

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

by Coni Koepfinger

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JOSIE IN THE BARDO

FOREWORD

Dear Theatre Enthusiasts,

You are about to embark on a spiritual journey unlike any you have taken. *Josie in the Bardo* explores the possibilities of learning how to become something greater than you are – or not.

I should introduce myself. My name is Matt Matthews, an actor, director, writer, and teller of tales. I have had the pleasure of creating art with Coni Koepfinger for a few years now and am very excited to work with her on *Josie in the Bardo*.

For those of you unacquainted with the term, as I was, the bardo is a Buddhist concept of the “gap between lives,” a transitory state between death and rebirth. I liken it to the Catholic purgatory, except that you are not waiting to get into heaven or hell, but for a chance to live another, improved life, a more evolved life.

Josie in the Bardo is the story of a sympathetic woman who is in the early stages of being recognized once again as a uniquely talented jazz musician and torch singer, just to have her life cut short in a horribly violent manner. We follow her experiences after that point in her existence, discovering the irony of pain and loss and her capacity for love through it all. After she is granted access into the Bardo Theatre, Josie finds herself in a truly unusual setting for her own production of *This Is Your Life*. Her experiences there resonate with that all-too-human longing to somehow go back and have a do-over for certain episodes. You might see a bit of yourself in Josie.

Whether your stage is large or small, there’s a gem in this two-act play whose brilliance shines for everyone.

Matt Matthews, Dramaturge

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

JOSIE IN THE BARDO was first performed in 2019 at The Broadway Bound Festival in Theatre Row, 42nd Street, New York City, Glenora Blackshire directing. The Announcer was played by Glenora Blackshire and Josie Divine was played by Beth Griffith. I dedicate this play to them. The role of Freddie was later conceived and performed in 2020 by David Ogrodowski, with Lani Cataldi as Josie Divine.

DRAMATIS PERSONAE

JOSIE DIVINE / YOUNGER JOSIE (Same actor can play both) – a legendary jazz singer, in love with Freddie. When she awakens in the Bardo, the place between life and the afterlife, she meets her Eternal Voice and can determine where she will go next. Younger Josie is an actress, then later a highly acclaimed movie star.

FREDDIE / FREDERICK (Same actor can play both) – a worn-out actor and rock singer who never really made it big. Josie’s jealous and lustful boyfriend, who transcends and becomes a successful actor and benevolent, trusted friend in their next life. FREDERICK is a budding film director in India.

ANNOUNCER / ETERNAL VOICE (Same actor can play both) – the omniscient voice of several characters including Josie’s Higher Self who gives her an exit interview in the Bardo. As a metaphysical, enlightened being, they later act as the DIRECTOR at The Bardo Theatre.

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ACT 1
SCENE 1

TIME: The Present

PLACE: Blue Lou's – a famous jazz club in Manhattan

The clatter of an overcrowded club fades as a single pin-spot comes up on Josie Divine, a famous jazz singer, known in music circles as 'everybody's sweetheart'. She sits center on a stool under a blue spotlight. She appears to be comfortable on it, yet uneasy since her extended stay in rehab. This is her comeback performance. Josie's former lover, Freddie, doesn't like the fact that she hasn't needed his help with her burgeoning career. He tried to make her life Hell by constantly belittling and berating her. Refusing to return his cruelties, Josie almost drank herself to death. She finally broke free and recovered. Slowly she began to trust herself enough to come back out to her public.

ANNOUNCER. Welcome to *Blue Lou's*, the number one place for classic jazz artists in New York City. Tonight, we are honored to welcome back to our stage the tender talents of "everybody's sweetheart". Please welcome the one, the only, Miss Josie Divine.

F/X: Thunderous applause.

Slow soft music filters in as a pinspot comes up on Josie.

JOSIE. Thank you. Thank you so much. I am so grateful to be here... to literally be alive and sitting on this stage before you tonight. I mean, it's a miracle I'm here and ... Well, thank you. Thank you so much. *(beat)* The song I chose for tonight, well, it tells my story but, it's for everyone... Everyone that gets involved with someone, someone who they really connect with... and then suddenly love comes, then it goes sour just as fast. Actually, it turns to hate. I don't know why or how people hate, but

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they do. I never used to believe in it, I mean, until it happened to me. I met him, here, not so long ago. I think now, perhaps he simply hated me all along. He was just playing the role of a friend. He told me that he was one of my best friends. Whenever we talked about love, he'd laugh and say, "What does that even mean? No one can define love." When I told him that I would love him forever, he'd say, "Come on, Josie girl...Nothing lasts forever. Nothing." (*Wiping a tear as the music comes up, she snaps her finger to the beat of the music and laughs ironically.*) How stupid we are when it comes to love, you know. You trust, then there's a break. You trust again. You feel like you know someone, and maybe you do... in another life. He suddenly became a different person. He started to accuse me of not making sense anymore... "Too many broken pieces, Josie." What does that even mean? Then the tenderness took a turn for the worse... I saw all the red flags yet I looked away... Hoping it would never happen, but knowing it would-- Just waiting for the day *When Love Turns to Hate*.

