

PURGATORY

by

Domenick Danza

PURGATORY

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PURGATORY

PURGATORY was part of Chain Theatre's One Act Festival, summer 2023. It was directed by Mary Linehan. The stage manager was Samantha DiBari. The marketing image was created by Jen DeRosa. The cast was as follows:

Jerry.....Joseph Menino
Angela.....Karla Hendrick
Elaine.....Barbara Haas
Millie.....Kathleen Huber
Janice.....Colleen Cosgrove

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CHARACTERS:

JERRY 58 year old male
ANGELA 56 year old female; JERRY's wife
ELAINE 78 year old female; JERRY & JANICE's mother; recently deceased
MILLIE 80 year old female; JERRY & JANICE's aunt, ELAINE's sister-in-law
JANICE 60 year old female; JERRY's sister

TIME:

The Present & Eternity (Time flow is continuous)_

SETTING:

A Bare Stage with 4 Suggested Locations:

- A Large Bed with an open suitcase on it
- A Table with Four Chairs (Kitchen/Dinette)
- An uncomfortable straight-back chair
- A podium with a sign-in book surrounded by flowers, suggesting a Funeral Parlor

NOTES ON TEXT:

1. A slash (/) is an interruption, indicating when the next line of dialogue begins.
2. Words in the square brackets [] are not spoken, but included to clarify meaning.
3. The ellipsis (...) is a trailing off.
4. A dash (--) indicates a cut off.

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Lights come up on JERRY and ANGELA standing around a large bed. On the bed is an open suitcase. Spread out on the bed are piles of neatly folded clothes (colorful polo shirts, plaid shorts, Khaki shorts, colorful underwear, colorful tee-shirts, sox, sandals, etc.). Jerry is meticulously packing the suitcase with the clothes from the bed. He is slow and organized. Angela is standing a short distance from the bed. She observes and speaks, keeping her distance. The dialogue begins as soon as the lights come up, but the slow, clear and meticulous rhythm of packing continues throughout, uninterrupted by the flow, rhythm, and pace of the dialogue, which should be varied and different. The pace and dialogue reflects the relationship of husband and wife (Jerry and Angela), yet Jerry's distance and pace of the packing feels almost trance-like.

JERRY. When do we leave?

ANGELA. Do you know what's going on?

JERRY. I've got almost everything ready.

ANGELA. I think we should wait.

JERRY. I don't want us to be late.

ANGELA. You're not hearing me.

JERRY. I have a few more things / to pack.

ANGELA. We shouldn't –

JERRY. What time is the flight? *(Silence. They stare at one another.)*

ANGELA. You did hear me? *(Silence. Staring.)* Then it's settled.

JERRY. Is it?

ANGELA. How could we leave now?

JERRY. Pack and go.

ANGELA. Seriously?

JERRY. We made plans months ago.

ANGELA. But now –

JERRY. We paid for the tickets...

ANGELA. So –

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JERRY. The hotel –

ANGELA. We could probably get some of that money back. If they have bereavement fares, I'm sure they'll credit us for / a death [in the family] –

JERRY. It's not about the money.

ANGELA. You're not facing this, Jerry. Your mother passed / last night.

JERRY. We are not here.

ANGELA. Yes, we are.

JERRY. We are leaving. *(Jerry continues to pack. Angela stands and waits. Inhales. Exhales. Angela sits on the bed. Jerry stops. Jerry sits on the bed next to her.)*

ANGELA. You knew this was coming.

JERRY. Why now?

ANGELA. When, Jerry? When would be better?

JERRY. Never.

ANGELA. *(After a silence, Angela puts her arm around Jerry.)* It'll be okay. You have to stay and face it.

JERRY. We have vacation plans.

ANGELA. Yes. And we need to stay.

JERRY. Yeah... I know. Yeah. *(Jerry gets up and meticulously continues packing in the same trance-like pace.)*

ANGELA. *(Angela resumes her standing position.)* But you're gonna pack anyway?

JERRY. Yeah.

ANGELA. Okay.

JERRY. Just let me deny it a little longer.

ANGELA. *(beat)* How long?

JERRY. Until I'm done.

Angela exits quietly. Jerry completes the packing, closes the suitcase. He stares off. Lights shift to the straight-back chair. Elaine enters with three or four shopping bags (or large trash bags) stuffed with her "belongings."

