

Remote Control

by

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Setting; A private home in an affluent US suburb.

Time; The present, the late spring of the year

OPENING;

In the theater, as the audience enters and is seated, the sound of a Mocking bird is heard intermingled with various other North American spring birds. This is heard up until the start of the video clip. There is a large projection screen, which can be raised and lowered throughout the play, and positioned to the right center of the stage.

The video/film clip: On the screen, which opens as totally black, are heard the bird sounds that were heard in the theater. A close-up of a man's feet walking down a set of outside cement steps. Close-up of a hand reaches for a car door and the door is opened. A suit jacket and some files are dropped onto the passenger seat of the car. A key is inserted into the ignition and the car is started. A radio button is pressed. (The song "Things Have Changed", by Bob Dylan, comes on and plays throughout the clip.) Shots of leaves and sunlight and various street scenes shot in an increasingly affluent setting, wide lawns and large houses etc. The car is stopped in a driveway. (The music stops and the sound of the birds is once again heard). CU of a man's feet descending onto the driveway, walking toward a large house with a wide front porch. (NOTE: At no time during the film clip do we see the man's face.) He crosses the porch to open the front door, which swings in. (The sound track stops)

Scan or Click to view Opening video



On Stage- At the same exact moment the front door swings open into the front hall, John enters dressed in the same suit as the video. The light brightens in the front hall, while at the same time in the darkened right side of stage; the projection screen is silently raised.

The Set

The hall is positioned to the far left of the stage with the front door mid way along the far-left wall. That wall connects to the back wall of the form a 120-degree angle (approximately) and contains the front door, and a grandfather's clock along the wall on the far side of the

door. The ticking of the clock is heard above the silence. The front door opens in toward the audience. (The hinges are on the down stage side) Up stage from the front door is another door leading to a powder room. (The door swings into the powder room) A door to a closet is cut into the back wall in the front hall. The front hall contains an umbrella stand, a small table, an antique wall mirror, and various paintings of ancestral family members. The floor is covered with an Oriental rug. The right wall of the front hall comes out from the back wall at a 90-degree angle. It's approximately 5 feet long and ends as a half arc toward the audience to form a doorway between the front hall and the larger living room to the right. Under the arch but slightly into the living room is a marble statue of a boy in the Greek style. (It seems a bit out of place for the rest of the living room decor).

The living room has a pair of French doors on the back stage wall that open onto a wrap-around wooded porch, which can be seen through them. The lawn and gardens can also be seen. To the right of the French doors and in the corner of the room is a small bar. To the left of the doors is a writing desk and chair. Mid stage is a couch and wing chair and end table with a shaded lamp. The right wall, which is also at a 120-degree angle from the back wall, has a sideboard, where a vase of fresh cut flowers are sitting, and a doorway that reveals a dining room. The walls, seen through the doorway, are covered with wainscoting. A small card table and four chairs are set in front of and to the left end of the couch in the living room.

ACT 1

The full stage is warmly lit, as the interior of a house. John enters through the front door. He is graying, in his early 60's. He is wearing a blue dress shirt and a loosened tie with a jacket over his sleeve. Around his neck is a stethoscope. He walks to the hall closet and hangs up his coat

At the same time as John is entering the house, sounds of china plates clinking together and cabinet doors closing etc. Margo enters the room through the kitchen/dining room door carrying a pair of candlesticks. She is a beautiful woman in her mid/late 50's. Tall and thin and very animated. She is dressed in a pair of white pants and rose colored blouse. She places the candlesticks on top of the sideboard. Margo, who has a iPod clipped to her pants and set earphones on her head, is listening and moving to the music, which is unheard by the audience. As she places the candlesticks into the holders, she begins to sing along, off key and at first quietly and then too loudly.

MARGO

(Singing and dancing)

R-E-S-P-E-C-T find out what it means to me..... sock it to me! Sock it to me.....

(MARGO exits through the dining room door still singing and dancing)

JOHN

(Yelling from the front hall)

Have you been outside today and heard the birds singing?

(JOHN picks up the mail that's lying on the small table and slowly toward the living room. As he passes through the arch, he removes the stethoscope and places it around the statue's neck. He notices that she has just left the room. Leafing through the mail, he sits down in the wing chair. The timing of the movements is such that JOHN enters the living room just after MARGO leaves the room. MARGO reenters the room carrying bowl of chips and some napkins. She has her eyes closed so she doesn't notice JOHN sitting in the chair as she moves rhythmically to the song in the head set.)

MARGO

(Singing and dancing)

COME ON, a little respect! a little respect ... R-E-S-P-E-C-T find out what it means to me.....

JOHN

(Yelling)

Margo!Aretha!!

MARGO

(Continues to sing and dance until she discovers John in the chair and is startled. Some of the chips from the bowl are thrown in the air.)

AAHH!

JOHN

What in God's name are you doing?

MARGO

(Margo takes off the ear phones and stooping to pick up some of the scattered chips)

You scared me to death.....

JOHN

Where did you get that?

MARGO

(Returning the iPod to a drawer in the sideboard while still humming the song)

I found it in the drawer, it must be Karen's.

JOHN

Why are you so cheerful?

MARGO

When am I *not* cheerful?

JOHN

(Sardonically)

Please!

MARGO

(Placing napkins and chips on the sideboard and fussing with each detail)

What's making me *more* cheerful than normal? Guests!
Stimulating conversation, you know someone to talk to!

JOHN

(John shakes his head and takes a deep breath, then looks through the mail)

How did we get on the Victoria's Secret mailing list?

(Holds up the catalogue then begins leafing through it)

And what exactly is her secret? Everything seems to be revealed.

(He stands drops the mail and catalogue on the desk)

MARGO

(Sarcastically)

Some little "naughties" for your girl friend and they put you right on the list.

JOHN

(Almost shouting)

You never let up, do you? For Christ sake! Give it a rest!

(Nothing is said for several seconds as Margo continues her preparation and John absentmindedly fingers through the mail. Margo turns to look around the room to see if everything is to her liking and notices the stethoscope hanging around the statue's neck).

MARGO

John! Take that off his head and put it away!

(Crosses over to the statue, takes the stethoscope off the statue, places the scope in his ears and pretends to listen to the statue's heart)

JOHN

(Feeling the arm of the statue arm)

I'm afraid we've lost him, dear. Rigor mortis has already set in.

MARGO

(Ignoring him)

And could you get the cards and pad out? They'll be here in a couple of minutes.

(John opens a desk drawer and pulls out two decks of cards and a score pad, throws the stethoscope into the drawer)

JOHN

(Sarcastically)

Anything else?

MARGO

Well, now that you mention it, could you not bore our guests with any videos tonight?

JOHN

What do you mean?

MARGO

Last time, everyone got very bored while you hunted for the Marlene Dietrich film.

JOHN

Bored! Everyone was not bored.

(John reaches for the remote control that's on the end table. He picks it up and points it at Margo who is turned away from him as he presses the button. She freezes in place and is stopped mid sentence)

MARGO

Then, I was...

JOHN

(Addresses the audience)

Admit it; you've always wanted to be able to do that to someone. Sometimes Margo just talks too much, but I've discovered the great equalizer.

(He holds up the remote)

This little gadget, this remote control, has amazing powers beyond changing channels. The real beauty of the thing is that I can freeze everyone in place, and they don't even know they've been stopped. The rest of the world is still ticking slowly on, but they're stopped with no sense of time passing. You push the right buttons and everything stops. I have no idea how or even why it works but it does. I remember lying in bed, as a kid of 7 or 8, thinking that if I could just touch the right places, sort of push the right buttons in the right sequence at the right time, I could get my wish. I would touch the knot on the headboard, the switch on my lamp, and then the knob on the drawer. Nothing! I'd reverse the order. Nothing! I'd wait until exactly 10 o'clock and try it again. Still nothing. I hadn't thought about that in years until the other day I just picked up this remote, and as a joke, pointed it at Margo, and stopped her dead in her tracks. It was wonderful! I've started her up again as you've seen. Anyway, where were we? Oh yes, Margo started to say that she was bored with my demonstration video. I was just trying to make a point. You see last week when Peter and Julia were over to play cards, some how the discussion turned to beauty, then to beautiful women. I said I thought that Marlene Dietrich was far more beautiful than any of these modern day

Brittanys or Tiffanys. And following the old, "one picture is worth a thousand words", I went to my collection and..