Josie sings.

WHEN LOVE TURNS TO HATE WORDS & MUSIC ©2019 BY JOE IZEN

YOU WALK THE FLOOR,
AND FEEL THE ACHE
YOU'VE CLOSED THE DOOR,
ON HOW MUCH YOU'D TAKE
STILL, YOU RECALL THE WORDS,
THOSE PAINFUL THINGS HE SAID
THAT LEFT YOU FEELING FOOLISH
AND FILLED YOUR HEART WITH DREAD
YOU MUSE HOW THIS COULD HAPPEN
HOW IT ALL WENT UP IN FLAMES
ONE DAY YOU BOTH WERE LAUGHIN'
NEXT YOU CALL EACH OTHER NAMES
HOW SAD THE TURN CAN BE,

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WHEN TRUTH REVEALS OUR FATE
THE UNDISPUTED CONSEQUENCE,
WHEN LOVE TURNS IN TO HATE
(INSTRUMENTAL SOLO)
HE STARTED OUT SO SWEET,
AS MANY LOVERS WILL
BUT SOON THE DOSE HE GAVE ME,
BECAME A POISON PILL
FOR AS I FOUND MY RHYTHM,
HE STRUGGLED FOR CONTROL
I SAW THAT DEVIL IN HIM, AS WE WRESTLED FOR
MY SOUL
IT WASN'T LOVE HE SOUGHT, NOR ONE TO BE HIS
MATE
THERE'S JUST NO WAY TO RECONCILE,
WHEN LOVE TURNS IN TO HATE
ALL YOU CAN DO IS WALK AWAY
WHEN LOVE TURNS IN TO HATE

The lights go down, and fade to black, the applause is quickly blotted out by a loud explosion followed by a fire alarm. People are screaming as panic breaks out. We can hear Josie's voice above the others, screaming in dark.

JOSIE. Freddie! What the hell? What are you doing?

FREDDIE. So, uh Josie, you think you can just walk away and leave?

JOSIE. Freddie! This place is on fire...

FREDDIE. Yes indeedy. It's hot tonight! You've been weird lately. Did you block me? I tried calling you. (*Grabs her by the hair, twisting her backwards*) You blocked me, didn't you?

JOSIE. Let me go, Freddie. Let me...

FREDDIE. What's the matter Josie? Don't you want to give your Freddie a little kiss.

JOSIE. Freddie, you're drunk.

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FREDDIE. I came here to see, and talk. Right here, right now.

JOSIE. Are you nuts? We need to get out of here... The place is on fire. Let's go, we can talk later.

FREDDIE. That's bullshit man! No! No way, man. Guys like me don't talk to old bitches like you.

JOSIE. Freddie, you're really drunk.

FREDDIE. Hell ya, bitch. I'm drunk out of my skull. I am self-medicating.

JOSIE. Oh my God. Please, we need to get out of here.

FREDDIE. So the bitch is back... Got to hand it to ya. "Everybody's sweetheart!" Ha! Who'd you sleep with to get this gig? *(Freddie pulls her closer, his arm around her neck.)*

JOSIE. Please Freddie, please. I can't breathe.

FREDDIE. Truth is, Josie girl, you still got it. You hear those peeps out there. They love you, Josie. They love the hell out of you. And to think I could have had you anytime I wanted. Right in my own bed. *(Freddie pulls out a gun and holds it to her face.)*

JOSIE. Oh my God, please Fred... Don't! You don't know what you're doing. You are drunk and crazy.

FREDDIE. Wooo-hoo! I'm drunk and crazy.

JOSIE. Yes. That's a gun, Freddie.

FREDDIE. Hell ya, it's a gun. It's your gun, I found it in your dresser drawer.

JOSIE. Please Freddie, let's go somewhere and talk.

FREDDIE. Talk? You want to talk to me now? After you blocked me?

JOSIE. I just got busy.

FREDDIE. Busy. Bullshit. I needed your help Josie girl.

JOSIE. I'm sorry. I can help you now.

FREDDIE. I slept in Penn Station, Josie. I didn't have food for three days. Help me now? What the fuck for? I'm done. No, no, I'm overdone. Over the edge. Washed up. Ruined. A waste. A waste of life. All thanks to my "best friend" Josie Divine.

JOSIE. I tried. You know I tried. I connected you to a ton of people... You showed up at auditions drunk. You are very talented. You just need to stop the booze.