ELAINE. These are coming with me. Don't tell me there's no room. We're just going to have to make room. I'll keep them close for now. Don't think of touching them. *(beat: She tries to get comfortable on the*

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chair.) Happy to get out of that apartment, at least. People in and out all the time. No privacy. Checking this. Checking that. I'm fine! Leave me alone! Feels like I was shouting that a million times a day. It's not an invitation to come back again every ten minutes and check in. Whatever. I know my son wanted me in a place where I had everything I needed. Who's he kidding. He could care less. As long as I had what HE thought I needed, his guilt about not coming to see me was less. Eh! Everyone has their own life. I know. When my husband died, I was relieved. I'm not embarrassed to say it. Why should I be? Face it, marriage is a lot of work. Having children is a lot harder, but at least they grow up and move on, but marriage... each year a heavier burden. What does he want for dinner tonight? What brilliant ideas do I have to smile and support this time? Who do I have to be for him today? Don't get me wrong, he treated me nice... real nice. I think we got married too young. It makes the journey longer, ya' know? Where was I? Oh yeah... so when my husband died, my kids... I have two... daughter, Janice, older... son, Jerry, younger. I'm sure you know all this. They practically arm wrestled to see who would take care of me. Loser takes all. *(big laugh)* Like I needed any care. I was fine. Really, I was fine. Little high blood pressure... oh, there was my hip replacement, then my knee, but otherwise I didn't need anything. The diabetes and irritable bowel were under control. A visit every now and then wouldn't hurt, but... I guess we all have our issues. *(points to shopping bags)* Don't tell me I can't take these, because I'm going to. And this is not exactly the chair I expected... Jesus!

Lights shift to the outer lobby of a funeral parlor. Flower arrangements and a visitor sign in book. Approximately two days from the opening scene. Jerry and Angela are standing on opposite sides, ready to receive visitors. MILLIE rushes in.

MILLIE. I am so sorry.

JERRY. Thank you, Aunt Millie.

MILLIE. She was such a wonder.

JERRY. Yes.

MILLIE. At her age, so energetic.

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JERRY. Yes.

MILLIE. She lived her life to the fullest.

JERRY. Every moment.

MILLIE. We should all be so lucky. (*Millie goes to the visitor book to sign in.*)

JERRY. (*Jerry crosses to Angela.*) How much longer?

ANGELA. (*Angela looks at her watch.*) Two hours or so.

JERRY. Two hours!

ANGELA. Or so.

JERRY. That means longer.

ANGELA. More like three.

JERRY. Jesus!

ANGELA. You can do it.

JERRY. I can do it. (*JERRY crosses to the opposite side.*)

MILLIE. (*Millie crosses to Angela. They embrace.*) I had to take car service to get here. I shouldn't miss it. I had to be here. We were sister-in-laws for sixty years.

ANGELA. Yes, Aunt Millie. I know.

MILLIE. Our whole lives. We went through the birth of our children and the death of our husbands. We were there for ALL the joys and heartbreaks life offered... and let me tell you... (*whispers*) she was not a pleasant woman. I mean that with all my heart... in the best possible way. Bitter and jealous and biting. Anything I had, she had to outdo. When my husband, God rest his soul, I miss him every day... when he got his promotion, we bought a new couch. Sectional. Blue. Made the carpet look dingy, so my husband said "re-carpet," so we did. The whole house. It was glorious. I never expected it. Especially from my husband. Loved him with all my heart and miss him every day, but he was tight with his money. Hated getting up for work every morning. Face it, he only got one promotion in his whole life and I was more surprised than he was when he it happened. Back to the point... you know what she did the day after she saw my new carpet... my new carpeted house? She redecorated. Everything. New furniture, paint, wallpaper. The wallpaper was fine. Textured. I hated it. Wanted it... real bad. Granted, her apartments was not as grand as my house, but the wallpaper... rich. It was rich... I felt... still

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feel – *(deep breath)* And that's what it's been like. And I kept it all inside. Bottled up. My no good son wouldn't drive me to the wake today. He was always a little scared of her and never got along with her children. Your husband and that sister of his... I won't go there... but they always treated my son, my good natured boy like a... second class citizen. So what he was a little overweight. He grew out of it. But I need to be here today to see her off. Without the jealousy and competition... I'm not sure who I'll be anymore. *(Angela grasps Millie's hand and smiles.)*