(He is standing to one side of the big projection screen. He turns toward it and presses the remote. On the screen is seen Marlene Dietrich singing "Falling in Love Again". After 30 seconds, John presses the remote toward the screen, the video stops and the screen retracts.)

Scan to see the video clip of Marlene Dietrich



JOHN

Now, was that boring? A thing of beauty is a joy forever, which I think was the exact quote that got us started on the subject.

(Turning toward Margo who is still frozen in place)

Now, there's Margo, my wife of 35 years. Even with all the, (Searches for a word) jousting, I guess we still love each other..

(He's not certain)

She loves to control everything. Drives me crazy! Right now she's fusing over the details, getting ready for our Thursday night bridge game. For the last couple of years, Peter and Julia have been coming over to play cards. Anyway, all good things must end. I can't leave her frozen forever.

(Turning toward Margo and pointing the remote at her)

I'll have to let her finish her sentence.

MARGO

(Still arranging things on a side table)

.....bored.)

JOHN

(Walks back to the bar and pours himself a drink)

Can I fix you something?

MARGO

(Curtly)

No thanks.

(Then realizing she's respond too harshly, a little softer)

Maybe later.

JOHN

What are you fussing with now?

MARGO

Just getting everything ready.....I want everything just so.

(John reaches for the remote again, stopping the action. Addresses the audience.)

JOHN

Just so! Margo still irons the sheets. If you look in the spice rack, they're all in alphabetical order! Details! She loves details. She revels in them. She never forgets anything. She knows the names of everyone she's ever met...and their birthday! Watch this.

(He presses the remote starting the action on stage again)

JOHN

(In an offhanded sort of way)

What was the name of the plumber we used last winter when the pipe froze?

MARGO

Why in earth would you want to know his name? It's David Bloom.

JOHN

(Aside to the audience)

Oh, that was too easy, but wait.

(To Margo)

Oh, his name came up again today I just couldn't think of it.

MARGO

His wife's name is Sarah, and they have the two children, Justin and Christine.

JOHN

I'll bet you know the kids' birthdays too.

MARGO

(Margo stops and looks at him curiously for a second)
June 6th and September 30th

(John turns and looks out at the audience, smiles with arms outstretched to the side.)

(John walks back to the bar to refresh his drink, but stops by a photo of his two children that's displayed on the end table. He studies it.)

JOHN

Haven't heard from the kids today, have we?

MARGO

No....Karen will call us Sunday as usual and David's not back from Mackinaw Island yet.

(She exits into the dining room)

JOHN

(To the audience picks up the photo and shows it to the audience)

These are my two kids.. Karen and David..... Grown up now.....they both live on the other coast.....and both have their two little ones..... See them two, three times a year.....Christmas.....

(His voice trails off)

MARGO

(From the kitchen)

Did you say something?

JOHN

(In a quivering old man's voice)
No, just talking to myself again. Christmas
(A little quieter and toward the audience)
my favorite time of the year. Wait; let me show you some of my old movies of the kids.

(Screen comes down and scenes of two children skiing. Various scenes of the kids opening presents, playing badminton, and tasting the frosting on a birthday cake. The quality and sound is that of a Super 8. (Running time about 60 seconds)

Scan to watch the "Kids" video



JOHN

I took these 30 years ago.....30 years....

I can't look at the old pictures of them.....

(Wipes a tear from his eye and presses the remote to stop the film. The screen rises)

MARGO

(From the kitchen)

I ran into Mary Hunt today at the super market.

JOHN

(John snaps out of his nostalgic funk and speaks to her)

Hmm Hmm

MARGO

She said her son, Roger, you know the one at Harvard....just got a fellowship to work with this research company in New York.

JOHN

(Disinterestedly)

That's nice.

MARGO

(She fades slightly at the end)

He's going to move there on the 14th.....

JOHN

(Talking over Margo and addressing the audience)

God, I hate small talk. We were at a party recently and I stood back and listened to the conversations in the room.

MARGO

(From the kitchen)

So what do you think she should do? Are you listening?

JOHN

(Addressing the audience.)

Hold on a second

(John finds the remote and points it toward the kitchen)

So, I was at this party and I noticed that each group of three or four people standing, holding a drink would take turns saying the same thing...I don't mean that they repeated it exactly, but it was a sort of "variations on a theme". The first would tell about how her garage door got stuck half way up, so she couldn't get the car out to go shopping. The next would tell about the time that happened to her, and the third would tell her tale of her stuck door. The others would stand there and nod supportively. I thought, "what meaningless...."

(Searches for a word)

chatter" The small, discuss people, the average, discuss events, while the great discuss ideas. Of course, Margo likes to add,

(The doorbell rings. He turns, puts down his drink, and walks toward the door.)

The sensitive, discuss feelings.

JOHN

I'll get it! I'm sure it's Peter and Julia.

(He opens the door to reveal Peter on his knees with his shoes off. The shoes have been placed under his knees to make him appear as though he's actually very short and standing in the shoes. A felt hat is pulled down over his head so that his ears are bent out to the side. He's wearing a light jacket. John steps back away from the door smiling.)

PETER

(In a Munchkin voice from The Wizard of Oz begins to sing)

We represent the Lollipop Guild, the Lollipop Guild.

JULIA

(Julia has been standing behind Peter slides by and into the hall. She is carrying a drink more than half finished)

All right Munchkin, that's enough..... Hello, Doc.

(Kisses John on the cheek and moves past him)

I started this drink just before we left and didn't want to waste it.

JOHN

(To Peter, smiling)

You're a complete idiot, you know that.

PETER

(Getting up and beginning to put his shoes back on)

I've always wanted to do that. Where's Margo? I'm sorry she missed it.

JOHN

(Yelling to the kitchen)

She's in the kitchen..... Margo! Guests!

(There is no response.)

JOHN

(A stage whisper),

Oh my God!

(John reaches for the remote and points it toward the kitchen. Peter is busily straightening himself, and Julia is looking in the hall mirror so they do not hear or see this action)

MARGO

(She is first heard in the kitchen then enters the room carrying napkins)

I mean should she tell her son not to go out with her?

MARGO

(She is surprised by the guests)

Oh, I didn't hear you come in.

JULIA

(Entering the room and crosses to kiss Margo on the cheek)

Sorry we're late, but you aren't going to believe what happened. Our garage door got stuck half way up

(John looks out into the audience and jesters, as to say "What did I say!")

and we couldn't get the Mercedes out, so we had to borrow Jim's car.

MARGO

(Margo listening to Julia then sees Peter)

What is Peter up to now?

(Peter is still wearing the hat, but not pulled down over his ears. He is brushing off the knees of his pants.)

JULIA

You don't want to know.

PETER

Don't tell her. I may want show her some other time.

(Peter crosses the room to meet Margo. They kiss cheeks.)

MARGO

Here let me take your coats. John, fix them a drink.

(Margo takes their jackets, and walks into the front hall, and back toward the closet.)

JOHN

What can I get you?

JULIA

(Addressing Peter referring to the hat still on his head)

Are you going to wear that thing all night?

PETER

Oh!No

(Peter takes off the hat and walks to the front hall following Margo to the closet. He pats her rear end. They embrace and kiss.)

JULIA

Maybe, you could freshen it up a little with some bourbon.

JOHN

Of course,

(Then to calling to Peter)

and what will you have, Peter?

PETER

(Startled)

Oh! Just a beer, thank you.

(Peter stops kissing and walks back toward the living room as Margo hangs the coats and hat in the closet)

JOHN

(Calling toward the hall)

Margo, can I get you something?

(Margo is in front of the mirror straightening hair and makeup with her fingers)

MARGO

(She reappears from the hallway)

No, nothing, I'm just happily high on life.

JOHN

Oh my God! Have you been reading those religious handouts again?

