

SAGE

By
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SAGE

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To Skyler for teaching me to laugh from the belly.

To Kaelia for teaching me to sing from the heart.

To Susan for teaching me to love from the soul.

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CHARACTERS

THE OLD MAN	Male	60s+	Insightful widower
THE PARK KEEPER	Any Gender	18-80	Direct, intuitive, & shy
THE BEST FRIEND	Male	60s+	Jovial jokester
THE MOTHER	Female	20-40	Kind-hearted & warm
THE SON	Male	30-45	Fast-talking hustler
THE NURSE	Female	30-60	Stoically professional
THE RUNNER	Any Gender	25-50	Tough love trainer
THE LITTLE BOY	Male	6-10	Inquisitive & full of life
THE YOUNG MAN	Male	20-30	Charming & nice guy
THE CHEF	Female	40-50	Stressed but driven
THE BAGEL MAN	Male	30-70	Dour & expressionless
GAME SHOW HOST	Any Gender	18+	Voice Over
CONTESTANTS	Any Gender	18+	Voice Over

CASTING NOTES

Feel free to cast any role differently than the gender indicated in the character name. All pronoun changes are pre-approved. All roles should be considered open to all ethnicities and level of physical or cognitive ability. The role of The Park Keeper was written as autistic, even though it is not explicitly indicated in the script.

LOCATION

A city park in a business and residential area.

TIME

Present.

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ACT I
SCENE I

THE PARK BENCH, weathered but solid, sits stoically underneath a dimming lamppost. There is a carved heart on one side with “R + S” carved inside it. The lights build slowly as pre-dawn shadows fade. The lamppost flickers out and birds are heard in the distance greeting the morning. Sunrise also reveals part of a running track in front of the park bench and a playground in the background. The passage of time is indicated throughout the play by the ‘Sun’ moving from East to West. The ‘Sun’ is represented by lights fading out as another fades in from stage left to stage right. This will be accelerated when the scenes change abruptly throughout the day. The park is empty as THE OLD MAN enters. He is wearing a hat, a coat, and exceptionally comfortable loafers. He is carrying a book, a newspaper, two cups of coffee, and a small duffle bag with an attached umbrella. He is whistling tunelessly as he shuffles to the park bench; carefully arranging himself and his belongings to allow for exactly half of the park bench to be available. There is an air of deliberateness to him, almost ritualized, as he goes about the business of organizing his bench. He looks at his timepiece, looks offstage for a beat, takes a drink of his coffee and opens his newspaper; covering his face from the audience. THE RUNNER jogs in on the track. She is fit and focused, hair tied back, and headphones on. She jogs right by The Old Man.

THE RUNNER. Morning.

THE OLD MAN. *(Not looking up from his paper) Mmmmm... (The Runner jogs offstage. The Old Man turns the page in his newspaper. THE YOUNG MAN jogs in on the track. He looks intently in the direction of The Runner and has an overly groomed look to him. He jogs in place next to The Old Man.)*

THE YOUNG MAN. Did she...?

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THE OLD MAN. *(Not looking up from his newspaper.)* Mmhmm...

THE YOUNG MAN. Shit!

THE OLD MAN. Mmhmm... *(The Young Man jogs off after The Runner as The Old Man turns the page. THE CHEF enters as The Young Man leaves. She walks with a determined step; clearly in thought. She looks mid-forties, wearing slacks and a fitted top. She is carrying a large satchel and a notepad and pencil. She crosses directly to the empty spot on the park bench and sits down. The Old Man lowers and folds his newspaper in time with her sitting down.)*

THE CHEF. That asshole did it again. He said there was “something wrong” with my Sauce Bercy. *(The Old Man hands her one of the coffee cups and begins to drink the other one.)* Thank you. Said it was too rich and that I should be doing the demi-glacé version rather than the fish velouté. Ugh! I hate him! *(They look at each other for a beat. The Old Man smiles.)* Sorry. Good morning. How are you?

THE OLD MAN. I’m well. I woke up, which was nice.

THE CHEF. I know, I know. I should quit, but...he knows everyone. Where would I go?

THE OLD MAN. Wherever it is, they’d be lucky to have you.

THE CHEF. Tell that to my boss. I’m off to the fish market, as usual. What do you think, salmon or sole? *(The Old Man begins to speak.)* I was thinking everyone loves salmon, but it might overpower the sauce, right? *(The Old Man tries to answer.)* But, sole may be too bland and people might be afraid to eat swordfish, so... *(The Old Man places a gentle hand on her hand.)*

THE OLD MAN. What would you like? *(The Old Man smiles again, reassuringly, and The Chef smiles back. She nods, stands up, takes a deep breath and strides off. The Old Man starts reading his newspaper again as THE PARK KEEPER enters US. The Park Keeper is dressed in a green uniform and hat, both with his name on them. He is wearing a green backpack and is picking up trash with a poker and trash bag. Shy and reserved, he moves around the back of the park bench in a wide circle to avoid interrupting The Old Man reading. When The Old Man doesn’t see him, The Park Keeper circles back around the park bench to read the newspaper over The Old Man’s shoulder. After a beat, The Old Man turns*

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the page. The Park Keeper slowly reaches over and turns it back.) Good morning, Reggie. (The Park Keeper continues to read the newspaper; mouthing the words he is reading. He does not react to The Old Man's greeting. The Old Man clears his throat and begins to lower the newspaper. The Park Keeper leans over the park bench to follow the newspaper down. The Old Man turns his head to speak directly in The Park Keeper's ear.) Good morning, Reggie. (The Park Keeper finishes the article he is reading and turns his head towards The Old Man as if seeing him for the first time. The closeness of their faces is not the least bit concerning for either of them.) Ahh...there you are. Good morning, Reggie.

THE PARK KEEPER. I found a new flower. By the wall. I found it last night, but I didn't pick it until this morning so it would stay fresh.

THE OLD MAN. *(Smiling.)* Reggie, we talked about this. When I say "good morning", you say...

