

# **THE WIDOW**

a play

by Ruth Apolonia Zamoyta

Copyright © 2025 by Ruth Zamoyta Productions LLC  
5915 Boulevard East, West New York, NJ 07093 U.S.A.  
1.973.960.8761 | woodthrush@gmail.com | ruthzamoyta.com

CHARACTERS:

CECE FOSTER	f, ~60, any race, very attractive; sweet, meek, demure
LOIS CRAFT	f, ~80, any race, uses walker, then wheelchair; garrulous, wry wit
NORIKO STEVENS	f, 20s, of Japanese heritage; neophyte trying to do her job
SY KIDD	m 60s, any race; charming brute

Must be Doubled:

KARL SHERMAN	played by SY; callous and offensive
TIM GILBERT	played by SY; soft-spoken, mild-mannered, gallant
GUARD	played by SY
HOSTESS	played by NORIKO
AIDE	played by NORIKO

TIME & PLACE: Early 21c; Queens, NYC

*Note:* The ellipses in Cece's lines sometimes indicate a pause, and sometimes indicate she has lost a word.

*Hamabe no Uta* translation (pages 62-63) accessed December 16, 2024:  
[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9NEFLtCgUY&ab\\_channel=JohnWhitehead](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L9NEFLtCgUY&ab_channel=JohnWhitehead)

PAGE COUNT: 85

SCENE BREAKDOWN:

Act 1

1. CECE's living room
2. LOIS's garden
3. CECE's living room
4. Bar
5. CECE's living room
6. CECE's living room
7. LOIS's garden
8. CECE's living room
9. LOIS's garden

Act 2

1. CECE's living room
2. Restaurant
3. CECE's living room
4. CECE's living room
5. Restaurant
6. LOI's garden
7. CECE's living room

Act 3

1. LOIS's garden
2. CECE's living room
3. CECE's living room
4. CECE's living room
5. Hospital

**Act I, Scene i**

SETTING: Living room of CECE's house, built in the 1950s, with aging but maintained furniture and Japanese décor. There is a wall unit on the back wall with many cabinets and drawers, a sofa, a recliner, and a short Asian altar table downstage on which there is a potted camellia and a photo frame turned away from the audience. On one side is the main entry; on the other a staircase leading to the bedrooms and a door to the kitchen.

AT RISE: Spot on CECE, kneeling, talking to the flower.

CECE

Camilla. My Camilla!

(drops fertilizer into water, waters the plant with a dropper)

The name your father chose before you were born. And suddenly I could picture you smiling up at me with unruly hair, a violin, and a skinned knee. My wild daughter. A fantasy. Until the day I was holding you in my arms.

(a few beats; continues tending and talking to the plant)

Mr. Wacksman moved out yesterday. I was in his house for the first time since Mrs. Wacksman passed. Just as I suspected: a hoarder. Bicycle tires, records, toilet seats, flashlights—I've never seen so many flashlights—and a museum of televisions, broken dolls, curtain rods—. He'd obviously been sleeping on the sofa. It had sweat stains in the shape of a head and back, and on the floor next to it was a bourbon bottle full of cigarette butts and an upside-down take-out container with porn magazines on top. Something squeaked underneath. The Realtor says the young couple want to raze it and build a new home. I don't blame them.

(beat)

Poor Dimitri. Raising his hand to me and Lois, as they put him in a wheelchair and lifted him into the van. Like the Pope giving us his blessing.

(beat)

None of us planned for abandonment. And other people's children moving in. This is a posh neighborhood, now, and we're old and in the way. I wonder who's next.

(nervous)

Oh, dear. I have something to ask Lois. I have to catch her now, before the senior center. We're going to the park today, with the kites we made in arts & crafts. Last time they sank in the mud while the Kindergarteners' kites soared high in the sky. Goodbye, darling. I'll be back.

(exits)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene ii**

SETTING: A few minutes later, LOIS's back garden next door—voluptuous, with May blossoms.

AT RISE: LOIS is kneeling, using a hand tool. She wears glasses. There is a walker nearby, on the seat of which is a large plastic cup with lid and straw. CECE enters, carrying a small jar of clear liquid.

CECE

Lois! The azaleas! Even more...  
(uses hand gestures)  
big than last year!

LOIS

(speaks without pause, one sentence running into the next)  
Cece, how are you? You're too kind. I had nothing to do with it. It's this glorious weather. Climate change has its rewards.  
(sees the azaleas)  
Ooh! They are indeed bigger than ten minutes ago. Or maybe it's these new glasses. They magnify everything.  
(getting up painfully and reaching for her walker)  
Are we doing balloon volleyball today? Last time we were at it, you know, Gerard pegged Imelda in the face and dislodged her wig. I need to get him back.

CECE

You have the best spike of anyone at the Center. You could knock out his dentures.

LOIS

Oh, I'm not going to spike his face. What kind of revenge is that? One and done. No, I'm going to sit next to him for the remainder of the season and make sure that ball hog never lays one finger on the balloon. It'll drive him insane.

(lifts cup and sits down on the walker seat)

You know, Cece, this arthritis cocktail was lovely at first, but it's getting old. Do I really need to sip it throughout the day? Can't I just get it over with around noon, when I'm distracted by my soaps? You know. Hold my nose and down it in one gulp?

CECE

No, I'm afraid you have to time the dosage. But, I'll look into different flavors I could add.

LOIS

Do I need to bring it to the Center today?  
(sips, grimaces)

CECE

It won't work unless you sip it in consistent increments. Four ounces every hour.  
(gives her the jar)  
And here's the nitrogen for your roses. Twenty drops to the gallon.

LOIS

Drops?

(CECE pulls dropper from pocket and hands it to her)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Thank you, Cece. I'm so fortunate to have a chemical engineer for a neighbor—a groundbreaking female chemical engineer, I might add—and my roses are so fortunate. Oh, I do hope they make the white chocolate macadamia cookies today in the Bistro. It's been oatmeal-raisin for seven days straight and those sluts in the kitchen know that oatmeal gives me terrible gas. Let me get my rouge. Oh! It's time already and I'm filthy! The state of my nails!

CECE

Rouge? Not for O'Reilly!

LOIS

Yes, for O'Reilly.

CECE

He has macular degeneration. He can't see anything. I sat next to him in the back of the van. He told me he sees with his hands and asked if he could feel my face.

LOIS

Then he grabbed your breasts.

CECE

How did you know?

LOIS

He did it to Sonya, too. It's total baloney. He can see perfectly well. And since you started coming to the Senior Center—prematurely, I might add—I've been doing everything in my power to divert his attention back to me. You're the one he's after. The natural beauty.

CECE

Not since I put him in a half nelson during the self-defense class.

LOIS

I'm so glad they hung the photo of that on the bulletin board. They captured a nice angle of his face. You're far too young for the Senior Center. You're making us look bad. You're what? 62? You should be doing hook-ups at clubs.

CECE

If you really want O'Reilly, why don't you make a ... you know, go to him and say something.

LOIS

(leans precariously from her walker to pluck a fading azalea leaf)

I have no real interest in O'Reilly. I only want to give him the hint of encouragement. Gets the old heart pumping and improves circulation. Anyway, I need rouge to keep from disappearing into the taupe wallpaper. Cece, I know you're mixing beauty elixirs and not sharing them with the rest of us. It's a shame. You should share your secrets. Oh, heavens. Is it time for the van?

CECE

It's not time for the van. I came early to ask you something.

LOIS

Oh. So, how much time do I have?

CECE

Twenty minutes.

LOIS

Not enough. I have to touch up my hair. And oh! My whiskers! I was going to pluck them but got distracted by a pimple. Would you believe it? A pimple at 80? I should be in a freak show—

CECE

Lois. This is serious.

LOIS

Oh. Cece. What is it?

CECE

Well, it's not serious. Maybe. It's just ... You see, I have a doctor's appointment. Thursday. And they said I need to bring family. I told them I have no family, but they said I had to bring someone.

LOIS

Are you having a procedure? What's wrong? You're the healthiest of us all. They say it comes like a thief in the night. But, I say, bring on *el bandito!* A tall, muscular, Spanish man with a sickle and a mole under his black mask and nice cologne who will carry me away to the underworld on his valiant steed—

CECE

No. Not a procedure. It's a consultation. I already had the test.

LOIS

Oh. Oh. Why, of course, Cece. ... What time tomorrow?

CECE

Thursday.

LOIS

I thought tomorrow was Thursday.

CECE

You're right. Tomorrow. Two o'clock.

LOIS

Yes, I will accompany you, dear Cece. Is it Doctor Rosenberg?

CECE

(pulls a small notebook from her pocket and reads from it)

Doctor Sharif. I don't think you know her.

LOIS

Could this Doctor Sharif do something about my knees? The pain is unlivable. It's not only on rainy days now but on sunny days, too. I do the therapy religiously and—

(indicates cup)

your cocktail doesn't seem to be working.

CECE

Are you certain you're using one scoop of the powder with cherries, strawberries—

LOIS

Yes, yes. Soybeans, olive oil, green tea. But every morning the knees are worse. I will admit to you, Cece—but don't tell a soul—I'm sleeping on the sofa in the living room. Like Dimitri. ... I can't climb the stairs any more.

CECE

Oh dear, dear Lois! You need a wheelchair. And a ... a thing to— an elevator!

LOIS

Oh my. I can't afford an elevator. What did I do to deserve this? My parents had the strongest knees. They walked up and down stairs for a hundred years, both of them.

CECE

Be grateful it's only your knees.

LOIS

What is life if I cannot kneel in my garden and tend to my plants? Do you think Doctor Sharif would allow me to get titanium knees?

CECE

She's not a rheumatologist. You should listen to Doctor Rosenberg. He says surgery would cause too much strain on your heart.

LOIS

What a wonderful way to die! On the operating table, knocked unconscious, slipping seamlessly into paradise and avoid institutionalization. I would rather die, now, with an anaesthetized smile, instead of ending my days in the house of the living dead, with Dmitri and Claudia and Rachel and all our old friends they've turned into zombies. Then Arturo's hard-earned money would go to our boys, not geriatric slum lords.

CECE

You have a point. There are worse ways to die.

LOIS

(starts to walk off stage, CECE follows)

Well, maybe Doctor Sharif knows another rheumatologist.

CECE

But, Doctor Rosenberg is world-renowned.

LOIS

Then I want a hack who will get me titanium knees.

(They exit.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene iii**

SETTING: The next day, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: CECE and LOIS sitting on opposite ends of couch. LOIS's smoothie is on the coffee table. CECE is in a daze, LOIS trying to be optimistic.

LOIS

Doctor Sharif said it could be 20 whole years.

CECE

Five to 20.

LOIS

And she doesn't know about your personalized health cocktails, does she? You're a magician, keeping us alive and healthy. You could probably raise us from the dead with your health cocktails. Twenty years? You'll be able to stretch that out another five or ten.

CECE

But, 20 years of ...dementia.

LOIS

You're perfectly fine. The smartest person I've ever known. Even smarter than your husband was. You deserved the promotion—not him—but that's how women were treated under Reagan and at least you were smart enough to marry Henry and get the money you rightfully deserved. You're the only woman at the Center with an MD. They should interview you for the newsletter.

CECE

I've been concealing it from everyone. Sometimes I can't find words.

LOIS

You? Some of your words I have to look up in the dictionary.

CECE

Losing a word is like losing a child.

LOIS

A memory cocktail! Certainly, you have a formula for memory!