ELAINE. *(Lights up on Elaine in the straight-back chair).* If she only knew how she inspired me... One look at her new crush velvet sectional and a picture popped into my head. Textured velvet wallpaper. Everything she did was magical. Magical. I admired her. Her husband was a lazy slob. Furniture salesman. How do you think they were able to afford the sectional in the first place? She had it rough. Fat good for nothing son and a lazy slob of a husband, but Camilla... they call her Millie, but to me... she's Camilla. She had class. Never ceased to amaze me. We could have been great friends... should have been. If she wasn't such a pain in the ass. *(Lights fade on Elaine.)*

ANGELA. Go ahead in, Aunt Millie. *(Millie takes a hankie from her purse or sleeve and begins to tear up. She exits sadly. Angela rolls her eyes at Jerry. Jerry returns the sign-in book. Jerry notices someone coming, possibly hears a loud sigh or cry. He crosses closer to Angela).*

JERRY. I'm not dealing with her. *(Jerry exits quickly. JANICE runs it with her arms open, overly emotional.)*

ANGELA. Janice.

JANICE. Angela. *(They embrace.)*

ANGELA. We were expecting it.

JANICE. I know. Yes. Yes. But still. It's a lot.

ANGELA. Oh Janice.

JANICE. Were you there?

ANGELA. Where?

JANICE. With her. When she passed.

ANGELA. No. No.

JANICE. Jerry?

ANGELA. Yes.

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JANICE. He was with her?

ANGELA. Oh, no. No. No. He wasn't.

JANICE. She was alone. She wasn't alone? Was she alone?

ANGELA. I don't think so. No. No. There were always people around her at the complex.

JANICE. The complex?

ANGELA. Assisted living. Round the clock care when needed.

JANICE. The home, yes.

ANGELA. It wasn't a home, Janice. Your brother would never put your mother in a home. She really didn't need a nursing home.

JANICE. So she said.

ANGELA. Yes.

JANICE. I came as soon as I heard. Was I listed as next of kin at the home?

ANGELA. You and Jerry both were. Yes.

JANICE. Where is Jerry?

ANGELA. He was just here. He's talking to a few people.

JANICE. (*Janice looks in the room where Millie and Jerry exited.*) Not many people here, I see. (*a breath*) Let me go in and face the music. How do I look?

ANGELA. You look fabulous. Fine. Grieved. (*Janice stays frozen in her place.*) Go ahead Janice. It'll be okay. Go. She's dead. She can't harm you anymore.

JANICE. You have no idea.

ANGELA. I remember when my mother died. I was a mess. It happened suddenly. Me and my sister were so confused. The grief didn't settle in until after. We didn't know what happened. One day we were having dinner... all three of us together. Our monthly girls' night out. Catching up. Laughing. Complaining. The next day Dad calls. In her sleep. Quietly. Peacefully. He was shocked into silence. Mute. But me and my sister... confused. That was so so long ago. Looking back, I understand how I felt and all, but you and your brother... you knew your mother was nearing the end.

JANICE. I couldn't get away to spend time with her. It was not easy... spending time with her.

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ANGELA. Your mother was always nice to me, but the things she said to you and your brother. How she treated you. I don't know what is worse. Losing your mother suddenly and unexpectedly when you don't realize the last time you saw her was going to be the last last time? Could I have been kinder that day? Did I say something nice? Why didn't I say I love you and hug her? Those things sort of pass when you remember the good times. But you and Jerry... so much unresolved. So much resentment. That's gotta be worse. Jerry doesn't deserve that. He's a good man.

JANICE. Don't speak of my mother in that way. Especially not today. I am grieving. *(Janice dramatically exits).*

ANGELA. You on the other hand... are a bitch.

Lights fade. Lights up abruptly on Janice, Jerry, and Angela sitting around a kitchen table. Approximately three days later.

JANICE. Don't fuck around, Jerry. We both know she had more money than that.

ANGELA. She didn't, Janice.

JANICE. Don't get in the middle of this.

