. Hangs up. Turns TV on. Off. Lifts phone. Hangs up. Turns off light. Goes inside.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 3

(The next morning. BARBARA enters Al's porch. As SHE reaches for the bell, the door flies open. AL comes out with a tray: muffins on her cake dish, coffee, a flower)

AL (simultaneously)

Barbara! I was just going to--

BARBARA

I came over for—

AL

You changed your mind!

BARBARA

Not on your life. I'm here for my cake dish.

AL

I was bringing it over.

BARBARA

I told you not to call.

AL

Right. So I was bringing it. Special delivery.

BARBARA

*(sees the tray)* You did this for me?

*(AL carries the tray to the porch table.)*

AL

You're worth it. ... We shouldn't let all this good food go to waste.

BARBARA

Give it to the homeless.

AL

I can never find a homeless person when I need one.

BARBARA

Kindly remove your food so I can take my plate.

AL

I've been through the dark night of the soul. I lied. I'm not happy with our situation.

BARBARA

Nor am I. It's built on lies. Ten years hearing that you'd marry me except for Ellen. And ten minutes after she's gone, hearing that you won't marry me anyway.

AL

I will. I was stupid. I didn't realize what I had until I lost you. Now I know I want you.

BARBARA

Only because you can't have me. Once I came back, you'd change your mind again. Don't do this to me, Al. I can't handle any more hurt.

AL

I don't want to hurt you. I want to make you happy. Marry you. If that's what you want.

BARBARA

I want what you want. But you don't know what you want. So I want what you don't know you want.

AL

That makes sense. ... I think. You're the best thing that ever happened to me. And I was too blind to see it. You're smart, loving, witty, sexy—

BARBARA

If you see all that, you're still blind.

AL

That's your sarcastic side talking. Deep down inside, you're soft and cuddly.

BARBARA

Like a kitten. But without the litter box.

AL

Please, Barb. When you walked out last night—

BARBARA

Not the first time.

AL

But last night I knew you meant it.

BARBARA

And here I am again. But just for my cake dish.

AL

Just as well. I ate all the cake. ... It's a nice dish. Let's use it for our wedding cake.

(HE pours coffee out of habit. THEY eat.)

BARBARA

Wedding cake? Are you serious? You know your mother and I—

AL

... are bitter enemies. Will you ever tell me why?

BARBARA

She should do that. ... She'll do whatever she can to stop us from getting married.

AL

We won't let her. ... So we're engaged? We're getting married? You really mean it?

BARBARA

Nothing would make me happier. Yes! ... I can't wait to tell my daughter.

AL

There's just one little glitch. We can't tell anybody until after Ma moves to Ancient Oaks. If she finds out, she'll stay here. And you won't be able to move in.

BARBARA

It's your house. Tell her to move out.

AL

Come on, Barb. Could you love a man who'd put his mother on the street?

BARBARA

If his mother was Ruth, I'd adore him. ... All right. I've waited this long. But I have a limited shelf life and it expires before I do. Let's aim for thirty days. But we're not engaged until after your mother has moved out. Agreed?

AL

Agreed. You can tell your daughter and I'll tell Bill. But nobody else.

BARBARA

You've got custody of the cake dish. ... When's Ruth coming back?

AL

Bill's bringing her (*looks at clock*) right about now. (*sees cups*) Gotta stash the evidence.

BARBARA

This is absurd. Hiding from Mama at our age. Romeo and Juliet we ain't.

AL

(*kisses her tenderly*) Soon, Darling....

(BARBARA exits. HE starts cleaning up.  
SOUND of a CAR and TWO DOORS.)

RUTH (O.S.)

Do they have that much fun every day?

BILL (O.S.)

I'm not there every day. But they seem to.

(RUTH and BILL enter.)

RUTH

I just might like living there. ... Good morning, Al. (*looks around*) Where's my picture?

AL

Inside. Safe from the rain.

What rain?  
RUTH

(RUTH darts inside and drags out the poster.  
BILL sets up a chessboard.)

RUTH  
I'm going there back for Prancin' Grannies right after lunch.

BILL  
I can drive you. I'm teaching an afternoon dance class for the morning golfers.

RUTH  
Figures. The women will be too tired to resist your charms.

AL  
How was the party?

RUTH  
Great! A nice band, good food. But the men are a little too old for me.

BILL  
They're not too old if they're still looking. And they were. The women were jealous.

RUTH  
Nonsense. The girls loved my new earrings. Thumbies! They're thumbprints from my two beloved husbands. (*shows one earring*) This is Robert (*turns*) and this is Harry.

BILL  
Nothing for your middle spouse? Where's Vernon?