MARGO

(Sarcastically)

It looks like we're in one of your pessimistic moods tonight, aren't we John?

JOHN

No, I'm an optimist. I'm positive nothing good will happen. I think my mood is more reflective.

(Quoting)

"An unexamined life is not worth living."

MARGO

(More as a statement than question)

Don't tell me, Socrates.

JULIA

Margo, I'm so impressed.

MARGO

Don't be. He uses that quote all the time. I'm surprised you haven't heard him use it before.

PETER

Is everyone in the right mood for bridge tonight, or should we try for another night?

JOHN

(Leading him toward the card table)

No, everything is fine. Come; sit down, just a little marital jousting.

PETER

All right, but I think we should trade partners: I mean, for bridge tonight.

MARGO

What an absolutely splendid idea. You don't mind do you Julia?

JULIA

No, not at all.

(Goes over to John)

We can take them, can't we Doc.

JOHN

Without a doubt.

(Hugging her slightly and pulling out the chair closest to back of stage. The four sit down around the card table and begin playing Bridge.)

JOHN

I'll deal.

(He quickly deals the cards.)

JULIA

(Moaning as she picks up each card)

Oh!, whoa, hmmm

PETER

Hey, no signaling!

JULIA

(Smiling slightly)

I didn't say a thing about these rotten cards.

JOHN

One club

PETER

Pass

JULIA

(Singing)

One diamond, because diamonds are a girl's best friend.

MARGO

One spade

JOHN

Two hearts

PETER

Two spades

JULIA

Three diamonds

MARGO

Pass

JOHN

Pass

PETER

Pass. So it's diamonds to you dear.

(Speaking to Julia)

So all that moaning was just a bluff?

JULIA

One of my specialties, fake moaning.

(Peter is about to say something but
decides not to and just shakes his head)

A bluff? I guess we'll just have wait and see, and play the
cards we're dealt.

(John lays his cards on the table as he is the dummy. They begin playing the cards.)

JULIA

Did you really think I was signaling?

PETER

No! Of course not! When I play a game, I just like to play by the rules.

JOHN

But why should we? No I mean it, why should we follow the rules?

MARGO

Really John, are you really looking for an answer?

(John gives a "sure-why-not" shrug)

PETER

Because without rules, there would be chaos.

JOHN

I was in my hotel room at a conference a couple of years ago. I woke up early, too early, and turned on the TV, and happened on one of those lecture courses. A professor of law was talking about the question; 'Why do we obey the law?' So he constructed a hypothetical situation to make his point. He said, imagine you are driving across a stretch of barren desert that's flat and open as far as the eye can see. There are no other cars or people around. You come to an intersection with another highway, where there's a traffic light. It's red in your direction. So, do you stop?

PETER

Sounds like a dream I had.

JULIA

Of course, you have to stop.

JOHN

But why?

JULIA

Because it's the law.

PETER

Because you don't want to hurt somebody by going through the light.

JOHN

That's one of the reasons the professor gave; safety. We don't want to injure someone or ourselves. But in this case, there is nobody to hurt. There's no one coming in any direction.

MARGO

With my luck, I'd go through it and get caught.

JOHN

That was his second reason - fear of punishment. But in this case, there are no billboards for a cop to hide behind...

PETER

No surveillance cameras? It's probably a set up, the county's one source of income.

JOHN

No surveillance cameras.

MARGO

I guess I'd stop at first out of habit...

JOHN

Then go through it after you've eliminated all dangers?

JULIA

I'd wait until it turned green.

PETER

My question is, why is the light even there?

JOHN

I think that was his point, also.....to question the reason a law exists in the first place. That a rule can't apply to every situation.

PETER

So there are no universal rules?

JULIA

What about the Ten Commandments?... Thou shalt not kill!

MARGO

Or steal.

JULIA

Or commit adultery.

(Margo looks down at her cards. Peter coughs then drinks. John looks at Margo)

JOHN

Seems to me that even those rules, if you believe in them, have exceptions.

JULIA

Only if you're willing to commit a sin.

PETER

That sounds like your grade school nuns talking.

JOHN

(Speaks before Julia can reply)

Thou shalt not kill, but it's OK to go to war, or kill someone who's trying to kill you or a member of your family.

MARGO

But the basic rules are good. Don't lie, cheat, steal or kill.

PETER

They're sort of guidelines; rules of conduct.

JOHN

They're human rules though. Without getting into whether God is involved, they're rules that apply to human interactions.

JULIA

That's not true. It's still a sin to kill an animal.....

PETER

Like that cow we ate for dinner?

JULIA

That's different! That's for food! I mean killing an animal just for the fun of it.

PETER

You mean hunting?

MARGO

You know what she means, unnecessary killing.

PETER

It all depends on where you want to draw the line. Some stop at fish. Some stop at all animals.

JOHN

The point is that it's a human law that's outside the laws of the natural world. We were walking along the cliffs on Block Island one summer. Remember dear?

MARGO

I know what you're going to say.

JOHN

We had stopped to look out over the sea and absorb the whole scene. It couldn't have been more beautiful, the perfection of nature. When all of a sudden, there was a cawing and fluttering in the treetop right next to us. We looked up to see a crow snatch a baby bird from a nest and fly off with it in its talons. The mother bird was frantically squawking and diving at the crow, but it flew off with its dinner.

MARGO

(Covering her face with her hands)

It was so horrible. It took me the whole day to get over it.

JOHN

The point I'm making is that what we witnessed, the theft and the killing, was perfectly natural. The baby bird was just food and no sins were committed.

(John gets up from the table as he is speaking his last line. The card game is still being played. He takes the remote out of his pocket.)

MARGO

I don't want to think about it. New subject!

(John presses the button over his shoulder and stops the action on stage. He walks toward the audience as the back stage light dims slightly.)

JOHN

(To the audience)

Oh! I love it! Big talk! Well, medium to big, anyway, something meaningful. That's why I enjoy having the Barretts over... I'm sorry; I didn't really introduce our guests, Peter and Julia.

(Two spotlights shine on Peter and Julia)

We've been friends for a couple of years now. We met on a cruise to the Bahamas we got as a present from our kids. I'm not much of a cruise person, all those deck chairs lined up

facing the sun, and the endless eating. Anyway, one day we just started talking to them and discovered that, not only did they live 5 miles from us. They also loved to play Bridge. Julia is about 50. Wait a second; I've got a better way.

(John points the remote at the screen and a video flashes onto the screen)

Scan to watch the "Elephants" video.



(A PBS-like "nature" video flashes onto the screen. Pictured are two elephants fighting, while the narrator explains the scene in a calm steady tone. The scene lasts about 10 seconds.)

JOHN

Sorry, wrong button.

(He presses another button and points the remote at the screen)

The Video: (Male voice-over, as in a documentary, and as each of the two are referred to in the video, the spot light illuminates first one and then the other.)

Scan to see the "Julia and Peter" video



Voice-Over	Images
<i>Julia was born just outside Cleveland</i>	A baby being born (Baby crying)
<i>in 1974, the year Nixon resigned because of WaterGate.</i>	Nixon getting on the helicopter and doing the peace sign with both hands.
<i>Peter was born that same year</i>	Same baby being born as opening (crying)
<i>and raised on a farm in Up-State NY.</i>	Bucolic shot of a farm (mooing)
<i>She was the youngest of four sisters,</i>	Four little girls standing in a row in age order and decreasing size.
<i>He was the oldest of four brothers.</i>	Four little boys standing in a row in age order and decreasing size.
<i>She went to an all girls Catholic school her entire life and hated when the nuns spanked their hands with a ruler for their sins.</i>	Image of a group of girls about 9 years old standing by the backboard with a stern nun in the foreground
<i>Peter went to a small public school. Was the class president and starred in every sport.</i>	Close-up of a pin "Pete for President"- football player on other player's shoulders, a news clipping about his no-hitter ,and basketball player spinning, driving the and scoring. (A crowd roar)
<i>(Note: Both are lit at the same time on stage) They met in college, married, and had two boys.</i>	A shot of a college campus. A shot of a married couple exiting a church. Two boys standing side by side. (College Alma Mater played on an organ that blends into the Wedding March" that slowly fades.)
<i>Julia tries to fill her days with the mundane tasks of a suburban home-maker. Peter, owns a real estate company.</i>	Close-up of hands putting clothes in a washing machine, doing dishes, and mopping a floor. A close-up of male hands pushing a real estate sign into the ground.