ANGELA. I am not getting in the middle –

JANICE. That is exactly what you're doing. You're always pushing in where you don't belong.

ANGELA. I am just making clear what you don't know.

JANICE. I was talking to my brother.

JERRY. Janice, that's all she had.

JANICE. I can't believe that. *(Silence. No one breathes, then Janice suddenly and loudly breaks the silence.)* I won't. I just won't. All those years of her moaning about not being able to afford this or that, when she had more than enough. Constant constant constant holding back and making us pay for what she needed.

JERRY. Us! Who's us who paid for –

JANICE. We both did what we could. I did my share. You might not have known. I didn't shout about it or bring attention to myself, but I did my share.

JERRY. Your share was staying away, and you were great at it.

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JANICE. There's got to be more.

ANGELA. There's not.

JERRY. Go home, Janice. Go. Just go home. There's nothing for you here.

JANICE. And that's it. You think that's it. I lost my mother. We lost our mother and now you're telling me to leave. Go home. Go. Just go. You didn't even call me. They called me from the home. Oh, excuse me... the complex. I'm surprised you even put me down as a contact. Would have been better if they didn't call me. Better for you. This is not over. I did not deal with a life of shit from her to get nothing and be called by some attendant and now told to go home.

ANGELA. Janice, this is an upsetting time.

JANICE. Don't placate me. This is shit! It is. *(Silence, then a total change in Janice's tone.)* I'll just go then. When can we talk and figure this out?

JERRY. There's nothing to figure out.

ANGELA. A couple of day, Janice. Next week. Come by next week. We'll have dinner and talk –

JERRY. About what?

JANICE. Thank you, Angela. Next week then. *(JANICE exits.)*

ANGELA. Don't let her get to you.

JERRY. You told her to come over next week.

ANGELA. She's your sister.

JERRY. For dinner.

ANGELA. You need to resolve –

JERRY. She's a / psycho –

ANGELA. Psycho bitch... yes, and your sister. You are both facing... a change in your life. A shock.

JERRY. I'm not in shock. I am aware and want to move on.

ANGELA. You both –

JERRY. It's enough for me. *(Jerry kisses Angela on the cheek.)* It's over and enough.

ANGELA. You need to resolve what's between the two of you.

JERRY. There's nothing to resolve. Just move on. *(Jerry turns to exit.)*

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ANGELA. We create our existence... our eternity... / every day... every minute.

JERRY. Every day... every minute. (*Jerry exits*).

Lights shift to Elaine fidgeting uncomfortably in the straight-back chair searching through the bags at her feet. She continues to rummage through her bags as she begins speaking.

ELAINE. That Janice. When she was born, I discovered the true meaning of love. It was innate. Visceral. Just... from deep inside. Almost overwhelming. As a baby... It was a joy to hold her, change her, feed her. When her brother was born... I don't know what happened. The overwhelming took a turn. She wanted so much, and there was only so much of me to go around. I was torn... to pieces... pulled apart. I wanted so badly to give to her. To be with her... every step, but I couldn't do it all. I became impatient... short tempered. One day when she was sick and stayed home from school... Well she wasn't really sick. She was pretending. I don't know why, but every time I turned around that day she was underfoot. So needy. Wanting every ounce from me. I was trying to figure out how to get to school to pick up my son from kindergarten... and there she was grabbing at me... pulling at me. I slapped her. Hard. I didn't mean it. It wasn't till later that I realized I even did it. It was over and done. She didn't cry or anything, so I figured she was okay. She didn't pull at me anymore after that. Not ever. Thank goodness for that. I was able to take care of the things I needed. The house. My husband. My son. I mean, I had two children and a husband and a home to run. That was my life. All my life. And it was a lot to handle. (*beat: breath, stare*) That feeling. That love that I felt when Janice was first born. I never felt like that for anything else. So... pure. Do you think she knows what she meant to me? How she changed my life? Made it full. Meaningful. (*breath*) If I stay still... perfectly still... I can feel it. That love. That pure and perfect love... for her.

Lights shift to Jerry, Angela, Millie, and Janice sitting around the dinner table. About one week from previous scene.

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MILLIE. The gold chain.

JERRY. When they deliver her stuff, I will look for it.

MILLIE. It was our mother-in-law's, your grandmother's. She gave it to your mother. It's an heirloom.