RUTH  
For him I'd need a ring in my nose. Vernon the Vermin should rot in hell! (*to Al*) I got your father's thumbprint from his military file. The undertaker took Harry's. It got me thinking about how much time I have before I pass on.

AL  
No way will I wear earrings.

RUTH  
I've decided to "make the rest of my life the best of my life." I'm moving to Ancient Oaks. But only if you're sure you won't mind.

AL  
I already told you. I'll be fine. Go with my blessing. I'll help you move.

BILL  
Me too.

RUTH

(to Bill) You I don't need. (to both) You're both too eager. But I am too, now that I've been there. They have a waiting list but I got lucky. Somebody's been holding an empty room. Today management decided to release it. To me! A good omen, don't you think?

AL

The gods have spoken. It would be fatal to resist.

RUTH

That place will be good for me. Lots of nice people. Plenty to do. It'll help take my mind off poor Harry. His ... passing ... was so sudden. I wasn't prepared.

BILL

You never expect somebody to choke to death.

AL

Especially on Jello.

RUTH

Who knew he was allergic? ... I'm going to start packing.

(RUTH goes inside. AL and BILL sit at the chessboard. Pencils and a fat, six-inch-wide roll of paper are nearby.)

BILL

Man, I love this porch.

AL

I pretty much live outside from the minute the first crocus springs 'til the last leaf falls.

BILL

Except for that. (notes poster) She's living in the past. Nostalgia ain't what it used to be.

AL

Leave it. I don't want her to forget it when she moves out.

(BILL takes a printed page from his pocket.)

BILL

You're all over the internet. (gives Al the page) Picture and all.

AL

Me? (reads) "Nosy pharmacist suggests nose prints for people." Geez, I was kidding.

BILL

Some reporter picked it up from a third-grader's blog. It's catchy. You'll get calls.

AL

This is what I'll be remembered for? Nose prints? ... Ready for our rematch?

BILL

Never saw a lamb so ready for slaughter. (*unrolls the scroll*) I've got a three-game lead.

(THEY play chess through the following.)

BILL (Cont'd)

Bet you and Barb had a good time last night.

AL

You lose. How'd you know she wants to get married? I told her again how I was already married. She pretty much ordered me to get a divorce. Well, I'm not about to be henpecked into anything so I resisted. And she said we were through. Just like that.

BILL

Good for her. Maybe now you'll get some sense. And quit using Ellen as your excuse.

AL

I can't anyway. She died. I got a call yesterday.

BILL

I don't know what to say. Condolences or congratulations? How do you feel?

AL

Numb, I guess. I stopped caring long ago but still, we were married—

BILL

Barely. And she didn't seem to think so. You told Barbara?

AL

Last night. ... Check. ... But when I said I need more time to—

BILL

No wonder she dumped you. You wanna end up like me? I've been lonely ever since Marge died. Not that I mind palling around with you but—

AL

You have a great life. Retired from a high-level career with a golden parachute. Lots of friends. A fun job on a luxury liner. A big, beautiful house—

BILL

A big, beautiful empty house. I only have pieces of a good life. You just threw away the real thing. ... You have any idea how hard it is being your best friend? I've nursed you through so many heartbreaks that I should get a certificate from the Red Cross. Wandering Wanda, Luscious Linda, Maureen the Machine—

AL

Youthful indiscretions. But I grew up. Married. I know you warned me against Ellen.

BILL

You should have backed away when she told you to call her “Rainbow Sunshine Windsong.” That’s not a wife. It’s a weather report. Still a hippie years after the others had moved on to suits and jobs. Ellen only wanted a meal ticket and left you for a better one. Barbara’s the best thing that ever happened to you. And you let her leave!

AL

I couldn’t stop her. And suddenly I was alone. Really alone. I started to think. About my Dad that I loved so much, and how he died when I was ten. ... About Ellen that I loved so much, and how she ran out on me.... About Barbara, that I took a chance on loving—

BILL

You drove her away, you jerk.

AL

I agonized all night. When I woke up, I finally saw my world as it really is. I realized I can turn things around. I saw Barb this morning and we’re getting married! ... I think.

BILL

*(shouts)* You’re getting—!

AL

*(quiets him)* I said, “I think.” You’re the only one I’m telling. Will you be my best man?

BILL

Of course. ... *(moves a chess piece)* Check. ... Why the hush-hush? You in the CIA?

AL

If Ma knows, she won’t move out. That means no marriage. No Barbara. ... I’m in a rut.

BILL

The only difference between a rut and a grave is how deep you dig your hole.