(John presses the remote at the screen and it retracts)

JOHN

After a little over two years, that pretty much sums up what I know about our guests. Amazing isn't it, how two lives can be summed up in a minute.

(He presses the remote at the card players. They resume play. He takes his seat again.)

MARGO

So, when you get back home tonight, are you going to put Peter to work fixing that garage door?

JULIA

Mr. Fix-It may just have to wait until tomorrow morning.

PETER

I might have a quick look at it.

MARGO

You are so lucky to have someone to help with these kinds of things. Thanks for letting me borrow him the other day.

JULIA

Borrow him?

MARGO

(Quickly looking at Peter then to Julia)
Yes, the smoke detector just kept beeping. It was driving me nuts. John was busy with his patients; the electrician couldn't get over here until late in the day, so I thought of Peter.

JOHN

(Slightly incredulous)
You came over to fix our smoke detector?

PETER

(Haltingly delivered)
Well, yes.....it..... was beeping away.

MARGO

Driving me nuts!

PETER

So I just put up the step ladder....

JOHN

What ladder?

PETER

I brought my folding ladder over.

JULIA

(Interrupting)

You didn't tell me about fixing Margo's smoke detector.

PETER

I'm sure I mentioned it. It was last Tuesday afternoon.

(To Margo)

Wasn't it?

MARGO

Yes, Tuesday afternoon.

JOHN

In the pouring rain? It rained all day Tuesday.

PETER

I just shoved the ladder into the trunk. It just needed a new battery.

(Peter laughs nervously)

JOHN

Which detector was it?

MARGO

For God sakes, John, what difference does it make?

JOHN

I was just wondering.

PETER

The one in the master bedroom ceiling.

JOHN

Well, thank you Peter. I'm sorry Margo had to bother you for such a trivial thing.

MARGO

It wasn't trivial. It beeped every couple of seconds.

JULIA

I wish I could get such a quick response for our little domestic fix-it jobs.

PETER

Now wait a minute. I always.....

JULIA

The patio door has been squeaking for months.

PETER

(Interrupting)

Now dear, I don't think Margo and John need to hear any of our...how did you put it John? Marital jousting.

(There's an awkward silence.)

MARGO

(Overly energetically breaking the silence)

Is it my deal?

JOHN

No, I believe it's Peter's. Does anyone need another drink?

(John jumps up from the table and walking toward the bar)

JULIA

Sounds good.

PETER

(To Julia)

Do you think you should, dear?

JULIA

Your concern is so touching. (Then to John)
Make mine a double-bourbon on the rocks.

MARGO

(Changing the subject)

I've had the oddest day. Every once in a while, it would seem like; I don't know how to explain it: like time passed and I was stuck in a dream. I would wake up and everything had moved ahead four or five minutes, and I had no idea of what had just happened.

PETER

Maybe, you should stop by John's office and have him run some tests.

JOHN

Oh, I don't think there's anything to worry about. It's just the brain playing tricks on you, kind of like déjà vu.

(Handing Julia her drink)

MARGO

Oh yes, it's nothing Peter, really. It was just an odd sensation. And I just don't know what's gotten into all of us tonight. Our Bridge night is usually so free and easy. I wish we could somehow rewind and start this evening over.

(The cards have been dealt out, and each player has taken them into their hands)

JOHN

What a bizarre and wonderful idea, if we could only do it.

(He takes the remote out of his pocket while he's speaking and points it secretly at them as he walks toward the front of the stage)

That's a very interesting thought... Rewind.... I don't know why I hadn't thought of it before. Thank you Margo, if she only knew what she was saying. Wouldn't life be so much easier if we could hit rewind, go back and get it right? Think of the possibilities! You could go back to that argument with that guy in the bar and, this time, say the perfect thing that would just cut the legs right from under him, because this time around, you would have had time to think of the perfect retort...the absolute perfect answer. Then there's the opposite, taking back that thing you said in anger that really hurt someone. Or what about that auto accident you can now avoid by *not* looking for that cell phone that slipped under your seat. Of course, there are all those dire warnings in the sci-fi books; "if you change one little thing, you'll alter the future in unknown ways". But isn't that the story of life? Every time you make a choice about something as simple as going or staying or phoning someone now or later, you've altered the future.(more excitedly) It's the chaos theory, isn't it? You know, where the beating of the wings of a butterfly somewhere in the jungles of Costa Rica eventually leads to a series of bigger and bigger events until we have a huge destructive storm thousands of miles away. We're all inside this...this massive, universal, connected web. We're like one little cell in the universe's brain or is it more like a computer? (More quietly) Lit or unlit..... On or off.....rewind or not.....

(Smiling, then delivers the line with a Shakespearean flair)

To rewind or not rewind, that is the question. I don't even know if it will work so it's probably a moot point. Let's just see.

(He pointing the remote at the screen, which flickers slightly and a low hum and the sound of human speech played backwards is heard. After a couple seconds he points the remote at the screen a second time. On screen, is a medium shot of the stage with the four characters sitting around the card table. The dialogue and images are an exact replay of the earlier scene.)

JULIA

I didn't say a thing about these rotten cards.

JOHN One club

PETER Pass

JULIA One diamond, (singing) because diamonds are a girl's best friend

(He stops the video image with the remote.)

JOHN

Yes!! It does work! Let's go back a bit farther back.

(He points the remote at the screen again. He rewind hum is heard for 5 or 6 seconds. He stops it with the remote and the new scene begins to play on the screen. John has just answered the door to let Peter and Julia in. The scene is shot as one continuous shot, zooming in slightly as various times as a character speaks.)

PETER We represent the lollipop guild, the lollipop guild.....

JULIA All right Munchkin, that's enough..... Hello, John I started this drink just before we left and didn't want to waste it.

JOHN You're a complete idiot, you know that.

PETER I've always wanted to do that..... Where's Margo?
I'm sorry she missed it.

JOHN She's in the kitchen..... Margo! Guests!

JOHN

(Smiling talks over the scene)

I forgot about her for a minute.

JOHN Oh my God!

MARGO I mean should she tell her son not to go out with
her..... Oh, I didn't hear you come in.

JULIA Sorry we're late, but you aren't going to believe
what happened. Our garage door got stuck half way up and
we couldn't get the Mercedes out, so we had to borrow
Jim's car.

MARGO What is Peter up to now?

(Peter is still wearing the hat but not pulled down over
his ears. He is brushing off the knees of his pants.)

JULIA You don't want to know.

PETER Don't tell her. I may want show her some other
time. (Crosses the room to meet Margo. They kiss cheeks.)

MARGO Here, let me take your coats. John, fix them a
drink. (She takes their jackets and walks into the front
hall and back toward the closet.)

JOHN What can I get you?

JULIA You going to wear that thing all night?
(Referring to the hat still on his head)

PETER Oh!... No (Takes off the hat and walks to the
front hall following Margo to the closet. He pats her
rear end. They embrace and kiss.)

JULIA Maybe, you could freshen it up a little with some
bourbon.

JOHN Of course. (Then to calling to Peter) And what
will you have, Peter?

(He stops the video by pointing the remote at the screen. Rewinds and presses "play". The last scene replays)

MARGO Here let me take your coats. John, fix them a drink. (She takes their jackets and walks into the front hall and back toward the closet.)

JOHN What can I get you?

JULIA You going to wear that thing all night?
(Referring to the hat still on his head)

PETER Oh! No!(Takes off the hat and walks to the front hall following Margo to the closet. He pats her rear end. They embrace and kiss.)