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FREDDIE. That's it? That's all? Simple, huh. You make it sound so easy.

JOSIE. It is, Freddie. I did it. I'll pay for your rehab. Together, we can do this... I love you and I promise... *(He hits her with the gun on the back of the skull. Josie drops to the floor.)*

FREDDIE. There you go, baby. And to think you didn't even tell me you got out of the nuthouse. Shame on you Josie girl. You should have told me. This is karma baby. This is your bad karma. *(Freddie laughs hysterically and exits through the stage door. There is a loud explosion followed by screams and confusion. Blackout.)*

SCENE 2

TIME: Moments after the explosion.

PLACE: The Bardo

Lights fade up faintly in the ER at the hospital. Coming out of the aftermath of the explosion, we see a lifeless Josie lying on a gurney. We hear the life support machine beeping in synch with the image of her lifeline that is projected on the scrim upstage. As the beeping stops, the lifeline goes flat. An intern enters, covers the face of the corpse and rolls it offstage. A spotlight comes up on Josie sitting on a chair by a window that opens to a brick wall. She is wearing a hospital gown over her slip. There is a bandage on her head and dried blood on her face. She stands and stares out.

JOSIE. Wow. Look at that rain. My momma used to say that a hard rain meant that the angels were sobbing. Something sad was going to happen... or maybe it already did. Ouch! My head hurts. Jesus. Feels like it's not even really *my* head. Strange. *(Looks about quizzically)* Okay, so, I'm in a hospital. I need to leave. I need a drink, or a Zoloft, or something. No, I just need to get out of here before they start asking me questions that I can't answer. Okay, Josie girl, get your shit together. Smells weird in here. And you, young lady, you have a show tonight. You're back in the biz... Remember? Headlining at *Blue Lou's* again... You're lucky, not everyone gets a second chance. So come on. Get your stuff and get out of

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here. *(Grabs her clothes and exits then returns panting. She grabs the chair for support and sits.)* What the... What the hell is going on out there? Everything is electrified... illuminated. What is this place? It isn't normal. I need to get out of here, now! *(Talking calmly to herself, as if coaching.)* Now. Just go out the door, past the rope, out of here. Don't be afraid... just do it. I know it seems terrifying out there, but... *(As she exits, a stream of colored lights and strange sounds pours in. She returns, a little slower this time, and in shock.)* This. Is. Not. Good. There has to be a way to get past those stupid ropes. Think Josie, think. *(She removes the hospital garb and puts on her evening gown from the night before. She looks quickly in a mirror and fluffs her hair.)* Well, it seems like you've been through quite an ordeal Josie but, you look okay... Now on to the mission at hand. You need to have a plan to get past the ropes. You see people coming and going on the other side, so there must be a way to get there... You can't be afraid. *(Sits to buckle her high heels.)* I wonder what the heck those red velvet ropes are doing in a hospital anyhow? They look like they belong in a theatre for crowd control. Think, Josie! Think! Think! Think! *(Suddenly realizing she can think again.)* Oh, wow... This is cool. My head stopped hurting. My mind is clear now. This is terrific! **ETERNAL VOICE.** It is terrific. It means that we can start your exit interview.

JOSIE. Huh? Who said that?

ETERNAL VOICE. It's me, Josephine.

JOSIE. Josephine?

ETERNAL VOICE. Josephine Marie.

JOSIE. Josephine Marie? *(Lights upstage reveal a larger-than-life image of Josie's face from behind the scrim.)*

ETERNAL VOICE. That's what your grandfather called you when you were a little girl. You loved that. *(Writing a memo.)* Note, retention lapse... The brain damage may have affected her memory. *(To Josie)* We have to wait till you totally regain your faculties.

JOSIE. Brain damage?

ETERNAL VOICE. Your boyfriend hit you pretty hard.

JOSIE. Who, Freddie?

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ETERNAL VOICE. Yes. He knocked you out so that you wouldn't survive the fire.

JOSIE. Freddie wouldn't do that. I mean he can get nasty, but... Hey, who are you anyway?

ETERNAL VOICE. I'm your Higher Self, your inner voice, your guardian angel, your conscience, your spirit, your director...

JOSIE. Why can't I see you?

ETERNAL VOICE. I'm inside your being.

JOSIE. So you're just in my head. Right?

ETERNAL VOICE. No, it's more than that Josie. I'm inside your entire being- mind, body and soul. You're like a house. I'm inside your house. Only you can understand because, well, you can't be inside the house and outside the house at the same time. I mean you can't see the mountain if you are on the mountain. Right? Your consciousness is still linear right now, so I usually stay in the background. Like when you say, "something was telling me to do this or that..." You know what I mean? But during a critical point of your destiny, I need to come forth and speak with you directly. This is a major turning point in your play.

