

STILL LIFE**MOLLY.....70 or older****AUSTIN.....40-50s, 8, 13****ABILENE (a female)...40-50s, 7, 12**

(NOTE: This is a play that juxtaposes MOLLY'S memories with her kids' grappling with what to do with her in realtime. It should be made clear through staging and lighting that the memory scenes are MOLLY's memories)

(MOLLY sits in a wheelchair or hospital bed [a hospital bed would be a better choice but for a short play it may be too impractical]. She is totally disabled. There's a vacancy in her eyes and her face is emotionless. She speaks her first few lines without changing her look, but with normal emotion. At a certain point, she gets up and joins the memory with appropriate affect)

MOLLY: Five, ten, fifteen....

(Lights up on AUSTIN and ABILENE ages 8 and 7)

AUSTIN: Come on, Abby. You have to hide.

ABILENE: I am hiding.

MOLLY: ...twenty, twenty-five, thirty...

AUSTIN: You're just standing there. Mom'll see you like right away.

ABILENE: No, cause I'm invisible.

AUSTIN: What?

ABILENE: I'm invisible; no one can see me.

AUSTIN: I can see you.

MOLLY: *(MOLLY gets up from the chair, takes a step forward into the memory, her hands over her eyes, her affect normal)*...thirty-five, forty, forty-five...

AUSTIN: I'm looking right at you.

ABILENE: That's cause we're on the same side, so we can see each other.

AUSTIN: That's so dopey. Mom's going to see you right away.

MOLLY: ...fifty, fifty-five, sixty...

ABILENE: No she won't.

AUSTIN: Yes she will. Come on –

ABILENE: But I'm invisible.

AUSTIN: You gotta find a place to hide or she'll get you.

MOLLY: ...sixty-five, seventy, seventy-five...

ABILENE: I'm invisible. And if you don't shut up she'll definitely find us.

AUSTIN: How about that shelf in the garage? We could hide there.

ABILENE: Don't have to. And there's like spiders there.

AUSTIN: You're just going to stand there?

ABILENE: I'm invisible.

AUSTIN: You're not invisible.

ABILENE: Am too.

MOLLY: ...eighty, eighty-five, ninety

AUSTIN: How did you get invisible?

ABILENE: Shhh, she's at ninety.

AUSTIN: How did you get –

MOLLY: Ninety-five a hundred. Anyone 'round my base is it. Here I come.

AUSTIN: I gotta hide.

ABILENE: Quick, get behind me.

AUSTIN: She can see through you, though, right, if you're invisible?

ABILENE: Just do it.

(AUSTIN scrunches down behind ABILENE. MOLLY approaches, apparently not seeing them. AUSTIN makes sure he's angled behind ABILENE)

MOLLY: Now, where could they be? (*MOLLY looks right at ABILENE*) Nope, not over here.

(*ABILENE giggles*)

ABILENE: (*Soto voce to AUSTIN*) See?

AUSTIN: Shh.

MOLLY: Oooh, did I just hear something?

ABILENE: No. (*ABILENE quickly bring her hand up to cover her mouth*)

AUSTIN: Shh.

MOLLY: Must have been a mouse. Or...I wonder if they made themselves invisible.

ABILENE: (*Soto voce to AUSTIN*) You told.

AUSTIN: What?

ABILENE: Shh.

AUSTIN: (*Soto voce*) How could I tell? I didn't even know.

MOLLY: I never heard mice talk like that. They must have made themselves invisible. I'll never find them now.

(*ABILENE giggles*)

MOLLY: Unless ... I turn J. Edgar invisible. Then he can sniff 'em out. Come on, J. Edgar, come on, boy.

(*MOLLY pets "invisible" J. Edgar and then taking his leash follows him around the stage as if he was tracking, finally coming up to ABILENE and AUSTIN*)

MOLLY: That's a good dog, atta boy, you got the scent, you got the scent.

(*ABILENE and AUSTIN try to suppress giggles as MOLLY and J. Edgar get closer*)

MOLLY: Wait, wait, is that them?

ABILENE: No fair.

AUSTIN: No invisible dogs.

MOLLY: Is that them? Sounds like them.

ABILENE: (*ABILENE pets and hugs invisible J. Edgar*) Good boy.

AUSTIN: You cheated.

ABILENE: I want to lead him, I want to lead him.

(*MOLLY gives ABILENE the invisible leash and ABILENE starts walking J. Edgar around*)

AUSTIN: I wanna turn.