(He freezes the frame of the Peter and Margo embracing. The zoom is stopped, revealing a medium two-shot of them. He is now lit with a single spotlight. He faces the back of the stage as the set goes dark to end Act 1)

ACT 2

(John is in the same position on stage, facing the back of the stage with a single spotlight on him. The others are also in their previous positions frozen in place. There is no sound. John stares silently at the screen, which has the frozen frame of Peter and Margo embracing. John presses the remote at the screen, which goes black and slowly rises out of sight. John slowly turns toward the audience.)

JOHN

How could this have happened?At some point in your life the people closest to you will fail you. Your parents, your children, your friends, even your wife..... and she is my best friend..... But I failed her too..... I'm not sure how it started, that's not true, I know exactly how it started. Elaine....Dr. Elaine Carey and I began working together at the hospital, a quick consultation here and there. One night after a very long day, we found ourselves going out the door together. "Bite to eat?".... "Sure". She was pretty ...energetic, and recently divorced, seven years younger than me. I'll spare you the details, but it lasted 6 months. We both knew it wouldn't work. We knew it wasn't real. I told

Margo about it as it ended. Guilt I guess.... She was very hurt.....I said I was sorry....that it was a mistake. I told Margo I loved her very much. We never spoke about again. Buried it under our daily lives..... Slowly things returned to normal...Normal ? Me working too hard and Margo fussing with the details and obviously still angry and hurt.

(Longer pause)

And I did NOT buy Elaine anything from Victoria's Secret!!

(He turns toward the frozen group)

Here's my little group frozen in time. My little Margo

(Only Margo is lit)

her type "A" lover

(Only Peter is lit)

And then there's poor Julia.

(Only Julia is lit)

I think she senses something's not right.

JOHN

(Addressing the audience

So what would you do now?) I know what my barber Mario would say, "I'd kill them both"

(Long pause and deep breath)

Let's start this up again right where we left off and see where it leads.

(John walks back into the scene as the whole stage is once again lit). (John looks through Peter's cards, selects three or four cards, and trades them with his own cards).

(John starts the scene)

JOHN

(To Peter)

I believe it's your bid.

PETER

(Peter quizzically looks at his hand of cards, then rearranges them. Looks on the floor and under the table)

That's funny..... I.....

JULIA

What are you looking for?

PETER

I... thought..... Pass

JULIA

Pass

MARGO

One diamond

JOHN

One heart

PETER

Two clubs

JULIA

Pass

MARGO

Three no trump

JOHN

(Aggressively)

Double

PETER

Pass

JULIA

Pass

JOHN

(To Margo)

Well, it's your play, my dear.

(They begin to play. Peter lays out his cards as dummy.)

JOHN

I was thinking.....We've known each other for a couple of years now.....

JULIA

(Interrupting him and acting a bit tipsy)
Ever since the cruise.

JOHN

Yes, since the cruise.... and we've all heard and shared little stories about our past. But what I was thinking was.... that everyone has a story about a sort of pivotal point in their lives.

MARGO

What do you mean, pivotal?

JOHN

Well, a sort of crossroads...

PETER

(Interrupting John)
Does that crossroad have a traffic light?

JOHN

No, I'm serious. I'm talking about an event that profoundly influenced your life, your character, maybe. There's, maybe, more than one, and I'm not talking about your wedding day or graduation day. It might be so small that it went unnoticed by everyone else. In fact, I might of just had one a couple of minutes ago...

PETER

I'm sure you have a perfect example.

JOHN

Sure, I gave it some thought.

MARGO

It's your game. You'll have to start.

JOHN

All right, I will, but you'll all have to tell your stories too.....The event I'll tell you about had absolutely no witnesses.

JULIA

Are we talking about a crime... a murder?

MARGO

And you're about to "come clean" after all these years.

JOHN

Let me tell my story. When I was 7 or 8 years old, we lived in a small town in northern Wisconsin on a street at the crest of a hill, with the river down one side and the railroad yards down the hill on the other side. Both were my childhood playgrounds. And on the day I'm talking about, I headed out the door and ended up in the rail yards. The rail yards were not for passenger trains, but for long slow freight trains. There was one set of tracks coming into town and one set leaving town, but in the yard, these fanned out to 10 to 20 tracks wide. On each of these sat various flat cars and boxcars waiting to be re-shuffled into new trains. The boxcars were the best. They had names like Santa Fe and Soo Line painted on their sides. Some were closed and locked up with a little steel band slid through the door handle. Others were wide open and empty. On this day, I walked between the boxcars and noticed one that was closed and had no band through the lock. I started to imagine the treasures that were right there behind that door just waiting for me to discover, so I grabbed the handle and pushed the door open. All at once, the air was filled with the fluttering of wings, and through the door, like smoke from a chimney, came hundreds of railroad yard pigeons. I was so surprised that, without thinking, I reached down, picked up a stone, and threw it into the swirling mass of birds.

(Slower and sadder delivery)

One bird suddenly dropped to the ground in front of me..... I slowly walked over to where it lay quivering and struggling.....I started to cry.....What had I done?!.... I hadn't meant to hurt it..... I just wasn't thinking.....The bird lay bleeding... I tried to hold its head up, praying it would suddenly flutter to life and fly away, but I knew it would never fly again.....It was suffering so much.....I looked around.....and found the biggest rock I could carry, lifted it over my head and dropped it on the bird.....It stopped quivering..... (long pause)..... I found patch of loose railway gravel and buried it. All the way home, I thought about the line between life and death. One minute it was a living thing. The next minute it was dead. What had changed? All the parts were still there, I mean, all the veins, the muscles, everything that had once made that bird a living thing were still there....But they parts stopped working together. That stone I had thrown had cut some little connections that made that pile of (struggling for a word) meat, a living, moving creature. Then I began to wonder, if I had been a doctor could I have saved its life. With the skilled hands of a surgeon, could I have fixed those severed connections?

(Margo reaches out and puts her hand on his)

JULIA

Wow! Doc

PETER

That's a great story.

JULIA

And so sad

JOHN

At the time, yes.

MARGO

I remember you telling me that story when we first met.

JOHN

That's one of those pivotal moments.

(Change of spirit as he stands to get
another drink)

Someone else's turn. Peter?

MARGO

Maybe, we all need to catch our breath. And maybe we didn't have a pivotal moment, or at least one we're willing to share. You're putting our guests on the spot.

JOHN

Nobody is forcing anyone into anything. I just thought it would be interesting to share deeper thoughts that are all.

PETER

No, I don't mind telling you. But, you're a tough act to follow. My story isn't quite as dramatic or powerful. I was about the same age as you were. We, my family and I that is, traveled to see my grandparents who lived on a farm in southern Canada just over the Minnesota border. It was a farm my Swedish grandfather had hacked out of wilderness when he arrived at the turn of the century. He was a creative, clever, hard working man, and by the time I got to know him, most of the humor had been knocked out of him by those Canadian winters. It was early June when we arrived and grandfather was busy preparing the fields for planting. The plowing was done, and the next step was to drag the fields with a harrow.

JULIA

A what?

PETER

A harrow, it's dragged behind the tractor and has a lot of metal spikes facing down, that smoothes out the rough earth. I remember it had large stones on all four corners to help keep it steady and dig in a little more. So after we had said our hellos at the house, he took me by the hand and told everyone, the men had to get back to work. So off we went across the fields to where the old tractor and harrow were stopped. He had been farming for more than 50 years by this time, and had kept most of his equipment alive as long as he could. And this tractor, a John Deere, was one of his first, maybe 25-30 years old. It had solid iron wheels with big metal teeth sticking out. No rubber tires on that baby. It started up by putting a crank in the front of the engine and giving it a whirl. It sputtered to life like an old locomotive. It chugged evenly like a heartbeat, and every once in a while, it blew a perfect smoke ring that floated up out of the exhaust pipe. (Slight drift into reverie is caught and he quickly resumes) So once he got it started, he climbed on and sat down on the iron seat and I climbed on in front of him. He showed me how to make it go, and how to make it go faster, and how to make it stop. Off we went across the field dragging the harrow. I was steering and keeping the wheels along the edge of what was smoothed already and what wasn't. At the end of the field, I grabbed the wheel and spun her around, and back across the field we went. After a couple of times back and forth, grandfather slid off to the side and let me sit in the seat by myself. Then he said, as he jumped off, just shut her off when I got done or tired. I was shockedafraid.....amazed. At first, I was sure I wouldn't remember how to stop it, but I kept it going straight across the field. I swung it around at the end of the row and I could see grandfather walking back toward the barn. Now I felt exhilarated. I had done it, I was doing it! I had control of the biggest and best tractor in the world, a John Deere. I don't remember whether or not I finished the whole field, but that was one of the best days of my life.