THE PARK KEEPER. Oh, right. Good morning, too. I found a new flower. By the wall. Want to see it? *(The Park Keeper circles around the side and puts his backpack on the park bench. He pulls out a thermos, two metal lunch boxes, Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles and Poison Ivy, and a sealed bag of soil with his name on it. All of the items are worn, but in good condition. With both hands, he extends the Poison Ivy lunch box to The Old Man. The Old Man grabs the lunch box with one hand, but The Park Keeper doesn't let go until The Old Man uses both hands. The Park Keeper then puts everything except the Poison Ivy lunch box back into his backpack and sits down next to The Old Man. The Old Man places the Poison Ivy lunch box in his lap and looks at The Park Keeper questioningly.)* Go ahead. Open it. *(The Old Man opens the Poison Ivy lunch box and looks inside. He looks again at The Park Keeper. There is a ritual nature to this interchange.)* Pick it up and smell it. It's a new one. I found it last night. *(The Old Man picks up the flower, a bright yellow specimen with wide leaves and a center bulb. He smells it, and gags noticeably.)* Smells awful, right? *(The Park Keeper laughs loudly at The Old Man's reaction.)* Do you know what it is? I remember you telling me about the corpse flower, Titan Arum, but you said it was a really big flower and this one is small, so I don't know what it is, but it really smells

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bad, right? Smell it again! *(The Old Man takes another hearty sniff of the flower and gags again causing more uproarious laughter from The Park Keeper. After a moment, The Old Man looks closely at the flower.)*

THE OLD MAN. Odd. This appears to be a *Lysichiton Americanus*. *(The Park Keeper frowns; confused.)* It's also called a "western skunk cabbage" although I wouldn't recommend eating it. They're not native to this area and usually bloom in late winter to early spring. Did you know, that these can be found growing in the wilds of Kodiak Island? *(The Park Keeper shakes his head; attention fixed on the flower and story behind it.)* In fact, the Kodiak bears will often eat the roots of these after hibernation. Can you guess why? *(The Park Keeper thinks for a moment.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. To help them poop after sleeping so much?

THE OLD MAN. *(Excitedly.)* Exactly! That's exactly right! The roots of this plant are a natural laxative to the bears.

THE PARK KEEPER. I just figured they smelled like what they help you do. *(The Old Man laughs as he puts the flower back into the Poison Ivy lunch box.)*

THE OLD MAN. So, who did this poop-inducing flower remind you of? *(THE BAGEL MAN enters with his cart of bagels. The Park Keeper looks at him and discreetly points in his direction. The Old Man laughs again.)* Aww, his bagels aren't so bad.

THE PARK KEEPER. It's not the bagels. That guy smells like anus. *(The Park Keeper quickly retrieves his lunch box from The Old Man, puts it carefully back in his backpack and exits away from The Bagel Man. The Bagel Man is a dour, quiet sort. His clothes are already covered in dried dough and his face appears to have a perpetual frown. He is pushing his bagel cart which is full of freshly cooked bagels.)*

THE OLD MAN. Good morning, my friend.

THE BAGEL MAN. Already? Why so good, huh?

THE OLD MAN. Well, the Sun is shining...

THE BAGEL MAN. Hot.

THE OLD MAN. The birds are singing...

THE BAGEL MAN. Loud.

THE OLD MAN. And you and I woke up THIS good looking.

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THE BAGEL MAN. Blind. *(The Bagel Man and The Old Man look at each other for a moment. A slow smile creeps across The Old Man's face. He leans in to The Bagel Man conspiratorially.)*

THE OLD MAN. Why did the bagel lose the election? *(The Bagel Man doesn't change expression.)* He was the victim of a schmear campaign. *(The Bagel Man stares at THE OLD MAN.)*

THE BAGEL MAN. The usual?

THE OLD MAN. Yes, please.

THE BAGEL MAN. Right. One plain-plain, one everything-onion-chives, one bag of crumbs. Four dollars. *(The Old Man hands The Bagel Man the money as THE BEST FRIEND enters. He is dressed similarly to The Old Man except that he uses a walker to get around and has a satchel across his shoulders.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Aww, man, did I miss the joke?

THE OLD MAN. Yup

THE BEST FRIEND. Did he laugh this time?

THE OLD MAN. Nope

THE BEST FRIEND. That's alright. Just try it again tomorrow.

THE OLD MAN. Why?

THE BEST FRIEND. Because bagel jokes never go stale. *(Both men look at The Bagel Man for a reaction. The Bagel Man stares for a moment and walks off. Both men laugh and hug each other warmly. The Old Man hands the everything bagel to The Best Friend as they both sit down. The Best Friend sets up his chess set, using the walker as a table, during the following conversation. The Old Man adjusts the pieces on the board to indicate that they are mid-game.)*

THE OLD MAN. One of these days, I'll get that guy to crack a smile. He's like chiseled stone.

THE BEST FRIEND. Bah...he's probably been laughing the whole time; it's just that his head's up his ass.

THE OLD MAN. Explains the smell.

THE BEST FRIEND. Right?

THE OLD MAN. Speaking of which, you hear from your ex-wife?

THE BEST FRIEND. Nah, just her lawyer. How's Ben?

THE OLD MAN. Ambitious. Takes after his mother. *(The Old Man*

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smiles. The Best Friend reaches out and squeezes The Old Man's hand) He still comes by every day, but it's all work, parties, cars, and girls. I'm afraid he'll be a bachelor his whole life.

THE BEST FRIEND. He'll be fine. He's got a good head on his shoulders when he chooses to use it.

THE OLD MAN. Takes after his mother. *(The Old Man winks. At this point, the chess set is ready.)* Your move. *(They trade moves on the chess board over the next part of the conversation.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. I had that mole removed.

THE OLD MAN. Mmm..?

THE BEST FRIEND. You know, the one on my back.

THE OLD MAN. Pretty sure I haven't seen your naked back since that lake trip 40 years ago.