CECE

Yes, and I've been drinking it every day for a year.

LOIS

Oh, Cece! Just think. You remember the names of all those chemical compounds and botanical minerals with long Latin or Chinese names like kyoo-dong-mao-tsee-tong-mai-jong.

CECE

Lois! Who will take care of me?!

LOIS

The HANAC homes are top-notch, lovely homes.

CECE

You called them houses of the living dead.

LOIS

I was referring to the for-profit chains. The HANACs are different. They're sunny and have activities. I heard the Harmony Home just got dogs—therapy dogs—because that's the trend.

CECE

No one in HANAC really cares.

LOIS

The dogs care. A bearded collie is what you need, with its sad eyes and long silky hair.

CECE

What's going to happen to me?!

LOIS

Look at you. You're healthy. Beautiful. Smart.

CECE

I can't read my bank statement anymore! And I used to be a scientist.

(LOIS puts her arm around CECE's shoulder. CECE cries softly.)

LOIS

We have to find you a man.

CECE

A man? The last thing I need is a ... thing to clean up after.

LOIS

There are many men who would love you and hire a maid to clean up after themselves.

CECE

I have dementia!

LOIS

They don't have to know that.

CECE

I can't lie. It'll be obvious.

LOIS

Everyone lies. White lies. I lie. It's playing the field.

CECE

Who do you lie to? You're not playing the field.

LOIS

Yes, I am. Well, I fake I am. On Be Naughty.

CECE

Be Naughty?

LOIS

A dating site. I like it better than Match Dot Com.

CECE

But you're not dating. You're 80.

LOIS

Cece! I could date at 80 if I wanted. And find a husband. Sure, my breasts hang like dumplings in pantyhose, but I have charm—you know, *savior faire*—and could get a husband instantly.

CECE

But, Arturo.

LOIS

I am the most fortunate of women to have had my sweet honey-bun, sticky candy-goo for 55 delectable years. But he's gone now. So, I'm fooling around.

CECE

I've never seen any men at your house.

LOIS

Not fooling around like that. I mean, fooling around online. I don't even use my own photograph. I found a pretty woman on Instagram. I use hers. I say I'm 42.

CECE

How can you do that? Those poor men!

LOIS

Oh no, they're not poor. Well, maybe they are poor, I don't know. But they know what they're doing and don't need our pity. It's all online. Message, text, email. Meeting in person is out of the question. But you should be serious. You need someone to take care of you.

CECE

I'm not doing online dating.

LOIS

What are your options? O'Reilly with his prosthesis everyone can see under his sweatpants? There are millions of desirable men on Be Naughty. Come on. It can't hurt to take a look.

(taps phone screen)

Let me log in and I will show you an ocean of men. Waves of sexy, succulent, rich, chivalrous men spurting out of the phone like a fountain, getting you all wet. Here we go.

(swipes after each name)

Smoldering Panda. Velvet Torso. Funky Philistine. Here's a cute one: Hot Twirling Tips.

(shows CECE the phone; she looks briefly and turns away)

Look at that curly gray hair. Are those freckles? Oh my, how adorable!

CECE

Liver spots.

LOIS

"Straight man, widower, 56 years old, five-foot-ten." Five-foot-eight—always shave off two inches. "Average build." That means fat, but everyone is. "Speaks French and ... Japanese!"

(CECE yields and looks at phone with her)

LOIS (Cont'd)

"Attended graduate school, sometimes smokes, drinks socially, likes cats, Pisces, looking for single women, 18 to 100, short and long term dating, or hookups."

CECE

He looks 75.

LOIS

I told you, everyone lies. "I prefer girly-girl to plain-Jane. So the simplest thing would be to see your photo."

(LOIS aims her phone at CECE, who ducks behind the couch.)

CECE

I'm not doing this.

LOIS

You don't have to meet him if you don't want. And look. "Doesn't have kids and doesn't want them." That's a "must." Children will protest the marriage. "Lives in Brooklyn and ... Osaka!"

CECE

(lifts head)

I've always wanted to go to Japan.

LOIS

With a house in Japan, he must be loaded. Maybe he has enough money to build me an elevator.

CECE

Are you suggesting a three-way?

LOIS

Oh, no! If I do that, she can't be prettier than I am, and you're definitely prettier. What I'm saying is that his money will be your money, and you can do what you want with it.

CECE

You do need one. It's a shame you sleep in your ... you know.

LOIS

Exactly. So, come on. Stand up.

CECE

I can't imagine myself dating after ... I don't know how many years.

LOIS

It will all come back to you.

CECE

Nothing's going to come back to me.

LOIS

Yes, it will. When I signed up with Be Naughty, I felt arousal for the first time since menopause. Butterflies in the stomach. Weak in the knees. And not because of the arthritis. Every night I check my messages. It helps me go to sleep with a smile on my face.

(aims camera at CECE)

Smile. Think cock.

(CECE gasps, puts hand over mouth.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Yes, cock. Be sexy. That's not sexy. Give me a sultry look. Mouth hanging open. Like this.

(LOIS demonstrates. CECE grabs a biscotti, thrusts it in and out of her mouth.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

That's my woman. Yeah, baby. You're a leopard. A cougar. You're gonna eat them alive. Rip into them with your fangs and claws. That blouse isn't quite right. Take it off. And your skirt.

CECE

What?!

LOIS

Let's get a photo in your slip. Slips are pretty.

CECE

If you're a porn star.

LOIS

This is what women do on Be Naughty. And they're Photoshopped. But your beauty is real.

(CECE, embarrassed, takes off blouse and skirt and poses.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

You're Venus, Aphrodite. Most 30-year-olds don't have your figure. Make love to the camera, baby.

CECE

Lois!

LOIS

I heard that in a movie. It works. Fuck the camera, baby! Fuck it! Oh! Oh! Oh! Thata girl.

(lowers phone)

We should have a few good ones.

CECE

We're using real photos of me. You lifted yours off the Internet.

LOIS

For me, this is an old woman's fantasy. For you, we're on a mission. We want to find you a hunk with a foreign accent and shaven chest who will love you and care for you the rest of your days. Oh, my! The time! I must make myself presentable and call a car to take me to the cemetery.

CECE

Oh! How could I have forgotten?! May 3rd. If I remembered, I wouldn't have asked you to come with me! You should have reminded me it was Arturo's—

LOIS

Nonsense. My sweet little pumpkin muffin with coconut flakes would have insisted that I help you, in your hour of need, set up an online dating profile.

CECE

You're such a good friend, Lois. I'll say a prayer tonight for the repose of Arturo's soul.

LOIS

Save your breath. My big, juicy bon-bon is already in heaven waiting for me on one of those circular beds with white satin sheets, with his robe hanging open and his— Well, I won't go into detail. Goodbye, goodbye. Oh, my hair! It might be too late for rollers. Oh dear. Goodbye.

CECE

Goodbye, Lois. Your hair looks fine.

(LOIS leaves. CECE shuts the door; kneels before the camellia.)

CECE (Cont'd)

Ah, Camilla! My Camilla!

(a long beat while she prepares to tend to the plant)

I saw my brain today, for the first time. Even before the doctor pointed, I saw them. White clusters in the front left lobe. Like papers from the best parts of my mind, crushed and left behind. ... You know, I always thought you couldn't hear the brain, but lately, when I wake up, I hear snaps. The doctor says it's probably ear fluid, but I know what it is. It's the dendritic spines snapping. Like twigs from a plant. I hear them, but I can't stop them from ... snap, snap, snap. ... Don't worry, my sweet daughter. I'll find someone who will take care of me—and you. Check your moisture and sunlight and ... things.

(takes her notebook from her pocket, makes a tally mark)

When I am nothing but a bin of crushed papers, your loveliness will bloom forever.

(CECE kisses flower, hops onto the sofa, recites what she types on her phone.)

Be naughty dot com.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, scene iv**

SETTING: Two weeks later, cigar bar, pop music playing.

AT RISE: CECE and SY are sitting at a table with wine, looking at each other with romantic energy. He is smoking. She looks gorgeous.

CECE

My husband was a chemical engineer at Squibb. That's how we met.

SY

You were his secretary? An office affair?

CECE

No. I was a chemical engineer, too.

SY

Then it's guaranteed we'll have...chemistry!

CECE

What does that mean?

SY

We're the right mix. You know. Alloys.

CECE

(blushes, changes the subject)

Do you have children?

SY

Never married. No kids. No braces, no college funds, no weddings, no bail to underwrite.  
(laughs, which causes him to cough substantially)

CECE

Are you ill?

SY

No, no, no. I should stop smoking, but I have too much money tied up in tobacco.

CECE

I have a health cocktail for the lungs.

SY

Health cocktail? Is that like a screwdriver because it has Vitamin C?

CECE

Dong-quai root, ophiopogon ohwii okoyama, gardenia, and licorice.

SY

I tried a few diets, you know, purges. But they were useless.

CECE

My health cocktails really work.

SY

Are you sick?

CECE

No. Why do you say that?

SY

You said you had good luck with your cocktails.

CECE

Oh, I make them for my friends. I have Lois with her arthritis, Ardith with her vision, and Horatio for his thinning hair—

SY

Would you make me one?

CECE

My pleasure.

SY

Now? At my place?

(forces a cough)

My lungs really need it.

CECE

This is a first date .... And I need my ... things.

SY

I have a spare toothbrush.

CECE

Oh, no. I mean ... minerals. Compounds. I have 25 clients with 15 different ailments. Some of the cocktails require up to ten ingredients. So, my medicine cabinet is quite full.

SY

An entrepreneur. I like that. Book clubs and bridge aren't not enough to keep you stimulated.

CECE

Are you retired?

SY

Retired? No way! I'm still making my way up the ladder at Deutschebank. Do you like to travel?

CECE

I've only ever been to the Bahamas. For my honeymoon. A long time ago.

SY

I'm jockeying the Board to make me director of Deutsche Securities. In Tokyo.

CECE

Tokyo! I've always wanted to go to Japan!

SY

Me, too. You see? We're soul mates.

(CECE blushes.)

SY (Cont'd)

Look. I'm tired of hopping from one woman to the next, like checkers. I'm looking for the one. Are you ... the one?

CECE

Yes. I mean, I have to get to know you.

SY

Come to my place. Get to know me.

CECE

I haven't changed my mind.

SY

How long have you been online?

CECE

Two weeks.

SY

That's about the time it takes to get it right.

(SY burns into her with his eyes. CECE is uncomfortable.)

CECE

I must be going. I have a hair appointment in the morning.

SY

I like that.

CECE

What?

SY

You tantalize me then vanish. Like Cinderella. When can I see you again?

CECE

Oh, I don't know—

SY

Tomorrow night. Bernardin.

(A slow-dance song comes on.)

CECE

Tomorrow? That's so soon.

SY

We're old enough to know it when we see it.

(SY stands, offers hand. She takes it. They dance.)

(FADEOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene v**

SETTING: Three weeks later, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: CECE and LOIS, well-coiffed, pull dresses from shopping bags. There are two smoothies on the coffee table.

LOIS

This one I will wear to the rehearsal dinner.

CECE

It brings out the red in your cheeks.

LOIS

I used to have red in my cheeks, but now it has sunk down here to my spider veins. Have you found a spot for the wedding dinner? How about Del Frisco's? They have the tenderest tenderloin, and I know the maître d'. He'll put aside the best cut. I haven't been there in years!