(*MOLLY watches the two of them playing with the invisible J. Edgar and smiles broadly and then sits back in the wheelchair and the vacant look returns*)

(*Light/scene change*)

(*It is the present. ABILENE is in a hospital waiting room. AUSTIN enters*)

AUSTIN: Hey, Abby. (*They hug*) How are you?

ABILENE: Oh, Austin, I'm so glad you're here.

AUSTIN: Sorry it took so long. There really is nobody at the Foundation –

ABILENE: Don't you dare apologize. Austin, I'm so proud of you, the work you're doing. I understand.

AUSTIN: We just got the funding for that start-up I wrote you about in Rwanda.

ABILENE: Wow. Good for you.

AUSTIN: It'll be a worker-owned business too. It really fits our profile. There I go, talking about myself all the time. And here you are –

ABILENE: No, it's fine.

AUSTIN: Still, you've had to do all the heavy lifting with mom.

ABILENE: And she was so proud of you. (*More to herself*) Is so proud of you.

AUSTIN: And it's so hard to get back here. *(Beat)* How is she?

ABILENE: Well, it's kind of a long story. For a while she was kind of okay but didn't always make sense and repeated herself a lot. Then she started inserting like nonsense words or syllables in the middle of sentences. Eventually it was all gibberish. They were giving her some pill for a while; I think that made it worse.

AUSTIN: God. That mind, all that creativity. Gone.

ABILENE: *(Slightly unsure)* Yeah. I guess. Anyway, I don't know if she'll recognize you.

AUSTIN: Does she recognize you?

ABILENE: Sometimes she smiles when she sees me.

AUSTIN: Then she probably does.

ABILENE: Same smile she always smiled at me.

AUSTIN: I want to see her.

ABILENE: Sure. *(Beat)* Austin, I wouldn't have called you except...

AUSTIN: What?

ABILENE: She had a stroke.

AUSTIN: When?

ABILENE: They're not sure. We didn't even know until she had another one last week. Another small one. That's why I called you. Who knows when...

(ABILENE reaches down absentmindedly as if scratching a dog)

AUSTIN: Yeah. Thanks. I'm glad you did.

(AUSTIN notices what ABILENE is doing)

AUSTIN: What are you doing?

ABILENE: Oh, what, was I –

AUSTIN: Was that the invisible J. Edgar? You still do that?

ABILENE: Apparently. I never really think about it.

AUSTIN: Really, Abby. Wow. Why did you start doing that, anyway? It was kinda creepy.

ABILENE: Was it? Sorry. When J. Edgar died, I guess –

AUSTIN: You started doing that before he died. I was in college when he died.

ABILENE: Oh. Really? Don't know where it came from. It's kinda comforting, to tell the truth, having an invisible pet. Wanna give it a try? He won't bite. (*AUSTIN smiles broadly*) Cassie was allergic so we never had anything in the house. Maybe that's why – no, that doesn't make sense.

AUSTIN: Invisible pets. Mom is the opposite of invisible now. You can see her but she's not there.

ABILENE: Hmm.

AUSTIN: Ready?

ABILENE: Yeah. Um, I don't know, I'm thinking – why don't you go in alone? I think it would be –

AUSTIN: No, definitely, that's a good idea. Thanks. Give me a moment and then you can come in, you know, whenever.

(AUSTIN goes in to see MOLLY; ABILENE reaches down to pet J. Edgar)

(Scene/light change)

(As before, MOLLY begins scene out of it, sitting in her wheelchair with a bland expression on her face, even when she speaks, and eventually gets up and physically joins the scene)

(Lights up on AUSTIN [age 13], ABILENE [age 12] and MOLLY [still in her chair as noted above] playing Monopoly. For practical reasons this should probably be mimed)

AUSTIN: Come on, 6 or an 8, 6 or an 8.

ABILENE: (*Rolling dice*) 9. Whew. Two hundred dollars please.

MOLLY: (*MOLLY gets off her chair, and joins the scene with normal affect*) The bank is out of hundreds. Austin, you have all the hundreds. Here (*MOLLY gives AUSTIN a couple of five hundreds from the bank*) Give me ten hundreds.

AUSTIN: I like the hundreds. It feels good to hold ‘em. Why can’t you give her four fifties?

MOLLY: I could. (*MOLLY continues to hold out the two five hundreds. AUSTIN slightly petulantly hands over the hundreds*)

AUSTIN: Come on, your turn.