THE BEST FRIEND. I told you about it. *(whispers.)* Shaped like a... *(looks around and points to his crotch. The Runner jogs by during the next line.)*

THE OLD MAN. Oh, right. So, what did the doctor say about your mole-penis.

THE BEST FRIEND. You had to say that as she was running by?

THE OLD MAN. What? She can't hear with those things in her ears. *(The Best Friend looks offstage where The Runner went. The Young Man jogs on and stops next to The Old Man.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Well, the doctor said my mole-penis was fine, if a little misshapen. Likely due to age.

THE YOUNG MAN. Gross. I never want to get old. *(The Young Man jogs off after The Runner as both men watch him go.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Next time I'll tell him about my balls.

THE OLD MAN. Yeah. Sat on mine the other day. What the hell is that about? Check.

THE BEST FRIEND. You going to Fred's funeral on Saturday?

THE OLD MAN. I barely knew the guy. But, I was going to visit Rosemary anyway, so maybe. Check.

THE BEST FRIEND. Gladys will be there.

THE OLD MAN. You're not a good person. Check.

THE BEST FRIEND. What? She likes you. What's wrong with that?

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THE OLD MAN. It's a man's funeral. Besides, she smells like vinegar and bleu cheese. Check. *(The Best Friend studies his friend for a moment. The Old Man looks up from the board and meets his gaze. The Old Man sags a bit.)*

Fine. I'll go. But, to pay my respects; not to play footsie with salad girl.

THE BEST FRIEND. I'll take it.

THE OLD MAN. Checkmate. *(The Best Friend looks down at the board again. Shrugs in defeat and begins to put the chess pieces away as THE MOTHER and THE LITTLE BOY enter to go to the playground. The Mother is dressed for comfort, not style. She has a warm, engaging personality and watches her son with affection. The Little Boy heads to the swing and leans back to feel the motion. The Old Man watches them while The Best Friend packs up.)* Time flies, huh? *(The Best Friend looks at The Old Man who is lost in thought watching the family in the playground. The Best Friend clears his throat loudly, stands, and does a slight bow.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Well, I'll be off then. See you tomorrow. *(The Old Man smiles and nods as his friend exits. He turns his gaze back to The Mother and The Little Boy as The Park Keeper enters upstage trimming the hedges in the background. The Old Man laughs as The Little Boy jumps off the swing with a giggle. The Mother notices The Old Man and gives a smile and a nod. The Old Man lifts a hand in response. The Park Keeper watches this interaction with interest. He carefully plucks a dandelion from the ground and crosses to The Old Man.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. Here, I found this. Kids like them. They make more flowers and kids like them. Here. *(He holds the dandelion out to The Old Man.)*

THE OLD MAN. Awww, that's very thoughtful, Reggie. Is it for the boy over there?

THE PARK KEEPER. Yeah. Because kids like them. Here. *(He holds out the dandelion again. More insistent this time.)*

THE OLD MAN. Would you like to give it to the boy?

THE PARK KEEPER. No thank you. *(The Park Keeper places the dandelion in The Old Man's hand and exits upstage. The Old Man looks at the dandelion and then where The Park Keeper exited and smiles warmly. He stands up and crosses to The Mother.)*

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THE OLD MAN. Excuse me, ma'am. Sorry to bother you.

THE MOTHER. Yes?

THE OLD MAN. Well, my friend Reggie, the Park Keeper for this park, found this dandelion and thought your son might enjoy it. Reggie's a little shy around strangers so he asked me if I could give it to you. *(The Mother smiles and looks off in the distance where The Park Keeper exited.)*

THE MOTHER. That's sweet. Aiden, look what this nice man brought you. Mr...?

THE OLD MAN. Smith.

THE MOTHER. Say hello to Mr. Smith.

THE LITTLE BOY. Hello, Mr. Smith. *(The Little Boy looks at the dandelion.)* Is that for me?

THE OLD MAN. It is. And it's your job to try to blow all of the seed petals off. *(He kneels down slowly and gingerly.)* Before you do, do you know the stories about this flower? *(The Little Boy shakes his head 'no'; eyes wide. The Mother smiles and tousles his hair.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. No. What stories?

THE OLD MAN. Well, this flower is called a dandelion.

THE LITTLE BOY. I knew that.

THE OLD MAN. Well, of course you did. Because you're super smart. Of course, you also know that you're supposed to make a wish before you blow away the seed petals, right?

THE LITTLE BOY. Uh-huh.

THE OLD MAN. Did you also know that some people believe that the seeds carry your thoughts and dreams to your loved ones no matter how far away? No matter how long it's been since you've seen them? *(The Little Boy shakes his head 'no' again.)* There's even a tale that, if you can blow off all of the seeds in one breath, that someone you love feels that love and loves you right back. Isn't that something?

THE MOTHER. Go ahead, hon. Give it a try. *(The Little Boy reverently takes the dandelion from The Old Man, closes his eyes for a moment.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. I wish...

THE OLD MAN. Shh...don't tell us. It's your wish to know. *(The Little Boy squeezes his eyes shut tight for his wish. He opens his eyes, draws in a deep breath, and blows all of the seeds off of the dandelion in one blow.)*

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THE LITTLE BOY. I DID IT!!

THE OLD MAN. HUZZAH!

THE MOTHER. Good job, honey. Now, what do you say to Mr. Smith?

THE LITTLE BOY. Thank you, Mr. Smith.

THE OLD MAN. You're quite welcome, Aiden. I hope your wish finds its way back to you. *(The Mother's cell phone rings. She looks at it and grimaces.)*

THE MOTHER. Ugh. What does HE want? *(She looks at The Old Man pleadingly and gestures to The Little boy.)* Would it be ok if...?

THE OLD MAN. We're good.

THE MOTHER. *(Smiling in gratitude.)* Thank you. I'll be quick.

THE OLD MAN. We'll be right here.