CECE

(holds a gown to her body)

This I will save for the honeymoon.

LOIS

How absolutely stunning. You see? What did I tell you? It all worked out. You'll have a darling husband to take care of you the rest of your life and you don't have to worry anymore.

CECE

I have you to thank, Lois.

LOIS

It happened so fast. Like he was waiting for you all this time. It was fate.

CECE

(blushing)

He said if he had to wait any longer he would ...pow!

LOIS

He's much better than Henry.

(sips her smoothie)

CECE

Lois! Henry was my first love, the love of my life. This disease may ... do bad things to my mind, but the last thing I'll forget is Henry.

LOIS

You must admit Sy is more handsome than Henry. More manly. His poise and confidence. Like a superhero with muscles bulging through his dress shirt. He spent eight thousand dollars on us. Eight thousand! In one afternoon! Henry was a miser.

(CECE lifts up a garment bag.)

CECE

Three thousand on this alone.

LOIS

Whenever I see that, I stop breathing. Open it. Let me see it.

CECE

I don't want to bring bad luck.

LOIS

The groom isn't supposed to see it. Your matron of honor has to see it.

CECE

You'll see it at my wedding.

LOIS

Tease!

(beat)

You're keeping the house, Cece, right? Here? With me? He's moving in with you, right? Oh dear. Who in their right mind would move from a penthouse on the Upper East Side to a post-war brutalist cube in Queens?

CECE

I'm not going to leave you alone, Lois. Sy and I will be a modern couple, going back and forth between our two homes. ... Unless he gets the directorship.

LOIS

Ah! Director of Japan! Like Richard Chamberlain! And you, Lady Mariko! But, promise, Cece, you will come visit me. My sons visit me only twice a year, with the pressure to be productive and buy the latest gadgets that make you think you know everything, so it's not worth spending time with your elders.

CECE

I don't want to leave you, Lois. I'll make sure he doesn't take the Director position.

LOIS

You're such a dear, but, really, you'll forget about me.

CECE

Yes, I will.

LOIS

I don't mean the dementia. I mean life in Tokyo with its exotic charms and karaoke nights.

CECE

I always thought we would spend our final days together, in our neighborhood, in our homes.

LOIS

The last of the Mohicans, fighting the phone-face Millennial invaders. Oh Cece! Your wedding dress! Open the bag! Let your old friend see it! Or your old friend will put it on herself!

(reaches for the dress)

CECE

OK! OK!

(pulls out the dress)

LOIS

Hand-embroidered silk from Milan! Not cheap machine-made polyester. That man of yours has class.

(gingerly lifts the fabric to her eyes)

One week from today.

CECE

Yes.

LOIS

I can't believe you haven't slept with him.

CECE

Lois!

LOIS

You don't even know what he looks like.

CECE

I made it clear I'm not doing anything until we're married, and even then, it'll be the first Thursday of every month. He respects that.

LOIS

Well, I have a strong feeling he'll be a champion in the bedroom, and your calendar will become much more accommodating. I'm sure I told you this before, but when I was young and my friends were getting engaged, I'd compose "honeymoon predictions." Remember?

CECE

No.

LOIS

Before their weddings, I'd write my predictions on a slip of paper. The techniques, positions, frequencies of climax, even what hand he would use and which fingers. After the honeymoon, the bride would open the paper and read it aloud. Nine out of ten times I was right.

(gathers her bags and starts to exit)

I'm going to write down my predictions for your honeymoon. It's starting to come to me now, in my imagination.

(smiles, gazes into space)

Ah! What curious geometry! I might have to do sketches for this one. It's going to be a very interesting evening, after all.

CECE

Goodbye, Lois.

LOIS

Goodbye, Cece. Sudoku. Tomorrow at 11. Sudoku is Japanese, you know. You'll have to practice if you're going to survive in social circles over there.

CECE

I'll remember this time. I already set my alarm.

LOIS

I'll come get you. Goodbye. Goodbye.

(LOIS exits. CECE admires her wedding dress, kneels before the flower and tends to it.)

CECE

We should have been shopping for your wedding dress, my sweet daughter. Thirty-one you'd be now. That was my age when I had you! You would have had your career, and you'd be married and having a child of your own... There's a word for a woman who lost a husband, but not a word for a woman who lost a child.

(beat)

I'm afraid of being a wife again. Having someone to care for, who cares for me. Another life, with pain and fragility— But that was the point: so we wouldn't be alone. Sy will take care of us. He's young and successful and ... good.

(takes notebook from pocket; writes a word, looks at the list)

That's 20 today. Twenty lost words. Fleeing like villagers when the dam breaks.

CECE (Cont'd)

(sings)

*Hush-a-by, don't you cry,  
Go to sleep, my little baby.  
When you wake, you shall have  
all the pretty little horses.*

When I sang that to you, you reached your little hand towards my mouth, to catch the words.  
(lifts shears, cuts off a blossom)

Snap.

(touches it to her lips)

Is this the last time I will remember that?

(FADEOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene vi**

SETTING: One week later, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: CECE and SY stand looking at each other. CECE is wearing her wedding dress. SY is in tails, tie undone and draped around his neck. He is hungry for her; she is shy.

SY

The Board chair couldn't keep his eyes off you.

CECE

It was my dress. He has effeminate taste.

SY

You'll make a fine Director's wife.

CECE

And you will make a fine husband, whether you get the position or not.

SY

You are so beautiful.

CECE

And you're ... beautiful too.

SY

And you're mine.

(SY kisses her neck, but erupts in coughing. CECE slips away.)

CECE

Time for your health cocktail.  
(opens the cabinet with the bottles)

SY

What's that?

CECE

My dispensary. You'll need the dong-quai, ophiopogon, gardenia—  
(grabs three bottles)  
I'll be right back.

(CECE runs off stage to kitchen.)

SY

(laughs)

You'll take excellent care of me.

(Sound of blender offstage. SY looks around, underwhelmed. He finds liquor cabinet, pours a whiskey. CECE emerges with a brown smoothie in a martini glass.)

CECE

Brown, I'm afraid. I only had red kale, not green. But it'll be tasty.

(CECE offers him the glass. He pours whiskey into it, downs it, puts the glass down, takes a deep breath.)

SY

Cured! You're a miracle worker!

(grabs her)

I want you.

(deftly turns her around and ties her hands together with his tie)

CECE

What are you doing?

SY

Good. I like a little resistance.

CECE

I don't like this.

(SY pushes her torso over the back of the sofa so she is doubled over, staring straight ahead at the flower. He hoists up her dress.)

CECE (Cont'd)

Stop!

(BLACKOUT except spotlight on flower, then full BLACKOUT.)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene vii**

SETTING: One month later. LOIS's garden, July blossoms.

AT RISE: LOIS is kneeling, gardening, her walker at hand. She rises with difficulty, sips her smoothie, looks at the time on her phone, shakes her head.

LOIS

Cece, Cece, Cece!

(she talks to herself as she begins to call CECE)

The van is coming. This is your last chance, then I'm giving up on you.

(has to leave message)

Cece! It's Thursday. Again. The third Thursday you haven't shown up. Where are you? It's craft day. We've been making quite lovely mosaics with dried beans. You should see O'Reilly's seascape. He's really getting into it. We always knew beans were his thing, but I never thought they'd bring out the artist in him.

(sigh)

I guess you've forgotten about us old invalids in the throes of your newlywed love. Well. If you ever get sick of bonking each other's brains out, you know where to find us. At the senior center. Gluing beans to plywood. And remember, I still need that blow-by-blow description of your wedding night. See if my predictions were right.

(pockets phone, sips smoothie)

Still on her honeymoon. Ha. Well. Good for her. Going out with a bang.

(LOIS shuffles off stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene viii**

SETTING: One month later, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: CECE is kneeling before the flower. She is wearing sunglasses. There is a green smoothie on the short table.

CECE

I'm sorry you have to witness this, Camilla. I can't tell what makes him mad, and I'm tired of living my life in the bathroom crying, with the water running so he can't hear. I'm tired of pretending to be asleep when he walks in the door, and telling my friends I have migraines and can't come out.

(tends to the plant)

You were probably wondering where I was yesterday.

(whispers)

The police station.

(end whisper)

Well, almost. I reached the station and my heart was pounding, but ... I just kept walking by. What did I want them to do? Arrest him? He'd come after me when he got out. And he would get out. And I'd be back on the floor, staring at the ceiling beam, praying: Please make him finish and get off me.

(takes off her glasses, touches the bruise on her eye)

Bruises on the outside and crumpled white ... things on the inside.

(touches her skull)

I can't stop the dementia. ... But I can stop him.

(CECE pulls a vial of sodium cyanide salts from her pocket; pours some into the smoothie. SY enters, coughing. CECE quickly puts cap on vial, pushes it into the soil of the plant, then runs to take SY's jacket.)

SY

(between coughs)

Water.

(CECE scurries off stage and returns with glass of water. SY drinks, stops coughing.)

CECE

Did the doctor call about the ... pictures?

SY

(gets himself a whiskey)

X-Rays? I told you the X-Rays confirmed it's getting worse.

CECE

What's she say?

SY

More drugs. More therapy. Therapy's a scam. It doesn't work.

(SY sits on the sofa. CECE kneels before him, takes off his socks, and massages his feet.)

CECE

The health cocktails should start to take effect soon. It's been several weeks—

SY

(between coughs)

I swear those things are making me worse.

CECE

I read about a new ingredient that's supposed to be excellent for ... breathing. It won't cure you but it'll give you relief.

SY

Lung reduction surgery. Goldfarb's recommending it.

(SY pulls out a cigarette. CECE gets a lighter. SY lights up, looks at her bruise, then looks away.)

SY (Cont'd)

You didn't go to the Center today, did you?

CECE

No. In a few days I'll go. Oh, a letter came.

SY

A letter?!

(CECE runs offstage, brings letter. SY tears it open, reads, takes a gulp of whiskey, tosses the rest on the flower. CECE, terribly distraught, gasps, runs to the plant, brushes whiskey off the leaves and petals.)

CECE

Why did you do that?!

SY

Why?! What kind of idiotic— A letter comes from the executive office and you— Aargh! I didn't get the post. Not even the decency to pick up the phone— It's these damn lungs!

CECE

We have to get you better. Here.

SY

Your smoothies are disgusting!

CECE

They haven't been disgusting enough. This one is very bitter due to the new salt. Drink it all in one swallow.

(SY drinks smoothie in one take and grimaces.)

SY

Ugh! What is this?

CECE

Now, water. Wash it down.

(He takes water. Within seconds SY grabs his stomach, screams. CECE backs away. He falls dead. For a few moments, CECE guiltily stares at what she has done. She then brings the contaminated glass off stage, returns, rips out a page from her notebook, crumples it, puts it in SY's sock, and puts the sock in a drawer. She searches for a phone, dials nervously.)

CECE (Cont'd)

Help. There's something wrong with my husband.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act I, Scene ix**

SETTING: Four days later. LOIS's home (implied; no set needed).

AT RISE: LOIS is on one side of the stage in a spotlight. She dials the phone. She waits, then records a voicemail.