JOSIE. My play?

ETERNAL VOICE. In a manner of speaking.

JOSIE. Look, this place, your voice, I mean it sounds vaguely familiar, but I got to tell you... I'm not putting it all together.

ETERNAL VOICE. It's okay. You're just waking up. You don't need to be afraid. It's only a dramatic pause, a blackout, a light shift. The play of your life never really ends. That's the meaning of eternity.

JOSIE. So, do you look like me?

ETERNAL VOICE. I don't really have a body at this moment, but neither do you.

JOSIE. This is creeping me out. Am I dead?

ETERNAL VOICE. What do you think?

JOSIE. I don't know... I never really died before.

ETERNAL VOICE. Well, what do you remember?

JOSIE. Oh, it's hard to remember anything right now.

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ETERNAL VOICE. Let's try something... Think about yourself as kid. Long braided pigtails with really short bangs, braces, and lots of freckles. What are you wearing?

JOSIE. Oh, that's easy, I always wore blue jean overalls that had patches on the knees.

ETERNAL VOICE. And where are you?

JOSIE. At my Baba and Dzedo's house, my grandparents. On the sun porch. Every Sunday, after church, well after lunch, my Dzedo would walk me to Zinn's corner store to get a big ice cream cone for a quarter. I used to skip all the way there and back.

FLASHBACK 1: Josie imagines licking an ice cream cone, then starts to sing a nursery rhyme, "London Bridge", pretending to jump rope.

ETERNAL VOICE. Nice! Sounds like your memory just rebooted. We just need to reconnect some loose wires. Alright now, shall we begin? Question #1...

JOSIE. Wait. What are you doing?

ETERNAL VOICE. Your exit interview.

JOSIE. Exit interview? For what?

ETERNAL VOICE. Your next assignment. Your next life. You said you wanted to get out of here, right?

JOSIE. But can't I just go back to my old life? I mean I was just getting started again... I made through rehab and...

ETERNAL VOICE. And into the inferno. Sorry Josie. Your body was burned beyond recognition.

JOSIE. So how can I have "a next assignment?" I mean, without a body.

ETERNAL VOICE. Great question. Let's think about it. You lost your body but you're still here, right?

JOSIE. I suppose I am. It feels like I am. But *what* am I and *where* am I?

ETERNAL VOICE. Let's start with where. We are in the Bardo and this is your chance to evolve.

JOSIE. What is the Bardo?

ETERNAL VOICE. Ah! The Bardo is the place between your past life and your next life.

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JOSIE. What's the purpose? I thought that everybody just goes to their next life.

I thought it was automatic. Part of a master plan.

ETERNAL VOICE. Master plan, yes, but nothing is automatic. Karma plays a huge part of it. I'm sure you've heard of that.

JOSIE. Yes, I think.

ETERNAL VOICE. Life is a process of evolution. This process is propelled by love, the basic human energy. Human beings either evolve or they don't.

JOSIE. How did I do?

ETERNAL VOICE. Good. And this is why you get a final evaluation. You are definitely one of the evolving ones. Your actions are clearly driven by love.

JOSIE. Okay... that makes sense.

ETERNAL VOICE. Let's get back to the task at hand—your next life. This exit interview will determine if you are ready to participate in the process. As I told you, we are in the Bardo, Josie. Here is where we draw on lines of divine energy to create new stages and play new roles. Think of an artist, an illustrator who uses lines to sketch a portrait, or an actor who builds his character line by line. Every human uses lines of thought to capture the quintessential moments of past realities and future imaginings in order to fabricate the present. Have you ever had the feeling that you knew someone, but you'd never really met them?

JOSIE. Yes. They say it's a past life thing.

ETERNAL VOICE. Or a future life. In reality, time doesn't exist. It all happens at once. There are only people playing out stories. Past, present, and future are all one. It's technically called the metaverse. That's why there is theatre... to show you how the same play can be performed at the same time, but in different theatres. Shakespeare had a handle on this but I'm afraid people still don't get it.

JOSIE. That sounds cool. I've always wanted to be an actor, but I could never learn my lines.

ETERNAL VOICE. Don't worry, lines come naturally if you keep your attention in the moment. Okay, so, let's begin your exit interview.

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QUESTION #1 - What was the most joyful memory of your most recent life?

JOSIE. Oh, okay. Okay... Let's see. I was in 9th grade, and I got cast in the high school musical, *Annie*, as Annie. I got the lead. My neighbor Mary Jane Jones said that I would never even get a part, let alone the lead. She said, "Ninth graders never get cast in the musical, so don't even try." Well, I wasn't trying for the lead, I just wanted to sing. *(Singing)* "*The Sun will come out, tomorrow...*" You know what I mean? *(A bell rings.)*

ETERNAL VOICE. CORRECT! You have answered that question correctly. You will receive three golden points.