MARGO

Do you miss that life? I know you eventually grew up on a farm.

PETER

My parents sold our farm and moved into town just before I went away to school, partly, to pay for my education, but mostly because the farm wasn't making enough money. Do I miss that life? Yes and no. What I miss is seeing the direct results of your labor. You move things, alter things, fix things, and when you're done with a lot of hard work you have a granary full of wheat or oats, and a real sense of

accomplishment. Now, I'm running my own company, has its rewards, but it's just not the same.

JULIA

(A little drunk)

But you still fix things. Look at Margo's smoke detector.

(Silence)

MARGO

That's a very sensitive story.

JOHN

Have you gone back to that field?

PETER

No, not for many years. They sold the farm after my grandparents died, so there isn't much left of the old homestead.

(Cards are re-shuffled and dealt.)

JULIA

Excuse me; I have to use the little girl's room.

(Julia exits, slightly unsteadily, through the front hall to the powder room. The others watch her leave and deliver the next lines initially in a stage whisper)

JOHN

(After she has shut the door to the powder room)

I'm a little concerned. Has anybody else noticed that Julia's been drinking too much?

MARGO

Yes, I have. Is there something wrong?

(Addressing Peter)

Has she said anything?

PETER

She says she doesn't want to talk about it.

JOHN

When did this start?

PETER

About three weeks ago. She came back from visiting her mother for the weekend, and I guess it started then. She was very moody and distant. I put it off to PMS or something.

JOHN

It sounds like she's depressed.

PETER

Once I came home in the middle of the day and found her in the bedroom crying. I tried to get her to tell me what was wrong but she kept saying I wouldn't understand because I was a man.

MARGO

Have you talked with her mother? Maybe, something happened between them on that visit.

PETER

Her mother is getting older and forgets things from time to time, and when I called and asked her about the visit, she couldn't remember Julia even coming to see her. But I'm not so sure it didn't start even before that weekend. We just don't seem to be on the same wavelength, or that's the way it felt to me for the last year or so.

MARGO

I really didn't notice when you two came over for cards. Everything seemed the same.

PETER

She kind of pumped herself up for a while. If we had to go out or someone stopped in for a drink. But

JOHN

(Interrupts)

Well, maybe it's something altogether different.

PETER

What do you mean?

JOHN

Maybe she found out about your affair with Margo.

(The sound of the powder room door opening. Peter gags and coughs on a drink he has half swallowed Margo gasps and looks at John)

MARGO

What are you saying!?

JOHN

(Holding up his hands)

Please, spare me.

PETER

I think we'd better be going.

(He almost leaps up from his chair and starts to walk toward the hall)

MARGO

I'll get their coats.

(Rises and walks toward the hall, but John has block their way.)

JOHN

(Insistent and slightly edgy)

Don't be silly. The evening is just getting started.

MARGO

Please, John.

(Grasping Peter by the shoulders and guiding him back to his chair)

JOHN

Why should anyone leave... when we're having so much fun.

JULIA

(Entering the room)

Well, did I miss anything?

JOHN

No, I believe we were all thinking about pivotal moments and how one little event now, even tonight, could change everything on into the future.

MARGO

I think we have enough trouble understanding the present without trying to see into the future.

JULIA

Even if we could see into the future, could we really change it?

JOHN

I believe we could.

(John picks up the remote and secretly pointing at everyone)

I believe we could.

(They are frozen and the back stage. The lights dim as John walk toward the audience)

JOHN

(To the audience)

That was interesting. What wheels of change did I just set in motion now that they know I know? What will the future bring is a good question. And Julia's right. Even if we could see into the future, could we manipulate things now that would change it? Is life one big movie that's cut into various scenes? Each scene following the next. Then there's God sitting in the director's chair, with a remote in hand, watching as the scenes go by. But how much fun would it be to watch the same movie over and over again? Knowing how each little part ends. Not only does he know the ending, but he knows the entire movie scene by scene. One flick of the remote and there's the past. Another button pushed, and fast forward into the future.....

(Looks at the remote... thinking)

Yes, into the future... It worked going back....

(He presses the Fast Forward button on the remote the screen descends, and a whirring sound with a slight flashing is seen on the screen. He presses the button again. The sound and flicker stop)

ON THE SCREEN; It is the living room of John and Margo's house. The camera shows a mid-shot of the room that includes only the width of the couch. In the room are two policemen, one standing in front of the couch is somewhat larger and older, the second policeman, younger and lean, appears suddenly from behind the couch, as if he has been down on the floor kneeling and stands up. He is holding a small pistol by having a pencil inserted in the barrel of the gun. The older policeman, a sergeant, asks, "What happened here? Do we know?"

The second says, "Well, here's the weapon." The sergeant looks at the gun and then out toward left, as if looking toward the front hall and says, "Someone's got some explaining to do." John presses the remote the scene stops and the screen retracts.)

JOHN

Oh my God! That was our place.....a shooting.....Someone was killed?a gun? I don't even own a gun... What do I do now? I could fast forward a little, NO, NO, I don't want to know. But I do know. Someone is shot right here in our living room, tonight! I've got to stop it. Yes! That's it! Stop it! Change things enough so it doesn't happen. But what do I change? Will what I try to do cause it? (Longer pause) I don't like this playing God business. I don't want to know so much. I just want to get on and ride, see where it all ends up. I look back and I see things I don't want to see. I look into the future, and I see things that need changing.

(John takes a deep breath after a long pause. He looks back to the scene which slowly becomes more lit)

I guess I just start things back up again and see what happens. What other choice do I have?

(John walks back into the scene)

Where were we? Oh I said we were talking about the future and how little events that happen now change things. Then Julia asked, could you really change things now even if you did know the future. And I was about here

(Pointing to a spot on the stage)

and saying I believe we could.

(Presses the remote and the scene restarts)

JOHN

Change it? That's a good question. No one can see into the future, so there's no way of knowing.

JULIA

What about the guy on TV? He talks to the dead and tells their relatives what he hears.

PETER

(A bit too angry at her)

For God sakes, Julia! That's a total sham! The guy stands in front of the audience and says things like; "I'm getting a feeling about a baseball hat. Does that mean anything to anybody?" Then one of the naive, hopeful audience members reacts,

(Peter reacts by gasping and putting his hand over his mouth)

and the psychic starts saying things and asking questions that are so general that it could apply to anyone.

JOHN

I'm sure the people, before they can come on the show, have to answer a long detailed questionnaire about their life and the person they're trying to contact.

MARGO

But is he really talking about the future and predicting things?

PETER

No, it's messages from the dearly departed.

JULIA

I'd love to be able to talk with a deceased loved one.

(They all look quizzically at her)

MARGO

Well, that's enough of that. It gives me the chills.

JOHN

Your deal, Julia.

(John gives the cards to Julia. Julia shuffles and deals the cards out somewhat sloppily as the others speak)

JULIA

Should we continue John's mivotal ponents, I mean pivotal moments game?

PETER

We haven't heard from the ladies.

MARGO

(Looking at Julia who is reluctant to speak)

Well, I'll go. Where do I begin? I was born in Poland near the Baltic Sea.

JOHN

Let's bid first before you continue, Julia your bid.

JULIA

One club

MARGO

One diamond

JOHN

Two spades

PETER

Pass

JULIA

Three spades

MARGO

Pass

JOHN

Pass

PETER

Pass

(The first card is played and Julia lays out the dummy cards on the table)

JOHN

Go ahead with your story, dear.

MARGO

As I was saying, I was born in Poland.