LOIS

Cece. This is Lois. Tell me what's going on. Can you imagine how I feel, watching an ambulance pull away from your house, and then going over there, knocking every day, twice a day, and no one answering? I called the hospital. They won't talk to me. I called every ambulance company in Queens. No one will tell me anything. And this is supposed to be the Information Age. I am beside myself. I need to hear from you, Cece. That fringe theatre festival with the senior discounts is on again and I need to know if you're available—

(LOIS gets another call. She looks at phone screen, accepts the call. Split scene. CECE appears on the other side of stage. Her bruises are faded to yellow. She is on her phone, in spotlight.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Cece! Oh, Cece! Thank goodness you're alive. What's been going on? Tell me!

CECE

Sy ... died.

LOIS

What on earth—?! The ambulance! Thursday night! Did he die Thursday night? How? Oh dear! Where have you been? Why haven't you returned my calls? Are you OK?

CECE

I'm OK. I couldn't see you. I wasn't ... good.

LOIS

Are you home now? I'm coming over. I just need to change my—

CECE

(touches her face)

No! No! I'm still not ready. I'm OK. I'll see you ... Monday. Monday will be good.

LOIS

Today is Monday.

CECE

I mean, Monday next week.

LOIS

That's an awfully long time. Are you sure you're OK? Has the funeral happened? It's been four days. Why didn't you tell me? You need a friend in the time of grief. You can't be alone. And, you! Married only two months! What was it? I am sure it was his cough. There was something underlying that cough. I sensed it at the wedding. Probably a tropical disease blown in by global warming. Oh! You might have contracted it, too. I am coming over, but don't be alarmed if I'm wearing that gas mask I got for the pandemic—

CECE

No!

(CECE hears the doorbell. Looks in the direction of the door.)

LOIS

I know. I know. All you want is to be alone. That is what you feel with grief. Like curling into a ball and hiding under the covers. I was there. You've been there already, twice. In that terrible place of grief.

(Knock, knock, knock.)

CECE

Lois? Are you at home now?

LOIS

Of course I'm at home. Where would I be? Tahiti? I can't believe he died. Already. Nothing is so painful as losing a husband. Nothing. Except, perhaps, arthritis—

(Knock, knock, knock.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

I heard this from Oprah. The best thing is to be with friends. You shouldn't be alone.

NORIKO (O.S.)

(from behind the door)

Hello? Mrs. Kidd? This is, um, Noriko Stevens? I'm a social worker. I need to speak to you.

LOIS

I'm coming over. I just need to get out of my gardening clothes—they are covered with manure, and put on a little light makeup and I'll be right—

(CECE hangs up. Spot on LOIS cuts out. Stage lights come up on CECE in her living room. There is an urn on a shelf with a photo turned backwards. More knocking.)

NORIKO (O.S.)

I know this is a hard time for you, Mrs. Kidd, but this is, like, the third time I've tried to reach you? And ... officer Ramirez told my boss I should talk with you.

(CECE perks up.)

NORIKO (O.S. Cont'd)

If I don't talk to you today, like, I'm going to get another bad performance review.

(CECE looks in a mirror, turns the photo around—it is a photo of SY—and opens the door. NORIKO is revealed.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Mrs. Kidd?

CECE

Yes?

NORIKO

(presents her business card)

Hi. I'm Noriko Stevens. I'm a social worker. May I come in and ask you a few questions?

CECE

(reads card)

It says "Big Vinny's Bake Shop."

NORIKO

Oh. How stupid of me. Here's my real card.

(NORIKO hands her the correct card. CECE reads it.)

CECE

Of course. Please, come in.

NORIKO

Thank you very much.

(CECE leads NORIKO to the sofa. They sit on opposite ends. NORIKO takes notes on an electronic tablet during the conversation.)

CECE

Am I under investigation?

NORIKO

Oh, no. They just noticed you're alone and sent me to check in on you.

CECE

Yes, I am alone.

NORIKO

I'm, uh, sorry to hear about your husband.

CECE

He was very ill. He, you know, coughing. All the time.

NORIKO

Did he have a lung condition?

CECE

Yes. It's on the tip of my tongue...

NORIKO

Cancer? Bronchitis? Emphysema?

CECE

Emphysema. That was it.

NORIKO

Had he been to the doctor?

CECE

Yes. In fact, he was talking about surgery. Nothing was working. He should have been in the hospital. But, you know how men are.

NORIKO

(fake-laugh with her)

Was he taking medication?

CECE

Oh, yes. And therapy. At the hospital. In the mornings. I made sure he ate well. And, I made him health cocktails.

NORIKO

Cocktails? As in, mojitos?

CECE

Oh, no. Smoothies. With supplements. I'll show you.

(CECE opens her dispensary cabinet.)

NORIKO

Wow. That's a lot of bottles.

CECE

I make health cocktails for my friends. My eyesight cocktail gave Ardith back her vision. The operation made it worse. But she drank my cocktail, and now she can drive again.

(strives to remember, counts ingredients on fingers)

Amla, ginkgo, black currant, green tea, zinc, magnesium, zeaxanthin, and cannabis.

NORIKO

Did you say cannabis?!

CECE

Weed is good for the eyes.

NORIKO

Are you a ... nutritionist?

CECE

I was a chemist.

NORIKO

Like, you worked in a pharmacy?

CECE

Oh no. I was in research and development at Squibb for many years.

NORIKO

Squid? Like the appetizer?

CECE

No. A company. They merged with Bristol Meyers.

NORIKO

Oh. Right. Wow. So you were, like, a scientist.

CECE

Yes.

NORIKO

It, um, looks like you had an injury.

CECE

I walked into a door. Silly me.

NORIKO

Maybe you need some eyesight cocktail!

(CECE doesn't laugh. NORIKO continues.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Uh, were you on good terms with your husband?

CECE

Yes. Very.

NORIKO

No fighting? Arguments?

CECE

Oh, no. No.

NORIKO

(sees something on her tablet)

Oh! You were just married a couple of months ago! Congratulations! I mean—I'm so sorry. Wow. Two months.

CECE

(agitated, rises)

I'm sorry. I'm getting quite tired.

NORIKO

Please excuse me, Mrs. Kidd. Only a few more questions, OK? This is just to see if there are any free services you can get.

(CECE reluctantly sits. NORIKO sees the photo next to the camellia.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Is this your daughter?

CECE

Yes. Camilla.

NORIKO

She looks like you! Does she live nearby?

CECE

There. In the flower.

NORIKO

I don't understand.

CECE

Her spirit. It's in the flower.

NORIKO

Oh. Did she die and this is, like, reincarnation?

CECE

Yes. She died many years ago.

(pulls her notebook from her pocket, consults it)

She was 23.

NORIKO

I'm 23!

CECE

Oh!

(They look at each other a moment.)

NORIKO

She was a daughter from an earlier marriage?

CECE

Yes. Henry died soon after Camilla. I'm a widow. Again.

NORIKO

I'm very sorry. Again.

(beat)

How ... did they die, may I ask?

CECE

Camilla had cystic fibrosis. Henry died by ... the heart. Forgive me, but will you be much longer?  
I need to lie down.

NORIKO

(looks at her tablet)

Just a few more questions about home care. Do you ... have other children?

CECE

No.

NORIKO

Do you have a sister? Someone to care for you?

I'm only 62. I'll be OK.

CECE

A family member?

NORIKO

No.

CECE

Mr. Kidd had no family?

NORIKO

No.

CECE

Did he ... provide for you?

NORIKO

A little. I'll be fine.  
(rises)

CECE

(rises)

Is there anything— Do you need help around the house? I mean, there are a lot of programs—

CECE

No.

NORIKO

A cab? To take you to the supermarket?

CECE

No. I can drive.

NORIKO

Would you mind if I checked in on you next week?

CECE

No need. I'll be fine.

NORIKO

Well, thank you very much for your time, Mrs. Kidd.  
(offers hand, follows CECE to the door)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

If you have anything else you'd like to talk about, you have my card. I'm very sorry for the imposition and for your loss.

(CECE nods, NORIKO exits, CECE closes the door. She turns the photo of SY around so it is facing away, kneels before the flower, tends to it.)

CECE

No more suffering, Camilla. Now we will be happy. I have his money and can hire people to do what I thought a husband would. And I can get Lois a motorized chair and a ... thingy.

(takes notebook from pocket, writes a tally mark, silently counts)

Thirty-five. If I don't forget any more words, that will be one fewer than yesterday. ... Unless I'm forgetting to record them. ... We need to find someone to care for you when I can't remember to anymore. Lois is too old. That ... worker would be nice, if she weren't looking for murder evidence.

(While testing the soil, she discovers the vial and pulls it out. There is a knock on door.)

LOIS (O.S.)

Cece! Cece! Let me in! Who was that girl? Cece! Cece!

(CECE looks at door. She slides the vial back into the plant, stands, starts to go to the door, but touches her face and exits to the bedroom.)

LOIS (O.S., cont'd)

Cece! Cece!

(FADEOUT)

*END OF ACT I*

**Act II, Scene i**

SETTING: One year later, CECE's living room. A television can be heard, along the fourth wall.

AT RISE: CECE, standing, looks at the audience as though watching TV. The urn and photo of SY are gone. CECE looks at the remote in her hand, looks at the TV, then the remote. She brings her finger close to touching a button, but withdraws it. She puts down the remote and searches until she finds an instruction manual. Her eyes go from instructions to remote, instructions, remote. Finally, she pushes a button and the TV shuts off. Then she walks to the kitchen, returns with a clear Zip-lock bag, crumples tissues, stuffs them in the bag, and puts it in a cabinet. There is a knock at the door. CECE opens it. LOIS enters in a motorized wheelchair, holding a bar of soap on a rope.

LOIS

Soap on a rope! Brilliant. I never have to worry about dropping the soap. If only everything I drop had a rope. Keys on a rope. Phone on a rope. Dope on a rope. Cece, you were such a dear for buying me an electric chair. And the elevator and ramps, beautiful ramps, everywhere. But sometimes I must bend down, and you've never felt such torture. Childbirth was like reclining on a divan and eating bon-bons compared to the pain in these knees. Do you realize I can no longer put my socks on?

(sips)

CECE

I have a health cocktail for that.

LOIS

One cocktail is enough, Cece, unless you plan on buying me a catheter, too. So, my son bought me this contraption that you load up with socks, and it opens the socks with robot hands, and all I need to do is zoom over to it, put my feet in the socks, and push a button on the remote control.

CECE

I don't like remote controls.

LOIS

I told him, "Why do I need a gadget when I have a grandson to put my socks on? After all, I put my grandmother's socks on her when I was a girl." Well, the gadget worked for seven days and then it ran out of socks and I realized I need to bend down to put the socks in the gadget.

CECE

The ... man who does the money.

LOIS

My accountant? I suppose I could ask him to put more socks in the machine.

CECE

No. What does he ...? Do you have money for a ... helper person?

LOIS

An aide? No, too expensive. I might have to turn myself in, Cece. Let them lock me up in Archbishop Sweeney's Home for Walking Dead. I can't believe it has come to this. Fated to a life of ersatz chicken croquettes, canned green beans, and tapioca pudding day after day after day in a dining hall with plastic plates, formica tables, and stained carpets smelling of Lysol and piss.

CECE

Your sons' wives. They can care for you.

LOIS

The performance artist and the hypochondriac? I don't think so. I told them if they institutionalize me, for mercy' sake put me in a place with a garden, though I can't imagine starting from scratch in this condition. And even if there was a geezer Guantanamo with a garden, I'd probably only get one square yard smashed between two hack jobs. Cross pollinating with amateurs! Over my dead body! No, if I must leave this garden, I'm throwing in the trowel. Ha!