THE MOTHER. *(Answers the call and walks upstage while keeping her eyes on The Little Boy.)* Hello? Can this wait until tonight? We're at the park. No, you'll just confuse him more. *(The Mother's voice fades as her conversation continues. THE LITTLE BOY finds a stick and begins drawing in the sand. The Old Man kneels down next to him.)*

THE OLD MAN. Hey there. Aiden, right? *(The Little Boy nods.)* What are you drawing, Aiden?

THE LITTLE BOY. I don't know yet. Sometimes I just start drawing to see what happens. It could be a spaceship or a really fast train or a superhero. I won't know until I'm done.

THE OLD MAN. Looks like you've started with a person?

THE LITTLE BOY. Yeah. That's me. I'm always in them. People are hard to draw though, so I just make them stick figures.

THE OLD MAN. Oh, I don't know, that a pretty good stick figure Aiden. Is he wearing a cape?

THE LITTLE BOY. Yup. I'm the hero this time.

THE OLD MAN. *(Looks up at The Mother who is now in a heated conversation.)* Mind if I draw with you? I don't know if I'm as good as you are, but I could do a floating evil eyeball.

THE LITTLE BOY. Eww...that's gross and awesome. Can you make it with lasers coming out of it?

THE OLD MAN. Sure can. *(The Old Man and The Little Boy start a 'drawing battle' while lights shift to The Mother.)*

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THE MOTHER. *(On the phone.)* I don't care. You chose her over us and I now need to choose our son over you. Goodbye, Eric. *(She ends the call and looks over at The Old Man and The Little Boy. She smiles and tears up a bit. She takes a deep breath, wipes her eyes, and walks back to the playground.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. And now I defeat you with my Dandy Lion of power! *(The Little Boy takes a deep breath and blows The Old Man's drawing away.)*

THE OLD MAN. *(Dramatically.)* NOOOOOOOO! Curse you... *(The Old Man makes a choking sound followed by a 'pop' to indicate the eye exploding.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. YAY! *(The Old Man and The Little Boy high five and laugh.)*

THE MOTHER. *(Smiling with them. Looks at The Little Boy.)* C'mon honey, it's time to go.

THE LITTLE BOY. Awww...can we come back again tomorrow? Please?

THE MOTHER. We'll see.

THE LITTLE BOY. *(Whispering loudly to The Old Man.)* That usually means 'no', but I'll keep trying.

THE OLD MAN. *(Whispering loudly as well.)* Gotcha. Well, I'll see if Reggie has another flower tomorrow in case you convince her. By the way...

THE LITTLE BOY. *(Still whispering.)* Yeah?

THE OLD MAN. *(Glancing at The Mother who is trying unsuccessfully to hide her amusement.)* I'm pretty sure she can hear us. *(The Little Boy looks at his mother and smiles mischievously. The Old Man and The Little Boy begin to laugh.)*

THE MOTHER. Alright you two. That's enough. Time to go. Thank you again, Mr. Smith. That was great. I'm pretty sure you made his day.

THE OLD MAN. He's a good kid. Happy to help.

THE MOTHER. Sorry about that. It was...

THE OLD MAN. We had fun.

THE MOTHER. *(Smiles.)* Hopefully we'll see you tomorrow?

THE OLD MAN. I'll be here. *(The Mother and The Little Boy begin to*

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exit.)

THE LITTLE BOY. Goodbye, Mr. Smith!

THE OLD MAN. Until next time, Aiden. *(The Mother and The Little Boy exit. The Old Man smiles to himself and makes his way back to the bench. He checks his watch and looks offstage expectantly. On cue, THE RUNNER jogs on stage on the track. This time she stops at the bench, but jogs in place.)*

THE RUNNER. He still behind me?

THE OLD MAN. Yup.

THE RUNNER. Gassed out yet?

THE OLD MAN. *(Looks.)* Nope.

THE RUNNER. Good. He's made some progress in the last two weeks, then. Remember the first day? *(She smiles.)*

THE OLD MAN. Ha! Pathetic.

THE RUNNER. Barely finished a lap. *(Looks closely at The Old Man.)*
Good day?

THE OLD MAN. *(Smiles.)* Fair to midland.

THE RUNNER. Don't play with me, old man.

THE OLD MAN. *(Smiles more broadly.)* Good day.

THE RUNNER. *(Nods.)* Good. *(Looks back the way she came.)* Here he comes. I'm going to let up a bit to give him some hope.

THE OLD MAN. Isn't that a lie?

THE RUNNER. *(Shrugs.)* Today it is. But, he'll never catch me if he believes he never will. *(She jogs off. The Old Man smiles as The Young Man jogs on panting a bit.)*

THE YOUNG MAN. She's like a machine.

THE OLD MAN. You hired the best. *(Looks at THE YOUNG MAN.)*
Marathon?

THE YOUNG MAN. Movie.

THE OLD MAN. Huh?

THE YOUNG MAN. I'm going to be playing a runner in a movie. My agent referred me to her.

THE OLD MAN. Ha! Your agent might not like you much.

THE YOUNG MAN. Yeah. *(The Young Man sighs and jogs after her. The Old Man chuckles to himself and opens his newspaper. The 'Sun'*

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shifts to Noon. THE SON enters.)

THE SON. Hey, Dad. How are you doing? I brought you lunch. *(The Son sits down on the bench, takes a sub sandwich out, gives half to The Old Man, and eats during the rest of the scene. The Son is wearing a full suit and recently polished shoes. He moves and talks quickly as if he is always late for the next thing. He maintains only the briefest of eye contact and likes to touch people's hands, shoulders, and back when he talks. The Old Man quietly eats his sandwich; occasionally attempting to respond with little success.)* Man, what a week! And it's only Monday, right? Greg's breathing down my neck about next quarter's projections, I got a landscaper at the house who doesn't know shit about feng shui, and my car is on some ship somewhere between here and Japan. I told them to have the car flown, but they whined about 'weight allowance' or some shit. It's like the universe hates me or something. Good sandwich, huh? Too much mayo, though, right? I swear you tell them exactly what you want and they still get it wrong. I said "hey guys, my Dad likes it a certain way and he'll be pissed if it's wrong" and what? Too much mayo. *(The Son looks at The Old Man who has been staring at him for a bit.)* What? *(The Son wipes his mouth and checks his hair.)* What??