JULIA

That's amazing. I don't hear a bit of an accent.

MARGO

I guess I have a good ear for languages.....Anyway; I lived there with my parents and my little sister until I was twelve. My mother was a bit of a dreamer and at the same time, very depressed. Her dream was to come to America, the land of milk and honey, no, the land of perpetual sunny days. She had a sister living here in the U.S. who wrote her letters about her life here, and how wonderful it was. She would read some of the letters to my sister and me. My father saw that her bouts of depression were getting worse, and I think he hoped a move

to America would help her. At that time, it would have been, 1959, you couldn't just go and ask to leave the country. We were behind the (using her hands as quote marks) "Iron Curtain", although it didn't mean anything to us. My father had a fairly high position in the Polish government. He was the head of fisheries, so he had a lot more power and freedom than most people. So one day, it was very early in the morning, I remember, and we had to be very quiet so we wouldn't wake the neighbors. Mother had packed up everything we could carry, and father took us all on board one of the fishing boats that went out into the Baltic. After a couple hours, we ended up in Germany. It's a rather long complicated story with many stops in many countries, but eventually we landed in America.... In Jersey City.....Where her sister, my aunt, lived with her husband in a small apartment. We moved in for a while, and then found our own little apartment nearby. Needless to say, the sun wasn't always shining on this little section of America. My aunt had clearly exaggerated the truth about her life here. This, plus my mother's depression was too much for her.....she jumped out of her bedroom window, and died instantly..... It was very hard for everyone to deal with this. My sister took it very hard, my father even harder. Somehow, I knew I had to be the strong one. I started taking care of the groceries, school lunches, helped with homework, and the hundreds of little things that needed doing. I was 13, but in a few months, I had become years older.

(Long pause, then a cheerful delivery of the next line)

So that's my pivotal story.

PETER

Amazing!

JULIA

How do you ever get over that?

MARGO

I guess when the moment comes to deal with a death, we all summon up the strength. I'm sure you'd be stronger than most, Julia.

JULIA

(Silently shaking her head. An inner emotional volcano begins to bubble forth. She begins to cry)

No, NO!, NO! I'm not the strong one! I can't do it! I can't!

PETER

(Jumping up from his seat and going to her)

It's all right dear. Now, now don't cry.

JULIA

(Hysterically)

Leave me alone! Don't touch me! You have no idea what it's like!

MARGO

(Reassuringly)

It's going to be all right. It's going to be just fine.

JULIA

No, it's not!, Everything is just one big mess! You want a fucking pivotal story. I'll give you a story!

JOHN

I'm sure we don't have to hear it now.

JULIA

No!, now is a perfect time to tell my story!

(Settling down a little, Julia gets up and walks back and forth carrying her drink then after a long pause)

You know that we met in college?

JOHN

Yes

JULIA

Well, I had a life before that too. I was raised in a Catholic home. I had three older sisters, who did all the right things. I, somehow, couldn't get it right. They all got straight A's; I got smacked on the hands by the nuns. I guess you could say I rebelled. I just got tired of living in their shadows. I began to stay out late, hung around with a "bad crowd", as my father put it. During my senior year, I started hanging around with this guy, and, well.....I got pregnant. Not a new story, is it? Happens all over the world every day, but it happened to me. I didn't tell anyone at first, I was so ashamed. But after awhile I just couldn't hide it any more. Needless to say, abortion was not even discussed. My family rallied around me, I did finish high school, and had the baby; a beautiful baby girl.

(She starts to cry, then checks herself)

I saw the baby for about 10 minutes. I never even named her. She was put up for adoption..... I got my life in order, and tried to forget about it. I went off to school and met Peter. I never told him about the baby.

(Looking at Peter)

Sorry. We had a discussion once about teen pregnancy and I remember you saying in an era of abortion, how anyone could be stupid enough.....

PETER

I would have.....

JULIA

(Interrupting him)

No, it's all right. So I went on living my life, raised our two and did all the right things. But it kept gnawing at me. It's amazing what a little Catholic guilt can do. So, one day a couple of months ago I decided to see if I could find my daughter, just to see how her life had turned out. I called, and then went to visit the Catholic adoption service back in my hometown. They were very polite, but could not reveal her name or where she lived. They did have a photo she had sent to them a couple of years before, which they showed me. She was a beautiful woman about 32 at the time. She had my eyes and coloring. I noticed that on the back of the picture, a name had been blacked out with a marker, probably by one of the Sisters, who saw it was there and didn't want me to see. While the Sister was away from her desk answering a phone or something, I don't remember exactly, I held the picture up to the light and could see the name "Sandy Johnston" underneath the marker. I came back home and began to try and see if I could find her. I got on the Internet and used all the searches I could find, but got nowhere. Then I saw an ad that promised to find anyone, anywhere, given a birth date and a name. I hired them, not expecting it to succeed. Two days later I got a call saying they had found her. They gave me her address and telephone number. It turned out that she still lived up near where I grew up, in the next town, actually. So, three or four weeks ago, I went up to visit my mother, but never got there. I decided to go and find Sandy. I thought about calling, but what could I say on the phone, "Hi, I'm your real mother, can I come over and see you?" I drove over to her street and sat in front of the house for a long time, I guess, hoping she'd come out, but she didn't. So I finally got up enough courage to go up and ring the bell. I got no answer. While I was walking back to my car, a neighbor woman came over and said, 'Wasn't it just horrible?' I told her I had been away for a while and asked what was horrible.....She then told me how Sandy had come home, pulled her car into the garage, shut the door and gone inside the house.....but left the car running..... She must have

gotten distracted or gotten a phone call.....They found her up in her bedroom, above the garage, on the bed..... dead.....carbon monoxide. She had just taken her two little girls over to a friend's house to play, so they were safe..... my granddaughters.....The neighbor went on about what a wonderful person Sandy was, and how strong she had been through all her troubles with her husband, the divorce, and then losing her mother to cancer..... I stayed in a motel nearby.... I just sat and thought about everything. The girls were living with an aunt. I decided not to go and see them and stir things up any more in their lives. Maybe someday, after things had settled down, I'd go and see them.... If I had only known! If I had come just a couple weeks earlier, I could have helped her. She was so alone....She needed her mother.

(Crying inconsolably, Peter and Margo both move to comfort her)

PETER

Don't cry, dear

MARGO

It's going to be all right.

JULIA

NO!! It's not going to be all right!! Don't you understand, I lost my only daughter. I know that her death was not an accident. She wanted to die. Life was out of control for her. She needed my help and I wasn't there for her.

PETER

(To John and Margo)

I think we'd better be going.

JULIA

(Ignoring Peter and is now more separated from reality)

You know that I could have kept her..... I could have taken good care of her.....But I was the bad one. I was the one who never got it right. It was an embarrassment to my family, so she had to go and live with someone else.....I said, why can't I keep her?.....Why can't she be part of our family?.....

PETER

Come on dear, let's go home.

(John goes to get their coats in the front hall closet. Peter tries to gently lead her by the arm, but she balks)

MARGO

Everything is going to be alright.

JULIA

(Peter hands Julia her hand bag)

You keep saying everything's going to be all right! Everything is going to be all right. Everything is going to be all right? Yea, it's going to be just great!

(Reaches into her hand bag and pulls out a small handgun)

PETER

Julia! What are doing?

JULIA

Just fine. I've got such a wonderful life. My husband's having an affair.

(As Peter starts to speak)

Don't try and deny it! (To Margo) Am I right Margo?

MARGO

Peter and I are just.....

JULIA

Please, spare me the "just friends" bullshit. Racing over here in the rain to fix smoke detectors. Please, do you think I'm some kind of fool?

PETER

Please dear, put the gun away.

JULIA

Oh, this makes you nervous? I got this a couple of weeks ago, in fact I think it was when you were over here playing with Margo's "detector". I didn't know who it was until tonight, but I knew. Yes, I knew..... I was going to simply go and sit by the fire one night and

(Delivered cheerily and with a smile)

kill myself.

(Still very drunk, she brings the gun to her head as she speaks)

MARGO

Please, don't!