(sips smoothie)

CECE

Oh dear. I have the money for a helper person ... but I can't get it.

LOIS

What do you mean?

CECE

My money. Whatshisname's. I invested it.

LOIS

You have more money? Can't you cash out? There might be a penalty but—

CECE

I bought property.

(she checks her notebook)

Pearly Shores!

LOIS

Where's that?

CECE

Florida.

LOIS

Pearly Shores? Florida? That doesn't sound good.

CECE

Condos. They need the money to build them, but then I'm going to make more money. It's a sure thing. They told me millions.

LOIS

Who?

CECE

The men. They came to my house.

LOIS

Who? What were their names?

CECE

I don't remember but ... the paper. It's on the paper.  
(looks in a cabinet)

LOIS

I bet it was scam artists! I read about them in the AARP magazine in the beauty salon. They feed on old, feeble people like ourselves, Cece. Like maggots on a roast beef sandwich. Never open the door unless you know who it is, or they'll fleece you for all you're worth.

CECE

(shakes her head, starts opening cabinet doors and drawers)

I need to find the paper. I called them on ... a few days ago. Maybe they'll get back to me. Maybe they sold some—

LOIS

Cece, you need another husband.

CECE

(forgets what she is searching for and stops)

No. Never. I need a new brain. The opposite of a husband.

LOIS

Nonsense. Sy was perfect. Who knew he was so ill? You'll get lucky again. You're still young and beautiful. It's been a whole year. Enough mourning. You'll find a healthy man this time. Same seductive eyes, firm pectorals, Armani suits, large ... bank account, better lungs.

CECE

Lois. I have to tell you something. ... Sy was a bad man.

LOIS

He wasn't bad. He was busy. A workaholic. Think of how he provided for you. So many gorgeous outfits. And he was to be Director of Japan. And you were to be the Director's wife, meeting princesses and Shoguns, and eating high-grade sushi. And me. Look what he provided for me, posthumously. Ramps and an electric chair! What a generous man, even when he's dead.

CECE

He hit me.

LOIS

Oh. Cece. I am so sorry. Oh dear.

(unsure how to react)

I don't know what to say.

(hugs her)

You are the last person in the world to deserve that. To deserve any of this. ... It's a good thing he died! The bastard!

(releases her)

CECE

It was a good thing.

LOIS

But he was just one man. We can't blame the whole sex. And this time, we'll look for someone with ... no arms. So he can't hit you.

CECE

Hm. No arms. And, rich. And, no children.

LOIS

Absolutely no children.

CECE

But he'll know I am sick. I lose more words every day.

LOIS

I'll handle the online correspondence. I'll feed you poetry, like Cyrano de Bergerac, and you just type what I say. And when it comes time to meet him, say very little. Tell him you're shy. Perhaps he'll be an introvert and then he won't want you to talk with him anyway. Or Deaf. Yes, we'll put that in your profile: "Seeking rich, introverted Deaf man with no children and no arms." Let's update your profile. Where's your phone?

CECE

(searches for phone)

Do we need to take more pictures? I'll get pretty underwear.

LOIS

Yes, we need new pictures, but not in your lingerie. Nothing sexy; it only provokes them. This time we're going for "prim and pretty companion for bocce ball and the cinema." Sado-masochists need not apply; only nobility. Gentility. What happened to you was terrible, Cece. But, you must brush yourself off and get back in the saddle.

(notices what CECE is wearing.)

You should let me dress you. Come to my house. I have makeup and proper clothes. Come now. ... What are you looking for?

CECE

My ... calling thing.

LOIS

It's right here.

(picks up phone from sofa)

CECE

Can I wear your mink? The one you told me you wore to your wedding in January and it was 80 degrees?

LOIS

And I foolishly wore it anyway and my makeup ran down my face and I looked like a sad French clown?! You see, your memory isn't gone yet.

CECE

The things I remember! Like unexpected guests. And then I say goodbye.

LOIS

(turns to go, in her wheelchair)

No mink. Too Venus-in-Furs. You need a cable-knit sweater, baggy pants, felt coat, and a beret. Total prude.

CECE

Maybe this time I'll get a good man.

(They exit.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II Scene ii**

SETTING: The next week, restaurant.

AT RISE: CECE and KARL sit at a table. KARL, corpulent and unkempt, eats wings and licks his fingers. He burps, swigs beer from a bottle, then wipes his mouth on his sleeve.

CECE  
You've not been married?

KARL  
That's what it said in my profile.

CECE  
No children?

KARL  
That's what it said. Why don't you believe my profile?

CECE  
I've been ... lied to before. But you seem like a good man.

KARL  
Why would I lie to you? I don't even know you.

CECE  
(checks her notebook, which is open in her lap)  
You did Squid Minions?

KARL  
(grunts, nods)  
I created the concept 40 years ago, drew a few comics. The producers picked it up ten years ago.

CECE  
It's in Japanese.

KARL  
Yeah. They got translators. In 20 languages. The books are all over the world.

CECE  
You make ... money from it?

KARL

Yeah. You could say. It's trademarked. Some kids are drawing the series now, but I get royalties on books, merch, everything.

CECE

About how much?

KARL

(darts a glance at her)

I don't know. It goes into the bank.

CECE

You're healthy?

KARL

(begins to choke on food but recovers)

Yeah, except the wheelchair and the diabetes. It's pretty much under control. I go for dialysis three days a week.

CECE

You eat so much. And, the beer.

KARL

I have no self-control. That's why I'm looking for a wife. To nag me and hide the food.

CECE

I can do that. ... You wouldn't get angry?

KARL

Probably, but I need a woman who'll do it anyway.

(CECE slides the dishes away from KARL. He looks at her slyly.)

CECE

I care about you.

KARL

We just met.

CECE

But online. We ... a lot.

KARL

You're quieter in person.

CECE

I can take care of you. In fact, I have the recipe for a health cocktail for ... what you have.

KARL

Health cocktail? As in martini? Cosmo?

CECE

(giggles)

No, no! Herbs, minerals, vitamins. Most of them taste good. The one for you is ... bleh, but filling. And low-cal. Good for ... fat. Would you like to try?

KARL

Now?

CECE

Yes. You can come to my place.

KARL

(can't believe his luck)

Where?

CECE

Oh ... just two miles from here.

KARL

I'll call a cab.

CECE

I'd like that.

KARL

(pulls phone out of pocket)

Waiter!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II, Scene iii**

SETTING: Two months later, CECE's living room, very untidy.

AT RISE: KARL is in the recliner, watching sports. On the ledge of his belly is a bowl of snacks. CECE is pruning the plant.

Tetrazzini.  
KARL

CECE  
(sarcastically mimics)  
Cece, I would like some tetrazzini, please. Your tetrazzini is the best.

KARL  
Oh yeah. My son called. My attorney told him I wanted to make you beneficiary of my life insurance. He said, no way. I told you it was a stupid idea.

CECE  
You told me ... no children!

KARL  
It's online dating. Did you believe that crap? And you're gonna have to cancel your kendo class.

CECE  
What?!

KARL  
The doctor called. He said dialysis every day now. You need to drive.

CECE  
What about a ... car thing ... service? Can't you take car service?

(It's as though KARL didn't hear. CECE explodes. KARL watches her, stunned, his eyes periodically wandering to the TV.)

CECE (Cont'd)  
You sit here all day and watch ... stuff! Why don't you come to my appointments? I'm the one who needs help but I'm a slave. You go around with that ... feed bag and sit there and get fatter and shit in your underwear. And your shit goes through to the ...  
(points at wheelchair)

CECE (Cont'd)

thing and I have to scrub it. And .... I don't go to the Center! Or see Lois! No sudoku or kendo and you're making me ...bad. And your toenails are disgusting and you make me clip them. And not even a "thank you." Two words. "Thank you." Did you ever say, "thank you" in your life?

KARL

Get me another beer, will you?

(KARL laughs. CECE starts jabbing at the soil with a trowel. She hits something, pulls out the vial, goes to the kitchen. We hear a blender. She brings back a blue smoothie and a water.)

KARL (Cont'd)

I had mine this afternoon.

CECE

It's two months. Time to increase to twice a day. I added a special ...thing that should help with the back. It will be bitter. Drink it fast.

(He swallows it in one take; grimaces. She hands him water. He swishes water in his mouth and swallows.)

KARL

Is it always gonna be like that? Ick.

(CECE exits with the glasses; KARL grabs his stomach, screams, tries to get up, goes limp. CECE enters, looks at him, kneels before the flower, slides the vial back into soil, tends to the plant.)

CECE

On my wedding night, I rubbed him. But, limp. Like a noodle. He said that's what happens with ... that sickness. He kept me ... out. And hit out every ... joy. Joy he couldn't have. And, he lied. He had no money. He had a bad contract for his ... squid. Impotent in more ways than one.

(kisses flowers; rises)

I'll find someone, Camilla. But I will be more ... smart.

(looks at KARL)

A son! The liar!

(searches, finds a phone in KARL's pocket, dials.)

Help. I think my husband is ... dead.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II, Scene iv**

SETTING: The next day. CECE's living room.

AT RISE: NORIKO and CECE sit on the sofa. There is a tea service on the coffee table. Noriko takes notes on her tablet. She is wearing white pumps with dark, autumnal clothing.

NORIKO  
Was Mr. Sherman very ill?

CECE  
Oh, very.

NORIKO  
What condition did he have?

CECE  
Dialysis.

NORIKO  
Diabetes?

CECE  
Yes.

NORIKO  
It must have been very hard for you to take care of him.

CECE  
It was bad. He was coughing. Then he was death.

NORIKO  
Did he take any medication?

CECE  
I knew you would come, so—  
(opens cabinet)

NORIKO  
Oh, your dispensary. For your health cocktails. Did you make Mr. Sherman a health cocktail?

CECE

No. A hopeless case.

NORIKO

Would you say you got along well with your husband?

CECE

I don't understand.

NORIKO

He was never ... out of line?

CECE

Oh, no.

NORIKO

Uhh... Just a few more questions. His son, Jed Sherman—

CECE

Is he here?!

NORIKO

No, I don't think so.

CECE

He thinks I was after his— He told me he had no money.

NORIKO

He said Mr. Sherman inquired about making you beneficiary of his life insurance.

CECE

Life insurance?! He said he didn't ...

NORIKO

(types)

Good. That should settle the matter—

CECE

He's probably dancing in the ... you know, because his father's dead and he got the money. I said no children. And, he lied!

NORIKO

No children? I don't understand.

CECE

I made it clear. In my profile.

NORIKO  
Were you ... online dating?

CECE  
Why not?

NORIKO  
Oh. I'm sorry. Of course, seniors can do online dating, too.

CECE  
We invented it thousands of years away. It's called match-making. Only now a ...  
(points at her tablet)  
thing does it. Not an old lady.

NORIKO  
Are you still living on your own?

CECE  
I have Camilla.

NORIKO  
Camilla? Oh yes. Your daughter. Who lives in the camellia.

CECE  
(remembers her idea of drafting NORIKO)  
Aren't they beautiful?!

NORIKO  
Why, yes, they are.

CECE  
Can you believe they have not stopped blooming since she died? Year-round!

NORIKO  
That's quite remarkable.

CECE  
It takes careful ... stuff. I check the water and the condition of the ...  
(makes hand gestures)

NORIKO  
(fidgeting uncomfortably)  
Petals? Leaves?

CECE

Yes. Everything must be tended to. But the most important is talking. Do you like plants?