AL

Can you divorce your mother? *(moves a piece)*

BILL

That, my friend, is a stalemate. ... *(moves a piece)* And this is checkmate.

*(Bill grandly unwinds the fat paper roll. He jots the score, unrolls further and reads.)*

BILL (Cont’d)

Bill, four, Al, zip. The winner and still champeen of chess, Bill Hilton. ... You’d better brace yourself. When your mother hears you’re marrying Barbara—

AL

... Mount Etna's eruption will be a hiccup on my seismograph of life. What's the deal with those two? When I left for college, Ma was running her dance studio. Barb was her bookkeeper and best friend. What happened? They won't tell me. But you were there.

(SOUNDS of RUTH walking to the porch.)

BILL

It's not my place to tell you. (*hears Ruth*) Ask your mother again.

(RUTH comes out in her gym outfit, with a bulging gym bag and pink basketball.)

RUTH

Ask me what?

AL

We're just talking about the future.

RUTH

My future's set. If you're sure you don't mind.

AL

You want me to talk you out of it? If I told you once—

RUTH

You want to get rid of me.

AL

I love having you here. But I did okay when you were with Vernon—

RUTH

Better than I did—

AL

... and when you were married to Harry. And I'll do fine again.

RUTH

I'm worried about you. Reaching the age of Social Security but still socially insecure. I'm not going to live forever. (*stuffs her ball into gym bag*) I won't rest in peace if you're alone after I die.

AL

You'll never know.

RUTH

Don't bet on it. ... You need somebody to care for you.

(RUTH hands him the gym bag.)

AL

I'm perfectly capable. (*buckles under the weight*) What's in here? A bowling ball?

RUTH

Mr. Bionic Man! God gave you two hips and already you've had four replacements. You haven't had that many cars. Plus cataract surgery . . . acid reflux ... gall stones.

AL

A woman would be lucky to have me.

BILL

What's left of you.

RUTH

I have lots of single friends who'd jump at the chan--

AL

You've sent me on so many blind dates, I should get a free dog. That last one was really blind—and a dog. No more blind dates. Ever. . . . Tell me: What's wrong with Barbara?

RUTH

Never you mind. You don't need to know. Just promise me you won't see her again.

BILL

Barbara's a good woman, Ruth.

RUTH

She's a leopard. Feeds her ego by chasing younger men like Al.

AL

I'm only a year younger. And what difference does it make?

RUTH

Younger men have more energy. (*whispers*) For sex! ...What's so funny?

AL

I think you mean cougar.

RUTH

A leopard's more deadly. I watch *Wild Kingdom*. And you're an antelope. Dumb and doomed. (*to Bill, coolly*) Will you join us for lunch? I'm whipping up an omelet.

BILL

Thanks, but I've already eaten. I'll stop back for you.

AL

Stay. Ma's a great cook.

RUTH

He said he has to go.

(BILL exits. RUTH goes inside.)

RUTH (O.S.)

One egg or two?

AL

Just cook for yourself. I had a big breakfast.

RUTH (O.S.)

Barbara's like an old dog chasing a snappy red convertible—

AL

I'm a snappy red convertible?

RUTH

She's worse than an old dog. ... A man-eating cat! A tiger. Leopard. Panther. Cougar. Whatever. They groom themselves. Plastic surgery, make-up. And they dress to kill.

AL

Barbara usually wears an apron. The bikini of the kitchen.

(RUTH pops out to the porch again.)

RUTH

Her apron is black. Sexy. Short. Clingy. Probably from Virginia's Secret. Valerie's. Whoever. She prowls for young tomcats. At the movies. The drugstore. The supermarket. I've seen her at Wal-Mart playing up to the greeters.

AL

The fast lane, huh? You're there? Maybe you're a cougar. Harry was younger than you.

RUTH

Men my age can't keep up with me.

AL

Men your age are dead.

RUTH

Mark my words: You'd be Barbara's boy toy. Sex, sex, sex. Morning, noon and night.

AL

Ma, you've made my day.

(SMOKE DETECTOR SOUNDS. SMOKE pours out the window. LIGHT EFFECTS indicate a fire. AL runs inside.)

AL (O.S.)

You left the stove on! The frying pan's on fire!

(SOUND of a fire extinguisher. AL comes out, extinguisher in hand, covered in foam.)

AL (Cont'd)

Come on. We'll go to Denny's. *(wipes his face)* Don't say I never take you anywhere.

(AL waits until RUTH heads down the walk. HE turns her poster backwards and follows.)