THE OLD MAN. How's Katie?

THE SON. Katie? Dad, I broke up with her like 5 months ago.

THE OLD MAN. Kelly?

THE SON. Not since Christmas.

THE OLD MAN. Kim?

THE SON. She's good.

THE OLD MAN. That's nice.

THE SON. You look a little grey around the eyes, Dad. You feeling ok? Because I know a yoga instructor that does this thing called 'hot yoga'. You sit in a room with a bunch of scantily clad gymnasts while they turn the temp up to, like, 105 and you try to get your ass to touch the back of your head. I'm going on Thursday after I get a release note from my Dr. You could join me.

THE OLD MAN. I'm fine.

THE SON. You sure? Well, are you at least taking your vitamins? *(The Old Man gestures to the sandwich.)* Mom would be pissed, you know...

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(The Old Man raises an eyebrow at his son.) It's true. (The Old Man softens after a beat and puts a hand on his son's knee. For the first time, the son's confident air lessens.)

THE OLD MAN. I'll try. *(They share a brief moment. The Son clears his throat.)*

THE SON. Cool. Well, I gotta get back to work. They're probably wondering if I quit or something. *(The Son gets up and circles behind the bench.)* Love you, Dad.

THE OLD MAN. Love you, too. *(The Son begins to exit. Turns.)*

THE SON. Hey. I'm having a barbecue this Saturday. You know, after I visit Mom. Anyway, burgers and stuff. Couple of friends, nothing crazy. Would love to have you...

THE OLD MAN. Got another funeral to go to.

THE SON. Aww, that sucks. Who is it this time?

THE OLD MAN. Fred. You wouldn't know him. We used to bowl together.

THE SON. Huh. Well, maybe you could swing by after, yeah?

THE OLD MAN. Yeah, maybe. I was going to visit your mother, too.

THE SON. Ok cool. You want me to drive you over?

THE OLD MAN. Nah, I like the bus.

THE SON. Dad...

THE OLD MAN. I'll be fine.

THE SON. If you change your mind... *(The Old Man smiles at him.)* Right. Well, you get home safe, huh? I'll call you tonight.

THE OLD MAN. I'll be fine. Now, go get to work. You have that Japanese car and a hot yoga instructor to pay for. *(The Son laughs.)*

THE SON. Right. Love you, Dad. Talk to you later.

THE OLD MAN. Love you, too. Be good.

THE SON. Where's the fun in that? *(The Son exits as The Park Keeper enters carrying two more dandelions. He hands one to The Old Man.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. I wish... *(They both close their eyes and blow off all of the seeds. Fade to black.)*

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SCENE 2

Slow sunrise on the park bench. The lamplight flickers and the birds are heard in the distance. The park is empty as The Old Man casually enters wearing similar clothes and carrying the same props as in the opening of the show. He is whistling a soft tune as he makes his way to his bench. He sits and meticulously arranges things in the same way as before. He looks at his timepiece, looks offstage for a beat, takes a drink of his coffee and opens his newspaper; covering his face from the audience as The Runner jogs on.

THE RUNNER. Morning.

THE OLD MAN. *(Not looking up from his newspaper.)* Mmhmm. *(The Runner jogs offstage. The Old Man turns the page as The Young Man jogs on.)*

THE YOUNG MAN. She's...?

THE OLD MAN. Mmhmm...

THE YOUNG MAN. Shit.

THE OLD MAN. Mmhmm. *(The Young Man jogs offstage as The Chef enters.)*

THE CHEF. So, I fixed the sauce exactly as he said and you know what he did? He didn't even taste it! Asshole! It's like he knew it would be good, so he just pretended it wasn't there. *(The Old Man hands her the other cup of coffee.)* We've got a big private party tonight and they're asking for paella and bourbon shrimp flambé. I might have to swap some of the shrimp in the paella with lobster tails...otherwise, too much shrimp? Either way, he's going to say I did it wrong. *(The Old Man smiles at her gently.)* Good morning. How are you feeling today?

THE OLD MAN. I seem to have won my daily struggle with gravity, so I must be doing something right. How are you? Did you get any sleep?

THE CHEF. Ha! Sleep? That's funny. I couldn't stop thinking about whether to load up on the shrimp or the lobster.

THE OLD MAN. Is there a third option?

THE CHEF. Mussels or scallops, maybe? Yes, and a side pot of Spanish rice simmering in the broth for those who want to keep it simple. *(The Old*

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Man smiles again. The Chef stands up, nods, and heads off. The Park Keeper enters and watches her leave. He is carrying a small pot of colorful flowers. He crosses behind the bench to read the paper with The Old Man.)

THE OLD MAN. Good morning, Reggie.

THE PARK KEEPER. I brought these for that cook lady. *(He points to where The Chef just exited.)* They're called Impatiens.

THE OLD MAN. Good morning, Reggie. *(The Old Man holds The Park Keeper's gaze briefly.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. Oh, right. Good morning, too. They're called Impatiens and they reminded me of her. *(The Park Keeper holds out the flowers to The Old Man who takes them with a smile.)*

THE OLD MAN. Ah, yes. Also known as 'Busy Lizzies'. *(Laughs.)* A perfect match. Nicely done. *(The Park Keeper smiles broadly. Sniffs the air and makes a sour face. The Bagel Man enters. The Park Keeper makes another face and exits away from The Bagel Man. The Old Man watches him leave and shakes his head then turns to greet The Bagel Man.)*

THE OLD MAN. Good morning, my friend! *(The Bagel Man begins to respond, but THE OLD MAN cuts him off.)* Ahh, surely you can't argue with the beauty of this morning? The air is cool *(The Bagel Man grunts.)*, the birds are quietly singing *(The Bagel Man sneers.)*, and we are still the best looking gents in the park. *(The Best Friend enters. The Bagel Man looks at The Best Friend.)*

THE BAGEL MAN. Well, that's true. *(The Old Man laughs and The Bagel Man cracks a slight smile.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Is he smiling? What'd you say, what'd you say?! *(The Old Man and The Bagel Man both laugh together.)* Awww...c'mon... *(The Bagel Man, still laughing, grabs two bagels and a small bag of bread crumbs and hands it to The Old Man.)*

THE BAGEL MAN. On me today. *(The Bagel Man nods to The Old Man, chuckles at The Best Friend and exits. The Best Friend watches him leave, looks at The Old Man, who is still chuckling to himself, and gently smacks his arm. The Old Man hands him a bagel and begins to eat.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. What was that all about?