NORIKO

Uh, yes? I have a few at home.

CECE

Do you talk to them?

NORIKO

Sometimes, I guess.

CECE

But, do you listen?

NORIKO

(amused)

No, I do not. But that's a brilliant idea. I'll try when I get home tonight.

CECE

Camilla and I tell each other secrets. She's a good girl.

NORIKO

She owes a lot to your care.

CECE

Let me introduce you!

NORIKO

(hesitates)

I'd be delighted.

(CECE and NORIKO rise and walk to the flowers. CECE kneels and cups a blossom delicately with her palms.)

CECE

Camilla, my darling, this is Inspector ...

NORIKO

Oh no. I'm just a social worker.

(bows, addresses plant)

You may call me Noriko.

CECE

She's a nice boss lady.

NORIKO

I'm not the boss by any stretch of the imagination!

CECE

She cares about us, Camilla. She protects us.

NORIKO

I do my best.

(CECE bends her ear to the plant then turns to NORIKO.)

CECE

Were you listening?

NORIKO

Uh ... Did she say ... thank you?

CECE

No. She said your mascara is smudged.

NORIKO

(wipes under eyes)

Thank you very much for alerting me ... Camilla.

(CECE looks like she is eager for NORIKO to continue conversing with the plant, so NORIKO begins her departure.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Well, I have to get back and enter my notes. But, it was very lovely meeting you, Camilla.

(NORIKO "shakes hands" with a leaf, gently. She and CECE look at each other, giggle, stand.)

CECE

You are welcome to come back. Any time. Or perhaps we can meet at a coffee shop.

NORIKO

Uh, thank you. Truth is, I'm not allowed to have social visits.

CECE

That's terrible. You're only 23. You need social visits.

NORIKO

Wow! You remember!

CECE

Camilla is 23.

NORIKO

I'm 24 now. And, I mean, I can't do social visits with clients. I can't go for lattes with them. Sorry. Maybe after this case is closed?

CECE

Case?

NORIKO

They should wrap it up after they get my report.

CECE

Ah, yes. You need a good performance review.

NORIKO

(laughs a little)

Yeah. Now they even have a survey.

(hands her a paper)

If you could fill it out and send it in, I'd really appreciate it. They're, um, thinking of eliminating my position.

CECE

Then you can be my friend. And Camilla's.

NORIKO

(uncomfortable)

Well, um, yeah, I guess. Thank you very much for your kind words and hospitality. I have to get back to the station now. I'm sorry for the intrusion, and for your loss.

CECE

Please visit again. You're a nice lady.

NORIKO

I hope I don't have to visit you again. I mean, on official business. I'll go now. Again, my condolences.

(They shake hands. CECE shows NORIKO to the door. After NORIKO exits, CECE stares at the door for three seconds. There is a knock. CECE opens the door and LOIS rolls in, a smoothie in her lap.)

LOIS

Anyone who wears white pumps in November is not to be trusted. Has she no sense of propriety, coming here in white pumps in November and barging in on a recently triple-widowed, respectable lady, grilling her with questions and innuendos? Tell me exactly what she asked you, Cece, and tell me exactly how you responded. Word for word. She's no social worker; she's a spy from the precinct, trying to institutionalize you, cage you up in the cuckoo's nest. She must be stopped.

CECE

She's a nice lady. She talked to Camilla.

LOIS

That's very nice, Cece, but, what questions did she ask you?

CECE

I forget.

LOIS

Did she ask you if you need help showering and washing the dishes? I am told it starts with simple questions like that and before you know it, they're carting you off in a straight-jacket.

CECE

I'll find another man.

LOIS

You've got a bad track record on the dating scene. They keep dropping like flies. Not because there's anything wrong with you—oh no, you're gorgeous and a darling and smart—but there's something wrong with them. If a treasure like you only gets batterers and ... men who haven't the decency to die somewhere else than your living room—

(Beat. She looks at the dispensary, then at CECE who is taking wads of crumpled paper from her pocket and putting them in a drawer.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Cece. Did Karl hurt you?

(During the following, LOIS rolls over to the dispensary and tries to read the labels, up high. She cannot. She looks at her own smoothie suspiciously.)

CECE

He was mean.

LOIS

How? Explain.

CECE

He made me cancel kendo. And scrub his underpants.

LOIS

Is that all?

CECE

He made me ...

(makes clipping gestures)

his disgusting toenails.

LOIS

Cece, no more men. I'm going to shut down your online profile for your own good. I'll call my sons. They'll help me find a fantastic place where you can live. Nearby, so I can visit you every day. And there will be crafts and balloon volleyball and sing-alongs, just like at the Center. And maybe kendo. I'll bring you my grilled sardines and baked chicken-and-potatoes. And a bottle of Lancer's every Sunday night.

CECE

I can try another man. I want to stay here. In my home. With you. And Camilla.

LOIS

Cece. You're not to look for men online any longer. Understand? You'll be fine with my help and the help of my sons. I'm going home now and calling Bradford.

(spins around and begins to leave as she continues talking)

We shouldn't delay another moment, with your disease and this nosy girl. I'll come by in the morning with a plan of campaign.

(LOIS exits. CECE kneels before plant, prunes.)

CECE

Nice boss lady. You might have been a spy, like her, Camilla. You were a smart girl. Or maybe you would be a doctor. You would have made Lois new knees. New brain for me.

(beat; she looks up)

So, he did have money, but his son got it. Just as well. He won't come after me. I have nothing...

(beat)

but dates.

(pulls her notebook from her pocket and reads)

CECE (Cont'd)

Thursday Charlie Walsh. Friday Antonio Santiago. Saturday afternoon Marvin Rosen. Saturday night Tim Gilbert.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II, Scene v**

SETTING: One week later. Japanese restaurant, a private room.

AT RISE: TIM and CECE sit across from each other, on either side of a short table. Throughout the conversation, they nibble or sip, nearly finished with their course. They are smitten.

TIM

So, you really like Shakespeare?

CECE

Yes. That was an exaggeration.

TIM

*Twelfth Night* is playing at Classic Stage. Would you like to go?

CECE

We're not ... done.  
(indicates unfinished food)

TIM

Oh, no. I meant next weekend. ... I very much enjoy your company.

CECE

Except when you dropped sashimi in the soy sauce.

TIM

I hope that doesn't disqualify me.

CECE

No. You're a ... Your wife died.

TIM

I'm a widower.

CECE

How long?

TIM

A year ago.

CECE  
That's so short.

TIM  
I don't think so. It's time to move on.

CECE  
Is this your first time?

TIM  
Date? Yes. Well, in almost 40 years. How about you?

CECE  
Me?

TIM  
You're widowed, too. How long?

CECE  
My husband. He died seven years ago. And my daughter.

TIM  
Daughter?! How very terrible. The same day? Were they in an accident?

CECE  
She was 23. Cystic fibrosis.

TIM  
I'm so sorry. And your husband?

CECE  
He died of ... the heart soon after. He was sad.

TIM  
Depression?

CECE  
Hm. Your wife?

TIM  
My wife was not well. Mentally.

CECE  
Oh. Something wrong with her ...  
(indicates her head)

TIM

She was borderline. Do you know about that?

CECE

No.

TIM

It's hard to live with someone who's borderline.

CECE

But, you did.

TIM

For 40 years. I cared about her very much. But I couldn't do anything for her.

CECE

She died of ... borderline?

TIM

She took her own life.

CECE

Oh! How do you ... Are you sad?

TIM

Relieved, actually. ... Do you think I'm callous for saying that?

CECE

Sometimes dying is the best.

TIM

I was depressed. Like your husband, I suppose. Depression is the worst. Even with pills, it felt like I was in a dark well. But when she died, suddenly there was a rope, so I could climb out.

CECE

You stayed.

TIM

Stayed?

CECE

With her.

TIM

I loved her. And when you love someone—

CECE  
You are a loving man.

TIM  
I can't help myself. When I am ... in love.

CECE  
(blushes)  
Do you have children?

TIM  
No.

CECE  
Are you sure?

TIM  
(laughs)  
Yes, I'm sure. No children, no parents, no siblings. I'm completely alone.

CECE  
I'm that, too.

TIM  
But now, you and I, we're ... not alone.

CECE  
Are you sad now?

TIM  
At this moment, I'm so far from sad, I wish I was a black belt and could chop this table in half.

CECE  
Oh! Why?

TIM  
It's the only thing keeping us apart.

(A knock.)  
TIM (Cont'd)  
Come in.

(HOSTESS in kimono enters, bows, kneels at their table.)

HOSTESS  
You requested me.

TIM

Oh, yes, thank you. I was here last month with my business partners. You were so kind as to sing us a song. Would you sing that song again, for my companion?

HOSTESS

Are you certain? My voice is not so melodic.  
(refills their teacups)

TIM

Oh yes, it is. I would be very much obliged.

HOSTESS

I do not want to displease your guest.

CECE

Does she sing?! The waitress?!

TIM

It's a Japanese thing.  
(to HOSTESS)  
Please, sing for us.

HOSTESS

I hope your companion has your forgiving ears.

TIM

There's nothing to forgive. A voice like yours could never betray.

(HOSTESS sings *Hamabe No Uta*, CECE and TIM watch her as she sings.)

HOSTESS

*Ashita hamabe o samayoeba  
Mukashi no koto zo shinobaruru  
Kaze no oto yo kumo no sama yo  
Yosuru nami mo kai no iro mo<sup>1</sup>*

(Before she starts the second verse, CECE whispers to TIM.)

---

<sup>1</sup> In the morning as I wandered about along the seashore  
I remembered things from the old times  
The sound of the wind, the shape of the cloud  
The wave that came and the color of the seashell too

CECE

(whispering)

What does it mean?

(As HOSTESS sings, CECE and TIM watch. TIM translates.)

HOSTESS

*Hayachi tachimachi nami o huki*  
*Akamo no suso zo nureijishi*  
*Yamishi ware wa subete iete*  
*Hamabe no masago manago ima wa*

TIM

(whispering)

Suddenly, the wind blew a wave.  
The bottom of my red clothes got wet.  
I was sick, but now am healed.  
Sand along the sea—where is my beloved  
child now?

(CECE, tears in her eyes, turns to TIM. They gaze into each other's eyes.)

(FADEOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II, Scene vi**

SETTING: One month later, LOIS's garden: January barrenness.

AT RISE: LOIS brushes heavy snow off the bushes, picks a broken branch off one of them, takes off her gloves, dials phone.

LOIS

(into phone)

Cece! Cece! Where have you been? This is the third time I've left a message for you. I worry about you with that Tim. He seems so saintly. The dimple on his chin and the way his eyebrows go up in the center when he smiles. I don't want anything to happen to him. I mean, you. I hope you're alive. Both of you. And not dead and decomposing in your house. like poor O'Reilly, before the postman smelled him.

(beat)

I do hope you're safe. And that you'll come to BINGO Wednesday in the van. It's not the same without you. Wednesday. Two o'clock. The van. I'll call you at one to remind you.

(beat)

Don't do anything rash to Tim. I mean, with Tim. If you're not dead and decomposing, I'm sure you're having a grand time. But, remember. If you're ever worried or disturbed about anything, I am right next door. Blue house. With the miniature spruce on the stoop and the cute little porcelain dragon. I'll be here. As always.

(Pockets phone, rolls off stage.)

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act II, Scene vii**

SETTING: Two months later, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: TIM, in formal wear, and CECE, in a wedding kimono, are standing, holding hands, gazing into each other's eyes romantically.