JANICE. I should have it then.

MILLIE. But it's an heirloom.

JANICE. Exactly. Passed from my grandmother to my mother to me. That's what makes an heirloom. It needs to be passed to me.

MILLIE. But you don't understand.

JERRY. What, Aunt Millie. What don't we understand?

MILLIE. It should have been given to me.

JANICE. But it wasn't.

MILLIE. But it should have been.

ANGELA. What are you getting at, Aunt Millie?

JANICE. I don't care what she's getting at.

ANGELA. Let her tell us.

MILLIE. Thank you. It was Christmas... and we had just celebrated our tenth wedding anniversary... your Uncle Joe and I...

JANICE. We know who you were married to.

ANGELA. Janice.

MILLIE. I always admired that gold chain. Every time your grandmother wore it. I always commented on it. She had a pendant, amethyst... on the chain. So that Christmas, right after our tenth anniversary... her last Christmas with us by the way... your grandmother gave me the amethyst as a gift, and your mother the gold chain. Isn't that just like your grandmother. I mean... it was the gold chain I always admired. Besides, how could I wear the amethyst without it? So I never did. It's time to reunite them. The gold chain and the amethyst.

JERRY. The assisted living center will be boxing up her stuff and –

JANICE. They are not going to go through her personal things without us, are they?

ANGELA. It's their job to –

JANICE. Not before we gather her valuables.

MILLIE. It's an heirloom. What if someone –

JANICE. Steals it.

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ANGELA. No one's going to steal anything.

JANICE. We don't know that.

JERRY. I'll go.

ANGELA. There's no need –

JERRY. I'll go to the apartment and gather the valuables.

MILLIE. Would you?

JANICE. I'll go with you.

JERRY. No need.

JANICE. I don't mind.

ANGELA. Let Jerry –

JANICE. Quit with the peace making. You're always making everything peaceful and calm. This is not a calm thing. My mother died. She died... and now everyone is grabbing. Taking. Wanting their share. My share. She was MY mother. I am beside myself with uncertainty.

ANGELA. And grief.

JANICE. Yes. Grief. (*JANICE breaks down. No one moves. They all look away.*)

JERRY. I will go to the apartment and gather her personal belongings.

MILLIE. Valuables.

JERRY. I don't expect to find too many valuables.

Lights fade. Approximately two days later. Lights up on Angela unpacking the suitcase, still on the bed. Jerry enters in a rush. He holds up a set of keys.

JERRY. I found these.

ANGELA. What are they?

JERRY. What do they look like?

ANGELA. Keys.

JERRY. A set of house keys.

ANGELA. Are they yours?

JERRY. No. I found them.

ANGELA. Where?

JERRY. At my mother's apartment.

ANGELA. I was hoping you wouldn't go there.

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JERRY. I told Janice –

ANGELA. And I was hoping –

JERRY. I needed to gather her personal things.

ANGELA. They are supposed to take care of that. It's part of what we pay them to do.

JERRY. I wanted to see... before they went through everything.

ANGELA. See what?

JERRY. What she had. What she kept.

ANGELA. You're sounding like Janice now.

JERRY. Under the circumstances –

ANGELA. We went through her things when she moved there.

JERRY. She did that.

ANGELA. With our help.

JERRY. I found these.

ANGELA. (*ANGELA takes the set of keys.*) Whose are they?

JERRY. I guess they're hers.

ANGELA. What are they for?

JERRY. I don't know. That's what I need to find out.

ANGELA. Jerry, your mother's gone. She's passed. You took care that she had what she needed. She was living in a place where she wasn't alone. Where her needs were met.

JERRY. And now I found these. Maybe Janice is right. Maybe there is more. Something we don't know about.

ANGELA. A set of keys? The lawyer would have listed it in the –

JERRY. You know my mother...

ANGELA. I knew her, yes...

JERRY. Sly. Sneaky.

ANGELA. Your words.

JERRY. Yes.

ANGELA. You're letting your sister get in your head.

JERRY. What?

ANGELA. Don't replace your mother's voice with your sister's insistence.

JERRY. My mother's what? (*beat*) This is all I found. No gold chain. And what about her solitaire diamond? Janice totally forgot about that.

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ANGELA. You told her to liquidate those things before she moved.