THE OLD MAN. He and I came to an agreement.

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THE BEST FRIEND. Which was?

THE OLD MAN. That you are one ugly son of a bitch. (*The Best Friend looks at The Old Man for a beat. Smirks.*)

THE BEST FRIEND. He should see me naked. Like a de-shelled turtle. (*The Runner jogs by. The Best Friend sets up the chess board for a new game.*)

THE OLD MAN. Eww...I'm eating here.

THE BEST FRIEND. You think you got it bad, I have a full length mirror in my bathroom. What the hell is that all about? Every time I get out of the shower, I get a floor to ceiling reenactment of a slug in a salt shaker. (*The Young Man jogs in during this. He stops at the end of the bench.*)

THE YOUNG MAN. Gross.

THE OLD MAN. You're disgusting.

THE BEST FRIEND. Yeah, I know. (*The Young Man jogs off. The Mother and The Little Boy enter upstage by the playground as The Best Friend pulls out the chess set and sets up the pieces. The two friends play as lights dim on the bench and rise on the playground.*)

THE LITTLE BOY. Mommy, look! There's Mr. Smith! I wanna show him my picture. (*The Little Boy starts towards The Old Man.*)

THE MOTHER. Aiden, Mr. Smith looks busy with his friend. Just wait until he's done.

THE LITTLE BOY. Awww, c'mon... (*The Little Boy pouts a bit, but then gets on the swing and starts swinging. The Park Keeper enters upstage opposite the playground. He is holding a dandelion and a pink carnation. He sees The Mother and The Little Boy and starts to walk away. The Mother notices him and approaches.*)

THE MOTHER. Excuse me, sir? Reggie, right? Mr. Smith said your name was Reggie? (*The Park Keeper doesn't turn towards her.*)

THE PARK KEEPER. Yeah. That's right. (*The Park Keeper turns just enough to show The Mother his name on his uniform.*)

THE MOTHER. Well, I just wanted to thank you for bringing my son, Aiden, that flower yesterday. That was very sweet.

THE PARK KEEPER. Yeah. It was a dandelion. I brought it because kids like them and they make more flowers. (*The Park Keeper looks at the*

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flowers in his hands. The Mother sees this and senses his tension.)

THE MOTHER. That is a lovely flower you have there. And I see you have another dandelion?

THE PARK KEEPER. Kids like them because you can blow the seeds off and make more flowers. This one is called a carnation. It's pink. The pink carnation is the most common variation for Mother's Day.

THE MOTHER. Well, it's very pretty.

THE PARK KEEPER. Here. *(He hands her the flowers without eye contact. The Mother gently takes them.)*

THE MOTHER. Aiden! Come see what Reggie brought you. *(The Little Boy jumps off the swing and hops over to The Mother. The Park Keeper shrinks a bit.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. A Dandy Lion! *(The Little Boy grabs the flower from The Mother.)*

THE MOTHER. What do you say?

THE LITTLE BOY. Thank you, Reggie!

THE PARK KEEPER. You can blow the seeds off and it makes more flowers. Sometimes, I like to run really fast to see if I'm fast enough to make them all come off.

THE LITTLE BOY. Like this? *(The Little Boy runs in a small circle.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. No. That's not fast enough. You have to run really fast.

THE LITTLE BOY. Ok. Like this?? *(The Little Boy runs faster, but still in a small circle.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. No. Not fast enough. Wait here. I'll find another dandelion and show you. *(The Park Keeper exits. The Little Boy keeps running in circles to blow off the seed petals with little success.)*

THE MOTHER. *(Calling after him.)* Thank you again, Reggie. *(The Old Man hears this and looks up from his game.)*

THE OLD MAN. Oh, hello again. Did I hear you say that Reggie was here?

THE MOTHER. Yes, and he gave me this. *(Shows him the carnation.)* He also brought another dandelion for Aiden. He said he was going to grab another one and come back.

THE OLD MAN. Good man. You know, that carnation is the most

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common flower...

THE MOTHER. ...for Mother's Day. Yes, he told me.

THE OLD MAN. Did he now? Well, isn't that something...

THE MOTHER. He's awfully thoughtful.

THE LITTLE BOY. *(Stops running when he sees The Old Man with The Mother.)* Mr. Smith! *(The Little Boy pulls a piece of folded paper from his pocket.)* Look what I drew! *(The Little Boy hands the paper to The Old Man who unfolds and looks at it.)* It's a drawing of us drawing. I call it a drawing drawing drawing.

THE OLD MAN. Is that us drawing the great superhero Aiden against the evil floating eye?

THE LITTLE BOY. Yup! I made that for you.

THE OLD MAN. Thank you, Aiden. It's wonderful. *(The Park Keeper enters with several dandelions.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. Found some. They grow in the untreated area.

THE OLD MAN. What are the dandelions for, Reggie?

THE PARK KEEPER. Practice. He doesn't run fast enough.

THE LITTLE BOY. I do too! *(The Little Boy runs in a small circle again, but to no avail.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. See? Your circle is too small. You have to run in a bigger circle. Watch. *(The Park Keeper hands all but one of the dandelions to The Old Man and then runs in a big circle around The Park Bench. He looks at the seedless dandelion in satisfaction. He grabs one more from The Old Man and looks at The Little Boy.)* Together? *(The Little Boy nods and starts running.)*

THE LITTLE BOY. I bet I'm faster than you!