END OF SCENE

#### SCENE 4

(Early July. SPOT UP to indicate Ancient Oaks multipurpose room: a table and chairs, a banner or sign reading, "ANCIENT OAKS RETIREMENT HOME. Make The Rest Of Your Life The Best Of Your Life")

(SWING MUSIC. GAIL dances with REV. JIM HESS, a too-smooth minister in an expensive sports jacket over a clerical shirt. HE holds HER too close. BILL cuts in.)

GAIL

*(to Bill, as they dance)* Thanks for rescuing me from that creep.

(HESS moves near LESTER and his walker. RUTH and AL enter, band-aids on his face.)

RUTH

I love it here. . . . Just in time for Happy Hour. I'll have a Long Island iced tea.

(RUTH and AL go to a table.)

BILL

*(to Gail, as they dance)* How'd you and Al finally convince Ruth to move here?

(LESTER and HESS approach RUTH.)

GAIL

The social life won her over. She'll do fine if she'll just stop flaunting that damned poster. I finally convinced her to save it for our next show. *(looks to Ruth's table)* There go our men. I hope I don't regret bringing her here.

BILL

Be kind. She's newly widowed.

GAIL

That's the worst kind. ... How did she kill him?

*(The MUSIC ends.)*

GAIL *(Cont'd)*

Her son is cute. Kind of. In an over-the-hill way. I'll go make nice.

BILL

Ruth will appreciate that.

GAIL

Who said anything about Ruth?

*(GAIL and BILL head to RUTH's table. To GAIL's dismay, BILL and AL step away.)*

BILL

*(indicates Al's bandages)* You all right?

AL

In better shape than the kitchen.

BILL

Your mother's a piece of work. How many mothers have mug shots?

AL

Ancient history. It's not like she was a drug dealer. But anti-abortion demonstrations can be just as deadly. I was relieved when she was arrested. Some of the picketers had guns.

BILL

Not your mother, I hope.

*(HESS sits near RUTH, leans close.)*

AL

Lord, no. She's dangerous enough unarmed. ... That minister with Ma ... He live here?

BILL

No. He's a volunteer, like me. There've been complaints that he's preying on lonely, wealthy widows but they can't prove anything. He hides behind his collar.

AL

Don't they screen volunteers?

BILL

His brother recommended him. A man with a good reputation. Management wants to ban him but they're afraid he'll sue for religious discrimination. He claims he's a missionary.

AL

Profession or position?

BILL

Now that Ruth's here, I can keep an eye on her. She's committed to a new life and Barbara's committed to you. Concentrate on yourself now. You have a wedding to plan.

AL

You're right. And time's a-wastin'. What time's the jeweler open tomorrow?

BILL

Tomorrow's Sunday. You have a stay of execution.

END OF SCENE

SCENE 5

(Next day. AL and BILL, on guitar and banjo, play and sing an upbeat sailing song, e.g., "Sea Cruise," "Beyond the Sea." Nearby are cruise flyers, Ruth's poster and Bill's jacket, BARBARA enters with a covered dish.)

BARBARA

Who's going on a cruise?

BILL

Me. This fall. I'll be a gentleman host again. What's in the dish?

BARBARA

Dessert. (*squints at a flyer, puts on her glasses*) This is a floating mansion. Sign me up.

AL

I have other plans for you. But they're looking for a chaplain. (*pockets flyer*)

BARBARA

(to Bill) A chaplain's job can't be as cushy as yours. Dancing with rich, lonely women. Gentleman host my foot. You're a gigolo. (removes her glasses)

BILL

No sex allowed. But I've been propositioned in twelve languages.

AL

And rejected in thirteen.

(TINA pedals and RINGS the bell, unheard. SHE heads to the porch with small plants.)

BARBARA

You don't know twelve languages.

BILL

I know what they're thinking.

BARBARA

Ah, the amazing Kreskin. ... A free cruise, free women. All that and a paycheck too?

BILL

No pay. The job is its own reward. But I've signed on as a dance partner at Ancient Oaks.

AL

For that you should get hazardous duty pay. (sees Tina) Hello Miss. How's your hand?

TINA

Tina. ... It's all better, thanks. I brought these moonflowers to replace the others.

(TINA gives AL plants and a card.)

AL

Moonflowers? (puts the plants down, reads the card) "These late bloomers represent the joy I wish you for the rest of your life." ... No name. You know who sent these?

TINA

Sorry, Sir. I'm just the delivery girl. ... Moonflowers grow like mad. You'll have gigantic green leaves up to your roof and beyond. Then late in the summer, late at night, big white flowers will burst open like magic. They'll smell heavenly.

AL

That's pretty good for "just the delivery girl." (gives Tina a tip)

TINA

(returns tip) I'm just doing my job. I'm a summer intern at Fairview College. In botany. I start classes in the fall.