MOLLY: Hold on, I’m giving Abby her money. Okay, where am I? Boy, there’s not a lot of good places to land.

AUSTIN: Four, five or seven. Four, five or seven. (*MOLLY rolls*) Yeah! Oh, no, that’s eight.

ABILENE: “Go to jail, go directly to jail, do not pass go, do not collect two hundred dollars.”

MOLLY: At least I’ll be safe there for a couple of turns.

AUSTIN: Let’s see. I guess anything but a 9, 10 or 12. (*AUSTIN rolls*) 11. Community Chest.

ABILENE: God, you’re so lucky, I can’t believe it.

AUSTIN: It’s skill. You gotta (*AUSTIN shakes his hand in some stylized way*) before you roll.

ABILENE: That’s stupid. What is it?

AUSTIN: “You have won second prize in a beauty contest. Collect ten dollars.”

ABILENE: Who won first prize, Elmer Fudd? (*ABILENE rolls dice*) Ten. One, two, three, four, five six, seven, eight, nine, ten. Just visiting. Hello, ma.

MOLLY: Hello. Did you bring me anything to eat? The prison food is terrible.

AUSTIN: Doubles. You gotta roll again. 6, 8 or 9.

ABILENE: 10, 10, free parking. (*ABILENE rolls*) Whoops.

AUSTIN: 9. New York Avenue. One thousand big ones.

ABILENE. I don't know if I have it.

MOLLY: Well, try, honey. You have a couple of things you can mortgage.

ABILENE: I have to mortgage Reading Railroad? I love Reading Railroad.

MOLLY: Okay, Hundred for that. Seventy-five for that. How much do you have?

ABILENE: Let's see, \$953.

AUSTIN: Sorry, Charlie.

ABILENE: Oh come on, Austin, it's only like forty dollars.

AUSTIN: Those are the rules.

MOLLY: You can't let her slide for forty dollars? We're having such a nice visit in jail.

AUSTIN: If I keep letting her slide, the game will go on forever.

MOLLY: Are you having fun?

AUSTIN: (*Beat*) Uh, yeah.

MOLLY: So what's wrong with it going on forever?

(*There is a beat*)

AUSTIN: Okay. I'm gonna win anyway. And I tell you what, here's your money back and here's Baltic and you should have enough to get Mediterranean out of mortgage and build hotels on both.

ABILENE: Wow, thanks.

AUSTIN: And I'm coming around so maybe you'll get lucky and I'll land on you and you'll get back in the game.

MOLLY: That's so lovely, Austin.

AUSTIN: I'm going to win anyway.

MOLLY: (*MOLLY goes back to her chair and resumes her emotionless affect, saying the following as she goes*) We're all going to win.

AUSTIN: What?

(Scene/light change)

(Still the hospital waiting room. AUSTIN is just returning from MOLLY's room)

AUSTIN: (*Somewhat shaken*) I thought you were coming in

ABILENE: The nurse came by and asked if I wanted to update the forms.

AUSTIN: What forms? The DNR?

ABILENE: Um, yeah, and –

AUSTIN: Does she have a DNR?

ABILENE: Well, I thought we should talk about it. I didn't feel comfortable just – I mean I'll be here.

AUSTIN: Okay. You know, whatever you can live with. Oh, that was stupid.

ABILENE: Yeah, the thing is, I'm not sure. I'm not sure what I can live with.

AUSTIN: Uh-huh.

ABILENE: You know, Austin, you're always saying what can you do to help, how can you help me with mom.

AUSTIN: It's just that I feel so guilty never being here.

ABILENE: Don't start that again.

AUSTIN: Sorry.

ABILENE: Do you think mom would want you here under these circumstances, pulling you away from your work?

AUSTIN: No. But ...

ABILENE: But what?

AUSTIN: Is it about what mom wants? Or what she would want if she was in any condition to have those kinds of thoughts?

ABILENE: Well, if it's about me, I mean –

AUSTIN: No, I know where you come out. (*Beat*) It's about me.

ABILENE: Okay, I get that. But if you want to help, this is what I mostly need right now. I need to decide about what to do if...

AUSTIN: If she deteriorates physically.

ABILENE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: What to do if they're keeping her alive.

ABILENE: Yeah.

AUSTIN: Whether you should pull the plug.

ABILENE: Austin!

AUSTIN: Sorry. But that is what you're asking.

ABILENE: (*Beat*) Yeah, it is. I just hate... And of course I'd call you but you know sometimes it takes a while to get to you and –

AUSTIN: It would be better if we decided in advance in any event, I guess.