JOSIE. Cool. What are the golden points for?

ETERNAL VOICE. Well, you need ten to go to the next level.

JOSIE. What about death?

ETERNAL VOICE. What about death?

JOSIE. I died, right?

ETERNAL VOICE. Yes. Didn't we just go over this?

JOSIE. Yes, but...

ETERNAL VOICE. But what?

JOSIE. Where did I go when I died?

ETERNAL VOICE. Josie, are you stalling?

JOSIE. No, I just want to know what happens when you die. I just died, I think I deserved to know what happened! Don't I?

ETERNAL VOICE. Sure. But I know you're stalling.

JOSIE. Oh, for pity's sake... You can't talk to me like this—You don't even know me. I mean I don't really know you... yet. I mean...

ETERNAL VOICE. *(Amused.)* Josie, be honest with me.

JOSIE. Okay, okay. What happens if I don't pass this interview?

ETERNAL VOICE. The same thing that happens when you die.

JOSIE. And that is...

ETERNAL VOICE. Nothing.

JOSIE. Nothing?

ETERNAL VOICE. Nothing.

JOSIE. Oh, come on, so all this conversation with you is for nothing?

ETERNAL VOICE. Yes. This is your void – the space between reality and illusion.

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JOSIE. So, my ex-boyfriend hit me on the head, I passed out and burned to death in a fire and then just ended up here. Talking with you.

ETERNAL VOICE. That's right. Talking with you.

JOSIE. With you?

ETERNAL VOICE. With yourself.

JOSIE. So nothing happens here?

ETERNAL VOICE. Nope. Think of it like a scene change, a blackout.

JOSIE. So now what?

ETERNAL VOICE. Can we please continue? Because if you get ten golden points, you can move on.

JOSIE. Okay so, I am officially dead. That we do know for sure. Right?

We know I am no longer living as Josie Divine, the jazz singer. Right?

ETERNAL VOICE. We call it "in transit". Death is not an end in itself. I mean seriously, how could it be?

JOSIE. Wait, what? I feel like... Well, I don't know... I'm sorry for feeling like this but...I mean I'm usually very positive.

ETERNAL VOICE. No, no. It's okay...You feel like that because you feel like that. Here now, let me explain it another way. Death is nothing, but everyone thinks it's some big thing because they've been conditioned to think that. You are in the holding pattern right now. You've lived a fairly conscious life... You were always aware of other people, how they thought, felt... So, you have earned this opportunity to increase your self-realization and co-create your next incarnation. That is, if you really want to.... It's up to you. It was always up to you. And it will always be up to you forever and ever. World without end. Amen. So let's just continue interview and see where that leads us. Okay?

JOSIE. Okay.

ETERNAL VOICE. Alright then, QUESTION #2 - What was the saddest memory of this most recent life?

JOSIE. Oh that is easy. When Freddie started being mean to me, I was so... Hurt. I mean he just turned into a monster. I was so depressed...

FLASHBACK 2 - Lights fade to black, a follow spot comes up on Josie, who is wandering about the dark stage. Nefarious laughing is heard over

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her voice. Freddie is teasing her because he knows she is afraid of the dark. Josie is just about panic stricken.

JOSIE. Aw come on Freddie, you know I'm afraid of the dark. Put the lights on. Don't scare me like this...

FREDDIE. Ha, ha, ha... Oh no! What's that? Holy shit Josie... It's a snake. There's a snake in the bedroom! *(He flings a rope at her, hitting her legs.)*

JOSIE. Ouch! What was that?

FREDDIE. Oh no, it bit you! I told you it's a snake, Josie. Get off the floor, you idiot. It could be poisonous. *(Again he snaps the rope at her heels. Josie jumps up to put the lights on. Lights up. Josie gets up and confronts him.)*

JOSIE. Oh Freddie. You are such a child. I knew it wasn't a snake. It's the rope for the draperies. I knew it.

FREDDIE.

(Mocking her.) "Oh Freddie, you are such a child." *(Now screaming.)* I warned you never to call me that. *(Grabs her by the hair)* Yes indeed, you asked for it, Josie. It's into the ice bath for you, baby. I'll teach you to call me names. I am not a child. I'm nobody's child, never was, never will be. My mother didn't even want me, she left me in a trash can.

JOSIE. Freddie, don't. Let me go. You've been drinking again. You always get...

FREDDIE. Yeah, so what. I like to drink. I'm self-medicating. A little booze and a little CBD, takes the edge right off. You should try it, baby. You need to calm down... *(He kisses her forcefully)* I mean that is if we are going to have fun here tonight. Huh? Let me get the lights baby. *(Lights flicker. Quick flash. Back in the Bardo. A buzzer sounds.)*

ETERNAL VOICE. WRONG! That answer is INCORRECT. You get two black points for that. So, three golden minus two black leaves you with one golden point.