TIM

You are the most beautiful creature. I can't believe my luck you agreed to marry me.

CECE

I can't believe my luck. The restaurant. The door opened. I saw you—

TIM

Only three months ago.

CECE

It was so cold.

TIM

But since that day, my heart has warmed with every tick of the clock.  
(kisses her delicately)

CECE

This feeling. Not even with Henry. When I was a girl. Yes, this feeling. I feel like a girl.

TIM

You are not a girl. You are an extraordinary woman.

CECE

Your words.

TIM

They spill out like a prayer I can't hold back. I adore you. You are so beautiful and fragile, like a swan of blown glass.

CECE

My words—

TIM

What use are words to you, my dear? Your voice is the light that fills the room when you walk in.

CECE

You are so good to me.

TIM

(embraces her)

My life was empty and you filled it like liquid gold. Of course, I am good to you. I am grateful and never want to lose you.

CECE

I have to tell you something.

TIM

What is it, my darling?

CECE

It's hard.

TIM

Don't be afraid. Nothing you tell me will change how I feel about you.

CECE

(beat)

Dementia.

TIM

Yes, I know. I detected it from the start.

CECE

But. You know what happens.

TIM

Yes. But nothing can stop me from loving you.

CECE

I lose more words every day. I keep ... my thing. I make a tally mark when I forget.

TIM

May I see?

(CECE reluctantly gives him the notebook. He opens it.)

TIM (Cont'd)

You wrote more than tally marks.

CECE

At the start.

TIM

(flips through the pages)

Some pages have been torn out.

(returns to the beginning and reads)

“I am Cece Foster, MD. I am 58 years of age and my brain cells are slowly being destroyed. I am losing words. Words are more than expressions. They are the essence of what they express. We can’t grasp a concept without knowing how to express it. And therefore, when you lose a word, you lose something, like ‘freedom,’ or ‘lilacs,’ or the color ‘blue.’ When you lose a name, you lose that person. So, this notebook is for writing words and names. The things and people I don’t want to forget. For the words I forget, I will make a tally mark.

(turns a page)

“Cece Foster, me. Henry Foster, my husband, dead. Camilla Foster, my daughter, dead. Annemarie Bertolucci, my mother, dead. Andrew Bertolucci, my father, dead. Lois Zacharias, my friend, alive. Pola, my cleaning lady, alive. Penelope Waksman, my neighbor, dead. Dimitrios Waksman, her husband. Ardith Khan, my friend. Mitch O’Reilly, my friend. Ice cream with sugar cookies. Lois’s garden in May. Panda bears. Lightning storms. Anything Japanese. Wet moss on the bottom of my feet—”

(TIM looks up; CECE is crying.)

CECE

I want to remember.

TIM

(hugs her)

Darling, let’s live in the moment. Let’s fill every day with music, art, poetry, and walks in the park. Barefoot. On the moss. And, rich food and fine wine. The world must be yours in its entirety.

CECE

I will forget you.

TIM

We will have many years together. For some of them, you might not know me or be able to grasp my love for you, so know me now and be happy.

CECE

I cannot believe... To have you...

(FADEOUT)

(END OF ACT II)

**Act III, Scene i**

SETTING: Two months later, LOIS's garden. May blossoms.

AT RISE: LOIS is in her wheelchair. CECE and TIM are holding hands. They all hold smoothies. LOIS's is pink, CECE's is purple, TIM's is orange.

TIM

Stunning. Absolutely stunning, Lois.

LOIS

You are very kind, Tim. I planted this garden 55 years ago, when I moved into this house. I had May blossoms in mind.

(points at plants as she names them)

Azalea, rhododendron, quince, the plum-colored blossoms of the redbud transforming overnight into a yellowish green, and pink apple blossoms. Pink. That's a special species I must attend to carefully.

CECE

Beautiful, beautiful!

(CECE whispers to plants as TIM and LOIS continue talking, LOIS watching CECE out of the corner of her eye.)

LOIS

In May, my garden is like a beauty pageant, each blossom rivaling the other. And, you see, the juniper there, the yews, and the weeping cedar carefully placed, to frame them, to keep the girls apart.

TIM

Astounding. You put so much thought and care into it.

LOIS

Oh, it's nothing, really. Although it did cost me my knees. And, what lucky people you were, away for two whole months, all over Japan, while I sat in Astoria watching dramedies. I did manage to win 50 cents during roulette night at the Center, but it wasn't the same without Cece cheering me on. The rest of them are sour grapes. Next year, you must see my garden in April with the hyacinth, crocuses, and forsythia. You're not moving, are you?

TIM

Absolutely not. Cece is more comfortable here. This has been her home for 30 years. It is a delightful home and I'm perfectly happy here.

(He extends his arm toward CECE, who rejoins him.)

LOIS

How wonderful. And they lived happily ever after in a brutalist brick cube in Queens. Where is your house, may I ask?

TIM

East Hampton.

CECE

East Hampton. So more from here.

TIM

(kisses her on the head)

So far from here, yes.

(to LOIS)

I'm putting it for sale.

LOIS

East Hampton? For sale? You're moving out of East Hampton?! But, the beaches! And the celebrities! Oh my! Why don't you keep it and rent it to tourists. You'll probably make more money. I could manage it for you. Does it have ramps?

TIM

I'm afraid not. Honestly, I'm glad to be making a clean break. Closing a chapter of my life and starting another.

LOIS

Cece, tell me about the honeymoon. What were your favorite spots?

CECE

Katsura!

TIM

The imperial palace in Kyoto. Her favorite palace. The gardens were exquisite.

CECE

(reads from her notes)

Reeds, pines, pond, teahouse, flowers—

(looks up from notebook)

even the ... stones in the paths. Beautiful!

LOIS

Do you have souvenirs? You should bring them for show-and-tell at the Center. Tim can come with us tomorrow and make potholders. Have you told Tim about the Center?

CECE

Yes, thank you. That would be nice.

TIM

Uh... we'll see about that. Lois, you should come to our house for tea some time and you can tell me more about it. It's better that Cece stays home now.

LOIS

(nods in understanding)

I'm so pleased my dear friend has found her Prince Charming. The two of you are adorable. You make me choke up. She is the sweetest friend, and you are a caring husband. Not like the other monsters.

TIM

Really? I only heard good things about Mr. Foster.

LOIS

Oh no. Not Henry. He was a gentleman. I'm talking about the other two.

TIM

(to CECE, half-jokingly)

More husbands? Cece. Another secret!

CECE

A mistake. Please, let's not talk.

TIM

(disconcerted)

Well, then, I'm glad there will be no more mistakes. And no more secrets.

CECE

Lois! Come to dinner! Come to our house.

LOIS

You're cooking?

CECE

Taco Bell take-out.

LOIS

Oh, the precious newlyweds, inviting me to your home for tacos. I'm so happy for you. But, tonight I must catch up on Netflix. And anyway, Taco Bell gives me noisome gas.

(cuts a rose with her shears, takes off the thorns)

TIM

Yes, I think we should ... be alone tonight. Thank you for showing me your garden, Lois. It really is exquisite.

(LOIS signals to CECE to bend down. She doesn't, so LOIS pulls her down and puts the rose behind her ear.)

LOIS

Here. For the beautiful bride. Who has only goodness in her heart.

(glances at TIM)

I feel things are in their right place now. I have accomplished some purpose, though I can't think of what it is.

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act III, Scene ii**

SETTING: Later that day, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: TIM is sitting on the sofa, laptop open, nervous.

TIM

"In his home." ... "Died suddenly." ...

(looks up in fear)

His home? My home! ... "Married two months." Then he was dead.

(TIM jumps up and looks at sofa suspiciously. He sits in recliner, then jumps up and looks at recliner suspiciously. He sits on the coffee table and types some more, reads.)

TIM (Cont'd)

And another one. Married two months and then ... died suddenly.

(looks at watch)

It's two months today!

(CECE enters with an orange health cocktail. TIM, without looking at her, grabs the glass, sips. A few silent seconds pass.)

CECE

You're quiet.

(gets up and sits at his feet, begins to rub one)

TIM

Not now, thank you.

CECE

The notes. They're working, no? I remember so much.

(CECE starts searching for her notebook while TIM continues combing the Internet.)

TIM

It's in the stationery drawer.

(CECE retrieves her notebook, flips through pages, reading.)

CECE

To-ji Temple. Karamon Gate. Nijo-jo Castle. Kyoto Gosho. Four Seasons Hotel—

TIM

(nervous, rises)

Cece, you had another husband in September. Less than a year ago. And he died here, in the house. Two months later. And another husband the year before that. And he died two months later. You never told me.

CECE

He was a bad man.

TIM

Who?

CECE

He hurt me.

(turns away)

My face.

TIM

(wrestling with his emotions)

Which one? Sy Kidd or Karl Sherman?

(CECE gives him a look of cluelessness. He taps on his laptop keyboard, and shows her a photo of SY. She nods.)

TIM (Cont'd)

Sy Kidd. He was very wealthy. What happened to his money?

CECE

I bought Lois an electric chair and her ... thing. Then I bought— I was an idiot.

TIM

What? What did you buy?

CECE

Condos in Florida.

TIM

You have condos in Florida?

CECE

I don't— They're not— The money's not ...  
(hangs her head in shame)

TIM

And Karl Sherman. Did he hurt you?

CECE

Karl?

TIM

Your last husband.

CECE

Did I marry Karl?

TIM

Yes, you married Karl. And you married Sy. And they both died. Here. In this house. There were dead men in this house.

CECE

Don't be angry.

TIM

I'm not angry. I'm just— I know you're losing your memory, Cece, but you've got to remember the death of your two husbands in the last two years. I mean, that's pretty significant. How do you think I feel about not being told? Like a fool. That's how I feel.

CECE

It was a mistake. It's not important. We're happy now.

(CECE stares into space, tears in her eyes.)

TIM

And maybe they died ... on this sofa! I've been sitting here— Or did they die in the bed? My bed? Am I next?

CECE

Stop.

TIM

Cece, this is very disturbing.  
(grabs jacket)  
I need some time alone.

(TIM exits.)

(FADEOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act III, Scene iii**

SETTING: One month later, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: CECE kneels before the flower, wearing her wedding kimono. There is a blue smoothie on the altar table. As CECE reads each of the following items in her notebook, she tears the page out, crumples it, and sets it on the table.

CECE

Goodbye, Katsura. Goodbye, Moon Pavillion. Goodbye, Four Seasons Hotel. Goodbye, Gardens of Ryoan-ji. Goodbye, Henry. Goodbye, Lois. Goodbye—

(puts the notebook down)

There is a cloud. Between me and Tim. A black cloud that won't go away. He was the best one. To me. And you. He loved us. Now, he's a sad man. Meant for sadness. I cannot change that.

(checks the soil, feels the vial, pulls it out)

Your death was long. My baby coughing. Not breathing. You knew that you were ... going. I go in and out of knowing. ... I must do it now, when I am knowing.

(holds the drink)

Blueberries, rice milk, fish oil, tea, selenium, ascorbic acid, retinol ... sodium cyanide.

(CECE pours cyanide in her glass, slides the vial back. TIM enters, sulking, tosses his jacket and a newspaper on the sofa, goes to the liquor cabinet. CECE, startled and confused, puts down her glass, jumps up, and runs to TIM. He doesn't look at her.)