(John has dropped Julia's coat on the floor and is slowly inching his way across the living room)

JULIA

(Taking the gun away from her head and waving it around as she speaks)

But now I'm not so sure I shouldn't just shoot you two. How utterly romantic, like an Agatha Christie mystery. Miss Marple coming into the room to find the two lovers, bleeding to death on the carpet, and then there's me with a bullet in my brain slumped in the chair nearby.

(She then remembers John and looks up at him)

But what do we do with you, Doc?

JOHN

I guess you'll just have to shoot me too.

JULIA

But I don't want to shoot you, Doc.

(John lunges toward the remote on the card table. This sudden motion causes Julia to flinch and she discharges the gun. The sound of a gun firing is cut off in middle as everyone on stage freezes in place as John, who has rolled over and is lying on the floor, has reached the remote and pressed the "Pause" button)

JOHN

Oh My God! I did it! I stopped it!
(Getting up and dusting himself off)

That was too close. Now we know who our would-be murderer is.

(He slowly gets to his feet)

Poor Julia, everything is spinning and she can't stop it. The weight of carrying that chunk of guilt around for all those years finally broke her. The death of her daughter was the last straw, well, that and finally seeing the truth about Peter and Margo. She doesn't want to hurt anyone.

(He walks over to the Julia and examines the gun and sees a bullet that has come out of the gun and is stopped 3 or 4 inches from the end of the barrel)

Well, well, well, look at this. The bullet has just left the barrel. Isn't that something, hanging here in limbo. Ready to be guided in any direction I want.

(Reaches out and moves the gun barrel and bullet in one direction and then another.)

I could simply tweak it a couple inches to the right, start everything back up and blow a small hole in the wall. Nobody is hurt. I grab the gun before Julia can squeeze off another shot, and we all live happily ever after. OR!... A couple inches in this direction, and Peter's dead. Or push the bullet this way and Margo's dead. Either way, I could revenge their little tryst. No, not an option. Poor Julia would end up in jail, Peter or Margo would be dead, and I'd have to live the rest of my life with the guilt. Or I could just stand up over here (he stands directly in front of Julia 4-5 feet away, as if facing a firing squad), "no blindfold needed" (addressing the executioner), press "play" (holding up the remote), and dream the dreamless sleep....

(a very long tension filled pause, where John stands tall and still with remote in hand ready to press the button)

But , no,.... I can't. I might miss something important. Something important and beautiful; A robin singing on that perfect spring morning... The smell of coffee... A call from the kids, they're coming to visit, the answer to 38 across in the Times Crossword Puzzle; "A city on the Tanaro River.....Asti." Maybe, I'd miss the discovery of life out there.

(looking up)

You don't think so? You think we're alone in the universe? May I play you a small clip of Carl Sagan?

Scan to watch Carl Sagan video



(The screen comes down as he speaks and a clip from The Cosmos with Carl Sagan's kneeling on a beach holding a handful of sand, and saying, "Each grain of sand in my hand represents the stars we can see with the naked eye". The camera draws back to reveal him standing on a vast beach, he continues, "Now to represent all the stars in the known universe, we'd need every grain of sand on every beach on this planet earth". John stops the tape, and the screen retracts)

Wow! There's lots of life out there. There's lots of life to live here, too.

(Turning back to the frozen threesome, who are relit)

Julia will figure it all out, with a little help. Peter, he'll rise to the occasion. That little affair will end and soon drift away, and Margo will still know everyone's name and birthday. And I'll.....I'll.....

(Walking back toward Julia)

I'll have a little fun yet

(John directs the bullet slightly and presses the remote.)

(The second half of the sound of a gunshot is heard, then the explosive sound of the Greek statue breaking into many pieces. Julia drops the gun onto the floor.)

JULIA

(Crying)

I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry. What have I done?

(Continues to cry uncontrollably)

PETER

(Moving to her side and hugging her)

It's going to be all right. Nothing happened.

MARGO

No one was hurt. It's going to be just fine.

PETER

We should be going home. I'm so sorry.

JOHN

A little rest and a good long talk, and things will be so much better. Let me get your coats.

(As John moves to pick up the dropped coats, a sound of a loud knocking on the front door)

POLICE

Police! Open the door!

(John opens the door; two police enter with guns drawn. They are the same two seen in the **video** clip)

JOHN

Come in, Come in! It's all right.... Just a little accident.

POLICEMAN#1

What's going on here, Doc?

(John hands Julia and Peter their coats. They put them on. Peter continues to console the crying Julia. Margo is helping them on with their coats and hugs Julia and then Peter. Peter and Julia exit.)

JOHN

(To the policemen)
I'll be right with you.

(He goes out the front door with Margo as they follow their guests out)

(The two policemen are standing In the same positions as in the video, one standing in front of the couch is somewhat larger and older. The second policeman, younger and lean, bends down behind the couch, then reappears. He stands holding a small pistol with a pencil inserted in the barrel of the gun.)

POLICEMAN#1

What happened here? Do we know?

POLICEMAN#2

Well, here's the weapon.

POLICEMAN#1

(Speaking toward John who reenters the front door followed closely by Margo)

Someone's got some explaining to do.

JOHN

Sorry to keep you waiting. Well, it's really quite simple. Julia, our departing guest, picked up, what she thought was a cigarette lighter, from the desk drawer, and before I could say a thing, it went off, mortally wounding Adonis here, but no other fatalities.

POLICEMAN#1

Doc, you know better than leaving a loaded gun around like that!

JOHN

Yes, I'm so sorry. It's been in there so long, I'd completely forgotten about it. I didn't even know it worked or was loaded.

(Policeman #1 Opens the small pistol and spills out the remaining cartridges into his hand, and hands the gun and shells to John.)

POLICEMAN#1

Here, put this away, will you, Doc?

JOHN

Thank you, I will.

MARGO

Thanks for your prompt attention. You arrived here so quickly, how..?

POLICEMAN#2

We just happened to be riding by and I had my window open, and I said to Sergeant O'Brien, I think that was a gunshot, so he pulled over and...

POLICEMAN#1

(Interrupting)

That's enough. Let these people get this mess cleaned up. We'll be on our way.

JOHN

Thank you once again.

MARGO

Yes, thank you.

(The two policemen exit. The door is closed)

MARGO

Do you think she's going to be all right?

JOHN

It's a nervous breakdown. She'll need some professional help; I'll connect them up with Bernie. Once she talks it all out with Peter and has time to rest and put things in their proper perspective, she'll be fine. Guilt is a horrible thing, and she's been carrying it for many years.

(Long pause. They look at each other)

So, how big is this.....affair?

MARGO

It isn't big at all. John, I'm so sorry. I don't even know how it all got so out of control.

JOHN

Are we even now? Is that what this is all about?

MARGO

No! No! I wasn't trying to get even. I didn't want to hurt you. It just sort of happened and the next thing....

(She begins to cry. He draws her closer and wipes tears from her cheeks)

JOHN

I've been a little distant and distracted lately, I'm sorry.

(They look each other in the eye and stand silently)

MARGO

You're my best friend..... We're a team, aren't we?

(Kissing her first on the forehead, then nose, and then lips)

JOHN

Yes we are. Let's get this straightened up and get to bed. We'll talk some more.

MARGO

I'll get the whisk broom and trash can.

(She exits into the dining/kitchen)

(John begins to pick up large pieces of the smashed statue finds the head and holds it smiling)

JOHN

Alas, poor Yoric, I knew him well, dear Margo.

(As she enters the room and hands him the trash can and broom. She then starts clearing the card table where she discovers the remote.)

MARGO

I know you've always hated the statue.

JOHN

What would make you....

(John freezes as Margo accidentally presses the remote. She whirls around to see him frozen in place. She presses the button again.)

say a thing like..

(She presses it again, he freezes in place.)

MARGO

My, oh my, what have we here?

(She suddenly becomes aware of the audience and jumps slightly)

Whoa!

(Then looks out at everyone)

What are all of you doing in my house?

(She points the remote at the audience. The stage goes black)

THE END

("Things Have Changed" is played as the audience begins to exit)