JOSIE. Hey wait. How can *you* say I'm wrong?

ETERNAL VOICE. Josie, you can't delude yourself. I am you. I know the answers. Maybe even better than you do. You just need to be honest with yourself. Shall we continue?

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JOSIE. Sure but... May I answer that second question again?

ETERNAL VOICE. Okay. Give it a shot.

JOSIE. The saddest moment of my life was when my sister was murdered. I saw it coming but I couldn't stop it. It was the saddest moment of my life, but not just for me, I mourned for her sons, and their children. Those little girls really needed their grandmother. *(A bell rings.)*

ETERNAL VOICE. CORRECT. Three golden points. That brings you up to four.

JOSIE. May I ask a question?

ETERNAL VOICE. Yes, of course.

JOSIE. Okay so, if I get the ten points... I get to leave this room and go into that lobby... So, then what's beyond the lobby?

ETERNAL VOICE. The theatre.

JOSIE. The theatre?

ETERNAL VOICE. The Bardo Theatre.

JOSIE. And that's where I help to develop the role of my next life?

ETERNAL VOICE. Yes, shall we? QUESTION 3 - Has anyone ever hurt you?

JOSIE. Sure, when Freddie... No wait, it's not about Freddie. Is it? Let me think about this question...

MEMORY 1: Stage lights fade out as the lights come up on the scrim. We see Josie now jumping rope, but she stops suddenly and screams. A tall figure of a young girl, Helen, comes up behind her. She knocks Josie down, takes her jump rope and tries to tie her hands behind her back. Josie recognizes Helen's voice immediately. She is older yet is extremely mentally challenged.

ETERNAL VOICE (playing HELEN). I'm gonna make you 'cai' Josie, I'm gonna make you 'cai'. Ha, ha, ha. You bad grill Josie. You big baby, you are. *(Helen towers over Josie, and steps on her face, smashing it into the gravel in the alley. Josie stays silent. Helen kneels down then to untie her.)* Oh, forget you Josie, I go home now. But I take jump rope, okay? Please. Helen has to go home before her Momma know she left the yard. Helen climbed out over the fence and Momma gonna whip her silly if she

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get caught. But Helen no gonna get caught. I take the jump rope. Okay?
(*Blackout. The sound of kids playing in a schoolyard at recess.*
Lights up back in the Bardo.)

ETERNAL VOICE. I will repeat the question once more- Has anyone ever hurt you? Two minutes remaining, Josie. Please resume.

JOSIE. It's like it was yesterday. Helen wasn't a bad kid, just mean. Everyone laughed at her. They lived behind us, so we could see her getting beat. Mom told us not to look, she said thar her dad did it outback so we would look. Both her mom and dad would hit her with a thick razor strap. And they made her sleep on the back porch a lot of times, even when it was cold. She slept on bags of trash and garbage. They had seven kids, and she was the only one who was mentally challenged. She would wail so loud. That day, in the alley, I remember thinking... Helen will never grow up. She's always going to be like an angry little kid stuck in that long, tall body. She had to be 14 or 15 by then, but mentally 4 or 5. She attacked me from behind and left me laying in the alley. I cried. But I wasn't really hurt. I cried because I felt her pain. So, I guess the answer is no. When you think about the other person with compassion, I don't think anyone can ever really hurt you.

ETERNAL VOICE. CORRECT. Three golden points. That brings us up to 7.

JOSIE. Cool. I only need three more! Yay! I'm starting to like this game...

ETERNAL VOICE. This is not a game, Josie.

JOSIE. I know.

ETERNAL VOICE. Your compassion is quite admirable, Josie. Things like that are what brought you to the Bardo. You have shown great empathy for your fellow human beings.

JOSIE. I know. I just, I don't know... Something made me feel for her... I mean, it's beyond thinking... When you just know. You can't feel bad about yourself, or even get angry.

ETERNAL VOICE. True. Now for your last question. Would you like to pick a category?

JOSIE. Yes! Okay so, what are the categories?

ETERNAL VOICE. There are seven. One for each day of the week.

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

Sunday is *Religion and Philosophy*.

Monday is *Art and Music*.

Tuesday is *Health and Medicine*.

Wednesday is *Wealth and Geography*.

Thursday is *Science and Nature*.

Friday is *Sports and Leisure*.

Saturday is *Love and Relationships*.

JOSIE. I get it. Wait... Wednesday? What does geography have to do with wealth?

ETERNAL VOICE. Some people think they can buy their way into anywhere.. Think now. Did you pay anything to be born?