JERRY. And now I find these. *(Jerry holds up the keys.)* Only these. Did she do something with the money before she moved? Could she have owned property that we don't know about?

ANGELA. She couldn't.

JERRY. She would. *(Pause: Angela stares at him.)* I'll go to the lawyer. Maybe we'll get to take that vacation. *(Angela exits.)* One of these days we will.

Lights up on Elaine in the straight-back chair. During Elaine's monologue, Jerry is seen slowly and meticulously repacking the suitcase that Angela just unpacked.

ELAINE. My son. What can I say? Didn't want another child. It just happened. Well, the intent was there, but it was one sided. He was a good boy though. Quiet. Fought a lot with his sister. Over every little thing. They just never got along. Don't understand why. I hoped they'd grow out of it, but it got worse and worse. Then he met that wife of his. What a doll. Perfect match. Made in heaven. Funny I should say that here. *(laughs)* Anyway, she was always the peacemaker. Always calming down a troubled situation. Loved her. Truly, I did. Like my own. They never had children. Another oddity. Used to think my son was [gay]... I never said anything. Didn't matter after he got married. I waited and waited to become a grandmother. Then I gave up on it. *(Lights fade on Jerry, still packing the suitcase. Elaine tries to get comfortable in the straight-back chair.)* Don't get me wrong, I know they're happily married. I mean... you know... happily happily. Eh... we all have our issues. Do you think I could get a cushion? Maybe a foot stool?

Lights shift to the table & chairs. Janice & Millie enter, as if Janice just arrived at Millie's home.

MILLIE. I'm so glad you called me.

JANICE. I'm going to the lawyers.

MILLIE. I've been so distraught since the wake. The funeral. *(Millie sits.)*

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JANICE. I need to know what else my mother had.

MILLIE. Her passing. I am beside myself. It's all I think about.

JANICE. What can you tell me?

MILLIE. A lifetime of knowing a person.

JANICE. Aunt Millie –

MILLIE. And face it... not too many people at the service. Did you get around to sending thank you cards yet?

JANICE. I'm not planning on it.

MILLIE. Angela will probably handle that. She's so good at that sort of thing.

JANICE. Beside the gold chain –

MILLIE. I don't know who will handle that for me... the thank you cards. My son doesn't really care about those kind of details.

JANICE. What else do you think my mother had?

MILLIE. I only ask because... well... my greatest fear... *(Millie has an emotional moment.)*

JANICE. What is it Aunt Millie?

MILLIE. That when I go... when I pass... *(Millie whispers.)* No one will come. I know it's a terrible thought. Foolishness... but the reality is... everyone seems to be going before me. Your mother, God rest her soul, I know she's at peace. Oh Janice, just know that. She's at peace now –

JANICE. So are we all, Aunt Millie, so are we all. But what about the diamond solitaire? I haven't seen that in years.

MILLIE. Oh. Oh. Neither have I, but it's been a while since there was any real reason to dress up and get together. The last time I saw your mother... huh... well... I wouldn't call it a dress up event exactly.

JANICE. What would you call it then?

MILLIE. Never mind. I don't want to think about it. I want to remember your mother as we used to be.

JANICE. Face it Aunt Millie, you and my Mom were never close. You were always envious and competitive. That's why you're the one who'd know what she had.

MILLIE. That's a terrible thing to say to me. I know you're grieving. We're all grieving, so I'll look the other way right now. This is a time to come together as a family.

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JANICE. Yes, so... as a family... what else do you think she had?

MILLIE. *(Silence, then Millie speaks.)* She always talked, your mother. Your mother always talked big. All things she was gonna have. All the great things she'd do... things she'd... all talk Janice. ALL talk.

JANICE. You're no help.

MILLIE. See what the lawyer says. Ask about the gold chain. I want to be buried with it. The gold chain and the amethyst. You can help me with that, Janice. People will come to the wake to see me wearing it. I just know it. People will show up if there's a reason. They'll want to see me in it. I have no one to leave it to anyway. Let me know if you find out.

JANICE. Yeah... I'll do that, Aunt Millie.

Janice exits. Lights fade. The next day. Lights up on Jerry at the table. He is holding the set of house keys, staring at them, deep in thought. Janice storms in.

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