CECE (Cont'd)

You're early. How was everything?

TIM

Not good, if you really want to know. I mean, the numbers have been excellent this year, but this quarter not so good.

CECE

Oh.

TIM

(sits in the recliner with his whiskey)

The Fed's strangling the dollar. Good for some people, not me.

(turns on television and reads the paper)

Is dinner ready? I'm famished.

CECE

I'm not happy.

TIM

(turns off television, puts down the paper)

I know. Neither am I.

CECE

You—would be better if I were dead.

TIM

Why do you say that?

CECE

There's a black cloud.

TIM

Look. Cece. Sit down. ... I need to tell you something, but everything will be OK. I've been talking to my lawyer. I think the right thing to do is get an annulment.

CECE

Why?

TIM

I didn't know about Sy and Karl.

CECE

If you knew, you would not ... marry me?

TIM

Frankly, no.

(CECE, beside herself, looks around the room for something.)

TIM (Cont'd)

There's no need to worry. I'm going to set up an annuity to cover the expenses of a home. A good home.

CECE

I was doing something ...

(Smoke starts to emanate from the kitchen.)

CECE (Cont'd)

The fish!

(CECE runs off stage. TIM grabs his head and mumbles.)

TIM

Another night of takeout.

(He paces. The smoothie catches his eye. He looks at it curiously.)

TIM (Cont'd)

Blue?

(He drinks it. His eyes open wide. He kneels on the floor and tries unsuccessfully to vomit, grabs his throat, staggers to his jacket, pulls his phone from the pocket, dials the emergency number.)

TIM (Cont'd)

2268 46th Street. Hurry!

(TIM drops the phone, drops to the floor, writhes. CECE enters with a pink smoothie, looks at him, screams.)

CECE

Darling! My darling! What's wrong?

(CECE sees the glass he drank from. Turns back to TIM and breaks down. She puts his head in her lap and strokes his hair.)

CECE (Cont'd)

That was mine! That was mine! There is no ... fix. Don't die! Tim, my love, don't die!

(TIM goes limp. CECE looks at the empty glass. There is a knock on door.)

VOICE

Emergency response team!

(CECE looks at the glass again. Another knock. Someone tries the doorknob. It is locked. They start trying to force the door open. CECE runs to the kitchen with the glass, comes back empty-handed, and runs to door.)

CECE

I'm coming! I'm coming!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act III, Scene iv**

SETTING: Next day, CECE's living room.

AT RISE: NORIKO stands, wearing a sundress and leg warmers.  
CECE brings in a tea service. Her sweater is on backwards  
and inside-out. A photo of TIM is next to the camellia.

NORIKO

Oh. Thank you very much, Mrs. Gilbert. This looks great.

(CECE pours hot water into two cups, opens tea tin and pours  
water into the tin. She sees NORIKO, smiles.)

CECE

I know you. You're the boss lady.

NORIKO

My deepest condolences, Mrs. Gilbert. Again. I only have a few questions. Protocol. Like last  
time. The last two times. Please tell me what happened yesterday.

CECE

Tim came home. The fish. Fire. I came to the room. He was ... the floor, coughing.

NORIKO

Was he complaining of stomach pains or chest pains or anything?

CECE

... I'm sorry. I sometimes ... words ... I'm getting old.

NORIKO

Did he eat or drink anything when he came home?

CECE

No.

NORIKO

(checks notes)

There were traces of fruit in his mouth.

CECE

Fruit?

NORIKO

I'm sorry. Did he ... have a health cocktail?

(CECE does not answer.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Mr. Gilbert was very wealthy.

CECE

Did he leave money?! Could you tell me? I need a helper person. For me and ... the sick one.

NORIKO

Sick one?

(CECE looks at the plant.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

Oh, yes. Camilla.

CECE

What?

NORIKO

Do you get confused sometimes?

CECE

Confused? I don't know that place.

NORIKO

What was Mr. Gilbert's health cocktail for? Was he ill? They, um, did an autopsy and couldn't—

CECE

I said no autopsy!

NORIKO

I know but, you see... I offered to come here instead of them getting a warrant.

(CECE is agitated.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

So, if you can tell me what illness he had—

He had ... teeth. CECE

A ... toothache? NORIKO

Yes. CECE

Just a toothache? NORIKO

Yes. CECE

What goes into a toothache cocktail? NORIKO

Carrots, cherries, oranges, cucumber, nutmeg, zinc, and fresh cultures. CECE

And, he drank the health cocktail right before he fell on the floor? NORIKO

(discomfited) CECE

I don't—

What was in Mr. Kidd's health cocktail? NORIKO

Mr. Kidd? CECE

Your second husband. NORIKO

Dong-quai root, ophiopogon ohwii okoyama, gardenia, licorice. CECE

You remember so much. NORIKO

It's my job. CECE

NORIKO

Of course. You were a scientist. ... What was in Mr. Sherman's health cocktail?

CECE

Mr. Sherman?

NORIKO

Yes. Mr. Sherman. Your husband before Mr. Gilbert. With the diabetes. In a wheelchair.

CECE

Toenails!

NORIKO

What was in his cocktail?

CECE

Corn, egg yolk, alpha-lipoic acid, bitter melon, banana, resveratrol, green grapes.

NORIKO

You were angry at Mr. Sherman.

(CECE hangs her head.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

And Mr. Kidd. Those scars on your hands. They look like cigarette burns.

CECE

It was the only thing to do.

NORIKO

Did he abuse you? Mr. Kidd?

(CECE stares.)

NORIKO (Cont'd)

What did Mr. Gilbert do to you?

CECE

(shakes her head violently)

A mistake. It was mine. I am very ... I must lie down.

(CECE rises to go. NORIKO rises, takes her gently by the arm.)

NORIKO

Please. Have some tea. I want to help you.

Lois!  
CECE

Who's Lois?  
NORIKO

(rubs her head)  
Snap, snap, snap, snap.  
CECE

Were you on good terms with Mr. Gilbert?  
NORIKO

(CECE cries. NORIKO hands her a napkin from the tray so she can wipe her eyes. She crumples it and puts it in a drawer.)

You had a good marriage?  
NORIKO (Cont'd)

He, he was ... divorce...  
CECE

You said it was a mistake. What was a mistake?  
NORIKO

His dying. I was supposed to—  
(beat)  
Will you care for Camilla when I am ...?  
CECE

The plant? Uh, sure. I just have to ask my supervisor.  
NORIKO

(a few beats, a smile)  
I have to show you.  
(gets gardening accoutrements, motions for NORIKO to join her)  
There's watering and feeding, and ... bugs. You ...  
(demonstrates crushing the bugs with her fingertips)  
Water only when soil is dry. Test it. With your finger. You'll find what you're looking for.  
Test it. I need to get something.  
CECE

(CECE goes to the kitchen. NORIKO tests the soil and pulls out the vial. She reads the label, makes a call on her phone.)

NORIKO

Hey, it's me. You better send a squad car now. I ... found cyanide. I gotta go.

(She pockets the phone. CECE returns.)

CECE

Did you check the soil?

NORIKO

Yes.

CECE

(beat)

Good. Here's the supplement. Nitrogen, phosphorous, soluble potash, boron, copper, iron, manganese, and zinc. In distilled water. If you don't remember, it's on the ... here.

(points at label)

6 drops per quart. Very important. Will you remember?

NORIKO

Yes.

CECE

And, it's best to cut the blossoms at their peak, on an angle away from the ... like this.

(Squad car lights from the window. This registers with CECE.

With scissors, she cuts a blossom and hands it to NORIKO. They look at each other.)

NORIKO

I am very sorry, Mrs. Gilbert. But, you have to go to the station.

(CECE nods, hangs her head, and allows NORIKO to lead her out.

The squad car lights disappear. After several moments, knocks are heard at the door. LOIS begins speaking from outside.)

LOIS's VOICE

Cece! Cece! Why were the police here?! Was it that inspector? The one who doesn't know how to dress seasonably?

(knocks)

Cece! Where are you?

(knocks)

Cece!

(BLACKOUT)

(END OF SCENE)

**Act III, Scene v**

SETTING: A few months later, Bellevue Hospital visiting room.

AT RISE: CECE stands s.r., GUARD and AIDE by her side. LOIS is s.l., holding the potted camellia on her lap. They meet at a table in the center and sit on opposite sides. LOIS puts the flower on the table. CECE looks at it, smiles.

LOIS

Cece! Oh, Cece!

CECE

(to the plant)

The sick one!

(moves to touch it, but GUARD stops her hand)

LOIS

(to GUARD)

It's just a plant! They let it in!

(GUARD steps back. CECE caresses the plant.)

CECE

My baby!

(CECE mumbles "All the Pretty Horses" and claps hands for the plant. Throughout the scene, gradually a vision of LOIS's garden appears, perceptible only to CECE.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

My dear, dear friend! I stood on line for five hours simply roasting in the blazing sun, just to get into that courtroom. Well, sat for five hours, thank goodness, in my chair. The line was wrapped around the block— All those gawking news junkies and gossips with nothing better to do. And then finally! The courtroom, with air conditioning, and then you walk in and stand there—

(CECE is oblivious)

LOIS (Cont'd)

That vicious judge! He showed no mercy, even for a harmless, sweet woman in your condition. You were a victim of a conga line of insensitive, terrible brutes. And I don't mean only Sy and Karl and Tim—god only knows what he did to you, he seemed so angelic—but also this hideous disease, and, and the phone-face yuppies—

(tries to get her attention)

They've bought your house, Cece. Look at me. Your house. It's been sold. The state. They tracked down a distant relative. He doesn't even look like you—the shameless impostor! And, your lawyer and I—we're fighting it, Cece. But time's running out. There's ... a dumpster.

(CECE sees the vision of the flowers for the first time. She wanders to them and makes gestures as though speaking to them.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Believe me, Cece. I didn't forget you. Every day since your arrest I've been calling that snotty girl who answers the phone for the court, demanding she let me in. And, here I am, how many months later? The indignity! You poor dear. You haven't seen anyone since you've been arrested. Except ... these automatons.

(LOIS glares at GUARD, who looks hurt. LOIS rolls over to CECE and looks in her face.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Cece! Your lawyer, he said we could appeal. I told him I know the Police Commissioner—she was engaged to my son—and he said that was an ace in my pocket—

CECE

(to LOIS)

I know you.

LOIS

(beat)

But, what would we be saving you from?

(The garden is quite pronounced, now. LOIS extends her hands. CECE takes them.)

CECE

(to LOIS)

You are my friend.

LOIS

Yes, I am.

CECE

Is it my time?

(LOIS looks at AIDE, who nods.)

LOIS

Yes.

(CECE goes to the table and digs into the soil of the camellia, searching for the vial, dislodging the plant.)

CECE

Where is it? Where?

(AIDE gently coaxes her hands down.)

LOIS

Oh, Cece. It's not in there.

(LOIS replaces the soil. AIDE sits CECE down and strokes her hair, which she leans into. LOIS slides the pot closer to CECE.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Here, Cece. Your daughter. Camilla. Take good care of her. And she will take good care of you.

(LOIS looks at GUARD who nods.)

LOIS (Cont'd)

Goodbye, my friend.

(CECE is absorbed in the flower. LOIS exits. The vision of flowers glows brighter. Spotlight on CECE and the flower. GUARD and AIDE recede. CECE sings non-words to the tune of "All the Pretty Horses.")

(BLACKOUT)

*END OF PLAY*