JOSIE. No.

ETERNAL VOICE. So which category?

JOSIE. Saturday. *Love and Relationships*.

ETERNAL VOICE. Great choice. Okay... Here goes. QUESTION 5 – How do you recognize love? Feel free to cite specifics: time, place, feelings.

JOSIE. Awww... I remember looking out into the audience that night. He looked like a little lost puppy. Deep into his black olive eyes. I saw his world of sorrow and pain and fear. Then I felt the warmth of his smile, I just loved him, instantly. The kind of love that just is. Pure, innocent. It was like the play started and we knew our parts. Walks, talks, dinners almost every night... I fell alright... head over heels. We were both in love, but he was so afraid of it. Then... Suddenly one day, he changed.

FLASHBACK 2: Sudden blackout, pinspot on Josie, sitting at the bar alone. Enter Freddie, walks up behind her and whispers in her ear. She laughs and pulls out the stool next to her.

FREDDIE. You want me to sit next to you?

JOSIE. Sure... if you want.

FREDDIE. But, you're the star of the show. I can't possible sit next to a big star like you, Josie Divine! I mean come on, what would people say? Think of your fans. Imagine the gossip. Josie Divine palling around with a lousy two-bit actor. Why, you don't even know my name.

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

JOSIE. Okay then, sit down and tell me your name.

FREDDIE. No! No way. You think I'm some easy catch like that...

JOSIE. Where are you from?

FREDDIE. Wouldn't you like to know?

JOSIE. Seriously.

FREDDIE. Seriously? Seriously Josie... May I call you Josie. Seriously, I am from Mars. I am a Martian from Mars. I came to New York City to get my Equity card. Seriously. Boy you sure are stupid, good thing you are so pretty. Ah such arrogance, you people think we aliens don't have unions? I can't land a gig without my card. Can you?

JOSIE. Well Mr. Mysterious Martian. (*Laughing and amused.*) Do you have a name? Do they give names on Mars.

FREDDIE. Yes indeedy. May I present to you, myself, the one and only Freddie.

My old man, used to call me Freddie the Freeloader after some comic on TV - But he got his. And I'll get mine. Wait and see. Hollywood is going to be begging for me. I just got 2 paragraphs in the New York Times.

JOSIE. So, you're an actor?

FREDDIE. How did you guess?

JOSIE. From Queens.

FREDDIE. Damn girl, you are hot tonight. Keep going... Let's do twenty questions. See if you can answer them before I ask them.

JOSIE. Okay, okay. I'm game. I like this.

FREDDIE. I'll think of something about myself and you...

JOSIE. You don't have a pet, you don't like dogs, and cats are not to be trusted.

FREDDIE. Interesting...

JOSIE. Maybe when you were little, maybe around 6 or 7, you had a cat scratch you. It got infected and, well, something happened... the cat had rabies and you... your dad had to shoot it.

FREDDIE. Jesus Christ, Josie! You've got a wild imagination.

JOSIE. Was I close?

FREDDIE. Nope. Not even close, my fair lady.

JOSIE. So what was it.

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

FREDDIE. The family coon hound. We lived in the country. My brother had this dog. It smelled nasty... wheeew hoo. Anyhow, it was a couple of years after my baby brother died, the family was always fighting and tense... The dog ran off and was lost for about a week. When he came back, my father said it looked funny and he was going to shoot it. My brother was crying and I said let me look at it. I went out to look at it, and that bastard fell dead at my feet. No shit. My brother blamed me, to this day he blames me. Hey, how'd you know I was from Queens?

JOSIE. Your accent.

FREDDIE. Well, then... in that case... I will allow you to buy me a drink! Scotch on the rocks. Make that a double... Double Dewars on the rocks. *(Freddie starts singing "Love on the Rocks")*

JOSIE. Make that two, but make mine just one shot.

FREDDIE. Aw, come on Josie. Let's have a proper drink on this proper evening of our memorable first meeting. You know I always wanted to meet you.

JOSIE. Me?

FREDDIE. It's true.

JOSIE. I'm flattered...

FREDDIE. You are very trusting.

JOSIE. Shouldn't I be?

FREDDIE. You tell me.

JOSIE. You seem like a nice guy.

FREDDIE. Don't be too sure.

JOSIE. Well, after all we have a bond.

FREDDIE. Yeah, like what?

JOSIE. We're both artists and we both like scotch.

FREDDIE. Okay... Let's see what else we both like, babydoll. *(He puts his hand down the back of her dress.)*

JOSIE. Uh, no. Not now.

FREDDIE. No? Okay. No. So, then... You're crazy aren't you?

JOSIE. Me? Aren't we all?