THE PARK KEEPER. *(Runs after The Little Boy.)* No. Your legs are smaller. *(They chase around the bench a couple of times. The Little Boy giggles in delight and The Park Keeper starts laughing as well. The Park Keeper catches up to The Little Boy and taps him on the shoulder.)* Tag! You're it!

THE LITTLE BOY. Hey! No fair! *(The Little Boy looks at his dandelion.)* LOOK! The seed petals are gone! I did it!! *(The Little Boy high fives The Old Man, The Mother, The Best Friend, and goes to high five The Park Keeper who deliberately 'air fives' him.)*

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THE PARK KEEPER. Good job. (*The Park Keeper grabs another dandelion from The Old Man and hands it to The Little Boy.*) You'd do it faster next time in a straight line. That was fun. Ok, bye. (*The Park Keeper exits. The Little Boy runs in straight lines back and forth.*)

THE MOTHER. (*Calling after The Park Keeper*) Thank you...

THE PARK KEEPER. (*OFFSTAGE*) You're welcome!

THE MOTHER. (*Looks to The Old Man*) He's great.

THE OLD MAN. Yeah. One of the best.

THE MOTHER. And I haven't seen Aiden laugh like that in a while. His father...well, let's just say he's not around much anymore. So, to see him just 'play' is great.

THE OLD MAN. Taking it hard, huh?

THE MOTHER. Yeah, well, he doesn't understand. He's just a little boy. He thinks it's his fault. I don't know why I'm telling you all this. I just...thank you. Aiden, it's time to go. Say goodbye to Mr. Smith.

THE LITTLE BOY. Goodbye, Mr. Smith.

THE OLD MAN. Nice to see you again, Aiden. Thank you for the drawing drawing drawing. You have a real talent. My son used to draw with me like that and he became a bigwig advertising exec. There's no telling how far you'll go with talent like that.

THE LITTLE BOY. To the moon!

THE OLD MAN. (*Laughs.*) Absolutely. Have fun with that dandelion!

THE LITTLE BOY. I will! (*The Little Boy starts running again.*)

THE MOTHER. Thanks for listening. Sorry if...

THE OLD MAN. Anytime. (*The Old Man smiles and The Mother gives him a grateful smile in return. The Mother and The Little Boy exit. The Best Friend looks at The Old Man a beat.*) What?

THE BEST FRIEND. (*Smiles.*) Nothing. I gotta go. (*Gestures to the board.*) Take a picture. (*The Old Man looks at the board and nods. The Best Friend packs up the pieces.*) We still on for Saturday? Funeral is at 9.

THE OLD MAN. Oh good, my son is having a bar-be-que right after.

THE BEST FRIEND. Yeah, he called me to make sure you made it.

THE OLD MAN. Ha! Figures. I'll be there for both. (*The Runner jogs on.*)

THE RUNNER. He's dragging today.

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THE BEST FRIEND. You're relentless.

THE RUNNER. *(Smirks.)* I'm consistent. Something he has yet to figure out. It's not like it's all that difficult. He just needs to put in a little more effort.

THE BEST FRIEND. Hasn't he efforted enough?

THE RUNNER. Has he passed out yet. *(The Young Man jogs on, breathing heavily.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Almost.

THE RUNNER. Exactly. *(The Runner jogs off. The Young Man stares after her.)*

THE YOUNG MAN. Seriously? *(The Young Man lumbers after her. The Best Friend gathers his things and does his best impression of The Young Man as he exits.)*

THE BEST FRIEND. Seriously??? *(The Best Friend bows and exits. The Old Man opens his newspaper as the Sun shifts to Noon. The Old Man looks up and glances off where THE SON typically enters. Looks at his watch and frowns.)*

THE OLD MAN. Hmph... *(The Old Man puts the paper away, stands up and stretches a bit. He checks offstage and his watch again.)* Hmph. *(The Old Man wipes 'crumbs' off of the bench and sits down; again looking offstage. He sighs in resignation and begins to pack up for the day.)* Alright. *(The Son enters hurriedly.)*

THE SON. Hey, Dad. Sorry I'm late. Some sort of car accident at the entrance to the park. Had to walk an extra couple of blocks just to get in here. Here you go. *(The Son hands The Old Man a sandwich. The Old Man gestures to The Park Bench.)* Nope. Can't really stay today. I'm already behind and I'm going to have to walk around all of that nonsense to get back to work. Just wanted to make sure that...well, you know. I gotta head back, but I've already told everybody that you're coming on Saturday and they're all excited. Don't worry about bringing anything, we've got it covered. Unless you're thinking about your famous guac because everybody loves that shit. I mean, it's not shit, well, you know what I meant. Anyway, love you. Gotta run. I'll call you tonight.

THE OLD MAN. *(Trying the entire time to get a word in.)* Love you, too. Talk with you later.

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THE SON. Yup. Oh, and remind me to tell you about this girl in HR...

THE OLD MAN. What happened to Kim? *(The Son grimaces.)*

Nevermind. But, I wouldn't recommend dating someone in HR.

THE SON. Right. Sure thing. On it. Anyway, love you. Talk to you later.

THE OLD MAN. Love you, too. Be good. *(The Son laughs and exits. The Park Keeper has entered during their exchange and quietly hands The Old Man a dandelion.)*

THE PARK KEEPER. I wish... *(The Park Keeper runs around the bench to blow the seeds off as The Old Man watches, smiling. The Park Keeper looks at The Old Man. The Old Man starts to stand, thinks the better of it, looks at his dandelion and shakes it until the seeds fall off. The Park Keeper laughs. Fade to black.)*

SCENE 3

Slow sunrise on The Park Bench. The lamplight flickers and the birds are heard in the distance. THE NURSE is sitting on The Park Bench in The Old Man's spot. The Nurse is still wearing scrubs under a coat. There is some dried blood on her clothes even though it appears an attempt was made to clean them. She is staring straight ahead; distant. The Old Man casually enters wearing similar clothes and carrying the same props as in the opening of the show. He is whistling a soft tune as he makes his way to his bench. He stops short when he sees The Nurse; surprised and concerned. He clears his throat and approaches when she doesn't respond.