ABILENE: Right.

AUSTIN: We should talk about it.

ABILENE: Yeah. How was your visit with her?

AUSTIN: Visit?

ABILENE: Did you talk to her?

AUSTIN: Yeah.

ABILENE: Did she respond to you at all, look at you, smile?

AUSTIN: No. She looked, this is going to sound dumb, but she just looked so totally lost.

ABILENE: Well...

AUSTIN: I think that's at the core of my memory of mom. That she was always the signpost, she was always where I looked when *I* was lost. It's just so painful to see her like this.

ABILENE: Yeah. Sorry.

AUSTIN: What are you sorry about?

ABILENE: No, it's not – I don't want you to take this the wrong way but it's different when you're here every day with her. You can get to a better place. I mean it doesn't change anything but, I don't know, I start to see her differently.

AUSTIN: Well, not sure what to do with that.

ABILENE: No, don't take it that way. I'm just letting you know, it's not as terrible as you might think for me. I like being with her. *(Beat)* But if she's suffering...

AUSTIN: *(AUSTIN sighs deeply)* Yeah.

(Scene/light change)

(ABILENE's house. ABILENE and AUSTIN are in their early 30s. As before, MOLLY begins scene out of it in wheelchair but eventually gets up and joins scene)

AUSTIN: What an asshole.

ABILENE: Austin, he's my husband.

AUSTIN: Not anymore.

ABILENE: He didn't leave me. I mean, yes, he left the house, but he's not leaving the marriage. He just needs time to sort this out. *(Beat)* I need time to sort this out.

AUSTIN: It's been, what, six months and he decides to leave now, to sort things out now? I know this is something you never get over but...

MOLLY: (*Getting up from her chair and entering the scene*) Oh, Austin. I had no idea you –

AUSTIN: Gotta take care of my sis. (*ABILENE hugs him*)

MOLLY: How are you doing, honey?

ABILENE: (*Misty*) Oh, mom. Maybe Jerry's right.

MOLLY: Well, I don't know that there's any right or wrong here.

AUSTIN: Right about what? Leaving?

ABILENE: It's not about that. (*Beat*) (*To MOLLY*) You know what it's like when you come over to visit. He's always off –

MOLLY: – fixing thing, I know. I wish he'd come to my place, I got plenty of stuff.

ABILENE: But that's at the heart of who he is. And he can't fix this. And it's killing him. And one day he just started talking about us having another child. I think he felt like that was the only way he could take control of the situation. And that was the last thing I wanted to hear. It felt like he thought he could replace her. And you...(*Trying to hold in her pain*)

AUSTIN: His child has been taken away from him. He's trying to fill the void.

ABILENE: (*Small outburst*) It's not a void. Lacy is still...(*Overcome*)

AUSTIN: Well, I'm sorry. I didn't mean it that way, it's just...I don't even know why I'm defending him.

(*A short silence*)

MOLLY: You think about her a lot?

ABILENE: All the time.

AUSTIN: That must be torture.

ABILENE: No, Austin. It's just the opposite. It's when I don't think about her that's torture.

MOLLY: And are you afraid if you have another child that you'll stop thinking about her?

ABILENE: I don't know, ma. It just feels wrong.

AUSTIN: Well, like mom said, maybe there is no right or wrong here.

ABILENE: It feels wrong to *me*.

MOLLY: For now. Of course. But Abby, no matter how many other children you have, or what else may happen to you, you'll never forget Lacy or all the joy she brought you. Trust me on that.

("Trust me on that" echoes, either MOLLY says it or there's a sound cue, as MOLLY walks back to her wheelchair)

(Scene/light change)

(The hospital waiting room)

ABILENE: So, I guess there's some things we're just not going to know, ever.

AUSTIN: The doctor has been pushing you on this DNR?

ABILENE: Yeah, I guess. It's more like a wink and a nudge.

AUSTIN: So maybe he –

ABILENE: He doesn't see a human being anymore. He just sees something he can't cure. So of course he's going to push this.

AUSTIN: But if she is suffering... I mean, they see this all the time. Maybe they get some sense of...

ABILENE: (*ABILENE unconsciously reaches down to scratch J. Edgar*) He can't know what's in her head.

AUSTIN: No. None of us can.

ABILENE: For all we know, she's having the time of her life in there.

AUSTIN: Maybe.

(Light focuses on MOLLY in her chair. A broad smile comes to her face)

- End of play -