FREDDIE. Yes indeedy. *(Whispering in her ear)* You're crazy about me Josie... And I'm crazy about you. So, let's celebrate. *(Calling off)* Hey

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

bartender, give my girl here a proper drink, will ya! (*Freddie moves closer to Josie and puts an arm around her.*

Sudden blackout.)

JOSIE. We were together constantly. It wasn't even six months, but it felt like an eternity. Love yes love. I just loved him. We did a lot of clubbing... And dinners together, we had the most fascinating discussions. Then... (*Beat*) One night, he turned into a monster. (*Theme music, **Love Turns to Hate**. We hear nefarious laughter as lights come up. Enter Freddie again, this time enraged.*) Please stop yelling at me, Freddie. You're making my head hurt. You know I hit my head in the shower. I did. It was bleeding.

FREDDIE. What? I thought we were having a discussion here. Fuck you, Josie just fuck you.

JOSIE. My head feels like an egg. I may have cracked my skull.

FREDDIE. (*Mocking her.*) "I may have cracked my skull!" God damn bitch... Egghead, I'll give you egghead. What's your problem Josie?

JOSIE. Nothing. I think I should go to the ER.

FREDDIE. (*Mocking her.*) "I think I should go to the ER." And tell them what, your boyfriend slapped you around a little? Jesus, Josie. Nobody cares about you. Pick up your fucking face. Look at me when I'm talking to you, bitch.

JOSIE. Freddie, don't... Please. My head is bleeding. I think I really hit it hard.

FREDDIE. Shut up about you head bitch. Hey, I know what I wanted to ask you... What's this stupid shit you're sending to my email?

JOSIE. Just a way to maybe quit drinking... a rehab place. I'm thinking about it. I also sent you a connection to a new agent. I told this guy about you, he's good. He's new but he's good. But if you don't want my help... If you don't like it, delete it.

FREDDIE. "If you don't like it, delete it". What the fuck is wrong with you?

JOSIE. Just being a friend, man.

FREDDIE. No, you're not a friend because you keep sending me all kinds of stupid shit to heal me and you know where I fucking stand on that silly

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

mumbo-jumbo spiritual crap. Don't send me that shit, man. Fucking bullshit.

JOSIE. Sometimes you don't make sense, Freddie. I think it's the booze.

FREDDIE. You don't know shit girl, and cut the sarcasm, Josie. It's unbecoming and it just doesn't work for me.

JOSIE. I'm not being sarcastic. I'm sincere.

FREDDIE. I wasn't born yesterday. Don't even speak to me. You don't deserve to speak to me.

JOSIE. Trust me, I won't.

FREDDIE. Trust you? You want me to trust you? Trust is out of the question. You are too involved with your own world to have a word like trust in your life. It's nonsense, Josie. Revisit all of your emails, text messages and what not. I saved them all, want me to show them to you? No! I don't have time for this crap, man I'm done. No more of your verbal diarrhea! No more! Please!

JOSIE. Okay I won't. I get it. I only wanted to help.

FREDDIE. Do you? Do you really? You say that, but it's all an excuse...

JOSIE. Okay, then just say goodnight. I'm sorry.

FREDDIE. Deflecting. Always avoiding.

JOSIE. Please, Freddie. What do want from me?

FREDDIE. No! More! Bullshit! Do I make myself clear?

JOSIE. Yes. Yes. Yes. Please. I said I was sorry.

FREDDIE. That's not what I want. That doesn't cut it anymore Josie. It's unbecoming. It's unimportant. I thought we were having a conversation?

JOSIE. Look, if you need to talk, I can listen...

FREDDIE. I don't need to talk because you don't talk. You have opinions and fears. I don't want that. You and your spiritual crap.

JOSIE. I fear nothing. I have great faith. In you, in me. And everyone has opinions.

FREDDIE. Jesus Christ, Josie. Shut the fuck up, I won't go down that rabbit hole, I won't! Enough for tonight, go, get out of here before I slap you silly... *(Blackout. Freddie exits. Lights up on Josie, back alone in the Bardo.)*

JOSIE IN THE BARDO

JOSIE. I was filled with Chevis Regal but I made it to rehab. I always knew he would come to kill me one day, but my love for him remained the same. I mean, I am not condoning the abuse, but I forgave him. I had to forgive him. That's the only way I could forgive myself. I love him, still, unconditionally. And if I am able to have a say in my next life... I'd do it all again. If I know anything about myself, I know that I am and always will be a lover. Love is what I live for...

ETERNAL VOICE. CORRECT. Josie Divine, you now have a total of ten golden points. You may now exit past the red ropes and go through the lobby.... the theatre is now open. (*Blackout.*)

END OF ACT ONE

***THE PLAY IS NOT OVER!! TO FIND OUT HOW IT ENDS—
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