THE OLD MAN. *(Still well short of The Park Bench.)* Good morning. *(The Nurse jumps a bit in surprise and covers her scrubs with her coat.)*

THE NURSE. Oh! I'm sorry, I didn't see you there. What did you say?

THE OLD MAN. I said good morning.

THE NURSE. Is it? *(Looks around.)* Oh, well, there it is. I should probably get home. *(The Nurse starts to rise and The Old Man gestures for her to stay.)*

THE OLD MAN. Looks like you've had a long night. Coffee? I have three sugars, one cream and black... *(He holds out the two coffees. The*

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Nurse looks at him; unsure. He smiles warmly.) Best coffee in town and piping hot. There's this great bakery one block that way and a half a block up. They open early. (He gestures to the seat next to her.) May I? (The Runner jogs on.)

THE RUNNER. Morning.

THE OLD MAN. Good morning. *(The Runner turns and jogs backwards to look at the new person on the park bench.)*

THE RUNNER. Everything alright?

THE OLD MAN. Not sure yet. I'll let you know next time around.

THE RUNNER. Call me if you need me, yeah?

THE OLD MAN. You know I don't know how to use that thing.

THE RUNNER. *(Glares.)* Just call me.

THE OLD MAN. We'll be fine. *(The Nurse looks up to notice this interaction. The Runner reluctantly jogs off. The Old Man looks at The Nurse and gestures to the bench again. The Nurse nods. The Old Man sits down and holds up the two coffees again. She looks for a moment, smiles, and takes the black coffee.)*

THE NURSE. Thank you.

THE OLD MAN. Black. Right. *(The Young Man jogs on and stops near the bench. He looks at the two on the bench for a short beat.)* She's already well ahead of you. You'll have to hurry if you want to catch up.

THE YOUNG MAN. Yeah, ok. Ummm...good morning.

THE OLD MAN. Good morning. *(The Young Man jogs off.)* She's training him for some movie or something. She gets here first, he chases after her. It's a thing.

THE NURSE. Sounds exhausting.

THE OLD MAN. It's entertaining in its own way. *(The Chef enters. She notices the bench arrangement, but doesn't seem bothered by it. She stands next to The Old Man.)*

THE CHEF. So, I ended up with too much rice.

THE OLD MAN. Uh oh. How'd he take it?

THE CHEF. He was furious! Said it threw the whole flavor balance off. The guests didn't seem to mind, but he had me add more shrimp which, of course, meant that we had a ton left over which really pissed him off because he hates throwing away food. But, you know that shelter a couple

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of blocks over? *(He nods.)* Yeah, I stopped by there afterwards with the extra paella. *(The Old Man smiles as The Nurse sips coffee. The Chef tilts her head slightly and The Old Man nods. He offers The Chef his coffee.)* I'm good. Slept like a baby last night. Something about doing for others that eases the soul. Just felt good to help someone in need, you know? *(The Nurse starts crying.)* What'd I say?

THE OLD MAN. Not sure yet. See you tomorrow?

THE CHEF. Yeah. *(The Chef exchanges a look with The Old Man and he indicates that he's got it. The Chef looks again, nods, and exits. The Old Man waits in silence for a beat then offers The Nurse his handkerchief. She accepts and dries her eyes.)*

THE OLD MAN. Rough night, huh?

THE NURSE. You could say that.

THE OLD MAN. Yeah. *(A beat of silence. The Nurse starts crying again.)*

THE NURSE. I'm sorry. It's not like it's the first time. It's just... *(She gestures impotently.)*

THE OLD MAN. Yeah. *(A beat of silence. Both distant. The Park Keeper enters upstage, unnoticed. He stays back when he sees The Nurse.)* A few years ago, Rosemary and I... *(she looks at him questioningly.)* oh, my wife. We were out for a morning walk by the water. *(He points)* Right over there a bit. She always loved the way the air felt there. She said it centered her. I just loved the way she held my arm when we walked. Like it was hers as much as it was mine. Not in a selfish way, mind you, but as though it was simply a part of her. I suppose that's what we were to each other, really. Anyway, we had stopped at our bench *(He gestures to the park bench.)* and she was watching the colors of the sunrise play on the water, and I was watching her eyes, when it happened. The doctors called it a subarachnoid hemorrhage. *(The Nurse looks up.)*

THE NURSE. Brain aneurysm?

THE OLD MAN. Yeah. At the time, I didn't carry a cell phone. She thought they degraded human connection. There also weren't any people around. One of the reasons we chose the path we did. So, I held her in my arms and yelled for help until that girl who jogged by earlier showed up. She called an ambulance, but it was too late by then. My wife didn't make

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it to the hospital. She was gone. Half of me was just gone. I was right there. I'm supposed to protect her; keep her safe. I was right there and there was nothing I could do. The doctors said that, even if we were in the hospital when it happened, she'd still be gone.

THE NURSE. They're probably right. I'm so sorry you went through that.

THE OLD MAN. Like I said, it was a few years ago.

THE NURSE. Still. That's really hard. I...I lost a little boy last night. Car accident. His mother said he liked to play in this park, so I came down here to, I don't know, honor him maybe? I suppose he played right over there. *(Points at the playground.)* Aiden. 8 years old. Head trauma and internal bleeding.

THE OLD MAN. *(Stunned.)* Car accident?

THE NURSE. Yeah. The mother said he ran out into the intersection before she could stop him. Said he was trying to run fast enough to blow all of the petals off of a dandelion. *(The Old Man sits back on the bench as The Park Keeper yells and runs off. Fade to black.)*

END OF ACT ONE

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